

## Reframing Qur'anic Hermeneutics Beyond the Text–Context Binary: A Dialogical Model for Contemporary Interpretation

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### Abstract

Contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics is often framed through a binary opposition between textualism and contextualism. While textualist approaches preserve linguistic discipline, exegetical continuity, and textual accountability, contextualist approaches foreground historical consciousness, ethical relevance, and contemporary applicability. This article argues that the text–context binary is insufficient for explaining the dynamic, mediated, and ethically situated formation of Qur'anic meaning. The study aims to formulate a dialogical model of Qur'anic interpretation that integrates textual, traditional, historical, readerly, and ethical horizons. Methodologically, it employs a qualitative conceptual-hermeneutical textual design based on close reading of selected Qur'anic verses, analysis of classical tafsir works, and critical engagement with contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics and dialogical theories of meaning. The findings show that the Qur'anic text itself contains dialogical structures through direct address, semantic layering, intertextual coherence, and ethical orientation. The tafsir tradition also demonstrates interpretive plurality rather than a single closed meaning, while ethico-legal verses such as Q. 4:34 reveal the need for mediation among textual wording, historical context, exegetical tradition, and ethical normativity. The article proposes a five-horizon dialogical model as a structured alternative to both rigid literalism and unrestricted relativism. Its theoretical contribution lies in redefining dialogical interpretation not as a loose attitude of openness or compromise, but as an epistemic framework for contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics. This model preserves textual accountability while enabling historically aware, tradition-conscious, readerly self-critical, and ethically responsible interpretation.

**Keywords:** Qur'anic hermeneutics; dialogical interpretation; text–context binary; tafsir tradition; ethical interpretation

### Abstrak

Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an kontemporer sering dipahami melalui oposisi biner antara tekstualisme dan kontekstualisme. Pendekatan tekstualis menjaga disiplin linguistik, kesinambungan eksegetis, dan akuntabilitas tekstual, sedangkan pendekatan kontekstualis menekankan kesadaran historis, relevansi etis, dan penerapan kontemporer. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa dikotomi teks–konteks tidak memadai untuk menjelaskan pembentukan makna Al-Qur'an yang dinamis, termediasi, dan terikat secara etis. Penelitian ini bertujuan merumuskan model dialogis penafsiran Al-Qur'an yang mengintegrasikan horizon tekstual, tradisional, historis, pembaca, dan etis. Secara metodologis, penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif tekstual konseptual-hermeneutis berdasarkan pembacaan dekat terhadap ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an terpilih, analisis karya tafsir klasik, serta telaah kritis terhadap hermeneutika Al-Qur'an kontemporer dan teori dialogis tentang makna. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa teks Al-Qur'an sendiri memuat struktur dialogis melalui sapaan langsung, pelapisan semantik, koherensi intertekstual, dan orientasi etis. Tradisi tafsir juga menunjukkan pluralitas interpretatif, bukan makna tunggal yang tertutup, sedangkan ayat-ayat etiko-legal seperti Q. 4:34 menunjukkan perlunya mediasi antara redaksi tekstual, konteks historis, tradisi eksegetis, dan normativitas etis. Artikel ini mengusulkan model dialogis lima horizon sebagai alternatif terstruktur terhadap literalisme kaku dan relativisme tanpa batas. Kontribusi teoretisnya terletak pada redefinisi tafsir dialogis bukan sebagai sikap keterbukaan atau kompromi yang longgar, melainkan sebagai kerangka epistemik bagi hermeneutika Al-Qur'an kontemporer. Model ini menjaga akuntabilitas tekstual sekaligus memungkinkan penafsiran yang sadar sejarah, berpijak pada tradisi, reflektif terhadap posisi pembaca, dan bertanggung jawab secara etis.

**Kata kunci:** hermeneutika Al-Qur'an; tafsir dialogis; dikotomi teks–konteks; tradisi tafsir; penafsiran etis.

## INTRODUCTION

The interpretation of the Qur'an remains one of the most contested and consequential fields in contemporary Islamic thought. In modern Muslim societies, Qur'anic interpretation is no longer confined to classical exegetical institutions, philological analysis, or juridical reasoning, but is increasingly implicated in broader socio-intellectual debates concerning legal reform, gender justice, religious pluralism, human dignity, ecological responsibility, political authority, and the ethical orientation of Muslim communities in a rapidly changing world. The emergence of modern nation-states, transnational Muslim publics, digital religious authority, global human rights discourses, and new forms of social contestation has intensified the need for interpretive approaches capable of maintaining textual accountability while responding critically to contemporary moral and historical realities. In this setting, Qur'anic hermeneutics is not merely a technical discipline of scriptural explanation; it is a scholarly arena in which the authority of revelation, the continuity of tradition, the situatedness of the interpreter, and the ethical demands of the present are continuously negotiated.

A central debate within contemporary Qur'anic studies concerns the relation between text and context. Textualist approaches tend to privilege the linguistic, grammatical, rhetorical, and transmitted dimensions of Qur'anic meaning, often grounding interpretation in Arabic philology, classical tafsir, hadith-based explanation, legal precedent, and the presumed stability of divine intent. Such approaches have methodological value because they protect interpretation from arbitrary subjectivism and preserve continuity with the accumulated epistemic discipline of Muslim scholarship. At the same time, when textualism hardens into rigid literalism, it may reduce Qur'anic meaning to a closed semantic structure detached from historical change and contemporary ethical complexity. Duderija's analysis of Neo-Traditional Salafi Qur'an-Sunna hermeneutics illustrates this tendency by showing how a philological and textualist approach may marginalize socio-historical context while rejecting *maqāṣid* and *maṣlaḥah* as legitimate interpretive tools.<sup>1</sup> Contextualist approaches, by contrast, emphasize the historical, cultural, and moral conditions within which revelation was addressed and continues to be understood. Rahman's double movement theory, for instance, moves from Qur'anic responses within their historical setting toward general moral principles and then back to contemporary situations.<sup>2</sup> Saeed further systematizes this concern by developing a contextualist reading of ethico-legal texts that attends to both the original context of revelation and the changing conditions of modern interpretation.<sup>3</sup>

The significance of contextualism, however, should not be understood as a purely modern rupture from premodern Islamic thought. Recent scholarship has shown that awareness of contextuality, semantic plurality, and interpretive mediation can also be located within earlier intellectual traditions. Calis, for example, argues that *Akbarī* scriptural hermeneutics, particularly in relation to *Shams al-Dīn al-Fanārī*, recognized the multiplicity of Qur'anic meanings in light of diverse human perceptions and interpretive contexts.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, studies of Abdolkarim Soroush's historicist framework highlight the Qur'an as a dynamic text whose interpretation is inseparable from the socio-cultural milieu of revelation and the historically conditioned agency of human understanding.<sup>5</sup> These studies complicate the assumption that textual fidelity and contextual consciousness must be mutually exclusive. They indicate that the problem is not the existence of textual or contextual approaches as

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<sup>1</sup> A Duderija, "Neo-Traditional Salafi Qur'an-Sunna Hermeneutics1 and Its Interpretational Implications," *Religion Compass* 5, no. 7 (2011): 314–25, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2011.00285.x>.

<sup>2</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity* (University of Chicago Press, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> Abdullah Saeed, *Islamic Thought: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> K Çalişkan, "Types of Words (Alfāz) in Abū Bakr Al-Jassās' Approach to the Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence (Usūl Al-Fiqh) and a Suggestion for a Diagrammatic Division," *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 63, no. 2 (2022): 607–715, <https://doi.org/10.33227/auifd.1052293>.

<sup>5</sup> S Gheytsi and A Salami, "Historicising Revelation: Abdolkarim Soroush and the New Historicist Turn in Qur'anic Hermeneutics," *Heythrop Journal - Quarterly Review of Philosophy and Theology* 67, no. 1 (2026): 80–94, <https://doi.org/10.1111/heyj.70022>.

such, but the binary structure that often frames them as opposing and competing modes of interpretation.

Previous scholarship has substantially expanded the field of Qur'anic hermeneutics by challenging static, literalist, and authoritarian readings from multiple directions. One major trend develops modernist and contextualist hermeneutics. Rahman emphasizes the movement between historical particularity and moral generalization, thereby challenging legalistic readings that isolate Qur'anic rulings from their ethical objectives.<sup>6</sup> Saeed extends this trajectory by proposing a more explicit framework for interpreting ethico-legal verses in relation to modern conditions.<sup>7</sup> Another major trend treats the Qur'an not merely as a fixed textual artifact but as discourse. Abu Zayd argues that a purely textual treatment of revelation risks ignoring the communicative and historically mediated character of Qur'anic meaning.<sup>8</sup> Mufid likewise reads Abu Zayd's hermeneutical project as an attempt to employ modern literary theory to challenge rigid textualism and foreground the human role in interpretation.<sup>9</sup> Akbar's study of contemporary perspectives on revelation similarly situates Abu Zayd, Rahman, Soroush, and Shabestari within a broader reformulation of revelation and Qur'anic hermeneutics, where human understanding becomes central to the production of religious meaning.<sup>10</sup>

A further strand of scholarship focuses on authority, ethics, gender, and social reform. Wadud's gender-inclusive reading demonstrates how patriarchal assumptions embedded in inherited exegetical practices shape the production of meaning and restrict the ethical possibilities of Qur'anic interpretation.<sup>11</sup> Abou El Fadl identifies the moral danger of authoritarian interpretation, arguing that claims to speak in God's name must be constrained by interpretive humility, ethical responsibility, and recognition of human fallibility.<sup>12</sup> Arkoun, meanwhile, calls for a critical rethinking of Islamic reason by examining how religious meaning is institutionalized, authorized, and excluded within historical formations.<sup>13</sup> Progressive and reformist scholarship has extended these debates into questions of gender equality, pluralism, and legal reform, including reinterpretations of *Shari'a* and patriarchal readings of scripture considering modern ethical concerns.<sup>14</sup> In Indonesian and Southeast Asian contexts, liberation-oriented Islamic thought, including readings associated with K. H. Abdurrahman Wahid, has demonstrated how traditional *fiqh*, social justice, and contemporary public ethics can be placed into productive dialogue.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, emerging trends in Islamic hermeneutics reveal that the text–context debate now extends beyond familiar questions of law, gender, and pluralism. Ecological hermeneutics, for example, applies Qur'anic interpretation to environmental sustainability by combining textual,

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<sup>6</sup> Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*.

<sup>7</sup> Saeed, *Islamic Thought: An Introduction*.

<sup>8</sup> Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Rethinking the Qur'an: Towards a Humanistic Hermeneutics* (Utrecht: Humanistics University Press, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> A Mufid et al., "Rereading Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's Method of Interpreting Religious Texts," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 79, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8102>.

<sup>10</sup> A Akbar, "Towards a Humanistic Approach to the Quran: New Direction in Contemporary Islamic Thought," *Culture and Religion* 20, no. 1 (2019): 82–103, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2018.1532919>.

<sup>11</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> M Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam, Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, Robert D. (Routledge, 1994), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429304651>.

<sup>14</sup> K Vogt, L Larsen, and C Moe, *New Directions in Islamic Thought: Exploring Reform and Muslim Tradition*, *New Directions in Islamic Thought: Exploring Reform and Muslim Tradition*, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755610280>.

<sup>15</sup> K U Addzaky et al., "Contextualizing Liberation Theology In Indonesian Religious Literature Through The Contributions Of K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 23, no. 1 (2025): 142–78, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlka.v23i1.1285>.

contextual, and empirical perspectives.<sup>16</sup> Philosophical studies have also shown that the integration of Qur'anic teachings with non-scriptural intellectual traditions is not alien to Islamic thought; figures such as Miskawayh and al-Fārābī demonstrate how Muslim philosophers historically engaged Greek philosophy while rearticulating Islamic ethical and metaphysical concerns.<sup>17</sup> These developments indicate that contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics increasingly operates in an interdisciplinary space where textual interpretation, ethical reasoning, philosophical reflection, and socio-historical analysis intersect. Yet this expansion also intensifies the methodological question of how such diverse horizons can be integrated without dissolving Qur'anic interpretation into either rigid literalism or unrestricted relativism.

Despite these contributions, an unresolved theoretical problem remains. Much of the existing literature critiques literalism, develops contextual reading, or emphasizes the ethical and historical dimensions of interpretation, but it does not always provide a sufficiently integrated model for overcoming the text–context binary itself. Contextualist hermeneutics often remains framed as a corrective to textualism, while textualist responses frequently regard contextualist interpretation as a threat to textual authority. The debate therefore tends to reproduce the very opposition it seeks to move beyond. Yüsek's discussion of *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*, for instance, shows that debates over clear and ambiguous verses continue to expose the tension between the limits of human comprehension and the claim to stable divine speech.<sup>18</sup> Abdorahimzadeh's analysis of *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* further illustrates one attempt to bridge the divide through Qur'anic intratextuality and rational analysis, showing that the Qur'an's interpretation by the Qur'an can operate alongside the exegete's intellectual engagement.<sup>19</sup> These studies are important, but the field still requires a model that does not merely balance text and context; it must reconceptualize interpretation as a disciplined dialogical process involving multiple horizons of meaning.

This article addresses that gap by proposing dialogical interpretation as an epistemic model for contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics. The theoretical basis of the study is drawn from three interrelated bodies of thought: philosophical hermeneutics, dialogical theory, and contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics. Gadamer's concept of historically effected consciousness and the fusion of horizons is useful because it shows that understanding is never detached from the interpreter's historical situatedness; interpretation occurs through an encounter between the horizon of the text and the horizon of the interpreter.<sup>20</sup> Bakhtin's theory of dialogism deepens this perspective by arguing that meaning is not monologic, isolated, or self-enclosed, but emerges through interaction, plurality, response, and the coexistence of multiple voices within discourse.<sup>21</sup> In Qur'anic studies, however, these theories cannot simply be imported as external frameworks. They must be critically reformulated so that dialogical interpretation remains accountable to the Qur'an's linguistic structure, the tafsir tradition, the historical conditions of revelation, the situatedness of contemporary interpreters, and the ethical claims generated by Qur'anic values.

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<sup>16</sup> Z Amin, "Women's Testimony in Criminal Law (Ḥudūd and Qiṣās): Classical Islamic Frameworks, Contemporary Applications, and Normative Tensions," *Muslim World* 115, no. 4 (2025): 358–83, <https://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.70021>.

<sup>17</sup> D Mohammadyani and S Majid, "The Influence of Qur'anic Teaching on Famous Muslim Philosophers," *Religious Studies and Theology* 34, no. 1 (2015): 5–18, <https://doi.org/10.1558/rsth.v34i1.24545>; M Najafi, "Reimagining Wisdom: Falsafa's Integration of Competing Conceptions," in *Perspectives on Wisdom: An Exploration in the History of Philosophy from West to East*, 2026, 85–104, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111246871-005>.

<sup>18</sup> M İ Yüsek, "The Context and Conceptual Framework of the Discussions on 'Can There Be Verses in the Qur'ān Whose Meaning Is Unknown?,'" *Mutefekkir* 11, no. 21 (2024): 29–53, <https://doi.org/10.30523/mutefekkir.1501576>.

<sup>19</sup> S Abdorahimzadeh, "Exegetic Logic In Al-Mizān Fī Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān: God's Attributes Verses As A Model," *Quranica* 15, no. 1 (2023): 82–108, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85218759508&partnerID=40&md5=72a43564b5a45ed0044f596f29644a11>.

<sup>20</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1975).

<sup>21</sup> Mikhail M Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

By “dialogical model,” this study does not mean an unrestricted pluralism in which all interpretations are equally valid, nor a simple compromise between textualist and contextualist positions. Rather, dialogical interpretation refers to a disciplined hermeneutical process in which Qur'anic meaning is generated through the interaction of five interpretive horizons: the textual horizon, the traditional horizon, the historical horizon, the readerly horizon, and the ethical horizon. The textual horizon concerns the linguistic, semantic, rhetorical, and structural features of the Qur'an. The traditional horizon refers to the accumulated interpretive legacy of tafsir, hadith, jurisprudence, theology, and classical Islamic scholarship. The historical horizon concerns the revelatory milieu, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, and the socio-moral circumstances addressed by Qur'anic discourse. The readerly horizon recognizes the location, assumptions, questions, and limitations of the contemporary interpreter. The ethical horizon relates interpretation to broader Qur'anic values such as justice, mercy, human dignity, moral accountability, and communal responsibility. This model also resonates with recent calls for dialogical approaches that integrate classical tafsir, modern hermeneutics, and *ijtihād* in addressing contemporary issues such as human rights and gender equality while keeping conservative and progressive interpretive tendencies in conversation.<sup>22</sup>

The central research problem addressed in this article is therefore the insufficiency of the dominant text–context binary in explaining the dynamic, mediated, and ethically situated character of Qur'anic interpretation. The article asks three research questions: first, why is the text–context binary inadequate as a framework for contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics? Second, how can a dialogical model integrate textual, traditional, historical, readerly, and ethical horizons in the formation of Qur'anic meaning? Third, what theoretical contribution does dialogical interpretation offer to contemporary Qur'anic studies, particularly in relation to textual accountability, historical consciousness, and ethical responsibility? Correspondingly, the objectives of the study are to critically examine the theoretical tension between textualist and contextualist approaches, formulate a dialogical model of Qur'anic interpretation, and demonstrate how this model can avoid both rigid literalism and unrestricted relativism.

The research gap addressed by this article is primarily conceptual and theoretical. While previous studies have extensively discussed textualism, contextualism, modernist hermeneutics, gender-inclusive interpretation, discourse theory, ecological interpretation, philosophical integration, and ethical authority, fewer studies have systematically reconstructed Qur'anic interpretation beyond the text–context binary through a structured dialogical epistemic model. The novelty of this article lies in formulating dialogical interpretation not as a general attitude of openness, but as an analytical framework that organizes the interaction among text, tradition, history, reader, and ethics. Its academic significance consists in offering a model that preserves textual accountability, recognizes the authority and plurality of tradition, incorporates historical awareness, acknowledges readerly situatedness, and foregrounds ethical responsibility. In doing so, the article contributes to international scholarship in Qur'anic studies, Islamic hermeneutics, and interdisciplinary Islamic textual studies by reframing interpretation as a dialogical process rather than a binary contest between textual fidelity and contextual relevance.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative conceptual-hermeneutical textual design. It is qualitative because it interprets textual, exegetical, and theoretical materials rather than measuring variables, testing statistical relationships, or collecting field-based participant data. Its validity depends on analytical transparency, coherence of interpretation, and the suitability of the selected sources to the research questions.<sup>23</sup> It is hermeneutical because the study examines how Qur'anic meaning is formed through the relationship between text, tradition, historical context, interpreter, and ethical horizon. This

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<sup>22</sup> M N Ichwan, D Ming, and M Sya'roni, “Bridging Tradition and Modernity: Integrating Classical Interpretation and Modern Hermeneutics through Ijtihad in Qur'an Studies,” *Pharos Journal of Theology* 106, no. SpecialIssue-2 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.106.2021>.

<sup>23</sup> John W Creswell and Cheryl N Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (Sage Publications, 2018).

orientation follows Schleiermacher's view of hermeneutics as the art of understanding written discourse through linguistic, historical, and critical analysis,<sup>24</sup> and Gadamer's argument that interpretation occurs through the encounter between the horizon of the text and the horizon of the interpreter.<sup>25</sup>

This article is designed as a textual and conceptual study, not an empirical field study or a digital humanities project. It does not use respondents, interviews, surveys, participant observation, statistical testing, computational corpus analysis, *isnād* criticism, or manuscript-based philology. Its primary task is to examine selected Qur'anic verses, classical tafsir works, and contemporary hermeneutical theories to formulate a dialogical model of Qur'anic interpretation. This design is appropriate because the article addresses a conceptual and theoretical problem: the insufficiency of the text–context binary in contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics.

The primary sources consist of three categories. First, the study analyzes selected Qur'anic verses that illuminate the relation between textual meaning, historical context, ethical normativity, and interpretive plurality. These include Q. 49:13 on human diversity and *taqwā*, Q. 5:48 on religious plurality and ethical competition, Q. 2:256 on non-compulsion in religion, Q. 4:34 on *qiwāmah* and gendered ethico-legal interpretation, Q. 30:21 on marital ethics, Q. 4:1 on human origin and kinship, and Q. 9:71 on mutual moral responsibility between believing men and women. These verses were selected purposively because they represent cases where the tension between textual fidelity and contextual relevance is especially visible.

Second, the study uses classical tafsir works representing major exegetical orientations within the Islamic interpretive tradition: al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, al-Qurṭubī's *Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, al-Zamakhsharī's *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl*, and Ibn Kathīr's *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*. These sources were selected because they represent transmission-based, legal, rhetorical, linguistic, theological, and hadith-oriented approaches to Qur'anic interpretation. Their use enables the study to treat "tradition" not as an abstract category, but as a concrete field of interpretive plurality.

Third, the study engages modern and contemporary works in Qur'anic hermeneutics and interpretive theory, including Rahman's *Islam and Modernity*, Saeed's *Interpreting the Qur'an*, Abu Zayd's *Rethinking the Qur'an*, Wadud's *Qur'an and Woman*, Abou El Fadl's *Speaking in God's Name*, Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*, Krippendorff's *Content Analysis*, and Schleiermacher's *Hermeneutics and Criticism*. These sources are used to clarify contextualist hermeneutics, Qur'anic discourse theory, readerly situatedness, ethical responsibility, dialogical meaning, and systematic textual analysis.

The sources were selected based on four criteria: direct relevance to Qur'anic interpretation, Islamic hermeneutics, tafsir tradition, or general hermeneutical theory; contribution to the problem of the text–context binary; representation of either a primary textual tradition, a major theoretical position, or an influential modern interpretive debate; and academic recognition within Qur'anic studies, Islamic studies, hermeneutics, or qualitative textual research.

The analysis is guided by a five-horizon dialogical framework. The textual horizon examines Arabic wording, grammar, semantic range, rhetoric, Qur'anic intertextuality, and internal coherence. The traditional horizon examines classical tafsir, hadith materials, legal reasoning, and theological assumptions. The historical horizon considers *asbāb al-nuzūl*, the socio-moral circumstances addressed by the Qur'an, and the historical setting of early Muslim communities. The readerly horizon recognizes the intellectual, social, ethical, and historical location of the interpreter. The ethical horizon evaluates whether an interpretation coheres with broader Qur'anic values such as justice, mercy, human dignity, *taqwā*, non-coercion, moral accountability, and communal responsibility.

This framework adapts established hermeneutical concepts to Qur'anic studies. Gadamer's fusion of horizons is used to explain the encounter between text and interpreter, but it is reformulated

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<sup>24</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, 1838.

<sup>25</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

so that the textual horizon includes not only linguistic meaning but also revelatory authority and exegetical inheritance.<sup>26</sup> Bakhtin's dialogism is also adopted, but it is modified by the normative demands of Qur'anic interpretation: dialogical meaning is understood as interaction among text, tradition, history, interpreter, and ethics, not merely as literary plurality (Bakhtin, 1981).

The interpretive procedure consists of five stages. First, selected Qur'anic verses were identified according to their relevance to the text–context problem. Second, each verse was examined through close textual reading, with attention to key Arabic terms such as *ta'ārafū*, *sharī'ah*, *minhāj*, *lā ikrāha*, and *qawwāmūn*. Third, classical tafsir sources were analyzed to identify interpretive patterns, agreements, disagreements, and areas of plurality. Fourth, contemporary hermeneutical scholarship was examined to understand how modern scholars reframe these verses in relation to historical consciousness, ethical concern, gender justice, religious freedom, and interpretive authority. Fifth, the findings were synthesized through the five-horizon dialogical model to show how Qur'anic meaning emerges through disciplined interaction rather than through a simple choice between text and context.

The study also uses a limited form of qualitative content analysis. Following Krippendorff, content analysis is understood as a method for making valid inferences from textual materials to their contexts of use.<sup>27</sup> In this article, it is not used quantitatively to count words or generate statistical patterns, but qualitatively to identify recurring conceptual categories such as textual authority, historical context, tradition, readerly position, ethical value, plurality, and interpretive responsibility.

The study has several limitations. It does not provide a comprehensive tafsir of all Qur'anic verses related to pluralism, gender, religious freedom, or ethics; the selected verses function as conceptual cases for developing a theoretical model. It also does not claim that classical tafsir is uniform but uses selected sources to show that interpretive plurality is already present within the tradition. Finally, although the article draws on Gadamer and Bakhtin, it does not impose Western hermeneutics uncritically onto the Qur'an. Their concepts are used selectively and reformulated within the epistemic requirements of Qur'anic studies. By combining close textual reading, classical tafsir analysis, contemporary hermeneutical theory, and qualitative conceptual synthesis, this method enables the study to demonstrate why the text–context binary is insufficient and how a dialogical model can offer a more coherent framework for contemporary Qur'anic interpretation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Dialogical Meaning Begins from the Text, but Is Not Exhausted by Textual Form

The most fundamental finding of this study is that the Qur'anic text itself provides the primary basis for a dialogical model of interpretation, because revelation is presented not as a silent textual object but as a communicative discourse that addresses, questions, corrects, remembers, commands, disputes, and morally reorients its audiences. This finding is important because it challenges the assumption that dialogical interpretation must be introduced from outside the Qur'an through modern hermeneutical theory alone. Rather, the Qur'an's own textual form already displays a dialogical structure: it speaks to multiple audiences, stages exchanges between different voices, recalls earlier communities, responds to objections, and transforms social categories into moral categories. The dialogical model proposed in this article therefore begins from the textual horizon of the Qur'an itself, while also arguing that textual form opens meaning toward ethical, historical, and readerly engagement.

The primary textual evidence for this claim appears in the Qur'an's repeated use of direct address. The Qur'an addresses humankind through formulations such as "*yā ayyuhā al-nās*" / "O humankind" (Q. 49:13), believers through "*yā ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū*" / "O you who believe" (Q. 5:8; Q. 49:6), and other communities through polemical, corrective, or dialogical engagements with earlier religious groups, hypocrites, opponents, and morally responsible audiences. These forms of address do not function merely as rhetorical openings. They establish a relation between speaker, text, audience, and ethical response. Q. 49:13, for example, states that humankind was created "from male and female"

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<sup>26</sup> Gadamer.

<sup>27</sup> Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (Sage Publications, 2018).

and made into “peoples and tribes” so that they may *lita ‘ārafū*, usually rendered as “know one another.” The verse then relocates human worth from lineage, ethnicity, gender, or communal identity to *taqwā*. The pattern is significant: the Qur’an does not simply acknowledge diversity as a sociological fact; it reconfigures diversity as a moral field in which recognition, restraint, and piety become the criteria of human distinction.

This textual pattern is not isolated. Q. 5:48 affirms the plurality of communities through the terms *shir‘ah* and *minhāj*, while redirecting this plurality toward ethical competition in *khayrāt* rather than uniformity. The verse therefore neither erases difference nor absolutizes communal separation. It frames plurality within a moral imperative. Read together, Q. 49:13 and Q. 5:48 show that the Qur’an contains a textual logic of address, plurality, and ethical response. This supports the argument that the Qur’an’s dialogical structure transcends a single historical moment by generating what some scholars describe as an omnitemporal mode of address, in which historical addressees and later readers are drawn into the same communicative field.<sup>28</sup> The Qur’an’s textual horizon is thus not reducible to the original audience alone, even though that audience remains historically significant.

The same conclusion is strengthened by studies of Qur’anic textuality and discourse structure. The Qur’an’s cohesion, coherence, and intertextual references contribute to its thematic progression and semantic density, making its meaning dependent not only on isolated lexical units but also on relations among verses, motifs, voices, and rhetorical patterns.<sup>29</sup> This matters methodologically because a purely atomistic reading of Qur’anic vocabulary may miss the way meaning is generated through discourse. The Qur’an often presents divine speech through dialogical markers such as *qul* / “say” and human responses such as *qālū* / “they said,” thereby creating an exchange between divine command, prophetic mediation, human objection, and moral correction<sup>30</sup> Such textual features show that Qur’anic discourse is not merely declarative; it is interactive, argumentative, and ethically formative.

The concept of *ta‘āruf* in Q. 49:13 is especially important for clarifying how dialogical meaning begins within the text. The root ‘-r-f suggests recognition, knowing, and relational awareness; in this verse, it does not refer to passive coexistence but to an active moral process of mutual recognition. Classical exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr connect the verse to genealogical recognition and moral piety, thereby reading human plurality in relation to social order and ethical rank before God.<sup>31</sup> Later ethical readings expand this meaning toward intercommunal recognition, peaceful coexistence, and critique of racial or tribal superiority. Contemporary discussions of *ta‘āruf* similarly treat it as a Qur’anic basis for interreligious dialogue, mutual understanding, social harmony, and ethical engagement across cultural and religious difference.<sup>32</sup> The significance of this development is not that later interpreters invent a meaning absent from the text, but that the text’s semantic and moral structure permits an expanding field of application.

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<sup>28</sup> A Gheitury, “God and the Present Voice: An Investigation into the Dialogical Nature of the Quran,” *Journal of Shi‘a Islamic Studies* 8, no. 3 (2015): 289–306, <https://doi.org/10.1353/isl.2015.0034>; A Abalkheel, M Sourani, and S El Zohbi, “Structural Independence and Dialogic Coherence in Qur’anic Texts: A Syntactic Analytical Study,” *Forum for Linguistic Studies* 7, no. 2 (2025): 487–500, <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i2.8333>.

<sup>29</sup> H Abdul-Raof, *Text Linguistics of Qur’anic Discourse: An Analysis*, *Text Linguistics of Qur’anic Discourse: An Analysis*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315670942>; H Abdul-Raof, “Textual Progression and Presentation Technique in Qur’anic Discourse: An Investigation of Richard Bell’s Claims of ‘Disjointedness’ with Especial Reference to Q. 17-20,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 7, no. 2 (2005): 36–60, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2005.7.2.36>.

<sup>30</sup> M Wehby, “The Qur’ān As A Hidden Academy For Learning Dialogic Exchange,” *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 5, no. 3 (2020): 50–75, <https://doi.org/10.55831/ajis.v5i3.285>; N M Al-Aadili and T H Shardaghly, “A Pragmatic Manifestation of Monologic and Dialogic Argumentation in the Holy Qur’an,” *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 9, no. 3 (2023): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.32601/ejal.903001>; Abalkheel, Sourani, and El Zohbi, “Structural Independence and Dialogic Coherence in Qur’anic Texts: A Syntactic Analytical Study.”

<sup>31</sup> Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ Al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy Al-Qur’ān* (Dār Hajr, 2001); Ismail Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Al-Qur’an Al-‘Azim* (Dar Taybah, 1999).

<sup>32</sup> H Babaei, “Love and ‘Suffering for’: A Shia Perspective on Rene Girard’s Theory on Violence and the Sacred,” *Religious Inquiries* 6, no. 11 (2017): 5–21, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85081634992&partnerID=40&md5=d77ee9041ae017e24dabf0b59ca7b18c>.

The hadith tradition reinforces this Qur'anic moral logic. The Prophet's reported statement in *Musnad Ahmad* that no Arab has superiority over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab over an Arab, nor a white person over a black person, except by *taqwā*, provides an important intertextual support for reading Q. 49:13 as a rejection of racial, ethnic, and tribal absolutism.<sup>33</sup> The hadith does not replace the Qur'anic text; rather, it clarifies the ethical trajectory already present in the verse. This demonstrates how textual meaning is strengthened through intertextual relations between Qur'an and hadith. It also shows why textual accountability cannot be reduced to lexical literalism. Responsible interpretation requires attention to wording, prophetic explanation, exegetical reception, and the broader moral architecture of revelation.

This finding refines the limits of strict textualism. Textual analysis remains indispensable because the dialogical character of revelation must first be in the Qur'an's language, grammar, rhetoric, and semantic organization. Yet strict textualism becomes insufficient when it treats meaning as if it were exhausted by fixed lexical reference or isolated grammatical form. Duderija's critique of Neo-Traditional Salafi hermeneutics is relevant here because it shows how certain textualist approaches privilege philological stability while marginalizing socio-historical context, *maqāṣid*, and *maṣlaḥah* as interpretive resources.<sup>34</sup> The evidence examined in this subsection suggests that the Qur'an's textuality itself resists such closure. The text demands careful philological attention, but its modes of address, intertextuality, and ethical orientation push interpretation beyond literal form toward dialogical engagement.

From the perspective of Gadamerian hermeneutics, this means that the text has a horizon that confronts the interpreter rather than merely reflecting the interpreter's assumptions.<sup>35</sup> The Qur'an is not a neutral repository of meanings waiting to be reorganized according to modern concerns; it addresses the interpreter with its own linguistic and moral force. At the same time, Bakhtin's theory of dialogism helps clarify that this textual horizon is not monologic. Meaning emerges through interaction among voices, responses, positions, and horizons.<sup>36</sup> Qur'anic discourse speaks through command, narrative, parable, question, warning, promise, dispute, recollection, and ethical exhortation. This dialogical multiplicity has also been noted in studies that describe Qur'anic discourse as an interactive field involving divine address, prophetic mediation, human response, justice, excellence, and moral communication.<sup>37</sup>

The implication is that the Qur'an should be approached as discourse, not merely as a fixed textual artifact. This supports Abu Zayd's argument that the Qur'an's meaning is inseparable from its communicative and discursive character.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, the present study qualifies Abu Zayd's position by insisting that discourse analysis must remain anchored in textual discipline. The Qur'an's dialogical character does not authorize unrestricted interpretive freedom; it requires closer attention to the text's forms of address, its semantic openness, its internal coherence, and its reception in the tafsir and hadith traditions. In this respect, textual accountability involves preserving both the integrity and the interpretive plurality of the Qur'anic text. Erebi's discussion of semantic openness and interpretive plurality is relevant because it highlights the need to distinguish between the sacred text and its interpretations while maintaining the flexibility inherent in Qur'anic expression.<sup>39</sup> Rippin's work on the

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<sup>33</sup> Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad Al-Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risalah, 1995).

<sup>34</sup> Duderija, "Neo-Traditional Salafi Qur'an-Sunna Hermeneutics1 and Its Interpretational Implications."

<sup>35</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

<sup>36</sup> Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*.

<sup>37</sup> A E Amoumri, "Crime and Punishment in the Spirit of the Qur'an: A Maqāṣid-Based Structural Reading of Divine Justice," *Human Arenas*, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-026-00591-5>; Wehby, "The Qur'ān As A Hidden Academy For Learning Dialogic Exchange."

<sup>38</sup> Abu Zayd, *Rethinking the Qur'an: Towards a Humanistic Hermeneutics*.

<sup>39</sup> M Erebi and A Almannā, "Between Text and Commentary: Translator Intervention and Semantic Openness in English Translations of the Qur'ān," *Cogent Arts and Humanities* 13, no. 1 (2026), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2026.2662804>.

Qur'an's oral and textual dimensions further underscores that Qur'anic meaning is shaped by the interplay between recitation, writing, structure, accessibility, and communal transmission.<sup>40</sup>

The theoretical significance of this finding lies in its correction of a false opposition: textual accountability and dialogical interpretation are not contradictory. A dialogical reading does not weaken textual authority; it deepens textual analysis by recognizing that the Qur'an's own form generates address, response, recognition, and moral obligation. Methodologically, this means that Qur'anic interpretation should begin with close textual analysis but should not stop at lexical meaning. The Qur'an's textual horizon is the point of departure, yet that horizon already opens toward tradition, history, readerly responsibility, and ethical judgment. Thus, the core finding of this subsection is that dialogical interpretation does not begin after the text has been analyzed; it begins within the text itself, because Qur'anic discourse is already structured as a dynamic field of address, plurality, and moral response.

### **The Tafsir Tradition Demonstrates Interpretive Plurality Rather than a Single Closed Meaning**

The central debate clarified by this study is whether fidelity to the Qur'anic text requires interpretive uniformity or whether the tafsir tradition itself authorizes a disciplined plurality of meanings. The evidence examined here supports the second position. Classical tafsir does not present Qur'anic interpretation as a single closed meaning mechanically extracted from the text; rather, it preserves a complex field of lexical possibilities, transmitted reports, legal judgments, theological assumptions, rhetorical observations, and contextual materials. This finding challenges the modern tendency to oppose "tradition" and "plurality" as if the former necessarily restricts meaning and the latter belongs only to contemporary reformist hermeneutics. The tafsir tradition is better understood as an archive of interpretive negotiations in which textual authority and semantic plurality coexist.

The interpretation of Q. 5:48 provides a strong example of this plurality. The verse describes the Qur'an as *muṣaddiqan*—confirming earlier scripture—and *muhayminan 'alayhi*—a term variously understood as guardian, witness, overseer, or criterion over previous revelation. It also states: "*li-kullin ja'alnā minkum shir'atan wa-minhājā,*" indicating that each community has been given a law and a way. Classical exegetes did not flatten these terms into a single semantic function. Al-Ṭabarī discusses the Qur'an's relationship to previous scriptures through confirmation, authority, and divine judgment, while also recognizing the differentiation of revealed laws within God's wisdom.<sup>41</sup> Ibn Kathīr similarly reads *muhaymin* as indicating the Qur'an's role as witness and judge over prior scriptures, yet he also acknowledges the historical plurality of divinely ordained legal paths.<sup>42</sup> The exegetical pattern is not one of indeterminacy, but of layered determination: linguistic meaning, theological hierarchy, legal differentiation, and inter-scriptural relation are all held together in the interpretive process.

This finding refines current scholarship on textualism and contextualism by showing that the opposition between the two is too simple to describe the operation of classical tafsir. Studies of Qur'anic interpretive plurality have long noted that the Arabic language, with its polysemy, syntactic flexibility, and multiple canonical readings, enables a range of possible meanings without necessarily undermining the authority of the text.<sup>43</sup> Erebiḥ's work on semantic openness similarly argues that classical exegetical practice often preserved multiple interpretive possibilities, whereas modern translations may narrow that openness by embedding one interpretive decision into the target

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<sup>40</sup> Andrew Rippin, "The Qur'an on the Internet: Implications and Future Possibilities BT - Muslims and the New Information and Communication Technologies" (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 113–26, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7247-2\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7247-2_7).

<sup>41</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy Al-Qur'ān*.

<sup>42</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-'Azim*.

<sup>43</sup> M A al-Latīf, "The Plurality of Declension in the Qur'anic Sentence," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 5, no. 2 (2003): 174–201, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2003.5.2.174>; S A Hamdi and T Alawi, "Fundamental Issues in the Book Al-Bustan in the Parsing of the Problems of the Qur'an by Ibn Al-Ahnaf Al-Yemeni (d. 717 AH)," *Journal of Ecohumanism* 3, no. 8 (2024): 9229–42, <https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v3i8.5540>.

language.<sup>44</sup> The implication is methodologically important: plurality is not a defect in Qur'anic interpretation, nor is it merely the result of modern relativism. It is partly generated by the linguistic, rhetorical, and transmitted structure of the Qur'anic interpretive tradition itself.

The same dynamic appears in the interpretation of Q. 2:256, “*lā ikrāha fī al-dīn*” / “There is no compulsion in religion.” The verse has been central to discussions of religious freedom, coercion, apostasy, and the limits of political authority in matters of belief. Classical exegetical discussions often connect the verse with reports concerning members of the *Anṣār* whose children had been raised among Jewish communities before Islam and were not to be coerced into conversion. Such reports show that interpretation did not proceed from wording alone; it involved the selection and evaluation of historical circumstances, communal memory, and legal-theological assumptions. Scholarship on *asbāb al-nuzūl* has shown that these reports do not simply “explain” verses in a neutral way; they identify which contexts are considered interpretively significant and thereby shape the range of meaning available to later readers.<sup>45</sup> Howe’s study of contemporary Qur’an study groups further demonstrates that *asbāb al-nuzūl* continues to function as an interpretive resource in pluralistic settings, where readers use contextual materials to negotiate religious diversity and contemporary ethical concerns.<sup>46</sup> Thus, Q. 2:256 illustrates that contextual reasoning is not foreign to tafsir; it is already embedded in the tradition’s own interpretive procedures.

This evidence challenges two opposing scholarly assumptions. The first assumption, often associated with rigid forms of textualism, is that the authority of the Qur’an requires the closure of interpretive plurality. The second, sometimes implied in overly sharp modernist critiques, is that plurality emerges only when contemporary interpreters move beyond tradition. The findings of this study support neither view. Classical tafsir often operates through a multi-layered method: lexical analysis, grammatical reasoning, transmitted reports, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, juristic argument, theological evaluation, rhetorical sensitivity, and comparison among earlier authorities. Al-Ṭabarī frequently records multiple opinions before weighing them; al-Qurṭubī expands exegetical discussion into legal analysis; al-Zamakhsharī foregrounds rhetoric, syntax, and theological argument; and Ibn Kathīr privileges transmitted reports while still arranging them within broader theological and legal judgments.<sup>47</sup> Their methods differ, but the very coexistence of these methods shows that tafsir is not a monolithic genre.

The plurality of tafsir is also visible beyond legal and philological exegesis. Sufi tafsir, for example, often works with multiple levels of meaning, combining symbolic, ethical, experiential, and esoteric readings without necessarily abandoning the textual surface.<sup>48</sup> This challenges the notion that classical tafsir can be reduced to a single exegetical model or that textual fidelity must take only one form. The broader tradition contains philological, juridical, theological, philosophical, rhetorical, and spiritual modes of interpretation. Their relationship is not always harmonious, but their coexistence demonstrates that Qur’anic interpretation has historically developed through contestation and differentiation. The interpretive debate, therefore, is not whether tradition contains plurality, but how that plurality should be governed, evaluated, and brought into conversation with contemporary questions.

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<sup>44</sup> Erebih and Almannā, “Between Text and Commentary: Translator Intervention and Semantic Openness in English Translations of the Qur’ān.”

<sup>45</sup> A Ragab, “Asbāb Al-Nuzūl: The (Good) Occasions of Revelation,” in *The Routledge Companion to the Qur’an*, 2021, 211–22, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315885360-23>; M Nguyen, “Sunnī Hermeneutical Literature,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur’anic Studies*, 2020, 832–47, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199698646.013.65>.

<sup>46</sup> J Howe, “Interpreting the Qur’an in the US: Religious Pluralism, Tradition, and Context,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 18, no. 3 (2016): 34–69, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2016.0249>.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ Al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy Al-Qur’ān*; Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami’ Li-Ahkam Al-Qur’an* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyyah, 1964); Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf ‘an Ḥaqā’iq Al-Tanzīl Wa-‘Uyūn Al-Aqāwīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1987); Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr Al-Qur’an Al-‘Azīm* (Dar al-Tayyibah, 2000).

<sup>48</sup> J J Elias, “Sūfi Tafsīr Reconsidered: Exploring the Development of a Genre,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 12, no. 1–2 (2010): 41–55, <https://doi.org/10.3366/E1465359110000951>.

The term *muhaymin* in Q. 5:48 is especially useful for clarifying this point. It indicates the Qur'an's overarching authority in relation to earlier scriptures, but classical interpretation does not treat that authority as a simple denial of historical plurality. Rather, the Qur'an's authority is articulated through confirmation, judgment, differentiation, and moral direction. Shah's study of al-Ṭabarī is relevant here because it shows that al-Ṭabarī's tafsir synthesizes literary, grammatical, theological, and transmitted elements rather than relying on a single mode of explanation.<sup>49</sup> In this sense, Qur'anic authority is not weakened by interpretive multiplicity; it is mediated through a disciplined tradition capable of organizing multiple forms of evidence. The concept of *muhaymin* therefore reinforces the article's larger claim: textual authority and interpretive plurality are not mutually exclusive when interpretation is anchored in a structured hermeneutical discipline.

This finding also refines the projects of modern contextualist hermeneutics. Rahman's double movement emphasizes movement from historical particularity to general moral principles and then to contemporary application,<sup>50</sup> while Saeed's contextualist method gives systematic attention to ethico-legal texts and the changing conditions of interpretation.<sup>51</sup> The present study does not reject these approaches; rather, it expands them by showing that the movement is not only between past and present, nor only between text and context. It also involves the traditional horizon as an active mediator. Classical tafsir is not simply the "past" from which modern interpreters depart; it is a dialogical archive through which contemporary interpretation gains both constraint and depth. Mubarak's study of Ibn 'Āshūr supports this point by showing how modern tafsir can balance innovation with continuity through the adaptation of premodern hermeneutical resources to contemporary concerns.<sup>52</sup>

The regional development of tafsir further confirms that tradition is neither static nor uniform. Studies of tafsir in Turkey and Kashmir, for instance, show how local intellectual and cultural contexts shape exegetical production while maintaining links to broader classical frameworks.<sup>53</sup> These regional trajectories are significant because they demonstrate that plurality is not only semantic or methodological, but also historical and geographical. Tafsir develops within communities, institutions, languages, pedagogical networks, and intellectual climates. A dialogical model of Qur'anic hermeneutics must therefore treat tradition not as a closed deposit of conclusions but as a historically extended field of reasoning in which inherited authority, local context, and contemporary questions interact.

The theoretical implication is that the "traditional horizon" in Qur'anic hermeneutics should not be understood as a rigid closure of meaning or as a merely optional background. Gadamer's concept of tradition is helpful because it frames tradition as a living medium through which understanding becomes possible, rather than as an inert object standing behind the text.<sup>54</sup> In Qur'anic studies, however, this concept must be specified through the actual disciplines of tafsir: *isnād*, Arabic philology, *qirā'āt*, grammar, rhetoric, jurisprudence, theology, and communal memory. The traditional horizon constrains arbitrary interpretation, but it also preserves disagreement, semantic layering, and methodological diversity. Contemporary interpreters therefore cannot responsibly bypass tradition, but neither can they honestly represent it as a single, uniform voice.

This debate strengthens the originality of the present study by showing that dialogical interpretation is not an external imposition upon Qur'anic hermeneutics. It is a theoretical

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<sup>49</sup> M Shah, "Al-Ṭabarī and the Dynamics of Tafsir: Theological Dimensions of a Legacy," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 15, no. 2 (2013): 83–139, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2013.0097>.

<sup>50</sup> Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*.

<sup>51</sup> Saeed, *Islamic Thought: An Introduction*.

<sup>52</sup> H Mubarak, "Change through Continuity: A Case Study of Q. 4:34 in Ibn CAshur's Al-Tarir Wa'l-Tanwir," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 20, no. 1 (2018): 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2018.0318>.

<sup>53</sup> G N Naqash, "Maṭlab Al-Ṭālibīn: A Milestone in the Development of Tafsir Literature in Kashmir," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 26, no. 1 (2025): 217–40, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v26i1.5640>; H Çoruh, "The Diyanet Qur'ān Commentary Kur'an Yolu (Path Of The Qur'ān): Methodology And Features," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 7, no. 1 (2022): 54–71, <https://doi.org/10.55831/ajis.v7i1.463>.

<sup>54</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

reconstruction of dynamics already present within tafsir: plurality under discipline, authority through mediation, and continuity through interpretive negotiation. The article's contribution lies in making this implicit structure explicit. By treating the tafsir tradition as a dialogical archive rather than a closed repository of fixed meanings, the study reframes the text–context debate and demonstrates that contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics can remain tradition-conscious without becoming interpretively closed.

### The Text–Context Binary Fails to Explain Ethico-Legal Verses Because Meaning Emerges through Textual, Historical, and Ethical Mediation

The distinctive methodological contribution of this study lies in showing that ethico-legal verses cannot be adequately interpreted through either textual extraction or contextual replacement, but require disciplined dialogical mediation among wording, exegetical tradition, historical setting, readerly location, and ethical normativity. This approach produces a different insight from readings that begin by asking whether a verse should be understood “literally” or “contextually.” Instead, it asks how different interpretive horizons interact, correct, and constrain one another. The method is especially productive for verses whose wording has legal force, historical embeddedness, and contemporary ethical consequences. Q. 4:34 is the most revealing case because its interpretation has become a site of intense debate over gender authority, family law, patriarchal epistemology, and the ethical limits of inherited legal reasoning.

The phrase “*al-rijāl qawwāmūna ‘alā al-nisā’*” in Q. 4:34 has commonly been translated as men being “in charge of,” “protectors and maintainers of,” or “caretakers of” women. The verse links this *qiwāmah* to two textual reasons: “*bimā faḍḍala Allāhu ba‘dahum ‘alā ba‘ḍ*” and “*bimā anfaqū min amwālihim*,” that is, a form of differentiated advantage and men's financial expenditure. The dialogical method first observes that the verse itself does not present *qiwāmah* as an abstract metaphysical superiority detached from social responsibility. Its textual logic is conditional and relational, especially because *infāq* functions as an explicit rationale. Classical tafsir often reads the verse within a framework of male financial maintenance, household authority, and marital discipline. Ibn Kathīr, for instance, interprets men as maintainers, caretakers, and leaders within the household structure.<sup>55</sup> Yet the same evidence also shows that the verse's meaning is mediated through social function, not simply through an ontological hierarchy of gender.

This methodological observation reveals a limitation in both rigid textualist and purely contextualist readings. A strict textualist approach may convert the verse into a timeless doctrine of male authority, but these risks ignoring the verse's own internal conditions, particularly the reference to economic responsibility. Conversely, a purely contextualist approach may neutralize the verse by reducing it to a seventh-century social arrangement, but these risks weakening textual accountability and leaving unclear how the verse continues to function within Qur'anic normativity. The dialogical approach avoids both moves. It does not deny that *qiwāmah* historically operated within a patriarchal household economy, but it also refuses to treat that historical arrangement as the entirety of the verse's normative force. This is why recent scholarship on *qiwāmah* is methodologically important: traditional interpretations often emphasize male leadership, while modern critiques argue that these readings are shaped by patriarchal epistemologies rather than fixed theological doctrines.<sup>56</sup>

The analytical value of the five-horizon method appears when Q. 4:34 is read intratextually rather than in isolation. The verse must be placed in dialogue with Q. 30:21, which frames marriage through *sakan*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*; Q. 4:1, which grounds human kinship in a single soul; Q. 9:71, which describes believing men and women as mutual protectors; Q. 33:35, which presents men and

<sup>55</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-'Azim*.

<sup>56</sup> N Ahmad and M A Rasheed, “The Qur'anic Concept of Qiwamah: A Review of Commentaries on the Verse: 4:34,” *Al-Shajarah* 23, no. 1 (2018): 169–81, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85049583280&partnerID=40&md5=b20ad15a787a6811c2bb0266995522c2>; A F Ardiansyah et al., “Qiwamah And Epistemic Violence: A Critical Socio-Legal Analysis of Gendered Authority In Islamic Family Law,” *Mawaddah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 3, no. 2 (2025): 605–26, <https://doi.org/10.52496/mjhki.v3i2.100>.

women symmetrically in moral and spiritual accountability; and Q. 49:13, which rejects superiority except by *taqwā*. This wider Qur'anic horizon does not erase Q. 4:34, but it prevents *qiwāmah* from being absolutized into unrestricted domination. The method therefore reveals a tension within the interpretive field: the Qur'an contains both verses historically read through hierarchical gender structures and verses that articulate moral reciprocity, spiritual equality, and shared ethical responsibility. Modern hermeneutics seeks to address this tension by distinguishing between context-specific rulings and broader ethical principles.<sup>57</sup>

The hadith corpus further strengthens the need for mediation. Reports concerning the Prophet's conduct toward women, the condemnation of harm, and the farewell sermon's emphasis on moral responsibility toward wives place marital authority within an ethical frame rather than a license for coercion. These materials vary in wording, transmission, and legal interpretation, but their cumulative ethical direction complicates readings that reduce *qiwāmah* to arbitrary control. In the dialogical model, hadith does not function merely as supplementary proof-texting; it forms part of the traditional and ethical horizons through which Qur'anic meaning is assessed. The method therefore reveals that *qiwāmah* must be interpreted through the interaction of household responsibility, social context, prophetic ethics, and Qur'anic values of justice and mercy. This prevents the verse's premodern legal setting from being erased while also preventing that setting from becoming an unquestioned norm for all social conditions.

This finding refines previous scholarship on gender hermeneutics. Wadud argues that patriarchal interpretation often arises not from the Qur'an alone but from male-centered exegetical assumptions and social structures.<sup>58</sup> Abou El Fadl's critique of authoritarian interpretation is equally relevant because it shows how interpreters may claim divine authority while suppressing humility, moral responsibility, and the plurality of possible meanings.<sup>59</sup> Saeed's contextualist approach helps explain why ethico-legal verses require attention to historical and contemporary conditions.<sup>60</sup> The present study supports these arguments but also refines them by insisting that ethical rereading must remain textually and traditionally accountable. It is not enough to invoke modern equality as an external principle; the argument must be developed through Qur'anic intertextuality, semantic analysis, tafsir engagement, hadith evidence, and ethical reasoning.

*Maqāṣid*-oriented scholarship provides an important methodological bridge, but the dialogical approach also clarifies its limits. Several contemporary interpreters propose reading *qiwāmah* through the objectives of Islamic law, especially justice, dignity, welfare, and protection from harm, thereby challenging patriarchal readings that treat male authority as absolute.<sup>61</sup> This is valuable because *maqāṣid* can prevent legal interpretation from becoming detached from the ethical purposes of revelation. Yet *maqāṣid* alone may become too general if not disciplined by the verse's textual structure and its exegetical reception. The contribution of dialogical mediation is to place *maqāṣid* within a wider interpretive ecology: textual wording sets limits, tradition preserves debate, history explains social function, the readerly horizon identifies contemporary questions, and the ethical horizon evaluates the moral adequacy of interpretation.

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<sup>57</sup> C Jones-Pauly, "Gender Relations," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Islamic Law*, 2016, 137–49, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315613093-14>; M Khorchide, "The Qur'anic Turn of Women's Image: From Being the Object to the Subject of History," in *Muslim Women and Gender Justice: Concepts, Sources, and Histories*, 2019, 140–69, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351025348-9>.

<sup>58</sup> Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*.

<sup>59</sup> Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women*.

<sup>60</sup> Saeed, *Islamic Thought: An Introduction*.

<sup>61</sup> A Duderija, *Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'a and Contemporary Reformist Muslim Thought: An Examination*, *Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'a and Contemporary Reformist Muslim Thought: An Examination*, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137319418>; Z Alwani, "Socioeconomic and Gender Justice in the Qur'an: Modern Challenges," in *Poverty and Wealth in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 2016, 77–103, [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-94850-5\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-94850-5_5); Ardiansyah et al., "Qiwāmah And Epistemic Violence: A Critical Socio-Legal Analysis of Gendered Authority In Islamic Family Law."

The method also helps assess alternative and more contested readings of *qiwāmah*. Muhammad Syahrur's interpretation, for example, has been read as suggesting that *qiwāmah* is not inherently male-centric and may be assigned contextually according to economic and social stability, including to women under certain conditions.<sup>62</sup> Reciprocal or partnership-based hermeneutics, such as *Qirā'ah Mubādalāh*, similarly emphasizes mutuality between men and women as a gender-sensitive reading that seeks to align Islamic principles with contemporary concerns for justice.<sup>63</sup> Collaborative work between Islamic feminists and male reformist scholars has also advanced gender-equitable interpretations by challenging inherited patriarchal norms through shared hermeneutical critique.<sup>64</sup> The dialogical model does not accept all such readings uncritically; rather, it offers criteria for evaluating them. A reading is stronger when it can account for Arabic semantics, classical reception, Qur'anic intertextuality, historical context, and ethical coherence at the same time.

This balanced approach is important because gender-sensitive hermeneutics remains contested. Critics argue that such readings may deviate from traditional Islamic principles or reflect external ideological influences, especially feminism.<sup>65</sup> Proponents respond that patriarchal interpretations are themselves historically and culturally situated, not simply identical with revelation.<sup>66</sup> The method proposed here clarifies what is at stake in this disagreement. The issue is not whether interpreters should choose between "tradition" and "modernity," but how they should evaluate inherited interpretations considering textual evidence, historical contingency, ethical normativity, and contemporary realities. Slater's discussion of Abou El Fadl's use of the fusion of horizons is relevant here because it shows how ethical interpretation can mediate between inherited Islamic principles and present moral concerns without collapsing one into the other.<sup>67</sup>

The strength of the dialogical method is therefore its capacity to make interpretive mediation visible. It reveals why Q. 4:34 cannot be responsibly interpreted by isolating *qawwāmūn* from *infāq*, or by separating the verse from the Qur'an's broader discourse on marriage, human dignity, mutual responsibility, and piety. It also reveals why contemporary ethical concerns cannot simply override the text; they must enter disciplined engagement with language, tradition, and historical context. The method's limitation is that it does not produce a single mechanical ruling or eliminate disagreement. Its purpose is not to close debate, but to establish more rigorous criteria for conducting it. In this sense, the dialogical approach is especially relevant to ethico-legal verses because these verses sit precisely at the intersection of textual authority, historical social order, and continuing ethical consequence.

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<sup>62</sup> F Nelli and Y Fajri, "Gender Equality in Imamate Shia and Sunni Inheritance Jurisprudence: A Comparative Analysis of Legal Doctrines and Familial Relationships," *Mazahib Jurnal Pemikiran Hukum Islam* 23, no. 2 (2024): 555–94, <https://doi.org/10.21093/mj.v23i2.8381>.

<sup>63</sup> N Nikmatullah, "Male Ulama Reinterpretation of the Gender Hadith in Indonesian Socio Cultural Contexts," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 105, no. 2 (2024): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.105.213>; M Azik and A Syukri, "Critical Analysis of the Concept of Qirā'ah Mubādalāh (Theory of Reciprocal Reading) in the Dynamics of the Development of Islamic Marriage Legal Theory," *Manchester Journal of Transnational Islamic Law and Practice* 21, no. 4 (2025): 209–22, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-105031089495&partnerID=40&md5=a2e966748f288d43a34efb95fa1faa05>.

<sup>64</sup> A Duderija, "Contemporary Muslim Male Reformist Thought and Gender Equality Affirmative Interpretations of Islam," *Feminist Theology* 28, no. 2 (2020): 161–81, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735019886076>; M S M Val, "Rethinking the Qiwāmah: A Qur'āno-Centric Evaluation of Modern Women Exegetes' Perspectives," *AlBayan* 11, no. 2 (2013): 55–70, <https://doi.org/10.11136/jqh.1311.02.04>.

<sup>65</sup> M Ichsan, "Gender Analysis on Islamic Texts: A Study on Its Accuracy," *Global Journal Al-Thaqafah* 4, no. 1 (2014): 57–68, <https://doi.org/10.7187/GJAT552014.04.01>; K M A Harris and A Muhtar, "The Concept of Gender Equality in Islam and the West," *Afkar* 21, no. 2 (2019): 33–74, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol21no2.2>.

<sup>66</sup> Jones-Pauly, "Gender Relations"; F Shahin, "Islamic Feminism and Hegemonic Discourses on Faith and Gender in Islam," *International Journal of Islam in Asia* 1, no. 1 (2020): 27–48, <https://doi.org/10.1163/25899996-01010003>.

<sup>67</sup> A M Slater, "Relationality And The Gadamerian 'Horizontverschmelzung': Khaled Abou El Fadl," *ReOrient* 6, no. 1 (2020): 47–64, <https://doi.org/10.13169/REORIENT.6.1.0047>.

This subsection therefore advances the article's contribution by demonstrating that the text–context binary fails most clearly where Qur'anic interpretation has legal and ethical stakes. The dialogical method reveals that meaning emerges neither from wording alone nor from contemporary values alone, but through accountable mediation among text, tradition, history, readerly consciousness, and ethical judgment.

### A Dialogical Model Offers a Structured Alternative to Literalism and Relativism

The main theoretical implication of this study is that dialogical interpretation offers a structured alternative to two recurrent weaknesses in Qur'anic hermeneutics: rigid literalism, which confines meaning within inherited formulations, and unrestricted relativism, which detaches interpretation from textual and traditional accountability. The findings developed in the previous subsections show that Qur'anic meaning is neither produced by textual form alone nor freely generated by the interpreter's contemporary context. Rather, meaning emerges through a disciplined interaction among textual wording, exegetical tradition, historical situation, readerly location, and ethical normativity. This model therefore reframes Qur'anic interpretation not as a binary contest between text and context, but as a multi-horizon process of responsible meaning-making.

The primary Qur'anic data support this model because the selected verses represent different but interconnected interpretive domains. Q. 5:48 recognizes plurality through *shir'ah* and *minhāj* yet directs communities toward ethical competition in *khayrāt*. Q. 2:256 rejects coercion in religion while affirming that truth has become distinct from error. Q. 49:13 grounds human diversity in divine creation and transforms difference into a basis for mutual recognition. Q. 4:34 demonstrates how a socially embedded ethico-legal verse requires mediation between textual wording, economic responsibility, gendered social structure, and broader Qur'anic ethics. Taken together, these verses show that Qur'anic interpretation must be simultaneously textual, historical, tradition-conscious, reader-aware, and ethically responsible. Their significance lies not merely in their individual meanings, but in the methodological pattern they disclose: contested Qur'anic verses require interpretive mediation across multiple horizons.

The model developed in this study can therefore be formulated around five analytical horizons. The textual horizon asks what Qur'anic wording, grammar, rhetoric, and semantic structure permit or restrict. The traditional horizon asks how tafsir, hadith, *fiqh*, theology, and inherited scholarly debates have historically understood the text. The historical horizon asks what socio-moral situation the verse addressed in its revelatory setting. The readerly horizon asks what assumptions, locations, questions, and limitations the contemporary interpreter brings to the text. The ethical horizon asks whether an interpretation coheres with broader Qur'anic values such as justice, mercy, *taqwā*, human dignity, non-coercion, compassion, and moral accountability. These horizons should not be understood as merely sequential steps. They function dialogically: each horizon interrogates, limits, and refines the others.

This framework extends Gadamerian hermeneutics while specifying it for Qur'anic studies. Gadamer's notion of the fusion of horizons explains why understanding is historically situated and why interpretation emerges through encounter rather than neutral objectivity.<sup>68</sup> Later discussions of Gadamer have emphasized that hermeneutical understanding is not the objectification of the other but a truth-oriented dialogue in which self and other remain in a relation of mutual address.<sup>69</sup> The concept of horizon is useful because it describes the historically shaped boundaries of understanding, while the fusion of horizons names the transformative interaction through which those boundaries are

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<sup>68</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

<sup>69</sup> G E Aylesworth, "Dialogue, Text, Narrative: Confronting Gadamer and Ricoeur," in *Gadamer and Hermeneutics: Science, Culture, Literature*, 2016, 63–81, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315543024>; H.-H. Kögler, "Being as Dialogue, or the Ethical Consequences of Interpretation," in *Consequences of Hermeneutics: Fifty Years After Gadamer's Truth and Method*, 2010, 343–67, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84903403713&partnerID=40&md5=304c10cc2a391ee9506341629294a42a>; C M Méndez Cabrita, "Dialogue as a Linguistic Epiphany: From Methodical Rationality to Funded Rationality in the Listen Logos (Hören)," *Utopia y Praxis Latinoamericana* 23, no. Extra3 (2018): 104–9, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2426756>.

expanded.<sup>70</sup> In intercultural hermeneutics, this process is also treated as a way to negotiate diverse standpoints without reducing them to sameness.<sup>71</sup> The dialogical model proposed here adopts this insight, but it does not simply transpose Gadamer into Islamic studies. It reformulates the fusion of horizons by placing Qur'anic wording, tafsir tradition, revelatory history, readerly situatedness, and ethical normativity into a disciplined relation.

Bakhtin's dialogism further clarifies the model's theoretical contribution. Meaning is not formed through isolated monologue but through interaction among voices, positions, and responses.<sup>72</sup> This insight is particularly useful for Qur'anic studies because the Qur'an itself contains modes of address, dispute, response, recollection, and moral correction. Recent hermeneutical scholarship has similarly described interpretation as a process involving multiple voices, perspectives, and standpoints rather than a single sovereign interpreter.<sup>73</sup> Yet Qur'anic hermeneutics requires a more normative structure than Bakhtinian dialogism alone provides. Because the Qur'an functions as revelation within Muslim intellectual tradition, dialogical interpretation must be constrained by Arabic linguistic discipline, inherited tafsir, hadith evidence, prophetic ethics, and Qur'anic moral coherence. The model therefore appropriates dialogism critically: it accepts the relational formation of meaning but rejects interpretive openness without criteria.

The findings also revise major trajectories in contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics. Rahman's double movement remains crucial because it links historical inquiry with moral generalization and contemporary application.<sup>74</sup> Saeed's contextualism remains important because it gives methodological attention to ethico-legal texts and the relevance of changing social conditions.<sup>75</sup> Abu Zayd's discourse theory remains valuable because it moves beyond treating the Qur'an as a static textual artifact and emphasizes its communicative character.<sup>76</sup> Wadud's gender-inclusive hermeneutics remains significant because it exposes the role of readerly location and patriarchal assumptions in shaping interpretation.<sup>77</sup> Abou El Fadl's ethical critique remains essential because it warns against authoritarian claims to divine certainty and insists on moral responsibility in interpretation.<sup>78</sup> The present model does not replace these approaches; it integrates and reorganizes their strongest insights by arguing that Qur'anic meaning is formed through structured dialogue among text, tradition, history, reader, and ethics.

The contribution of this model also lies in its explicit ethical structure. Qur'anic ethics is not an external supplement added after textual analysis; it is part of the interpretive process itself. Studies of Qur'anic ethics have emphasized justice, compassion, righteousness, human dignity, and moral accountability as central to the Qur'an's ethical worldview.<sup>79</sup> *Maqāṣid*-oriented scholarship similarly

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<sup>70</sup> R Nemeč, "Gadamer's Subtilitas Applicandi versus Whitehead's Symbolic Reference," *Filozofia* 64, no. 1 (2009): 18–27, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-62449108761&partnerID=40&md5=76e38e10fe1e6a1c72f4d3d33182ca0b>; J de Mul, "Horizons of Hermeneutics: Intercultural Hermeneutics in a Globalizing World," *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 6, no. 4 (2011): 628–55, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11466-011-0159-x>.

<sup>71</sup> de Mul, "Horizons of Hermeneutics: Intercultural Hermeneutics in a Globalizing World."

<sup>72</sup> Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*.

<sup>73</sup> J Etxabe, "A Dialogical Model of Human Rights Adjudication," in *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, vol. 21, 2023, 1011–40, <https://doi.org/10.1093/icon/moad085>.

<sup>74</sup> Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*.

<sup>75</sup> Saeed, *Islamic Thought: An Introduction*.

<sup>76</sup> Abu Zayd, *Rethinking the Qur'an: Towards a Humanistic Hermeneutics*.

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

<sup>78</sup> Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women*.

<sup>79</sup> R Harvey, *The Qur'an and the Just Society, The Qur'an and the Just Society*, 2017, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85213788562&partnerID=40&md5=a3c224658519da4c5354d7375c8c7f7f>; A Khan, R Sukmana, and A Mahmood, "Islamic Social Finance Ecosystem And The Role Of Crowdfunding: A Proposed Model," *Hamdard Islamicus* 46, no. 3 (2023): 91–111, <https://doi.org/10.57144/hi.v46i3.876>; C Rois, A Irfan, and H Anam, "ISLAMIC HIERARCHY OF VALUE: Abdullah Saeed's Progressive Interpretation of the Qur'an," *Miqot: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 49, no. 1 (2025): 205–21, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v49i1.1125>.

argues that Islamic legal interpretation should attend to universal moral objectives rather than remain confined to rigid literalism.<sup>80</sup> Thematic and structural approaches to Qur'anic ethics further show that the Qur'an's moral vision remains relevant to contemporary debates on social justice and human rights when interpreted through coherent ethical analysis rather than isolated prooftexts.<sup>81</sup> The dialogical model contributes to this debate by treating the ethical horizon as a critical test of interpretation, while still requiring that ethical claims remain grounded in textual evidence and tradition-conscious reasoning.

Methodologically, the model provides a concrete framework for studying contested Qur'anic themes without collapsing into prooftexting. In discussions of religious freedom, for instance, Q. 2:256 should not be cited in isolation but examined through its wording, relevant *asbāb al-nuzūl* reports, classical legal reception, modern debates on freedom of conscience, and Qur'anic principles concerning responsibility and non-coercion. In studies of pluralism, Q. 5:48 and Q. 49:13 should be read not as isolated textual supports for predetermined conclusions, but as parts of a wider Qur'anic discourse on difference, divine judgment, moral accountability, and ethical competition. In gender interpretation, Q. 4:34 must be analyzed through its vocabulary, historical household economy, tafsir reception, Qur'anic marital ethics, prophetic conduct, and contemporary questions of justice and harm. This approach resonates with broader hermeneutical methodology, which seeks to bridge the historical distance between text and interpreter through reflexive and dialogical interpretation.<sup>82</sup>

The model also has relevance beyond the specific verses analyzed in this article. It can be applied to Qur'anic discussions of governance, interreligious relations, punishment, economic justice, ecology, family law, and communal ethics. Its value lies in its capacity to organize disagreement rather than eliminate it. Islamic hermeneutics has long included methods such as *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* for engaging apparent and deeper meanings of the Qur'an, and contemporary scholarship increasingly combines these inherited methods with modern hermeneutical tools to address current intellectual and ethical challenges.<sup>83</sup> Recent applications of Gadamerian hermeneutics to Qur'anic studies similarly indicate that the fusion of horizons can help integrate linguistic, historical, and ethical dimensions in a more holistic understanding of the text.<sup>84</sup> The five-horizon model proposed here gives that integration a more explicit analytical structure.

At the same time, the model must be presented with appropriate limits. It does not claim to produce a final, uncontested interpretation of every Qur'anic verse. Nor does it eliminate the need for philological expertise, hadith criticism, legal theory, historical inquiry, or ethical judgment. Its contribution is not closure but disciplined mediation. It provides a way to test interpretations by asking whether they are textually plausible, tradition-conscious, historically informed, readerly self-critical, and ethically coherent. In this sense, the model offers a methodological middle ground without becoming a weak compromise: it rejects literalism when literalism closes the text against its own ethical and dialogical complexity, and it rejects relativism when relativism ignores the constraints of language, tradition, and Qur'anic moral structure.

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<sup>80</sup> Duderija, *Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'a and Contemporary Reformist Muslim Thought: An Examination*.

<sup>81</sup> A M Almajeedy, "Structural and Thematic Coherence in Qur'anic Sūrahs (Taswīr): A New Domain in Qur'anic Inimitability (Sūrat Al-Nisā' as a Model\*)," *Journal of College of Sharia and Islamic Studies* 40, no. 1 (2022): 247–74, <https://doi.org/10.29117/jcsis.2022.0321>; Harvey, *Qur'an Just Soc*.

<sup>82</sup> Aylesworth, "Dialogue, Text, Narrative: Confronting Gadamer and Ricoeur"; I Dvorkin, "Hermeneutic Strategy of Rabbinic Literature," *Religions* 16, no. 9 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16091107>; Méndez Cabrita, "Dialogue as a Linguistic Epiphany: From Methodical Rationality to Funded Rationality in the Listen Logos (Hören)."

<sup>83</sup> H R Açar, "Some Remarks on Studying the Qur'ān as Revealed Knowledge," *AlBayan* 11, no. 2 (2013): 93–105, <https://doi.org/10.11136/jqh.1311.02.06>; I Supena, "Epistemology of Tafsīr, Ta'wīl, and Hermeneutics: Towards an Integrative Approach," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 14, no. 1 (2024): 121–36, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.141.08>.

<sup>84</sup> M G Abdelnour, "From 'What' Makes It Miraculous to 'How' It Is Miraculous: The Qur'ān's Methodological Revolution," *Religions* 17, no. 1 (2026), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel17010037>.

The broader academic contribution is therefore both conceptual and methodological. Conceptually, the study reframes Qur'anic interpretation beyond the text–context binary by defining meaning as a dialogical relation among five horizons. Methodologically, it offers an analytical structure for studying contested Qur'anic passages in a way that is rigorous, transparent, and responsive to contemporary scholarship. Theoretically, it contributes to Islamic hermeneutics by transforming dialogical interpretation from a general call for openness into a disciplined epistemic model. This is the article's central originality: it shows that contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics need not choose between inherited textual authority and modern ethical relevance, because responsible interpretation is formed precisely through their structured and critical dialogue.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the text–context binary is insufficient for explaining the formation of meaning in contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics. Qur'anic interpretation cannot be reduced either to rigid textualism, which confines meaning to fixed lexical or inherited formulations, or to unrestricted contextualism, which risks detaching interpretation from textual and traditional accountability. Instead, Qur'anic meaning emerges through disciplined mediation among the text, tafsir tradition, historical setting, readerly situatedness, and ethical normativity. In relation to the first research objective, the study shows that the Qur'an itself contains a dialogical structure. Through direct address, semantic layering, intertextual coherence, and ethical orientation, the Qur'anic text does not function as a closed object of interpretation but as a communicative discourse that calls readers into response and moral reflection.

In relation to the second objective, this article formulates a five-horizon dialogical model: the textual, traditional, historical, readerly, and ethical horizons. These horizons enable interpretation to remain faithful to Qur'anic language and classical tafsir while also engaging historical context, contemporary questions, and broader Qur'anic values such as justice, mercy, human dignity, *taqwā*, non-coercion, and moral accountability. In relation to the third objective, the study shows that this model provides a structured alternative to both literalism and relativism. The analysis of Q. 49:13, Q. 5:48, Q. 2:256, and Q. 4:34 indicates that contested themes such as human diversity, religious plurality, non-compulsion, and gendered ethico-legal authority require accountable dialogue among textual evidence, exegetical tradition, historical mediation, and ethical reasoning.

The main contribution of this article lies in redefining dialogical interpretation as an epistemic model, not merely as openness or compromise. Its academic significance is that it shows interpretive plurality to be embedded within the tafsir tradition itself, while also offering a method for addressing contemporary hermeneutical problems. Future research may apply this five-horizon model to more specific themes, including gender justice, religious freedom, ecology, family law, governance, and interreligious relations.

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