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DIFFERING RESPONSES TO WESTERN HERMENEUTICS
A Comparative Critical Study of M. Quraish Shihab's and Muḥammad 'Imāra's Thoughts

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Abstract

This article deals with Muslim scholars' responses to Western hermeneutics and its application to the Qur'an. It focuses on the thoughts of two thinkers, i.e. M. Quraish Shihab from Indonesia and Muḥammad 'Imāra from Egypt, and discusses them in a comparative critical way. On the basis of the available data, its author comes to the following conclusions. First, the two scholars have different receptions of the Western hermeneutics. While 'Imāra rejects it totally only because it is rooted in the Western tradition that is different from the Islamic tradition, Shihab accepts it with some considerations on the basis that it can widen horizons of Qur'an interpreters, so that they might understand the Qur'an in a more careful way. Second, 'Imāra's arguments for his rejection of it are not strong enough, and even constitute misunderstandings of hermeneutical theories, whereas Shihab's arguments can be considered more plausible, even though in some cases he does not give enough elaborations. Third, these responses have a certain impact on the dynamics of hermeneutical approaches in Indonesia.

[Artikel ini membahas respon ilmuwan muslim mengenai ilmu hermeneutik

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barat dan penerapannya pada Qur'an. Tulisan ini fokus pada dua pemikir muslim yaitu M. Quraish Shihab dari Indonesia dan Muḥammad 'Imāra asal Mesir serta mendiskusikannya dalam kerangka perbandingan kritis. Berdasarkan data yang diperoleh menunjukkan bahwa pertama, dua ilmuwan tersebut berbeda dalam penerimaan hermeneutik barat. 'Imāra menolak sepenuhnya karena berakar pada tradisi barat, sedangkan Shihab menerimanya dengan beberapa pertimbangan selama dapat memperluas cakrawala penafsiran Qur'an dan dapat memahaminya dengan berhati-hati. Kedua, argumen penolakan yang diajukan 'Imāra tidak cukup kuat dan kadang terdapat kesalahpahaman teoritikal, sedangkan argumen Shihab lebih masuk akal, walaupun dalam beberapa bagian ia tidak memberikan penjelasan lebih lanjut. Ketiga, kedua respon ilmuwan tersebut mempunyai dampak signifikan pada dinamika pendekatan hermeneutik di Indonesia.]

Keywords: hermeneutics, interpretation of the Qur'an, hermeneutical schools, rejection, reception

A. Introduction

Since the 1990s Western hermeneutics has been discussed by Muslim scholars of many countries. It is one of the most controversial themes. The main question is whether or not it can be used for the interpretation of the Qur'an. Some of them reject it totally and some others accept it with certain reservations. This article deals with the opinions of M. Quraish Shihab and Muḥammad 'Imāra on Western hermeneutics, asking how each one elaborates it, what each one thinks of the possibility of applying it to the interpretation of the Qur'an, and why? There are two reasons for choosing these two thinkers. First, they are prolific Muslim scholars of Islamic studies in general and of Qur'anic studies in particular. Shihab is an Indonesian Muslim scholar, whereas 'Imāra is an Egyptian one. Both graduated from al-Azhar University. They wrote many books on Islam and especially on the interpretation of the Qur'an and the 'sciences' of the Qur'an (*'ulūm al-Qur'ān*). Second, they have been involved in the discussion of Western hermeneutics. One chapter of Shihab's work *Kaidah Tafsir* is devoted to this subject matter, and 'Imāra's book *Qirā'at al-naṣṣ al-dīnī* is dedicated to responding to it.

This comparative study identifies some similarities and differences

in their opinions on hermeneutics, and analyses what might influence them in this regard. I try to analyse their ideas and arguments on this subject in a critical way. In this case, I am involved in discussing with the two scholars about many aspects under discussion.

B. A Short Biography of M. Quraish Shihab and Muḥammad ʻImāra: a Comparison

1. Education

M. Quraish Shihab[2] was born in a very religious family on February 16, 1944, in Rapang, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. He received his elementary education in Ujung Pandang, and afterwards went to Malang in order to attend junior and senior high school at the Darul-Hadits Islamic boarding school, where he studied many subjects in Islamic studies. In 1958 he travelled to Cairo and was accepted as a student at the second level of the Azhar "preparation school" (*al-madrasa al-iʻdādīya*) (similar to a junior high school in the Indonesian context). Nine years later, in 1967, he graduated from the undergraduate program in the department of the Interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith, Faculty of Islamic Theology, al-Azhar University. He then continued his study at the same faculty and in 1969 he completed his master's program in the field of Qur'anic studies. The title of his msater's thesis was *al-Iʻjāz al-tashrīʻī lil-Qur'ān al-karīm*. Afterwards, he went back to Ujung Pandang and was involved in academic activities at the Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN/State Institute of Islamic Studies) in Ujung Padang. He was even appointed vice-rector of this institute, with responsibility for academic matters and students affairs. From 1980 to 1982 he did a doctoral program at al-Azhar university, also in the field of Qur'anic studies. The title of his dissertation was "*Naẓm al-Durar lil-Biqāʻī, taḥqīq wa-dirāsa*."

Looking at their education, it is noteworthy that both graduated from al-Azhar University, studying Islam in undergraduate, master's, and

[2] Shihab's biography is mostly derived from his official website: 'Home', *Muhammad Quraish Shihab Official Website*, http://quraishshihab.com/, accessed 30 Jan 2017; 'Biografi M. Quraish Shihab', *TAFSIR AL-MISHBAH - M. Quraish Shihab* (27 Dec 2010), https://tafsiralmishbah.wordpress.com/biografi-m-quraish-shihab/, accessed 1 Feb 2017.

doctoral programs at the same university but in different fields: 'Imāra in the field of Islamic legal philosophy, and Shihab in the field of Qur'anic studies.

About thirteen years before the birth of Shihab, Muhammad 'Imāra[3] was born on December 8, 1931 in Egypt. Before his birth, his father said, "If the child that is born is a son, I will call him Muhammad and send him to al-Azhar in order that he can dedicate himself to Islamic knowledge." In his childhood he was sent to a *kuttāb* (Qur'anic school or *madrasa*) of his village, where he memorized the Qur'an. In 1945 he was sent to study Islam in a junior high school, the *Ma'had Dasūq al-Dīnī,* and finished his study there in 1949. In the same year he went to *Ma'had Ṭanṭā al-Aḥmadī* to study in a senior high school until 1954. Afterwards, he did an undergraduate program at *Kulliyyat Dār al-'Ulūm* in the university of al-Azhar from 1954 to 1965. His undergraduate program took a little bit longer than usual because he was very active in political movements. In 1970 he was finished a master's program in the same university in the field of Islamic philosophy, defending a thesis titled *al-Mu'tazila wa Mushkilat al-Ḥurrīya al-Insānīya* (the Mu'tazilites and the problem of human freedom). Five years later he received a doctoral degree from the same university with a dissertation on Islam and legal philosophy. Looking at his education, one can say that Muḥammad 'Imāra dedicated himself to Islamic studies, as his father had hoped. He died on February 29, 2020.[4]

2. Political and Managerial Activities

Shihab was appointed rector of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University in Jakarta for two periods, 1992-1996 and 1997-1998. He had already been involved in teaching-learning processes at the same university since 1984, when he also began to be active in Majlis Ulama Indonesia (Indonesian Ulama's Council). At the beginning of 1998 he was then appointed Minister of Religious Affairs for two months. He was also active in several organisations, including Lajnah Pentashhih al-Qur'an (Department of the Correction of Qur'anic *maṣāḥif*), Badan Pertimbangan

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[3] This biography is derived from his autobiography given in his book Muḥammad 'Imāra, *Radd Iftirā'āt al-Jābirī* (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2011), pp. 207–21..

[4] See *Wafat al Mufakir al'Islamii Muhammad 'Imāra.. wahadhih wasiatuh* (29 Feb 2020), https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1475981, accessed 27 Aug 2021.

Pendidikan Nasional (the Consultative Board of National Education), and Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia (Indonesian Networking of Muslim Scholars). As of 2019 he is the director of Pusat Studi Alquran (Centre for Qur'anic Studies) in Ciputat, Banten, in the Jakarta area. Last, but not least, he was appointed as ambassador in Egypt from 1999-2002, in which he wrote a Qur'an commentary called *al-Misbah*.

Muḥammad 'Imāra was very active in political movements from early in his life. When he was still in junior high school, he was very interested in joining nationalist, Islamic, Arab and cultural movements for the independence of Egypt and Palestine. He was also politically engaged while in senior high school and during his study at al-Azhar University. He joined in some military training in order to be involved in struggling for Egypt. However, he was only involved in the *muqāwama al-sha'bīya* (the national struggle) in 1956 in the Suez Canal. Most of his contributions to this struggle were conducted by writing articles that were published in several magazines and newsletters. In 1948 he published his first article titled "*Jihād*" in *Miṣr al-Fatāt*. Many of his articles also appeared in magazines like *Minbar al-Sharq, al-Miṣrī,* and *al-Kātib*. In 1958 he began to write a book on the "Arab nationalism" (*al-qawmīya al-'arabīya*).[5]

Comparing their political activities, we may note that Shihab has lived in an independent country where he was involved in the New Order government under Soeharto's presidency, which had no political problem with Western countries and was even very close to them. These different situations seem to have influenced their views on Western thought, whereas 'Imāra has been very active in the political movements for the liberation of Palestine and Egypt from the Israeli occupation that was supported by many Western countries.

3. Works

Shihab is a prolific Indonesian scholar. He has written many books and articles, most of which are related to the Qur'an and its interpretation. Some of them are; *Membumikan al-Qur'an*[6], in which he deals with many aspects of *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* and contemporary issues arising prior to its

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[5] See Muḥammad 'Imāra, *Qirā'at al-Naṣṣ al-Dīnī bayna al-Ta'wīl al-Gharbī wa al-Ta'wīl al-Islāmī* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Shurūq al-Duwalīya, 2012), pp. 89–90.

[6] M. Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan Al-Qur'an* (Bandung: Mizan, 2002).

publication; *Tafsir al-Misbah*[7], in which he interprets the whole Qur'an; *Membumikan al-Qur'an*: *vol. 2*[8], in which he discusses many contemporary issues from a Qur'anic perspective; and *Kaidah Tafsir*[9], which elaborates many principles for the interpretation of the Qur'an. Here he also expresses his response to Western hermeneutics. I mention these works here because they are closely related to the topic under discussion.

Muḥammad 'Imāra is a member of al-Azhar's academy and a prolific Muslim thinker. Since finishing his doctoral program at al-Azhar University, he has written many works on Islam, as well as responses to other Muslim thinkers and to the West. So far he has written and published more than one hundred and eighty books on various topics within Islamic studies. Some of them are: *Al-Gharb wa al-Islām: Ayna al-Khaṭa'? Wa ayna al-Ṣawāb?*[10], in which he makes a comparison between Islam and the West; *Al-Islām wa al-Ghrab*[11], in which he describes some bad relations between Islam and the West; *Radd Iftirā'āt al-Jābirī 'alā al-Qur'ā al-Karīm*[12], in which he criticizes Muḥammad 'Ābid al-Jābirī's thoughts on the Qur'an; and *Qirā'at al-Naṣṣ al-Dīnī bayna al-Ta'wīl al-Gharbī wa al-Ta'wīl al-Islāmī*[13], in which he criticises Western hermeneutics and rejects its application to the Qur'an by figures such as Ḥasan Ḥanafī and Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd.

These works are mentioned here bacause I see that they are relatively relevant to the above mentioned topic. As the above–mentioned works illustrate, both are prolific scholars who discuss the Qur'an and its interpretation, as well as interpretative principles, including hermeneutics.

C. Quraish Shihab's and Muḥammad 'Imāra's Thoughts on Hermeneutics: How Do They Define Hermeneutics?

In his work *Kaidah Tafsir* Shihab discusses many things related

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[7] M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Misbah* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2000).

[8] M. Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan Al-Quran Jilid 2* (Bandung: Mizan, 2011).

[9] M. Quraish Shihab, *Kaidah Tafsir* (Bandung: Lentera Hati, 2019).

[10] Muhammad `Imarah, *al-Gharb wa-al-Islām: Ayna al-Khaṭa'? wa-Ayna al-Ṣawāb??* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Shuruq al-Dawliyah, 2004).

[11] Muhammad `Imarah, *al-Islām wa al-Gharb* (Jiza: Markaz al-I'lām al- 'Arabī, 2006).

[12] 'Imāra, *Radd Iftirā'āt al-Jābirī.*

[13] 'Imāra, *Qirā'at al-Naṣṣ al-Dīnī bayna.*

to 'hermeneutics': the definition of hermeneutics, its schools, and its theories. Shihab defines the term 'hermeneutics', which is translated by some Arab writers as *'ilm al-ta'wīl'* or '*al-ta'wīlīya',* as 'a set of tools used to analyse and understand the meaning of a text as well as to explore its contents', or 'a set of strategies used by those who are willing to understand clear and unclear passages of a text.'[14] Unlike Shihab, who defines it clearly, 'Imāra does not mention in his *Qirā'at al-naṣṣ al-dīnī* any definition of it. He only explains some of its characteristics. When he discusses Biblical hermeneutics, he says,

From this, Biblical hermeneutics constitutes a part of philosophical hermeneutics which judges the death of God in terms of religious texts, as it judges the death of the author in terms of human texts. Because of its extravagance (*al-ghulūw al-ta'wīlī*), it considers the reader as the producer (author) of the religious text without looking at any rules and principles which differentiate religion as divine revelation from the texts which are created, changed and developed by human beings. Hermeneutics interacts with the absolute religious text by considering it as a relative text, because it rejects totally the absolute one.[15]

According to 'Imāra, then, hermeneutics is a certain way of interpreting based on the following assumptions: (1) the death of the author, (2) the reader's total right to meaning production, (3) the relativity of interpretative truth, and (4) the sameness of religious and profane texts. Whether these assumptions are always present in hermeneutics will be discussed later.

Looking at the definitions mentioned by Shihab and 'Imāra, we can say that the two scholars define hermeneutics in partial and specific ways. Shihab is actually aware that there are many other kinds of definition, which depend on the interests and emphases of certain hermeneutical schools. One school tends to focus on certain methods of interpretation, whereas another school prefers principles of interpretation in defining the term hermeneutics. However, the definition given by Shihab only refers to one part of the broadest sense of hermeneutics, including only a set of interpretative methods. 'Imara, on the other hand, stresses only a certain interpretative practice based on the above-mentioned assumptions.

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[14] Shihab, *Kaidah Tafsir*, pp. 401–2.

[15] 'Imāra, *Qirā'at al-Naṣṣ al-Dīnī bayna*, pp. 19–20.

As a branch of knowledge, hermeneutics actually encompasses four things: *Hermeneuse*, hermeneutics in the narrow sense, philosophical hermeneutics, and hermeneutical philosophy. These related terms are mentioned by scholars such as Ben Vedder in his *Was ist Hermeneutics?* and Mathias Jung in his *Hermeneutik zur Einführung*.[16] First, *Hermeneuse* (the act of interpreting, or the activity and product of interpretation). Vedder defines this term as "die inhaltliche Erklärung oder Interpretation eines Textes, Kunstwerkes oder des Verhaltens einer Person"[17] (the explanation or interpretation of a text, a work of art, or a person's behavior). In Jung's view, this term does not seem to differ from such terms as *Auslegung* and *Verstehen* (understanding) in all their forms.[18] On this definition, the term refers to exegetical activity performed on certain objects such as texts, artistic symbols (paintings, novels, poetry, etc.) and human behavior. *Hermeneuse* is not substantially related to the methods, requirements (conditions), and foundations of interpretation. The second term is hermeneutics in the narrow sense. If someone talks about regulations and methodical strategies of interpretation, then he or she is talking about hermeneutics in the narrow sense. This aspect of hermeneutics is concerned with the question of how or by what method a text (or something else) should be interpreted. The history of hermeneutics, according to Vedder, deals with the rules of interpretation.[19] What Vedder means is similar to what is put forward by Mathias Jung when he says that

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[16] For further information, see Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika dan Pengembangan Ulumul Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Nawesea and Baitul Hikmah Press, 2017); Sahiron Syamsuddin, 'In Search of the Integration of Hermeneutics and 'Ulum al-Qur'an', in *Muslim Christian Relations Observed: Comparative Studies from Indonesia and the Netherlands*, ed. by Volker Küster and Robert Setio (Leipzig: Evang. Verlag-Anst., 2014), pp. 245–7.

[17] Ben Vedder, *Was ist Hermeneutik?: ein Weg von der Textdeutung zur Interpretation der Wirklichkeit* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2000), p. 9; Syamsuddin, 'In Search of the Integration of Hermeneutics and 'Ulum al-Qur'an', pp. 245–7.

[18] Matthias Jung, *Hermeneutik zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2001), p. 19; Syamsuddin, 'In Search of the Integration of Hermeneutics and 'Ulum al-Qur'an', pp. 245–7.

[19] Vedder, *Was ist Hermeneutik?*, p. 10; Syamsuddin, 'In Search of the Integration of Hermeneutics and 'Ulum al-Qur'an', pp. 245–7.

hermeneutics is '*Technik zum Extrahieren eines einheitlichen Schriftsinns*'[20] (a technique for revealing the unity of the meaning of a text). The third term is philosophical hermeneutics, which is not primarily about exegetical methods, but about the conditions of the possibility of understanding and interpreting a text, symbol or behavior.[21] The questions raised in philosophical hermeneutics are, then, how are we able to interpret, and what is required for interpretation to be possible? The answers to such questions lead to paradigms, theories and principles that might support interpretative methods and acts. The fourth and last term is hermeneutical philosophy. It consists of philosophical thoughts which try to answer problems of human life by interpreting what is accepted by human beings from history and tradition. In this field humans are seen as 'hermeneutical beings' in the sense that they must understand themselves.[22]

D. Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics in The Eyes of Shihab and 'Imāra

The hermeneutical theories Shihab is mostly devoted to exploring are those of by Friedrich Scheiermacher, Wilhem Dilthey, Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Nevertheless, I will focus my discussion here on Shihab's understanding of Schleiermacher's and Gadamer's hermeneutics. Shihab summarizes Schleiermacher's thought as consisting of two methods: grammatical analysis and psychological analysis. In order to understand a text, Schleiermacher said that interpreter must pay attention to linguistic aspects of the text that is being interpreted, and to the psychology that might lead its author to produce the text. Both methods are necessary in order to grasp the meaning and intention of the author. Shihab emphasizes that Schleiermacher's psychological hermeneutics is much more difficult to do than his grammatical one, because the psychological hermeneutics

[20] Jung, *Hermeneutik zur Einführung*, pp. 9; 20; Syamsuddin, 'In Search of the Integration of Hermeneutics and 'Ulum al-Qur'an', pp. 245–7.

[21] Vedder, *Was ist Hermeneutik?*, p. 11; Jung, *Hermeneutik zur Einführung*, pp. 21–2; Syamsuddin, 'In Search of the Integration of Hermeneutics and 'Ulum al-Qur'an', pp. 245–7.

[22] Vedder, *Was ist Hermeneutik?*, p. 11; Jung, *Hermeneutik zur Einführung*, p. 22; Syamsuddin, 'In Search of the Integration of Hermeneutics and 'Ulum al-Qur'an', pp. 245–7.

requires the interpreter to analyse the biography of the author, his or her psychology, and the historical context in which the text was produced. Shihab also mentions that this two-fold hermeneutics could prevent what Schleiermacher calls "misunderstanding".[23] Shihab then discusses Dilthey's hermeneutics, which is similar to Schleiermacher's. However, in relation to psychological hermeneutics, Shihab argues, Dilthey did not agree with Schleiermacher. It is impossible for Dilthey, as Shihab understands him, to grasp the 'inner' aspect of the author of a text, so the only way to reach the author's intention, in addition to the linguistic analysis, is to pay attention to the historical context of the text.[24]

Shihab's description of Schleiermacher's hermeneutical theories seems too simple. There are several aspects that are not properly addressed. As concerns grammatical hermeneutics, for example, the principles of linguistic analysis which are proposed by Schleiermacher but not discussed in Shihab's work are as follows: (1) the necessity of the acknowledgement of the language used by the author of a text and his or her original audiences for determining the historical or original meaning,[25] (2) the importance of the syntagmatic analysis in which someone, for the purpose of determining the meaning of a word, pays attention to other words surrounding the word in question,[26] and (3) the significance of taking the relation between the whole text and its part into account in the process of interpretation.[27] In addition, Shihab is not interested in explaining Schleiermacher's methods for psychological hermeneutics. It seems to me that the lack of detailed elaboration results from dependence on secondary sources dealing with Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. He does not directly refer to Schleiermacher's works, such as *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings,* in his description of his thought.

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[23] Shihab, *Kaidah Tafsir*, pp. 408–10.

[24] .*Ibid.*, p. 415.

[25] See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism: And Other Writings*, trans. by Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 30; Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2010), p. 368; 'Abd al-Ghanī Bāra, *al-Hirmīnūṭīqā wa al-Falsafa* (Aljazair: Arab Scientific Publishers, 2008), p. 181.

[26] Schleiermacher, *Schleiermacher*, p. 44; Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, p. 368; 'Ādil Muṣṭafā, *Fahm al-Fahm: Madkhal ilā al-Hirminūṭīqā* (Cairo: Ru'ya, 2007), p. 106.

[27] Schleiermacher, *Schleiermacher*, p. 71; Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, p. 368.

Unlike Shihab, who appreciates Schleiermacher's objectivist hermeneutics, 'Imāra rejects the existence of such hermeneutics when he says that *al-hirmīnūṭīqā 'ilm mawt al-mu'allif*[28] (hermeneutics is the knowledge or recognition of the death of the author). This statement means that all kinds of hermeneutics ignore the intentions of the author and speaker (*al-ilghā' li-maqāṣid al-mu'allif wa al-mutakallim*) and identify the meaning of a text with the reader's subjective understanding of it (*al-iḥlāl lil-dalāla allatī hiya al-fahm al-dhātī li al-qāri'*).[29] 'Imāra's simplification of hermeneutics might lead someone to the idea that the term hermeneutics only refers to subjectivist hermeneutics that emphasizes the role of the interpreter in producing meaning. In fact, hermeneutics also encompasses other schools, such as the objectivist one to which Schleiermacher belongs, which points out that the main task of interpretation is to seek for the author's intention, and the objectivist-*cum*-subjectivist one, in which Gadamer can be included, whose main idea is that interpretation constitutes a fusion of horizons. This will be discussed later in more detail.

'Imāra's neglect of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics of authorial intention might be due to the fact that 'Imāra has been willing to reject all thought coming from the West. In other words, he is eager to purify Islamic thought from everything that comes from other traditions. He thinks that this purification would not be successful if he were to mention Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, because some of it can be considered appropriate to the interpretation of the Qur'an, as Shihab says in his work.

E. Gadamer's and Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics According to Shihab and 'Imāra

Shihab summarizes some of Gadamer's main ideas as follows. First, a text is autonomous: it no longer belongs to its author. Second, on the basis of the first idea, the interpretation of a text does not aim at understanding the original meaning that was intended by its author or understood by its historical audiences. Third, a text does not have a rigid, permanent, and fixed meaning. The meaning of a text is broader than the authorial intent. Therefore, it might be developed by its readers over time. Fourth, the interpretation constitutes a dialogue between a text

[28] 'Imāra, *Qirā'at al-Naṣṣ al-Dīnī bayna*, p. 13.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

and its interpreter, and its meaning represents the resulting consensus between the two. There is no need to generalize any interpretative method in order to grasp meaning. Fifth, the horizon, ideas and knowledge of the interpreter have a significant role in determining a text's meaning. Sixth, the author of a text can possibly be one of its interpreters.[30] This is how Shihab understands Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics.

Shihab's description of Gadamer's hermeneutics is insufficient, and may lead to his misunderstanding of it. There are several key Gadamerian concepts that are not explained by Shihab in a comprehensive way, such as *Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* (awareness of effective history), *Vorverständniss* (preunderstanding), *Horizontverschmelzung* (fusion of horizons), and *Anwendung* (application). One may summarize these theories of Gadamer's as follows. Everyone has his or her own horizon of understanding which results from historical situations (Gadamer's term 'effective history') in which he lives. This horizon creates pre-understanding, through which one can understand a text and 'dialogue' with it. However, this pre-understanding should not impose on the reader's understanding of the text, in order that he or she might not misunderstand it. Rather, the reader should let the text speak to himself or herself. The reader should also be aware that the text has its own horizon. If one interprets a text from the past, one must consider its historicity, meaning that one must look at its historical situation. In this case, both horizons have their own position and must be fused in the process of understanding. The awareness of the historicity of a text can prevent misunderstanding. Without proper reflection, the pre-understanding of the interpreter and his or her contemporary horizon of understanding could impose upon the interpretation. This was emphasized by Gadamer:

> Das [d.h. den Text zu verstehen] bedeutet aber, dass die eigenen Gedanken des Interpreten in die Wiedererweckung des Textsinnes immer schon mit eingegangen sind. Insofern ist der eigene Horizont des Interpreten bestimmend, aber auch er nicht wie ein eigener Standpunkt, den man festhält oder durchsetzt, sondern mehr wie eine Meinung und Möglichkeit, die man ins Spiel bringt und aufs Spiel setzt und die mit dazu hilft, sich

[30] Shihab, *Kaidah Tafsir*, pp. 421–6; 449–50.

wahrhaft anzuzeigen, was in dem Texte gesagt ist.[31]

The interpretation of a text, Gadamer argues, is like a conversation in which an interviewer tries to understand those who are being interviewed: "Die Auslegung ist wie das Gespräch ein durch die Dialektik von Frage und Antwort geschlossener Kreis"[32] (interpretation is, like a conversation, a circle that is closed through the dialectic of question and answer). The point of this comparison is the avoidance of misunderstanding of what someone says or what a text means. In conversation, this avoidance is easier than in the interpretation of a text, but the hermeneutical mechanism is the same. The task of an interpreter resembles the task of a journalist: to get true information about what happened and what someone said. In other words, the first task of interpretation is to find out the original historical meaning which is in fact something fixed and immutable. The other task of interpretation is to explain how a text can be of importance for the present, and probably for the future, in which the challenges and situations are or will be different from those at the time of the production of a certain text. In terms of religious and moral texts that should be implemented in the life, Gadamer adds the theory that the texts should be reinterpreted by paying more attention to their main messages ('meaningful sense', *Sinngemäß*), not to their literal meanings.[33]

These theories are missing in Shihab's writing on Gadamer. This results in his misunderstanding of Gadamer's hermeneutics, especially when he says that Gadamer's hermeneutics is a subjectivist one, and therefore is not suitable for the interpretation of the Qur'an. If one reads Gadamer's work carefully, one will find that the Gadamerian theories represent a 'balanced' hermeneutics that gives a fair position both to the objectivity of the text under interpretation and to the subjectivity of

[31] It [i.e. to understand the text], however, means that the thoughts of the interpreter are always brought along into the reawakening of the meaning of the text. To this extent, the horizon of the interpreter is influential, but it is not like a specific position that must be enforced firmly; it is rather an opinion and a possibility that one brings into play, and that helps to truly show what is said in the text. See.Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge Einer Philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990), p. 392.

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, ed. by Richard E. Palmer (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. 173.

the interpreter. Shihab is not right in saying that according to Gadamer the autonomy of the text resulted in the reader's being able to interpret it according to his or her own pre-understanding and interest. Rather, Gadamer said that there should be a fusion of horizons in every interpretation. It means that understanding and interpretation are neither fully objective nor subjective. In this case, Vanhoozer's elaboration of Gadamer's hermeneutics is very helpful. In his book *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* he says:

> The reader, far from being a detached observer, occupies a standpoint that limits and conditions what can be known, not outside history, but within a history that is itself the result of previous interpretations. Gadamer calls such a cultural-historical standpoint a "horizon". One's horizon defines the limits behind which one cannot see. One's horizon is linked to one's prejudices, to one's habit of looking at the world in particular ways. Readers, in other words, always come to texts with a certain 'pre-understanding'. At the same time, the text also has a horizon, for it too reflects the prejudices of its historical situation. Interpretation, then, is like a dialogue in which the reader exposes himself or herself to the effects of the text, while the text is exposed to the reader's interests and prejudices. Understanding is a matter of "fusing" the horizons of the text and reader.[34]

Shihab's inadequacy and misunderstanding in describing Gadamer's hermeneutics might result from the fact that he does not refer to Gadamer's works. Rather, he uses secondary sources circulated in Indonesia, which elaborate the Gadamerian theories. Which sources he used is unclear, as there are no footnotes or endnotes in Shihab's elaboration.

Unlike Shihab, who, regardless of insufficient understanding of it, at least discusses Gadamer's hermeneutics, 'Imāra does not elaborate on it at all. It is not clear why he is not interested in doing so. However, he does mention Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics. According to 'Imāra, Ricoeur pointed out that hermeneutics, which emerged for the first time as a science in the 18th century, was influenced by Copernicus' scientific revolution. As a result, studies in philosophy, the humanities and the social

[34] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 2009), p. 106.

sciences had to be conducted according to approaches and methods which were used in the natural sciences. In the case of hermeneutics 'Imāra says,

> From this 'hermeneutical revolution' the sources that focus on this subject appeared and stated that the study of the speaker (*mutakallim*) dominated to a great extent the study of texts in the 18th century, at which point the awareness of the historical circumstances of both speaker (*mutakallim*) and audience (*mukhāṭab*) and [the awareness of] the distance that separated the two began to be shaped. From this, the sciences of interpretation (*'ulūm al-tafsīr wa al-ta'wīl)* changed from sciences that discussed sense/meaning (*dalāla*) to hermeneutics that discussed the mechanism of comprehension/understanding (*ālīyāt al-fahm*). This change made the reader (*qāri'*) an object of discussion, instead of the speaker. The change of the study of texts, from the attempt to interpret them based on grasping the authorial intent (*qaṣd al-mutakallim*) to the attempt to know the mechanism of understanding, has created many problematic issues that had not been raised before. One of them is the socio-cultural frame in which a text is produced in comparison with the frame in which it is received. The distance of time and place that separates the text from its reader becomes an obstacle in the understanding of the text. The concept of relativism began to enter the study of texts. Its underlying idea is that everything that is produced in a certain culture (*muntaj thaqāfī*) is conditioned by the circumstances of its production, which are different from time to time, from one place to another, from one language to another, and from one culture to another.[35]

From this quotation it can be inferred first of all that, according to 'Imāra, hermeneutics only looks for the 'mechanism of understanding' and does not search for the meaning of a text at all. 'Imāra thinks this assumption is based on Ricoeur's hermeneutical idea. This is questionable. Ricoeur mentions in his *Interpretation Theory*[36] that through hermeneutics someone tries to pay attention to the meaning of a text. In this case, Ricoeur points out that in interpretation someone should consider the importance of both the meaning of a text and its 'event', so that he or she can reach a proper understanding of it. He says that "The concept of meaning allows two interpretations which reflect the main dialectic

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[35] 'Imāra, *Qirā'at al-Naṣṣ al-Dīnī bayna*, pp. 14–5.

[36] Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Texas: TCU Press, 1976).

between event and meaning. To mean is both what the speaker means, i.e., what he intends to say, and what the sentence means, i.e., what the conjunction between the identification function and predicative function yields."[37] Moreover, he says that these two kinds of meaning can be found in the 'utterance meaning'.[38] This idea is related to his statement: "To interpret is to understand a double meaning."[39] This indicates that according to Ricoeur, hermeneutics is employed to grasp two kinds of meaning: authorial intention and linguistic (symbolic) meaning. On that basis, we can say that 'Imāra has misunderstood Ricoeur's idea.

The second point that can be inferred from 'Imāra's statement is that Ricoeur suggested ignoring the authorial intent in the process of interpretation, and proclaimed the 'death of the author'. This is another misunderstanding of Ricoeur's thought. If we refer to Ricoeur's works, we find that he pointed to the importance of the authorial intent, as we can see in his previously quoted statement. However, unlike Schleiermacher, who proposed what he called 'psychological hermeneutics' to find authorial intention, Ricoeur mentions that it can be grasped in what he calls 'utterance meaning' by analysing the grammatical devices of the text and its speech event. He says:

> By paying attention to these grammatical devices of the self-reference of discourse we obtain two advantages. On the one hand, we get a new criterion of the difference between discourse and linguistic codes. On the other hand, we are able to give a non-psychological, because purely semantic, definition of the utterer's meaning. No mental entity need be hypothesized or hypostasised. The utterance meaning points back towards the utterer's meaning thanks to the self-reference of discourse to itself as an event.[40]

Moreover, to my knowledge, Ricoeur does not point to the 'death of the author' at all. Rather, this idea is proposed by Roland Barthes, who

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[37] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 13

[39] Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 8; Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 1992), p. 347.Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 1992

[40] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, p. 13.

does not agree with the traditional literary criticism that underscores the importance of paying attention to the author's identity in reading and interpreting a text. In short, we can say that 'Imāra's misunderstanding is caused by the fact that he refers only to one book written by Ricoeur, *From Text to Action,* and does not refer to his other works like *Interpretation Theory*. This has led him to simplify Ricoeur's thought. He also simplifies the definition of hermeneutics when he says, "*al-hirmīnūṭīqā 'ilm mawt al-mu'allif"* (hermeneutics is the knowledge [that is based] on the idea of the death of the author). In fact, there are many hermeneutical schools, and the deconstructionist school is only one of them.

F. The Application of Hermeneutics to the Qur'an

Before exploring Shihab's and 'Imāra's opinions about the application of hermeneutics to the Qur'an, it is important to explain the historical and literary contexts in which they wrote their respective books, *Qirā'at al-Naṣṣ al-Dīnī* and *Kaidah Tafsir*. It seems to me that they wrote these books for the purpose of responding to the emergence of many books on Islam, and especially on the interpretation of the Qur'an, written by progressive Muslim thinkers such as Ḥasan Ḥanafī, Mohammed Arkoun and Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, and discussed in several Muslim countries including Egypt and Indonesia. The works to which they respond critically are, for example, Ḥasan Ḥanafī's *Qaḍāyā islāmīya mu'āṣira*, and Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's *Mafhūm al-naṣṣ* and *Naqd al-khiṭāb al-dīnī*. These works propose new insights with regard to the interpretation of many Qur'anic passages. These new interpretations are assumed to be influenced by Western hermeneutics.

After describing the ideas of Schleiermacher, Shihab gives his opinions on whether or not they can be applied to the interpretation of the Qur'an. In this case Shihab is quite objective, and tries to be careful in looking at and analysing those ideas one by one. According to him, some of those hermeneutical ideas can be accepted and used for the interpretation of the Qur'an. He does not agree with those who totally reject hermeneutics. He clearly says:

> According to me, not all ideas that are expressed by various schools and thinkers of hermeneutics are wrong or negative ideas. In fact, there are some ideas that are good and new as well as useful for broadening horizons

and enriching interpretation, including that of the Qur'an.[41]

There are at least two reasons for his partial acceptance. The first is that some hermeneutical ideas pointed out by western scholars are the same as, or at least similar to, those of Muslim scholars. The other reason is that the substance of some hermeneutical theories can be accepted with certain adjustments.[42] On this basis, it is very plausible that Shihab gives great appreciation to Schleiermacher, who emphasized the importance of an attempt to reach the original meaning and authorial intention and to prevent the interpreter from misunderstanding in the process of interpretation.[43] In the case of the Qur'an, the authorial intention for which an interpreter should search is Allah's intention. Its importance is clearly stated in some definitions of the term *tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Abū Ḥayyān (d. 744/1344), for example, defined *tafsīr* as "a science in which the aspects of the Qur'an are discussed with regard to the indication (*dalāla*) of its intention (*murādihi*) according to human capability."[44] The term *murād* (intention) here refers to what God intended when He revealed the Qur'an. The same idea is also expressed by many other scholars, such as Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111),[45] and Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/915).[46]

Other similarities of Schleiermacher's grammatical hermeneutics with Muslim scholars' exegetical theory can be seen in the principles of linguistic analyses. Schleiermacher points out that the interpreter should pay attention to the language that is common to the author and the historical audience. In this case, he says, "Everything in a given utterance which requires a more precise determination may only be determined from the language area which is common to the author and his original

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[41] Shihab, *Kaidah Tafsir*, p. 427.

[42] *Ibid.*.

[43] Shihab, *Kaidah Tafsir*, pp. 443–4 .

[44] 'Abd al-Qādir Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-Mufassirūn* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 2003), p. 80.

[45] Ulrika Mårtensson, 'Through the Lens of Modern Hermeneutics: Authorial Intention in al-Ṭabarī's and al-Ghazālī's Interpretations of Q. 24:35', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2009), pp. 20–48.

[46] David R. Vishanoff, *The Formation of Islamic Hermeneutics: How Sunni Legal Theorists Imagined a Revealed Law* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2011), p. 116.

audiences."[47] If this principle is applied to the Qur'an, we can say that the interpreter must be familiar with the Arab language of the seventh century in which the Qur'an was revealed, so that he or she can catch its historical meaning or authorial intention. This idea is the same as what Abū Isḥaq al-Shāṭibī (d. 790/1388) writes in his *Muwāfaqāt*.[48]

Nevertheless, Shihab has a critical opinion about Schleiermacher's psychological hermeneutics, according to which the interpreter must consider the psychology of the author of a text for the purpose of grasping his intention. Shihab argues that it cannot be applied to the Qur'an, because it is impossible to know the psychology of Allah. However, he is still optimistic, pointing out that Schleiermacher's theory should be adjusted in such a way as to be in accordance with the nature of the Qur'an. In this case, Shihab says:

> On this basis, if Schleiermacher's idea is to be applied to Qur'anic texts, it could only be done through the acknowledgement of the sirah of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. This was actually done by many scholars of Qur'anic interpretation and Islamic law when they explained the meaning of Qur'anic verses.[49]

According to Shihab, Schleiermacher's psychological hermeneutics could be applied not by searching for Allah's psychology, but by looking at the *sīra* (biography) of the Prophet Muḥammad, through which the interpreter could see the historical context of the revelation of the particular verse under interpretation. Many accounts on *asbāb al-nuẕūl* (occasions of revelation) can also be included in the *sīra*.

In response to Gadamer's hermeneutics, Shihab offers some critical comments. The autonomy of the text, which he considers one of Gadamer's ideas, cannot be applied to the Qur'an. He argues that someone must believe in its divine authorship and "consider God's presence" when he/she interprets Qur'anic verses. This is important for the purpose of determining what Allah meant when He revealed

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[47] Schleiermacher, *Schleiermacher*, p. 30.

[48] He says, for example, "Those who want to understand the Qur'an let it understood from the direction of the language of the Arabs." Ibrāhīm ibn Mūsā Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Sharī'a* (Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub al-Ilmiya, 2004), p. 255.

[49] Shihab, *Kaidah Tafsir*, p. 447.

the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad. Consequently, Shihab does not agree with Gadamer's idea of the unimportance of authorial intention in the process of interpretation. He argues for the importance of authorial intention in the interpretation of the Qur'an, as he mentions when he discusses Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, even though this can only be achieved to the extent that human capability allows.

In this case, Shihab misunderstands what Gadamer proposes. The latter does not deny the importance of authorial intention at all. Although he does not agree with Schleiermacher's psychological hermeneutics, he still preserves the significance of the authorial or historical meaning when he says that the interpreter should fuse the horizon of text and the horizon of the interpreter. The horizon of the text can be understood by analysing its linguistic aspects and historical context, and by finding what he calls the "*Sinnesgem*äß" (meaningful sense) of the text. This meaningful sense is not a literal meaning, not "what the author said", but "what he wanted to say". It is the main message of the text. After discerning the horizon of the text, an interpreter is supposed to reflect about what the text means by re-contextualising and developing it for the contemporary situation in which her/his own horizon might be involved. This contextualization of the Qur'anic message has been expressed by many scholars of Islamic jurisprudence in the past, and by many Muslim thinkers in the contemporary era, even if they employ different terms. Fazlur Rahman, for example, proposes in his *Islam and Modernity* what he calls a "double movement" approach, in which the Qur'anic interpreter should analyse the Qur'anic text historically, so that he/she can grasp its *ratio legis* and then reinterpret it for contemporary needs.[50] Abdullah Saeed develops Rahman's approach by systemizing certain methodical strategies which he calls tools for the "contextualist approach".[51] Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd has also made a great contribution to this contextualization by proposing the importance of searching for both the *ma'nā* (historical

[50] Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 6.

[51] Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 150; Abdullah Saeed and Ali Akbar, 'Contextualist Approaches and the Interpretation of the Qur'ān', *Religions*, vol. 12, no. 7 (2021), pp. 1–11.

meaning) of the Qur'an and its *maghẓā* significance.[52]

Unlike Shihab, who regardless of his critical views on some hermeneutical theories is somewhat optimistic with regard to the application of hermeneutics to the Qur'an, Muḥammad 'Imāra totally refuses that Western hermeneutics be applied to it. There are several arguments for this rejection. One of his reasons is that hermeneutics negates the divine nature of the scripture. In relation to this argument, 'Imāra points out that Western hermeneutics, which he calls "philosophical hermeneutics" (*al-hirmīnūṭīqā al-falsafīya*), is derived from and based on the philosophy of the Enlightenment, which is based on objectivist-materialistic realities. As a result, he emphasizes, sacred texts are seen as human texts, and must be understood accordingly. He rejects this by saying, for example:

> Indeed, along with this hermeneutics (i.e. philosophical hermeneutics) which 'humanizes' the religious text (i.e. sacred text) by separating it from Heaven (i.e. divine origin) and emptying it of religion and divinity, the religious hermeneutics (*al-hirmīnūṭīqā al-dīnīya*) interprets revelation, which constitutes the way of the sacred text, in terms of the religious idea (*ra'y al-dīn*). As philosophical hermeneutics (*al-hirmīnūṭīqā al-falsafīya*) puts the reader, his horizon, and the existence of the recipient in the place of the author, his horizon, his personality, and his intentions and meanings, religious hermeneutics (*al-hirmīnūṭīqā al-dīnīya*) puts – in terms of the religious interpretation – what is understood by the horizons of the reader and the recipient in the position of the divine revelation.[53]

According to 'Imāra's understanding, philosophical hermeneutics does not see revelation (*waḥy*) as what is revealed by God, but as what is revealed by the reader, or by his subjective reading, because it considers the death of God in the religious text like the death of the author in human texts.

'Imāra's understanding can be considered an exaggeration. Many hermeneutical scholars, especially those belonging to the objectivist-*cum*-subjectivist school, want to say that every text – either religious or secular – has its own context that is related to human matters – their worldviews,

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[52] Abū Zayd, 'al-Manhaj al-Naf'ī fī al-Nusūṣ al-Dīnīya', *al-Hilāl* (1992), pp. 54–60..

[53] 'Imāra, *Qirā'at al-Naṣṣ al-Dīnī bayna*, p. 28.

behaviours and attitudes – and therefore should be understood and interpreted by paying attention to the context. A scripture is considered to be seen as a response to what the human beings of its revelation believed and did. This idea does not always mean rejecting its divine origin. In addition, it was revealed or written in a human language, and accordingly, followed the linguistic rules of the language. To understand it, therefore, one should pay attention to how the language was used by people living at the time of its revelation or production.

With regard to the subjectivity of the reader/interpreter, of which 'Imāra has accused the scholars of hermeneutics, we can say that he is not totally right in this case. The fact is that many hermeneutical scholars, including Gadamer, point out that even though subjectivity cannot be abolished from the process of interpreting a text, it must be evaluated critically, so that it does not force the text to say whatever its interpreter wants.[54] In addition to the search for the meaning of a text, the interpreter, according to Gadamer and Gracia, has a right to develop and re-actualize its meaning for contemporary needs and particular places. This meaning development can be seen in Gadamer's theory of *Anwendung* ('application') and Gracia's idea of 'meaning function' and 'implicative function'.[55] These constitute 'subjective' sides of interpretation, but are still closely related to the (historical) meaning of the text.

In short, we can say that 'Imāra has simplified hermeneutics while saying that it is a merely 'subjectivist' way of interpreting a text. Another simplification is related to the idea of subjectivity. For him, all kinds of subjectivity are negative and always force the interpreted text to have a certain meaning that its interpreter wants. But according to hermeneutical theorists, subjectivity in a interpretation process can be accepted, if it can find out the significance of a text for contemporary needs and places and improve what is implied by the text under interpretation.

The question is, then: What factor has led 'Imāra to such a simplification and misunderstanding of hermeneutics? The answer could be that he has not had enough reference to hermeneutical works written by Western authoritative scholars. This can be seen from the fact that he

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[54] Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 367.

[55] Jorge J.E. Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality: The Logic and Epistemology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), p. 154.

mentions in his book *Qirā'at al-Naṣṣ* only a few works on hermeneutics. In addition, it is very possible that he is trying to respond to contemporary Muslim scholars' ideas on the Qur'an and its interpretation. With regard to the negation of the divine nature of the Qur'an, of which he accuses hermeneutics, he responds to Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd who calls the Qur'an '*muntaj thaqāfī*' ('a cultural product'). By this term Abū Zayd actually means that it was not revealed in an empty situation, but in a certain cultural context in which the Arab people of the seventh century lived along with their particular traditions and cultures. These were, he argues, responded to by the Qur'an. However, it does not mean that it loses its divine origin. He says:

> God has chosen Prophet Mohammed to be His messenger to convey His message which is Islam. This message is essentially expressed in the Qur'an, which was not simply sent down as a book but was revealed orally in portions to the Prophet. This process of revealing, waḥy, is nothing but an act of communication, which naturally includes a speaker, which is God in this case, a recipient, which is Prophet Mohammed, a code of communication, which is Arabic, and a channel, which is the Holy Spirit.[56]

Clearly, Abū Zayd believes in the divine origin of the Qur'an. However, it should be understood and interpreted contextually, because it was revealed in the Arab context of the 7th century. The contextual interpretation that he proposes in his works is an attempt to grasp what he calls *ma'nā* (historical meaning) and *maghzā* (significance). For this exegetical purpose, he argues that someone should take four contexts into consideration: (1) the socio-cultural context (*al-siyāq al-thaqāfī al-ijtimā'ī*), (2) the external context (*al-siyāq al-khārijī*), (3) the internal context (*al-siyāq al-dākhilī*) and (4) the linguistic context (*al-siyāq al-lughawī*).[57] By the term 'socio-cultural context' he means all epistemological sources that can make the linguistic communication possible, i.e. the Arab culture of the seventh century with all its conventions and traditions. The 'external context', which is linked to the cultural context on certain points, refers

[56] Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, 'The Textuality of the Qur'an', presented at the Islam and Europe: in the Past and Present. An academic session (Wassenaar, 20 Sep 1996), p. 4.

[57] See Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *al-Naṣṣ al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1995), p. 116; Johanna Pink, *Muslim Qur'anic Interpretation Today: Media, Genealogies and Interpretive Communities* (Sheffield, South Yorkshire: Equinox Publishing, 2018), pp. 133–4.

to the stages of communication between the 'speaker/transmitter' (*qā'il/mursil*) and the 'recipient' (*mutalaqqī/mustaqbil*), who determine the nature of the text and the source of interpretation, respectively. For this reason, Abū Zayd also speaks of the 'context of conversation' (*siyāq al-takhāṭub*), which does not refer solely to the history of the revelation of the Qur'an including occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) and Meccan/Medinan periods of revelation, but also refers to how the Qur'anic text was formulated in relation to various respondents (*mukhāṭabūn*). By 'internal context' (*al-siyāq al-dākhilī*) Abū Zayd means the context within the Qur'an. By considering it, one can notice the peculiarity (*khuṣūṣiyya*) of the Qur'anic text. The text as a whole is not uniform, because the order of its verses or chapters differs from the order in which they were sent. By 'linguistic context' (*al-siyāq al-lughawī*) Abū Zayd understands not only linguistic phenomena, which were used by medieval interpreters, but also what he calls the 'tacitly implied meaning' (*al-dalāla al-maskūt 'anhā*) of a statement. The task of the interpreter is then to explain not only what certain verses say literally, but also what they implicitly mean.[58]

From all this it is evident that 'Imāra misunderstood Abū Zayd's thought. His accusation that Abū Zayd abolished the divine origin of the Qur'an is not supported by the available data. It is very possible that 'Imāra was influenced by some other Muslim scholars of al-Azhar University, who rejected Abū Zayd's ideas and even considered him apostate. Unlike 'Imāra, Shihab, who also responds to Abū Zayd's recognition of the Qur'an as 'cultural product', is a little bit more careful in saying that it is very possible that what he meant by this term is that the Qur'an was sent down to the Prophet Muḥammad in order to respond to certain aspects of the culture at that time.[59]

In relation to the subjectivity of interpretation, 'Imāra responds to what Ḥasan Ḥanafī says in his article *Qaḍāyā Islāmīya Mu'āṣira,* as quoted by him, as follows:

> The text does not speak. Its author died. All the reader or interpreter can do is to revive it anew, not in accordance with its (first) author, rather according to its interpreter. The interpreter is the second author who can be considered the real author, not the first author. So, the text is mute and

[58] Zayd, *al-Naṣṣ al-Sulṭa, al-Ḥaqīqa*, pp. 97–110.

[59] Shihab, *Kaidah Tafsir*, pp. 472–3.

> the interpreter is the one who makes it speak. ... In the interpretation there is no objective reality. There is also neither something right nor wrong. Rather, both are (ways of) reading. In fact, there are no criteria for the right and the wrong within the text. All readings constitute disseverance (*ijtizā'*) and resemble deception against the whole, because the whole is returned to its parts.[60]

In this case, 'Imāra is right when he concludes that Ḥasan Ḥanafī's hermeneutics is subjectivist in the sense that the interpreter has the right to produce a new meaning(s) of a text. However, this is not the only hermeneutical school. It is merely one of the existing hermeneutical schools, as I have mentioned. So, 'Imāra's statement: "Hermeneutics is knowledge based on the idea of the death of the author" is not totally right.

'Imāra's second reason for rejecting hermeneutics is that it creates what he calls *ansinat Allāh* ('humanization' of God) and *ansinat al-ghayb* ('humanization of the unseen). For him, hermeneutics 'humanizes' Allah. All of His essence (*dhāt*), attributes (*ṣifāt*) and deeds (*af'āl*) are described by hermeneutical scholars in such a way that they are human. 'Imāra criticizes such description, because it negates His existence. With regard to this criticism, he again quotes Ḥasan Ḥanafī's statements as follows: "In fact, the theological sciences (*ilāhīyāt*) – even though a theory about God emerged in relation to His essence, attributes, and deeds – constitute a characterization of the perfect human being (*al-insān al-kāmil*) with regard to his essence, attributes, and deeds."[61] Another expression of Ḥasan Ḥanafī, which is also cited by 'Imāra in this regard, is as follows:

> The Divine Essence (*al-dhāt al-ilāhīya*) is the human essence in the most perfect form. Any proof that discloses the confirmation of the existence of God merely reveals a forged/spurious awareness. Therefore, thinking about God is an alienation in the sense that the natural position of the human being is to think about society. ... The conception of God, expressing that He is the perfect existence, is actually an expression of desire (*ta'bīr 'an rughba*) and an inquiry of demand (*taḥqīq li-maṭlab*). It is not a determination of an existence on the outside. So the Essence of God is our essence driven to the highest level. God's absolute essence is

[60] 'Imāra, *Qirā'at al-Naṣṣ al-Dīnī bayna*, p. 76.

[61] Ḥasan Ḥanafī, *Dirāsāt Islāmīya Mu'āṣira* (Beirut: Dār al-Tanwīr, 2002), p. 405; 'Imāra, *Qirā'at al-Naṣṣ al-Dīnī bayna*, p. 70.

> our essence pushed to the absolute.[62]

Looking at Ḥanafī's statements, 'Imāra points out that he denies the existence of God, and assumes that he is in this case influenced by Western hermeneutics. These two assumptions are subject to discussion. With regard to the first one, we can say that in order to understand Ḥanafī's main ideas, we have to put them in the context and situation to which he responded. It is very possible that he criticizes the concept of God that has been explained and handed down by Muslim theologians over time. According to him, their theoretical frameworks in this regard have not been practical and functional. They merely described the divine essence, attributes and deeds, and did not try to relate them to the life of human beings. He thinks that such a concept is not beneficial at all and will never be successful, because God exists beyond human awareness. In order to make Islamic theology functional, he reinterprets the divine concept by saying that God should be understood as "the human essence in the most perfect form". In other words, for him, our description of God is actually not God himself, because we are unable to know God exactly. Therefore, the approach to describing God should be changed in such a way that it becomes anthropological and then functional. According to Yudian Wahyudi, Ḥasan Ḥanafī tries to "transform Islamic traditional theology into revolutionary ideology".[63] In order to make Islamic theology more functional, in his work *Min al-'aqīda ilā al-thawra* Ḥasan Ḥanafī reinterprets all the divine attributes that are believed in the Islamic Sunni tradition. One of his functional interpretations can be seen in the following:

> Allah is the All-Mighty (*qādir*). This means that a human being wishes to be powerful and capable (of doing all things). So, the capability or power (*qudra*) is his highest ideal, uppermost goal, and supreme destination. However, he cannot be so powerful, considering the many obstacles, social situations in which he lives, and bearings in which he finds himself. So

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[62] Ḥasan Ḥanafī, *Min al-'Aqīda ilā al-Thawra*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Tanwīr, 1988), p. 639; 'Imāra, *Qirā'at al-Naṣṣ al-Dīnī bayna*, p. 71.

[63] Yudian Wahyudi, "The Slogan "Back to the Qur'ān and the Sunna": A Comparative Study of Responses of Ḥasan Ḥanafī, Muhammad "Ābid al-Jābirī, and Nurcholish Madjid'", PhD. Dissertation (Montreal: McGill University, 2002).

the (human) capability has its limits, from within or outside its nature.[64]

Ḥanafī is trying to make our belief in absolute divine power/capability functional for awakening human beings' awareness of their very limited capability and power due to many factors. In other words, Ḥanafī still believes in God's essence and attributes, but for him this belief should not stop at itself; it should be beneficial for human lives. This is also the case for all eschatological aspects of Islamic theology. All God's essence and attributes, as well as eschatological doctrines, are interpreted by Ḥanafī in 'functionalist' ways. Unfortunately, I cannot discuss this subject in more detail in this article, as its main purpose is to show that 'Imāra's accusation of Ḥanafī for *ansinat Allāh* ('humanisation of God') is not right, and that he misunderstood Ḥanafī's main message and idea on this point.

'Imāra's third and last argument for rejecting hermeneutics is that it creates what he calls "*ta'lih al-'aql* (deification of intellect), or makes the intellect absolute.[65] This is mentioned when he responds to Ḥanafī's idea that the intellect is able to comprehend what is good (*ḥasan*) and what is bad (*qabīḥ*). Ḥanafī' says, "The intellect (*'aql*) does not need any help. There is nothing rival to it. It can judge that something is good or bad, and comprehend good and bad qualities in things, as the sense is capable of understanding (*idrāk*), observing (*mushāhada*) and experimentation (*tajrīb*). It is possible to know ethics through innate capacity (*fiṭra*)."[66] 'Imāra's argument is not strong enough, and is easy to counter, for two reasons. The first is that no hermeneutical scholar claims that human intellect is absolute. Rather, they say that human reasoning is very significant in the process of understanding. However, for them, the human mind is influenced by many factors that Gadamer calls "effective history", i.e. knowledge, traditions, cultures and life experiences. It creates a human horizon, through which one has pre-understanding and according to which one is able to understand a thing or a text. Therefore, the way someone understands is relative and, of course, not absolute. The second reason is that Ḥanafī's opinion about the intellect's capability

[64] Ḥanafī, *Min al-'Aqīda ilā al-Thawra*, 2: 590.

[65] 'Imāra, *Qirā'at al-Naṣṣ al-Dīnī bayna*, p. 73.

[66] Ḥasan Ḥanafī, *Min al-'Aqīda ilā al-Thawra*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Tanwīr, 1988), p. 848.

of recognising ethical qualities is not directly due to hermeneutics, but rather agrees with the Mu'tazilite creed regarding intellectual capacity.

G. The Impact of the Debate in the Indonesian Context

The debate between M. Quraish Shihab and M. 'Imāra on whether the western hermeneutics can be applied to the interpretation of the Qur'an seems to have impact on the discourse about this subject among Indonesian scholars. 'Imāra's rejection of it has been agreed upon by some of them. Adian Husaini, for example, rejects the western hermeneutics because it is derived from the Christian exegetical tradition. For him, its application to the Qur'an is not appropriate because the Qur'an is not the same as the Bible in terms of their revelation: the Bible is believed by Christians to be inspired by God, whereas the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad *verbatim* (word by word).[67] This is one of Adian Husaini's arguments for his rejection of it. This argument is not strong enough for, regardless of their different ways of revelation, both the Qur'an and the Bible as objects of interpretation represent a linguistic phenomenon, meaning that every body can read and interpret their linguistic structures and forms.

Adian Husaini's other argument for the rejection of the hermeneutics is that the hermeneutics might lead to (1) the idea of exegetical relativisme, (2) severe criticims of classical Muslim scholars, and (3) the deconstruction of the concept of Qur'anic revelation.[68] With regard to the exegetical relativism in which interpreter might interpret the Qur'an according to his/her subjectivity Husaini seems to echo 'Imāra who says, "Hermeneutics is knowledge based on the idea of the death of the author." As mentioned before, this idea is not right, because not all hermeneutical schools are subjectivist. Gadamer's and Gracia's hermeneutics belong to the objectivist-cum-subjectivist school. In realtion to the second impact, i.e. severe criticism, we can say that that the critical tradition has been done by many scholars from the past until now. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, for example, criticises in his *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* such Muslim philosophers as al-Farābī and Ibn Sīnā. On the other hand, Ibn

[67] For more details, see Adian Husaini and Abdurrahman Al Baghdadi, *Hermeneutika dan Tafsir Al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 2007), pp. 1–16.

[68] *Ibid.*, pp. 17–41.

Rushd criticises in his *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* al-Ghazālī's thoughts. So, it is acceptable that those who agree with hermeneutics, such as Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, do not agree with classical scholars in some cases. The third negative impact of hermeneutics that Adian Husaini mentions, i.e. deconstruction of the concept of Qur'anic revelation, is also not clear. It is because hermeneutics has nothing to do with whether a certain text is revelation or not. Rather, it concerns with how to understand it by means of certain methods. His accusition of Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd for stating that the Qur'an was produced by the Prophet Muhammad is not right. If we read Abū Zayd's works carefully, we will find that he believes that th Qur'an was revealed by Allah to the Prophet in order for the first time to respond situations in which he faced at that time. So, in this case Adian Husaini like 'Imāra misunderstood what Abū Zayd really meant with his term *muntaj thaqāfī* ('cultural product') for the Qur'an.

In relation to the development of hermeneutical approach to the Qur'an, it can be stated that those who are interested in it have been trying to apply it. M. Quraish Shihab interprets Qur'anic verses on *shūrā* ('consultation'). Taking linguistic aspects and historical context of the verses, he contextualises them by saying that democracy that acknowledges human equity, individual responsibility and law enforcement is in accordance with the Qur'anic *shūrā,* and, therefore, Muslims should practice it today.[69]

Another scholar who are concerned with the application of hermeneutical approach is Yudian Wahyudi. He interprets Q.S. al-Baqara (2): 30-38, using a 'symbolic' method, meaning that he tries to grasp inner meaning of the verses in oder to be relevant for current situation. The word *khalīfa* (God's vicegerent) that refers to Adam in Q.S. 2:30 is interpreted by him as 'everybody who has profession in a certain field'. So, he relates it to "natural, human, material, concrete-practical-operational dimensions".[70] Another symbolic interpretation that he proposes can be seen in his interpretation of Q.S. 2:31. For him, the divine order given

[69] For detailed information, see Shihab, *Membumikan Al-Quran Jilid 2*, pp. 399–406.

[70] See M. Djidin and Sahiron Syamsuddin, 'Indonesian Interpretation of the Qur'an on Khilāfah: The Case of Quraish Shihab and Yudian Wahyudi on Qur'an, 2: 30-38', *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 57, no. 1 (2019), p. 151.

to Adam to present *asmā'* ('names') to the angles can be understood as something like 'fit and proper test' for someone who wants to be a *khalīfa* (leader or professional in every field).[71]

The development of hermeneutical approach among Indonesian Muslim scholars can be seen also in Sahiron Syamsuddin's interpretation of some Qur'anic verses. In his book *Hermeneutika dan Pengembangan Ulumul Qur'an*, he interprets, for example, Qur'an, 22: 30-40 that literally talks about the permission of warfare given to the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions, using what he calls '*ma'nā-cum-maghzā* approach' in which he looks for the original meaning (*ma'nā*) of the verses and their significance (*maghzā*). He concludes that the main message of the verses is not war itself, but consists of (1) "the abolishment of *ẓulm* (oppression; unjust action), (2) the establishment of religious pluralism, and (3) peace."[72] The above examples can show us that the hermeneutical approach has been used by Indonesian Muslim scholars in the current period.

H. Concluding Remarks

Looking at the above mentioned discussions, it can be concluded, as follows. First, Shihab and 'Imāra define hermeneutics in different ways. The former means by hermeneutics a set of interpretative methods. The latter, on the other hand, means by it a certain interpretative practice based on the assumptions of (1) the death of the author, (2) the total right of meaning production for the reader, (3) the relativity of interpretative truth, and (4) the sameness of all texts. Both definitions can be seen as too partial, because hermeneutics actually is not just a set of interpretative methods and activities, but consists of four aspects: the practice of interpretation, a set of interpretative methods, philosophical hermeneutics, and hermeneutical philosophy. Second, in terms of their descriptions of the hermeneutical theories proposed by Western scholars, 'Imāra explores only the thought of Paul Ricoeur, whom he accuses of

[71] *Ibid.*, p. 156.

[72] For detailed information, see Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika dan Pengembangan Ulumul Qur'an*, pp. 163–78; Sahiron Syamsuddin, 'Peaceful Message beyond the Permission of Warfare (Jihad): An Interpretation of Q. 22:39-40', in *(un)Common Sounds: Songs of Peace and Reconciliation among Muslims and Christians*, Illustrated edition edition, ed. by Roberta R. King and Sooi Ling Tan (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014), pp. 104–16.

propagating the idea of the death of the author, implying that every interpreter has the right to interpret a text and to produce its meaning according to his/her own subjective interests by ignoring its authorial intention. In this case, 'Imāra misunderstands Ricoeur's hermeneutics. In addition, he reduces hermeneutics to just the subjectivist school. In fact there are other schools, namely the objectivist/romanticist one and objectivist-*cum*-subjectivist one. Meanwhile, Shihab explores in detail Schleiermacher's and Gadamer's hermeneutical theories. In this case, he appreciates Schleiermacher's grammatical hermeneutics and says it can be applied to the interpretation of the Qur'an. With regard to his psychological hermeneutics, Shihab points out that it must be adapted to the divine nature of the Qur'an. Gadamer's hermeneutics is included by Shihab in the subjectivist school that ignores the importance of the original meaning of the text under interpretation. In this regard, Shihab's judgment is not right. Gadamer's hermeneutics should be seen as part of the objectivist-*cum*-subjectivist school, especially when he proposes what he calls the 'fusion of horizons' (i.e. the horizon of the text and that of the interpreter). Third, according to Shihab some hermeneutical theories can be applied to the Qur'an, and can even broaden the insights of the interpreter, whereas 'Imāra rejects them totally for several reasons that can be considered weak. Fourth and finally, both are involved in discussing Western hermeneutics for the purpose of responding to some Muslim scholars who have introduced it, especially Ḥasan Ḥanafī and Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd. However, 'Imāra's criticism of these thinkers is not strong enough, and even represents a misunderstanding of their thoughts. Fourth, the ideas proposed by Shihab and 'Imāra have a certain impact on the discourse on the subject among Muslim scholars in Indonesia. Some scholars, like Adian Husaini, agree with 'Imāra in terms of the rejection of the Western hermeneutics and some agree with Shihab who has a moderate 'selective' attitude towards it, and have even applied some 'proper' hermeneutical approaches to the interpretation of several Qur'anic verses.

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