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The Hermeneutics Influence on Feminist Exegesis: A Case Study on Amina Wadud

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Abstract

This article will discuss how hermeneutic influences the exegesis of the Qur'an initiated by Muslim feminists. Through hermeneutical principles, Muslim feminists develop their own theories and methods in presenting new interpretations of the Qur'an. This research will focus its discussion on one of the well-known Muslim feminists, Amina Wadud. Through a critical study of text analysis, this research will try to answer questions about (1) the necessity of using the hermeneutical method in feminist interpretation, (2) the influence of hermeneutics on Amina Wadud's method of interpretation. This paper will highlight this event using a **socio-historical approach** and content analysis. In addition, references related to the patterns of Islam integrity and culture will be used with a comparative pattern. **The conclusion** of this research is that through historical critical analysis tools and text criticism inspired by hermeneutical principles, Amina Wadud succeeded in creating her own interpretation method and developing an interpretation approach that is not gender biased and emphasizes the principal and universal messages contained in the Qur'an.

Keywords: Amina Wadud's Exegesis, Feminist, Hermeneutic

Introduction

Among the global issues that have been on trend so far until today is the issue of gender. Gender issues are increasingly discussed on various occasions, so that they are continuously held at local, national, and international seminars. The spread of gender differences, which gave birth to injustice and even violence against women, is basically a social and cultural construction formed through a long process [1].

The issue of gender which is increasingly being discussed in the global sphere has made Muslim feminists realize that the conditions that befell women, especially in Islamic countries, are the result of exegesis of the Qur'an and hadith that do not take into account matters concerning issues and women's interests. This is as a result of the factor of Islamic society which adheres to a patriarchal system, in addition to the internal aspects of the interpreters who are mostly male. The Islamic religion with its normative provisions (*shari'ah*) is accused of being partly responsible for gender injustice. In criticizing aspects of Islam or Islamic society, feminists base their position on a view that is radically foreign to the Islamic world view and is typically moral in nature [2].

Realizing the facts above, feminists are starting to try to present new interpretations of the verses of the Qur'an that are suitable to gender equality. Among the feminists who are most vocal about the issue of gender equality is Amina Wadud. She attempted to create a new method of interpreting the Qur'an. In her efforts to present a gender-friendly exegesis, she is very much inspired by hermeneutics. Here, the author will explain how hermeneutics has become a necessary tool that must be used by Muslim feminists to present a new interpretation of Islam and then, how this hermeneutics influenced Amina Wadud in formulating her method of interpretation of the Qur'an.

Method

In this study, the method that the author uses is the *library* research method or referred to as literature research, which is a method with data collection techniques through existing literature in the form of books, journals, and documents relevant to the theme in this study. The source refers to the theme of feminist hermeneutics from Amina Wadud. The literature data that has been collected is then divided into two parts, namely primary data in the form of books and journals, Qur'anic exegesis and hermeneutics of Amina Wadud and secondary data in the form of additional data relevant to the problem and hermeneutics of Amina Wadud. Both of these data are data used in research. Then the data that has been collected is combined with other theories to produce a conclusion that is relevant to the core of the problem.

In this study, the data analysis used content analysis. Content analysis is a method for studying and drawing conclusions from a phenomenon using texts. The stages in content analysis include *first*, formulating the objectives of the analysis. *Second*, conduct a literature study. *Third*, determine the unit of observation and unit of analysis. *Fourth*, determine conceptualization and operationalization. *Fifth*, make categorization. *Sixth*, conduct data analysis and discussion. And *seventh*, draw conclusions

Discussion

The Necessity of Using a Hermeneutic Approach to the Feminists' Exegesis

For two decades ago until now, feminism has become an interesting issue that is often discussed among Muslims. Discussions about feminism in the Islamic world cannot be separated from the impact of globalization that has spread throughout the world. Issues that initially echoed in other parts of the world, for example in the West, are also heard and discussed in the Islamic world. Among the issues that are often discussed are about democracy and women's emancipation [3].

The idea of women's emancipation which is the basis of the feminist movement forces Muslims to rethink the position of women who have been marginalized for centuries. The concept of feminism, which was originally born in the West in the 19th and 20th centuries, was used as a model for women's liberation in countries where the population is predominantly Muslim. The early generations who brought feminist ideas from the West were Egyptian intellectuals who studied in Europe. After returning to their home country, they developed the concept of feminism that they learned from the West and then developed it in their own country. The early Muslim feminism movement in Egypt was known as *Tahrir al-Mar'ah* (liberation of women). This movement is growing along with the increasing awareness of Muslims about oppression, especially that experienced by women, due to religious doctrines that restrict [4].

At the end of the 20th century, Muslim feminists began to emerge who focused and seriously studied the concept of feminism. What are the main issues they study and fight for are the same; namely wanting to offer new understandings of religious doctrines that have so far suppressed, silenced, and marginalized the role of women [5].

Among the early feminists known among Muslims is Fatima Mernissi. She is a woman who was born in Fez, North Morocco in 1941. According to her, the exegesis of the verses of the Qur'an and also the hadiths of the Prophet so far has been dominated by a culture of male domination and supported by the construction of scholars by manipulating texts for the benefit of men [3]. She considers that the inability to distinguish which areas of religion are sacred and which are not sacred is one of the reasons for a rigid understanding of religion.

Apart from Fatima Mernissi, another Muslim feminist who has spoken out loud about issues of emancipation and gender equality is Riffat Hassan. She is a Pakistani woman who was born in 1943, two years after the birth of Fatima Mernissi. She is a doctoral graduate from St. Mary's College University of

Durham with a dissertation on the thoughts of Iqbal, a philosopher from Pakistan [6].

Her intellectual interest is the issue of discrimination and injustice of women peaked when she was involved in a research project in which the political situation and condition of the country of her birth, Pakistan, was undergoing Islamization. In carrying out this research, she wondered why the initial action taken by a country that was carrying out Islamization was forcing women into the house, covering their entire bodies, enforcing rules and laws that regulate women's behavior and movements [7].

All Muslim feminists agree that what causes discrimination and marginalization experienced by Muslim women is the result of the tradition of interpreting the Qur'an so far dominated by the use of narrow and atomistic traditional interpretation methods [8]. According to Amina Wadud, what is problematic about this traditional interpretation model is; (1) Interpreting the Qur'an using the *tahlili* method, namely interpreting the Qur'an based on the order of the chapters and verses, from the first verse of Surah Al-Fatihah to the last verse of Surah An-Nas. Even though they have various approaches in interpreting Qur'an verses (such as fiqh, dsufi, historical, etc.) approaches, this method of interpreting the Qur'an cannot fully capture and discuss the series of Qur'an verses which has the same big theme. Maybe occasionally they mention the connection between one verse and another, but it's not enough to provide a systematic and comprehensive explanation. In the *tahlili* method, it is almost impossible to find interpreter activity connecting verses that have the same idea, connecting syntactic structures, basic principles, and main themes of the verses of the Qur'an. (2) Most traditional commentary books are written exclusively by male commentators. That is, men's experiences are included while women's experiences are not included or viewed from a man's point of view, vision, perspective, or need for women [9]. Not surprisingly, the marginalization of women in Islam is rife because their views and perspectives are not represented.

Fatima Mernissi said that interpretations of the verses of the Qur'an or the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad, especially those discussing women, are filled with a patriarchal spirit which results in injustice, discrimination, alienation and domestication of women. All of this, according to Mernissi, is nothing more than a social construction that is legitimized by the interpretation of the *ulama* who are said to have authority in the interpretation of religious texts. Therefore, Mernissi does not fully believe in an elite group of thinkers who are desperately defending law when it comes to talking about women. In She view *turats* negatively and considers discussions around *turats* to be nothing more than a new way for men to maintain domination over women. He believes that past models are no longer relevant in today's context [10]. As a way out of the shackles of traditional

interpretations that mostly discredit women, many Muslim feminists use the hermeneutical method as their analytical tools.

Actually, in terms of understanding, Hermeneutics and the science of exegesis that existed before were not much different. *First*, both teach how to understand and interpret the text correctly and carefully. *Second*, what distinguishes between the two is the history of their emergence, scope, and object of discussion. Hermeneutics covers all research objects in the social sciences and humanities (including language and texts), while the science of interpretation is only concerned with texts. *Third*, the object of study of hermeneutics initially departs from the tradition of biblical interpretation while the science of interpretation is the Qur'an. But both of them seek to communicate divine messages to humans in human language [11].

Hermeneutics is basically a method of interpretation that departs from language analysis and then moves on to context analysis, to then "pull" the meaning obtained into space and time when this understanding and interpretation is carried out. Qur'an hermeneutics is how the Qur'an is present in society, then it is understood, interpreted, translated, and dialogued with its historical dynamics [12]. Hermeneutics is basically a method of interpretation that departs from language analysis and then moves on to context analysis, to then "pull" the meaning obtained into place and time when this understanding and interpretation is carried out. Qur'anic hermeneutics is how the Qur'an is present in society, then it is understood, interpreted, translated, and dialogued with its historical dynamics.

The use of hermeneutics is also used by contemporary Muslim scholars in offering a new understanding of the Qur'an. Among them are Muhammad Arkoun, Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri, Muhammad Syahrur, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd. Not only focusing on studying texts, but there are also three areas that are the core concern of hermeneutics, namely, (1) the initiator of the text, (2) the text, and (3) the context. These three aspects are researched, analyzed, and discussed in such a way as to gain a comprehensive and contextual understanding [13].

For example, Riffat Hassan. Through a hermeneutical approach, he succeeded in constructing a method which he called historical-critical-contextual. The application of this method includes the following ways; *First*, checking the correctness of the meaning of a word or language, by tracing the history of the root of the word according to the context in which the word was stated. *Second*, to test the products of interpretation that already exist in terms of their philosophical consistency. *Third*, using ethical principles that are based on the principle of justice which is part of the belief that God is just [6].

Apart from Riffat Hassan, Asma Barlas also implements a hermeneutic approach in her interpretation system. Asma Barlas invites Muslims to look at the primary texts of the Qur'an, how these texts are read, and their relationship to one another; relation to local social, legal, and practices that developed during the early Islamic centuries before the door of *ijtihad* was "considered" to have closed in the tenth century. With these foundations, Asma Barlas wants to offer a new way of interpretation in the Qur'an; Asma Barlas' interpretation methods include examine the nature of the text, textuality, and intertextuality in religious discourse. What is meant by text, according to Asma Barlas, is any discourse that has been "imprisoned" in writing/text. What is meant by textuality is how the text is read, and intertextuality is the internal relationship between one text and another and extratextuality is the social conditions, history, political context, in which the text is read [14].

If the interpretation of the Qur'an is enriched with a hermeneutic approach, it will produce a richer field of meaning and be able to explain the relationship between revelation and social realities. Texts or texts are not always understood as they are, but they have been enriched with contexts, souls, worldviews, and relationships between relationships with others. War verses, *jihad* verses, and other "strong" verses, for example, do not automatically mean as literally as the text says. The construction of its meaning shifts to a more universal direction, namely the war against injustice, *jihad* against poverty, and the struggle to defend environmental welfare. These meanings arise from the expansion of meaning resulting from understanding hermeneutics and/or semiotics [13].

To fight for justice and equality based on an understanding of religious texts, the use of the hermeneutical method is a necessity chosen by feminists. Because, as explained above, in order to gain new understanding and conclusions on a problem, using the lens of a new method of interpretation is a necessity and a path must inevitably be chosen by a feminist to obtain results of interpretation that are friendly to gender and encourage gender equality. the spirit of emancipation, justice, and eroding all aspects that lead to the marginalization of the role of women in the private and public spheres in general.

The Influence of Hermeneutics on the Amina Wadud's Exegesis

In the beginning, the hermeneutic method was indeed used as a tool to "interpret" various fields of scientific study, looking at the history of its birth and development. However, it must be admitted that the role of hermeneutics in the study of the Qur'an is very large. The major role of hermeneutic studies here is historical analysis and text criticism.

Komaruddin Hidayat in his book says [15];

The Paradigm for hermeneutics is the interpretation of a traditional text, where the problem must always be how we can come to understand in our own context something which was written in a radically different situation.

Hermeneutics here is essentially a method of interpretation that departs from language analysis and then moves on to context analysis, to then "pull" the meaning obtained into space and time when this understanding and interpretation is carried out. If this approach is reconciled with the study of Qur'an texts, then the main problem and theme faced is how the Qur'an text is present in society, then understood, interpreted, translated and dialogued with the dynamics of its historical reality.

In connection with this modern hermeneutical approach to the Qur'an, it is necessary to pay attention to three things which are the basic assumptions in its interpretation, namely:

1. The commentators are human.

Whoever interprets the text of the holy book, he is still an ordinary human being who is complete with all his shortcomings, strengths, and transience because he is bound by a certain time and space. With this assumption, it is hoped that it can be understood that humans will not be able to break away from the historical ties of their lives and experiences, where these ties will more or less influence and color the style of their interpretation. This assumption is intended not to give an "absolutely" right or wrong verdict for an interpretation, but rather to lead to a critical understanding and analysis of one interpretation. Interpreters are human beings who carry their own "loads" of humanity. Every generation of Muslims since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, carrying this "cargo" with them, has produced their own commentaries on the Qur'an. It is not surprising then that there are a variety of interpretations from each generation [16].

2. The exegesis cannot be separated from language, history, and tradition.

All interpretive activities are basically a participation in the historical-linguistic process and the prevailing tradition, where this participation occurs in a certain time and space. The struggle of Muslims with the Qur'an is also in this "confinement". One cannot escape from the language, culture and traditions in which they live. Reformist thinkers often state that the crises that have occurred in the Islamic world and the inability of Muslims to make a useful contribution to the contemporary world are due to tradition. The way out recommended by the reformers is often to leave the bonds of tradition and "return to the Qur'an". This statement is actually inconsistent with the fact that one interpretation cannot be completely independent based on the text, but is definitely related to its

historical content, both the historical content when the text appeared and when the text was interpreted [16].

3. No text is a territory unto itself.

The socio-historical and linguistic nuances in the revelation of the Qur'an can be seen in the content, form, purpose, and language used by the Qur'an. This can also be seen, for example, in the distinction between makkiyah verses and *madaniyah* verses. In relation to the process of revelation, language, and content on the one hand, and with the community of people who accept it on the other hand, the Qur'an is not "unique". Revelation is always a comment on – at least it must be understood within the framework of – the conditions of the particular society in which the revelation descends [16]. Below, the author will explain how hermeneutics influences the method of interpretation used by Amina Wadud.

1. Amina Wadud's Perception about the Text

Amina Wadud has her own way of viewing the text of the Qur'an. She is very concerned about the words in the Qur'an that contain elements of gender. She considers all words in the Qur'an that contain elements of gender to be made neutral. All discussion of the Qur'an which is universal in nature, will be further analyzed its limitations and expression in specific terms in the seventh century in the Arab world, where this Qur'an was revealed.

Amina Wadud has her own way of viewing the text of the Qur'an. She is very concerned about the words in the Qur'an that contain elements of gender. He considers all words in the Qur'an that contain elements of gender to be made neutral [17]. All discussion of the Qur'an which is universal in nature, will be further analyzed its limitations and expression in specific terms in the seventh century in the Arab world, where this Qur'an was revealed.

Muslims who are in other parts of the world must implement the application of the Qur'anic verses based on the original intentions/intentions of the Qur'anic verses, then apply them to the era and time in which they live. In this modern era, this is what is called the spirit of the Qur'an. To get this spirit, a comprehensive and organized hermeneutic model must be applied [18].

Amina Wadud initially questioned why the Qur'an differentiates between men and women in a verse such as (*al-mukminum and al-mukminat*), but in several other verses it uses a more general form of the word (*ya ayyuhalladzina amanuu*). Based on these assumptions, Amina Wadud then concluded that every verse that uses the male plural form is believed to refer to men and women equally, except

in cases where there is an indication that the verse is specifically addressed to gender or certain gender.

Likewise, all verses that refer to women, either simultaneously or separately, are juxtaposed with verses that refer to men (e.g.: *al-mu'minum wal mukminaat*), will be analyzed using traditional interpretation methods, it is *tafsir Qur'an dengan Qur'an* (interpretation of the Qur'an based on the Qur'an itself). So it can be concluded, when Amina Wadud elaborates and provides an interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an, she will take the following steps; Elaborating on some of these specific terms and methods, by which each verse will be analyzed, includes; what is the context, are there other verses that discuss similar matters or themes, is there a similar language or the same syntactic structure in other verses of the Qur'an, are there attempts to override the principles of the Qur'an, and how is the world viewpoint of the interpreters of the Qur'an (this category, in hermeneutics, is included in the discussion of context) [9].

One of the challenges faced by Amina Wadud when interpreting the verses of the Qur'an is the presence of male and female forms in Arabic words. This fact, later on, forms an understanding that demands to distinguish what things are the domain of men and which things are the realm of women. Everything in the end, is always classified which is the male area and which is the female area. Language that specifically differentiates between men and women. So, to go beyond gender differences, Amina Wadud chose to approach the text from the outside. This can make Amina Wadud more flexible in offering new interpretations and not being imprisoned in the differences between men and women in Arabic. Even though Arabic words are classified into male and female, according to Amina Wadud, in practice, you don't have to stick to this distinction. For him, the divine text must overcome cultural barriers which in this case manifest in Arabic.

2. Amina Wadud's Perception about Context

The context here, according to Amina Wadud, is related to the point of view used by the interpreters of the Qur'an itself. People's understanding of the Qur'an, according to Amina Wadud, is determined by two things which she calls the "prior text"; namely the language and cultural context in which the Qur'anic text is read or interpreted. It cannot be denied that these two aspects are representations of the various natural and cultural conditions experienced by readers or interpreters, which of course will lead to variations in understanding and interpretation of the Qur'an itself.

Prior-Text causes many perspectives to be present in a conclusion in an interpretation. By observing the prior text, we can unravel the individuality that pervades an interpretation, this is neither good nor bad in an interpretation. However, when a reader or someone with a certain worldview overemphasizes his views, it will obscure the interpreter or reader of the text from the many other contexts that allow for an interpretation that emerges from different backgrounds and contexts.

Knowing this, to stay away from relativism, one must be aware of the sides that can change and remain in a verse of the Qur'an. Then from that unchanged side, then implemented in their unique reflection. Amina Wadud emphasizes that, it is not the text that changes, but our reflections and interpretations that change according to the conditions of the times and times in which we live. Therefore, according to Amina Wadud, a reader must interact with the text. Thus, the assumption and emphasis that there is only one interpretation can result in the limitation of the Qur'an text and being unable to answer the challenges of the times. This is of course contrary to the core spirit of the Qur'an, which is always able to adapt to the conditions of the times [9].

In interpreting the Qur'an, Amina Wadud uses a women's perspective. He deplored the traditional assumptions that were deeply rooted and accepted by most people, namely the inferiority of women and inequality between men and women. Assumptions and assumptions like these do not only affect the position of women in Muslim society, but also affect the interpretations of the Qur'an towards women. Such assumptions or beliefs arise from the understanding that there are essential and essential differences between men and women in the aspects of creation, capacity and function in society, access to guidance and their rewards in the hereafter. It is the assumptions above that Amina Wadud flatly rejects, even though there are differences between men and women, according to her, they are not essentially different.

This assumption is based on differences in biological structure, which has implications for the marginalization of women's roles. Men, according to Amina Wadud, if only assessed from a biological point of view, will have many advantages. From the assumption of this biological structure, men get many advantages and get a lot of privileges such as freedom of movement, work, and the opportunity to be involved in the social, political and economic spheres. Here, Amina Wadud realizes that the Qur'an does not attempt to erase the differences between men and women or to compartmentalize human roles based on gender differences. In fact, according to Amina Wadud, there must be a mutually beneficial and supportive relationship between men and women which is the core aim of the Qur'an. However, the Qur'an neither favors nor supports a single

role or a single definition of several roles exclusively limited to a particular gender in all cultures.

Certain practices emphasized by the Qur'an, according to Amina Wadud, may only be limited to the social conditions at that time, but that does not mean that these practices must be practiced or last forever. Therefore, modern Muslim society must really understand the basic principles which are the essential messages of the Qur'an itself. For this, Wadud's amines provide an example. In Arabia, during the time of revelation, women who were rich and came from powerful tribes would wear/wear the headscarf and be separated for the purpose of providing protection. In this case, the Qur'an really knows the meaning of politeness and then demonstrates it through the practices that were in effect in Arabia at that time. The core message is modesty, not how women should wear the headscarf or be segregated or sequestered (which was a practice only in ancient Arabia). The core message of the Qur'an is how this modesty practice is applied to all people, not a message to wear the headscarf or seclusion of women.

The method that seeks to limit universal and principled matters to specific contexts like this is what Amina Wadud regrets, she wants how the core message of the Qur'an is shown and raised, not the principal messages which are instead made the focus. Including compartmentalizing gender roles which are actually not included in principle matters [18].

Conclusion

Hermeneutics greatly influences the method of interpretation used by Amina Wadud. Through historical critical analysis tools and text criticism inspired by hermeneutical principles, Amina Wadud succeeded in creating her own interpretation method and developing an interpretation approach that is not gender biased and emphasizes the principal and universal messages contained in the Qur'an.

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