

Nurcholish Madjid's Contextual Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Epistemology and the Relationship between Religion and State in Indonesia

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Abstrak

Relasi Islam dan negara dalam masyarakat Indonesia yang plural menghadirkan persoalan dalam memahami ajaran Al-Qur'an agar relevan dengan konteks sosial-historis tanpa kehilangan dimensi normatifnya. Dalam diskursus tersebut, pemikiran Nurcholish Madjid melalui hermeneutika kontekstual Al-Qur'an penting dikaji karena berupaya menghubungkan pesan normatif wahyu dengan realitas sosial dan kebangsaan Indonesia. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis epistemologi hermeneutika kontekstual Al-Qur'an dalam pemikiran Nurcholish Madjid, khususnya dalam memahami hubungan agama dan negara. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kepustakaan. Data primer berupa karya-karya Nurcholish Madjid dan data sekunder berupa literatur akademik yang relevan. Data dikumpulkan, diseleksi, dan diverifikasi melalui perbandingan antarsumber, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan *cultural theme analysis* dan hermeneutika kontekstual dengan menghubungkan konteks sosial-historis, aspek kebahasaan, prinsip interpretatif, dan tujuan moral ayat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa hermeneutika kontekstual Nurcholish Madjid tidak berhenti pada makna literal, tetapi menghubungkan konteks historis, pesan moral, dan realitas sosial kontemporer, sebagaimana terlihat dalam penafsirannya terhadap konsep *din* dan *Allāh*. Pendekatan ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan pemahaman Islam yang inklusif, toleransi, dan relasi harmonis antara agama dan negara dengan Pancasila sebagai titik temu kebangsaan. Namun, kontekstualisasi memerlukan batas epistemologis agar penggalian nilai universal Al-Qur'an tidak menghilangkan makna spesifik teks dan prinsip normatif Islam.

Kata Kunci: Al-Qur'ān; Hermeneutika Kontekstual; Interpretasi; Nurcholish Madjid.

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Abstract

The relationship between Islam and the state in Indonesia's pluralistic society presents challenges in understanding the teachings of the Qur'ān in ways that remain relevant to the socio-historical context without losing their normative dimensions. Within this discourse, Nurcholish Madjid's thought through contextual Qur'ānic hermeneutics is important to examine because it seeks to connect the normative message of revelation with Indonesia's social and national realities. This research aims to analyze the epistemology of contextual Qur'ānic hermeneutics in Nurcholish Madjid's thought, particularly in understanding the relationship between religion and the state. This is qualitative research using a library research approach. Primary data consist of Nurcholish Madjid's works, while secondary data comprise relevant academic literature. Data were collected, selected, and verified through comparison across sources, and then analyzed using cultural theme analysis and contextual hermeneutics by connecting socio-historical context, linguistic aspects, interpretive principles, and the moral objectives of the verses. The findings indicate that Nurcholish Madjid's contextual hermeneutics does not stop at literal meanings but connects historical context, moral messages, and contemporary social realities, as reflected in his interpretation of the concepts of dīn and Allāh. This approach contributes to developing an inclusive understanding of Islam, fostering tolerance, and establishing harmonious relations between religion and the state, with Pancasila as a common national ground. However, contextualization requires epistemological boundaries to ensure that the exploration of the Qur'ān's universal values does not eliminate the specific meanings of the text and the normative principles of Islam.

Keywords: *Al-Qur'ān; Contextual hermeneutics; Interpretation; Nurcholish Madjid.*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country built upon the reality of ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity. Although Islam is the religion embraced by the majority of the population, Indonesia is constitutionally not an Islamic state, but rather a unitary state founded on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution (Omara, 2024; Nggili et al., 2024). This configuration places the relationship between Islam and the state in a complex position: on the one hand, Islamic values have a strong influence on the social life of society; on the other hand, the state is founded upon civic principles that accommodate all religious groups (Ahyar & Huda, 2021). Tensions between these two positions have emerged since the formulation of the state's foundations and have continued in various forms, including debates over the formalization of Islamic law, the Islamic state, and the idea of the caliphate (Anshori & Abdurrahman, 2024). Thus, the issue of the relationship between Islam and the state in Indonesia is not merely a political issue, but is also related to how religious teachings and texts are understood within the context of a pluralistic society.

In this context, the central issue is not only whether Islam should be formalized within the state structure, but also how the Qur'ān is understood when confronted with changing social and political realities. An understanding that approaches the text literally and detaches it from its historical context may produce formalistic religious views, particularly when Qur'ānic verses concerning divinity, society, justice, and public life are

understood as political provisions that are singular and non-negotiable (Nuraini et al., 2024; Saeed & Akbar, 2021). Conversely, a contextual approach seeks to reconcile the normative message of the Qur'ān with the socio-historical context in which interpretation takes place. In the context of a pluralistic Indonesia, such an approach is important because it enables the universal values of the Qur'ān to be translated into national life without having to make a particular religion the exclusive foundation of state administration (Falihin et al., 2024).

The debate over the relationship between Islam and the state is closely related to the development of modern Islamic thought in Indonesia. Several studies on Nurcholish Madjid have examined his thought from various perspectives, including Islamic modernization, secularization, pluralism, the relationship between Islam and the state, and criticism of the formalization of Islamic politics and the idea of the (Albab, 2023; Nafis et al., 2023; Faisal, 2023). These studies demonstrate that Nurcholish Madjid was one of Indonesia's Muslim intellectuals who consistently sought to establish a constructive relationship between Islam, society, and the state. His ideas concerning the renewal of Islamic thought were not directed toward eliminating the role of religion from public life, but rather toward distinguishing between the universal values of Islam and historical and political forms that are contextual.

Nurcholish Madjid's position is important because his thought was based on the awareness that Islamic understanding cannot be separated from the socio-historical context in which Muslims live. Through a reading of the Qur'ān that takes context into account, he emphasized the values of monotheism, justice, humanity, and freedom while criticizing the tendency to equate Islam with a particular political institution or system (Nurcholish Madjid, 1992; Nurcholish Madjid, 1994; Nurcholish Madjid, 1995; Nurcholis Madjid, 1999; Nurcholish Madjid, 1999; Nurcholish Madjid, 2004). Within this framework, Indonesia's multicultural context is not positioned as an obstacle to the application of Qur'ānic values, but as a historical space that requires an interpretive process so that the universal message of revelation can be actualized in a relevant manner. Thus, Nurcholish Madjid's thought can be understood not only as a conception of modernization or the relationship between Islam and the state, but also as an attempt to develop a way of knowing and understanding the Qur'ān contextually.

Nevertheless, studies of Nurcholish Madjid have largely focused on the substance of his ideas concerning modernization, secularization, pluralism, and opposition to the formalization of Islamic politics, while the epistemological dimension of how he constructed an understanding of the Qur'ān within Indonesia's socio-historical context has received insufficient attention (Sumanta, 2022; Syamsuar et al., 2024; Lahaji & Faisal, 2023; Nafis et al., 2023a). This epistemological dimension is important for explaining how

Indonesia's social context, history, and pluralistic reality interact with Islamic sources in shaping Nurcholish Madjid's thought. This gap indicates the need to examine Nurcholish Madjid's thought more specifically through the perspective of contextual Qur'ānic hermeneutics, particularly to understand how he connects the normative message of the Qur'ān with changing social and political contexts.

Based on these issues, this research aims to analyze the epistemology of contextual Qur'ānic hermeneutics in Nurcholish Madjid's thought, particularly concerning how Indonesia's socio-historical context influenced the formation of his Islamic knowledge and how the Qur'ān is understood in responding to issues concerning the relationship between religion and the state. The novelty of this research lies in placing Nurcholish Madjid's thought within the framework of contextual hermeneutical epistemology, rather than merely treating it as a conception of modernization, pluralism, or secularization. This approach is expected to make a conceptual contribution to the development of Qur'ānic studies and Islamic thought in Indonesia, particularly in formulating an inclusive and contextual model of Islamic understanding that is compatible with the reality of a pluralistic nation-state.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is qualitative research using a literature study approach. The research data consist of primary data in the form of Nurcholish Madjid's works discussing Islamic thought, the Qur'ān, religion, society, and the state, as well as secondary data in the form of books, scholarly articles, and academic publications discussing Nurcholish Madjid's biography, educational background, teachers, socio-cultural life, political activities, and the development of his thought (Moeloeng, 2021). Data collection was conducted through a literature search, which was then selected based on its relevance to the focus of the research (Neuman, 2014). Data verification was conducted by comparing information from various sources and cross-checking Nurcholish Madjid's primary works with secondary literature to ensure the consistency of information regarding the background and development of his thought (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The verified data were then analyzed using cultural theme analysis (discovering cultural themes) by identifying recurring themes from various aspects of Nurcholish Madjid's life and connecting them holistically (Spradley, 1979; Abdurrahman, 2011). Furthermore, contextual hermeneutics was used as the analytical framework by connecting three elements, namely the socio-historical context underlying the emergence of Nurcholish Madjid's thought, the interpretive principles reflected in his understanding of the Qur'ān, and the socio-political issues that constituted the context for the application of his thought (Taylor, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Educational Background and Socio-Historical Conditions of Nurcholish Madjid

Nurcholish Madjid was born to H. Abdul Madjid and Hj. Fathanah on 17 March 1939 AD or 26 Muharram 1358 Hijriyah in Jombang, East Java (Yusuf & Mawalidin, 2022). He was born into a boarding school family and his father was the director of a boarding school at the time called Madrasah al-Wathaniyah. His father was a member of Nahdhatul Ulama (NU) with traditionalist Islāmic views, but in terms of politics he joined the Masyumi party with modernist Islāmic views (Farouki, 2004). His mother was from Kediri and came from a family of Syarikat Dagang Islām (SDI) activists, which later turned into the Islāmic Sarikat Party. The organization is also very thick with the modernist Islāmic paradigm (Rosidah et al., 2023).

Nurcholish' early education began with attending the People's School (SR) in the morning and studying at his father's Wathaniyah Madrasah in the afternoon. Therefore, he acquired different knowledge from the two schools, namely secular general knowledge from the People's School and religious knowledge from the Wathaniyah Madrasah and showed serious interest in both (Safitri et al., 2022). Furthermore, he attended the Junior High School (SMP) and the Darul Ulum Islāmic Boarding School. In his education at the Darul Ulum Islāmic Boarding School, he began to feel uncomfortable because his slightly secular modernist thinking was not liked by his friends who tended to be Islāmic traditionalists. Therefore, shortly afterwards he moved to the Darussalam Gontor Islāmic Boarding School located in the city of Ponorogo which is 120 km from Jombang to adjust to him (Farouki, 2004).

However, other sources say that his move to Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Gontor, Ponorogo was caused by his father and mother who were Masyumi Party activists, even his mother served as the head of the Masyumi Party campaign. The entry of his parents into the Masyumi Party means that he is a land of penetration of new modernist thoughts that are open to Western understanding (Putra et al., 2023). That's why his family was in the minority in Jombang, the cradle of Nahdatul Ulama (NU). Behind his parents who were Masyumi Party activists, Nurcholis had the opportunity to cross the boundaries of traditional thinking at that time by opening up to modernist, Western-orientated understanding (Faisal, 2023).

At Pondok Pesantren Darussalam Gontor, Nurcholish found an atmosphere that suited him and was more open. This boarding school did have different characteristics from other boarding schools that tended to be traditionalist Islāmic at that time (Nuha et al., 2024). The characteristics are being able to combine general and religious subjects, Arabic and English being the language of instruction and being more open in the sense that it is not too rigid to one madhhab. In addition, the curriculum of this Islāmic Boarding

School was also designed to respond to social changes that occurred in society, especially during pre-Indonesia independence, Indonesia independence, and post-Indonesia independence (Siroj & Ulfah, 2024). There he showed his genius by achieving various achievements, even though he immediately jumped from the first grade to the third grade. When he graduated from the boarding school, like other boarding schools, he served as a teacher at the Darussalam Gontor Boarding School. Then his teacher, KH Imam Zakarsyi, intended to send him to al-Azhar University, but it failed because of the difficulty of obtaining a visa due to the turmoil that occurred in Egypt (Nafis et al., 2023a).

Nurcholis was still determined to study with a balanced combination of religious and general studies. Then in 1960, he continued his studies at the Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta State Islāmic Institute (IAIN) by majoring in Arabic Literature at the Faculty of Adab. IAIN was the right choice because the curriculum was designed to teach religious and general subjects with modern academic methods, and its alumni were prepared to become well-educated people and fill the state's religious administrative institutions (Siregar, 2021). The year 1960, which coincided with the first year of university, was the end of the DI/TII rebellion in various parts of Indonesia and the end of the Masyumi Party movement due to its dissolution by President Sukarno, which led to a decline in the dominance of Islāmic parties in politics. Nurcholis began to reflect on the social conditions around him at that time and thought about the concept of realizing the best for Muslims in Indonesia (Farouki, 2004).

As a student, Nurcholis actively participated in student socio-political organizations, joining the Jakarta branch of the Islāmic Student Association (HMI) in 1963. The HMI is an Islāmic student organization in which members are groomed to be academics (modernists) and servants of Islām (Makin, 2016). In 1966, he was nominated to attend the HMI national congress in Solo and he was elected chairman of the HMI for a three-year term (1966-1969). After that, he was also re-elected for a second term (1969-1971). Nurcholis became the only HMI chairman in history to serve for two terms. Within the organization, Nurcholis was active in debates on the renewal of Islāmic thought to meet the challenges of modernity (Rozak et al., 2015).

Nurcholis graduated in 1965 with a BA (Bachelor of Art) degree and three years later he obtained a Drs (Doktorandus) degree at the same university. After graduating, he realized that the struggle of Muslims for an Islāmic state and united Islāmic political parties had reached a dead end (Lidyaningsih & Hanif, 2023). Therefore, he began to search for the meaning of the word "*Islām*" that could play its role in the plurality of religions and ethnicities in Indonesia (Saputri et al., 2024). It was not long before he came up with an idea, which he conveyed during a speech in 1972, known as the slogan "*Islām yes, Party No*". He formulated this idea to show the position and role of Islām in

Indonesia, a country where the majority of the population is Muslim despite its ethnic and paradigm diversity. Thus, Islām cannot be reduced by political parties, which means that if an Islāmic party loses an election, Islām will also be seen as losing (Hamudy & Hamudy, 2020).

During the New Order period in 1973 under the leadership of President Soeharto, there was a policy of party simplification with the enactment of MPR Decree Number IV/MPR Number IV/MPR/1973 on the Guidelines for State Policy (GBHN) as a result of the 1973 MPR session. The decree stated that for the 1977 elections, there would be two parties and one Golongan Karya. The two parties were categorized based on ideology. Parties with nationalist ideologies such as PNI, Murba, IPKI, Catholic Party, and Parkindo merged into the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI). Meanwhile, parties with spiritual religious ideologies such as NU, Parmusi, PSII, and Perti merged into the United Development Party (PPP). The Golongan Karya (Golkar) is not categorized as a political party, but the only socio-political organization allowed to participate in elections (Farouki, 2004). Golkar was nothing but a political vehicle designed to build government stability. In the 1977 elections, the PPP and PDI suffered a crushing defeat to Golkar's share of parliamentary seats. Thus, Golkar became very powerful without any equal opposition and President Soeharto emerged as the sole ruler with unlimited power (Isra & Fahmi, 2019).

Realizing the authoritarianism of the New Order regime, Nurcholis reflected on how Islām should play its role in a religiously plural civil society without narrowing Muslims in political views as the fusion of the New Order regime had done. He also thought about how Muslims should interpret the verses of the Qur'ān and hadith to play their role in dealing with the problem of division in modern times. Nurcholis then suggests that the core answers to these questions should be in line with the framework of Pancasila as the basis of the Indonesian state (Nurcholish Madjid, 1999; Farouki, 2004).

Motivated to realize the answers to the questions that arose in his mind, in 1978 he continued his Doctoral studies at the University of Chicago by majoring in Philosophy at the Faculty of Islāmic Studies. There he was taught by Fazlur Rahman, a Muslim scholar from Pakistan (Dian et al., 2022). Fazlur Rahman is an Islāmic reformer of Islāmic Neo-Modernism, which is a school that seeks to respond to the stagnation of Islām due to purifications that do not demand the dynamism of the times as the Wahabi school does (Ahmad, 2023). According to Fazlur Rahman, the school of Islāmic Neo-Modernism has the characteristics of a systematic methodology by carrying out a deep reconstruction of the state of Muslims in facing modern challenges without setting aside the study of history in Islāmic teachings (Akbar, 2020). The distinctive feature of Western Neo-

Modernism is to recognize that truth is not absolute, but relative and humans can deny religion based on irrationality (Amin & Syarifah, 2021).

The concept of Islāmic Neo-Modernism, taught by Nurcholis' teachers at the University of Chicago such as Fazlur Rahman and Ismail al-Faruqi, seeks to respond to Western Neo-Modernism which does not believe in the existence of absolute truth, so there is a bad possibility that humans can declare themselves as God and can determine the truth according to their will. About this, Lyotard says that basically the idea of neo-modernism is a response to not recognizing metanarratives, so it inevitably results in the emergence of new movements to respond to it as well. Therefore, the Islāmic Neo-Modernism movement is one of the new movements that want to respond to Western Neo-Modernism thinking, especially about its goal of realizing the formation of a plural, democratic, egalitarian religious life, and freedom of ideology that eliminates religious teachings (Rohmawati, 2021).

Nurcholis Madjid is one of the early initiators of Islāmic Neo-Modernism thought in Indonesia inspired by Fazlur Rahman. This Islāmic Neo-Modernism thought has a consequence of the universal form contained in Islām. This universal nature requires a new understanding to face various problems in the development of an ever-changing society, but still actualize the values of Islāmic teachings in the context of history and culture (Sumantri, 2019). Therefore, renewal according to Islāmic Neo-Modernism is a way of changing the paradigm of thinking to Islāmic values that are more universal, comprehensive, contextual and perfect. Islāmic Neo-Modernism believes that if such a paradigm of thinking is not applied in the modern era as it is now, in other words still using conventional thinking, then stagnation will still occur, while currently, the religious, intellectual and moral dimensions have increasingly complex problems (Latif, 2022)(Syamsuar et al., 2024).

After obtaining his doctorate in 1984 which coincided with NU no longer participating in Indonesian politics, he focused on religion and social welfare and became the first major Islāmic organization to accept Pancasila as the sole ideological basis. At that time Indonesia was indeed shackled by Soeharto's authoritarianism, he did not want Indonesia to be interfered with by other ideologies that were opposite to Pancasila which could lead to disunity. Therefore, at that time the New Order Government implemented Pancasila as the only ideology that must be upheld and practiced purely and consequently (Farouki, 2004). This also influenced Nurcholish Madjid's thinking in the future when interpreting the Qur'ān and hadith to answer complex problems in the modern era while upholding the values of Pancasila, including his thoughts on the concept of divinity which will be described in the next sub-chapter (Sumanta, 2022).

The Concept of Nurcholish Madjid's Contextual Hermeneutics Approach

Nurcholish Madjid is basically not a *tafsīr* expert armed with the discipline of *fiqh* and traditional *tafsīr* methods. This is as stated by Farouki "Nurcholish, then, encourages the Qur'ān and Islāmic tradition as an individual responding to the social and ideological turbulence of his time, but with neither the constraints nor the insights of the traditional Islāmic disciplines of *fiqh* and *tafsīr*". This is because he did not write many specialised works of tafsir and his principles of interpretation after returning from his education in the United States (Farouki, 2004). Nurcholis interpreted the Qur'ān using the paradigm of Islāmic Neo-Modernism solely to overcome the problems that occurred in Indonesian society and did not record it in a special *tafsīr* book. The thing that most concerns him is in terms of religious harmony in Indonesia which is considered very low. In his interpretation, pluralism and inclusivism become prominent characteristics as the basis of his thinking (Nurcholish Madjid, 1992; Nurcholish Madjid, 1999).

According to Nurcholis, the Qur'ān does not contradict rationality and God did not create it arbitrarily. He adds that instead the Qur'ān calls on humans to exert their intellect to appreciate God's creation as stated in the Qur'ān. Therefore, the Qur'ān is seen as compatible with rationality, while rationality itself is an important part of modernity. Nurcholish also said that rationality is basically not the monopoly of Western secularisation or westernisation. Therefore, the challenge faced by Muslims is how to restore the rational dimension of Islām that has been covered by traditional customs and habits for centuries (Nurcholish Madjid, 1992; Nurcholish Madjid, 1992).

Nurcholish's approach in interpreting the Qur'ān is not complicated, namely contextualisation which becomes the principle of hermeneutics as he follows in the footsteps of his teacher, Fazlur Rahman who has also created a double movement theory. This contextualisation relates two contexts, namely: first, the time and situation when the Qur'ānic verse was revealed, second, the time and situation of the interpreter (Farouki, 2004)(Rahman, 1982). The starting point of Nurcholish's interpretation is very close to the relationship between place and time. Nurcholish Madjid in interpreting the Qur'ān must explore the application of the Qur'ānic verses from the beginning of the revelation to later periods, namely by considering the application of the Qur'ānic verse when it was revealed during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, the generation of companions, the generation of *Tābi'in*, the generation of *Tābiut Tābi'in*, and later periods. This is in accordance with the paradigm of Islāmic Neo-Modernism which always links the context of the modern situation with the historical analysis of Islāmic teachings as described earlier (Nurcholish Madjid, 1992; Nurcholish Madjid, 2004).

Thus, according to Nurcholish, by not binding the search for meaning to the specificity of the time and situation when the Qur'ānic verse was first revealed and

allowing it to be related to any context of time, it is appropriate that the meaning in interpretation must be universal. Therefore, Nurcholish can be classified as a person who does hermeneutic interpretation of the Qur'ān with the perspective of the historicity of the Qur'ānic text. Nurcholish is aware that the use of interpretation with this contextual hermeneutic approach is a contemporary need. Without the contextual hermeneutic approach by exploring the meaning of the historicity of this Qur'ānic verse, Muslims will arise contemporary problems (Nurcholis Madjid, 2003; Nurcholish Madjid, 2004).

According to Nurcholish, the rigid application of Qur'ānic verses is obtained from the effort to hold the normative text of the Qur'ān and forget other values, namely *maslahah*. According to Nurcholish, in facing the problems of this diverse era, it is impossible to apply the normative text of the Qur'ān rigidly. *Maslahah* plays an important role in punishing people so that sharia law is carried out flexibly. Nurcholis views that the teachings brought by the Prophet Muhammad are not finalised, but a process towards something better. Therefore, with his contextual hermeneutic approach that always draws universal values from the past to be applied in modern times, he is called a contemporary Islāmic reformer like his teacher Fazlur Rahman (Nurcholish Madjid, 2000).

In interpreting the verses of the Qur'ān, he started with the study of *maudhu'i* interpretation. At first, he looked for the same verse that was chosen based on a particular theme. This process is done by looking for certain keywords from the Qur'ānic verses. After the verse is collected, the interpretation operation is carried out by understanding the basic meaning and its derivations, as well as considering its relational meaning and *menasabah* with other words in a particular verse. Then he understands the cause of the revelation of the values contained in the verse. After that he also compares it with the arguments of traditional mufasssirs as comparative material. After that, he draws a conclusion on his interpretation. Thus, he can be called an interpreter who is not based on rationality alone. This is because he interpreted it with the *asbābun nuzūl* approach and always compared it with traditional mufasssirs (Nurcholish Madjid, 2000; Nurcholish Madjid, 2004).

Nurcholish explained that this *asbābun nuzūl* has implications for five things, namely the meaning is understood immediately without thinking (*emmediately*), the reason (causality) can be known, the purpose (meaning that can be known), knowing the target of the verse whether it is specific or general, and knowing the historical conditions and situations. According to him, *asbābun nuzūl* is divided into two, namely *asbabun nuzul* which is direct and macro. This macro *asbābun nuzūl* is an understanding of the Qur'ānic verse by exploring the political, social, cultural context, and all situations in the revelation. In this case Nurcholish gave an example that in the legal provisions of cutting hands for stealing, the essence is not to cut hands, but to protect property and social

resilience. If Fazlur Rahman termed this essence as a moral ideal, then Nurcholish termed it as a universal value (Nurcholish Madjid, 2000)(Nurcholish Madjid, 2004; Farouki, 2004).

Examples of Nurcholish Madjid's Contextual Hermeneutics Approach to Religion and Deity

Contextual Qur'anic hermeneutics in Nurcholish Madjid's thought can be understood as an approach to understanding the message of the Qur'an by considering the relationship between the text, its historical context, and the social reality in which the message is understood. For Nurcholish, understanding the Qur'an cannot be achieved solely through a textual reading, because each verse has a historical context and a moral purpose that need to be considered in the process of interpretation. Historical context, including *asbāb al-nuzūl*, is used to understand the background in which a verse was revealed and the issues addressed by the revelation. Meanwhile, linguistic analysis is used to understand the meaning of words and the structure of the verse accurately, while the moral purpose of the verse is used to grasp the universal message that extends beyond a particular historical context. Thus, historical context is not intended to limit the meaning of the Qur'an to past events, but rather serves as a basis for identifying values and principles that can be applied in different contexts (Nurcholish Madjid, 2000)(Nurcholish Madjid, 2004; Farouki, 2004).

Interpretively, this approach involves several interconnected stages. First, the Qur'anic text is understood through its linguistic aspects and literal meaning. Second, the historical context underlying the revelation of the verse is reconstructed, including the social conditions and issues addressed by the revelation. Third, the values and moral purposes contained behind the textual provisions or messages are identified. Fourth, these moral values are connected to contemporary social contexts so that the message of the Qur'an can be understood relevantly without losing its fundamental principles. Within this framework, Qur'anic interpretation does not stop at asking what the text says within its past context, but also addresses what values the text seeks to realize and how these values can be actualized in social life. This hermeneutical character can then be seen in the way Nurcholish Madjid interprets Qur'anic verses concerning religion, divinity, and interreligious relations (Farouki, 2004).

With the paradigm of Islāmic Neo-Modernism and a contextual approach, Nurcholish began to give meaning to several verses of the Qur'ān, especially those that received the most attention was about religion (Nurcholish Madjid, 1992). He paid attention to interpreting religion because the conditions in Indonesia at that time were very intolerant between religious communities, even wanting to show superiority over others (Nurcholish Madjid, 1992). He emphasised that the Qur'ān says religions are

legitimate instruments of salvation. He pointed out several verses of the Qur'ān that are universal so that all humans have knowledge of God, among these verses are: (Nurcholish Madjid, 1998)

وَرُسُلًا قَدْ فَصَّصْنَاهُمْ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَرُسُلًا لَمْ نَقْصُصْهُمْ عَلَيْكَ يَكَلِّمُ اللَّهُ مُوسَى تَكْلِيمًا

Meaning: "And (We sent) messengers about whom We related (their stories) to you before and messengers about whom We have not related to you. And Allāh spoke to Moses with (direct) speech". (Qur'ān Sūrah An-Nisā' verse 164) (International, 2004).

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالنَّصَارَى وَالصَّابِئِينَ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

Meaning: "Indeed, those who believed and those who were Jews or Christians or Sabans (before Prophet Muhammad ﷺ) those (among them) who believed in Allāh and the Last Day and did righteousness will have their Lord, and no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve". (Qur'ān Sūrah Al-Baqarah verse 62 ; International, 2004).

The verses, according to Nurcholish, should be understood as a command to Muslims not to define themselves according to a narrow interpretation in relation to other religions formulated based on a particular historical situation. In his opinion he reveals that there is a connection between two words in the Qur'ān, namely "*dīn*" and "*Allāh*". He said that both words have a double meaning, which on the one hand applies specifically to Muslims and on the other hand applies universally (Nurcholish Madjid, 1994).

The word "*dīn*" in its traditional sense means a religion called Islām. However, this word can be understood universally. Likewise, the word "*Allāh*" is not necessarily understood as the name of the personal God worshipped by Muslims, but has a broad meaning, namely absolute truth (*haqq*). Thus, the lafadz "*Allāh*" can be understood to include all the names of God in every religious tradition. Nurcholish's inclusive and universalistic understanding of the lafadz "*dīn*" and "*Allāh*" is due to the existence of a sūrah that is clearly understood to mean "the ultimate truth" (Nurcholish Madjid, 1994; Nurcholis Madjid, 2003). The sūrah is as follows:

أَفَعَبِّرْ دِينَ اللَّهِ يَبْعُثُونَ وَلَهُ أَسْلَمَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُونَ

Meaning: "So is it other than the religion of Allāh they desire, while to Him have submitted (all) those within the heavens and earth, willingly or by compulsion, and to Him they will be returned?". (Qur'ān Sūrah Āli Imrān verse 83; Saheeh International, 2004).

According to Nurcholish, the word “Islam” has two dimensions of meaning. On the one hand, Islam is the name of the religion brought by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), while on the other hand, Islam can be understood in a universal sense as an attitude of submission to Allah. This universal understanding is associated with the concept of the primordial covenant in Qur’an Sūrah Al-A’rāf verse 172, in which humanity acknowledges Allah as its Lord through the question, *alastu bi rabbikum?* (“Am I not your Lord?”). Based on this understanding, Nurcholish interprets the phrase “inna al-dīn ‘inda Allāh al-Islām” in Qur’an Sūrah Āli ‘Imrān verse 19 not merely in the sense of Islam as the name of the religion brought by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), but also in a universal sense as an attitude of submission and surrender to Allah. Through this universal understanding, the concept of Islam can encompass religious attitudes oriented toward submission to God, leading Nurcholish to identify a fundamental common ground among various religious traditions (Nurcholish Madjid, 1994).

Nurcholis finds the basis of his idea of religious tolerance in Qur’ān Sūrah Āli Imrān verse 64 as follows:

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ.

Meaning: “Say, “O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you that we will not worship except Allāh and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of Allāh”. But if they turn away, then say, “Bear witness that we are Muslims (submitting to Him)”. (Qur’ān Sūrah Āli Imrān verse 64; International, 2004).

On the basis that Allāh in this case is understood as the Ultimate Truth, the verse encourages religious believers to respect and meet each other. He interprets the phrase “*kalimatin sawā*” as a meeting point between followers of different religions. Nurcholish views that the meaning of tolerance as in the verse above is implied in the values of Pancasila, especially the first principle which reads “Ketuhanan Yanag Maha Esa”. Thus, he argues that Indonesia, which is a unitary state with a variety of religions that tolerate each other, is very appropriate rather than showing extreme religious radical movements that even lead to treason (Nurcholish Madjid, 2004).

Critique of Nurcholis Madjid's Hermeneutical Approach to the Concept of Religion and Godhead in the Qur’ān

The hermeneutic approach with the contextualisation of the times by Nurcholis Madjid, inspired by Fazlur Rahman's double movement theory, is indeed in some ways very useful. This is because he can draw a universal meaning contained in a verse to be applied according to the current conditions of the interpreter (Nurcholish Madjid, 1992).

With this approach, Nurcholis Madjid seeks a way for Indonesia, which at that time was being hit by various disintegrations and divisions, to become whole again for the sake of the unity of the Indonesian nation. The thing that was very intensive in the disintegration at that time was about religious radicalism (Nurcholish Madjid, 1992).

Nurcholis Madjid at that time interpreted the Qur'ānic verse about the concept of divinity in order to get enlightened that basically all religions are the same. This is because all religions essentially seek the Supreme Truth. According to Nurcholis Madjid, the word "*Allāh*" is believed to be the Supreme Truth, which in essence all religions also seek the Supreme Truth in this universe. Therefore, according to him, it is wrong if there are people today claiming that their religion is the most correct than others (Nurcholish Madjid, 1994). In addition, according to Nurcholis Madjid, the word "*Islām*" has been used since the time of Prophet Adam not only for the teachings brought by Prophet Muhammad. Therefore, Nurcholis believes that Muslims today should not interpret the word "*Islām*" narrowly (Nurcholish Madjid, 1994).

Although the approach taken by Nurcholish is so that inter-religious people in Indonesia tolerate each other so as to create harmony and unity. However, in essence, tolerance is not seeing that all religions are the same, but rather allowing each other without discrimination when others practice their religion (Nurcholish Madjid, 1999)(Nurcholish Madjid, 2004). The hermeneutic approach inspired by Fazlur Rahman's double movement theory in terms of the concept of divinity is not suitable. Islāmic teachings cannot be interpreted universally to justify all religions. Islāmic teachings in this case must be interpreted narrowly.

There are several reasons why the teachings of Islām need to be interpreted narrowly, which is limited to the teachings brought by the Prophet Muhammad. First, the Prophet Muhammad brought teachings that erased the previous treatise (*nāsikh ar-risālah*), in this case the teachings and books taught by the prophets and apostles before the Prophet Muhammad such as the *shuhuf* that was revealed to Prophet Ibrāhim (Qur'ān Sūrah Al-'A'lā verses 14-19), the *Taurāt* that was revealed to Prophet Mūsā (Qur'ān Sūrah Al-Baqarah verse 53, Qur'ān Sūrah Āli Imrān verse 3, Qur'ān Sūrah Al-Māidah verse 44, and Qur'ān Sūrah Al-'An'ām verse 91), the *Zabūr* which was revealed to Prophet Dāwūd A.S. (Qur'ān Sūrah An-Nisā' verse 164, Qur'ān Sūrah Al-Kahfi verse 55, and Qur'ān Sūrah Al-Anbiyā' verse 105), and the Gospel to Prophet 'Īsā (Qur'ān Sūrah Āli Imrān verse 3 and Qur'ān Sūrah Al-Māidah verse 46). All the teachings contained in these treatises are abrogated by the Qur'ān except for some stories and laws. This is as explained by Allāh in his words such as Qur'ān Sūrah Al-Māidah verse 13, Qur'ān Sūrah Al-Baqarah verse 79, and Qur'ān Sūrah Āli Imrān verse 78 (Al-Ṭabarī, 1999)(Al-Dimasyqī, 1999)(Saeed, 2006).

Second, the Qur'ān which is the holy book of Islām brought by the Prophet Muhammad as the completion of the previous treatise. This means that the teachings brought by the Prophet Muhammad is the closing of the teachings of the previous prophets and rosul because his teachings are much distorted by his followers, such as changing the lafadz (Qur'ān Sūrah Āli Imrān verses 75, 181, and 182), adding stories or laws (Qur'ān Sūrah Al-Baqarah verse 79, Qur'ān Sūrah Āli Imrān verses 79-80, and Qur'ān Sūrah Al-Maidah verses 116-117), and hiding news about the arrival of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. (Qur'ān Sūrah Al-Baqarah verses 89, 90, 109, 146). This is as Allāh SWT. explained in Qur'ān Sūrah Al-Māidah verse 3 that the teachings of Islām brought by the Prophet Muhammad has been declared as a perfect teaching (Al-Ṭabarī, 1999)(Al-Dimasyqī, 1999)(Robinson, 2003).

Thus, Nurcholis Madjid's hermeneutic approach to the concept of divinity by drawing universal values to be contextualised with the current era is considered inappropriate. This is because there is a verse of the Qur'ān that explains that the teachings of Islām are the teachings of perfection and penasakh from the teachings brought by the previous prophets and apostles. Therefore, it is not appropriate if the concept of divinity, especially regarding "*dīn al-Islām*" and "*Allāh*" is interpreted universally to justify the existence of various religions in Indonesia. Therefore, the phrase "*dīn al-Islām*" must be interpreted specifically, namely the teachings brought by the Prophet Muhammad SAW. and the phrase "*Allāh*" it must also be interpreted as the God of the Universe who is worshipped by Muslim followers of the Prophet Muhammad (Hallaq, 2009)(Esposito, 2011). If you want to promote tolerance between religious communities, there is no need to interpret the concept of divinity as if all religions are equally true. Other ways can be done such as respecting each other, not discriminating against people of other religions, not making hate speech against people of other religions, and helping each other. In addition, if what is faced is disintegration due to religious radicalism, then it would be nice if what is done is a hermeneutic approach by contextualising the meaning of *ukhūwah wathaniyah*.

CONCLUSION

Nurcholish Madjid developed contextual Qur'ānic hermeneutics as an approach that connects the text, historical context, and social reality in understanding the message of the Qur'ān. Epistemologically, this approach does not stop at the literal meaning of the verse, but seeks to reconstruct its historical context, understand its linguistic aspects, identify its moral values and objectives, and actualize them within contemporary social contexts. This character can be seen in his interpretation of the concepts of *dīn* and *Allāh*, which is directed toward identifying universal values as a basis for building tolerance and social coexistence within Indonesia's pluralistic society. The findings of this research

indicate that this approach makes an important contribution to developing an inclusive and contextual understanding of Islam and strengthening harmonious relations between religion and the state by positioning Pancasila as a common ground for national life. However, the application of contextual hermeneutics still requires epistemological boundaries to ensure that efforts to identify the universal values of the Qur'ān do not eliminate the specific meanings of the text and the fundamental principles of Islamic teachings. Thus, the principal contribution of Nurcholish Madjid's contextual hermeneutics lies in its ability to bridge the message of the Qur'an with Indonesia's social realities, particularly in fostering tolerance, maintaining national integration, and developing harmonious relations between religion and the state, without disregarding the normative principles of Islam.

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