An Intercultural Methodology in Area-Based Qur'anic Studies: The Integration of Hermeneutics, Anthropology, and History

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tudi Al-Qur'an Kawasan; Metodologi Interkultural; Hermeneutika Qur'an; *Corresponding Author :* saifads82@gmail.com	Qur'anic studies in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia, have developed within plural and dynamic socio-cultural contexts, rendering purely textual-normative approaches insufficient to explain the relationship between sacred texts and religious practices in society. This study employs a qualitative library research approach by analyzing primary sources in the form of Qur'anic texts and secondary sources consisting of classical and contemporary literature in the fields of hermeneutics, anthropology of religion, and historical Qur'anic studies. The findings indicate that interreligious and polysemic hermeneutics enable contextual and inclusive readings of the Qur'an, especially in addressing contemporary issues such as gender equality, social justice, and interfaith relations. This approach is reflected in the reinterpretation of normative verses, such as the concept of qawwāmūn (Qur'an 4:34), which is analyzed through the framework of maqāṣid al-sharī'ah to emphasize substantive justice. Meanwhile, the anthropology of religion plays a crucial role in revealing the disparity between the Qur'an's normative ideals and the lived religious practices of Muslim communities, without reducing the essence of the text. Instead, it encourages critical reflection and the revitalization of Qur'anic ethical values. The integration of these three disciplines forms an intercultural methodology that not only enriches academic discourse but also carries practical implications for strengthening religious moderation, fostering interfaith dialogue, and promoting inclusive social development in multicultural regions. This study concludes that intercultural methodology constitutes an epistemological necessity in regional Qur'anic studies, as it effectively bridges the universality of revelation with the particularity of local contexts, thereby reaffirming the relevance of the Qur'an as a source of ethical and humanitarian values in modern society.

INTRODUCTION

Since the twentieth century, Qur'anic studies as an academic discipline have experienced significant development, particularly among Muslim scholars in Southeast Asia such as Indonesia and Malaysia. This development is marked by a shift in perspective in which the Qur'an is no longer understood solely as a normative sacred text, but also as a living source of inspiration that interacts with the social, cultural, and historical realities of society. In the context of the Nusantara region, the Qur'an does not exist in a cultural vacuum; rather, it is intertwined with local traditions such as wayang in Java, rudat in Lombok, and various other regional customs. These interactions have given rise to distinctive, inclusive, and contextual expressions of Islam, while simultaneously demonstrating the dynamic reception and lived experience of the Qur'an within a plural cultural space.

This phenomenon necessitates a more comprehensive methodological approach to Qur'anic studies, particularly in the era of globalization characterized by intensified intercultural and inter-civilizational interactions. The intercultural approach has thus emerged as an academic response to the need to understand the Qur'an not only through textual-normative readings, but also through its connections to the social, cultural, and historical contexts that surround it. This approach emphasizes the importance of dialogue between the revealed text and diverse human realities, enabling Qur'anic studies to address contemporary challenges without losing their normative authority.

Within this framework, the integration of hermeneutics, anthropology, and history constitutes a complementary methodological foundation. Hermeneutics functions as an interpretive analytical tool that facilitates a dialogical and contextual understanding of the Qur'an by taking into account the relationship between text, context, and reader. The anthropology of religion contributes to uncovering how the Qur'an is experienced, practiced, and interpreted in the daily lives of communities, thereby revealing both the gaps and the harmonies between normative texts and social practices. Meanwhile, the historical approach enables the tracing of the evolution of Qur'anic understanding over time, including the influences of colonialism, migration, and modernization that have shaped the character of Islamic life in various regions.

This intercultural approach also holds strategic relevance in addressing contemporary issues such as social justice, ecology, gender, and interreligious relations. In contrast to traditional approaches to Qur'anic studies that tend to be textual and normative, intercultural methodology opens space for readings that are more responsive to modern humanitarian problems. Thus, the Qur'an is positioned not only as an eternal and sacred text, but also as a source of values capable of engaging constructively with dynamic and multicultural social realities.

Therefore, this study asserts that intercultural methodology in area-based Qur'anic studies is not merely an academic innovation, but an epistemological necessity. The integration of hermeneutics, anthropology, and history is expected

to bridge the tension between the universality of the Qur'anic message and the particularity of local cultural contexts. Furthermore, this approach has the potential to strengthen the contribution of Qur'anic studies to the development of inclusive, dialogical, and socially harmonious religious understanding within a plural global society.

In addition, the intercultural approach in area-based Qur'anic studies serves as an epistemological critique of the dominance of single paradigms, whether scripturalist-textual or orientalist-historical. Qur'anic studies in Southeast Asia often stand at the crossroads between normative classical exegetical traditions and modern academic approaches that have developed in the West. This tension frequently results in methodological polarization: on the one hand, highly defensive readings that emphasize textual authority; on the other, critical readings that are detached from the theological sensitivities of the Muslim community. Intercultural methodology offers a middle path by positioning the Qur'an as a sacred text with a transcendent dimension, while also recognizing it as a historical text that interacts with human culture and social structures. In this way, area-based Qur'anic studies avoid being trapped in the sacred–profane dichotomy and instead construct a productive synthesis between faith and scientific inquiry.

Furthermore, the application of intercultural methodology opens opportunities for the development of Qur'anic studies oriented toward social praxis and religious public policy. In multicultural societies such as Indonesia, Qur'anic understanding that is sensitive to local realities has the potential to serve as an ethical foundation for strengthening religious moderation, conflict resolution, and sustainable interfaith dialogue. The integration of hermeneutics, anthropology, and history not only produces a holistic analytical framework, but also encourages the transformation of Qur'anic studies from mere academic discourse into a functional cultural instrument. Therefore, intercultural methodology in area-based Qur'anic studies can be understood as a strategic effort to affirm the relevance of the Qur'an in guiding modern social life without losing its normative and spiritual foundations.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research method, involving a literature analysis of primary sources such as the Qur'anic text and secondary sources consisting of academic literature on hermeneutics, anthropology, and history. Data were collected through a systematic search of databases such as MDPI, ResearchGate, and the OAPEN Library, with a focus on journal articles and books that discuss interdisciplinary integration in Qur'anic studies.

The analysis was conducted using a descriptive-analytical method, in which key concepts from each discipline were integrated through an intercultural framework. This approach enables the reconstruction of a methodology that is adaptive to regional contexts, with particular emphasis on

the principle of polysemy (multiple meanings) in textual interpretation. A limitation of this method lies in its reliance on written sources; therefore, future research is recommended to incorporate field-based ethnographic studies in specific regions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Integration of Elements of Modern Interreligious Hermeneutics

In order to function as an interpretive framework that consciously integrates interreligious elements, modern hermeneutics is challenged to undergo transformation, particularly within complex multicultural contexts such as Southeast Asia. This challenge arises because exclusive or absolutist textual interpretations—those that claim sole religious truth—carry the potential to generate interreligious tensions and disrupt established social harmony.

Hermeneutics, as the art of interpreting meaning, has evolved from a classical philological approach into a modern system that is contextual and socially relevant. Within Qur'anic studies, interreligious hermeneutics enables gender-sensitive and multicultural readings, as illustrated in the narrative of the Queen of Sheba (Qur'an 27:22–44). In this passage, the Qur'an presents a female figure as a wise and just ruler, contrasting sharply with the misogynistic portrayal found in the Targum Sheni. Such an interpretive integration opens space for dialogue with Jewish and Christian traditions while revealing the inclusive dimension of rahmah (compassion). In the Southeast Asian context, this form of hermeneutics is particularly relevant for interpreting the Qur'an amid religious plurality, thereby avoiding literalist interpretations that may provoke social conflict.

Issues related to marriage, inheritance, and waqf further demonstrate the need for such an approach. Several legal provisions in these areas are still perceived as gender-biased, despite the existence of Indonesia's Compilation of Islamic Law (Kompilasi Hukum Islam). These biases largely stem from classical fiqh interpretations that are strongly patrilineal, particularly concerning guardianship rights and inheritance distribution, which are often regarded as unjust toward women's economic contributions. In response, activists and scholars such as Musdah Mulia, as well as organizations like Fatayat NU and Rahima, have undertaken reinterpretations of Qur'anic verses frequently used to justify gender inequality—most notably Qur'an Surah al-Nisā' (4):34.

The verse stating that "men are qawwamūn over women" has been reinterpreted by these scholars through the lens of maqāṣid al-sharī'ah (the higher objectives of Islamic law), with justice as its primary aim. Rather than understanding the verse as endorsing male superiority, they interpret it contextually as reflecting the financial and protective responsibilities of men in a particular historical setting—responsibilities that must be re-evaluated in contemporary contexts where women possess economic and intellectual autonomy. This reinterpretation exemplifies a contextual understanding of the term qawwamūn.

Such developments have also given rise to movements that engage in dialogue with universal human rights principles recognized globally. These ethical principles resonate with values found in other religious traditions, such as the emphasis on equality in Christian theology or in Hindu Dharma. This interreligious resonance strengthens the argument that Islam fundamentally promotes comprehensive and equitable justice—not only within its internal framework but also as a universal humanitarian value.

These reinterpretive efforts have resulted in initiatives such as the Counter Legal Draft of the Compilation of Islamic Law and progressive fatwas issued by organizations like the Indonesian Congress of Women Ulama (KUPI). These initiatives challenge practices such as child marriage and sexual violence, while supporting women's leadership in public spaces. Such developments demonstrate how contextual reinterpretation can revitalize the essence of rahmah and justice within social practice.

Qur'anic Interpretation in the Context of Plurality

In multicultural regions such as Malaysia and Indonesia, tensions often arise from interpretations of Qur'anic verses that are perceived as excluding non-Muslims, thereby hindering constructive dialogue and triggering social friction. One illustrative example is the concept of Kalimatun Sawā' ("a common word") in Southeast Asian interreligious dialogue.

Muslim intellectuals such as Nurcholish Madjid and figures associated with the Liberal Islam Network (Jaringan Islam Liberal) frequently refer to Qur'an Surah Āl 'Imrān (3):64, which states:

"Say, O People of the Book, come to a common word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, that we shall associate nothing with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides God. If they turn away, then say: bear witness that we are those who submit (to God)."

Through this verse, the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) are invited to unite upon Kalimatun Sawā', namely the exclusive worship of the One God without associating partners with Him.

From the perspective of interreligious hermeneutics, however, rather than restricting Kalimatun Sawā' to a purely theological domain, modern hermeneutical approaches expand it into an ethical and practical foundation. Kalimatun Sawā' is thus interpreted as a shared value system that encompasses faith in God—understood as recognition of a transcendent reality—and a collective moral commitment to promote justice, resist oppression, and advance social welfare. This interpretation enables Muslims to collaborate with Buddhists, Hindus, and Christians, whose cultures are deeply rooted in values such as mutual cooperation (gotong royong) and deliberation (musyawarah), including joint efforts to address environmental degradation and poverty, without compromising the core beliefs of each faith tradition.

Furthermore, the emergence of significant interreligious dialogue initiatives sponsored by moderate Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah in Indonesia emphasizes the principle of rahmah (universal compassion). This principle represents one of the highest hermeneutical orientations, aimed at promoting public welfare (maṣlaḥah ʿāmmah) and peace—both of which are vital needs in plural societies. The Qur'an reinforces this universal ethos in Surah al-Anbiyā' (21):107:

"And We have not sent you [O Muhammad] except as a mercy to all worlds."

وَمَآ أَرْسَلْنَٰكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَٰلَمِينَ

Translation: "And We have not sent you, except as a mercy to all worlds."

These two examples demonstrate that inclusive and gender-sensitive hermeneutics has become a central methodological tool for Muslim reformers in Southeast Asia in responding to the challenges of modernity and pluralism.

Anthropology in Revealing the Disparity Between Text and Social Practice

Anthropology plays a crucial role in analyzing the inevitable tension between the normative idealism of the Qur'anic text—what ought to be believed and practiced—and the diverse, and at times deviant, realities of social practice among Muslim communities. As a discipline focused on lived religion, anthropology reveals that the implementation of religious teachings is often mediated by local culture, power relations, and pragmatic interests, resulting in significant disparities. One clear example is the contrast between the Qur'anic call for equality and the persistence of strong patriarchal practices at the community level.

Anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz, through his mapping of diverse religious practices, and Talal Asad, through his analysis of institutionalized religious practices, do not seek to reduce the normative essence of the Qur'an. Rather, by highlighting where social practices fail to embody the ideals of the text, anthropology stimulates critical reflection and encourages communities to revitalize their commitment to core Qur'anic values—such as justice and tawḥīd—which may have been obscured by rigid cultural layers or secondary interests.

Anthropology thus exposes the disparity between Qur'anic normative ideals, such as justice and moral equality, and Muslim social practices that are often culturally mediated. Examples include rigid applications of inheritance law that perpetuate patriarchy or local ritual practices that risk deviating from the principle of tawḥīd. Through the study of lived religion, anthropology does not undermine the text's authority; instead, it highlights the failure of practice to meet textual ideals. Contemporary responses increasingly emphasize the maqāṣid al-sharīʿah (objectives of Islamic law) approach to ensure substantive justice in issues such as inheritance—through mechanisms like hibah (inter vivos

gifts)—while promoting critical dialogue and contextual education at the community level. In this way, anthropological findings function as catalysts for revitalizing ethical commitments to core Qur'anic values, including justice and maṣlaḥah ʿāmmah (public welfare).

Historical Context for Revitalizing Qur'anic Understanding in the Era of Globalization

The use of historical context—particularly the socio-political, cultural, and revelatory circumstances (asbāb al-nuzūl) of the Qur'an—is essential for revitalizing the understanding of the sacred text amid the forces of globalization, which tend to homogenize cultures and values. Globalization often produces two extreme responses: ahistorical literalist fundamentalism or total secularization that sacrifices religious tradition. To counter these tendencies, interpretation must distinguish between teachings that are universal in nature—such as moral principles and foundational values—and solutions that are particular, having addressed the specific conditions of seventh-century society.

In this regard, the methodology proposed by Fazlur Rahman, known as the Double Movement, is especially valuable. This approach first moves backward from specific Qur'anic rulings to uncover the universal ethical values and moral principles that constitute the core objectives of the text, such as justice, equality, and tawḥīd. It then moves forward again to apply these universal principles within contemporary, complex contexts. Through this process, the Qur'an is not treated as a relic of the past, but as an adaptive and relevant ethical guide, enabling Islam to engage constructively with modernity and globalization without losing its enduring normative authority and identity.

Anthropological Approach

Anthropology contributes a social perspective to Qur'anic studies by focusing on how the sacred text is lived and experienced in everyday life. This approach distinguishes between "research on religion" (doctrinal studies) and "research of religion" (social and empirical studies). Using methods such as observation, anthropology analyzes how communities respond to Qur'anic teachings in practice. In Indonesia, anthropological research has revealed forms of syncretism between the Qur'an and local cultures, such as religious rituals that incorporate elements of Hindu-Buddhist traditions. Such findings help communities recognize interpretive diversity, illustrating how Qur'anic norms adapt to cultural realities in ways that promote tolerance and the universal Islamization of knowledge.

Historical Context

A deep understanding of the Qur'an is inseparable from the historical context of its emergence in Late Antiquity (seventh century CE), a period in which the text interacted closely with dominant religious traditions in the region, particularly Judaism and Christianity. Understanding this historical milieu—

including the socio-political conditions of the Hijaz and Muhammad's interactions with other monotheistic communities—helps identify the thematic background of many Qur'anic passages. Although historical narratives of the Prophet Muhammad's life are largely derived from sīra literature compiled centuries after the events, these sources remain crucial because they shape Muslim historical consciousness regarding how the Qur'an was lived and applied in situ.

In contemporary area-based studies, historical context is also essential for tracing the evolution of Qur'anic interpretation in the postcolonial period. Experiences of colonialism and struggles for independence have significantly shaped how Muslim communities receive, interpret, and implement Qur'anic values, often resulting in interpretations that emphasize political autonomy, social justice, and resistance to Western hegemony.

Integration of the Three Disciplines

The integration of hermeneutics, anthropology, and history forms an essential intercultural methodology that enables an understanding of the Qur'an as a dialogical text capable of engaging contemporary issues. At the core of this methodology is polysemic hermeneutics, advocated by scholars such as Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, which recognizes that a single text may contain multiple meanings and that interpretation is always shaped by social reality.

This hermeneutical framework is reinforced by anthropological insights that view the Qur'an as embedded within cultural production and social interaction in Late Antiquity, as well as by detailed historical studies—such as asbāb al-nuzūl and sīra—that help distinguish between universal messages and particular historical solutions. Together, these approaches generate a critical reading. For instance, in the issue of gender equality, hermeneutics enables interpreters to uncover universal ethical meanings—such as justice—behind particular legal rulings influenced by seventh-century patriarchal contexts, while anthropology highlights how patriarchal practices continue to perpetuate inequality at the level of lived religion.

This holistic approach ensures that Islamic studies, particularly in multicultural regions such as Southeast Asia, do not remain confined to rigid academic analysis. Instead, they function as a vital instrument for inclusive social development by formulating interpretations that promote justice, tolerance, and broad-based participation.

CONCLUSION

The methodology of Qur'anic studies in Southeast Asia must transform into a holistic intercultural framework that integrates hermeneutics, anthropology, and history in order to address the challenges of pluralism and modernity. Interreligious and polysemic hermeneutics functions to uncover universal ethical values—such as rahmah (compassion), justice, and an expanded understanding of Kalimatun Sawā'—that underlie particular textual

prescriptions, as exemplified by feminist reinterpretations of the qawwāmūn verse.

This approach is further strengthened by anthropological insights grounded in the study of lived religion, which critically reveal the disparity between the Qur'an's normative ideals (such as equality) and social practices that perpetuate patriarchy or syncretism. Such findings stimulate the revitalization of ethical commitment through the framework of maqāṣid al-sharī'ah (the objectives of Islamic law). Finally, the use of historical context and Fazlur Rahman's Double Movement methodology ensures that interpretation can distinguish between seventh-century solutions and enduring principles, enabling Islam to engage adaptively with globalization and postcolonial experiences.

The integration of these three disciplines is not merely an academic tool, but a vital catalyst for inclusive social development in multicultural regions such as Indonesia and Malaysia. It formulates a Qur'anic understanding that upholds justice, tolerance, and public welfare (maṣlaḥah 'āmmah). Future research is expected to incorporate empirical applications in specific regions in order to test the practical effectiveness of this integrated methodological framework.

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