

## DARI TEKS KE WACANA: INTERPRETASI KONTEKSTUAL AL-QUR'AN DALAM HERMENEUTIKA NASR HAMID ABU ZAYD

Shofiatul Jannah<sup>1</sup>, Hairus Saleh<sup>2</sup>, Ummu Kulsum<sup>3</sup>, Tarmidzi<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Islam International Indonesia, Indonesia

<sup>2,4</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri K.H Abdurahman Wahid Pekalongan, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>STAI Al-Hamidiyah Bangkalan, Indonesia

shofiatul.jannah@uiii.ac.id

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji hubungan dialektis antara teks dan realitas dalam hermeneutika Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, khususnya pemahamannya mengenai Al-Qur'an sebagai fenomena linguistik sekaligus produk budaya. Abu Zayd berpendapat bahwa Al-Qur'an tidak lahir dalam ruang hampa sejarah, melainkan diturunkan dalam konteks sosial-historis, linguistik, dan budaya tertentu. Berdasarkan perspektif tersebut, ia mengkritik penafsiran yang kaku dan ahistoris yang memisahkan Al-Qur'an dari realitas kehidupan manusia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kepustakaan (*library research*) yang dipadukan dengan analisis tematik dan hermeneutik untuk mengeksplorasi transformasi Al-Qur'an dari teks statis (*mushaf*) menjadi diskursus hidup yang terus berinteraksi dengan perubahan realitas sejarah dan sosial. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada analisis terhadap hermeneutika Abu Zayd yang tidak sekadar dipahami sebagai metode penafsiran, tetapi sebagai transformasi epistemologis yang menggeser Al-Qur'an dari teks yang tetap menuju diskursus yang dialogis dan kontekstual. Selain itu, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa gagasan Abu Zayd memunculkan perdebatan intelektual mengenai otoritas keagamaan, penafsiran, serta hubungan antara wahyu dan pengalaman manusia kontemporer. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa hermeneutika Abu Zayd merepresentasikan kritik terhadap tradisi penafsiran yang membekukan makna Al-Qur'an dalam otoritas tekstual yang kaku.

**Kata Kunci:** Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd; hermeneutika; teks; realitas; Al-Qur'an.

## FROM TEXT TO DISCOURSE: A CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION OF THE QUR'AN IN NASR HAMID ABU ZAYD'S HERMENEUTICS

### Abstract

*This study examines the dialectical relationship between text and reality in the hermeneutics of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, particularly his understanding of the Qur'an as both a linguistic phenomenon and a cultural product. Abu Zayd argues that the Qur'an did not emerge in a historical vacuum, but was revealed within specific socio-historical, linguistic, and cultural contexts. From this perspective, he critiques rigid and ahistorical interpretations that separate the Qur'an from the realities of human life. This study employs a library research approach combined with thematic and hermeneutical analysis to explore the transformation of the Qur'an from a static text (*mushaf*) into a living discourse that continuously interacts with changing historical and social realities. The novelty of this study lies in its analysis of Abu Zayd's hermeneutics not merely as a method of interpretation, but as an epistemological transformation that shifts the Qur'an from a fixed text toward a dialogical and contextual discourse. In addition, this study shows that Abu Zayd's ideas generated intellectual debates concerning religious authority, interpretation, and the relationship between revelation and contemporary human experience. Ultimately, this study argues that Abu Zayd's hermeneutics represents a critique of interpretive traditions that freeze the meaning of the Qur'an within rigid textual authority.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd; hermeneutics; text; reality; Qur'an*

## INTRODUCTION

Civilization and culture are shaped by the dialectic between humanity and reality, encompassing all the structures that form the economic, social, political, and cultural spheres. In human civilization, the Qur'an plays a cultural role that cannot be dismissed in shaping civilization and in determining the nature and character of the sciences that develop within it (Zaid, 2002). In this regard, differences of opinion regarding the interpretation of the Qur'an are inevitable. Consequently, various models and methods of Qur'anic interpretation have emerged. One Muslim figure who sought to reconcile the text with reality is Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd. Nasr believes that since Arab civilization places such a high priority on the text of the Qur'an and employs interpretation as a method, it is certain that this civilization possesses a concept albeit an implicit one regarding the nature of the text and its methods of interpretation. Nevertheless, in reality, the aspect of interpretation has received little attention in studies that focus on other disciplines. Meanwhile, the concept of "text" has not yet been addressed by studies capable of exploring this concept within the Islamic tradition (Zaid, 2002). Generally, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's intellectual concerns stemmed from the harsh reality of the Arab world's weakness in the face of an alliance between external foes international imperialism and Israeli Zionism and internal conservative hegemonic forces. This gave rise to various arguments about the state of the Arab nation at that time. He lived under the hegemony of an Islamic religious discourse isolated from Western science. His profound interest in Qur'anic interpretation drove him to explore Western philosophies, such as rationalism, criticism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics (Hirschkind, 1995).

Such renewal is grounded in scientific knowledge of the substance of tradition, culture, and the factors that shape them. According to Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, the substance of Arab-Islamic civilization is a text-based civilization. The foundations of Arab-Islamic science and culture grew and stood firm on the foundation of text as its center. As a linguistic text, the Qur'an can be called the central text in Arab cultural history. For this reason, the Qur'an plays an undeniable cultural role in shaping the face of civilization and determining the nature and character of the sciences that develop within it. A civilization that views "text" as its main axis will make interpretation (ta'wil) one of the important mechanisms in producing knowledge. Such a civilization surely has a concept albeit implicit about the essence of the text and its interpretive methods. According to Nasr Hamid, studying the concept of text is necessary to discover the missing dimension in Arab tradition, namely the dimension that can help formulate scientific awareness of the tradition itself (Zaid, 2002).

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's hermeneutical framework for Qur'anic thought has been extensively studied by researchers and intellectuals, such as Darsitun's analysis, which explores how to elaborate hermeneutics in a modern context. Studies on the core ideas of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's hermeneutics have also been conducted by Muhammad Alfian (2018) and Imam Subhi (2019). These works focus solely on the framework and key concepts of his hermeneutics, without reviewing the initial problems that led him to adopt hermeneutical methods in interpreting the Qur'an. This study examines Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's

hermeneutics while addressing Muslim intellectual responses to his proposed hermeneutical concepts.

Numerous studies have been conducted on Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's hermeneutics, such as Darsitun's analysis, which explores the development of hermeneutics in a modern context. Additionally, Alfian (Alfian, 2018)(2018) and Subchi (Subchi, 2020)(2020) have mapped out the framework and key concepts in Abu Zayd's thought. However, there is a significant research gap in this literature; previous studies have tended to focus on methodological structures or the final outcomes of interpretation, without providing an in-depth examination of the initial textual problems that serve as the foundational discourse or "point of departure" for why this hermeneutical method is urgently needed to understand the Qur'anic text.

The novelty of this research lies in its effort to go beyond conceptual description by conducting a critical analysis of the dialectic between text and reality as the root issue underlying the transformation of the Qur'an from a mere static text (*mushaf*) into a living, humanistic discourse. Through this approach, this study offers a new contribution by synthesizing the intellectual responses of contemporary Muslims to map the functional relevance of Abu Zayd's method in addressing modern humanitarian challenges that have been insufficiently addressed in an integrated manner in previous research. Thus, this study contributes to expanding the study of Qur'anic hermeneutics through a more contextual, humanistic, and historical approach. Thus, this study aims to understand the textual problems as the initial discourse grounding the use of hermeneutical methods in comprehending Qur'anic texts.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research design, as the focus is directed toward analyzing texts and discourses within Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's hermeneutics through a systematic review of scholarly literature. The research proceeds through stages of data collection, analysis, and writing. The object of inquiry is Abu Zayd's hermeneutical thought, particularly his concepts of text and discourse in Qur'anic interpretation, with units of analysis consisting of Abu Zayd's primary works such as *Tektualitas Al-Qur'an Kritik Terhadap Ulum al-Qur'an* (translation), *Isykaliyyah al-Qira'ah wa Ayat al-Ta'wil* and *Rethinking the Qur'an: Towards a Humanistic Hermeneutics*, alongside secondary literature in the form of critiques and academic responses from contemporary Muslim intellectuals.

Data collection follows purposive criteria: (1) Abu Zayd's original works addressing Qur'anic hermeneutics, (2) academic literature that examines or critiques his thought, and (3) scholarly publications recognized within the academic community. The instrument for data collection is a structured data extraction sheet, containing analytical categories such as text and discourse, the dialectic between text and reality, critiques of traditional exegesis, and intellectual responses to Abu Zayd. Documentation is carried out by transcribing, classifying, and coding information derived from the selected sources.

The research procedure comprises: (1) identifying sources through library catalogues and digital databases, (2) selecting documents according to relevance criteria, (3) categorizing data based on analytical themes, (4) coding data within established categories, (5) conducting

thematic analysis to connect categories with Abu Zayd's hermeneutical framework, and (6) synthesizing findings into an academic narrative. Data analysis employs content analysis to examine Abu Zayd's texts and secondary literature, and thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes related to the dialectic of text, reality, and interpretation. Data validity is maintained through source triangulation, by comparing Abu Zayd's primary works with diverse academic critiques and perspectives.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd and the Problematics of Textual Interpretation**

The Qur'an is also referred to as *risalah*. The term *risalah* describes something conveyed by a sender (subject) to a recipient (object). That which is conveyed passes through a linguistic medium process, in accordance with the language system, linguistic rules, and other language-related elements. In other words, the Qur'an as a *risalah* conveyed through language and recorded in textual form is part of culture or intersects with culture. Moreover, the structure of that text is inseparable from the surrounding elements that contribute to shaping it, making the dialectical process among those various elements unavoidable (Fitria, 2016). Nasr Hamid argues that Hermeneutics is simultaneously a classical issue and aims to attain the meaning of the text through a series of historical and linguistic proofs that aid in objectively understanding the text as it was understood by those contemporaneous with its revelation through the various linguistic phenomena embedded in the text and comprehended by a number of people. This means the interpreter begins their exegesis from historical facts and modern linguistic phenomena. In its focus on the relationship between the interpreter and the text, hermeneutics is not a specific issue of Western thought, but rather a matter whose existence is profoundly serious in both classical and modern Arab heritage (Zaid, 2004).

He further elaborates in his book *Iskaliyyah al-Qira'ah wa Ayat al-Ta'wil*. He states that traditionally, the interpretation of religious texts (the Qur'an) has been divided between *tafsir bi al-ma'tsur* and *tafsir bi al-ra'yi*. The assumption is that the first model aims to reach the text's meaning through a series of historical and linguistic proofs that facilitate an objective understanding of the text as comprehended by those who were contemporaries with its revelation via the various linguistic phenomena contained within the text and understood by a number of people. This indicates that the interpreter begins exegesis from those historical facts and linguistic phenomena. In contrast, with the second model, the interpreter starts from their own stance and then seeks to find support for that stance within the text. Because it originates from the interpreter's personal attitude, this second model tends to be viewed as subjective and non-objective. Supporters of the first model, known as *ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* and *al-Salaf al-Salih*, are generally regarded with great reverence and appreciation. Meanwhile, advocates of the second model such as the Mu'tazilah philosophers, Shi'ah, and Sufis are viewed negatively, and in some cases, this escalates to levels of declaring them apostates and burning their books (Zaid, 1994).

In this context, he mentions that both *tafsir* models represent differing perspectives on the relationship between the interpreter and the text. The first model tends to disregard and marginalize the interpreter's existence, as it prioritizes defending the text along with its historical and linguistic facts. The second model, however, does not overlook this relationship

but affirms it with varying degrees of emphasis and activity among the different groups and tendencies that articulate this viewpoint (Zaid, 1994). He also states that the three axes of study in interpretive activity commonly referred to as the trilog of author, text, and interpreter cannot be mechanically unified among their elements. This is because the relationships between these various elements represent an essential problem that hermeneutics seeks to analyze, in order to minimize certain difficulties in understanding it. In turn, hermeneutics provides a new foundation for the relationships among these elements (Zaid, 1994). Therefore, Abu Zayd views the textual problem as becoming even more complex when the question the trilateral relationship among these three axes and the reality in which two processes truly occur: creation and interpretation. This complexity intensifies if the text evolves into a time and reality different from the era and context of its interpreter meaning the author and interpreter belong to distinct periods with divergent realities. To address this issue, he considers it essential to adopt hermeneutics as a conceptual proposal for a new interpretive approach in Islamic thought.

The challenges surrounding the interpretation of this text demonstrate that Abu Zayd's hermeneutics aims not merely to introduce a new method of interpretation, but also to reconstruct the epistemological relationship between text, history, and the interpreter. Abu Zayd's critique of the dichotomy between *tafsir bi al-ma'tsur* and *tafsir bi al-ra'yi* reflects his rejection of the notion that interpretation can be entirely objective and free from historical influence. In this context, Abu Zayd's thought is connected to Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of "historically effected consciousness," which asserts that every process of understanding is always influenced by the interpreter's historical horizon (Naupal, 2019). Thus, interpretation is not a neutral activity but a dialogical process between text and reality.

Thus, the central issue in Abu Zayd's thought lies in the epistemological status of interpretation itself. Interpretation is not merely an effort to retrieve a fixed meaning from the text, but also a process shaped by the historical horizon of the interpreter (Akbar et al., 2025). For this reason, hermeneutics becomes necessary in order to bridge the distance between the historical context of revelation and the changing realities of contemporary society. In this regard, Abu Zayd rejects the assumption that interpretation can ever be fully objective or entirely detached from the socio-historical condition of the interpreter (Mufid et al., 2023).

### **The Qur'an as a Cultural Product**

In viewing the Qur'an, conservative groups argue that the best solution is to return to Islam by implementing Islamic Sharia and making it the law for all aspects of life, including economics, society, politics, and even minor issues in individual and communal living. They take pride in the achievements of Muslim advancement during the golden age. They also interpret that progress as achievable only because Muslims adhered strictly to the texts, using them as legal guidelines in their lives. In this sense, Nasr Hamid argues that this stream unwittingly denies the purpose of revelation and the intent of Sharia by separating the text from reality. As known in Qur'anic sciences, Sharia forms itself alongside the evolving dynamics of Islamic society's reality (Zaid, 2002). Meanwhile, reformist groups see it as impossible to simply follow ancient scholars, since they understood the Qur'an and created traditions from it in accordance with their own space and time. Thus, only positive outcomes from their thought are selected and renewed in language suited to contemporary space and

time. The key is to harmonize authenticity with the current situation. For this reason, renewal must be rooted in ancient origins. However, these ancient origins are not a singular tradition but diverse, shaped by the variety of forces that produced them. Tradition is not a single fact but comprises multiple tendencies. Faced with this diversity of traditional streams, reformers have no choice but to select according to their position toward the reality they experience (Munir, 2019).

Regarding this matter, he emphasizes that renewal centers on the substance of Arab-Islamic civilization, which he sees as fundamentally text-based. Such renewal must be grounded in scientific knowledge of tradition's substance, culture, and the factors shaping them. Thus, Nasr's study of the Qur'anic text essentially draws from facts surrounding the Qur'an itself formed by Arab civilization on one hand and from concepts offered by the Qur'anic text on the other. Moreover, the process of revelation of the Qur'an from its initial descent to completion, cannot be detached from the prevailing reality and culture. From these facts, Nasr Hamid concludes that the text is a product of culture (Imron, 2010). He mentions that the Qur'an as a religious text possesses two fundamental characteristics: 1) specific textuality, and 2) linguistic nature. Textuality is grounded in profane human reality, which is sociological, cultural, and linguistic in essence. The existence of God's sacred word only becomes a focal point when positioned humanly that is, when Muhammad utters it in Arabic. Cultural context and linguistic texts encompass everything forming the epistemological framework for linguistic communication to occur. Therefore, speaker and listener cannot rely solely on knowing language codes to ensure successful communication; they must also share a common framework of mutual understanding. Such an epistemological framework is culture itself, encompassing all its customs, traditions and practices (Zaid, 2002).

Misunderstanding toward Abu Zayd's concept of the Qur'an as a cultural product often stems from the assumption that he reduces the Qur'an to a purely human construction. In fact, Abu Zayd does not deny the divine nature of revelation, but emphasizes that the Qur'an was revealed within a particular historical, linguistic, and cultural context (Munjin, 2019). The Qur'an emerged within Arab society with its own language, traditions, and social realities, meaning that revelation cannot be separated from the socio-historical circumstances surrounding its emergence (asbab al-nuzul). From this perspective, hermeneutics becomes important as an approach that reconnects the text with the historical and cultural realities in which it functioned. Although the term hermeneutics became widely known through Western scholarship, contextual interpretation of sacred texts has long existed within the Islamic intellectual tradition itself (Sya'bani, 2019). Through this understanding, Abu Zayd seeks to shift Qur'anic interpretation away from rigid and ahistorical textualism toward a more contextual and dialogical reading, while still maintaining the Qur'an's transcendent status as divine revelation.

Therefore, the concept of a "cultural product" is not intended to diminish the sacredness of the Qur'an, but rather to revive its dialogical function in human life. The Qur'an does not remain merely a mushaf frozen in the pages of a text, but continues to evolve as a living discourse through an ongoing process of interpretation (Nurhuda et al., 2026). This is where the importance of Abu Zayd's humanistic hermeneutics lies: in restoring the dynamic relationship between text, humanity, and reality so that the messages of the Qur'an remain

capable of addressing contemporary human problems without losing their transcendent dimension as divine revelation.

This understanding of the Qur'an as historically and culturally situated eventually became the epistemological foundation of Abu Zayd's hermeneutical project. If revelation continuously interacts with human reality, then interpretation cannot remain confined within rigid textualism. It is from this point that Abu Zayd formulates hermeneutics as a dialogical approach capable of reconnecting text, history, and contemporary human experience.

### **The Hermeneutics of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd**

When discussing the concept of interpretation in the realm of Islamic thought, he states that hermeneutics began to seek various rules and criteria that could lead to correct interpretation starting with Schleiermacher. And in its latest development, hermeneutics has reached the stage of applying theory to the interpretation of literary texts. This is particularly true when it is intended for use within the Islamic *turats*, specifically the interpretation of the Qur'an (Zaid, 1994). Abu Zayd essentially attempts to apply constructive hermeneutics in his various studies of the Qur'an. He identifies the fundamental issue in Islamic studies as the problem of textual interpretation in general whether of historical texts or religious texts (the Qur'an) (Zaid, 2004). In Qur'anic studies, his views about hermeneutics as contributing to a shift in interpretive focus toward the interpreter (*mufassir*) himself. He consulted numerous hermeneutics scholars and literary theorists, from Schleiermacher and T.S. Eliot to Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Gadamer, Hirsch, Goldman, and Paul Ricoeur (Zaid, 2004). This broad engagement with modern hermeneutics demonstrates that Abu Zayd was not merely borrowing Western theories, but was attempting to reconstruct Qur'anic interpretation in response to the epistemological crisis within contemporary Islamic thought.

Abu Zayd adopts Gadamer's dialectical hermeneutics as a framework for reexamining the relationship between the interpreter and the Qur'anic text. Through this approach, interpretation is understood not as a passive effort to recover a fixed meaning, but as a dialogical process shaped by history, language, and human experience (Palmer, 2003) (Nurhuda et al., 2026). For Abu Zayd, the Qur'an should not be approached solely as a closed textual corpus, but as a discourse that continuously interacts with social reality. Therefore, the process of interpretation always involves the active role of the interpreter in reconstructing meaning within changing historical contexts. To strengthen this perspective, Abu Zayd distinguishes between the textual and discursive dimensions of the Qur'an. The textual dimension refers to the Qur'an as a written text (*mushaf*), while the discursive dimension refers to the Qur'an as a living communication that emerged through interaction with the social realities of its first audience (Sulaiman, 2023). Through this distinction, Abu Zayd seeks to move Qur'anic interpretation beyond rigid textualism toward a more contextual and dynamic understanding of revelation. He interprets the horizontal dimension as that which is contained within the structure of the Qur'an and which has been manifested during the ongoing process of communication between the Qur'an and its audience (Zaid, 2005).

This vertical dimension constitutes the textual dimension of the Qur'an, while the horizontal dimension constitutes the discursive dimension of the Qur'an (Rippin, 2013). This discursive dimension is a living and dynamic realm, referring to the initial process of revelation known as the phenomenon of the Qur'an, the spoken discourse (Johns, 2011). The Qur'anic

discourse manifests within the context of daily life, so it not only speaks in the Arabic language in which the revelation was revealed but also influences the thought and culture of its recipients. To see how this occurs, one can trace the influence of the Qur'an in daily life.

Qur'anic hermeneutics is understood within the context of the diversity of religious experiences as part of the diversity of humanity. The Qur'an as a discourse, thus necessitates a connection between the meaning of the Qur'an and the meaning of life, in which the Qur'an is regarded as the result of dialogue, debate, development, acceptance, and rejection (Hirschkind, 1995). This concept is then linked to humanistic hermeneutics. After defining the concept, Nasr Hamid discusses the foundations of his humanistic hermeneutics, namely: discourse versus the *Mushaf* and the reconstruction and manipulation of the text. The foundation for constructing the Qur'an as discourse lies in the contrast between the Qur'an and the *Mushaf*. This first refers to the arbitration event during the war between Ali's and Muawiyah's factions that occurred in 657 CE. Nasr Hamid views this event as an affirmation of the importance of considering the Qur'an as a living phenomenon to avoid manipulation, such as the political manipulation in that arbitration event (Hirschkind, 1995).

At this point, Abu Zayd's hermeneutics no longer functions merely as a theoretical framework for interpreting texts, but also as a critique of interpretive traditions that isolate the Qur'an from the realities of human life. His distinction between the Qur'an as text and the Qur'an as discourse demonstrates an attempt to restore the communicative nature of revelation, which had gradually become confined within rigid textual interpretations (Akbar et al., 2025). In this regard, Abu Zayd does not reject the authority of the Qur'an as divine revelation, but rather criticizes the tendency to treat classical interpretations as final and unquestionable truths. For him, the problem of Qur'anic interpretation lies not in the sacredness of the text itself, but in the freezing of meaning through interpretive authority that often neglects historical change and social transformation. Consequently, hermeneutics becomes an effort to reopen the dialogical relationship between revelation and contemporary human experience, allowing the Qur'an to remain relevant within changing historical realities.

As for the reconstructed and manipulated texts, he explains the possibility of a humanistic interpretation among the existing interpretive possibilities. He opts for a Sufi or philosophical interpretation rather than a theological or legal one, which posits that the verses of the Qur'an consist of those whose meanings are clear and those that are not, as indicated in Surah Ali Imran, verse 7 (Hirschkind, 1995). This humanistic hermeneutical approach treats the Qur'an as a discourse, the nature of whose concepts and potential implications warrant further examination. Ricoeur's discourse hermeneutics further strengthens Abu Zayd's view that interpretation should move beyond rigid textualism toward a more contextual understanding of meaning (Ricoeur, 2023).

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's hermeneutics essentially arose from a concern regarding religious interpretations that place too much emphasis on the authority of the text while neglecting human reality as the context in which the text exists. In his view, the main problem with the interpretation of the Qur'an does not lie in a lack of exegetical methods, but rather in the tendency to freeze the text's meaning, thereby positioning the Qur'an as if it were speaking outside of history. As a result, interpretation often becomes detached from the communicative and dialogical nature of revelation itself (Daniel, 2026).

It is at this point that Abu Zayd's hermeneutics moves beyond the classical debate between the objectivity and subjectivity of interpretation. He does not fully accept the traditional claim of interpretive objectivity, which holds that the text's meaning can be definitively determined, nor does he allow interpretation to descend into boundless subjectivity (Arnett, 2018). For Abu Zayd, meaning arises from a dialogical relationship between the text, the interpreter, and the ever-changing social reality. Therefore, interpretation is always dynamic and open-ended. This perspective reflects the strong influence of Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics, which understands interpretation as an endless dialogical process between the horizon of the text and the horizon of the reader. In this process, the interpreter cannot detach themselves from their own history, tradition, and social experience.

But, Abu Zayd does not stop at Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics alone. He brings hermeneutics into the realm of social criticism by positioning the Qur'anic text as a living discourse situated within power relations and ideological interests. At this point, Abu Zayd's hermeneutics moves beyond philosophical interpretation and begins to address the social implications of religious discourse (Rozaq et al., 2025). It is here that his thought intersects with that of Michel Foucault, who views discourse not merely as language, but also as an arena for the production of knowledge and power. Abu Zayd demonstrates that religious authorities often establish specific interpretations as the sole truth, while other interpretations are deemed deviant. Consequently, religious texts lose their dialogical nature and become tools for ideological legitimization (Ahmadi et al., 2025). Through this hermeneutical framework, Abu Zayd seeks to formulate a mode of interpretation capable of maintaining the relationship between revelation and contemporary human experience. Hermeneutics, therefore, functions not simply as a technique for reading texts, but as a dialogical approach that enables interpretation to remain responsive to changing historical realities. This is why Abu Zayd places significant emphasis on the active role of the interpreter in reconstructing meaning within new social contexts.

Through his humanistic hermeneutics, Abu Zayd is actually striving to restore a more dynamic relationship between revelation and human life. Hermeneutics is no longer understood merely as a method of reading texts, but as an effort to liberate the Qur'an from closed, rigid, and ahistorical interpretations (Mostfa, 2024). With this approach, the Qur'an remains positioned as divine revelation, yet is simultaneously understood as a living discourse that continues to engage in dialogue with the evolving realities of human society. In this regard, Abu Zayd's thought offers an important contribution to contemporary Qur'anic studies by reopening the relationship between revelation and changing human realities.

### **Intellectual Responses to the Thought of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd**

Nasr Hamid's ideas have elicited responses from Islamic intellectuals, both positive and negative. Several figures have praised him, including Ulil Absar Abdallah, who stated on his YouTube channel that he agrees with Nasr Hamid's ideas. Ulil Absar emphasizes the importance of Nasr Hamid Zayd's hermeneutics. Furthermore, Ulil argues that a distinctive feature of Nasr Hamid's hermeneutical thought is his approach to religious texts particularly the Quran from a historical perspective. Thus, in understanding the Quran, one must not ignore the historical context, as the Qur'an must be understood within its historical context (*asbab al-nuzul*). In this context, he states that Nasr Hamid's hermeneutics is important to apply

in order to foster religious diversity and to create a form of Islam that is relevant. However, Nasr Hamid has also faced criticism from various Muslim figures, including Ali Harb, who in 1995 published his book *Naqd al-Nash*, which was translated into Indonesian in 2003. In this book, Harb criticizes Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's hermeneutics for being limited to treating the Quran solely as a linguistic text, Nasr neglects the non-linguistic dimensions of the Qur'an and overlooks the potential benefits of various existing methods (Harb, 2003).

These differing responses largely stem from Abu Zayd's attempt to reinterpret the relationship between revelation, history, and interpretation through a contextual hermeneutical framework. Nasr Hamid's study of hermeneutics contributes to the Muslim community's ability to continue understanding the meaning of the Qur'an without neglecting its historical aspects (Afrizal, 2016). Nasr's study of the Qur'anic text essentially draws on a number of facts surrounding the Qur'an itself shaped by Arab civilization on the one hand and on the concepts presented by the Qur'anic text on the other. Furthermore, the history of the revelation of the Qur'an, from its initial revelation until its completion, cannot be separated from the prevailing realities and culture of the time. Based on this fact, Nasr Hamid argues that the text is a cultural product.

The responses to Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's thought largely emerged from his attempt to reinterpret the relationship between revelation, history, and interpretation through a contextual hermeneutical framework. By emphasizing the historical and socio-cultural dimensions of the Qur'an, Abu Zayd shifted the understanding of the Qur'an from a fixed textual authority toward a living discourse that continuously interacts with human reality (Jamaluddin Akbar et al., 2025). For conservative groups, this approach was considered problematic because it challenged the assumption that the meaning of the Qur'an had already been fully established through authoritative classical interpretations. Consequently, Abu Zayd's hermeneutics was often viewed as weakening the stability and certainty of religious meaning (Tayob, 2018).

On the other hand, many Muslim intellectuals regarded Abu Zayd's thought as an important contribution to contemporary Qur'anic studies because it reopened the dialogical relationship between text and reality. His hermeneutical approach enabled the Qur'an to remain relevant in responding to changing historical and social conditions without reducing it merely to a rigid legal or doctrinal text (Sanusi Lafiagi Haruna, 2024). In this context, the debate surrounding Abu Zayd reflects not merely a disagreement over interpretive methods, but also differing perspectives regarding how the Qur'an should function within contemporary Muslim society whether as a closed textual authority or as a living discourse open to contextual interpretation.

The debates surrounding Abu Zayd reveal that Qur'anic interpretation is closely connected to broader struggles over religious authority and the relationship between revelation and social reality. At this point, Abu Zayd's thought opens up space for a more dialogical, historical, and humanistic reading of the Qur'an, while simultaneously challenging interpretive tendencies that are closed off to social change and the progression of time.

## **CONCLUSION**

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's hermeneutics emerged from his criticism of Qur'anic interpretations that tend to separate the text from historical and social realities. Through his humanistic hermeneutical approach, Abu Zayd shifts the understanding of the Qur'an from a fixed text toward a living discourse that continuously interacts with human experience. In his view, interpretation is not merely an attempt to uncover the literal meaning of the text, but a dialogical process shaped by the relationship between revelation, history, and the interpreter.

This study argues that Abu Zayd's hermeneutics is not merely a methodological alternative, but a critique of interpretive traditions that detach revelation from historical and social realities. The intellectual responses to his thought further demonstrate that debates over Qur'anic interpretation are closely tied to questions of religious authority and the relationship between text and social reality. In this sense, the transformation of the Qur'an from text into discourse becomes the central contribution of Abu Zayd's thought to contemporary Qur'anic studies.

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