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Understanding Text and Context for Productive Reading: an Analysis of Abu Zaid's Hermeneutics of the Qur'an

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Abstract

This paper describes the thoughts of Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid on the theory of al-Qur'an interpretation, with a descriptive-analytic analysis. The data were collected from various sources from Nasr's writings, books, and journals that wrote about Nasr and his thoughts, as well as other sources that had relevance for analysis purposes. Abu Zaid tries to reveal the meaning and significance (*magza*) which then brings out the meaning of "the ineffable". In this case, the meaning is represented by the text or in the sense that it lets the text speak about itself. Then, from that meaning, there is a dialogue with the conditions or contexts that surround a reader. Therefore, the meaning is static because it contains historical meaning, and the significance is dynamic in accordance with the horizon of each reader.

Keywords: *Al-Qur'an, Hermeneutics, Meaning, Significance, Text.*

Abstrak

MEMAHAMI TEKS DAN KONTEKS UNTUK PEMBACAAN PRODUKTIF: ANALISIS HERMENEUTIKA AL-QUR'AN ABU ZAID. Tulisan ini memaparkan pemikiran Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid tentang teori tafsir al-Qur'an, dengan pendekatan deskriptif-analitik. Data dikumpulkan dari berbagai sumber dari artikel, buku, dan jurnal yang terkait tentang Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid dan pemikirannya, serta sumber lain yang memiliki relevansi dengan fokus kajian. Abu Zaid mencoba mengungkap makna dan signifikansi (magza) yang kemudian memunculkan makna "yang tak terlukiskan". Dalam hal ini, makna diwakili oleh teks atau dalam arti membiarkan teks berbicara tentang dirinya sendiri. Kemudian dari pemaknaan tersebut terjadi dialog dengan realitas atau konteks yang melingkupi seorang pembaca. Oleh karena itu, makna bersifat statis karena mengandung makna historis, dan makna bersifat dinamis sesuai dengan cakrawala pembacanya masing-masing.

Kata Kunci: *Al-Qur'an, Hermeneutika, Makna, Signifikansi, Teks.*

A. Introduction

Today, there is a tendency among contemporary Muslim thinkers to make hermeneutics as a partner¹, approach², or even as a substitute for the science of Quranic exegesis³. This tendency is motivated by several reasons, such as the Qur'an is said to be a reflection of and a response to the social, cultural, economic and political conditions of the primitive and patriarchal social⁴, cultural, economic and political conditions of the Arab Jahiliyah community of the 7th century AD.⁵ *Ulumul Qur'an* is considered to

¹ Aksin Wijaya, *Arah Baru Studi Ulumu Al-Qur'an: Memburu Pesan Tuhan di Balik Fenomena Budaya* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2009), 175.

² M. Amin Abdullah in introduction of book, Sahiron Syamsuddin (et. al.), *Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an Mazhab Yogya* (Yogyakarta: Islamika, 2003), xxiii.

³ M. Zainal Abidin, "Ketika Hermeneutika Menggantikan Tafsir Al-Qur'an" in *Republika*, 24th June 2005. Sahiron Syamsuddin (et. al.), *Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an Mazhab Yogya*, xv.

⁴ Asghar Ali Engineer, *Hak-Hak Perempuan dalam Islam*, terj. Farid Wajidi dan Cici Farkha Assegaf (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2000), 3.

⁵ Sahiron Syamsuddin (et. al.), *Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an Mazhab Yogya*, xv

have no contextualization variables⁶. The methodology of classical ulama interpretation is assumed to underestimate the ability of public reason to idolize the text and ignore reality.⁷ Classical interpretation is considered not to have a solid theory that has tested and selected principles⁸. The traditional interpretation paradigm is supposed to impose the universal principles of the Qur'an in any context in the text. As a result, the understanding that emerges tends to be textual and literal.⁹ Classical interpretations are considered to provide no longer clear meaning and function in the lives of Muslims. They have helped perpetuate the status quo and deterioration of Muslims morally, politically, and culturally¹⁰. According to them, the deconstruction and reconstruction of the interpretation's methodology need to carry out. And according to him, hermeneutics is a necessity and the only option (the only alternative)¹¹, as a solution to bridge the 'deadlock' and 'crisis' of the *ulumul Qur'an* and classical interpretations that are no longer relevant to the context and spirit of today¹².

One of the issues that was questioned by the Quran hermeneutics' initiators was the need to integrate scientific traditions in Islamic studies and contemporary religious studies.¹³ It ideally starts with the study of the Koran as the main axis of Islamic studies. The Quran is the text that has become central to

⁶ Fahrudin Faiz, *Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an: Tema-Tema Kontroversial* (Yogyakarta: eLSAQ Press, 2005), 19-20.

⁷ Ulil Abshar-Abdalla (dkk.), *Metodologi Studi Al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2009), 140.

⁸ Hasan Hanafi, *Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an?* trans. Yudian Wahyudi (Yogyakarta: Pesantren Nawesea, 2010), 80-81.

⁹ Abdul Mustaqim, *Epestemologi Tafsir Kontemporer* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2010), 55.

¹⁰ M. Amin Abdullah, in Introduction of Book, Ilham B. Saenong, *Hermeneutika Pembebasan* (Jakarta: Teraju, 2002), xxv-xxvi 10.

¹¹ M. Zainal Abidin, "Ketika Hermeneutika Menggantikan Tafsir Al-Qur'an" dalam *Republika*, 24th June 2005.

¹² M. Amin Abdullah in Introduction of Book, Abdul Mustaqim, *Madzahibut Tafsir: Peta Metodologi Penafsiran Al-Qur'an Periode Klasik Hingga Kontemporer* (Yogyakarta: Nun Pustaka, 2003), xii.

¹³ Asep Setiawan, "Hermeneutika al-Qur'an "Mazhab Yogya" (Telaah atas Teori Ma'naCum-Magza dalam Penafsiran Al-Qur'an)" *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis*, Vol. 17, No. 1, January 2016, 71-72.

Arab civilization after the Jahiliyyah era. When the text contains the Quran, the text will become an inseparable part of the Quran. The gradual decline of the Quran is evidence that there has been a dialectical relationship between the text and reality. The Quran text in the Arabian Peninsula as a response to the realities that occurred at that time helped regulate the process of civilization. The formation of civilization does not mean merely because of the text. The interaction and dialogue between the text and the context (reality). As is usually the case with literary texts, the Quranic text cannot separate from the reality around it. By looking at efforts to dialogue between text and reality, it is seen how the hermeneutic construct that Nasr initiated to find *dalalah* and *magza* behind the text of the Quran. Nasr's attention to the structure of the language of texts and the reality that helped produce the text was enormous. The assumption that one of the reasons is because Nasr himself has an educational background in Arabic language and literature? This paper will endeavor to explore and seek answers to these questions.

Nasr's thoughts could not be separated from the background surrounding his journey. Getting to know the figure of Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid in this study is an effort to look for a relationship between his background with his thoughts. Nasr's ideas were not born from a vacuum but were taken from his struggle with the family environment and the Education environment, which forged it. The concept of Nasr's text is an important part that must be considered in exploring his views. One of his controversial statements is when he says that the Quran text is a cultural product. Separating the product of his thought from his background would only lead to new errors. Therefore, the interpretive theories that accompany it become an essential and inherent part of studying Nasr's hermeneutics.

Muhammad Alfian wrote an article entitled "Hermeneutika Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd"¹⁴. He showed that one form of the study

¹⁴ Muhammad Alfian, "Hermeneutika Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd", *Jurnal Islamika: Jurnal*

was carried out by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd using a hermeneutic approach. The author elaborates the study results on Abu Zaid's hermeneutical thought in the study of the Quran. In general, Abu Zayd said, the meaning of the Qur'an text could not be separated from the context of the times in its descent; both of them must have interrelations so that from there. Abu Zayd issued a theory about *takwil*, *talwin*, and productive reading levels of external context (interpersonal context), internal context (relationships between elements), linguistic context (sentence composition), and finally, the reading context or interpretation context.

Similarly, Lailatu Rohmah also analyzes Abu Zayd's hermeneutics through his article, "Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an: Studi atas Metode Penafsiran Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid: Between Meaning and Significance (Literary Hermeneutics)"¹⁵. This study focuses on the meaning and significance. Through descriptive studies and critical analysis of the hermeneutic approach in capturing the message of the sacred text, he rolled out the idea that the Quran is only a product of culture, human texts, linguistic texts, and nothing more than a historical phenomenon. Abu Zaid views the original meaning (historical) as the starting point for the reading of the Qur'an today; the most important thing is to know the significance (main message) of the verse so that it can be contextualized with the conditions of contemporary society. It shows that the history of the text or the history that surrounds the birth of the text is not helpless but an instrument that lives and helps produce new meanings according to the socio-cultural context.

In contrast, Ismail S.W & Acep A. A wrote an article entitled "Hermeneutical approach to the Qur'an: A Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's Contribution to Quranic Studies"¹⁶. This article aims to examine

Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman, Vol. 18, No. 01, Juli 2018, 25-38.

¹⁵ Lailatu Rohmah, "Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an: Studi atas Metode Penafsiran Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid (Between Meaning and Significance) (Literary Hermeneutics)", *Jurnal Hikmah*, Vol. XII, No. 2, 2016, 223-244.

¹⁶ Ismail Suardi Wekke & Acep Aam Amiruddin, "Hermeneutical approach to the

the background of Abu Zayd and his hermeneutic methods. They concluded that Abu Zayd was among the prolific Muslim scholars. The study uses a historiographical approach. It can be proven because the author analyzes Abu Zaid's hermeneutical thinking by connecting his analysis with his background. They asserted because there is a fundamental difference between hermeneutics on the one hand and *tafsir-takwil* on the other, it is considered inappropriate to use it to study the Qur'an.

In reading legal verses, the hermeneutic approach also becomes a discourse like other objects of study. Badrus Zaman, "Konsep Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an, Ma'na -Cum-Magza dan Aplikasinya dalam Memahami Bunga Bank" (The Conception of Ma'nā-Cum-Mağza Qur'anic Hermeneutics and Its Application to Understanding the Bank Interest".¹⁷ This article elaborates the theory of *ma'nā-cum-mağza* and its implementation on the topic of usury in the Qur'an. Through a descriptive-qualitative study, he can show that by taking *mağza* through historical studies, interpretation theory *ma'nā-cum-mağza* tends to emphasize the moral aspect of the prohibition of usury. It subordinates the legal form of usury—because it has an unspeakable legal significance so that it is not forbidden. It emphasizes the ethical aspect rather than its legality of it.

Asep Setiawan analyzed through his article, "Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an "Mazhab Jogja (Telaah atas Teori Ma'na-Cum-Maghza dalam Penafsiran Al-Qur'an)¹⁸. The article tries to discuss the discourse of hermeneutics in Qur'anic studies, as seen in the theory of ma'na-cum-maghza offered by Muslim scholars in Yogyakarta. The study uses a qualitative approach with library sources. The main

Qur'am: A Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's Contribution to Quranic Studies" *Epistemé*, Vol. 13, No. 2, December 2018, 455-479.

¹⁷ Akhmad Roja Badrus Zaman, "Konsep Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an, Ma'na -Cum-Magza dan Aplikasinya dalam Memahami Bunga Bank", *Jurnal Şuhuf*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Juni 2021, hlm. 79-97. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v14i1.603>.

¹⁸ Asep Setiawan, "Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an, 69-96.

issue is that hermeneutics departs from skepticism and relativism, equates the Qur'an with other texts, and produces uncertainty in meanings and relative-tentative interpretations.

Of course, Abu Zayd's hermeneutics study is not limited to the articles mentioned above. There are many studies on it from various perspectives and purposes. In that context, this study will analyze the context of Abu Zayd's hermeneutics in bringing together text and context in producing an understanding that is productive and methodologically measurable. Abu Zayd's hermeneutics offers and guides the reader to produce a dynamic and contextual understanding so that the text can dialogue with every context and dynamics that continue to change. The relationship between text and context is a necessity that is analyzed simultaneously. The text and context must be integrated into generating understanding. The context consists of the context of the sentence and the historical context of the appearance of the text.

This study is a study of the hermeneutical concept of Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid and its application as an approach in the Qur'an and the application of the application it causes. As a hermeneutic that seeks to bring texts to life and dialogue with constantly changing contexts. Several sources, including books, research results, and articles in various journals, were referred to analyze it. Abu Zayd's views are analyzed by comparing the views of hermeneutic figures. Furthermore, the possibility is analyzed to be used as an alternative approach in the interpretation of the Qur'an.

B. Discussion

1. Background of Nashr Hamid Abu Zaid

Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid is a modernist thinker from Egypt. His name is very well known by observers of Islamic thought after rolling out the idea that the Koran is only a cultural product, a human text, a linguistic text and is nothing

more than a historical phenomenon.¹⁹ He is a controversial figure due to religious criticism he made in Egypt and Sunni Muslims. He was born on June 10, 1943, in the village of *Quhafa* in the city of Tanta province, Egypt. He is a pious child who has learned the Quran since childhood. Nasr is a reciter and memorizer who has the talent to tell the contents of the Quran since the age of eight years.²⁰ From his family's religious background, he received religious teachings from his family since childhood.

Nasr's educational background was from the Tanta technical school and graduated in 1960. Nine years later, precisely in 1968 he became a student in the Arabic Language and Literature department, Faculty of Letters, Cairo University. Since then, he has shown his intellectual talents and has been a critical and progressive student. In 1972 obtained his bachelor's degree, then became a teaching assistant in the same department. Then, he continued his master's education in the same program and finished in 1977, earning a Ph.D in 1981. He also taught Arabic to foreigners at the diplomatic center and minister of education from 1976 to 1987.

As an academic career at Cairo University, he has produced various works in Islamic studies. His published works are "Al-Ittijdhat al-'Aql fi al-Tafsir: Dirasah ft Qadiyah al-Majaz 'inda al-Mu'tazilah" and "Falsafah al-Takwil: Dirasah fi Takwil al-Quran 'inda Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi". Both of these works are thesis of a master degree and a Ph. D at the university. He also wrote a book "Mafhum al-Nash: Dirasat fi Ulum Alquran" as a new methodological offer for

¹⁹ Lailatu Rohmah, "Hermeneutika Al-Quran: Studi atas Metode Penafsiran Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid", *Hikmah*, Vol. XII, No. 2, 2016, 225.

²⁰ Navid Kermani, "From Revelation to Interpretation: Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid and the Literary Study of the Qur'an, in Suha Taji-Farouki (ed.), *Modern Muslim Intellectual and The Qur'an* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004),169.

understanding the Quranic text. This book is a response to various discourses about the dialectical process of texts with reality and the process of struggling with Islamic discourse. Through his critical attitude towards the discourse, he believes that the methodology must be reconstructed to interpret the Quran.

Besides that, "Naqd al-Khitab al-Din", is one of his works that tries to enter contemporary Islamic discourse by redefining religion. Then his book entitled "Al-Imam al-Shafi'i was Ta'sis al-Aidiulujiyyat al-Wasatiyyat", this book is his attempt to trace al-Shafi'i's epistemological roots along with ideological values that might influence it. He wrote "Al-Nashsh, al-Sultat, al-haqqiqat", this book is an exploration of the nature of the text and its context. In this book, he discusses a lot of cultural and ideological relationships that might influence certain texts. He also wrote "Isykaliyyat al-Qira'at wa Aliyat al-Ta'wil". This book is the result of his debate on the subject of interpretation methodology that tries to offer a modern hermeneutic and semiotic approach to interpreting texts, and other works.

2. Concept of Text According to Abu Zaid

The Quran is a text²¹ The Quran is not defined as the Word of God (Kalam Allah) that is preserved in the Lauh Mahfuz (*fi lawh mahfuz*) in Arabic alphabets. In his book *Mafhum al-Nass*, Abu Zaid.²² In the course of the history of the Arab world, the text has an important position. Especially

²¹ Nur Zainatul Nadra Zainol, Latifah Abd Majid & Muhd Najib Abdul Kadir, "Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid as a Modern Muslim Thinker". *International Journal of Islamic Thought*, Vol. 5: (June) 2014, 63.

²² Nur Zainatul Nadra Zainol, Latifah Abd Majid & Muhd Najib Abdul Kadir, "Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid as a Modern Muslim Thinker", 63; Abu Zaid, Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid. *Falsafat al-ta'wil: Dirasah fi ta'wil al-Qur'an 'inda Muhyi al-Din ibn al-'Arabi* (Cairo: al-Markaz al-Saqafi al-'Arabi, 1998).

when viewed from the development of literature from the pre-Islamic era to Islam, oral tradition is deeply rooted. This text is ultimately believed to have a significant influence on the formation of civilization.²³ However, he also admitted that civilization was formed not only by text, but also through dialectics between humans, reality, and the text itself. The next concept is an important part, so in some of his books, this issue is always alluded to. One of the statements, the text of the Quran is a cultural product (*mntaj tsaqafi*) is a controversial statement so that it received a response from several groups.

According to Moch. Nur Ichwan, in the book *Mafhum al-Nashsh* (concept of the text), Abu Zaid did not give a definite meaning and clear from his own opinion regarding the meaning of “text,”²⁴ The term text in Arabic called “al-nashsh”, whereas, in classical Arabic, the word “nashsh” means to lift.²⁵ Before heading to the meaning of the text’s terminology, it is necessary first to explain the development of the meaning of the text from the etymological aspect. It is required to trace the development of the meaning of the text from its etymological aspects by departing from the assumption that the term text (*nashsh*) is a language. In contrast, the language represents the principal sign system in the general cultural structure. In this context, tracking the development of language is the first step that must be followed before revealing the concept of the text itself.

²³ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Mafhum al-Nashsh* (Kairo: Al-Hai’ah al-Mishriyyah al-’Ammah li al-Kutub, 1990), 11; Ahmad Fauzan, “Teks al-Qur’an dalam Pandangan Nashr Hamid Abu Zaid”, *Jurnal Kalimah*, Vol. 13, No. 1, Maret 2015, 65.

²⁴ Moch. Nur Ichwan, *Meretas Kesarjanaan Kritis al-Qur’an: Teori Hermeneutika Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid* (Jakarta: Teraju, Cet.I, 2003), 65; Ahmad Fauzan, “Teks al-Qur’an dalam Pandangan Nashr”, 65.

²⁵ Hilman Lastief, *Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid: Kritik Teks Keagamaan* (Yogya-karta: eLSAQ Press, 2003), 93.

In European languages, the text means a fabric of structural-semantic relations that go beyond sentence boundaries in grammatical terms (*nahwiyyah*), indicating a meaning supported by the main root of Latin.²⁶ Different notions between texts in European languages and Arabic. Quoting the meaning of “al-nashsh” in the Lisan al-‘Arab Dictionary - as Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid - which means ‘visible’ and ‘revealed’ as the primary meaning. There are four levels of shifting the meaning of the text, including the material meaning, the transition from the material meaning, the transition to the conceptual meaning, then enter into the terminological meaning.

At the level of material meaning, the word “nashsh” means to raise the neck, as in the sentence نصت الذبية جيدها (the female deer raises her neck). At the level of self-transition, the material meaning is heavy, as in the expressions النص والتنصيص (heavy travel) and نص الأمور (severe cases). The transition to conceptual meaning means ‘asking about something until it is revealed’ and meaning ‘old age’, as in the sentence نص الرجل (someone asks him about something until what is revealed to him) and بلغ النساء نص الحقائق (the woman has reached the age of puberty). Meanwhile, after entering into the terminological meaning, becoming meaningful *isnad* in the science of hadith, meaning *tauqif* and *ta’yin* (determination).²⁷ The shift from material meaning to terminological meaning does not undergo a significant change from the primary meaning. Each word has a basic meaning, namely the contextual content of the vocabulary that will remain attached to the word, even though the word separated from the context of sentence speech.²⁸ The

²⁶ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Al-Nashsh wa al-Sultah wa al-Haqiqah* (Beirut: Al-Markaz al-Saqafi al-Arabi, 2000), 150.

²⁷ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Al-Nashsh wa al-Sultah wa al-Haqiqah*, 150-151.

²⁸ M. Nur Kholis Setiawan, *Al-Qur’an Kitab Sastra Terbesar* (Yogyakarta: eLSAQ Press, 2006), 166.

underlying meaning is the primary basis for understanding the development of meaning according to the context.

The word “-shash” means bayan, as used by al-Shafi’i. Al-Shafi’i places “-nashsh” at the peak of the forms of bayan and defines it as a word that is “sufficient with the text itself and does not require takwil”, and there is no reason for someone to ignore it²⁹ It shows that what is meant by text is clarity about something (text) so that it does not require *takwil*. The precise meanings are related to *tasyrik* issues, such as prayer, zakat, hajj, and others. The texts that talk about it are *mujmal* (global) texts, which have clear textual meanings.

In explaining the meaning of the word *nashsh*, al-Zamakhsyari said that Qs. al-Baqarah/2: 7. “Allah has sealed their hearts and hearing, and their visions are closed, and for them a very severe punishment.” This verse is a *mutasyabih* verse that requires *takwil*. The verb *nashsha* is used to indicate a bright and clear *muhkam* verse that does not require *takwil*. Both the concepts of *nashsh* and *mutasyabih* are contested, then *nashsh* refers to *muhkam* and *mutasyabih* shows the meaning of “cryptic” that requires *takwil*.³⁰ Without *takwil*, it is difficult to understand vague texts. This understanding certainly contrasts with the meaning of the text itself.

The use of the word *nashsh* with the meaning “which is clearly clear and does not require takwil” was also used until Ibn Arabi (d. 638 H).³¹ It is found in Arabic writings, including Sufi’s writings. It is then used as false evidence that the texts mean “clear” and “bright”. The concept of *nashsh* has not changed significantly from previous times.

²⁹ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Al-Nashsh wa al-Sultah wa al-Haqiqah*, 150.

³⁰ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Al-Nashsh wa al-Sultah wa al-Haqiqah*, 154.

³¹ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Al-Nashsh wa al-Sultah wa al-Haqiqah*, 154.

According to contemporary definitions, text (*nashsh*) is a series of signs arranged in a system of relations that produce general meaning and contain messages. These signs can use ordinary language or signs using other languages. Therefore, the structure of signs in a system that contains messages also includes text.³² It is one of Nasr's views. Nasr's opinion shows that in the text, there is a sign system, namely: there is a relationship between the marker and the marker in the text. Language is the main sign and the axis of culture, so to know the message contained in it needs to be analyzed the structure of signs and determine the mechanism of interrelationships between parts.

He gave an example by presenting several terms that have similarities, namely: 'ilm,' nature, and 'alamah. The similarity of these three vocabularies happens not by chance, but each rooted from one root word in Arabic. Likewise, with the Quran as a hegemonic text, it is also not a coincidence that the Quran calls itself "treatise" (message), and the basic units of its letter elements are called verses (signs).³³ This shows that the whole form of the Quran is a series of signs that show God Almighty. Thus, the Quranic text is a collection of systemized signs containing messages from God to be conveyed to humans.

3. Between the Text and the External Side of the Text

Before the Quranic text descended, the reality of Arabic culture was already present. In addition, the passage of the Quranic text from the time it was first descent to the end cannot be separated from the existing external and cultural reality. Departing from this fact, Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid argues that the text is a cultural product.

³²Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Al-Nashsh wa al-Sultah wa al-Haqiqah*, 169.

³³ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Al-Nashsh wa al-Sultah wa al-Haqiqah*, 169.

إن النص في حقيقته وجوهه منتج ثقافي. والمقصود بذلك أنه تشكل في الواقع والثقافة خلال فترة تزيد على العشرين عام³⁴.

“The text is in fact is a cultural product. The purpose of the statement is that at the level of reality and culture it lasted more than twenty years”.

Nasr’s statement about the text of the Quran is a “cultural product” actually wants to show that the text of the Quran was formed or passed down to the Prophet Muhammad, which was not in a society that was empty of culture. The combination of the two crucial sources of Islamic Law is seen as a link between reason and revelation.³⁵ The text has been formed in reality and culture for more than 20 years. His opponents often misunderstand Nasr’s statement that culture produced the Quran, so as if the Quran is no longer God’s revelation, but rather as a creature produced by culture. In reality, it is not what some people think it is, but it recognizes that the Quran is a revelation. It was also proven in his book “Mafhum al-Nashsh” by placing the discussion of revelation in the beginning before the other discussions.

Understandably, as an intellectual, Nasr has a background in literary education, so it was strongly suspected that literary theories studied have a significant influence on his thoughts. The assumption that the Quranic text is a cultural product is taken from the theory of literary criticism, namely the theory of genetic structuralism and sociology of literature.

Lucian Goldmann considers literature to be a structure as a product of ongoing history.³⁶ Meanwhile, the sociology of

³⁴ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Mafhum al-Ndsh: Dirdsat ftUlum al-Qur’dn* (Beirut: Al-Markaz al-Tsaqafi al-Arabi, 2000), 24.

³⁵ Rafat Y. Alwazna, “Islamic Law: Its Sources, Interpretation and the Translation of It into Laws Written in English”, *International Journal Semiot Law*, 29 (2016), 251-260.

³⁶ Faruk, *Pengantar Sosiologi Sastra* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2003), 13.

literature considers that literary works are produced through meaningful interrelationships, namely the subject of creators and society.³⁷ This theory views literary works as part of society, namely as social documents. However, an author may not create a literary work if there is no background reality. Therefore, literary works are the products of individual people. It was suspected that these literary theories influence his thinking so that the Quranic text is considered a cultural product.

By looking at the historical fact that the Quran was revealed within 23 years accompanied by two socio-historical backgrounds that were responded to by verses that went down the time interval, it shows that the verses of the Quran were responses to external aspects of the text. It is known as *asbab al-nuzul*. The socio-historical background (*asbab al-nuzul*) is macro and there is micro.³⁸ *Asbab al-Nuzul* macro covers the socio-cultural aspects of Arab society, divided into two periods; the Meccan period and the Medina period. In contrast, the *asbab al-nuzul* micro is an event or specific historical fact that lies behind the descending verses, groups of verses, or certain letters.

4. Text Interpretation Theory

The civilization and culture will be formed if there is a dialectical process between human reality and text.³⁹ The discussion of the Quran as a message cannot be separated from the interpreter's awareness of the Quran as a linguistic text with its characteristics. According to Nasr, in the

³⁷Nyoman Kutha Ratna, *Paradigma Sosiologi Sastra* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2003),10-11.

³⁸ Faiq Ainurrofiq, "The Use of Hermeneutics Double Movement Fazlur Rahman in Comprehending Hadith of the Unsuccessful Leadership of Women", *Jurnal Ushuluddin*, Vol. 27 No. 2, July-December 2019, 132-144.

³⁹ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Mafhum al-Nas*, trans. Khoiron Nahdyyin (Yogyakarta: LKIS, 2005), 1; Fikri Hamdani, "Teori Interpretasi Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid", *Jurnal Farabi*, Vol. 13 No. 1 Juni 2016, 36.

meaning of language, two dimensions seem contradictory but complement each other.⁴⁰ This description of the explanation found in distinguishing between the concepts of interpretation and *takwil*.

5. Between *Ma'na*, *Magza*, and *Tafsirah*

The interpretation has the meaning of revealing something hidden, which can be understood because of the medium of *tafsirah*.⁴¹ Meanwhile, *takwil* is returning to the origin of something to express *ma'na* and *magza*.⁴² *Ma'na* is a meaning that is built based on grammar (*al-ma'ani al-nahwiyah*)⁴³, so the resulting meaning is grammatical meanings (*al-ma'ani al-nahwiyah*) 'while *magza* shows the meaning in the socio-historical context.⁴⁴ In the interpretation process, these two things are strongly interrelated. *Magza* always follows *ma'na* and vice versa. Nasr Hamid sendiri, mengikuti gagasan hermeneutika E. D. Hirsch.⁴⁵ *Ma'na-Cum-Magza* theory assumes that every word (symbol) in any text including the Koran has a historical meaning specific in a particular context.⁴⁶ Abdullah Saeed, a scholar from Melbourne University, explained that there are three approaches to interpreting the Quran; textual, semi-textual, and contextual.⁴⁷ For the group that uses the third approach, Duderija calls it as a progressive Muslim.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini* (Kairo: Sina li al-Nasyr; 1992), 224.

⁴¹ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Mafhum al-Nashsh*, 225.

⁴² Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Mafhum al-Nashsh*, 229.

⁴³ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Al-Nashsh wa al-Sultah wa al-Haqiqah*, 108.

⁴⁴ Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika dan Pengembangan Ulumul Qur'an*, 86.

⁴⁵ Sunarwoto, "Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid dan Rekonstruksi Studi-Studi Al-Qur'an" dalam Sahiron Syamsuddin (et. al.), *Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an Mazhab Yogya*, 105.

⁴⁶ Adi Fadilah, "Ma'na-Cum-Magza Sebagai Pendekatan Kontekstual dalam Perkembangan Wacana Hermeneutika Alquran di Indonesia", *Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies*, Vol. 8, Issue 1, January – June 2019, 12.

⁴⁷ A. Halil Thahir, "Dari Nalar Literalis-Normatif Menuju Nalar Kontekstualis-Historis", *Islamica: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2010, 5.

⁴⁸ These two terms classified by Adis Duderija can be seen in Yusuf Rahman's review

It is Saeed's opinion above that distinguishes the textual approach vis-à-vis contextually different from Mun'im Sirry's view. When explaining that the meaning of the text can be revealed through three aspects of hermeneutics, namely author, text, reader, Sirry assesses that in the three these aspects have their respective contexts.⁴⁹ The important difference between these two things is reflected that the interpretation process always requires a medium of interpretation. The interpreter can reveal what he wants, while the regional process does not always require a medium of interpretation, sometimes even the Regional Territory is based on mental-intellectual movements in finding the origin " symptoms".⁵⁰ This shows that *takwil* can run based on a direct relationship between subject and object. Meanwhile, interpretation can only be carried out in the presence of a medium, so the process of the relationship between subject and object is not straightforward. This medium is in the form of language text or the form of a marker.

6. *Asbab al-Nuzul* as Concrete Evidence

The interpretation of the Quran as a language text cannot be explored only by analyzing language inherently. However, the Quranic text does not descend in a society with no culture at all. The existence of *asbab al-nuzul* is proof that the Quran text has responded to society's conditions at the time of the revelation process. The broad cultural context,

of his dissertation entitled *Constructing a Religiously Ideal, Believer and woman in Islam: Neo-Traditional Salafi and Progressive Muslims in Yusuf Rahman*, "Textual and Contextual Interpretation of Al-Qur'an and Hadith (Studies on Salafi Muslims and Progressive Muslims)", *Journal of the Qur'an and Hadith Studies* Vol. 1, No. 2, 2012, 297-302.

⁴⁹ Adi Fadilah, "Ma'na-Cum-Magza Sebagai Pendekatan Kontekstual, 9-10.

⁵⁰ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Al-Nashsh wa al-Sultah wa al-Haqiqah*, 232.

which at that time developed, was an important issue that could not be left out. Leaving *asbab al-nuzul* in interpreting the Quran can be fatal. Although on the other hand, *asbab al-nuzul* is not the goal to be achieved in interpretation, but instead as one of the instruments of analysis to reveal the text's ideal messages (verse).

Analysis of the Quranic text and authentic traditions of the Prophet according to the background context that happened at that time must be done in the process of interpretation. This is because the message of Islam does not influence if the people who first receive it are unable to understand the message. Meanwhile, these communities can only understand messages in their socio-cultural context.⁵¹ This view led to the emergence of different understandings of text messages carried out by the people in different socio-cultural contexts.

7. Understanding the Context and External Side of Text

The different contexts and methods give birth to diverse understandings over time. Understanding the first Muslim generation of text messages is not considered a final and absolute understanding.⁵² Language, the text of the Quran, is essentially the same as other languages. Language always experiences dynamic development through a continuous coding process without end. It means that the text has a meaning that develops into significance, or there is always an endless production of meaning. The dynamic meaning of the text makes it possible to interpret the text continuously. The interpretation process will never end, and reinterpretation

⁵¹ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Al-Qur'dh, Hermeneutik dan Kekuasaan*, trans. Dede Iswadi et. al., (Bandung: Korpus, 2003), 96.

⁵² Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Al-Qur'dh, Hermeneutik dan Kekuasaan*, 96

will always occur throughout the time according to the challenges of the times that occur in every space and time.

Interpretation of the text can be made by anyone who has competence, but before the interpreter interprets. Some contemporary theories tend to emphasize the internal aspects of texts as semantic relations, giving birth to bound readings.⁵³ The relationship between the text and author or the period and reality that produces the text itself must be separated. Reading like this results in reading the text always bound to the linguistic data contained in the text. The relationship between the text and the world outside of the text is ignored if the text cannot be separated from external factors that influence the text. This kind of bound reading is not maintained, because human life and the dynamics of the problem accept the light of the Quran.

8. Avoiding Tendentious Readings

Another reading model that must be left by the interpreter is the tendency to read (*al-qira'ah al-mugridah*).⁵⁴ Tendentious reading is the reading of texts carried out following the ideology adopted by the interpreter.⁵⁵ Tendentious interpretations are readings made on the basis of interest, so the results achieved will always be subjective. From the beginning, the interpreter has an interest and tries to make the results of the interpretation speak as he wishes. If you want objective meaning, before interpreting, the interpreter must abandon all kinds of subjective horizons in his brain.

The reader (interpreter) will find it difficult to produce meaningful texts free of interest if he interprets the above interests. An interpreter who has a hegemony of unfinished

⁵³ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini*, 113.

⁵⁴ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini*, 113.

⁵⁵ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini*, 114.

political interests will produce a tendentious and biased interpretation. This is one that has been criticized by some contemporary thinkers for the reading of past scholars who are dominated by male interpreters, especially verses related to gender issues. The issue of ideology is also one of the causes of bias that must be watched out. It will reduce the independence of the interpreter in producing the exact meanings of the text.

Faithful interpreters include people who have finished their problems and interests so as not to give birth to biased or ordered meanings by certain parties. It takes separation of two dimensions of meaning in the text, namely between *dalalah* and *magza*. The distinction between *dalalah* and *magza* must be the main requirement so that the methodology of text interpretation is not subject to the reckless and vulgar ideology of the reviewer.⁵⁶ Strictly speaking, Nasr rejects the activities of interacting with texts and interpreting them on an opportunistic-pragmatic basis. Interactions and interpretations considered to disregard the motion of texts (*harakat al-nashsh*) in historical contexts and deny data that allows them to help uncover the meaning of texts.

The act of reading aims to expose specific facts from the levels of existence outside the horizon of the reading subject. If the reader's horizon limits his viewpoint, then the text data does not position as a positive recipient of subject orientations.⁵⁷ This means that readings and the right intellectual activity based on the dialectic between the subject and the object. In contrast to this, tendentious reading will only produce ideology. The tendency of opportunistic

⁵⁶ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini*, 114.

⁵⁷ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini*, 115.

subjectivity will eventually give birth to the claim that the reader can find meaning, even though the resulting meaning is the desired meaning before reading.

9. Productive Reading: Understanding the Context

The reading model called *al-qira'ah al-muntijah* (productive reading), is a reading model carried by Abu Zaid. *Al-Qira'ah al-muntijah* is offered again in the discussion about the relationship between *ma'na* and *magza*. In this case, it uses the dialectics between the terms *dalalah* and *magza*. It appears inconsistencies in using the term, sometimes using the distinction of *magza* and *dalalah*, sometimes also using the distinction of *magza* and *ma'na*. *Dalalah* and *magza* are two forms used for one job. *Magza* cannot be released from the touch of *dalalah*, because *dalalah* is what brings *magza* to the most distant meaning.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, to uncover the meaning of *dalalah*, it must pass through *tafsirah* media (denotatum/sign). In this context, *al-qira'ah al-muntijah* departs from the analysis of sign language to obtain textual meaning. After that, it returns to the origin or is associated with the meaning of socio-historical context to obtain *magza*. The socio-historical context again occupies an essential position in producing meaning.

The text structure and the production of the meaning of the text cannot be separated from the problem of *al-siyaq* (context). The word *al-siyaq*, although in the form of a single sentence, actually shows quite a number.⁵⁹ That is, the word *al-siyaq* has a broad meaning, namely a variety of contexts. The texts in ordinary languages have a variety of diversity. When you see cultural texts (*al-nushush al-tsaqafiyah*) or

⁵⁸ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini*, 144.

⁵⁹ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Al-Nashsh wa al-Sultah wa al-Haqiqah*, 9.

texts meaning semiotics, the difference will increase. He views al-siyaq as an essential issue in producing meaning.

لذلك نكتفى هنا بالتوقف عند مستويات السياق المشتركة العامة جداً، مثل السياق الثقافي الاجتماعي، والسياق الخارجي (سياق التخاطب) والسياق الداخلي (علاقة الأجزاء)، والسياق اللغوي (تركيب الجملة والعلاقات بين الجمل)،⁶⁰ وأخيراً سياق القراءة وسياق التأويل.

“Therefore, we stop here at some level of context. Those contexts consist of external context (*siyaq al-takhatub*) internal context, language context (sentence structure, and the relationship between sentences)—finally, the context of reading and the context of judgment.

Based on this, the Quranic text has several levels of context, namely: socio-cultural context (*al-siyaq al-tsaqafi al-ijtimai*), external context (*al-siyaq al-khariji or siyaq al-takhathub*), internal context (*al-siyaq al-dakhili*), the context of language (*al-siyaq al-lugawi*) and the context of reading or condemnation (*siyaq al-qira'ah or siyaq al-ta'wil*). Exploring meaning only by using or fulfilling these five contexts is enough. Nasr's view is the same as the theoretical framework built on semiotics. Semiotics views the facts and phenomena of society and culture as meaningful signs, while language is part of that fact. If the interpreter wants to explore the meaning of a particular language text, then he must analyze the text's various contexts. The text does not stand alone, but together with their respective contexts.

All kinds of language texts, both the Quran and literary texts, are always related to the above contexts. Understanding the socio-cultural context (*al-siyaq al-saqafi al-ijtima'i*) language texts are all things that describe the cognitive source

⁶⁰ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Al-Nashsh wa al-Sultah wa al-Haqiqah*, 9.

of the possibility of communication using language.⁶¹ Language represents the collection of traditional rules or conventions of a particular society, starting from the level of sound or sound that has meaning. These conventions depend on people who use language. Sources of knowledge about this convention can be explored through culture with all kinds of places and traditions, appear in the language and regulations.

The external context (*al-siyah al-khariji*) describes the context of the conversation (*siyah al-takhatub*), namely the communication relationship between the *qail* (messenger) and *al-mutalaqqi* (receiver of the message). *Al-siyah al-khariji* of the Quran, on the one hand, is thick with historical aspects that shape the text and related to the natural change of the audience of texts (*al-mukhatab*) on the other side⁶². The Quranic text has causes underlying a verse down and facing the audience in the da'wah phase, both in the Mecca and Medina phases.

In that context, it cannot be ignored because both phases illustrate the development of the Quranic ideas with their respective language characteristics. An understanding of the concepts of makkiyah and madaniyah is not only aimed at knowing when and where a verse was revealed. More than that, understanding him in order to describe the historical situation when the verse goes down has implications for drawing conclusions about the message they contain. Both become analytical instruments that illustrate the development of the Quranic ideas.

Al-siyah al-khariji is limited to the problem of asbab al-nuzul and makki-madani, but textually, the Quranic verses also have their respective audiences. The Quran has a wide

⁶¹ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Al-Nashsh wa al-Sultah wa al-Haqiqah*, 97.

⁶² Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Al-Nashsh wa al-Sultah wa al-Haqiqah*, 102.

and diverse building of speech (*al-khitab al-Qurani*). Some of these audiences, like the Prophet Muhammad as the first audience (*al-mukhatab al-awwal*). Other audience contexts include the audience context of the Prophet's wives, women, men, and so on. This view gave birth to the opinion that *asbab al-nuzul* can also be obtained from the Qur'anic text itself, not necessarily through narrations. This view provides wider possibilities when elaborating verses and the demands of contemporary cultural and social dynamics.

After the discussion of *al-siyaq al-khariji* changes to the discussion of *al-siyaq al-dakhili*, which is directly in the discussion about the absurdity of the Quranic text, the basis of interfaith communal agreements and letters is because the text of the Quran is a structural unit that interrelated between sections.⁶³ *Al-Siyaq al-dakhili* has substantive characteristics because of its existence as a text that has similar parts. This characteristic can be seen from the aspect of the contents and stylistics of the text of the Quran. In the form of text, the material object of interpretation must be understood as an integral part of the text in itself. An internal relationship approach is a necessity to get a full understanding.

The internal context (*al-siyaq al-dakhili*) is not only limited to the issue of *munasabah*, which has been discussed by classical Quranic scholars. *Al-Siyaq al-dakhili* still has other contexts, namely the context of the discussion (*siyaq al-qaul*) or the context of the conversation (*siyaq al-khitab*). The contexts fall into this category consist of *siyaq al-qishshah* (context of the story), *siyaq al-nahy wa al-amr* (prohibitions and orders), *al-targhib* (motivation and hope), *al-tarhib* (threat), *jadal* (debate), *sajal* (rivalry), *tahdid*, *inzdr*, *akidah*, *syariah*,

⁶³ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Mafhum al-Nash*, 160.

halal, haram, mubah, makruh, sunna, and so on. These aspects cannot be ignored in producing meaning (*istinbath*).⁶⁴

The next context is the language context (*al-siyāq al-lugawī*) which directly produces grammatical meaning (*al-ma'ani al-nahwīyah*). By quoting Abdul Qahir, Nasr explained that *al-siyāq al-lugawī* is an analysis of style phenomena (*al-zawahir al-uslubīyyah*) at the level of sentences, such as *al-taqdim*, *al-ta'khir*, *al-hazf*, *al-idhmar*, the relationship between sentences, balagh, and issues related to the analysis of language in general.⁶⁵ Nasr added that the analysis at the level of *al-siyāq al-lugawī* was limited to the analysis of language in general and sought to broaden the analysis to reveal *al-dalalah al-maskut 'anha* (hidden meaning). Analytical linguistic context (*al-siyāq al-lugawī*) aims to explore the grammatical meaning and explain the meaning hidden behind the text.

10. The Concept of *Al-Dalalah*

Al-Dalalah al-maskut 'anha means searching for the deepest meanings to reveal a strongly jostling relationship between something outside the text and meaning in the context of language.⁶⁶ The language context of sura al-Jin, for example, speaks of a description of the form of the jinn, which is related to cultural realities that are outside the text. It shows that the meaning of text language describes the cultural reality outside the text even though the genie is a hidden realm described as real as a cultural context and external reality outside the text.

⁶⁴ Nasrulloh, "Tajdīd Fiqh Dari Konservatif Tekstual Menuju Fiqh Progressif Kontekstual", *de Jure, Jurnal Syariah dan Hukum*. Vol. 6 No. 1, Juni 2014, 20-32.

⁶⁵ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Mafhum al-Nash*, 108.

⁶⁶ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Mafhum al-Nash*, 109.

The last context is the reading context (*siyaq al-qira'ah*). The reading of the text, which separates the interrelations of several levels of context, describes the type of ideological-opportunist-tendentious reading (*al-qiraah al-aidiyulujjiyyah al-naf'iyyah al-mugridah*).⁶⁷ This reading activity sends messages from the sender of the message (*al-mursil*), who always reads the text to the recipient of the message (*al-mutalaqqi*). In the world of interpretation can be found so many interpretations. It is due not only to a large number of readers but also to different backgrounds of thought and ideology. A reader in interpreting texts must be aware of this. This fact makes such as Nasr assume that the context of reading includes part of the structure of the text. Thus, the interpreters' perceptions that have existed are essential issues that cannot be left out to extract the meaning of the text. Naturally, Aminah Wadud Muhsin made an explanatory statement that no interpretation does not contain the interpreter's subjectivity when explaining gender verses.

However, a proper interpretation, it must still be understood and seated as a result of reasoning and understanding of interpreters that can not be released from interpreters' tendencies. This attitude will always provide space and new possibilities that are relevant or irrelevant to interpretation dealing with the socio-cultural reality that is always dynamic. Such an interpreter's awareness will lead him to become a productive reader because he always opens the possibility of the birth of a new meaning.

⁶⁷ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Mafhum al-Nash*, 110.

11. Interpretation Application

a. The Creation of Heaven and Earth

The creation of heaven and earth mentioned in several verses of the Quran, both globally and in detail. Some only mention the sky's creation, and some only mention the creation of the earth alone. Many verse editors explain that heaven and earth were created with "al-haqq". Nasr began by showing Qs. al-Nahl/16: 3-4. It tells the comparison between the creation of heaven and earth with "al-haqq", and the creation of man from semen.⁶⁸ This comparison comes from two things: the creation of heaven and earth that sanctifies God as believed by the inhabitants of Mecca, and the creation of human beings who later became disputants.⁶⁹ he heavens and the earth created with "al-haqq," indicating God's cleansing and shirk affirmation. Simultaneously, the creation of human semen as a very despicable material caused people to dare to defy God and deny His favors.⁷⁰

The two relations of creation are paradoxical and are similar to verses that explain that the creation of heaven and earth is more powerful than human creation.⁷¹ This verse speaks in the context of the Prophet Muhammad's prophetic denial and has given rise to the threat that the Day of Judgment is close to the opposing human group.⁷² The paradoxical relationship shows two different processes of creation. The human creation process from semen indicates that there are phases that must be taken until it is fully human. The creation of the

⁶⁸ Qs. al-Nahl/16: 3-4.

⁶⁹ Qs. al-Nahl/16: 24-25.

⁷⁰ Nasr Abu Zaid, *Teks Otoritas Kebenaran*, terj. Khorion Nahdiyyin (Yogyakarta: LkiS, 2003), 305.

⁷¹ Lihat Qs. al-Mu'minun/40:57.

⁷² Nasr Abu Zaid, *Teks Otoritas Kebenaran*, 305.

heavens and the earth created with “al-haqq” is different. What does “al-haqq” mean in the context of the verse of the creation of the earth and sky? This question will be answered by Nasr to find out how the heavens and the earth created.

The expression “bi al-haqq” in the context of the verses of the creation of heaven and earth in different formulations.⁷³ He revealed (exposed) disagreements about the meaning of “bi al-haqq” by quoting al-Tabari’s opinion. Some say that the word means “right” as opposed to “vanity” and “wrong”, based on the word of Allah. “And We did not create heaven and earth and what existed between the two with vanity.”⁷⁴ The existence of the letter ba’ and the alif lam article in the expression “bi al-haqq” indicates an impossibility which is a custom in Arabic *kalam*, because Arabs used to say something right with the expression “bi al-haqq”.⁷⁵

This interpretation is essential that the heavens and the earth were created with certain materials because it departs from the analysis of the preposition ha ‘and the limiting article alif lam, which shows the material is not the nature of creation. He then mentions another interpretation which says “al-haqqq” is the word of Allah, because Allah created everything by His words, namely “be” (kun).⁷⁶ This argument is according to the word of Allah in Qs. Yasin/36: 82. So, “al-haqq” is the word and word of Allah that is *kun fayakun*. Thus, there is a difference between this interpretation and the previous

⁷³ Ayat-ayat tersebut di antaranya: Qs. al-An’am/6: 73, 39, 45, 22, Qs. Yunus/10: 5, Qs. Ibrahim/14: 19, Qs. al-Hijr/15: 85, 46, 3, Qs. al-Ankabut/29: 44, Qs. al-Rum/30: 8, dan Qs. al-Tagabun/64: 3.

⁷⁴ Qs. Shad/38: 27

⁷⁵ Nasr Abu Zaid, *Teks Otoritas Kebenaran*, 307.

⁷⁶ Nasr Abu Zaid, *Teks Otoritas Kebenaran*, 308.

interpretation, which says "al-haqq" is the meaning (material of creation), not the act of creation (process).

The context of the use of "al-haqqq" is also seen as useful in Arabic culture. It also explains at the same time that the revelations coming from the sky (verse) descended greeting the cultural realities of the Arab community, especially by using the word used by its first recipient. In this case, the Prophet (PBUH) to be socialized to the Arab community at that time.

b. Inheritance Law (*Mawarith*)

Nasr began the discussion about inheritance by first explaining the rights, the prohibition on consuming property, and the obligation to return the property to orphans when they reach adulthood (Qs. al-Nisa'/4: 7-11). For Nasr, in principle, the Quran is very concerned about the problem of inheritance,⁷⁷ even if there are relatives, orphans, and poor people who do not get an inheritance are encouraged to give alms. Islam does not condone the neglect of this phenomenon. The Quran also warns that kinship relations, such as children and fathers, are not human relations that are too important.

The Quran has taught the principle of justice through equal distribution of property in society at large, which can be understood from the concept of zakat, alms, and roseits. This variable of equality is a hidden meaning (*al-dalalah al-maskut 'anha*) with the aim that wealth is not only monopolized by wealthy people. Departing from this universal meaning, he feels he must analyze the meaning of *mawarith* in the Quran, then move from the

⁷⁷ Muhammad Yusuf & Ismail Suardi Wekke, "Inheritance and Gener Equality", *Justicia Islamica*, Volume 15, Nomor 1 Juni Tahun 2018, 1-12.

meaning of the historical context to the *magza* implicit in that meaning, and may also emerge in contemporary religious awareness.⁷⁸ It is where it appears that *ma'na* is the textual meaning of *mawarith*. In contrast, *magza* is after the textual meaning of *mawarith* is obtained and then connected to the historical context and adjusted to the current religious awareness.

Pre-Islamic history shows that women and little boys do not inherit anything, even women whose husbands have died can be inherited. Inheritance only belongs to men who are able to fight. This historical picture shows the very oppressed position of women in a society that justifies the burial of live baby girls. This historical background is what Nasr meant by *al-siyaq al-saqafi al-ijtima'i* concerning the issue of *mawarith*. Islam came and considered all that was a big sin. Islam then laid the foundation for women's rights to inheritance. The Quranic response to this historical reality shows the function of the Quran as *inzar* as mentioned by Nasr, and *al-siyaq al-khariji* also has an important role here. The process of changing reality in the first Islamic era did not proceed easily, because the logic of the society at that time still adhered to the principle: لا نورس من لا يركب فرسا: ولا يحمل كالا ولا ينكأ عدوا.⁷⁹ "We do not inherit people who cannot ride horses, are unable to endure fatigue, and are unable to defeat the enemy."

Nasr then entered *al-siyaq al-lugawi* analysis by following Muhammad Abduh's analysis. Editor of النساء وللنساء واما ترك الوالدين والأقربون *wa linnisai nashibun mimma taraka al-walidani wa al-aqrabun* shows the meaning of

⁷⁸ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Dawa'ir al-Khauf: Qira'ah fi Khithab al-Mar'ah* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, 2004), 229-230.

⁷⁹ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Dawair al-Khauf*, 231.

fard (determination). It departs from the analysis of the text structure, namely the relation of the athaf with the previous sentence, and the predetermined repetition of the word *nashib* (part). Muhammad Abduh considers this verse to be a verse that speaks in the context of orphans and their rights, as evidenced by the following three verses. Based on *al-siyah al-lugawi* this verse means there is no difference in parts for women and men, which is indicated by the repetition of the editors *مما ترك الوالدان والأقربون* / *mimma taraka al-walidani wa al-aqrabun* and the meaning of the expression *nash* نصيبا مفروض.

The subsequent analysis is the editorial relationship of *للمذكر مثل حظ الأنثيين* and *يؤصيكم الله في أولادكم* / *Yushikumllahu fi Awladikum* and *Li al-dzakari mitslu hazhzi al-untsayayni*. It is a form of warning and abolition of the Jahiliyyah tradition which forbids women to get an inheritance. The analysis of the first editor cannot stop at grammatical analysis, because it will give birth to the meaning of the male portion is twice the female portion. For Nasr, meaning like this has no merit, because it does not unite several contexts.

The issue of inheritance is also related to the issue of women's testimony, both in the judiciary and commercial affairs, as part of *al-siyah al-dakhili*. Textually, the editorial of the verses on this matter mentions one in two, one authority being a male witness is the same as two female authorities. It is necessary to look for *magza* by connecting the text with the socio-historical context mentioned earlier, which requires the abolition of monopolies and equality. This *magza* is a balance, both balance in the field of religion, and the field of social society. Thus, the principle of equality also applies in the context of inheritance.

Regarding the phrase, “the male portion is twice the female portion, “ Nasr also considers the principle of equality in the text. These expressions are the limits of God’s decree; namely, men do not receive more than double inheritance for women, and that women do not accept less than half of men’s parts. Nasr citing Muhammad Syahrur concluded that the meaning of equality in inheritance was the maximum limit for men, and the minimum limit for women,⁸⁰ which did not contradict Allah’s decree. Meanwhile, the depiction of the value of women half the value of men is only figurative.⁸¹ Shahrur’s limitation theory (*hudūd*)⁸² is the result of an integrated interpretation of language analysis and mathematics in understanding the verse of law, through this theory of limits, Shahrur tries to apply it *nash* muhkamat al-Qur’an into the reality of life with its limitations.⁸³

The foundation of Nasr’s thinking using the arguments of Muhammad Abduh and Muhammad Syahrur is the application of *siyaq al-qira’ah* or *siyaq al-ta’wil*. Nasr tried to see how the previous commentators read and understood the text. It is one of Nasr’s strengths, who still holds the old paradigm as part of *turath*. Nasr also criticizes and offers a new methodological tool to cover up the existing deficiencies.

⁸⁰ Muhammad Ali Murtadlo, “Keadilan Gender dalam Hukum Pembagian Waris Islam Perspektif the Theory of Limit Muhammad Syahrur”, *Gender Equality: Internasional Journal of Child and Gender Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1, Maret 2018, 173-188.

⁸¹ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Dawair al-Khauf*, 234-235.

⁸² Hendri Hermawan Adinugraha, Fakhrodin, and Ahmad Anas, “Reaktualisasi Hukum Islam di Indonesia (Analisis terhadap Teori Hudud Muhammad Syahrur)”, *Islamadina: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam*, Vol. 19, No. 1, Maret 2018, 1-26.

⁸³ Havis Aravik, Choiriyah & Saprida, “Critical Study on the Legal Thinking of Muhammad Shahrur”, *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah*, Vol. 18, Num. 1, 2018, 43-64.

c. The Semiotic Paradigm in Nasr's Hermeneutics

An interesting problem with Nasr's hermeneutics is the semiotic paradigm in his hermeneutic thinking. In his various concepts and theories, Nasr was unable to break away from semiotics. The language of the Quran is the same as other languages. It has aspects of the message that the sender wants to send to the recipient. This language is not formed by itself, but there are socio-cultural factors in the language user community has an essential role in the process of language formation. Languages have their respective conventions, which formed due to the existence of language, which is a system of various signs that are contained in the language of a particular society.⁸⁴

Nasr sees language as having a distinction between *dall* (signifier) and *madlul* (signified), which is metaphorical.⁸⁵ The distinction between the signifier and signified is a concept that had previously been developed by Ferdinand de Saussure. The language of the Quran is a sign of the reciprocal relationship between the sign and the sign as the sign system. Therefore, the relationship between the two elements must be analyzed.

For Nasr, the interpretation must separate the meaning of *dalalah* (meaning) and the meaning of *magza* (significance).⁸⁶ These two things are like the sides of a coin, with one another interconnected. *Magza* cannot stand alone, because it cannot be separated from *dalalah*. Besides, *magza* also refers to the dimensions of *dalalah*. The *magza* reflects the goals and objectives of the act of

⁸⁴ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Pengantar Linguistik Umum*, transl. Rahayu S. Hidayat (Yogyakarta: UGM Press, 1996), 76.

⁸⁵ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Al-Nashsh wa al-Sultah wa al-Haqiqah*, 200.

⁸⁶ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini*, 115.

reading the text, which can be achieved only through the disclosure of the *dalalah*.

The meaning of *dalalah* reflects the effort to return to the origin, while *magza* reflects the purpose and objective of reading.⁸⁷ In other words, the text has two meanings, namely the first meaning as *dalalah*, then the first meaning is revealed to achieve the second meaning as the purpose and target of reading called *magza*. The significance is a deed that brings together signifiant and signifie.⁸⁸ It is this reciprocal relationship between the signifier and the sign that gives birth to meaning. Verbal or written language is a sign that has a certain reference. Because it has a reference to something, language also has a meaning, which often called the initial concept of a language (words).

Nasr called the concept of *dalalah*. In a broader context, the meaning of a language is determined by the conventions of the language user community. New meanings emerge, which for Nasr are called *magza* (significance).⁸⁹ This hermeneutics seeks to reveal two levels of meaning, namely *dalalah* (meaning) which is static, *magza* (significance) which is dynamic, and *maskut anhu* (unspoken things) which is the core message of the text. In linguistic studies, language, both words and sentences, has denotative and connotative meanings. This is Nasr's reason when he said that the relationship between signifiers and markers is metaphorical. Denotative language is the language that leads to one-

⁸⁷ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini*, 116.

⁸⁸ Roland Barthes, *Petualangan Semiotologi*, trans. Stephanus Aswar Her-winarco (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2007), 46.

⁸⁹ Ulummudin, "Memahami Hadis-hadis Keutamaan Menghafal al-Qur'an dan Kaitannya dengan Program Hafiz Indonesia di RCTI (Aplikasi Hermeneutika Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid)", *Al-Quds: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Hadis*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2020, 57.

on-one correspondence between signs (words) with something that is designated.⁹⁰ It shows that language has an original meaning or first meaning that has not changed, but it has not only denotative meaning, but also connotative meaning. The connotative meaning arises because the language in specific contexts is associated with something else, giving birth to additional meanings.

The *dalalah* and *magza* distinction made by Nasr also resembles the denotation and connotation distinction, which is one of the theories developed by Roland Barthes. The connotative meaning cannot be separated from the denotative meaning. The connotative meaning departs from the denotative meaning. It supports what Nasr said that *magza* could not be released from the touch of *dalalah*, because *magza*' is oriented to the dimensions of *dalalah*. The distinction between the two dimensions of language meaning has been made by previous scholars, namely the division between birth and inner meaning. Thus, there is a correlation between Nasr's opinions about the meaning of language with Western scholars such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, and classical scholars.

He looked at the text of the Quran experiencing the dynamics of the coding process that never ends. In this process, the contextual socio-cultural meaning cannot be ignored, because the meaning is vital for the instructions of the text's new message. This guide will facilitate the development of meaning to the significance of the existing socio-cultural context.⁹¹ The encoding of this text will continue over with the passage of texts

⁹⁰ Rahmat Djoko Pradopo, *Pengkajian Puisi* (Yogyakarta: UGM Press, 2007), 58.

⁹¹ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Al-Qur'an, Hermeneutik*, 96.

which have been received from time to time and different socio-cultural contexts. In other words, the meaning produced by interpretation cannot be separated from the historical, socio-cultural, and linguistic context of the text encoded again by the interpreter. Thus, the production of the meaning of the text will always occur according to the context at hand. Interpretation will never end, and reinterpretation will always be different all the time.

The concept of text dynamics developed by Nasr cannot be separated from the theory of Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce created a general theory for signs so that they could be applied to all kinds of signs, both signs in linguistics and signs' in social and cultural phenomena. Peirce also gave the concept of trichotomy, namely representamen, object, and interpretant. Representamen or signs are something that for someone functions as a representative of something else in a particular case or capacity.⁹² This sign refers to something called an object or reference. The position of the sign is a representation of what it refers to, and this representation can occur thanks to the help of something called ground. Often this ground is code, a regulation system that is trans-individual, although sometimes it also starts from an individual ground.⁹³

Traffic signs can be understood by road users who are familiar with the system of traffic signs, for example, signs in traffic lights. A green light sign means a road, a yellow light sign means caution or preparation to stop, and "a red light" sign means to stop. Such meanings can

⁹² Umberto Eco, *Teori Semiotika*, trans. Inyik Ridwan Muzir (Yogyakarta: Kreasi Wacana, 2009), 21.

⁹³ Aart van Zoest, "Interpretasi dan Semiotika" dalam Panuti Sudjiman dan Aart van Zoest, *Serba Serbi Semiotika* (Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1996), 7.

only be understood by motorized motorists who follow the rules.

The sign is interpreted, which means it is connected with the reference, then from the original sign develops a new sign called interpretant. The interpretant's interpretation cannot be confused with the understanding of the interpreter, which refers to the recipient of the sign.⁹⁴ According to Pierce, the interpretant is what produced by a sign or can also be called a representamen's definition.⁹⁵ This interpretant is another representation of what is referred to by the same reference. This interpretation becomes a new sign that also has another interpretant so that the semiosis process will never stop.

After seeing the theories developed by Pierce above, Nasr also used this theory. Nasr's theory, which says meaning always develops following historical and socio-cultural contexts, so that the interpretation of the text will never end, basically has a basic principle of conceptualization of sign production developed by Pierce. Nasr had compared the *dall*, *madlul*, and interpretation trichotomy, Pierce's interpretant, object, and ground trichotomy.⁹⁶

Thus, in Nasr's hermeneutics, there are two streams of semiotic thought, namely significance semiotics, which examine the mechanism of the relationship between markers (*dal*, significant) and signifiers (*madlul*, signifies) developed by de Saussure. And communication semiotics, which emphasizes aspects of messages in the text as a vehicle communication developed by Pierce. The

⁹⁴ Aart van Zoest, "Interpretasi dan Semiotika", 8.

⁹⁵ Umberto Eco, *Teori Semiotika*, 99.

⁹⁶ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Mafhum al-Nashsh: Dirasat*, 225.

possibility of Nasr to use these two theories of semiotics in several theories is possible. If it evidenced by Nasr's intellectual background, whose character is a linguistic scholar, undergraduate education is majoring in Arabic Language and Literature. If we look at the contents of the final project on "Al-Ittijahat al-'Aql fi al-Tafsir: Dirasat fi Qadiyat al-Majaz 'inda al-Mu'tazilah" and "Falsafat al-Ta'wil: Dirasat fi Ta'wil Alquran 'inda Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi", it cannot separate from language problems.

C. Conclusion

There are four levels of shifting the meaning of the text. The fourth level includes: material meaning, the transition from material meaning, transition to conceptual meaning, then enter into the terminological meaning. Text is clarity about something (text), so it does not require *takwil*. The interpretation has the meaning of revealing something hidden or unknown, which can be known because of the existence of media interpretation. Meanwhile, *takwil* is returning to the origin of something to express *dalalah* and *magza*. The revelation of God which is contained by the texts has a strong and inseparable external relation to the text. Each text has its own historical context. The reading of texts that separate them from their historical context results in a fatal error. Likewise, positioning the historical background of the text as vacuum information results in the text not having a dialogue with reality. It is in this context that the theory of *ma'na-cum magza* and *tafsirah* finds its significance to make the text live and have a dialogue with all variables including situation, condition, space and time.

The interpretation of the Quran as a language text cannot be explored only by analyzing language inherently. However, the Quranic text does not descend in a society which has no culture at all. Analysis of the Quranic text and authentic hadiths according to the contextual background that happened at that time must be

done in the process of interpretation. In addition, it focuses on analyzing several contexts and their respective relationships in the interpretation process. Some of these contexts are *al-siyaaq al-saaqafi al-ijtima'i*, *al-siyaaq al-khariji*, *al-siyaaq al-dakhili*, *al-siyaaq al-lugawi* dan *siyaaq al-qiraah*. In interpreting the text, the interpreter provides an opportunity for the text and historical data to speak and recognizes the interpreter's potential to interpret the text. Faithful interpreters also try to avoid interpretations that only rely on structural texts (*al-qira'ah gairu al-bariah*) and tendentious interpretations (*al-qira'ah al-mugridah*). This has similarities with Gadamer, namely in the analysis. It must provide the potential of the text and interpreter in a balanced manner and avoid the aspects of pre-understanding (*qira'ah mugridah*) within the interpreter. Thus, it can be concluded that Nasr's Hermes included in the intersubjective flow. In Nasr's hermeneutics perspective, there are two streams of semiotic thought, 'namely significance semiotics which examines the mechanism of the relationship between signifiers (*dall*, significant) and signifieds (*madlul*, signified). De Saussure developed it, and communication semiotics emphasize the messaging aspect in the text as a vehicle for communication developed by Pierce. The two theories of semiotics are, in some theories, very possible to use.

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