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The Interpretation Shift of Polygamy Verses in Surah an-Nisā' (4): 3 and Its Contextualization in the Contemporary Era (Interpretation Studies in the Classical, Medieval, Modern-Contemporary Era)

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Abstract

The study of gender issues along with the dynamics of the times has been in the spotlight, especially the reviewers of Islamic interpretation and thought, gender issues are getting hotter so that the implications are for commentators to continue to do ijtihad so that interpretations are in accordance with the text and context. The gender issue is specifically contained in the Qur'an Surah an-Nisā' (4): 3, where this verse often has different interpretations of the classical, medieval, and modern-contemporary commentators. Specifically, the medieval-classical interpretation tends to understand the verse as legitimacy and a commandment to practice polygamy. But on the one hand, modern-contemporary thinking reads the verse more as a monogamy command rather than on the aspect of polygamy. This diversity becomes a necessity which is certainly caused by several factors that are the background for these commentators. The purpose of this article is to try to analyze the causes of a shift in interpretation and the factors behind the occurrence of a shift in interpretation, especially Surah an-Nisā' 4: 3 from the perspective of classical, medieval, to modern-contemporary commentators. This research is a library research with an approach descriptive analysis. The results of this study indicate that the medieval-classical interpretation of understanding the verse is due to the influence of patriarchal culture and ideology so that the text is often understood textually without dialogue between the text and reality. However, the modern-contemporary interpretation of the verse does not refer to the aspect of polygamy even though it is essentially an order, but rather to the monogamous aspect, because contextual reading in understanding

the text needs to have a dialogue by looking at its implications for social reality.

Kata Kunci

Pergeseran penafsiran, Surah an-Nisa' (4): 3, Tafsir Klasik-Pertengahan-Modern-Kontemporer

Abstrak

Kajian terhadap isu gender seiring dinamika perkembangan zaman telah menjadi sorotan terutama para pengkaji tafsir dan pemikiran Islam, isu gender semakin hangat sehingga implikasinya bagi kalangan mufasir untuk terus melakukan ijtihad agar tafsir sesuai teks dan konteks. Adapun isu gender secara khusus termuat dalam al-Qur'an Surah an-Nisā' (4): 3 yang kerap kali ayat ini terjadi perbedaan penafsiran, baik di kalangan mufasir abad klasik, pertengahan, hingga modern-kontemporer. Secara spesipik, penafsiran abad klasik-pertengahan cenderung memahami ayat tersebut sebagai legitimasi dan suatu perintah melakukan poligami. Namun, pemikiran abad modern-kontemporer lebih membaca ayat tersebut sebagai perintah monogami bukan pada aspek poligami. Keberagaman tersebut menjadi suatu keniscayaan yang tentu disebabkan oleh beberapa faktor yang melatarbelakangi para mufasir tersebut. Artikel ini akan menganalisis sebab-sebab terjadinya pergeseran penafsiran dan faktor-faktor yang melatarbelakangi terjadinya pergeseran penafsiran, khususnya surah an-Nisā'4: 3 dalam perspektif ulama tafsir klasik, pertengahan, hingga modern-kontemporer. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian pustaka (library research) dengan pendekatan analisis deskriptif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penafsiran abad klasik-pertengahan memahami ayat tersebut disebabkan adanya pengaruh budaya patriarkhi dan ideologi sehingga kerap kali teks tersebut dipahami secara tekstual tanpa mendialogkan antara teks dengan realitas sosial, karena ayat tersebut hakikatnya adalah perintah. Namun demikian, penafsiran abad modern-kontemporer memahami ayat tersebut bukan menunjukkan pada aspek poligami walaupun hakikatnya adalah perintah, namun lebih kepada aspek monogami, karena pembacaan kontekstual dalam memahami teks perlu mendialogkan dengan melihat implikasinya pada realitas sosial.

Introduction

The discourse of gender studies has recently become hot issues and interesting to be studied in various argumentations of interpretation thoughts and islamic thoughts which are developing. One of the gender studies. that has become a spotlight for intellectual persons is related to the interpretation of Surah an-Nisā' (4): 3 which has become

a polemic along with time changes. Many interpreters try to reinterpret the meaning of this verse and try hard (Ijtihad) for it mainly in methodological aspects and interpretation approaches. The differences in understanding the verse become inevitability when the interpreters give arguments in different epistemic thoughts, so this verse is often understood as an allowance to do polygamy;

a man marries more than one women, because what is naturally conveyed in *Nash* (Qur'an) is a command. On the other hand, people view that this *Nash* as a legitimacy to do polygamy whose main requirement is be fair physically and mentally to his wives. The last views that polygamy is really prohibited because it is understood textually so that the meaning can be seen literally; it is really a command to do polygamy. For intellectual persons who always criticize texts likely think that this verse does not indicate an aspect of polygamy, but it indicates more on a monogamous aspect; a command to marry only one woman. This view tends to see it based on a situation and a condition when integrating between a text and a reality

The diversity of Muslims' views related to polygamous issues is interesting to be studied and to be researched more deeply because it shows that a state and also the dynamics of thought which always keep developing (both pro and contra to polygamy) in accordance with social change streams which keep moving in the contemporary era. So, the al-Qur'an interpretation must be placed at a relevant position based on texts and contexts. If it is studied based on a glance of the interpretation in four periods; classical, medieval, and modern-contemporary, it has indicated the dynamics of different interpretations especially in giving comments and criticizing this verse. The interpretation portrait of Surah an-Nisā' (4): 3 began at the classical century; at-Thabari interpretation (225H-310H) views that this verse tells about a command to do polygamy; marry more than one women; two and three, with a main requirement; be fair to wives.

At-Thabari interpretation goes along with Ibn Katsir interpretation (700H/1300M), that the concept of the verse states that it is allowed for a man to marry more than one women; two, three, until four women as long

as he can fulfill all of their rights.¹ The writers view that the al-Qur'an interpretation in the classical century shows that this verse tells about the allowance of doing polygamy with a requirement; the rights of women who will be married must be fulfilled fairly both physically and mentally. Although the interpretation in the medieval century is almost similar to the interpretation in the classical century, the interpretation in the classical era is still dominated by ideological factors and interpreters' interest. It is stated in Fakhr al-Din al-Razi interpretation as follows:

"If you are afraid of being fair to your wives, just have one wife, keep up and choose only one wife and leave the polygamy".¹

A part of the interpretation above asserts based on the ideology and the interest, it means that this verse is a command, when a command must be done fairly both in physical and mental contexts, it is permitted to do polygamy, on the other hand, there is no a chance for a man who is not able to be fair to his wives in the aspects of living, wealth and intercourses. So, it is better to marry only one woman. There are two aspects of interpretation recitations in the medieval century; they are still dominated by ideological and interest factors. As it is commented in al-Zamakhshari interpretation, which has the same view, when a man wants to marry, and he is worried if he is not able to be fair when he has more than one wives, so, just marry one woman whom he chooses. This verse shows that the alertness toward orphans.²

However, it is in line with epistem and paradigm that a different thought in the modern-contemporary tries to do individual interpretation (*ijtihad*) and to update in

¹Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, Vol. 9, first edition (Beirut: Dâr al-Fikr, 1981), 182.

²Al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kasasyaf*, Tahqiq by Ali Muhammad Mu'awwidh and Adil Ahmad 'Abd al-Mawjud, Vol. 2 (Riyad: Maktabah al-Abikan, 1998), 15.

methodological aspects, an interpretation approach. A type of comprehension which has developed in the interpretation of the Modern-Contemporary century is criticizing texts which places al-Qur'an as "*shalihun likulli zaman wa makan.*" It means that al-Qur'an as a main knife to answer every problem. So, usually the al-Qur'an interpretation is always delved and leaves textual comprehension and uses a contextual comprehension type.³ As it has been responded by Fazlur Rahman especially about surah an-Nisā' (4): 3 which has been interpreted more differently than some interpretation theologians who were existing in the classical-medieval century.

A glance example of the interpretation result is made by Fazlur Rahman who has commented the meaning of the verse not literally, but more contextually so that the interpretation of this verse is further more different than another. According to Fazlur Rahman, the word "fair" is something which is hard to be implemented in a marriage. Specifically, the verse is recited more contextually, so it can be considered as monogamous verses not polygamous in the aspect of principle meaning.⁴ In his mind, understanding al-Qur'an as an aspect that contains social and justical values which are necessarily seen from the backgrounds of al-Qur'an sent down or historical contexts by interpreters through the histories in al-Qur'an is very important to be applied through historical-chronological approaches.⁵

Observing the shift above, the al-Qur'an interpretation in the period of classical, medieval, until modern-contemporary is

an inevitability when communicating texts with the problems faced nowadays. The verse above is often interpreted partially even misunderstood, so it is as if a man were allowed to do polygamy simply without paying attention how the context was when the verse was sent down and what is really the moral idea of practicing polygamy. Therefore, polygamy is understood by interpreters as a rule. However, in the contemporary era, it focuses more on monogamy because it is the purpose and the function of al-Qur'an as a solution to solve problems of mankind.⁶ However, the diversity has become an interpretational discourse caused by some factors that influence and become the background by interpreters

So, an academical problem of the writers related to the phenomena above is: a study of gender verses in surah an-Nisā'(4): 3 has a dynamics which is interesting enough to be studied, then continued to do the research, because academically there has been a lot of research related to the studies on polygamous verses. However, the research done is only comparative studies, and researched some figures as comparative studies and etc. There are some previous studies as a comparison to find out a novelty in this research, they are Saifuddin Zuhri Qudsy and Mamat S. Burhanuddin⁷ "Using Polygamy Hadiths in Ibn Katsir Interpretation." Khozainul Ulum "Amina Wadud Muhsin about his Thought about Polygamy."⁸ Ahmad Baidhowi "Muslim Feminist al-Qur'an Interpretation by Feminists Muslims about Polygamy."⁹ Mansur

³Abdul Mustaqim, *Dinamika Sejarah Tafsir al-Qur'an (Studi Aliran-aliran Tafsir dari Periode Klasik, Pertengahan, hingga Modern-Kontemporer)* (Yogyakarta: Idea Press, 2016), 145-146.

⁴Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, translated by Ahsin Muhammad (Bandung: Pustaka, 1984), 44.

⁵Taufik Adnan Amal, *Islam dan Tantangan Modernitas (Studi atas Pemikiran Hukum Fazlur Rahman)* (Bandung: Mizan, 1989), 158.

⁶Abdul Jalil, "Wanita dalam Poligami: Studi Pemikiran Muhammad Syahrur", *Cendekia: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 2, no. 1 (2016): 3.

⁷Saifuddin Zuhri Qudsy and Mamat S. Burhanuddin, "Penerapan Hadis-Hadis Poligami dalam Tafsir Ibnu Katsir," *Musâwa* 15, no. 2 (2016).

⁸Khozainul Ulum, "Amina Wadud Muhsin Dan Pemikirannya Tentang Poligami," *Al-Hikmah: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 7, no.1 (2017)

⁹Ahmad Baidhowi, "Penafsiran Feminis Muslim terhadap

“Deconstruction of Polygamy Interpretation Analyzes Dialectics between Texts and Contexts.”¹⁰ Mustafa “Polygamy in the study of Maudhu’i Interpretation.”¹¹ Meanwhile, in this research, the writers talk about the causes of interpretation shift, which become a novelty and academical anxiety. Based on the literature review, the writers consider that this research has a novelty value and contributions to knowledge which are significant enough because academically this research discusses the interpretation shift in the classical, medieval, and modern-contemporary era through an approach (descriptive analysis) by analyzing commentary books, journals, and some relevant references.¹²

Result and Discussion

Based on the theoretical review, the word “Polygamy” in an Arabic dictionary is called *ta’addud zaujāt* تعدد الزوجات (*couple*). In a further study, the word polygamy is composed of two parts; Poly means many (more than one). Gamy means wife. In short, it means that a man marries more than one women. As Allah states it in Alqur’an as follows:

وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تُقْسِطُوا فِي الْيَتَامَىٰ فَانكِحُوا مَا طَابَ
لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ مِثْلَىٰ مَثَلَىٰ ۚ وَتِلْكَ أَوْرَاقُهَا ۚ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا
تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَلَّا
تَعُولُوا ﴿٢٠٠﴾

Its Meaning “And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls,, then marry those that please you of (other) women;

Ayat al-Qur’an tentang Poligini,” *Jurnal: Sosio-Religia* 8, no. 3 (2009).

¹⁰Mansur, “Dekonstruksi Tafsir Poligami Mengurai Dialektika Teks dan Kontekstual,” *Jurnal Al-Ahwal* 1, no. 1, (2008)

¹¹Mustafa, “Poligami dalam Kajian Tafsir Maudhu’i,” *Al-Bayyinah* 3 no. 2 (2019).

¹²Rosihon Anwar, *Ilmu Tafsir, first edition* (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2000), 178.

two, or three, or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then (marry only) one or(the slaves) your right hands possess.. That is nearer to prevent you from doing injustice.”¹³

1. The Interpretation in the Classical Century

If the interpretation was analyzed at the beginning of the classical age; for example, the Ibnu Katsir interpretation commented the verse based on the epistemology of hadiths, the stories of prophet Muhammad’s friends. Furthermore, Ibnu Katsir understands more about nash by using textual method, not contextual meaning. So, when the verse contains a command to marry women; more than one, two, three until four women. Therefore, literally it is allowed for a man to marry more than one women with a requiremen; the rights of his wives must be fulfilled fairly. It is asserted by Ibnu Katsir based on the story of Ibn Abbas and the numbers of scholars because the context of the verse tells about enjoyment and it is allowed.¹⁴ Ibn Katsir understands the following as it is said:

“And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of (other) women; two, or three, or four.”

Based on some stories in the Ibn Katsir book from al-Bukhari stated through Abdul Aziz Abdillah until Ibrahim bin Sa’ad from Shalih bin khaisan from Ibnu Syihab told: Urwah bin az-Zubair informed me that she asked Aisyah as Allah says;

“and if you fear that you will not be just, towards the rights of the orphan girsl (if you marry them. So,, Aisyah answered”

¹³Kementerian Agama RI, *Al-Qur’an dan Terjemahan* (Bandung: Mikraj Khazanah Ilmu, 2016), 27.

¹⁴Imam Ibnu Katsir, *Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Adzim*, Vol. III, first edition (Surakarta: Insan Kamil, 2015), 232.

“my niece was an orphan girl who was raised by a guardian, he did not give her a dowry like what he had given to other women, so the guardian was prohibited to marry her except he paid the dowry fairly. And if his dowry is the highest one, then the guardian was asked to marry other women.

So, the meaning of Allah’s commandment “Marry the women whom you want except those have mentioned previously, if anyone of you wants to marry, you may marry two, three, even until four women”. As mentioned by Imam Ahmad, Ismail dan Muhammad bin Ja’far told us, both said that Ma’mar told us from Aziz Zuhri. Abu ja’far said in his hadith: Ibnu Syihab informed us from Salim, from his father, Ghailan bin Salamah ats-Tsaqafi embraced Islam with ten wives, then the prophet Muhammad said, “Choose four of them!”¹⁵ Then, in the Ibn Katsir’s commentary book, he strengthened through a hadith told by Abu Dawud and Ibn Majah, the prophet Muhammad said, “if you marry the women whom you like, please marry them, and choose four of them”.¹⁶

The next interpretation in the classical age is the at-Tabari interpretation in the al-Mustasna hadith story which told us, “if you fear that you are not deal justly (the rights) with the orphan girls (if you marry them), so marry the women that you like: two, three, or four” Allah says, “As you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls (if you marry them), so you must fear if you cannot be just, and be just with women. Therefore, do not marry them except those you like. You may marry one, two, three and four. Textually, the verse shows that a permission to marry women whom a man loves. As Allah says (If you keep your authority for other woman, so

you may marry the women who are permitted and legalized to you; two, three, and four. But, if you fear with the authority you have in marrying the number of women you want to marry, so do not marry more than one women.¹⁷

The writers comment the at-Tabari interpretation that the concept of the verse an-Nisā’ [4]: 3 is often legitimized as a concept of polygamy which comes from understanding textually. Furthermore, the prohibition of polygamy in hadiths has not appeared yet, so in the stories of interpretation emphasized on marrying women as long as their rights can guaranteedly be fulfilled. As a result, many interpreters permit polygamy in a marriage because historically there were many orphans, so al-Qur’an commands to marry them. Al-Qur’an has limited a man to marry four women, not more than ten women. Textually, it is often legitimized as a permission to do polygamy.¹⁸ The interpretation of the classical theologians often tended to understand al-Qur’an textually without considering it contextually, so it usually seems that the interpretation is partial, not dynamic especially in the methodology and the epistemology which come from texts of al-Qur’an and Hadiths. In this context, as a study was conducted by Wely Dozan in her article The Epistemology of Interpretation in the Classical Era, it is necessary to map the methodology and the source of interpretation epistemology in the classical era as follows:¹⁹

¹⁷Abu Ja’far Muhammad bin Jarir at-Tabari, *Tafsir at-Tabari Qur’an Surah Ali ‘Imran dan an-Nisa’*, Vol. 6 (Jakarta: Pustaka Azzam, 2008), 396.

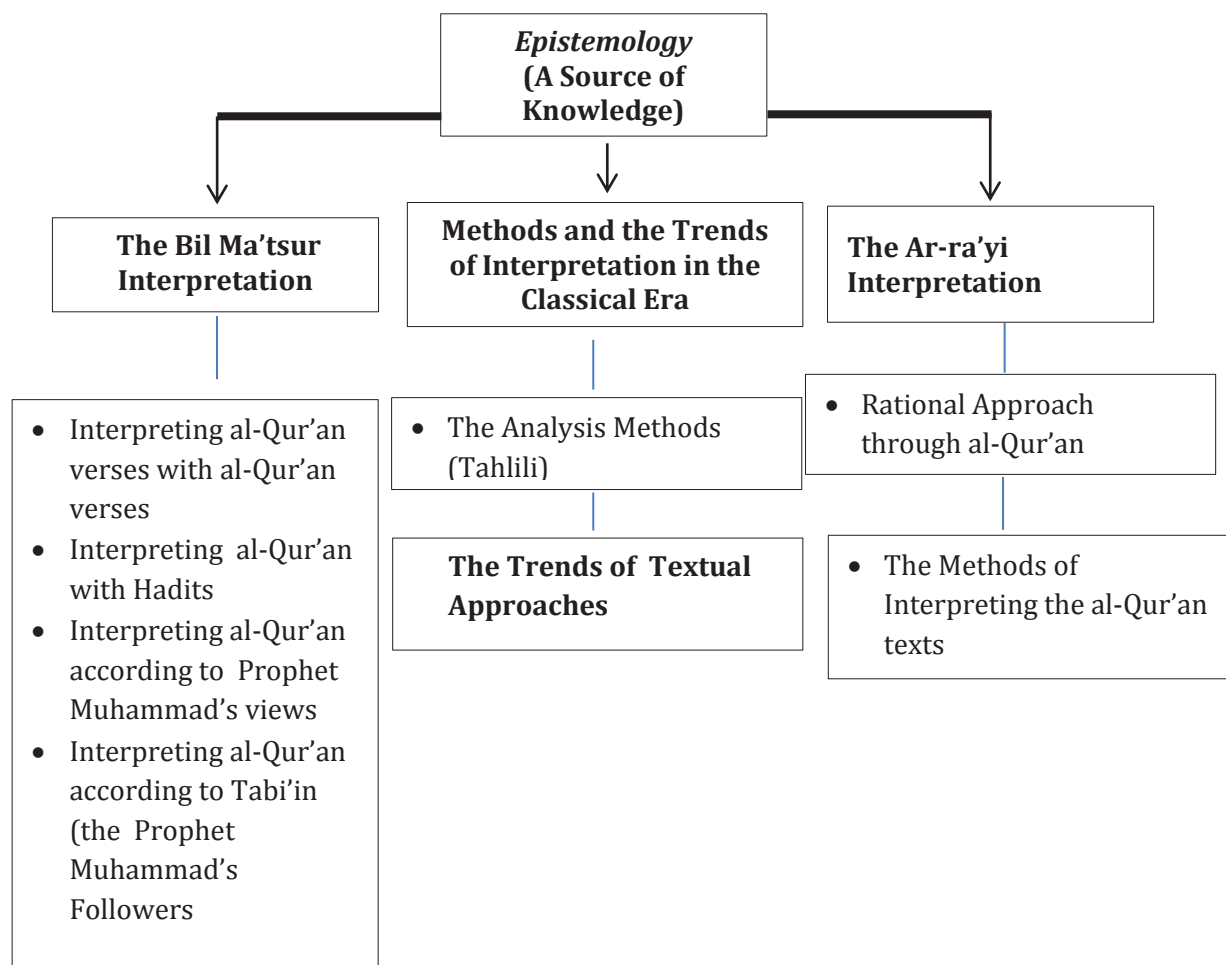
¹⁸Yusuf Qardhawi, *Perempuan dalam perspektif Islam*, translated by KH. Ghazali Mukri, second edition (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Fahima, 2006), 145.

¹⁹Wely Dozan, “Epistemologi Tafsir Klasik “Studi Analisis Pemikiran Ibn Katsir,” *Falasifa: Jurnal studi keIslaman* 10, no. 2 (2019): 157.

¹⁵Imam Ibn Katsir, *Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Adzim...*, 230-232.

¹⁶Ibid., 240.

Figure 1. Methodology and the source of interpretation epistemology in the classical era



According to the writers, the mapping of epistemology made by interpretation theologians in the classical era is still based on understanding textually without considering the history of al-Qur'an; contextual understanding. It is as a reason of the understanding of interpretation in the classical era (Ibn Katsir and at-Thabari) often legitimized especially the verse of an-Nisâ' (4): 3 as the verse about the permission of doing polygamy in a marriage with a requirement; being fair as its main requirement. In one side, the classical interpretation limits on the use of Hadith studies and the development of rational interpretation (*al-ra'yi*). So, if the verse is interpreted textually, it contains a command to marry women (two, three, even until four). It is mentioned in the history of hadiths that there is no prohibition for a man to

do polygamy. The writers conclude a concept of the classical interpretation that contextual understanding can influence the methodology of interpretation. So, the conclusion is that it is allowed to do polygamy as long as women's rights can be fulfilled fairly.²⁰

2. The Interpretation in the Medieval Century

The interpretation in the medieval century as in the interpretation of ar-Razi that it is different from the classical interpretation. Ar-Razi understands this verse that allows the polygamy with requirements: be fair and the women's rights are fulfilled based on their needs or ideologies. On the other hand, if the

²⁰Saiful Amin Ghafur, *Profil Mufassir al-Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Insan Madani, 2008), 25.

polygamy in a marriage is not done fairly, just marry one woman because it is one of the best way.²¹ The interpretation of surah an-Nisā' [4]: 3 is not understood to give a big chance to do polygamy, however, it views some emphasis and requirements that must be fulfilled; be fair.

Furthermore, ar-Razi explained *qira'at* and also asserted that it is read *nasab (fawâhidatan)* it means that just choose one wife and leave polygamy, because it must be based on justice, it is allowed to do it when there is a justice. When it is read *rafa' (fawâhidatun) fa hasbukum wâhidatun* or *fa kaffat wâhidatun*, it means that one wife is enough.²² The writers conclude that the diversity ways of reading texts can affect the interpretation shift of al-Qur'an, as the word *fawahidah* in general, it consists of two aspects of reading; *firstly*, the word *fawahidatan* means a looseness toward doing polygamy because the principle of al-Qur'an is a command, so it is interpreted as a command to do polygamy as long as women's rights are fulfilled. *Secondly*, the word *fawahidatun* means enough to marry one. It means that there is no a looseness to do polygamy as the theologians' opinions that the writers have mentioned above.

As it is mentioned in the interpretation of the priest al-Zarkasyi that, *qira'at* is the differences of al-Qur'an pronunciation which deal with its letters and the ways of pronouncing them as well.²³ *Secondly*, Mannâ' al-Qattân defined that *qira'at* is a science that studies about *qirâ'ât* differences. Al-Qur'an will cause different opinions (theologians) in (*istinbat*) law.²⁴ *Based on the definition above, it can be known that the ontology*

aspect of qirâ'ât science is al-Qur'an from the aspect of pronunciation differences and the ways of its articulation. Meanwhile, from the epistemological aspect of *qirâ'ât study is a science which studies related with the stories that came from Rasulullah SAW*. In axiology, the use of *qirâ'ât* study as mentioned by al-Zarqâniy in *Manâhil al-Irfân* is as one of instruments to maintain the originality of al-Qur'an and as a key to interpret al-Qur'an.²⁵

In the interpretation of surah an-Nisā' [4]: 3 there is a reading variety of interpreters when meaning a text word (Lafadz) *fawahidah* there is a different *qirâ'ât*: *First*, al-Hasan, al-Jahdari, Ibn Hurmuz, and Abu Ja'far reads *rafa (fawahidatun)*. *Second*, the seven priest of *qirâ'ât* read *nasab (fawahidatan)*. In understanding both of the reading (*qirâ'ât*) al-Zamakhsyari and Ibnu Athiyyah differ between both. The *qirâ'ât* that reads (*fawahidatan*) means if you worry that you cannot be fair to orphan women, you must also worry to be unfair toward other women whom you marry; two, three or four. This understanding is strengthened by the background of this verse which was sent down (*sabab nuzul*) expressed by Ibnu Abbâs who said that a half of Arabian people fear to the wealth of orphan women, because of worrying they hesitate to marry them. However, they do not worry to be fair towards their wives.

Qirâ'ât (reading) which reads *rafa' (fawahidatun)* according to Ibnu Athiyyah functions as *mubtada', khabar muqaddar*, it means that (if a man is not able to be fair to his wives, just marry one woman). Based on the explanation above, the writers conclude that there is a variety of understanding in reading a text, so it can be understood that *Qirâ'ât that reads rafa' gives an explanation and a confirmation that marrying more than one women*

²¹Fakhr al-Din ar-Razi, *al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, Vol. 9, first edition (Beirut: Dâr al-Fikr, 1981), 182.

²²Ibid., 282.

²³Imam Badr al-Din Muhammad al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan fi Ulumul al-Qur'an*, Vol. 1, second edition (Mesir, Isa al-Babi al-Halabi, n.d.), 318.

²⁴Mannâ' al-Qattân, *Mabâhith fi Ulûm al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Mansyûrât al-Ashr al-Haditsah, 1973), 181.

²⁵Muhammad Abd al-Azhîm al-Zarqâniy, *Manâhil al-Irfân fi Ulûm al-Qur'an*, Vol. I, 21.

requires a man to be fair toward his wives. The meaning of fair is too broad. Being fair in giving livelihood, clothes, and love. Regarding to the latter type of being fair, dividing love is so hard, according to justice experts it is not included as a requirement in polygamy, as it was stated by Abu Hayyân. Being fair is so hard to be fulfilled by the person who does the polygamy, because of that reason, just marry one woman, it is based on the understanding of Ibnu Athiyyah's and al-Zamakhsyari's opinions as cited by Abu Hayyân.²⁶

As mentioned in Ulumul Qur'an books and other books of *qira'at* studies, that al-Qur'an was sent down with various reading versions and dialects. So, the meaning of al-Qur'an sent down within seven kinds of reading is to give a cue to them in order to get looseness in reading al-Qur'an through which they can choose an easy reading for them.²⁷ Theoretically, *qira'at* means a science which studies the ways of pronouncing al-Qur'an's words which are viewed from the aspect of different narrators. Furthermore, Abdul Mustaqim explained that the differences of *qira'at* (al-Qur'an reading) can cause a different interpretation and be meant variously²⁸ The writers conclude that the interpretation of surah an-Nisâ' (4): 3 in the medieval century generally is influenced by ideological factors and the interpreters' needs because if it is viewed, the interpretation emphasizes on allowing to do polygamy as long as being fair, on the other hand it is not allowed to do polygamy, and if it is allowed to do it, it will really burden. The concept of interpretation in the medieval century is influenced by ideological factors and the interpreters' needs.

²⁶Romlah Widayati, "Memahami Penafsiran Ayat Poligami Melalui Pendekatan Qira'at al-Qur'an: Penafsiran QS. an-Nisa' Ayat 3," *Alim Journal of Islamic Education* 1, no. 1 (2019): 219-220.

²⁷Nashruddin Baidan, *Wawasan Baru Ilmu Tafsir* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2011), 96.

²⁸Abdul Mustaqim, *Dinamika sejarah Tafsir al-Qur'an...*, 17.

3. The Development of Interpretations in the Era of Modern- Contemporary

Next, the development of interpretations in the era of Modern-Contemporary is the development of the epistemology and the methodology of al-Qur'an texts interpretation. The development of interpretations in this era is to present a contextual interpretation and answer problems faced by people. Absolutely, what interpreters have built is the critical epistemology, so the texts of al-Qur'an needs to be reconstructed its methodology and understood contextually. The texts of al-Qur'an verses are not considered as texts only. So, in this case, Fazlur Rahman understands al-Qur'an without interpreting it directly, but al-Qur'an needs to be read from the background of sending down or historical contexts which interpreters call as *asbab al-nuzul* (the causes of revelation). Understanding the history of al-Qur'an is very important in interpreting through historical-cronological approaches.²⁹ As Abduh views that developing thought and looking at the interpretation context are substances which contain and give values for people.³⁰

Fazlur Rahman does not directly understand surah an-Nisâ' (4): 3 textually, but he understands it contextually; it focuses more on the aspect of monogamy, not in the aspect of polygamy, regarding to Rahman's understanding toward al-Qur'an as an effort to create a justice through the process of interpretation. Furthermore, M. Quraish Shihab stated that if the verse is understood as the polygamy verse, it is a small door to do it. Shihab explains that being fair in the context of polygamy is really hard to be implemented and can cause the hardness effects toward women. Shihab concludes that the polygamy is not an effort which has been understood so far, but

²⁹Taufik Adnan Amal, *Islam dan Tantangan Modernitas*, 158.

³⁰Ignas Goldziher, *Mazhab Tafsir: Dari Aliran Klasik Hingga Modern* (Yogyakarta: Elsaq Press, 2003), 444.

it is only as a small door to do the polygamy, so monogamy is an alternative way to uphold fair for communities and people.³¹ Fazlur Rahman commented that the implications of the polygamy toward women cause moral destructions and be unfair especially for women.³² It needs to be reconstructed in Rahman's thought through Hermeneutics studies as theories that are often as a basis of text interpretation which are welcomed and can be interpreted by everyone. Therefore, a text should not be understood based on an author's ideas but based on materials stated in the text.³³

The contemporary interpretation tries to understand al-Qur'an from various aspects of approaches; the approach of al-Qur'an histories (*asbab an-nuzul al-Qur'an*: Macro and Micro), the emerge of hermeneutics,

gender analysis and social studies, the emerge of contextual approach which is appropriate with purposes and al-Qur'an values and the emerge of *maqashidi* interpretation approach. The writers cite an argument from Abdul Mustaqim; *maqashidi* interpretation is to show purposes and al-Qur'an functions presented on the earth. Using the term taken from Abdul Mustaqim to give arguments related to the interpretation methodology of *maqashidi*; excluding values to objectify benefits for people.³⁴ The writers conclude that the contemporary interpretation is a starting point in interpreting al-Qur'an with a few theories and the methodology to form the epistemology. Specifically, the writers try to analyze the epistemology of contemporary interpretation as follows.

Table 1. The Structure of the Interpretation Epistemology in the Reformatory Era with a Critical Thinking³⁵

The Sources of Interpretations	The Methods and the Approaches	Interpretation Validity	The Purposes of Interpretation
<i>Al-Qur'an, Realities, Thought which dialectic circularly</i>	<i>Interdisciplinary, hermeneutic, Gender Analysis Studies</i>	<i>Appropriate with Maqashid Syari'ah, Social Implications</i>	<i>Critical, transformative solutive, interdisciplinary.</i>

³¹M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah (Pesan dan Keserasian al-Qur'an)*, Vol. 2 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2017), 41.

³²Syahiron Syamsudin, *Hermeneutika al-Qur'an dan Hadits* (Yogyakarta: Elsaq Press, 2010), 81.

³³Imam Musbikin, *Isthanthiq al-Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2016), 66.

³⁵Abdul Mustaqim and Saifuddin Zuhri Qudsy, *Pergeseran Epistemologi Tafsir Klasik hingga Kontemporer* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pustaka Pelajar, 2008)

³⁴Abdul Mustaqim, "Argumentasi Keniscayaan Tafsir Maqashidi Sebagai Basis Moderasi Islam," *Pidato Pengukuhan Guru Besar pada Bidang Ulumul Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, 2019), 33.

Based on the structure above, it shows a dynamic process and al-Qur'an interpretation paradigm in the modern-contemporary era. It can be seen from the epistemological aspect of interpretations related to historical and social approaches and tend to see how people respond to the verses of al-Qur'an. It is in line with needs and challenges toward a contextual interpretation. As it is viewed that the interpretation method is representative and comprehensive enough to understand texts and it is very intensive contextualization to make the interpretation seem to create public social values.³⁶

If it is seen at glance, the epistemology offers a logical, critical, and comprehensive method to give a new direction that can systematically and contextually produce an interpretation which is not atomistical, literal, and textual, but the interpretation which can answer recent problems.³⁷ As mentioned at the beginning, the contemporary interpretation is an interpretation or an explanation of al-Qur'an's verses which is suited with contemporary or recent condition; it is an effort to suit religious teachings with the contemporary life by interpreting them suited with the development of sciences and social conditions of the society. The contemporary

interpretation enthusiastically returns al-Qur'an back as a guidance book. Previously, al-Qur'an was assumed by interpreters as a progressive revelation, so they developed a model of reading which is more critical and more productive. Besides, the classical interpreters also believe that al-Qur'an was not sent down to people who did not have cultures; it appeared in the structure of Arabians in the seventh century. It had also been written based on rules of Arabians cultures for twenty years. Therefore, al-Qur'an guidance which is universal can be formulated by considering sites-histories at the time then, to be reformulated based on contemporary contexts through understanding.³⁸

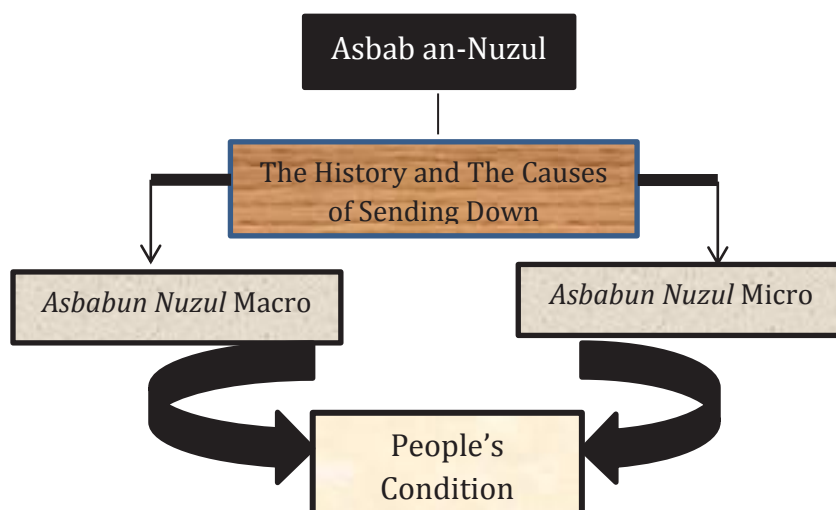
Historical approach in interpreting al-Qur'an extremely influences an interpretation because the historical approach of texts can analyze contemporary and past conditions. The concept of interpretations, especially studies on gender- base verses needs to view studies on *asbab an-nuzul* of al-Qur'an in both aspects; macro and micro. It is important for interpreters in looking at the history of a text. As Fazlur Rahman understands the concept of al-Qur'an by looking at texts through the historical approach. The writers think that the mapping of al-Qur'an histories is very urgent to be carried out as follows:

³⁶Fahrudin Faiz, *Hermeneutika al-Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Qalam, 2007), 8.

³⁷Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago and London: University Press, 1982), 6.

³⁸Muhammad Syahrur, *Prinsip dan Dasar Hermeneutika al-Qur'an Kontemporer*, translated by Sahiron Syamsuddin & Burhanuddin (Yogyakarta: Elsaq Press, 2004), XVI.

Figure 2. Historical Mapping of the Qur'an



According to Amin Abdullah who has new thoughts chooses the term *sabab al-nuzul al-jadid* (the latest) for a macro guidance and *Sabab al-nuzul al-qadim* (the former) for a micro guidance.³⁹ So, Fazlur Rahman really emphasizes on the history of al-Qur'an text sent down because looking at the previous histories and the latest one has different social values.⁴⁰ Therefore, in expressing text messages to be objective, actually it is claimed to leave pre- understanding, it means that understanding of al-Qur'an verses texts must be based on problems faced nowadays (a context has its own context), so, to interpret and to understand texts need social studies in which the texts appeared on implementation steps. Rahman does not use literal meanings of the texts, but ideal moralities of the texts.⁴¹

Generalizing specific responses toward al-Qur'an in the context of determining moral-social purposes to know expression

meanings and al-Qur'an's narrations which are coherent with general values and principles, and systematic as a base of various normative commands. Through this method Rahman tries to understand arguments of responses given by al-Qur'an and concludes law principles or its general requirements. So, Rahman views that al-Qur'an must be understood universally (based on social contexts) not textually related to local-historical events in the past time.

Factors that Cause the Shift of Interpretation Paradigm

1. Internal Factors

Internal factors are factors that come from inside of an interpreter or individually. It means that the objective condition of al-Qur'an texts that is possible and gives a chance to read variously; understanding texts internally.⁴² It really influences when theologians interpret and understand texts. Because every understanding or interpretation of a text, including the holy al-Qur'an book is often really influenced by interpreters' perspectives, cultural backgrounds, and prejudice as factors which are called by Amina

³⁹Amin Abdullah, "Metode Kontemporer dalam Tafsir al-Qur'an: Kesalingketerkaitan Asbabun al-Nuzul al-Qadim dan al-Jadid dalam Tafsir al-Qur'an Kontemporer," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadits* 13, no.1 (2012): 4.

⁴⁰Sibawaihi, *Hermenutika Fazlur Rahman* (Yogyakarta: Jalastura, 2007), 53

⁴¹Abdul Fatah Abdul Gharu al-Qadhi, *Asbab al-Nuzul 'an al-Shababah wa al-Mufassirin* (Mesir: Dâr al-Salam, 2005), 6.

⁴²Abdul Mustaqim, *Dinamika Sejarah Tafsir al-Qur'an...*, 17.

Wadud as *prior texts*. Mostly, different ideas (interpretation) come from different emphasis on one of the three aspects. According to Amina Wadud, to get more objective interpretation, an interpreter has to back to the basic principles of al-Qur'an as a framework of its paradigm. An interpreter should understand *weltanschauung* or world view.⁴³ As Amina Wadud classifies interpretations related to women's problems in al-Qur'an into three categories. *First*, traditional interpretation. The traditional interpretation uses a certain topic based on interests and capabilities of interpreters, such as laws (*fiqh*), *nahwu*, *sharaf*, *History*, *tasawuf* and etc., because those were the results of *ijtihad* (individual interpretations) of the classical interpretation theologians that developed in the classical century until the medieval era.

Next, along with the dynamics of sciences, it has appeared an interpretation model which is atomistic; it means that the interpretation is done verse by verse, and not thematic, so, the discussion looks partial, and there is no an effort of the interpreters to know further its theme and discuss the relationship among al-Qur'an's verses thematically. Indeed, when telling the relationship between one verse and another verse, they do without implementing hermeneutic principles because the methodology which correlates the same things, same ideas or thoughts, *Saraf* syntaxis structure, and principles or similar themes almost does not have. The traditional interpretation model exclusively was written by men, so only the men's awareness and experiences were accommodated within it. Whereas women's experiences, visions and perspectives should be included within it too, so it cannot cause a bias patriarchy which produces an injustice gender.

Next, the approach of reactive interpretation model is an interpretation which contains reactions of modern thinkers toward a number of obstacles and hindrances faced by women as an individual and as a member of a society that are considered coming from al-Qur'an. In this category, many women and people who against al-Qur'an's messages. They use the status of weak women (low) in a society to justify reactions. In this interpretation, there is a new offer related to feminism as an effort to fight against the injustice gender toward women in a family or in a society. Although the interpreters of the second category often focus on their explanations about valid problems, but there is no comprehensive analysis of al-Qur'an, as a result it sometimes causes them preserve and justify women at unfeasible position with a reason that it goes along with the position of women in al-Qur'an.⁴⁴ The reactive interpretation as a model of interpretation to give directions of new development toward an interpretation through obstacles; striving women's rights as struggled by Muhammad Abduh. Feminism Muslims reminded more the destiny of millions women who experienced physical or psychological violances, it is not an al-Qur'an's teaching, but it is a result of interpretations. Most of women were suppressed as if Misogynist interpretation that does not care at all about al-Qur'an's verses whose purpose are to free people.⁴⁵

The next is Holistic Interpretation; it is an interpretation which uses all interpretation methods and correlates to various social, moral, economics problems including women's issues in the modern era. Amina Wadud, as he has admitted before, uses this interpretation. By using the holistic interpretation model, he wants to make al-Qur'an interpretation which contains women's experiences and without

⁴³Khozainul Ulum, *Amina Wadud Muhsin dan Pemikirannya Tentang Poligami...*, 14-15.

⁴⁴Yunahar Ilyas, *Kesetaraan Gender dalam al-Qur'an...*, 16.

⁴⁵Nelyy Van Doorn-Harder, *Menimbang Tafsir Perempuan Terhadap al-Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Percik, 2008), 30.

stereotype made in most of men's interpretation framework.⁴⁶ Holistic interpretation as a base to get out from slump and create a new nuance with various aspects of sciences when dialoguing between texts and realities. A such interpretation nuance tries to understand texts through hermeneutics patterns; interpretation patterns to open many spaces for al-Qur'an reviewers to find out a justice to support a bias gender happening in interpretations. This interpretation produces a new action; a feminism as basis to renew interpretation models and change the perceptions related to interpretation processes.⁴⁷

2. External Factors

External factors are factors that come from outside of texts, it is a subject condition of interpreters such as socio-cultural, politics which produces a thought and influences interpreters in interpreting texts of al-Qur'an. The perspectives and skills or disciplines which are occupied by an interpreter are very significant factors including histories or reference sources used by interpreters.⁴⁸ So, the interpretation in the modern-contemporary era when meaning and understanding texts is not based on hadiths, stories from prophet Muhammad's friends, *tabi'in* (Muhammad's followers after his friends), but understanding based on the texts to explain and interpret what Allah means.⁴⁹

As Syahrur's perspective is mentioned that interpretation traditions is an inevitability for critical, creative, and innovative thinkings in developing, examining, deconstructing, even reconstructing previous theories. Therefore,

an objective reading when understanding texts has to prioritize rationality in order to understand texts of al-Qur'an that must be understood through various approaches and new methodologies that are always developed, and may not stop at one point.⁵⁰ The writers conclude that the interpretation development from the classical era to contemporary era has developed from time to time in different ages. When interpretation theologians in the classical-medieval era allow to do polygamy, but being social and justice are factors to equalize and solve justice and new methods in interpretations. This is a main factor that influences the shift of al-Qur'an interpretations.

The main stream of interpretations in the development of modern-contemporary era is constructing arguments through a gender analysis approach and broadly contextual approaches. The contextual approach is a first step in formulating a methodology and an interpretation. The main thing of the interpretation development in the modern-contemporary era is the purpose of interpretations to omit a biased gender, so the real concept of interpretations can be accepted by all societies. Frequently, gender interpretation studies impact more discriminative and do not find out values and purposes of al-Qur'an sent down. Individual interpretations (Ijtihad) of modern-contemporary thoughts with the appearance of a few theories and just methodologies is to struggle rights and gender equality, so the bias toward interpretations is based on texts and contexts.

⁴⁶Abdul Mustaqim, *Dinamika Sejarah Tafsir al-Qur'an...*, 36-37.

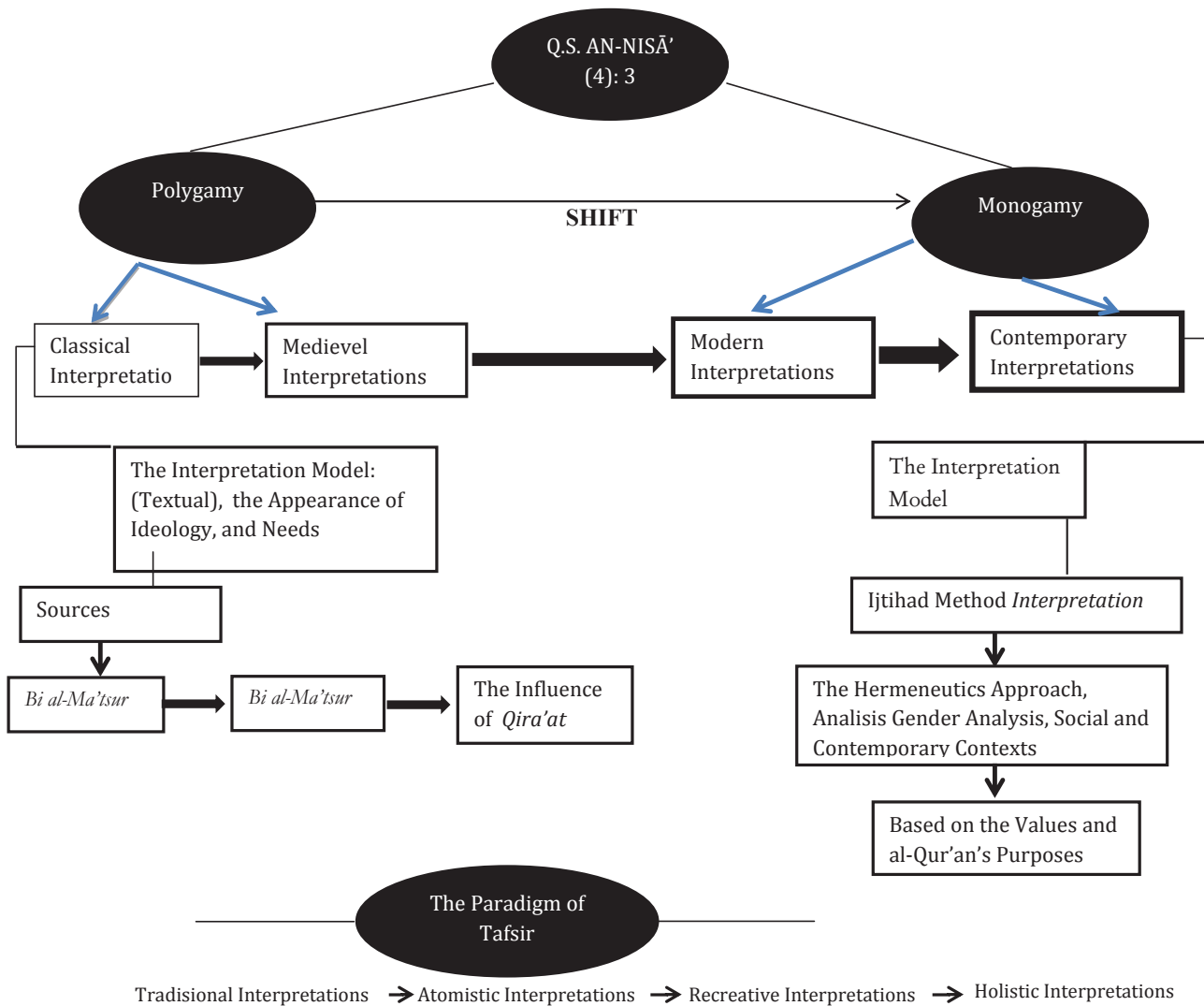
⁴⁷Nelly Van Doorn-Harder, *Menimbang Tafsir Perempuan Terhadap Al-Qur'an...*, 21.

⁴⁸Ahmad Izzan, *Metodologi Ilmu Tafsir...*, 82.

⁴⁹Hasan Hanafi, *Hermeneutika al-Qur'an*, translated by Yudian Wahyudi and Hamdiah Latif (Yogyakarta: Pesantren Nawasea Press, 2009), 35.

⁵⁰Muhammad Syahrur, *Prinsip dan Dasar Hermeneutika al-Qur'an Kontemporer...*, 6-7.

Figure 3. The Structure of Interpretation Shift in Surah an-Nisā' (4): 3
From the Classical to Contemporary Era



Conclusion

Based on the result of the discussion above, it shows that the shift of al-Qur'an interpretation has happened especially in the views of the classical, medieval, and modern-contemporary interpretations. There are some aspects that the interpretation shift has happened. *First*, methodologies and interpretation approaches; the interpretations in the era (classical and medieval) frequently understand *nash* (al-Qur'an and Hadiths) textually and physically without considering contextual aspects. However, interpretations in the modern era

delve more about meanings contextually by omitting bias of patriarchy, so its bias toward interpretation does not conclude as a command of *nash* to do polygamy. *Second*, the shift of meaning; the interpretations in the era (classical-medieval) tend to understand surah an-Nisā' (4): 3 as a command to do polygamy. While the interpretations in the era modern focus more on monogamous aspects.

The factors that cause the interpretation shift are internal and external factors. Internal factors can influence internally both in readings and interpretation methods. While

the external factors are factors that influence from the outside of interpreters such as politics, cultures, patriarchies, and ideology. The classification and interpretation paradigms are traditional interpretations, atomistic interpretations, recreative interpretations, and holistic interpretations. The contextualization especially in the contexts of contemporary era is that the interpretations of surah an-Nisā' (4): 3, almost all interpretations are textual, understanding it more is as a command not to do polygamy, although in fact the text contains a command. Reconstructing epistemological reasons by using contextual approach gets a conclusion which emphasizes on the aspect of monogamy; just marry only one woman.

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