

Epistemological Tensions between Qur'anic Revisionism and Decolonial Thought: A New Concept Integrative-Critical Tafsir

Alif Hibatullah¹, Abdul Kadir Riyadi²

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia

¹alifhibatullah07@gmail.com, ²abd.kadir@uinsa.ac.id

Abstract

This study examines the epistemological tension between devisionism and decolonial thought in contemporary Qur'anic studies. Revisionism emphasizes the historical-critical examination of the Qur'an as a human artifact, while decolonialism highlights the importance of epistemic autonomy grounded in both spiritual authority and rationality. The study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach with a comparative analysis of key scholars such as Patricia Crone, Michael Cook, and Joseph Lumbard, etc. The findings reveal a significant gap in the previous literature, as both paradigms have often been studied separately without efforts toward synthesis. Through theoretical analysis, this article proposes an integrative-critical tafsir model that combines the methodological precision of Western philology with the spiritual and ethical awareness of Islamic epistemology. By restoring Muslim epistemic agency while maintaining academic rigor, this framework provides a transformative middle ground for relevant Islamic scholarship. The case study of surah Al-Baqarah verse 144, concerning the change of the *qiblah*, is used to demonstrate how historical accuracy can coexist with spiritual meaning. This research affirms that integrative-critical interpretation offers a new epistemological framework for Qur'anic studies one that is both scientifically grounded and spiritually rooted bridging Western rationality and Islamic revelation, while guiding scholars to navigate the intersection of history, revelation, and wisdom through a more epistemically comprehensive interpretive methodology.

Keywords: Revisionism, Decolonization, Contemporary Tafsir Studies, Comparation Analysis, integrative-critical tafsir

Introduction

Contemporary Qur'anic studies are currently at a crucial crossroads, driven by a tension between the revisionist approach and the decolonization movement. While revisionism tries to deconstruct the historical origins of the Qur'an through a skeptical lens, the decolonization movement aims to free this field from Western dominance in scholarship. This dynamic has grown

Corresponding author:

Alif Hibatullah, e-mail: alifhibatullah07@gmail.com

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beyond simple differences in methods into a fundamental debate over who has the authority to define the scientific nature of Qur'anic studies.¹

The revisionist tradition, pioneered by figures such as John Wansbrough, Patricia Crone, and Michael Cook, challenges Islamic tradition by treating the Qur'an as a historical artifact subject to philological and archaeological scrutiny. However, this skeptical current is no longer monolithic. Recent developments indicate a "post-revisionist" shift, in which scholars like Nicolai Sinai and Angelika Neuwirth offer a more nuanced approach one that acknowledges the Qur'an's context within *late antiquity* while still respecting its internal coherence and canonical development. Moreover, the source-critical works of Harald Motzki and Fred Donner have provided important methodological balance, demonstrating that early Islamic traditions can be analyzed rigorously without adopting a purely skeptical stance. Despite these advancements, Western academic paradigms often remain rooted in a positivist-secular framework that marginalizes the theological and spiritual dimensions of the text.²

In response, the decolonization movement, led by scholars such as Joseph E. B. Lumbard and Wael Hallaq, argues that so called "scientific" neutrality often serves as a façade for epistemic colonialism. They contend that the dominance of Western methodologies has, for centuries, relegated the Islamic intellectual tradition to a subordinate position treated as an object of study rather than as a living source of knowledge. The core problem is that these two movements revisionism and decolonization are often framed as binary opposites: the former viewed as objective but faith-neutral, and the latter as authentic but potentially apologetic.³

The tension between the empirical-historical revisionist approach and the spiritually-focused decolonization movement reflects the epistemic dilemma faced by Muslim scholars in balancing theological integrity with scientific objectivity on a global stage.⁴ This dynamic shifts the focus of Qur'anic studies from simple interpretation techniques to a broader discussion on the authority of paradigms, while also attempting to bridge the gap between religious tradition and modern science that has been separated since the colonial era.⁵ Through decolonization, revelation is reintegrated into modern scientific practice to balance the power relations between faith and reason, as well as tradition and modernity, without losing the critical-rational values of revisionism.⁶

Scholarship regarding revisionism and decolonization in Qur'anic studies has become a significant discourse in the last two decades, yet both are frequently discussed in isolation and rarely examined within a comparative epistemological framework. In Western literature, works such as

¹ Hadia Mubarak, "Modern Approaches to Qur'anic Interpretation," ed. Hadia Mubarak, *Rebellious Wives, Neglectful Husbands: Controversies in Modern Qur'anic Commentaries* (Oxford University Press, March 24, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197553305.003.0004>.

² Necmettin Salih Ekiz, "What Do Orientalist Qur'anic Studies Mean For A Muslim?," *Journal of Tafsir Studies* 7, no. 1 (2023): 35, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31121/tader.1316371>.

³ Joseph E. B. Lumbard, "Decolonizing Qur'anic Studies," *Religions* 13, no. 2 (2022): 1, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020176>.

⁴ Zaryan D Kareem, "What Is Empiricism? Critically Evaluate Its Value When Writing History," OTS Canadian Journal 2, no. 5 (2023): 12, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.58840/5t33ys67>; Deirdre C Byrne and Josephine Olofunmilayo Alexander, "Decolonising Speculative Fiction," *Image & Text*, no. 37 (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.17159/2617-3255/2023/n37a28>.

⁵ Akbar and Michelle Picard, "A Conceptual Framework of Academic Integrity in Islam," in International Conference on Muslim Society and Thought (Surabaya: Faculty of Ushuluddin and Philosophy UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, 2024), 248, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15642/ICMUST.4.2024.1674>.

⁶ Unun Zumairoh Asr Himsyah and Kholili Hasib, "Decolonization of Contemporary Science According to Professor Syed M. Naquib Al-Attas as the Aufklarung Movement in Islam," *Adabuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran* 3, no. 1 (2023): 60, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.38073/adabuna.v3i1.1117>.

Quranic Studies Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation,⁷ and *HAGARISM: The Making of The Islamic World*,⁸ stand as strong representations of the revisionist approach, which positions the Qur'an as a historical text gradually formed through early Arab social and cultural processes. This type of scholarship attempts to dismantle what is referred to as the “official narrative” of Islamic history and strives to reinterpret the origins of the Qur'an through philological and historical-critical approaches.

On the other hand, a counter-current has emerged that seeks to correct the dominance of the Orientalist paradigm through the decolonization movement. A figure like Joseph E. B. Lumbard wrote a pivotal article titled “Decolonizing the Study of Islam and the Qur'an”, which highlights how the Western epistemic system has framed the academic world's understanding of Islam.⁹ In addition to Lumbard, thinkers such as Wael Hallaq also contribute to the broader framework of the decolonization of knowledge in Islamic studies. They affirm that modern Islamic sciences must return to Islamic epistemic values rooted in the tradition of revelation, rather than solely adhering to the Western model of positivistic rationality.¹⁰

A journal article by Sajjad Rizvi advocates for a decolonization approach in Qur'anic studies that not only reverses old views but also examines them in greater depth. This approach invites us to critically scrutinize assumptions and ways of thinking inherited from colonial and European traditions, while simultaneously appreciating the diverse ways in which Muslims understand and experience the Qur'an. The ultimate goal is to build a unified scholarship and restore epistemic justice, by acknowledging the political dimension in the scientific process and opening space for more authentic and diverse perspectives, rather than merely replacing one dominant discourse with another.¹¹

The journal article by Muhammad Rafii and Fridiyanto argues primarily that the idea of revisionist Islam popularized by Mun'im Sirry in Indonesia constitutes an academic invitation for Muslim scholars to re-examine Islamic sources in pursuit of historical truth. According to Sirry, the Islam currently adhered to by Muslims still fails to clearly distinguish between historical fact and theological belief. Muhammad Rafii and Fridiyanto found that Sirry supports several theses from earlier revisionist scholars, such as John Wansbrough and Ignaz Goldziher, regarding the numerous distortions in the history, teachings, and rituals of Muslims that, in fact, differ from early Islamic practices.¹²

This research identifies a significant gap in the literature: although many studies describe these paradigms separately, deep comparative analyses that seek a synthesis remain rare. Most scholars working within Western or traditional Islamic frameworks face an “epistemic dilemma” struggling to maintain critical-rational standards without sacrificing their theological integrity. Therefore, this study moves beyond mere description to answer a fundamental question: How can

⁷ John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, 1st ed. (New York: Globe Pequot Publishing, 2004).

⁸ Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *HAGARISM: The Making of The Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁹ Lumbard, “Decolonizing Qur'anic Studies.”

¹⁰ Wael B. Hallaq, *Restating Orientalism* (Columbia University Press, 2018), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/hall18762>.

¹¹ Sajjad Rizvi, “Reversing the Gaze? Or Decolonizing the Study of the Qur'an,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 33 (2021): 134, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-12341511>.

¹² Muhammad Rafii and Fridiyanto, “Memahami Konsep Islam Revisionis Mun'im Sirry,” *Nizham: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 9, no. 1 (2022): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.32332/nizham.v10i1.6851>.

the critical-historical rigor of modern scholarship be integrated with the decolonial demand for epistemic justice? This article aims to build an integrative framework that bridges the gap between these two currents. By analyzing the methodological foundations of revisionism from Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, alongside the epistemological critique of decolonization by Joseph Lumbard, this research proposes a “Middle Path.” This path seeks a way to study the Qur'an that is both scientifically critical and spiritually grounded, ensuring that Qur'anic studies in the global era is no longer a field of intellectual conflict, but a collaborative effort to seek knowledge that respects both history and revelation.

Method

This research employs a qualitative approach,¹³ using the library research method.¹⁴ The primary data sources include seminal works from revisionist figures such as John Wansbrough (*Quranic Studies*), Michael Cook and Patricia Crone (*Hagarism*), and Mun'im Sirry (*Scriptural Polemics*), as well as works by decolonial figures such as Joseph E. B. Lumbard (*Decolonizing the Study of Islam and the Qur'an*) and Wael Hallaq (*Restating Orientalism*). Secondary data are drawn from journal articles, conference proceedings, and books discussing the epistemological debates within Islamic studies.

The analytical framework is built upon a critical hermeneutic approach, which is operationalized through a systematic comparative analysis.¹⁵ To ensure analytical transparency, the comparison is conducted based on four specific criteria: ontology (the nature and status of the Qur'an), epistemology (the sources and validity of knowledge), methodology (the analytical tools employed), and authority (the power structures that validate scholarly truth). By applying these categories, the research moves beyond descriptive summaries to uncover the underlying philosophical assumptions of each paradigm.

The hermeneutic process is executed in three distinct stages. First, the textual excavation stage involves identifying and mapping the core arguments and epistemic biases within the selected primary works.¹⁶ Second, the dialectical comparison stage utilizes the four criteria mentioned above to pinpoint areas of irreconcilable conflict and potential convergence between the revisionist and decolonial approaches. In this stage, the research scrutinizes how each paradigm responds to the epistemic dilemma faced by modern scholars.¹⁷ Finally, the synthetical reflection stage aims to construct a new methodological framework that integrates critical-historical rigor with decolonial justice.¹⁸ This structured approach ensures that the findings are not merely reflective but provide a robust theoretical contribution to the advancement of contemporary Islamic scholarship.

¹³ M. Djunaidi Ghony and Fauzan Almansur, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Yogyakarta: Ar-Ruz Media, 2017), 25.

¹⁴ Sugiyono, *Memahami Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2010), 82.

¹⁵ Kusroni and Mukhammad Zamzami, “Revisiting Methodology of Qur'anic Interpretation: A Thematic Contextual Approach to the Qur'an,” *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadith* 11, no. 1 (June 18, 2021): 200, <https://doi.org/10.15642/mutawatir.2021.11.1.177-202>.

¹⁶ Rasha Alsaigh and Imelda Coyne, “Doing a Hermeneutic Phenomenology Research Underpinned by Gadamer's Philosophy: A Framework to Facilitate Data Analysis,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 20 (January 1, 2021): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211047820>.

¹⁷ Jairo I Fúnez-Flores, “Decolonial and Ontological Challenges in Social and Anthropological Theory,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 39, no. 6 (March 9, 2022): 21–41, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02632764211073011>.

¹⁸ Eyob Balcha Gebremariam, “Decentering Coloniality: Epistemic Justice, Development Studies and Structural Transformation,” *The European Journal of Development Research* 37, no. 2 (2025): 442, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-024-00681-6>.

Result and Discussion

Result

Theoretical Study of Qur'anic Revisionism

The development of Qur'anic studies in the modern world cannot be separated from the powerful influence of the Western Orientalist tradition. It is within this context that the so-called revisionist approach to Qur'anic studies emerged an intellectual current that attempts to reconstruct the origins of the Qur'anic text through historical-critical and philological methods. The revisionist movement was born from the academic spirit to review the traditional Islamic narrative regarding the history of revelation, the codification of the mushaf, and the authority of transmission (*riwāyah*).¹⁹ In the view of revisionists, the Qur'an is not a text that was revealed instantaneously, perfectly, and finally, but rather the result of a long and complex historical process within early Arab society.

The roots of revisionist thought can be traced back to the development of Semitic philology and Biblical studies in 19th-century Europe. Orientalists like Theodor Nöldeke and Ignaz Goldziher had already paved the way for a historical approach to Islamic texts. However, it was only in the second half of the 20th century, especially since the publication of the monumental work *Quranic Studies* by John Wansbrough, that the revisionist approach took a more systematic and radical form. Wansbrough viewed the Qur'an not as a pure Arabic text emerging in Mecca and Medina during the time of Prophet Muhammad, but rather as a product of Jewish and Christian traditions. He argued that the Qur'anic text only achieved its canonical form after a long period of redaction and theological polemics between the Muslim and Jewish-Christian communities.²⁰

Wansbrough's view was subsequently developed by his students, such as Michael Cook and Patricia Crone, in their controversial work, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*. Both rejected the use of early Islamic sources (such as *hadīth*, *sīrah*, and *tafsīr*) because they were considered too apologetic and written long after the events they narrated. In their place, they utilized non-Muslim sources like Byzantine, Armenian, and Syriac chronicles to reconstruct early Islamic history. In their view, the early Islamic community was a religious movement that emerged from a Jewish and Eastern Christian environment, and only later formed its own distinct identity.²¹ From this perspective, the Qur'an is seen not merely as a Divine revelation but as a historical document reflecting the ideological struggles among various monotheistic communities of that era.

Although the theories of Wansbrough, Crone, and Cook drew considerable criticism from both Muslim scholars and moderate Orientalists, they opened up a new discursive space in Qur'anic studies.²² The revisionist approach introduced rigorous philological methods, the use of cross-religious sources, and linguistic analysis of the text's structure. Consequently, Qur'anic studies are no longer viewed solely as a theological field, but also as a branch of religious studies. This approach emphasizes the importance of scientific objectivity and detachment from claims of faith, allowing it to be tested by the same academic standards as studies of other sacred texts, such as the Gospel or the Torah.

¹⁹ D. V. Mukhetdinov, "A Brief History Sketch On The Genesis Study Of The Quranic Corpus In Western Quranic Studies (From The 19th Century To The Present Day)," *Minbar: Islamic Studies* 16, no. 3 (October 3, 2023): 647, <https://doi.org/10.31162/2618-9569-2023-16-3-647-682>.

²⁰ Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, 78.

²¹ Crone and Cook, *HAGARISM: The Making of The Islamic World*, 6.

²² Roxanne D. Marcotte, "New Trends in Qur'anic Studies: Text, Context, and Interpretation," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 33, no. 1 (January 2, 2022): 99–101, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2022.2031656>.

Within the context of contemporary Muslim scholars, revisionist ideas are met with diverse responses. One key figure who occupies a unique position in this discourse is Mun'im Sirry, an Indonesian Muslim intellectual active in the Western academic world. In his work *Scriptural Polemics: The Qur'an and Other Religions*, Sirry attempts to understand the Qur'an using a historical approach that is open to the context of religious pluralism in the early Middle East. He does not reject the validity of the Qur'anic text as revelation but endeavors to read it through the lens of history, particularly in its interaction with Jewish and Christian traditions. Mun'im Sirry views that reading the Qur'an historically does not necessarily negate its transcendent aspect, but rather opens up a space for dialogue between the text and the social reality that gave rise to it.²³

On the other hand, there are also Muslim scholars who respond to revisionism with a critical and defensive attitude. They argue that the revisionist approach often neglects the Islamic epistemic context and measures the sacred text based on Western positivistic standards. This critique is voiced by figures like Fazlur Rahman, who, in his work *Islam and Modernity*, affirmed the importance of a historical approach to the Qur'an, but within the framework of the *double movement* a reciprocal motion between the context of revelation and the contemporary context.²⁴ Rahman rejects historical reductionism of the kind found in revisionism, as it is seen to eliminate the Qur'an's moral and normative dimension as a guide for life.

This debate indicates that Qur'anic revisionism touches not only upon the aspect of methodology but also the core issue of Islamic epistemology, how to understand revelation in a modern context without losing its spiritual meaning. The revisionist approach emphasizes the importance of historical verification, whereas Islamic epistemology proceeds from a belief in a Divine source of knowledge. It is within this tension that the need arises to re-examine the foundations of scholarship in Qur'anic studies, so as not to be trapped between two extremes: a total rejection of modern critique, or a blind acceptance of Western rationality.

Although revisionism is often accused of being a form of secularization of Qur'anic studies, it actually makes a significant contribution to the methodology of sacred text research. Through this approach, new studies have emerged concerning early Qur'an incorporating all of its seven canonical, variant readings (*qira'at*),²⁵ and the history of mushaf codification, which are more open to archaeological and philological findings. Such efforts enrich the treasury of Qur'anic sciences, particularly in a global academic context that demands cross-disciplinary study. However, the main critique of revisionism remains relevant: that the approach often neglects the epistemic dimension of faith, which is the foundational meaning of the Qur'an for Muslims.

Thus, Qur'anic revisionism can be understood not merely as a threat to Islamic theology, but as an intellectual challenge for Muslims to reassert the basis of their scholarly epistemology. This approach demands a response that is not merely apologetic but analytical and reflective specifically, how to integrate the critical spirit of revisionism with spiritual awareness and the values of revelation. It is this thinking that will subsequently be juxtaposed with the idea of Qur'an decolonization, which seeks to reconstruct the paradigm of Islamic knowledge to be more epistemically just and not subject to the dominance of colonial ways of thinking. X1

²³ Mun'im Sirry, "Scriptural Polemics: The Qur'an and Other Religions" (Oxford University Press, June 2, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199359363.001.0001>.

²⁴ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 5.

²⁵ Ian VanderMeulen, "Vocal Arrangements: Technology, Aurality, and Authority in Qur'anic Recording," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 53, no. 3 (2021): 371–86, <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1017/S0020743821000428>.

By reading revisionism in such a theoretical and contextual manner, this research seeks to place the movement not just as a Western intellectual phenomenon, but as part of the long process of dialogue between Islam and modernity. A comprehensive understanding of revisionism serves as a crucial foundation for proceeding to the next chapter, which will discuss the Qur'an decolonization movement as an epistemological response to the colonial legacy in Islamic studies and as an effort to rebuild the intellectual independence of Islamic knowledge in the global era.

The Decolonization Movement in Qur'anic Studies

The discourse on decolonization in Qur'anic studies emerged as a critical response to the epistemic dominance of the West within the Islamic academic world. If the revisionist approach attempts to interpret the Qur'an through a historical-empirical paradigm, the decolonization movement strives to liberate Islamic studies from the knowledge structures shaped by modern colonialism. Decolonization is not merely a rejection of Orientalist theories or Western methodologies, but rather a far-reaching effort to reclaim the epistemic autonomy of Muslims in understanding the sacred text and building a scholarly tradition rooted in Islamic values themselves.²⁶

The decolonization movement in the Islamic context has deep roots closely linked to the colonial experience of Muslims across various parts of the world. Since the 19th century, colonialism not only dominated political and economic territories but also imposed specific knowledge systems and epistemologies that positioned the West as the center of rationality and modernity. Social sciences, history, and even religious studies were shaped by a way of thinking that assumed the methodological superiority of the West.²⁷ In the context of Islamic studies, this was evident in the way Orientalists depicted Islam as an object of research that had to be explained through European historical, anthropological, or philological lenses.

The decolonization movement emerged as a critique of this hegemony, particularly since the development of postcolonial and decolonial theory in the late 20th century. Thinkers like Edward Said, through his work *Orientalism* (1979), raised awareness that the study of the East often became a tool of power to define and control the non-Western world. It is from this point that a generation of Muslim scholars arose, seeking to extend Said's critique into the field of religious studies and sacred texts, including Qur'anic studies.²⁸

One key figure marking the new direction of Qur'an decolonization is Joseph E. B. Lumbard, a contemporary Islamic scholar who writes extensively on the necessity of liberating Islamic studies from the hegemony of Western epistemology. In his article "Decolonizing the Study of Islam and the Qur'an (2022)", Lumbard argues that Qur'anic studies in the West have often been conducted under the assumption that only rational and empirical methods are scientifically valid. According to him, this paradigm neglects the spiritual and metaphysical dimensions which are precisely the core of Islamic epistemology. He criticizes what he calls "epistemic colonization" the dominance

²⁶ Irzak Yuliardy Nugroho and Imam Syafi'i, "Metode Studi Ilmu Al-Qur'an Kontemporer: Respon Terhadap Pandangan Orientalis Pada Al-Qur'an," *Ayy-Syari'ah: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 8, no. 1 (February 7, 2022): 98, <https://doi.org/10.55210/assyariah.v8i1.641>.

²⁷ Lumbard, "Decolonizing Qur'anic Studies," 4.

²⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1979), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2536347>.

of one knowledge system over another which causes Islamic sciences to lose their spiritual depth and orientation toward revelation.²⁹

Lumbard argues that to construct an epistemically just Islamic scholarship, there must be a process of reintegrating Islamic epistemology into the modern academic framework. He rejects the dichotomy between rationality and spirituality, asserting that Islam possesses a complete scholarly tradition where reason and revelation, empiricism and intuition, are complementary in the process of truth-seeking. For him, decolonization does not mean rejecting Western science, but positioning it in a dialogical stance with the Islamic tradition. Thus, the decolonization of Qur'anic studies means restoring revelation to the center of knowledge, rather than merely treating it as an object of empirical research.³⁰

From his work, including his focus on the decolonization of Qur'anic Studies, Lumbard has strong resonance with the ideas of global decolonial thinkers like Walter Mignolo, Ramon Grosfoguel, and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, who emphasize the concept of pluriversality the acknowledgment that no single knowledge system is universal and dominant. Within this framework, decolonization is not only a political project but also an epistemological project building a world of knowledge that recognizes the diversity of ways of knowing and sources of truth. In the Qur'anic context, this means opening space for exegesis (*tafsir*) that does not solely rely on historical analysis but also values spiritual experience, Sufi tradition, and classical Islamic wisdom.³¹

In addition to Lumbard, several contemporary Muslim scholars have strengthened the decolonial current in Islamic studies. Wael Hallaq, in his work *Restating Orientalism* (2018), critiques the structure of modern knowledge which claims scientific objectivity but is, in fact, shaped by colonial and secular forces. Hallaq demonstrates that the modern academic system separates knowledge from ethics and transcendence, thereby producing knowledge that loses its moral orientation. He calls upon Muslims to build a knowledge system rooted in the concept of *Tawhid* the unity between God, humanity, and nature as the basis of Islamic epistemology. In this context, decolonization means restoring Divine value into the process of scientific thought.³²

The decolonization movement also finds expression in the global Muslim scholarly discourse, including within the Indonesian academic world. The emergence of the term “Islamization of knowledge” championed by Syed Naquib al-Attas and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi in the late 20th century can actually be viewed as a precursor to epistemic decolonization. Both attempted to construct a framework of knowledge that does not separate rationality from revelation.³³ Although their approach is more normative and theological compared to Lumbard's philosophical approach, both equally emphasize the importance of restoring the authority of knowledge to Islamic values.

In the context of Qur'anic studies, the idea of decolonization invites Muslim scholars not merely to be consumers of Western theories but also producers of knowledge stemming from the Islamic epistemic framework. This necessitates a re-reading of the classical intellectual heritage,

²⁹ Lumbard, “Decolonizing Qur'anic Studies,” 7.

³⁰ Lumbard, 7.

³¹ Lumbard, 14.

³² Hallaq, *Restating Orientalism*, 184.

³³ Coil and Wedra Aprison, “Islamisasi Pengetahuan Syed Naquib Al-Attas Dan Ismail Al-Faruqi,” *Yasin: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Sosial Budaya* 3, no. 5 (July 12, 2023): 838, <https://doi.org/10.58578/yasin.v3i5.1413>.

such as the concepts of *tafsir bi al-ma'thur*, *tafsir iyyari*, which have been marginalized by purely philological and historical approaches. Decolonization thus serves as a recovery movement toward the spiritual and ethical dimensions in Qur'anic studies, as well as a strategy of critique against exploitative and hegemonic knowledge structures.³⁴

However, the decolonization movement is not without its challenges. One frequent criticism is that decolonization risks becoming trapped in romanticism of the past or epistemic exclusivism. If it is not balanced with openness to critique and cross-cultural dialogue, decolonization could turn into a new form of intellectual isolationism. Therefore, many decolonial scholars, including Lumbard, affirm that decolonization is not about closing oneself off from modern knowledge, but a critical repositioning toward it. Its goal is not to replace one hegemon with another, but to create a knowledge space that is plural, ethical, and reflective.³⁵

Decolonization can be understood as an attempt to restore the epistemological balance that was disrupted by modernity. While revisionism emphasizes the critique of text history, decolonization stresses the critique of the history of knowledge itself namely, who has the right to interpret, under what paradigm, and for whose purpose that knowledge is produced.³⁶ The idea of Qur'an decolonization presents both a significant challenge and a great opportunity. It demands a way of thinking that is more inclusive of non-Western sources while also remaining consistent in preserving the values of Islamic spirituality.

This movement becomes increasingly relevant in the contemporary era when the academic world faces a crisis of meaning and ethics in knowledge. Under these conditions, the decolonization of the Qur'an emerges not merely as a scholarly project but also as a spiritual and moral movement to restore human consciousness to the source of Divine truth. In this way, Qur'anic studies evolve from being just an academic discourse into a field of struggle for constructing a civilization of knowledge that is more humane, just, and rooted in Divine values.

Deconstruction of Revisionist Theory and Critique of Decoloniality in Qur'anic Studies

Although revisionism in Qur'anic studies has successfully introduced methodological skepticism and expanded the critical analysis of traditional Islamic narratives, the approach often displays fundamental conceptual and empirical weaknesses.³⁷ Generally, revisionism is trapped in a methodological bias stemming from Western positivistic paradigms, where the sacred text is treated merely as a historical artifact. This perspective often ignores the spiritual, oral, and social dimensions that originally shaped the text. Consequently, revisionism fails to recognize the Qur'an as a living text that functions within a unique performative and religious context.³⁸

³⁴ Muhammad U. Faruque, "Decolonizing the Muslim Mind: A Philosophical Critique," *The Philosophical Forum* 55, no. 4 (December 10, 2024): 353, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phil.12378>.

³⁵ Lumbard, "Decolonizing Qur'anic Studies," 2.

³⁶ E. Barbieri and T.S. Silva, "Decolonialidade Na Ciência Reconstruindo Conhecimento Para Inclusão E Pluralismo Epistemológico: Reconstruindo Conhecimento Para Inclusão E Pluralismo Epistemológico," in *Decolonialidade: Aspectos Contemporâneos Fundamentais* (Editora Científica Digital, 2024), 18, <https://doi.org/10.37885/241017848>.

³⁷ Muhammad Diaz Supandi and Ihwan Agustono, "Trends in Islamic Revisionist Discourse on Qur'anic Studies (A Critical Analysis of John Wansbrough's Thought)," *Jurnal Kawakib* 5, no. 2 (December 30, 2024): 78, <https://doi.org/10.24036/kwkib.v5i02.238>.

³⁸ Yusuf Rahman, "Pendekatan Tradisionalis Dan Revisionis Dalam Kajian Sejarah Pembentukan Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir Pada Masa Islam Awal," *Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 4, no. 1 (2015): 129.

One of the sharpest critiques of revisionism lies in its inability to adapt to emerging material evidence, such as the discovery of early manuscripts. For instance, John Wansbrough built his skeptical theory on the assumption that no physical evidence could confirm the existence of the Qur'anic text in the 7th century,³⁹ a claim that has been significantly challenged by the discovery of the Birmingham Qur'an Manuscript and the Codex Parisino-Petropolitanus. These findings reveal that early copies of the Qur'an possess physical and linguistic features known as codicological and paleographical characteristics that are entirely consistent with the Prophetic period.⁴⁰ Revisionism's fundamental error was the neglect of codicology (the study of the physical nature of manuscripts) in favor of literary speculations that are disconnected from the empirical reality of ink, parchment, and the writing process. Ultimately, revisionism focused too heavily on textual theory while ignoring the material evidence that serves as the necessary foundation for scientific verification.

In addition to neglecting material evidence, revisionism is also criticized for ignoring the oral and performative dimensions of the Qur'an. Gerald Hawting and Wansbrough and his followers treat the Qur'an as a useless text, viewing it as if it were a literary compilation mixed with non-Arabic traditions⁴¹. In reality, the structure of the Meccan suras filled with rhythm, rhyme, and direct polemical responses reflects an active communicative process between the Prophet and the Meccan community. By overlooking these performative and liturgical aspects, revisionism displays a philological deafness that fails to capture the vitality and internal coherence of the sacred text.⁴²

Critiques of revisionism highlight its roots in an excessive hermeneutics of suspicion, as described by Joseph Lumbard. This approach often operates with a double standard: traditional Islamic sources, such as Hadith and *Sirah*, are treated as guilty until proven innocent, while non-Muslim sources which are frequently polemical are automatically regarded as objective. Lumbard argues that this mindset is not only methodologically flawed but also carries colonial residues that prioritize Western epistemic authority over Islamic tradition. He sharply characterizes revisionism as a project born of malice, raised in frustration, and nurtured by revenge against the resilience of Islamic orthodoxy. This critique reveals that despite its claims to be strictly scientific, revisionism operates within an ideological framework that is far from value-neutral.⁴³

On the other hand, decolonial theory, which arose as a response to Western intellectual dominance, is not without its own flaws. While the decoloniality movement in Islamic studies offers a necessary correction to Eurocentric bias, its academic application often falls into the trap of epistemic nativism and identity politics.⁴⁴ In an effort to return the authority of knowledge to Muslims, some decolonial voices argue that only Muslims have the legitimacy to speak about Islam. They often reject analytical tools such as critical history, philology, and sociology viewing them

³⁹ Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*.

⁴⁰ Alba Fedeli, "Early Qur'anic Manuscripts, Their Text, and the Alphonse Mingana Papers Held in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Birmingham" (University of Birmingham, 2014), <https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/5864/>.

⁴¹ Nancy Saki and Muhammad Kazem Shaker, "Tawatur: Forgotten Historical Evidence in the Studies of Wansbrough and His Followers," *Religious Inquiries* 7, no. 13 (2018): 91, <https://doi.org/10.22034/ri.2018.63738>.

⁴² Walid A Saleh, "The Preacher of the Meccan Qur'an: Deuteronomic History and Confessionalism in Muhammad's Early Preaching," *Journal of Quranic Studies* 20, no. 2 (June 1, 2018): 74–111, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2018.0338>.

⁴³ Lumbard, "Decolonizing Qur'anic Studies."

⁴⁴ Mohamed Abdou, "Conquistador Settler-Colonialism & the Crises of Migrant Muslim Complicity," *Political Theology* 24, no. 7 (October 3, 2023): 720–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462317X.2023.2262852>.

merely as colonial instruments.⁴⁵ This creates a serious risk, if rationality and historical evidence are rejected in favor of subjective religious truths, Islamic studies may lose its academic standing and turn into a closed confessional theology that is isolated from global dialogue.

Apologetic tendencies also represent a major issue within decolonial discourse. In his work *Theorizing Islam*, Aaron Hughes argues that many scholars who identify as decolonial or progressive often use critical theories such as those by Foucault or Said not to dismantle power structures, but rather to shield Islamic origin narratives from historical criticism. He describes this phenomenon as Islamic religious studies, which functions more as theological advocacy than as rigorous academic analysis. Hughes' critique reveals a paradox of decoloniality: when it opposes Western bias but refuses to address internal contradictions within Islamic history itself, decolonization transforms into a new form of ideological hegemony.⁴⁶ Ideally, decoloniality should challenge all forms of dominance, whether they originate from outside the faith or from within the religious tradition itself.

Beyond epistemic and apologetic issues, decolonial discourse also faces significant institutional challenges. In many cases, decoloniality is commodified by neoliberal universities as a moral symbol to show a concern for epistemic justice, yet without making real changes to the structures of knowledge production. The decolonial label often becomes a mere academic commodity a tool used to enhance an image of inclusivity or build moral capital without actually dismantling the power relations inherent in the global education system.⁴⁷ In the context of Islamic economics, for example, the term decolonization is frequently used as a wrapper to label capitalist practices with Sharia terms, without changing the underlying exploitative economic substance.⁴⁸ This phenomenon demonstrates that when decoloniality is not accompanied by deep critical reflection, it risks becoming an empty slogan that loses its power for real transformation.

Epistemological Convergence between Revisionism and Decolonialism in Qur'anic Studies

The first point of convergence manifests at the philological-material level, characterized by a mutual recognition of both the stability and the simultaneous dynamism of the Qur'anic text. The discovery of various early manuscripts, such as the Birmingham Qur'an Manuscript, the Codex Parisino-Petropolitanus, and the Sana'a Palimpsest, has compelled both scholarly camps to re-evaluate their core assumptions.⁴⁹ Revisionists must now concede the fallacy of Wansbrough's hypothesis, which dated Qur'anic codification to the 9th century, as material evidence provides clear proof that the text's fundamental form already existed by the 7th century. On the other hand, traditionalists can no longer uphold the view of a static and ahistorical text; the presence of spelling variations (scriptio defectiva), scribal errors, and variant readings proves that canonization was a historical process shaped by human interaction and gradual philological evolution.

⁴⁵ Abdessamad Belhaj, "Who Defines Islam? Critical Perspectives on Islamic Studies," *Religions* 14, no. 6 (2023): 11, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14060753>.

⁴⁶ Aaron W. Hughes, *Theorizing Islam Disciplinary Deconstruction and Reconstruction*, 1st ed. (Acumen, 2014).

⁴⁷ Melanie Bowman and María Rebollo-Gómez, "Uprooting Narratives: Legacies of Colonialism in the Neoliberal University," *Hypatia* 35, no. 1 (2020): 18–40, <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1017/hyp.2019.13>.

⁴⁸ Mariam Khawar, "Decoloniality and Islamic Economics," *ReOrient* 9, no. 2 (2025): 267, <https://doi.org/10.13169/reorient.9.2.0004>.

⁴⁹ Alba Fedeli, "The Qur'an in Manuscript, Print, and Digital Form" (Oxford University Press, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.938>.

From these two corrective approaches, a new consensus has emerged, which François Déroche describe as the stability of the consonantal backbone (rasm) amidst variations in vocalization and readings. This means that while the core structure of the Qur'anic text is proven to be exceptionally stable, its phonetic and interpretive layers show a high degree of contextual flexibility.⁵⁰ This approach combines the rigorous methods of Western philology with the traditional Islamic understanding of authentic transmission. The resulting synthesis acknowledges the historical development of the text while continuing to respect the sacred nature of the revelation.

The second convergence occurs in the historical dimension, primarily through the *late antiquity* approach developed by Angelika Neuwirth in the *corpus coranicum* project. Neuwirth accepts the revisionist premise that the Qur'an must be read within its historical and intellectual context, specifically in dialogue with Jewish and Christian biblical traditions. However, she rejects the revisionist conclusion that views the Qur'an as merely a derivative text of previous traditions. In Neuwirth's framework, the Qur'an is positioned as an active subject participating in the theological discourse of *late antiquity* reinterpreting, correcting, and expanding existing monotheistic narratives.⁵¹

This approach simultaneously fulfills two epistemic demands that were previously seen as contradictory. From a decolonial perspective, it recognizes the Qur'an's agency as a text with its own voice and authority in the history of revelation. At the same time, from an academic perspective, it maintains rigorous historical analysis within a comparative textual framework. In doing so, Neuwirth dissolves the dichotomy between East and West by demonstrating that the Qur'an is an integral part of the global monotheistic intellectual heritage a European text in a genealogical sense, rather than a geographical one. Under this approach, Islamic tradition is no longer treated as an exotic object of study but as an active intellectual actor in the history of universal thought.

The third convergence occurs at the theological-hermeneutical level, as seen in the work of Mun'im Sirry, particularly in his book *Scriptural Polemics*. Sirry utilizes revisionist critical findings not to delegitimize revelation, but to open possibilities for more inclusive and pluralist interpretations. He argues that if the Qur'an's polemical stance toward Jewish and Christian communities reflects the socio-political context of the 7th century or even early Islamic discursive constructions then those verses do not necessarily need to be read as eternal and exclusive universal doctrines.⁵²

Through this approach, historical skepticism is effectively utilized as a tool to decolonize interpretation (tafsir). By re-examining the historical context in which both the text and its commentaries were formed, Sirry uncovers a new hermeneutical space where the authority of revelation remains preserved, while the reading of it is freed from the ideological burdens of the past. This embodies what he calls critical traditionalism a deliberate effort to maintain faithfulness to the sacred text while simultaneously opening up room for autonomous rational and ethical interpretation in the modern era.

⁵⁰ François Déroche, *The Qur'an and Its Handwritten Transmission Current Researches* (Brill, 2024), <https://brill.com/display/serial/DOCO>.

⁵¹ Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx, *The Qur'an in Context Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu* (BRILL, 2009), <https://brill.com/edcollbook/title/11399?rskey=OqwJNx&result=6>.

⁵² Sirry, "Scriptural Polemics: The Qur'an and Other Religions."

From these three points of convergence, it is evident that the boundary between revisionism and decoloniality is becoming increasingly fluid. Historical criticism, once viewed as a threat to faith, has become a dialogue partner in deepening our understanding of the text. At the same time, the decolonial spirit which was previously accused of being anti-scientific now encourages more reflective, open, and contextual readings. Consequently, the new direction of Qur'anic studies is moving toward an integrative-critical paradigm: an approach that no longer separates rationality from spirituality but links them through a creative dialectic between history, text, and revelation.

Implications and Future Directions of Islamic Studies

The paradigm shift described above has profound implications for the future of Islamic studies, particularly in the field of Qur'anic research. While academic discourse was once dominated by the tension between Orientalism and Islamic apologetics,⁵³ Critical collaboration based on empirical data and methodological openness. The long standing conflict between East and West, as well as between faith and reason, is gradually evolving into a more balanced conversation between two distinct traditions of knowledge.⁵⁴ In this context, the Qur'an is no longer merely an object of ideological struggle, but has become a meeting point for interdisciplinary, intercultural, and inter-paradigmatic dialogue.

This transformation is inseparable from the rapid progress in digital humanities, which is changing how scholars access, research, and interpret the sacred text.⁵⁵ The future of Qur'anic studies is no longer shaped by speculative theories like those developed by Wansbrough or Crone, but by concrete, data driven research that allows for empirical verification. The digitization of manuscripts and projects like *corpus coranicum* have opened public access to early Islamic texts that were restricted to specific institutions for centuries. Today, anyone can directly examine the variant readings and spellings in the Sana'a or Birmingham manuscripts without being entirely dependent on the authority of religious or academic institutions.

As a result, traditional religious institutions are being challenged to be more transparent about the history and canonization of the text. Meanwhile, Western scholars are being pushed to remain humble when facing the complexity of material evidence, which is increasingly difficult to simplify for ideological purposes. In this new environment, dogmatic debates are being replaced by data-driven dialogue, and intellectual authority must now be earned through verifiable scholarly work.

However, technological progress and open data alone are not enough to guarantee epistemic independence. The movement to decolonize Islamic studies must move beyond anti-Western rhetoric, which is often merely reactive and symbolic. True decolonization is not a rejection of Western scholarship; rather, it is a process of critical integration that places both Islamic and Western intellectual traditions in an equal position of dialogue.⁵⁶ Within this framework, the future of Islamic studies demands recognition of the diverse languages and intellectual traditions of the Muslim world beyond the English language. Works in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu, and

⁵³ Osamah F Khalil, “American Orientalism” (Oxford University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.985>.

⁵⁴ Zia U Haq, “Modern Western Thought and Islamic Reformism: Intellectual Challenges, Prior Discourse, and Future Prospects,” *Religions* (mdpi, 2023), 1, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030308>.

⁵⁵ Marius J Nel, “The Hermeneutical Challenge of Reading Digital Biblical Texts in Africa,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 81, no. 2 (May 31, 2025): 1, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v81i2.10696>.

⁵⁶ Michael Onyebuchi Eze, “Decolonizing ‘Decolonization’ and Knowledge Production beyond Eurocentrism,” *The Monist* 107, no. 3 (July 1, 2024): 264–78, <https://doi.org/10.1093/monist/ona013>.

Indonesian should be recognized as sources of theory and methodology, not just as objects of study. Shifting these works from the periphery to the center restores the epistemic right of Muslim scholars to speak with their own voices in the global academic conversation.

Substantial decolonization also requires the creation of a more inclusive epistemology.⁵⁷ This approach does not reject modern scientific methods; instead, it places them in a critical conversation with analytical categories rooted in the Islamic tradition itself. Concepts such as *sanad* (chain of transmission), *ijma'* (consensus), or *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* (tradition-based exegesis) can be used reflectively to study the history of the text, alongside modern methods of philology, archaeology, and linguistics.⁵⁸ In this way, Qur'anic studies can move beyond the old dichotomies between faith and science, or tradition and modernity, toward a more complete form of epistemic synthesis.

Discussion

Comparative Analysis and Epistemological Synthesis between Qur'anic Revisionism and Decolonization

Scholarship concerning Qur'anic revisionism and decolonization indicates that both movements originated from distinct intellectual and historical contexts, yet they are equally driven by the impulse to re-examine the understanding of the sacred text in the modern situation. Revisionism emerged from the Western academic tradition, propelled by a spirit of criticism and historical verification of religious sources, while decolonization developed from the non-Western world's awareness to liberate itself from colonial epistemic hegemony. Both, therefore, are reactions to a crisis of authority be it traditional religious authority or modern scientific authority which is deemed necessary to be reviewed.

Epistemologically, Qur'anic revisionism is rooted in a positivistic paradigm that emphasizes that truth must be verifiable empirically and rationally. Revisionists such as John Wansbrough,⁵⁹ Patricia Crone and Michael Cook,⁶⁰ and later Mun'im Sirry,⁶¹ strive to explain the Qur'an through the approach of textual history, philology, and source criticism. In their view, the Qur'an must be understood not merely as a final Divine revelation, but as a product formed within specific social, political, and linguistic contexts. Consequently, their methods tend to be skeptical of classical *tafsīr* traditions and emphasize re-reading based on historical evidence.

The revisionist epistemology stems from what is called the "hermeneutics of suspicion" a scientific attitude that questions the authenticity, authority, and continuity of religious texts. Its goal is not to reject revelation ideologically, but to trace how the text evolved and was received historically. From this approach emerges the idea that the Qur'an cannot be separated from the context of Semitic culture and previous monotheistic traditions.⁶² This kind of approach opens new ground in the study of Islamic history but has also garnered criticism for being perceived as reducing the spiritual and theological aspects of the Qur'an.

⁵⁷ Fernanda Coelho Liberali, "Decolonizing Academic Spaces: Challenges and Responsibilities," *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 31, no. 1 (January 2, 2024): 9–13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2024.2440076>.

⁵⁸ Muhammad Misbah, "Creating the Qur'an: A Historical-Sritical Study," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 52, no. 5 (October 20, 2025): 1305–7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2023.2210928>.

⁵⁹ Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*.

⁶⁰ Crone and Cook, *HAGARISM: The Making of The Islamic World*.

⁶¹ Sirry, "Scriptural Polemics: The Qur'an and Other Religions."

⁶² Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, 78; Crone and Cook, *HAGARISM: The Making of The Islamic World*, 6.

Conversely, Qur'an decolonization emerges as a critique of this kind of epistemology. Decolonial thinkers like Joseph Lumbard⁶³ and Wael Hallaq⁶⁴ argue that the revisionist approach, though critical, still operates within a colonial epistemic framework that positions Western methods as the sole measure of scientific truth. Within the decolonial framework, the primary problem is not the Qur'an text itself, but the way the academic world produces and legitimizes knowledge about the Qur'an. The dominance of the secular-rational paradigm is deemed to have marginalized the spiritual, ethical, and metaphysical dimensions of Islamic studies.

Decolonial epistemology asserts that truth originates not only from empirical rationality but also from a transcendental consciousness rooted in revelation. In the Islamic tradition, this aligns with the concept of (*'ilm ladunni*) knowledge acquired through Divine illumination (*nūr*) and deep inner experience. By revitalizing such an epistemic dimension, decolonization seeks to build a plural paradigm where knowledge is no longer solely defined by modern science but emerges as the result of a dialogue between reason and revelation.

If revisionism is focused on the text, decolonization is focused on the subject interpreting the text. Revisionism asks how the text was formed, while decolonization asks who has the right to speak about the text and within what epistemic framework. In this regard, decolonization challenges the structure of academic authority that has historically determined the validity of Islamic research, which tends to be centered in Western institutions. This critique has political and ethical implications: that knowledge is not neutral, and every form of research carries a certain ideological position.

This comparison shows that the two approaches occupy nearly opposite epistemological positions. Revisionism relies on distance from the text a critical distance deemed necessary to maintain scientific objectivity; decolonization actively seeks reconnection with Islamic values, tradition, and spirituality as sources of meaning. Nevertheless, both share one crucial commonality: they reject dogmatism. Both revisionists and decolonial scholars proceed from the awareness that Qur'anic studies must be open to review and methodological renewal.

It is from this juncture that the potential for epistemological synthesis emerges. This synthesis is not intended to equalize the two approaches but to find a productive area of dialogue between them. Within a dialectical framework, revisionism can contribute a spirit of scientific criticism and rigor, while decolonization can offer an ethical and spiritual awareness that limits the reduction of the text. By integrating both, Qur'anic studies can move toward a more integrative approach one that is methodologically critical yet theologically grounded.

In practice, this synthesis can be realized through what is termed "integrative-critical tafsir", an approach that combines historical analysis with spiritual and contextual awareness. For instance, research can use modern philological methodologies to study the history of the mushaf formation, but its interpretation still considers the values of *tawhīd*, revelation, and Islamic ethical consciousness. Such an approach does not reject Western science but places it in dialogue with the rich Islamic scholarly tradition.

This epistemological synthesis also carries methodological implications. Where revisionism tends to be text-centered and decolonization subject-centered, the synthesis is relation-centered, focusing on the relationship between the text, the interpreter, and the social context. That is,

⁶³ Lumbard, "Decolonizing Qur'anic Studies."

⁶⁴ Hallaq, *Restating Orientalism*.

Qur'anic studies should not only examine the history of the text or the ideology of the interpreter but must also observe how the text interacts with the realities of human life. Thus, the Qur'an is understood not just as a scientific object but as a living partner in the civilizational process.

Furthermore, this epistemological synthesis can also serve as a bridge between the academic world and the faith community. The revisionist approach often creates distance from believers because it is perceived as too secular, while decolonization is sometimes considered too normative and ideological. By critically integrating the two, Qur'anic research can offer a space for discourse that respects both rationality and spirituality. This is vital for cultivating a generation of Muslim academics capable of open thinking without losing the roots of their faith.

In conclusion, the relationship between revisionism and decolonization should not be understood as an absolute contradiction, but as a complementary epistemic dialectic. Both remind us that Qur'anic studies cannot stand at one pole only be it pure empiricism or pure spiritualism. True knowledge, from the Islamic perspective, is born from the unity of intellect and heart, the empirical and the transcendent, history and revelation.

It is through this epistemological dialogue between revisionism and decolonization that a new paradigm for Qur'anic studies one that is more humane and comprehensive can be envisioned. This paradigm rejects the reduction of the text to a mere object of historical critique, but also rejects isolation from the modern rational world. It strives to position the Qur'an as a source of intellectual inspiration capable of answering contemporary challenges, without sacrificing its sacred dimension. This is the direction this research aims to achieve: building a middle ground between critique and faith, between the universalism of science and the particularity of revelation.

Integrative-Critical Interpretation Model: An Epistemic Synthesis

The integrative-critical tafsir model proposed in this research arises from the need to bridge two extreme poles in contemporary Qur'anic studies, revisionist skepticism, which tends to reduce revelation to a mere historical product, and decolonial isolationism, which can fall into the trap of epistemic nativism and reject dialogue with modern science. This model is not a shallow compromise; rather, it is an epistemological synthesis that seeks to integrate the methodological rigor of Western philology with the spiritual and ethical awareness of Islamic epistemology. Consequently, this approach aims to create an interpretive space that is both critical and firmly rooted in the values of revelation representing an epistemic encounter between rationality and spirituality.

Conceptually, this model treats philological and historical analysis as essential scholarly tools, yet not as the sole authorities on the text's truth.⁶⁵ Here, the philological approach serves as a window to examine the historical layers of the Qur'an tracing linguistic dynamics, intertextuality with Judeo-Christian traditions, and the development of early codices and manuscripts. Through this method, we can understand how revelation interacted with the social, political, and intellectual contexts of *late antiquity*. However, this approach is not meant to reduce revelation to a mere cultural product. Instead, it aims to reveal how revelation itself operates within history: negotiating, affirming, and transforming the religious traditions that came before it. In this way, philological

⁶⁵ Ignacio Arellano, "Criticón Defensa e Ilustración de La Filología o Cómo Leer Los Textos Del Siglo de Oro (Notas Sueltas)," *Criticon*, 2022, 1, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4000/12dlr>.

methods are used critically but are placed within a horizon of faith that recognizes the Divine presence in the historical process.

In this framework, Muslims are not just passive recipients of Western academic theories, they are active subjects who build knowledge about their own sacred text.⁶⁶ The epistemic agency of the Muslim community is restored by acknowledging that Islamic intellectual traditions from classical exegesis and Sufism to Qur'anic sciences and theology contain a valid logic of knowledge that can engage on equal terms with modern academic methods. Therefore, this model rejects the idea that Islamic knowledge is secondary to Western positivism, while also avoiding the trap of cultural relativism. Instead, it places both in a dialogic relationship where historical criticism and theological faith support and strengthen each other rather than negating one another.

Moreover, the integrative-critical tafsir model extends beyond its analytical and ontological dimensions, advancing toward an ethical-teleological horizon that seeks to extract Qur'anic meanings to address contemporary humanitarian challenges. In this framework, interpretation is not merely intended to explain what happened in the past, but to uncover what it signifies morally for the present? Revelation is understood as a text in continuous communication with human history, calling the intellect to reflect and the heart to take action. This approach creates space for readings that remain relevant to modern issues such as social justice, environmental protection, gender equality, and religious pluralism without losing its theological roots. Thus, tafsir becomes a dynamic process that bridges historical knowledge with ethical awareness, ultimately reviving the spirit of Qur'an, the living Qur'an that speaks to every age.

This model is built upon a relational epistemology that views the text, the interpreter, and the context as mutually shaping elements within a constant dialogue.⁶⁷ In this framework, exegesis (tafsir) is understood not merely as an analytical act of reading, but as a transformative process of becoming a thinking, faithful, and ethical individual. The integrative-critical tafsir model offers a fresh approach to Qur'anic studies by navigating away from both historical reductionism and theological dogmatism, choosing instead to view revelation as a multifaceted phenomenon.

Model Demonstration: Case Study of QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 144 (Change of Qibla)

To demonstrate the operational workings of the integrative-critical tafsir model, we can examine the historical case of the *qibla* change in surah Al-Baqarah [2]: 144, which has long been a focal point of debate between material data, historical narratives, and theological claims.

Within this discourse, radical revisionist analysis tends to use this verse to challenge early Islamic geography, speculating that the shift in direction from Jerusalem to Mecca reflects a competition between socio-religious identities that only consolidated at a later date. These scholars often base their arguments on external sources, such as non-Muslim chronicles, to delegitimize traditional Islamic chronology (*asbab al-nuzul*).⁶⁸ Conversely, a decolonial approach reads this phenomenon not merely as evidence of political conflict, but as a tangible manifestation of the

⁶⁶ Hamza R'boul and Othman Z. Barnawi, "Islamic Emancipation as Alternative Maarifa in Education: Decoloniality as a Holy Mission," *British Journal of Religious Education* 47, no. 3 (July 3, 2025): 242–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2024.2393176>.

⁶⁷ Riku Haapaniemi, "Translation as Meaning-Construction under Co-Textual and Contextual Constraints: A Model for a Material Approach to Translation," *Translation Studies* 17, no. 1 (January 2, 2024): 20–36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14781700.2022.2147988>.

⁶⁸ Ari Michael Gordon, "Sacred Orientation: The Qibla As Ritual, Metaphor, And Identity Marker In Early Islam" (University of Pennsylvania, 2019), <https://repository.upenn.edu/handle/20.500.14332/30221>.

theological agency of the Muslim community in independently defining its spiritual identity amidst the dominance of Judeo-Christian traditions. Its primary focus is on the *ruh al-wahy* (the spirit of revelation), which provided a new direction for a civilization that is epistemically sovereign.

Through the proposed integrative-critical synthesis, researchers acknowledge the validity of philological and sociolinguistic tools such as the examination of the term *shatrah* or the sociolinguistic context of Medina at that time to uncover its historical depth, yet firmly reject skeptical biases that question the event's authenticity without conclusive material evidence. This model works by integrating historical data with the theological awareness that the change of *qibla* was a moment of spiritual decolonization for the early Muslim community, representing a rupture from the epistemic ties of previous dominant traditions to build a new civilization centered on *tawhid*.⁶⁹ By unraveling layers of meaning that are often overlooked when using only a single lens including the dimensions of intertextuality and theological negotiation throughout history this verse is ultimately understood holistically as a text that is both historically accurate and possesses a transformative spiritual resonance.

In addressing archaeological challenges, such as the claims made by revisionist scholars regarding the *qibla* direction of early mosques allegedly facing Petra rather than Mecca, the integrative-critical tafsir model promotes a scientific attitude that is not blindly defensive. Instead, it utilizes such data to enrich our objective understanding of the historical context. Variations in the orientation of early physical structures are not viewed as evidence to negate the existence of Mecca, as alleged, but are analyzed as a technical transition phase or a variation in geographical interpretation analogous to a *scriptio defectiva* in ancient mapping prior to the achievement of universally standardized architectural canonization.⁷⁰ Researchers perform an epistemic correction by integrating evidence of the Qur'an's textual stability as validated by the philological research of Deroche with robust traditional narratives.⁷¹ This leads to the conclusion that while the *qibla* change is an absolute historical reality, its physical manifestation on the ground was a process of gradual evolution that followed the development of navigation technology at the time.

More profoundly, this transition is understood through a decolonial lens as an Epistemic Rupture that solidifies the geographical sovereignty of the Muslim community, shifting them from the orbit of influence of previous religious traditions toward their own spiritual center of gravity at the Ka'bah. Thus, the change of *qibla* is far more than a technical-navigational issue, it is a fundamental effort to restore local agency and the voice of the early Muslim subject in reclaiming an authentic spiritual home. This act symbolically moves the community from the periphery of other traditions toward a center of independent epistemic sovereignty centered on *tawhid*.

Within the ethical-teleological dimension, the integrative-critical tafsir model explores the moral significance of the *qibla* change as a guide for modern humanity through the principle of flexibility within stability. Although the ultimate goal or the essence of *tawhid* is fixed and absolute, the methods and directions taken to achieve that goal within the course of history can change

⁶⁹ Lady Eka Rahmawati, "Asbab Al-Nuzul Surat Al-Baqarah Ayat 142 Dan 144 (Kajian Analisis Historis Tentang Perpindahan Kiblat)," *Sanaamul Quran: Jurnal Wawasan Keislaman* 3, no. 1 (October 18, 2022): 46, <https://doi.org/10.62096/sq.v3i1.28>.

⁷⁰ Heba Mostafa, "The Early Mosque Revisited: Introduction of the Minbar and Maqṣūra," *Muqarnas Online* 33, no. 1 (2016): 1–16, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1163/22118993_03301P002.

⁷¹ Deroche, *The Qur'an and Its Handwritten Transmission Current Researches*.

dynamically in accordance with Divine guidance.⁷² This offers a crucial lesson for the community, to avoid becoming trapped in idols of form or rigid physical symbolism, and instead to remain constantly focused on the essence of obedience to the Giver of Commands.

Furthermore, a candid understanding of past polemical contexts through historical criticism enables contemporary Muslims to engage in more authentic pluralistic dialogue. By recognizing that tensions with other religious communities in the early era were reflections of specific seventh-century socio-political contexts, the community can build healthier and more open interreligious relations without feeling burdened or threatened by historical residues.⁷³ In this manner, tafsir does not merely stop at historical reconstruction, instead, it transforms into an ethical impetus capable of turning polemical memories into a foundation for inclusive and just humanitarian collaboration.

Tanble: Operational Framework Model Summary

Work Stages	Instruments Used	Expected Results
Material Exploration	Philology, Archaeology, Manuscripts	Accuracy of historical and textual data.
Ideological Criticism	Deconstruction of bias (Western/Apologetic)	Cleansing interpretation from the interests of power.
Reconstruction of Meaning	Ulumul Qur'an, Theology, Sufism	Restoration of revelation and personal interests.
Ethical Actualization	Contemporary Hermeneutics	Moral solutions to the challenges of the times (Justice, Pluralism).

Conclusion

This research finds that the tension between historically critical revisionism and the decolonial demand for epistemic autonomy constitutes a productive dialectic leading to an integrative-critical synthesis. The main finding suggests that scholars do not have to choose between scientific objectivity and theological integrity, as the methodological rigor of revisionism can be harmonized with the ethical and spiritual awareness of decolonization. The primary contribution of this study is the integrative-critical tafsir model, a new conceptual framework that bridges the dichotomy between Western rationality and the spirituality of revelation while restoring Muslim epistemic agency.

The implication of this model is the creation of a transformative scholarship that treats the Qur'an as both a historically accurate text and a living source of spiritual resonance. As demonstrated in the case study of the *qibla* change, this approach transforms historical polemics into a foundation for inclusive humanitarian collaboration. However, a limitation of this study is its purely theoretical and library-based nature. To address what remains to be learned, it is recommended that future research conduct empirical case studies to validate this integrative-critical model in the practical interpretation of the Qur'an.

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