



From Reformist to Hermeneutics: A Genealogy of Interpretation in the Modern-Contemporary Periods

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Abstract

The transformation of Qur'anic interpretation in the modern and contemporary periods represents one of the most significant epistemological shifts in modern Islamic intellectual history. Nevertheless, existing scholarship has predominantly examined this transformation through descriptive, thematic, or biographical approaches, often overlooking the deeper relations between interpretation, discourse, power, and the historical construction of religious authority. This study aims to critically investigate the genealogy of Qur'anic interpretation from reformist exegesis to contemporary hermeneutics through Michel Foucault's genealogical framework. Employing a qualitative critical-textual design, the research analyzes major interpretive and theoretical works of influential Muslim thinkers, including Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Riḍā, Fazlur Rahman, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and Mohammed Arkoun. Data were examined using genealogical analysis and critical discourse analysis to identify epistemological ruptures, discursive transformations, and shifts in interpretive legitimacy across different historical periods. The findings demonstrate that the transition from reformist tafsir to contemporary hermeneutics did not emerge as a linear methodological evolution, but as a historically contingent epistemological rupture shaped by colonialism, modernization, globalization, and the encounter between Islamic scholarship and modern critical humanities. Reformist interpretation reconstructed the Qur'an as a rational and socially transformative discourse, whereas contemporary hermeneutics repositioned interpretation as a historically conditioned, discursively negotiated, and contextually produced process of meaning-making. The study further reveals that contemporary tafsir increasingly integrates interdisciplinary approaches emphasizing historicity, plurality, and critical reflexivity, thereby destabilizing singular structures of interpretive authority within modern Muslim societies. Theoretically, this research reconceptualizes Qur'anic interpretation not as a fixed theological tradition, but as a dynamic discursive formation continuously shaped by struggles over knowledge, legitimacy, and socio-political power, thereby contributing a critical genealogical perspective to contemporary global debates in Qur'anic studies and Islamic hermeneutics.

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INTRODUCTION

The discourse of Qur'anic interpretation has never developed as a neutral or purely theological enterprise. Throughout Islamic intellectual history, interpretive practices have continuously reflected broader struggles over religious authority, knowledge production, and socio-political legitimacy within Muslim societies. The Qur'an, as the central text of Islam, has been interpreted through diverse epistemological frameworks shaped by changing historical circumstances and intellectual paradigms. In contemporary Islamic studies, debates concerning interpretation increasingly revolve around questions of textual authority, contextual meaning, and methodological legitimacy rather than merely doctrinal correctness (Rum, 2025). These debates

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intensified as Muslim intellectuals encountered modernity, colonialism, secularism, and global philosophical traditions that challenged inherited structures of religious knowledge. Consequently, Qur'anic interpretation evolved from a predominantly tradition-oriented enterprise into a contested field characterized by competing epistemological claims and methodological pluralism (Gauthier & Spickard, 2022; Istratii, 2024). Understanding this transformation requires more than chronological historiography because interpretive change is deeply connected to shifting configurations of discourse, power, and intellectual authority across different historical periods.

The emergence of modern Qur'anic interpretation during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries represented a critical response to the profound crisis experienced by the Muslim world under colonial domination. The weakening of Islamic political institutions, the stagnation of educational systems, and the growing influence of Western rationalism generated anxiety regarding the decline of Muslim civilization (Ali, 2022). Reformist scholars such as Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Riḍā attempted to reconstruct Islamic thought by repositioning the Qur'an as a dynamic source of ethical, social, and political guidance capable of addressing modern realities. Their interpretive orientation emphasized rational inquiry, social reform, anti-taqlid discourse, and intellectual renewal as strategies for overcoming Muslim backwardness. In this context, interpretation became an instrument of civilizational revival rather than merely an exegetical activity confined to theological explanation. Modern tafsir therefore functioned simultaneously as a religious discourse and as a project of socio-political transformation intended to negotiate the pressures of modernity while preserving Islamic authenticity (Azkya et al., 2025; Sertkaya & Coruh, 2026). This reformist epistemology marked an important rupture from earlier classical interpretive traditions that were largely centered on textual preservation and scholastic continuity.

However, the intellectual transformation of Qur'anic studies did not stop within the reformist paradigm. During the second half of the twentieth century, new epistemological tensions emerged as Muslim scholars increasingly engaged with Western humanities, critical theory, linguistics, hermeneutics, and post-structuralist philosophy. Thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman, Mohammed Arkoun, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd began to question not only the content of interpretation but also the epistemological foundations upon which interpretive authority had historically been constructed (Ahmad, 2023; Latif, 2024). Contemporary interpretation shifted from apologetic reconciliation with modernity toward critical reflection on language, historicity, discourse, and the production of religious meaning itself. This transition fundamentally altered the orientation of Qur'anic exegesis by positioning the text as part of a broader socio-historical process rather than as a closed repository of fixed meanings. In many cases, contemporary hermeneutics challenged the absolutization of classical authority and opened interpretive space for plural readings associated with human rights, gender, democracy, and religious freedom (Okur et al., 2026; Sajir, 2023). As a result, contemporary Qur'anic interpretation became deeply intertwined with broader intellectual debates concerning power, ideology, and the politics of knowledge in modern Muslim societies. The movement from reformist exegesis toward hermeneutical approaches therefore reflects not merely methodological diversification but a profound epistemological reconfiguration within Islamic thought.

The urgency of examining this epistemological transformation becomes increasingly significant amid the growing fragmentation of religious authority in the contemporary Muslim world. Current debates surrounding Islam are often characterized by tensions between scriptural literalism, reformist rationalism, and contextual hermeneutics, each claiming interpretive legitimacy over the meaning of the Qur'an (Shahryari, 2025). These competing paradigms influence contemporary discussions on Islamic law, education, governance, gender relations, and religious pluralism across different Muslim contexts. The expansion of digital religious platforms has further intensified these contestations by democratizing interpretive authority and weakening the monopoly of traditional religious institutions (Abusharif, 2023; Wahid & Abdulloh, 2026). Consequently, interpretation has become a strategic arena where ideological interests, institutional power, and religious identity are continuously negotiated. Despite the growing complexity of these debates, many studies still approach the development of modern and contemporary tafsir descriptively, treating interpretive transformation as a linear intellectual progression detached from relations of power and historical discontinuity. Such approaches tend to overlook how specific interpretive paradigms become dominant while others are marginalized within particular socio-political contexts. Therefore, a

critical genealogical analysis is necessary to uncover the deeper structures that shape the emergence, transformation, and legitimization of interpretive epistemologies in modern Islamic thought.

Within this context, Michel Foucault's concept of genealogy offers an important theoretical framework for re-examining the historical development of Qur'anic interpretation. Unlike conventional historiography, genealogy does not seek to construct a stable narrative of intellectual continuity; instead, it investigates ruptures, discontinuities, and power relations embedded within the formation of knowledge (Gerson, 2022; Storm, 2025). Genealogical analysis views discourse not as an innocent reflection of reality but as a mechanism through which regimes of truth are produced and maintained. Applied to Qur'anic studies, this perspective enables a deeper investigation into how interpretive authority is historically constructed, contested, and transformed across different periods. The transition from reformist exegesis to contemporary hermeneutics can therefore be understood not simply as the evolution of methods, but as a struggle over the legitimacy of religious knowledge itself. Recent scholarship has increasingly emphasized the importance of critical approaches in Islamic studies, particularly regarding the relationship between religion, modernity, and epistemology (Al-Shuqairat et al., 2025; Fouz Mohamed Zacky & Moniruzzaman, 2024). Nevertheless, the use of genealogy as a critical framework for mapping epistemological shifts in Qur'anic interpretation remains relatively underdeveloped. This absence creates a significant theoretical gap in understanding how modern and contemporary interpretive paradigms are historically interconnected through relations of discourse and power.

Several previous studies have explored the transformation of Qur'anic interpretation from theological, hermeneutical, sociological, and philosophical perspectives. Raman et al., (2024) emphasizes contextual interpretation as a methodological response to modern ethical problems, while Saffari, (2024) highlights the emancipatory dimensions of Qur'anic hermeneutics within liberation theology. Other scholars such as Akhtar et al., (2023); Haq, (2023); Kazmi, (2022) examine the intellectual consequences of Islamic modernism and the encounter between Islamic scholarship and Western critical thought. Studies on Fazlur Rahman generally focus on the double movement theory and moral interpretation of the Qur'an, whereas research on Abu Zayd frequently centers on textuality, linguistic discourse, and interpretive pluralism (Fitra et al., 2025; Muslih et al., 2025). Similarly, studies concerning Mohammed Arkoun emphasize applied Islamology and the critique of orthodox Islamic reason as part of broader efforts to reconstruct Islamic epistemology (Apriliana, 2024; Pratama & Masruchin, 2024). Although these studies contribute significantly to contemporary Qur'anic scholarship, most remain limited to thematic analysis, intellectual biography, or methodological classification of particular figures. Existing research largely treats modern and contemporary interpretation as separate intellectual phenomena rather than interconnected epistemological formations shaped by historical discontinuities and struggles over interpretive authority. Moreover, previous scholarship rarely positions the transformation of tafsir within a Foucauldian framework capable of revealing the relationship between interpretation, discourse, and power. Consequently, the genealogy of interpretive epistemology between reformist and hermeneutical paradigms remains insufficiently examined in current Qur'anic studies.

Based on these limitations, this study argues that the transition from reformist exegesis to contemporary hermeneutics should not be understood as a simple methodological evolution, but rather as an epistemological rupture produced through shifting configurations of authority, modernity, and knowledge production in the Muslim world. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the genealogy of Qur'anic interpretation in the modern and contemporary periods through Michel Foucault's genealogical perspective. Specifically, the study investigates the socio-historical factors shaping interpretive transformation, the epistemological characteristics of modern and contemporary tafsir, and the changing structures of interpretive authority within contemporary Islamic discourse. Theoretically, this research contributes to Qur'anic studies by integrating genealogy into the analysis of tafsir epistemology, thereby expanding existing approaches that remain predominantly descriptive or thematic. Practically, the findings offer a critical framework for understanding current debates concerning religious authority, contextual interpretation, and methodological pluralism in contemporary Islam. By uncovering the discontinuities underlying interpretive transformation, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of how Qur'anic interpretation operates as a dynamic field of intellectual negotiation rather than a fixed tradition of textual explanation. Ultimately, this article positions interpretation as a historical discourse

continuously shaped by the dialectical interaction between text, power, reason, and socio-political reality.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative critical-textual research design grounded in Foucauldian genealogy to examine the epistemological transformation of Qur'anic interpretation from reformist exegesis to contemporary hermeneutics. A qualitative design was selected because the primary objective of the study was not to measure empirical variables or statistical relationships, but to critically investigate the historical formation of interpretive paradigms, the construction of religious authority, and the shifting epistemological structures underlying modern and contemporary tafsir discourse. Unlike conventional historiographical approaches that tend to reconstruct interpretation through linear intellectual chronology, genealogical analysis seeks to uncover discontinuities, ruptures, contestations, and relations of power embedded within the production of religious knowledge (Boas & Candiotta, 2025; Siddiqui, 2022). In this study, genealogy was not merely positioned as a historical tracing technique, but as a critical epistemological framework for analyzing how interpretive authority was historically legitimized, negotiated, and transformed across different periods of Islamic intellectual history. The study therefore approached Qur'anic interpretation as a dynamic discursive formation shaped by broader socio-political, intellectual, and ideological contexts rather than as a neutral theological activity detached from historical realities. This design was considered particularly appropriate because the research aimed to move beyond descriptive classification of tafsir trends toward a critical examination of the epistemological conditions that enabled the emergence of reformist and hermeneutical interpretive paradigms. Through this framework, the study investigated not only what modern and contemporary Muslim scholars interpreted, but also how specific forms of interpretation became authoritative within changing configurations of knowledge and power.

The research was situated within the broader field of contemporary Qur'anic studies and Islamic intellectual history, particularly focusing on the transformation of interpretive discourse in the Muslim world from the late nineteenth century to the contemporary era. The analysis concentrated primarily on intellectual developments emerging in Egypt, the broader Arab-Islamic scholarly tradition, and modern transnational Islamic discourse, where debates concerning reformism, rationalism, hermeneutics, and interpretive authority developed most intensively. The temporal scope of the study covered the period extending from the rise of Islamic reformism during the nineteenth century until the consolidation of contemporary hermeneutical approaches in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This periodization was selected because it represents a critical phase in which Qur'anic interpretation underwent profound epistemological transformation following the encounter between Islamic scholarship and modern Western intellectual traditions. Data collection and analysis were conducted between January and April 2026 through systematic examination of primary interpretive texts, theoretical works, and recent academic scholarship related to tafsir epistemology, genealogy, and Islamic hermeneutics. The socio-historical contexts surrounding colonialism, modernization, secularization, globalization, and the expansion of critical humanities were also incorporated into the analysis because these factors significantly influenced the emergence of modern and contemporary interpretive paradigms. By situating the study within these interconnected historical and intellectual contexts, the research sought to produce a comprehensive genealogical understanding of the transformation of Qur'anic interpretation in modern Islamic thought.

The primary sources of the study consisted of major intellectual and interpretive works representing distinct epistemological orientations in modern and contemporary Qur'anic studies. The selected texts included *Tafsir al-Manār* by Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Riḍā, *Islam and Modernity* by Fazlur Rahman, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ* by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Lectures du Coran* by Mohammed Arkoun, and *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah al-Islāmiyyah* by Ibn 'Ashūr. These works were purposively selected because they occupy influential positions within the historical development of modern Islamic thought and represent major interpretive shifts from rational reformism toward contemporary hermeneutical approaches. The inclusion criteria for primary sources were determined based on four considerations: the intellectual influence of the author within Qur'anic

studies, the explicit engagement of the text with epistemological questions concerning interpretation, the relevance of the work to debates on modernity and interpretive authority, and the significance of the text within broader contemporary Islamic discourse. Secondary data consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, conference proceedings, and recent studies published predominantly between 2021 and 2026 concerning Qur'anic hermeneutics, Islamic reformism, discourse theory, genealogy, and critical Islamic studies. These secondary sources functioned not merely as supporting references, but as discursive materials that enabled comparative interpretation, theoretical contextualization, and critical engagement with existing scholarship. Through this purposive and theoretically driven selection process, the study ensured that all analyzed materials directly contributed to the genealogical investigation of interpretive epistemology.

The principal research instrument was an analytical framework constructed from Foucauldian genealogy, critical discourse analysis, and contemporary theories of Qur'anic hermeneutics. In qualitative textual research, the researcher functions as the primary interpretive instrument responsible for identifying, categorizing, and critically interpreting epistemological patterns within the analyzed texts (Pandey et al., 2026; Wiesner, 2022). To maintain analytical rigor and conceptual consistency, the study developed a structured coding framework consisting of several interconnected analytical dimensions. These dimensions included the construction of interpretive authority, the role of rationality and historicity in exegesis, the relationship between text and socio-political reality, the critique of orthodoxy, the conceptualization of revelation, and the methodological orientation toward reformism or hermeneutics. Particular attention was given to identifying discursive ruptures between modern reformist tafsir and contemporary hermeneutical interpretation, especially regarding how each paradigm positioned the Qur'an in relation to reason, ethics, social transformation, and modernity. Analytical categories were developed deductively from theoretical concepts proposed by Foucault (Antonicelli, 2026; Melis, 2024), as well as contemporary scholarship on Islamic hermeneutics and discourse analysis. During the analytical process, interpretive memos and thematic matrices were continuously constructed to trace recurring epistemological patterns, tensions, and discontinuities across different texts. This analytical framework enabled the study to systematically investigate the genealogy of interpretive transformation while preserving interpretive depth and theoretical coherence.

The validity and trustworthiness of the study were ensured through methodological triangulation, interpretive reflexivity, and theoretical consistency. In qualitative genealogical research, validity is not primarily determined through statistical measurement, but through analytical transparency, interpretive rigor, and the coherence between theoretical framework, analytical procedure, and research findings (Wainstein, 2026; Wainstein et al., 2023). To strengthen conceptual validity, the analytical categories used in the study were continuously compared with established theoretical discussions in genealogy, discourse theory, and contemporary Qur'anic studies. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing primary interpretive texts with secondary scholarly analyses in order to minimize interpretive reductionism and strengthen analytical credibility. In addition, the study employed iterative reading and cross-textual comparison to ensure consistency in identifying epistemological themes, discursive formations, and interpretive ruptures. Reflexive analysis was also maintained throughout the research process to acknowledge the interpretive position of the researcher and to minimize subjective bias during textual interpretation. Rather than claiming absolute objectivity, the study emphasized epistemological awareness regarding the situated nature of interpretation itself, particularly within critical Islamic studies and hermeneutical inquiry. These procedures were essential because genealogical analysis depends fundamentally on depth of interpretation, conceptual precision, and critical engagement with discourse rather than on procedural positivism.

The data collection process was conducted systematically through several interconnected stages designed to ensure analytical depth and methodological transparency. The first stage involved identifying and selecting relevant primary and secondary sources associated with the genealogy of modern and contemporary Qur'anic interpretation. Following source selection, intensive close reading was conducted to identify key epistemological assumptions, methodological orientations, interpretive strategies, and discursive constructions embedded within the texts. Important passages related to rationality, reformism, historicity, hermeneutics, textual authority, and discourse

transformation were documented and organized into preliminary thematic categories. During the third stage, the collected data were coded and classified into broader analytical themes representing major epistemological configurations within modern and contemporary tafsir discourse. The analysis subsequently focused on tracing discontinuities and ruptures between interpretive paradigms rather than merely identifying intellectual similarities between scholars. At this stage, genealogical tracing was employed to investigate how changing socio-political conditions, intellectual encounters, and structures of authority contributed to the emergence of particular forms of interpretation. The final stage involved synthesizing the findings into a coherent genealogical narrative capable of explaining the transformation of interpretive epistemology from reformist exegesis to contemporary hermeneutics. This systematic procedure enabled the study to maintain analytical consistency while preserving the complexity and multidimensionality of interpretive discourse.

The collected data were analyzed using a combination of genealogical analysis and critical discourse analysis. The analytical process began with open coding to identify recurring epistemological concepts, interpretive assumptions, and methodological patterns across the selected texts. These initial codes were then categorized into broader thematic formations such as rational reformism, interpretive authority, textual historicity, hermeneutical pluralism, discourse transformation, and epistemological critique. Following thematic categorization, the study employed genealogical tracing to examine how these discursive formations emerged, interacted, and transformed across different historical periods. Particular emphasis was placed on identifying epistemological ruptures and shifts in interpretive legitimacy between modern reformist and contemporary hermeneutical paradigms. The analysis further examined how relations of knowledge and power shaped the production of authoritative interpretation within different socio-historical contexts. Foucauldian discourse analysis was subsequently used to investigate how particular interpretive regimes became dominant while alternative approaches were marginalized, contested, or reconstructed. Rather than treating interpretation as a stable transmission of religious meaning, the analysis conceptualized tafsir as a contested discursive arena continuously shaped by ideological negotiation and historical transformation. Through this analytical strategy, the study aimed to produce a critical understanding of Qur'anic interpretation as a dynamic epistemological formation embedded within broader structures of discourse and power.

This study also adhered to fundamental principles of academic ethics throughout the research process. All primary and secondary sources were appropriately cited according to APA citation standards to ensure academic integrity and avoid plagiarism. The researcher maintained intellectual honesty by critically engaging with diverse scholarly perspectives without selectively privileging particular interpretations for ideological purposes. All analytical conclusions were derived transparently from the examined texts through systematic interpretation rather than speculative generalization. Furthermore, the study emphasized analytical paraphrasing and critical synthesis instead of extensive textual reproduction in order to preserve originality and scholarly authenticity. Ethical responsibility was also reflected in the researcher's effort to represent the intellectual positions of the analyzed scholars fairly and contextually without reductive simplification. Although the study did not involve human participants, ethical considerations concerning interpretive accountability, transparency, and scholarly rigor remained central throughout the research process. By maintaining methodological integrity and epistemological reflexivity, this research sought to contribute responsibly to the development of contemporary Qur'anic studies and critical Islamic intellectual discourse.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings of this study reveal that the transformation of Qur'anic interpretation from reformist exegesis to contemporary hermeneutics represents a profound epistemological reconfiguration within modern Islamic intellectual history. The genealogical analysis demonstrates that interpretive change did not occur through a linear or cumulative development of exegetical methods, but rather through a series of discursive ruptures shaped by colonialism, modernization, globalization, and the encounter between Islamic scholarship and modern critical humanities. Across

the examined texts, the study identified a gradual shift in the construction of interpretive authority, moving from classical textual preservation toward historically conscious and critically reflexive forms of interpretation. This transformation also altered the position of the interpreter, the function of revelation, and the relationship between the Qur'anic text and socio-political reality. Modern reformist tafsir primarily emerged as a response to Muslim civilizational decline and colonial domination, whereas contemporary hermeneutics developed through epistemological dissatisfaction with reformist apologetics and the increasing influence of modern philosophy, discourse theory, and social sciences. The findings further indicate that contemporary interpretation no longer views the Qur'an solely as a closed doctrinal text, but increasingly approaches it as a dynamic discourse continuously interacting with language, history, culture, and power structures. Consequently, the genealogy of modern and contemporary tafsir reflects not merely methodological diversification, but a deeper struggle concerning the legitimacy of religious knowledge and the authority to interpret revelation in changing historical contexts.

Genealogy of Modern Interpretation: Reformism, Rationality, and the Reconstruction of Religious Authority

The findings indicate that the emergence of modern Qur'anic interpretation during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was inseparable from the multidimensional crisis experienced by Muslim societies under colonial domination. The weakening of Islamic political institutions, the collapse of Ottoman authority, and the growing influence of Western rationalism generated widespread concern regarding the decline of Muslim civilization. Within this historical context, interpretation gradually transformed into an intellectual instrument aimed at reconstructing Islamic thought and revitalizing Muslim society. The analysis demonstrates that modern reformist scholars no longer perceived tafsir merely as a scholastic activity dedicated to preserving inherited theological traditions. Instead, interpretation was increasingly positioned as a medium for social reform, intellectual renewal, and civilizational awakening. This shift marked a significant rupture from earlier classical exegetical traditions that largely prioritized textual preservation, grammatical analysis, and narratological continuity. The findings therefore reveal that modern tafsir emerged not only as a religious discourse but also as an ideological response to colonial modernity and the crisis of Muslim intellectual authority. In this context, interpretive legitimacy became closely associated with the ability of the Qur'an to address contemporary social and political realities rather than solely with fidelity to inherited exegetical authority.

The study further found that the reformist paradigm represented by Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Riḍā introduced a substantial transformation in the epistemological orientation of Qur'anic interpretation. Through *Tafsir al-Manār*, both scholars reconstructed tafsir as a rational and socially transformative discourse capable of mediating between revelation and modernity. Their interpretive methodology emphasized rational inquiry, anti-taqlid discourse, and socio-political reform as central components of Islamic intellectual renewal. The findings demonstrate that Abduh and Riḍā rejected the excessive dependence on scholastic authority and uncritical transmission characterizing many forms of classical interpretation. Instead, they promoted interpretive openness through *ijtihād* and encouraged contextual engagement with the realities of Muslim society. This transformation significantly altered the function of the interpreter, who increasingly operated as a reformist intellectual rather than merely a transmitter of inherited doctrinal meanings. The analysis also reveals that reformist tafsir functioned as a discursive strategy for resisting colonial domination while simultaneously redefining the relationship between Islam and modern civilization. Consequently, modern interpretation became deeply intertwined with broader debates concerning governance, education, constitutionalism, and social transformation within the Muslim world.

Another important finding concerns the epistemological structure underlying modern reformist interpretation. The analysis identified four dominant epistemological orientations consistently appearing across reformist tafsir discourse: rationality, socio-religious reform, critique of traditional authority, and openness toward scientific modernity. First, rationality functioned as the principal interpretive mechanism through which Qur'anic verses were understood in accordance with logical inquiry and modern intellectual developments. Second, interpretation was strongly oriented toward social reform, particularly in addressing issues of educational backwardness, political fragmentation, and moral decline within Muslim societies. Third, reformist scholars

challenged the monopoly of classical interpretive authority by reopening the possibility of *ijtihad* as a mechanism for intellectual reconstruction. Fourth, modern *tafsir* increasingly incorporated scientific discourse and modern knowledge systems into Qur'anic interpretation, especially regarding cosmology, nature, and social progress. These findings indicate that modern interpretation represented a decisive transition from preservation-oriented exegesis toward transformative and socially engaged interpretation. Rather than functioning exclusively as guardians of orthodoxy, reformist interpreters positioned themselves as agents of civilizational reform capable of integrating revelation with the demands of modern historical reality.

Table 1. Genealogical Transformation of Qur'anic Interpretation Across Historical Periods

Aspect	Classical Interpretation	Modern Interpretation	Contemporary Interpretation
Historical Context	Developed within dynastic Islamic empires under dominant ulama authority	Emerged during colonialism, modernization, and Islamic reformism	Developed amid globalization, pluralism, and critical humanities
Source of Authority	Hadith, companions' opinions, and classical scholarly consensus	Rationality, reformism, and social realities	Historicity, hermeneutics, and interdisciplinary approaches
Dominant Method	Tahlili and philological interpretation	Rational-thematic and socio-reformist interpretation	Critical hermeneutics and discourse-oriented interpretation
Epistemological Orientation	Textual-traditional	Rational-reformist	Historical-discursive
Function of Interpretation	Preservation of orthodoxy and doctrinal continuity	Social transformation and intellectual renewal	Epistemological critique and discursive reconstruction
Position of Interpreter	Guardian of inherited authority	Reformist intellectual mediator	Critical and contextual interpreter
Relation Between Text and Context	Context subordinated to text	Context integrated into textual understanding	Meaning produced through text-context interaction
Representative Figures	Al-Ṭabarī, Al-Zamakhsharī, Al-Qurṭubī	Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Riḍā	Fazlur Rahman, Abu Zayd, Arkoun

Table 1 demonstrates that the transformation of Qur'anic interpretation involved more than methodological expansion. The findings reveal a deeper epistemological shift concerning the construction of religious authority, the function of revelation, and the relationship between text and socio-historical reality. Classical interpretation primarily emphasized textual preservation and scholastic continuity, whereas modern interpretation introduced rational reformism as a response to colonial modernity and Muslim decline. Contemporary hermeneutics subsequently extended this transformation by incorporating historicity, discourse theory, and critical humanities into Qur'anic studies. The table also indicates that each interpretive paradigm emerged within specific historical conditions that shaped its epistemological assumptions and methodological priorities. These findings support the genealogical argument that interpretive paradigms are historically contingent discursive formations rather than timeless or universal structures of religious knowledge.

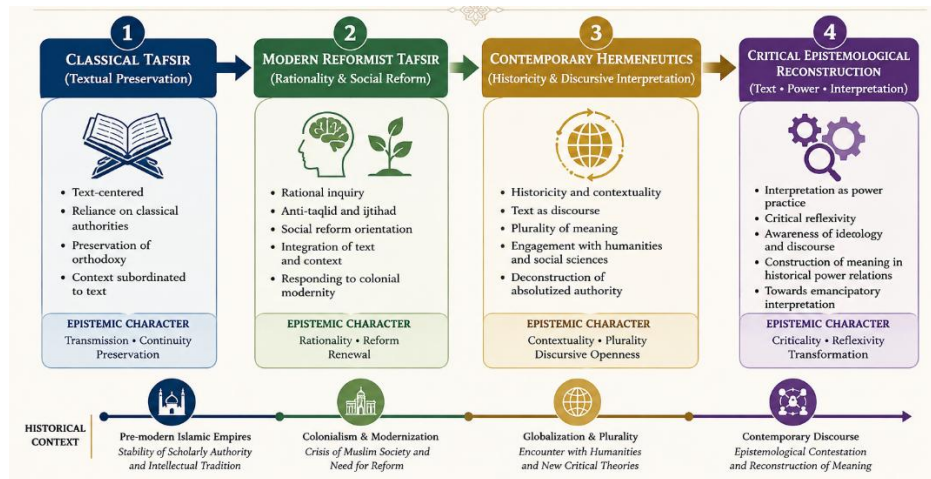


Figure 1. Genealogical Shift of Qur'anic Interpretation

Figure 1 illustrates the genealogical transformation identified in this study. The movement from classical exegesis toward modern reformism and contemporary hermeneutics reflects a gradual reconfiguration of interpretive authority and epistemological orientation within Islamic intellectual history. The figure demonstrates that interpretive discourse increasingly shifted from preservation-centered exegesis toward historically conscious and critically reflexive forms of interpretation. This transition also reveals the growing interaction between Islamic scholarship and broader global intellectual traditions, particularly modern philosophy, social sciences, and critical humanities. Consequently, Qur'anic interpretation emerged as a dynamic discursive arena continuously reconstructed through historical negotiation and epistemological contestation.

Genealogy of Contemporary Interpretation: Hermeneutics, Historicity, and Discursive Transformation

The findings further demonstrate that contemporary Qur'anic interpretation emerged as both a continuation and a critique of modern reformist tafsir. Although reformist scholars successfully introduced rationality and socio-political awareness into Qur'anic interpretation, contemporary thinkers increasingly viewed reformist exegesis as epistemologically insufficient because it remained largely trapped within apologetic modernism. The analysis reveals that contemporary interpreters sought not only to reinterpret the Qur'an in light of modern realities, but also to critically interrogate the foundations of interpretive authority itself. This epistemological dissatisfaction intensified following the encounter between Muslim intellectuals and modern Western humanities, particularly hermeneutics, semiotics, discourse theory, and post-structuralist philosophy. Consequently, contemporary tafsir gradually shifted from rational reformism toward critical and interdisciplinary modes of interpretation. The Qur'an was no longer approached solely as a normative doctrinal text detached from historical reality, but increasingly understood as a discursive text interacting dynamically with language, culture, ideology, and social structures. These findings indicate that contemporary interpretation represented a substantial epistemological rupture in which the production of meaning itself became a central object of critical inquiry.

One of the most significant findings concerns the emergence of historicity as a dominant epistemological principle within contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics. Fazlur Rahman's double movement theory illustrates this transformation by emphasizing that the Qur'an must first be interpreted within its socio-historical context before universal ethical principles can be derived for contemporary application. The findings demonstrate that this approach repositioned revelation not as a static legal text but as a dynamic ethical discourse oriented toward social justice and moral transformation. Similarly, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd conceptualized the Qur'an as an open discursive text whose meaning continuously evolves through interaction between text, interpreter, and historical context. This perspective challenged the absolutization of singular interpretations and destabilized traditional monopolies of religious authority. Mohammed Arkoun further radicalized this epistemological critique through applied Islamology and modern textual criticism aimed at uncovering the "unthought" dimensions embedded within classical Islamic discourse. Collectively, these findings reveal that contemporary hermeneutics fundamentally transformed the

epistemological orientation of tafsir by prioritizing contextuality, plurality, and discursive openness over rigid textual absolutism. As a result, interpretation increasingly became associated with broader debates concerning ideology, authority, discourse, and the politics of religious meaning in modern Muslim societies.

The study also found that contemporary interpretation significantly expanded the methodological boundaries of Qur'anic studies through the integration of interdisciplinary analytical frameworks derived from modern humanities and social sciences. Unlike classical exegesis, which primarily relied on philology, jurisprudence, and narratological traditions, contemporary hermeneutics increasingly incorporated anthropology, sociology, linguistics, semiotics, and discourse analysis into interpretive practice. This interdisciplinary orientation enabled contemporary scholars to engage critically with issues such as gender equality, pluralism, democracy, human rights, and religious freedom through contextual readings of the Qur'an. At the same time, the findings indicate that the expansion of hermeneutical approaches generated significant resistance from conservative religious institutions because these approaches destabilized established structures of interpretive authority. Consequently, contemporary tafsir became an arena of epistemological contestation between textual orthodoxy and critical contextual interpretation. The analysis further demonstrates that contemporary hermeneutics no longer positioned interpretation as the preservation of fixed sacred meanings, but rather as an open-ended process of discursive negotiation shaped by historical and ideological conditions. This finding confirms that the transition from reformist exegesis to contemporary hermeneutics involved a profound transformation in the structure of religious knowledge and interpretive legitimacy within modern Islamic thought.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the transformation of Qur'anic interpretation from reformist exegesis to contemporary hermeneutics constitutes a profound epistemological rupture rather than a gradual methodological refinement. This transformation reflects a fundamental reorientation in the construction of religious authority, where interpretation increasingly moved beyond textual preservation toward critical engagement with historical reality, discourse, and socio-political change. The reformist paradigm represented by Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Ridā emerged primarily as an intellectual response to colonial domination and Muslim civilizational decline, positioning the Qur'an as a dynamic source of ethical and social transformation. In this regard, the study confirms the argument that modern tafsir functioned not merely as a theological enterprise but also as a project of intellectual reconstruction aimed at restoring Muslim agency within the modern world. This finding strongly supports Foucauldian genealogy, which conceptualizes knowledge as historically contingent and continuously shaped by relations of power, discourse, and institutional legitimacy (Gerson, 2022; Storm, 2025). Similar observations were identified by Raman et al. (2024), Saffari (2024), and Akhtar et al. (2023), who argue that modern Islamic interpretation increasingly reflects the intersection between religious reform and socio-political transformation. However, this study advances previous scholarship by demonstrating that the emergence of reformist interpretation should be understood not only as intellectual adaptation to modernity, but as an epistemological struggle over the legitimacy of religious knowledge itself. Consequently, the reformist paradigm represents a critical historical moment in which interpretive authority began shifting from inherited scholastic continuity toward rational and socially engaged hermeneutical consciousness.

Another important finding concerns the emergence of rationality and anti-taqlid discourse as central epistemological foundations within modern reformist tafsir. The study reveals that reformist scholars reconstructed interpretation through *ijtihad*, rational inquiry, and contextual engagement with social realities in order to challenge the stagnation associated with excessive scholastic traditionalism. This transformation significantly altered the position of the interpreter, who increasingly operated as a reformist intellectual mediator rather than merely a transmitter of inherited doctrinal meanings. Theoretically, this finding aligns with the broader framework of Islamic modernism, which views revelation and reason as mutually reinforcing instruments for civilizational renewal (Ali, 2022). Similar conclusions were reported by Azkya et al. (2025), Kazmi (2022), and Sertkaya and Coruh (2026), who emphasize that reformist tafsir attempted to reconcile

Islamic authenticity with scientific rationality and social reform. Nevertheless, the present study critically argues that the rational orientation of reformist interpretation remained partially constrained by apologetic modernism because it still sought to defend the universal compatibility of Islam with modern civilization rather than critically interrogating the epistemological foundations of interpretation itself. This explains why contemporary hermeneutical thinkers later considered reformism insufficient for addressing deeper questions concerning language, historicity, and discourse. Thus, the study contributes conceptually by showing that rational reformism functioned simultaneously as a liberating epistemological project and as a transitional stage leading toward more critical forms of contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics. The implications of this finding indicate that the modernization of tafsir was not simply methodological expansion, but part of a broader renegotiation of interpretive legitimacy within modern Muslim intellectual history.

The findings further indicate that contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics emerged through epistemological dissatisfaction with the limitations of reformist exegesis and the increasing encounter between Islamic scholarship and modern critical humanities. Thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and Mohammed Arkoun fundamentally transformed the orientation of tafsir by repositioning interpretation as a historically conditioned and discursively constructed process. The emergence of historicity as a dominant epistemological principle demonstrates that contemporary interpretation no longer views the Qur'an as a closed repository of fixed meanings, but rather as a dynamic ethical discourse interacting continuously with changing socio-historical contexts. Fazlur Rahman's double movement theory particularly illustrates how moral principles must be reconstructed through historical analysis before being applied to contemporary realities. This finding supports the argument that contemporary hermeneutics reflects a transition from textual absolutism toward contextual and ethical interpretation (Ahmad, 2023; Latif, 2024). Similar tendencies were identified by Fitra et al. (2025), Muslih et al. (2025), and Okur et al. (2026), who highlight the increasing emphasis on textual plurality, contextual ethics, and interpretive openness within modern Islamic scholarship. However, this study extends previous research by demonstrating that historicity should not merely be understood as a methodological tool, but as an epistemological mechanism that destabilizes traditional monopolies of religious authority. Consequently, contemporary hermeneutics redefines interpretation itself as a contested discursive practice through which religious legitimacy, ideological interests, and social power are continuously negotiated.

Another significant finding concerns the integration of interdisciplinary approaches within contemporary Qur'anic interpretation. The study demonstrates that contemporary tafsir increasingly incorporates concepts and analytical tools derived from linguistics, anthropology, sociology, semiotics, discourse theory, and post-structuralist philosophy. This interdisciplinary expansion reflects the growing awareness that classical interpretive frameworks alone are insufficient for addressing complex contemporary issues such as democracy, gender justice, pluralism, and human rights. Theoretically, this finding supports the argument that interpretive paradigms evolve in response to broader intellectual and socio-political transformations rather than remaining permanently fixed within inherited theological traditions. Similar observations were reported by Al-Shuqairat et al. (2025), Wahid and Abdulloh (2026), and Fouz Mohamed Zacky and Moniruzzaman (2024), who conclude that contemporary Islamic scholarship increasingly emphasizes contextual and interdisciplinary methodologies in order to maintain social relevance. Nevertheless, this study critically identifies that interdisciplinary hermeneutics simultaneously generates resistance from conservative religious institutions because it challenges long-standing assumptions regarding textual certainty and orthodoxy. This tension demonstrates that the expansion of interpretive methodology is inseparable from broader struggles over institutional authority and ideological control within Muslim societies. In contrast to earlier studies that often celebrate interdisciplinary interpretation uncritically, the present research highlights the dialectical relationship between methodological innovation and epistemological contestation. Therefore, the study contributes to the broader literature by positioning contemporary tafsir as a dynamic arena of intellectual negotiation shaped by both emancipatory aspirations and institutional resistance.

The study also reveals that the transformation from reformist exegesis to contemporary hermeneutics cannot be separated from broader historical forces such as colonialism, modernization, secularization, and globalization. These socio-historical conditions created profound

crises of authority that forced Muslim intellectuals to renegotiate the relationship between revelation, reason, and modern social reality. The findings confirm that interpretive paradigms emerged within specific historical configurations that shaped their epistemological assumptions, methodological priorities, and discursive legitimacy. This conclusion strongly resonates with Foucauldian genealogy, which emphasizes that knowledge systems are historically contingent formations embedded within structures of power and institutional regulation (Siddiqui, 2022). Previous studies by Abusharif (2023), Gauthier and Spickard (2022), and Istratii (2024) similarly acknowledge the influence of modernity and globalization on contemporary Islamic thought. However, most previous scholarship still tends to treat interpretive transformation as a largely internal theological evolution rather than as an epistemological rupture deeply connected to socio-political crisis and global intellectual restructuring. The present study therefore provides a more critical interpretation by demonstrating that modern and contemporary tafsir should be understood as historically situated discursive formations rather than timeless expressions of religious continuity. This analytical perspective significantly expands existing Qur'anic studies by uncovering how interpretive authority is continuously reconstructed through historical contestation, institutional negotiation, and changing regimes of truth. As a result, the study offers a more comprehensive understanding of how contemporary Islamic interpretation operates within the broader dynamics of global intellectual history.

Finally, the findings demonstrate that contemporary Qur'anic interpretation should be conceptualized as a contested epistemological field where discourse, authority, ideology, and socio-political reality continuously interact. The transition from reformist exegesis toward hermeneutical approaches reflects not merely diversification of interpretive methods, but the emergence of competing regimes of religious knowledge within modern Islamic thought. This finding modifies conventional approaches in Qur'anic studies that often isolate interpretation from questions of discourse and power. Instead, the study confirms Foucauldian assumptions that interpretation itself functions as a mechanism through which legitimacy, authority, and truth are historically produced and contested. Similar tendencies were identified in recent works by Boas and Candiotta (2025), Melis (2024), and Pandey et al. (2026), although these studies generally focus on genealogy and discourse theory within broader philosophical contexts rather than specifically within Qur'anic hermeneutics. The novelty of this research lies in its successful integration of genealogy, discourse analysis, and tafsir epistemology into a coherent analytical framework capable of explaining both continuity and rupture in modern Islamic interpretation. Practically, the findings provide an important intellectual foundation for developing more contextual, critical, and inclusive approaches to Qur'anic interpretation in contemporary Muslim societies. Ultimately, this study positions tafsir not as a fixed tradition of textual explanation, but as a dynamic historical discourse continuously reconstructed through epistemological negotiation, socio-political transformation, and shifting structures of interpretive authority.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the transformation of Qur'anic interpretation from reformist exegesis to contemporary hermeneutics represents a profound epistemological rupture within modern Islamic intellectual history rather than a simple methodological evolution. Through a Foucauldian genealogical framework, the study demonstrates that shifts in tafsir discourse were fundamentally shaped by changing configurations of power, modernity, colonialism, globalization, and the reconfiguration of religious authority in Muslim societies. Modern reformist interpretation emerged as a strategic response to the crisis of Muslim civilization under colonial domination by reconstructing the Qur'an as a rational and socially transformative source of guidance. However, the development of contemporary hermeneutics revealed a deeper epistemological dissatisfaction with reformist apologetics, leading scholars such as Fazlur Rahman, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and Mohammed Arkoun to critically interrogate the foundations of interpretive authority itself. Consequently, contemporary Qur'anic interpretation increasingly shifted toward historically conscious, discursive, and interdisciplinary approaches that positioned revelation as dynamically interconnected with language, history, culture, and socio-political reality. The findings therefore confirm that tafsir is not a neutral or static theological activity, but a contested discursive arena

continuously reconstructed through struggles over legitimacy, interpretation, and the production of religious knowledge. By uncovering the discontinuities underlying interpretive transformation, this study expands contemporary Qur'anic scholarship beyond descriptive historiography toward a more critical understanding of interpretation as a historical mechanism shaped by discourse and power relations.

Theoretically, this research contributes significantly to the development of contemporary Qur'anic studies by integrating Foucauldian genealogy into the analysis of tafsir epistemology, thereby offering a new analytical perspective capable of explaining both continuity and rupture within modern Islamic interpretation. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on thematic interpretation, intellectual biography, or methodological categorization, this study demonstrates that interpretive paradigms emerge within historically contingent structures of authority and ideological negotiation. The research also highlights that the rise of contextual and interdisciplinary hermeneutics should not merely be understood as methodological innovation, but as an epistemological transformation redefining the relationship between revelation, reason, and socio-historical reality. Practically, the findings provide an important conceptual framework for understanding contemporary debates concerning religious authority, interpretive pluralism, gender discourse, democracy, and contextual interpretation within Muslim societies. At the same time, the study reveals that contemporary hermeneutics remains inseparable from tensions between critical interpretation and institutional orthodoxy, indicating that the future of Qur'anic interpretation will continue to be shaped by broader intellectual and socio-political contestations. Although this study has provided a comprehensive genealogical mapping of interpretive transformation, it remains limited to selected modern and contemporary intellectual traditions within the Arab-Islamic scholarly context. Therefore, future research is encouraged to expand genealogical analysis toward regional, digital, feminist, postcolonial, and transnational forms of contemporary Qur'anic interpretation in order to further explore how new regimes of interpretive authority continue to emerge in the evolving landscape of global Islam.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Mokh. Fatkhur Rokhman was primarily responsible for conceptualizing the study, developing the theoretical framework, conducting data collection and textual analysis, interpreting the findings, and drafting the original manuscript. He also contributed to the formulation of the genealogical approach and the integration of Foucauldian theory within the context of contemporary Qur'anic interpretation. Abdul Kadir Riyadi contributed to the supervision of the research process, refinement of the conceptual and methodological framework, critical review of the analytical arguments, and validation of the interpretation of findings. In addition, he participated in revising the manuscript critically for important intellectual content and ensuring the overall academic coherence of the article. Both authors collaboratively discussed the results, contributed to the final version of the manuscript, and approved the article for publication.

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