

The Prospects for Decolonising *Qur'ān* and *Tafsīr* Studies in Indonesian Islamic Universities: A Static Discourse?

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Abstract: The discourse on decolonizing *Qur'ān* and *tafsīr* studies has gained momentum following Joseph E. Lumbard's critique of Eurocentric epistemologies in Islamic studies. However, its reception and development in Indonesian *Qur'ānic* studies remain insufficiently examined. This article investigates the discourse in Indonesian Islamic universities by focusing on the reception of Western scholarship, the dominance of contextual interpretation, and the position of *tafsīr Nusantara*. Using qualitative library research and critical discourse analysis, it evaluates the conceptual assumptions underlying these developments. The study finds that decolonization in Indonesia remains largely a static discourse. Although Western scholarship has been widely adopted, it has reinforced the predominance of contextual hermeneutics while leaving classical Islamic exegesis and *tafsīr Nusantara* marginal to contemporary scholarship. The article argues that meaningful decolonization requires not the rejection of Western scholarship but the reconstruction of a pluralistic epistemology that recognizes classical Islamic exegesis and *tafsīr Nusantara** as autonomous intellectual traditions. It thus offers a conceptual framework for advancing decolonization in Indonesian *Qur'ānic* and *tafsīr* studies.

Keywords: Decolonisation, Hermeneutics, Indonesian Islamic Universities, *Qur'ān* and *Tafsīr* Studies, *Tafsīr Nusantara*

Abstrak: Artikel ini mengkaji perkembangan wacana dekolonisasi studi al-Qur'an dan tafsir yang menguat sejak seruan Joseph Lumbard untuk mengkritik dominasi epistemologi Barat dalam Studi Islam. Berbeda dari anggapan bahwa keserjanaan Barat bersifat monolitik, penelitian ini menunjukkan adanya dinamika internal yang mencerminkan kemampuan tradisi tersebut untuk mengkritik dan merevisi asumsi-asumsinya sendiri. Dengan menggunakan library research dan analisis wacana kritis, penelitian ini mengevaluasi perkembangan diskursus dekolonisasi di Indonesia melalui tiga aspek, yaitu resepsi keserjanaan Barat di Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri (PTKIN), dominasi tafsir kontekstual dalam bentuk hermeneutika dan tafsir tematik (*mawḍū'ī*), serta posisi tafsir Nusantara dalam studi al-Qur'an kontemporer. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa hermeneutika dan tafsir *mawḍū'ī*, yang selama ini diposisikan sebagai dua pendekatan yang berbeda, bertumpu pada struktur epistemik yang serupa. Keduanya lahir sebagai respons terhadap modernitas, berangkat dari persoalan-persoalan kontemporer, dan memperlakukan korpus tafsir klasik sebagai sumber data, bukan sebagai tradisi intelektual yang memiliki genealogi dan logika epistemiknya sendiri. Karena itu, tafsir *mawḍū'ī* tidak dapat diposisikan sebagai alternatif dekolonial terhadap hermeneutika. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa dekolonisasi studi al-Qur'an dan tafsir di Indonesia masih merupakan "wacana yang statis", yang ditandai oleh ambivalensi institusional, polemik yang berpusat pada asal-usul pendekatan alih-alih metode, serta marginalisasi tafsir klasik dan tafsir Nusantara. Artikel ini menawarkan kerangka konseptual untuk mengevaluasi sekaligus mengembangkan agenda dekolonisasi studi al-Qur'an di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Dekolonisasi, Hermeneutika, Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam, Studi Al-Qur'ān dan *Tafsīr*, Tafsir Nusantara

1. Introduction

"While Muslim lands are no longer directly colonized, intellectual colonialism continues to prevail in the privileging of Eurocentric systems of knowledge production to the detriment and even exclusion of modes of analysis that developed in the Islamic world for over a thousand years." Joseph Lumbard

Decolonisation has become a new field of study that continues the discourse initiated by postcolonial figures, who recognise the need to rethink the residues of Western colonialism that have become hegemonic and the standard for epistemology, considered valid and authoritative. Colonised regions, such as the Islamic world, have fallen victim to a domination that has increasingly shackled and obscured the unique identity and characteristics of the Islamic intellectual civilisation, whose foundations were built 15 centuries ago, long before the West discovered what they call "enlightenment" (J. Lumbard, 2022, pp. 1–2).

Re-questioning the centrality of the West in determining what is "appropriate" and "inappropriate" amid the current surge in Islamic studies is an integral part of decolonisation. The important point is to re-examine the awareness of the hegemonic influence of the Western academic paradigm, which appears to hold a superior position and subordinate other paradigms as inferior (Said, 1978, p. 35). There is a discomfort here that a decolonial argument should name rather than conceal. The discourse acquires authority in proportion to the institutional position of those who voice it. A critique of Eurocentrism formulated in Indonesian and published in a national journal circulates as local opinion; the same critique formulated in English by a scholar holding a chair in a metropolitan institution circulates as a field-defining intervention. This is not an argument against Lumbard, whose contribution is substantive and whose call is the occasion for the present article. It is an observation about the economy of recognition within which even anti-hegemonic claims must be made, and it is the first thing such an argument should be honest about, since the argument is itself subject to it. The present article, written in English for an indexed journal by an author whose institution rewards precisely that choice, is no exception. Decolonisation, in this sense, functions as a critical counter-discourse directed by Western scholars at the internal assumptions of their own field—challenging a tradition that has, consciously or not, curtailed the intellectual creativity of civilisations working to establish their own epistemic traditions, among them the Islamic world (J. E. B. Lumbard, 2024, pp. 1–2, 2025, pp. 1–2).

The above phenomenon undeniably shows the centrality of Western intellectual civilisation as the beacon of knowledge today. An Indonesian scholar, for example, who attempts to write various critiques of Western intellectual hegemony in Bahasa is likely to have their ideas disregarded as insignificant in the development of decolonisation studies. They must write their ideas in a language that can be considered acceptable by Western academia and must publish in internationally recognised media. Ironically, if they do not follow these rules, it is very likely that their work and ideas will have no value and will not be cited in research written by Western scholars discussing the same topic.

Focusing on the field of Islamic studies, particularly Qur'ān and *tafsīr* studies, the primary field of inquiry in this article, a similar dynamic is at work. Western scholars consider Qur'ān and *tafsīr* studies to have entered their golden age with the emergence of various innovative studies, making them worthy of the title "the crown of Islamic Studies" (Sirry, 2019, pp. 1–18). It is therefore not surprising that the issue of decolonisation is also unavoidable in discussions within this field of study. Joseph Lumbard's article, "Decolonizing Qur'anic Studies," is one of the references that explicitly addresses this issue.

Lumbard is a prominent American Muslim scholar and an Associate Professor of Qur'an Studies at Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Qatar, widely recognised for his role as a general editor of *The Study Quran*. He advocates for the decolonisation of Qur'anic studies to combat the pervasive "intellectual colonialism" within Western academia, which routinely privileges Eurocentric systems of knowledge production at the expense of traditional Islamic methodologies. Lumbard argues that this academic hegemony induces an epistemological reductionism that dismisses or excludes over a

thousand years of classical Islamic analytical tools and native scholarship, reducing the Islamic tradition to a mere object of investigation rather than an active producer of meaning. By proposing a decolonial approach, he aims to dismantle the presumed intellectual superiority of Euro-American frameworks, thereby fostering a more inclusive, egalitarian international discourse that respects and integrates the analytical autonomy of the classical Islamic tradition.

Lumbard reveals,

Much of the consternation expressed by scholars who critique approaches to the Quran that have emerged from within the Euro-American academy arises from the fact that Quranic scholarship in many parts of the Islamic world is often ignored in Euro-American Quranic Studies. The extensive research in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Indonesian, and other languages is rarely cited in work written in European languages, and many of the sources that have informed the Islamic tradition for some one thousand years continue to receive little to no regard in the Euro-American academic study of the Quran (J. Lumbard, 2022, p. 2).

It is no exaggeration to say that Lumbard has made this discourse increasingly resonant and serious enough to be followed up in this field of study. He presents several cases that illustrate the polemic among Western scholars, where there is a polarity divided into two camps: on the one hand, there is a hostile reception and assessment of the legacy and development of Islamic scholarship; and on the other hand, there is an appreciation of it and its use as a foundation for new creations and innovations in the topics being worked on. Lumbard builds his critique based on the ideas of several scholars who are concerned with the discourse of decolonisation in Islamic studies, such as Sajjad Rizvi (2021), Parvez Manzoor (1987), Wael Hallaq (2018), Talal Asad (2009), and especially Behnam Sadeghi (2011; Sadeghi & Bergmann, 2010) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014).

Upon further examination, there are several fundamental differences between the two poles mentioned above. The first pole tends to treat the Islamic traditional heritage as invalid and non-authoritative historical data. The abundant material is only considered to have no historical value, except as a product of dogmatic faith and religious piety. Materials drawn from the tradition of Islamic historical narration and codified in genres such as *kutub al-hadīṣ*, *tafāsīr*, and *sīrah* are treated merely as artifacts of faith-formation rather than as repositories of knowledge that record Muslims' epistemological history of reconstructing, interacting with, and extracting meaning from the Qur'an. Among the prominent scholars who fall into the first typology, often referred to as revisionists, are Andrew Rippin (2006), Gabriel Sayd Reynolds (2010), Christoph Luxenberg (2007), Arthur Jeffery (2007), Nicolai Sinai (2017), and David S. Powers (2011).

The second camp operates from an appreciative paradigm toward the intellectual heritage of Islamic scholars (*'ulamā*) in this field. Scholars who support this paradigm aim to present an antithesis to the first, arguing that there is a rich history of Islamic scholarship that seeks to understand the holy book in terms of its historical context, its meaning, and its proper interpretation as an integral part of faith. The inclusion of elements of faith is inevitable in the knowledge products of the Muslim community throughout its intellectual history related to the Qur'an. The position of the Qur'an as a holy book that is the source of teachings and values in Islam has been agreed upon since its revelation. Consideration of this fact has led scholars in the second typology to pay close attention to the Islamic intellectual tradition born from its unique epistemology as important data that must be used as a fundamental basis before discussing topics related to the study of the Qur'an. Prominent scholars in this second typology include Angelika Neuwirth (2007), Travis Zadeh (2015), Walid Saleh (2004; 2022), and Emran el-Badawi (2014).

These two opposing poles suggest that Western scholars are in contention regarding the epistemology they employ to assess an intellectual tradition, while also indicating that critical and evaluative efforts are always present within Western intellectual academia. This capacity for self-critique may account for the continued intellectual vitality of Western scholarship today. Fred M. Donner, in his article "Reflections on the History and Evolution of Western Study of the Qur'an, from

ca. 1900 to the Present," provides an interesting response to the polemical and anti-Islamic bias within Western scholarship. He acknowledges that the roots of Islamic studies in the Western world can indeed be considered to have such a negative bias. However, over time, many Western scholars have begun their studies through the basic doctrines developed within traditional Islamic teachings. Nevertheless, the perception that Western scholarship seeks to undermine Islamic tradition has become ingrained in the minds of Muslim scholars, so that even scholarship models that are free of negative bias and are solely motivated by the pursuit of knowledge continue to be viewed negatively (2019, pp. 21–44).

This situation is indeed a dilemma. Western scholarship has its own distinctive characteristics, mainly due to the dominance of rationalism and the philological approach of the post-Enlightenment period. Meanwhile, Eastern scholarship has also long had its own way of studying the Qur'an. In this context, it is quite difficult to reconcile the two, and the best meeting point can only be identified through a description of the second pole, summarized from Lombard's views and what he means by decolonizing. In this context, their efforts to continue questioning and criticizing everything that has been considered established are worthy of emulation as part of the maturity of academic culture, which also enriches the discourse within it. The implication is a genuinely pluralistic epistemology. The willingness to continuously interrogate established assumptions is the foundation upon which a more authentic epistemological self-awareness can be built. This is, arguably, the horizon toward which decolonisation points: a state that gives every intellectual tradition the freedom to express itself without being dictated to by other traditions, while still appreciating the existence of those traditions.

In the Indonesian context, the encounter between Western Qur'anic studies and local Muslim academia has been documented by Yusuf Rahman (2019) and Yusuf Rahman and Ervan Nurtawab (2024), whose work maps institutional history, curricular dynamics and the polarized responses of Indonesian scholars. Their account is indispensable, and the present article depends on it. What that literature does not undertake is an evaluation of the conceptual apparatus itself. It records that hermeneutics entered the curriculum and that a controversy followed; it does not ask whether the terms of that controversy were correctly drawn. The question pursued here is precisely that one. If the instruments contending for the interpretation of the Qur'an in Indonesian departments turn out, on examination, to share a common epistemic structure beneath their opposed genealogies, then the controversy has been conducted over the wrong variable, and the decolonial programme that takes its bearings from that controversy will remain static however vigorously it is pursued.

But has the same thing happened in Indonesia? How is the academic milieu of Qur'ān and *tafsīr* studies in Indonesia, as represented by Islamic universities, engaging with the discourse of decolonisation in this field? This series of questions will be answered in this article, as a response to Lombard's scholarly invitation and preliminary evaluation towards the development of Islamic intellectual discourse in Indonesia, by revealing and evaluating several main points of focus: (1) the reception of Islamic higher institutions in Indonesia, in this case Islamic universities, towards the entry of Western scholarship; (2) the excessive proliferation of contextual interpretation in the Indonesian Muslim academy; (3) the development of the study on *tafsīr* Nusantara as an original intellectual product composed and produced in Indonesia. As a preliminary study concerned with the evaluation of a discourse, this article proceeds without statistical data and without a survey of curricula or educational policy. Its material is the body of scholarship already published in this field, read evaluatively rather than tallied. The order is deliberate: before one can measure whether a field is moving, one must first specify what movement would consist in, and that specification is a matter of argument rather than of counting.

2. The Reception of Western Scholarship in PTKIN: An Institutional Ambivalence

To examine how the academic milieu of State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN) in Indonesia introduced and received Western scholarship in support of the orientation of Islamic studies, particularly in the field of Qur'ān and *tafsīr*, several studies can be reviewed here. Two articles written

by Yusuf Rahman (2019; Rahman & Nurtawab, 2024), in particular, and several other complementary articles serve as references for the narrative presented in this segment.

Questioning the acceptance of Western scholarship in the Indonesian academic milieu has become an age-old problem, as their ideas have become something that must be included in the curricula of the Department of Qur'an and *Tafsir* Studies at PTKIN and its official associations, such as AIAT (Association of Qur'an and *Tafsir* Studies), today. At the very least, the studies of "Orientalism and Qur'anic Studies," "Qur'anic Studies in the West," and "Hermeneutics" are present across all five universities surveyed in Rahman and Nurtawab's latest research: UIN Jakarta, UIN Yogya, UIN Padang, UIN Bukittinggi, and UIN Makassar (Rahman & Nurtawab, 2024, p. 340).

It is worth noting, however, that UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung was not included in Rahman and Nurtawab's sample, yet it represents a notable pioneering case in the institutionalisation of hermeneutical methodology within PTKIN. According to a senior lecturer at the university, taken from the direct conversation, the course on Hermeneutics was formally introduced in the Department of Qur'ān and *Tafsir* Studies at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung as early as 2000—well before it became a widely mandated feature across the national network of Islamic universities—a development that required considerable institutional advocacy to secure its place in the official curriculum. This early initiative signals that the intellectual openness necessary for decolonisation discourse was not absent from the Indonesian context; it was, in many instances, present but institutionally contained.

In the field of Islamic studies, the classic debate among Muslim scholars about the permissibility of befriending and engaging in discussions with Western scholars has been ongoing since the emergence of sentiments against orientalism. This mega intellectual project was seen as an attempt at colonisation and blurring of faith. Christopher Berg and Melanie Shaw's historical account documenting the elegant "intellectual war" between Abdul Latif Tibawi, Anouar Abdel Malek, and Edward Said *vis a vis* Francesco Gabrieli, Donald Little, and Bernard Lewis is one of the most thought-provoking works on this topic that emerged in the postcolonial era (Berg & Shaw, 2014, pp. 1–16). Muhammad Abdul-Rauf and Fazlur Rahman, who were later mentioned in Rahman and Nurtawab's article, represent the continuation of the polarity of acceptance of Western scholarship among Muslims in the more specific field of Qur'an and *Tafsir* studies (Rahman & Nurtawab, 2024, p. 338).

Polarisation also occurs in the study of the Qur'an and *tafsir* in Indonesia. Sahiron Syamsuddin's criticism of M. Quraish Shihab's selective attitude towards hermeneutics may be one of the most recent examples (Kurdi, 2022). The classic debate between Adnin Armas and Mun'im Sirry about the history of the Qur'an in the early 2000s, triggered by the entry of Mustafa al-A'zami's book, *The History of the Qur'anic Text*, which discusses the history of the Qur'an based on tracing the tradition, remains a reference point in Indonesian academic discourse. Unlike Armas, Quraish Shihab's compromising attitude is more suited to the group of proponents (albeit not entirely), rather than opponents. This is because, though he criticised it, Shihab also accepted several hermeneutical theories that he considered applicable. In older cases, Shihab also appreciated, yet he questioned, the overly appreciative attitude towards Western scholarship shown by Taufik Adnan Amal when writing *Rekonstruksi Sejarah Al-Qur'an* (Reconstruction of the History of the Qur'an) (Rahman, 2019, pp. 45–60).

When it comes to the opposition camp, the prominent figures within it are relatively few. Names such as Adian Husaini, Adnin Armas, Syamsudin Arif, Hamid Fahmi Zarkasyi, Taufik Adnan Amal, Fahmi Salim, and Henri Shalahuddin are the most famous figures from this minority group. The intellectual influence of Syed Naquib Alattas has served as a significant catalyst for the resistance mounted by these ISTAC alumni and INSITS founders. Rahman commented that the harsh criticism voiced by this resistance group was misdirected because they lumped all Orientalists together. In fact, as explained in the previous segment, orientalist are not monolithic. This latent and long-standing issue is also caused by ideological evaluations and inadequate access to reading materials. Nevertheless, the dialectical face of discourse in the Indonesian Muslim academic world has become more diverse and vibrant (Wibowo, 2019, pp. 145–212).

In the context of PTKIN today, Western scholarship has been certified as acceptable and is even required, as mandated by the superstructure institutions. This development is inseparable from the wave of Islamic scholars who studied at Western institutions in the 1960s and 1970s who later returned to their homeland and filled central positions in the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as well as successfully establishing academic cooperation with several Western universities—under a lecturer training program organised by Munawir Sjadzali. Mukti Ali and Harun Nasution, who were rectors at IAIN Yogyakarta and IAIN Jakarta, respectively, are considered the initiators behind the inclusion of Western scholarship in the Islamic studies curriculum at Indonesian Islamic universities (Rahman, 2019, pp. 45–60).

In one of his articles compiled in a collaborative publication sponsored by ISEAS, *The New Santri: Challenges to Traditional Religious Authority in Indonesia*, Azhar Ibrahim refers to these newly "enlightened" arrivals as Muslim religious intellectuals or reformist circles. Their emergence is considered to challenge the *kyai*, *ustadz*, *tuan guru*, *ajengan*, *da'i*, and similar titles that are traditionally regarded as holders of religious authority (Azhar, 2020, pp. 28–45). Continuing Ibrahim's notion about the position of these new contestants, he argues that these Muslim intellectuals carry a mission to bridge religion and modernity. They are the articulators and disseminators of modern Islamic ideas. He quotes Forough Jahanbakhsh, *Islam, Democracy and Religious Modernism in Iran 1953-2000: From Bazargan to Shorush*, to emphasise that the phenomenon of reformism that Jahanbakhsh saw in Iran can also be felt in Indonesia (Azhar, 2020, pp. 28–45). The slogan *Islām shālīḥ li kull zamān wa makān*, which Islamic studies students hear today, is an echo that has been heard since that time. This means that the mega project of "Contextual Islam" began to take shape when Muslim students who had become ideological disciples of the Western scholarship set foot in Indonesia. The mission may have been noble and in line with the challenges of the time.

However, when applied to the field of Qur'an and *Tafsīr* studies, this same scholarly model has drawn sharp criticism for its apologetic character. Majid Daneshgar is one of the actors highlighted in several places by Rahman and Nurtawab. Through his work, *Studying the Qur'an in the Muslim Academy*, which records his intellectual experiences in three countries—Iran, Malaysia, and New Zealand—Daneshgar explicitly states that, generally, studying the Qur'an in the Muslim academy is apologetic, and this is supported by what he terms "irshadic power" (Daneshgar, 2020, p. 17). Rahman himself had provided a similar evaluation earlier, assessing doctoral dissertations in the field of Qur'ān and *tafsīr* studies in Indonesia that use *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* as a normative and dogmatic product (Rahman, 2019, pp. 45–60). These two indictments deserve to be set side by side, since they do not fall upon the same instrument. Daneshgar's charge is directed at the apologetic temper of Qur'ānic scholarship in the Muslim academy at large, whereas Rahman's falls specifically upon dissertations organised by *tafsīr mawḍū'ī*. The finding, however, is the same in both that the text is approached with its verdict already settled. It is worth registering at the outset, then, that the apologetic diagnosis does not arrive attached to any single provenance, and that the earliest Indonesian evidence for it concerns a method of impeccably Islamic descent.

Rahman and Nurtawab trace the intellectual genealogy of Daneshgar's critique to a festschrift dedicated to Andrew Rippin, "Western Non-Muslim Qur'anic Studies in Muslim Academic Contexts: On Rippin's Works from the Middle East to the Malay-Indonesian World." In this article, Daneshgar shows his intention to argue that the phenomenon of apologetics in Muslim academia is a recurring historical pattern. A similar view is found in classical works, in which non-Muslim ideas were used as the basis for constructing Islamic theological arguments, affirming Rippin's argument that historical narratives are used only as material for interpretation, rather than as historical data (Rippin, 1988). Daneshgar's criticism may not be excessive if it refers to academic studies in the Muslim world today, but it becomes analytically disproportionate when directed at the intellectual formation of Muslim intellectuals in the Middle Ages, who indeed had a distinctive intellectual tradition that did not separate theological discourse from all their scholarly activities. In this special case, decolonisation finds its momentum through some scholarly efforts which began to examine the trajectories and tensions within

tafsir's intellectual tradition and history (see: Pink, 2020, pp. 818–831; Rahman & Nurtawab, 2024, p. 345; W. Saleh, 2004; W. A. Saleh, 2020b).

Given the complexity of the discussion on the acceptance of Western scholarship in Indonesian Islamic academy, several points warrant brief elaboration regarding the potential for decolonisation studies to develop in Indonesia. Firstly, as a locus of encounter between Muslim and Western intellectual traditions, PTKIN is indeed in a dilemma. On the one hand, the presence of Western intellectual traditions brings a breath of fresh air to the emergence of new scholarship that focuses on critical discussion. On the other hand, PTKIN is expected to be a cradle for prospective scholars who master the normative principles of Islam through *turāth* and are able to apply them practically in society. This last part is also influenced by the early days of PTKIN, which looked to Al-Azhar University as a role model and included traditional religious authorities who were also mostly influenced by, or were indeed alumni of, Middle East academia. The two main orientations of graduated students from this study program have been standardised by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which determines the direction of higher education institutions under its authority (Rahman & Nurtawab, 2024, pp. 346–347).

The two orientations considered incompatible will not yield anything positive, except for a battle based on arrogance due to differences in intellectual traditions. In fact, decolonisation envisions the emergence of an academic study model that is capable of bridging constructive dialogue between two intellectual traditions with different historical roots, Lumbard refers to this as “new ecologies of knowledge” (J. Lumbard, 2022, p. 14). However, to ensure that this happens, Islamic universities must be more serious in designing the academic orientation in this field of study as a vehicle for the dialectic of ideas and concepts. This is because if too much attention is given to the production of *mufassir* (Qur'anic commentators), students will tend to dwell on the realm of contextual *tafsir* production and will further perpetuate the battle between two intellectual poles that are still very difficult to reconcile. This point is elaborated further in the following section.

Secondly, the dilemma faced by the institution also affects lecturers who bear primary responsibility for operating and ensuring academic performance within the scope of Indonesian Islamic universities. They are also inevitably caught in a duality of conditions as both intellectuals and practical interpreters in society. Rahman and Nurtawab then put forward two ideal proposals. The first proposal concerns the balance of experts in the department of Qur'an and *tafsir* studies. This is necessary as an effort to balance the two demands directed at this department, namely, as producers of academicians and traditional religious authorities simultaneously. Then, the second proposal is placed in the realm of cultivating an inclusive tradition in the intellectual sphere that can accommodate both orientations, representing two different knowledge directions. For Rahman and Nurtawab, the success of UIN Jakarta and UIN Yogya in adapting to various new discourses discussed globally and becoming leading Islamic universities is inseparable from their efforts to provide a comfortable home for intellectuals (Rahman & Nurtawab, 2024, pp. 353–356).

3. The Proliferation of Contextual Interpretation in Indonesian Muslim Academy

Contextual Interpretation and The Rise of Apologetics

This section highlights the tension between Rahman's appraisal and, more importantly, Daneshgar's assessment of the milieu of Islamic studies in the Muslim academy. The tension arises because both scholars implicitly critique the very instrument—hermeneutics—that has become part of the epistemological apparatus of Muslim academia, particularly in Indonesia. The term “Contextual Islam”—employed earlier in this discussion—undeniably carries a strong sense of apologetics. To clarify, let us refer to the operational definition used by Daneshgar. Islamic Apologetics is identified with the phrase Islamic Religious Studies used by Aaron W. Hughes when describing the model of Islamic studies in North America, which is characterised as follows: “one which is theological in orientation, manipulative in its use of sources, and distortive in conclusions, and which has the aim of

showing a merciful and less controversial picture of Islam, its emergence and development" (Daneshgar, 2020, p. 22).

The formation of a "new theological" perspective is both the starting point and the culmination of the process of studying the Qur'an promoted by Muslim intellectuals today. This seems to be the objection of Daneshgar's criticism of Islamic apologetics. Walid Saleh's analysis reinforces this point; he pays particular attention to contemporary interpretation of the Qur'an and puts forward a thesis that writing interpretations in the modern era is indeed intended to situate Muslims in the context of modernity, or what he terms "scriptural theology." Furthermore, this becomes a starting point to confirm that Daneshgar's claim, with its operational basis, is accurate when applied to the Muslim academy in Indonesia, notably since today most students at all levels who attempt to produce contextual exegesis use epistemological constructs derived from Western scholarship (hermeneutics) and also pay attention to *tafsir mawḍū'ī*, which later is considered to lack historical sensitivity in its methodology (Rahman, 2019, p. 50).

Abd Muid Nawawi carefully observed this debate when writing his review of Daneshgar's monograph. According to him, perhaps the similarity in apologetic reasoning has become the root cause of conflict between the contestants who are trying to introduce Western approaches and the incumbents who remain loyal to modern Islamic methodology. The battle between Hermeneutics vs. *Tafsir Mawḍū'ī* (see: al-Ṣadr, 1989; Muslim, 2000) is a representation of this tension. Therefore, it is understandable that the writings of critics of orientalism in Indonesia—some of whose main figures have been described above—revolve around two main topics, namely the history of the Qur'an and the use of hermeneutics as a method of interpreting the Qur'an. As a result, personal attacks against Hermeneutics and its proponents are inevitable (Nawawi, 2024).

The Department of Qur'an and *tafsir* studies at PTKIN is indeed at a crossroads. However, the crossroads in question here is no longer in the context of uncertainty between producing academics or *dā'ī* (preachers). Rather, the choice at hand is between producing scriptural theologians with a *salaf* (traditional epistemology—based on 'Ulūmul Qur'ān or *Qawā'id al-Tafsir*) approach or scriptural theologians with a *khalaf* (modern epistemology—based on Hermeneutics) approach. Whichever option is chosen, ultimately, scholars who view apologetics as not part of academic activities, such as Daneshgar and his colleagues, will always be at odds with Muslim scholars who place too much emphasis on contextual interpretation. This tension, however, does not engage those who remain unaware of or indifferent to it. Most scholars today may be in the latter camp, although they should now be tired and weary of seeing the proliferation of graduate and postgraduate theses that present contextual interpretations in an arbitrary manner. Yet if both paths issue in scriptural theologians, the difference between them may be smaller than the vigour of the dispute suggests, and it is worth asking what the two approaches share.

Two Instruments, One Epistemic Posture

Turning to the terms of the controversy itself, it becomes apparent that the debate occupying Indonesian Qur'anic studies for decades has been conducted as though the decisive question were one of provenance. The logic on both sides is simple enough: hermeneutics is foreign and therefore suspect, whereas *tafsir mawḍū'ī* is Islamic and therefore safe. The critics of orientalism have constructed a substantial body of writing upon the first premise, while the departments that resist them have constructed their curricula upon the second. However, it is worth asking whether both camps have misidentified what is actually at stake, and whether the vigour of their disagreement has concealed the extent of what they share.

Before proceeding, an obvious objection must be addressed. Does *tafsir mawḍū'ī* not possess classical antecedents? Genres such as *aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, *al-wujūh wa al-naẓā'ir*, and *gharīb al-Qur'ān* did indeed gather verses from across the *muṣḥaf* under a unifying rubric, and the procedural resemblance is real enough. Nevertheless, resemblance of procedure is not identity of purpose. These genres operated within a discipline whose questions were generated by that discipline itself: a jurist assembled the verses of a legal category because the derivation of a ruling required it, while a lexicographer

assembled the faces of a word because the constraints of Arabic usage required it. In both cases the rubric arose from within the tradition's own economy of inquiry, and the operation remained bounded by that economy. Nothing in it obliged the interpreter to begin from a question that the tradition had not itself posed.

Modern *tafsīr mawḍū'ī*, by contrast, inverts this direction. Its codification as a self-conscious *manhaj* belongs to the twentieth century, and the works that transmitted it to Indonesian classrooms are themselves twentieth-century products: al-Ṣadr's treatise on thematic exegesis and social philosophy, and Muṣṭafā Muslim's manual, both of which present the method explicitly as the means by which the Qur'an is brought to address the conditions of the age (al-Ṣadr, 1989; Muslim, 2000). Significantly, its intellectual milieu is the reformist lineage of Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā, a lineage constituted by the encounter with European modernity and by the felt obligation to demonstrate that revelation remains adequate to it. In this arrangement, the question no longer arises from within the discipline. It arrives from outside, formulated by a social agenda, and the *muṣḥaf* is subsequently traversed in search of an answer.

This inversion is precisely what philosophical hermeneutics performs when it begins from the horizon of the present interpreter and works back toward the text. The two methods were, admittedly, codified in different cities, in different languages, under different institutional patronage, and with opposed confessional self-understandings. Nevertheless, they share both a telos and an epistemic posture. Both begin from the present; both treat the exegetical corpus as a reservoir of material rather than as a sequence of positions taken by identifiable interpreters in identifiable circumstances; both are, in the strict sense, extractive. Their difference is therefore one of address rather than of structure, and where the structure is identical, the difference of address carries no consequence whatsoever for what happens to the intellectual heritage once either instrument is applied to it.

The consequence for the decolonial argument is considerable, and it cuts against an assumption widely held within Indonesian departments. *Tafsīr mawḍū'ī* is routinely offered as the indigenous alternative to imported hermeneutics, the method by which Muslims may interpret the Qur'an without borrowing. If the foregoing analysis is correct, however, the reverse is nearer the truth. Whatever its Cairene or Najafī address, *mawḍū'ī* reproduces the very posture that the decolonial critique identifies as the problem, and it may well do so more thoroughly than hermeneutics precisely because it is more widely trusted. Suspicion, in other words, is reserved for the instrument that carries a foreign name, while the instrument carrying a familiar one operates without scrutiny. A method is not decolonial by virtue of the passport of its author; to mistake the accent of an instrument for its structure is to leave that structure intact while congratulating oneself on having replaced it.

It is for this reason that the vocabulary required here is that of colonality rather than colonialism. Colonialism names an administration, and that administration ended. Colonality, by contrast, names a pattern of knowledge production that outlives the administration and is subsequently reproduced by the formerly colonised on their own initiative and in their own idiom. Syed Hussein Alatas, the Malaysian sociologist and a figure distinct from the Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas mentioned earlier, gave this reproduction its most economical name in this region: the "captive mind," a mode of scholarship that imitates without examining and that draws its problems from elsewhere while believing itself to be posing its own (Alatas, 1974; see also Alatas, 1972, 2000). The condition described here, accordingly, is not the intrusion of a foreign method into an Indonesian department. It is rather the settled operation of a posture that no longer requires importation because it has been thoroughly naturalised, and this is a far more difficult condition to argue against, since it presents itself as the tradition rather than as a departure from it.

It should be stated plainly that what has been offered here is a proposition rather than a demonstration. What would count against it is specifiable, and the final section of this article sets out what such evidence would look like. What can be said at this stage is that the alternative account, according to which *mawḍū'ī* preserves the intellectual heritage while hermeneutics dissolves it, requires one to explain why the classical commentaries fare no better under the former than under the latter.

The Marginalisation of Classical Qur'anic Commentaries

Classical Qur'anic commentary has become an issue that has received little attention in the field of Qur'ān and *tafsīr* studies, especially in Indonesia. This indication is based on some of the discourses voiced by leading scholars of Qur'ān and *tafsīr* studies, which appear to be intensely focused on current issues, such as the development of modern methodologies in interpreting the Qur'an (Mustaqim, 2019; Syamsuddin, 2022; Wijaya, 2021) and gender as a representative issue in modern exegesis (Kusmana, 2022). The lack of interest in studying classical Qur'anic commentaries is believed to be caused by both institutional and methodological factors. In terms of institutional factors, borrowing from Mu'ammār Zayn Qadafy's analysis in one of his articles questioning the stagnation of the study of classical Quranic commentary at Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN) in Indonesia, he mentions that there is still a pragmatic usefulness that causes fragmentation of motivation in writing academic research, which is divided between academic needs and religious preaching requirements (Qadafy, 2023).

The latter motivation, as noted above, cannot be separated from the formulation of Islamic Studies that has been promoted by PTKIN, which adopts the integration-interconnection approach formulated by Amin Abdullah (Qadafy & Yunita, 2025). This long-accepted approach provides space for collaboration between various disciplines projected onto the realm of meaning production. Consequently, studies that focus on examining the socio-historical context of texts and, at the same time, using them as material for efforts to present meanings that are relevant in the current context still dominate the field of Qur'ān and *tafsīr* studies in Indonesia (Qadafy, 2023).

Turning to methodological factors, there are at least three reasons for the lack of studies on classical interpretation. These three reasons are adopted from Walid A. Saleh's monograph on contemporary interpretation. First, there is a high level of enthusiasm for studying philological/linguistic aspects, which are central to modern exegesis methodology and closely linked to contextual characteristics. Second, the placement of classical exegesis materials in a complementary function, whose presence is needed when modern exegetes need them to reinforce modern exegesis arguments, especially classical exegesis that has rich philological descriptions. Third, the printing revolution of exegetical works that has colored the field of Islamic studies, including the genre of Qur'anic commentary, appears suspicious, as there is an impression of a hidden agenda behind it, yet it also provides ease of access. The hidden agenda, Saleh meant, is an effort to popularise several works of interpretation that are considered to be representative of classical interpretation, such as the works of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AH), and has implications for the decline of several other works of interpretation that were actually very popular in classical times, such as the works of al-Baiḍāwī (d. 685 AH), al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538 AH) and al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH) (W. A. Saleh, 2020a).

The emergence of a new hierarchy of texts—Saleh's term—has been sufficiently addressed by the internet and the mass dissemination of interpretive works on various website platforms. However, it still leaves behind residues, particularly regarding methodological problems that seem monotonous and taken for granted. This is similar to studies that focus on the classification or typology of classical interpretive works based on the framework popularised by Husain al-Dhahabi (d. 1977 AD), specifically *bil ma'tsūr* and *bil ra'y* (Kurdi, 2024), as outlined in his seminal work, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*. In fact, the philosophical boundaries of these two typologies cannot be measured, because, after all, an exegete who uses historical narratives as material for his exegesis also has a personal and rational role in determining the chosen tradition as the basis for his commentary (Qadafy, 2022a).

Classical Qur'anic commentary, beyond being perceived as an uninteresting subject, faces several compounding problems that deepen its decline. The two factors that have been elaborated provide at least two key steps that must be taken to overcome the stagnation. Firstly, the paradigm of Islamic higher education in this field requires clarification rather than amputation. It would be incoherent for an argument of this kind to demand that PTKIN purge confessional commitment from its scholarship. The strict separation of inquiry from faith is itself among the post-Enlightenment norms whose universality the decolonial critique places in question, and the medieval scholars whose analytical autonomy this article defends did not observe that separation either. Daneshgar's charge of apologetics,

persuasive as it is when directed at contemporary Muslim academia, becomes disproportionate when extended backwards to an intellectual formation that never undertook to keep theology and scholarship apart. The distinction that matters is therefore not between committed and uncommitted scholarship but between commitment as an acknowledged epistemic location and apologetics as a predetermined conclusion. A scholar may write as a Muslim, and may say so, without undertaking in advance that the tradition will be found to have anticipated the present. What must be relinquished is not *da'wah* but the arrangement in which the outcome of an inquiry is fixed before the inquiry begins, and in which the exegetical corpus is consulted only to ratify a position already held. This point may be entirely the responsibility of those who formulate the road map for PTKIN in Indonesia. Secondly, accommodating and adopting new approaches that can give significance to more methodologically innovative classical interpretation research (Qadafy, 2023, 2025).

What is needed is a new epistemological framework capable of bridging two intellectual civilisations, which, to this day, continue to compete without communicating with each other. This is because the increasingly massive production of contextual interpretations, which have become the medium of battle between *tafsir mawḍū'ī* and hermeneutics, has eroded the potential of scholars to engage more with the classical intellectual heritage, rather than simply using it as an authoritative basis for the new interpretations they are working on. Providing a contextual nuance to Islamic theology is indeed a challenge in this new era (Pink, 2014, 2019), but that does not mean it is the only issue that must be addressed. Ignoring other important issues that provide space for reading and studying the works of classical scholars and examining the traces of Islamic intellectual dynamics throughout its history is a high price to pay for the existence of this anachronistic contextual interpretation. Walid Saleh's proposal for studying the classical Qur'anic commentaries as a genealogical tradition should be welcomed enthusiastically in Indonesian Islamic scholarship. If it continues to be ignored, then decolonisation will only become a static discourse in the world of Indonesian Muslim academia (W. Saleh, 2004).

Several Indonesian scholars, with a more methodologically innovative spirit, have begun to propose alternative methodologies to untangle this knot. Mu'ammār Zayn Qadafy and Fadhli Lukman could be called the pioneers of this new awareness. "Releasing *Tafsir* studies from the Shadow of Qur'an Studies" (Qadafy, 2022b, 2022c) and "Becoming a Historian of *Tafsir*" (Lukman, 2021a) are the taglines of the grand methodological design they offer. However, we must realise that the consequence of this new trend is that the contextual interpretation may slowly begin to be minimised. This is because, in addition to being indicative of apologetics, other complications have been identified as afflicting it, as expressed by academic echolalia—a term coined by Qadafy in his latest writing, which often compels the use of a theory in academic research without understanding the context and philosophical reasoning behind its application (Qadafy & Yunita, 2025, p. 66).

4. *Tafsir Nusantara* as a Decolonial Resource: Intellectual Self-Confidence and the Movement from Periphery to Center

In addition to the issue of classical Qur'anic commentaries, *tafsir Nusantara*, which is a corpus of interpretations related to the archipelago, has also encountered similar difficulties amid the proliferation of contextual interpretation. *Tafsir Nusantara*, as a discourse, began to establish itself as a technical term from 2015 onward and was subsequently attributed to academic works that sought to examine *tafsir* works produced in, and written by authors from, the archipelago as their material object. Based on this definition of terminology, *tafsir Nusantara* should be understood as an intellectual product emerging from the Indonesian academic milieu's sustained engagement with Islamic intellectual heritage. Significantly, this extensive corpus should provide an adequate historical sketch of Indonesian scholars' involvement in the development of the Islamic intellectual history and, at the same time, establish it as a vital node in the global transmission of Islamic scholarship. However, today's phenomenon shows the opposite. Not only does it not hold a central position, but the *tafsir*

Nusantara is also regarded merely as supplementary data in contextual interpretation projects that are overly focused on creating new theological constructs.

Fadhli Lukman recognises this issue quite clearly in his article "Telaah Historiografi *Tafsir* Indonesia" (A Study of the Historiography of Indonesian *Tafsir*). There are at least two main typologies that can be identified from Lukman's assessment, which will be discussed further in this article, along with necessary modifications and additions. Macroscopic and microscopic reading indicators are employed as evaluation tools to assess the methodology and theses in academic works, with the aim of examining the study's direction.

The first typology considers the *tafsir* Nusantara as an essential part of the intellectual development within the Muslim world, or what can be described as trans-regional *tafsir*. Scholars falling into this typology aim to develop regional research that uses *tafsir* Nusantara as a framework to explore the dynamics of Muslims' intellectual history in Indonesia and nearby regions. This approach requires scholars to gather various available exegetical collections and understand the specific materials they present (microscopic) as a foundation for engaging in a broader discussion (macroscopic). Several scholars who have pursued this path have produced important works that serve as key references when discussing this issue, such as the works of Howard Federspiel (1994), A.H. Johns (Johns, 1988, 2005), Peter G. Riddell (2002, 2014), Majid Daneshgar (2016), Johanna Pink (Pink, 2019), Islah Gusmian (2013), Jajang A. Rohmana (2024, 2025, 2026), Ervan Nurtawab (2018, 2020), and Fadhli Lukman (2022). Their writings can also be referred to as historical works that enable their authors to be called historians of *tafsir* and, at the same time, actualise efforts to release the *tafsir* studies from the shadow of Qur'anic studies (Lukman, 2021b, pp. 60–64).

The second typology is dominated by Indonesian scholars, who often use the term "*Tafsir* Nusantara" merely as a slogan in their academic writings. This term is considered only a slogan because Lukman observes that academic works in this typology mainly focus on describing the plethora of exegesis through microscopic readings. Their findings remain atomistic because the *tafsir* works studied fail to illuminate the broader concept of *tafsir* Nusantara, place it in a specific historical moment in *tafsir* studies in the Nusantara region, or make it an essential part of the widespread circulation of the *tafsir* tradition. Ironically, other models of study even force *tafsir* Nusantara to become a secondary subject in the narrative that contextual *tafsir* aims to construct, a phenomenon similar to what classical Qur'anic commentary experiences, while also claiming that Nusantara *tafsir* supports the contextual *tafsir* in an anachronistic manner.

Two representative examples of cases that can be referred to as symptoms of contextual interpretation above are the article entitled "Nilai-Nilai Pluralisme dalam *Tafsir* Nusantara" (The Values of Pluralism in *Tafsir* Nusantara) written by Munzir Hitami (2021), a professor of Qur'an and *tafsir* studies at UIN Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, and "Konsep Ummatan Wasathan dalam Perspektif *Tafsir* Indonesia" (The Concept of Ummatan Wasathan in the Perspective of Indonesian *Tafsir*) written by Mohammad Nuryansah and Muhammad Izzul Haq (2022). Both articles attempt to address the results of their microscopic examination of several samples of *tafsir* Nusantara, contributing to the topics raised in today's mainstream discourse on religious moderation in Indonesia. Ultimately, the *tafsir* Nusantara is not read in the context of its time, and the interpretive narratives found are not treated as important data for tracing the genealogy and intellectual development of Indonesian Muslims during the period when the *tafsir* was produced. As a result, the corpus functions less as an object of study than as a source of confirmation: a contemporary category, whether pluralism or religious moderation, is carried to the text and subsequently reported as having been found within it. What such readings recover is therefore not a position held by the *mufassir*, but the shape of the question the researcher brought along.

Should this phenomenon of contextual interpretation, which bears apologetic tendencies, continue to be cultivated, the intellectual history of Muslim Nusantara, as collected in *tafsir* Nusantara, will be considered merely as supplementary data that lacks intrinsic historical value. As a result, this local regional context will only be recognised as a peripheral tradition. It will not play a significant role in the Muslim intellectual tradition, except as figures placed on the margins, serving no purpose other

than to observe from the margins in silence. Decolonisation, therefore, will remain a static discourse with little (no) influence in the academic context of Indonesian Islamic universities as long as there are no efforts to explore the identity of its scholarship, which has been built upon a rich intellectual heritage by its predecessors.

Positioned against the backdrop of decolonisation discourse, *tafsir* Nusantara carries a significance that extends far beyond the boundaries of regional study. It represents an indigenous intellectual tradition with genuine historiographical depth—one that can speak to the global conversation on Islamic exegesis with its own epistemic authority, rather than as an auxiliary corpus awaiting validation from Euro-American or Middle Eastern scholarship. The intellectual confidence required to sustain this claim is not unfounded. The archipelago's exegetical tradition, stretching from the Kitāb Malay manuscripts of Banten to the monumental works of Hamka's *Tafsir al-Azhar* and Quraish Shihab's *al-Miṣbāḥ*, constitutes a living genealogy of interpretive engagement that deserves to occupy a central, not peripheral, position in any serious account of Islamic intellectual history. Framing *tafsir* Nusantara in these terms is a prerequisite for any genuine decolonisation project: the assertion of epistemic self-confidence must precede, and not merely follow, the critique of hegemonic frameworks.

The movement toward this center has, in fact, already begun. The scholars cited in this article—among them Federspiel, Johns, Riddell, Gusman, Rohmana, Nurtawab, Pink, and Lukman—represent a growing scholarly network whose work collectively refuses to treat *tafsir* Nusantara as a footnote. Their contributions constitute a gradual but discernible recentering of the archipelago's exegetical tradition within the global map of *tafsir* studies. What remains absent is the institutional momentum from within PTKIN itself to sustain and amplify this trajectory—transforming it from an individual academic initiative into a structural commitment embedded in research agendas, curricula, and publication strategies. The disciplinary boundary between a periphery and a center is rarely dismantled by the force of a single argument; it erodes under the cumulative pressure of sustained, rigorous, and institutionally supported scholarship. The intellectual resources for this work are demonstrably available. The question that remains is whether the institutional will to organise them exists.

5. Conclusion

This article has traced the contours of decolonisation discourse as it fails to manifest within the academic milieu of Qur'ān and *tafsir* studies at Indonesian Islamic universities. Three conditions sustain that failure. PTKIN remains institutionally ambivalent, caught between the demand to produce academically rigorous scholars and the expectation to train normative religious authorities, so that critical initiatives depend on individual advocacy rather than structural design. Contextual interpretation has become hegemonic, and the exegetical corpus is consulted as material rather than read as a tradition. And *tafsir* Nusantara, rather than serving as a locus of epistemic self-determination, is instrumentalised as a reservoir of authoritative citations for arguments settled in advance. A tradition that cannot be read in the context of its own historical moment cannot ground any credible claim to intellectual sovereignty.

The article's central claim, however, concerns the terms in which the second of these conditions has been understood. The dependence at issue is not a dependence on Euro-American frameworks, and to describe it that way is to repeat the error these pages have tried to expose. Philosophical hermeneutics and modern *tafsir mawḍū'ī* were codified in different cities and are defended by parties who take themselves to be opposed, yet both begin from a question posed by the present and both treat the exegetical corpus as a reservoir. Their difference is one of address, not of structure. *Tafsir mawḍū'ī* cannot therefore serve as the indigenous alternative it is widely taken to be, and a polemic conducted for decades over provenance has been conducted over the wrong variable. A borrowed method feels least like a borrowing when it arrives in the language of the tradition itself.

Three consequences follow for the community of Qur'ān and *tafsir* studies lecturers and researchers. The first concerns method: the frameworks in use, whether hermeneutical or *mawḍū'ī*, should be treated as objects of epistemological inquiry rather than as instruments for generating

contemporary relevance, and the question asked of each should be what it does to the tradition it is applied to, not where it was codified. The second concerns the *tafsir* Nusantara corpus, which must be institutionalised as a core rather than an elective field, with research clusters, manuscript digitisation and training in the history of the *tafsir* book, since a department cannot historicise what it has not been taught to read philologically. The third concerns infrastructure: sustained publication and structured international collaboration in Southeast Asian Islamic intellectual history, in place of the individual initiative on which such work has so far depended.

Because the argument advanced here is conceptual, it ought to be stated in a form capable of being tested, and three propositions are offered in that spirit. First, if the convergence thesis holds, then research nominally devoted to classical or Nusantara exegesis should be found to employ thematic framing at rates comparable to research that announces itself as contextual; were such work instead to exhibit distinctively historical or philological framings, the thesis would fail. Second, if the hermeneutics controversy has been misdirected, then explicitly hermeneutical studies should constitute a small minority of actual research output, out of all proportion to the volume of polemic they have generated. Third, if the field is static in the sense proposed here, then methodological change over time should be observable without any corresponding increase in engagement with classical or Nusantara traditions.

Each of these propositions is answerable from materials that Indonesian departments already hold: curriculum documents, registers of research topics, and the citation practice of theses and dissertations. The author intends to address them in a subsequent study. If they are borne out, the diagnosis offered here will have been confirmed by evidence rather than by argument alone; if they are not, the account will require revision, and the field will have learned something either way. That, rather than any conclusion reached in these pages, is what a discourse would need in order to stop being static.

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