

CHAPTER IV

ANALYZING MAKKY AND MADANY SCIENCE WITH GADAMER'S HERMENEUTICS

A. The Contiguous Between Makky and Madany Science and Gadamer's Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics, for Gadamer, is not reconstruction, but mediation. We are the transmitter of the past to the present. The essence of understanding remains a mediation or translation of the meaning of the past into the present situation. Thus, Gadamer emphasizes particularly not to the application of a method by subject, but rather to the continuity of history, which is the medium that pervades every action of subjects and objects that s/he understood. Understanding is an event, a history of its own motion that either the translator or the text cannot be thought as autonomous parts. The core of understanding is an action of going into transmission events in which past and present are constantly mediated.¹

Such definition of hermeneutics above is thus deemed suitable by the writer to analyze Makky and Madany Science. Makky and Madany science is one of sub-disciplines of *Ulum al-Quran* that discuss the problem of categorization of verses and chapters in the Qur'an based on phases of revelation. Makky verses and chapters have different style and content from Madany verses and chapters. The differences are in line with the motion of developing reality of the Islamic societies,² which are, according to this science, divided into two phases: Makky phase and Madany phase. Each phase represents the context and horizons of both; horizon of past that stretches across 14 century. Then it's our task as a transmitter to mediate

¹Adnin Armas, M.A., *Hermeneutika Gadamer dan Dampaknya Terhadap Studi Qur'an*, paper presented in INSISTS discussion on August 11, 2007.

²Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Tekstualitas al-Qur'an: Kritik terhadap 'Ulumul Qur'an*, Trans. Khoiron Nahdiyyin, Yogyakarta: LkiS, 2002, p. 9.

between past horizons and now horizon in order to understand the “meaningful senses” of the Qur’an.

Makky and Madany Science, when it is analyzed with Gadamer’s hermeneutics, then we could withdraw a few points of contiguities. Those are: hermeneutical circle, dialogue and logic of question and answer, the power of rhetoric, and understanding as being historical (Past-Present-Future).

1. Hermeneutical Circle

The idea of the hermeneutical circle as an approach to understanding is rooted in ancient rhetoric and the attempt to understand sentences. The essence of the hermeneutical circle is the relationship between the whole and its parts. The parts cannot be understood in isolation from the whole, and the whole is understood by the coherence of the parts. Interpretation moves in a circle between parts of the text and the whole text and between the whole text and parts of the text. Viewed by some as a paradox, the theory of the hermeneutical circle asserts “that we cannot truly understand the text’s structural and linguistic parts except in the light of the whole, and yet we can only know the whole as it is expressed in its parts.” As Gadamer points out:

“this is a logically circular argument, insofar as the whole, in terms of which the part is to be understood, is not given before the part, unless in the manner of a dogmatic canon ... or of some analogous preconception of the spirit of an age...”³

People noticed long ago that certain concepts or elements of a text cannot be examined independently from the meaning of the whole text, for their meaning changes according to its unfolding. Dependence is mutual: individual text elements change their meaning following the whole, just

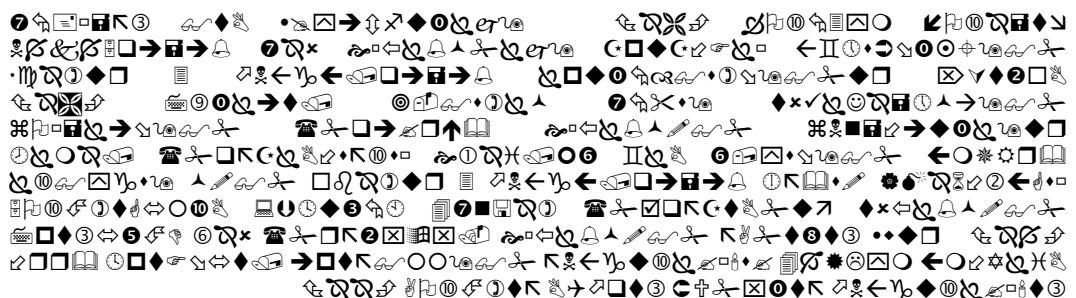
³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, edited translation by Garrett Barden and John Cumming, New York: Seabury Press, 1975, p. 190.

Although some Companions (e.g. Ali RA., Ibn Abbas and Ibn Mas'ud) ensured that they know the horizon surrounding the revelation of every verse, but the guarantee is not accompanied by the recording of the context and chronology of each verse. This imbalance is then tried to be bridged with the hermeneutical circle approach. Thus, this approach is in line with the ideality of Qur'anic understanding which operates in a comprehensive manner as a single entity, not as separate commands, atomistic, and partial.⁸

In relation to textual comprehension, Gadamer states:

*A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the texts with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning.*⁹

What really takes place during the process of understanding is the formation of a common situation of communication. It is the only way to let the other side express itself. Present horizon is neither closed nor it can be separated from the past, but it grows inside of it—that is the real meaning of the above—mentioned assertion that there is no particular horizon-in-itself. Genuine interweavement of all horizons is at issue, by understanding the past ones, we build a huge, common horizon that is permanently on move. Likewise the above-mentioned hermeneutical circle is determined by the constant mutual influence of its parts and its whole, a huge horizon is influenced by a smaller and vice versa. When we try to



⁸ Ilyas Supena, *Desain Ilmu-ilmu Keislaman Dalam pemikiran Hermeneutika Fazlur Rahman*, Semarang: Walisongo Press, 2008, p. 7.

⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Op. Cit.*, p. 4.

understand someone, we never lose ourselves, but approach a more general ground that represents our common space. Similarly, as we interpret texts, we must not fix the meanings, so that the meaning of the whole could be outlined. Particular meanings give a new sense to the whole, but, on the other hand, the unfolding of the whole presents us with a new self-understanding. Only by understanding others, we approach ourselves.

2. Dialogue and Logic of Question-Answer as Fusion of Horizon

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics have a well known term named "logic of question and answer." It expresses what Gadamer holds as "the most original hermeneutical phenomenon," the most universal feature of language, namely "*that no statement is possible which could not be understood as an answer to a question, and that the statement can always be understood only in this way.*" Whoever wishes to understand a proposition must first of all strive to understand the question which it is attempting to answer, or the horizon of question that bring the proposition about. Gadamer speaks of a "logic" of question and answer, and this logic, as a discipline of truth in discourse, aims at suspending the predicative logic which confines itself to the positivity of statements. The dialogic of question and answer invites one to look at the truth of the discourse which is at work in advance of our utterances, at the dialogue out of which such statements "emerge".¹⁰

Since comprehension is a communicative event, it has as its basic characteristic the hermeneutical conversation. The central relationship of this event is the question and answer. For Gadamer (2000), "*(a) person who thinks must ask himself questions.*"¹¹

In a dialogue, there is always a conversation between one party and another as a dialogue partner. According to Gadamer, in every conversation, both parties will be speaking in the same language. In

¹⁰ Jean Grondin, *Sources of Hermeneutics*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1995, p. 149.

¹¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Ibid*, p. 333.

looking at the conversation, we could simply say that we make conversation. However, basically, we are the one who “fall” and engage in the conversation.

In an interpretation of text by interpreter, there is a conversation between the interpreter and the text. This interpretation is a closed circle in dialectic of question and answer. In a dialogue between reader and text, it is required “openness” so that the conversation can continue. The text is not a passive party, but is also active in the conversation. In this condition, the interpreter must be able to make the text speaks about the concept and experience that they contain to be heard by the interpreter. “*Al-Qur’ana>n la> yant}iqu, wa innama> yatakallamu bihi> al-rija>l,*” that is what Ali RA has said.¹²

In the process of dialogue, there is a process called fusion of horizons. Text as the interpreted entity has its own horizon formed by the tradition of the text. When humans try to understand and interpret a text, the fusion between two different horizons will occur, i.e. horizons interpreter and the horizon of the text. In such a fusion of horizons the possibility of understanding will be shifted because the prior prejudices and pre-judgment can be tested and reviewed to form new understanding. This new understanding became a foundation for the interpreter and a pre-understanding for subsequent interpretation. Dialogue with the text is a process that occurs continually in the course of time.

Related with Makky and Madany science, the concept of dialogue and logic of question and answer will find the relevance with the diverse characters of the verses and chapters of the Qur’an. As highlighted in previous chapters, Makky and Madany science differentiate characters of Qur’anic verses and chapters in terms of structure and theme. Makky

¹² According to Ali RA., The Qur'an is a text that does not speak. Who can make the Qur'an speaks is human as its readers. The written Qur'an was compiled between two book covers that do not speak, except humans could make it speaks. See M. Nurkholis Setiawan, “Al-Qur’an dalam Kesarjanaan Klasik dan Kontemporer: Keniscayaan Geisteswissenschaften”, in *Jurnal Studi Al-Qur’an*, Jakarta: Pusat Studi Al-Qur’an, 2006, Vol. I, p. 83.

verses and chapters have different characters from Madany verses and chapters. Social context, *al-da'wah al-Islamiyyah*, and *tashri'* phases for example, are the factors, or horizons, which affect these differences. Any effort to interpret the Qur'an must consider the tradition, or horizon, from which each Qur'anic verse emerges.

Different horizons of each verse make the Qur'an's responses also different, adjusting its interlocutor. The Qur'an shows its responses, either in a form of discourse or rebuttal, through different language styles.¹³ Up here, the hermeneutic problem that arises is that any languages, including the scriptures, have limitation that is local because the language is a cultural reality. Meanwhile the message and the truth of religion contained in "the local language" have been a universal claim. In this aspect, the language of religion is tested its sophistications to store religious messages without having anomaly or trapped in the language it uses.¹⁴

In reading (and therefore interpreting) the Qur'an, the first movement will occur between the reader and the Text. As a reader (and therefore an interpreter), the question that has to be delivered is what the text literally says and what it means to me. The further question is what was the tradition or what were the historical circumstances surrounding the text when it was written by the author? Finally, the reader poses a more self-reflective question: How do I interpret this text with the tradition and experiences that I have at my disposal?¹⁵

Understanding will only occur in historical context or horizon that constantly changing. This has been one of the reasons why interpretation is never monolithic, or has one single aspect, rigid and static. If the horizon

¹³ Uniquely, the Qur'an also uses the dialogue style approach to the verses. See e.g. Qur'an dialogue with the infidels of Mecca who skeptic on eschatology in the Qur'an in Yasin [36]: 77-83. See Muhammad 'Ata Al-Sid, *Sejarah Kalam Tuhan*, tran. Ilham B. Saenong, Bandung: Teraju, 2004, p. 127.

¹⁴ Syamsul Ma'arif, *Metode Hermeneutik Untuk Penelitian Agama*, in *Teologia*, Vol. 17, Semarang: Fakultas Ushuluddin IAIN Walisongo Semarang, 2006, p. 10

¹⁵ Yeni Ratna Yuningsih, "Is There Objective Meaning In A Text? Re-Examining Hirsch's And Gadamer's Interpretive Strategy", in *Indo Islamika Journal*, Jakarta: Indo Islamika, 2007, p. 17

of history is constantly changing, understanding will follow its contour and also its shape. Finally, understanding itself is a fusion of different horizons, reciprocal relationships between various contexts. Gadamer argued that a text, either it is a legal code or a holy book, should be understood at all times, in specific situations, and in new ways that different from old, if we want to understand both as they should be understood.¹⁶

In a broader scope, dialogue can also occur between communities that have different cultures and reason on the one hand, and time distance on the other hand. It is our task to build a dialogue between the communities of Arabian, the first recipient the Qur'anic verses, and the contemporary community where we live. Each culture can influence and criticize each other. Sharing and critique of a community's reason can be only within the context of a history which is effective. These two related points have important repercussions for the possibility of dialogue among communities and for the kind of changes individual communities realistically can initiate.

3. The Power of Rhetoric

Text, in the view of hermeneutics, always has two components: the structure of the author's ideas and the actualization of those ideas into the structure of language. Structure of ideas and structure of language need to be noticed here in understanding a text.

Implicitly, this structure contains a problem concerning the nature of the text, the ways used to understand it and how the understanding and interpretation is determined by presupposition, belief or horizon of the audience who become the addressee of the text.¹⁷

¹⁶ E. Sumaryono, *Hermeneutika: Sebuah Metode Filsafat*, Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1995, p. 76-78

¹⁷ Van A. Harvey, "Hermeneutics", in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987, VI, p. 279.

The Qur'an, as sacred texts, is truly unique in composition. It is neither prose nor poetry. But, there are a high frequency of rhetorical features occupied in it. The Qur'an is a "sea of rhetoric". The Qur'an exhibits an unparalleled frequency of rhetorical features, surpassing any other Arabic text, classical or modern. The use of rhetoric in the Quran stands out from any type of discourse.¹⁸ A close up analysis of the Quran can highlight a wide range and frequency of rhetorical features.¹⁹

The totality of every chapter has a special character, with its own unique form, and its unique use of literary devices. Both Makky and Madany use rhetorical form to send the messages of God to the first addressee.

The features of the Qur'an are part of the reason of why it has not been emulated to this day. The highly acclaimed Professor and Arabist Hamilton Gibb states:

"....the Makkans still demanded of him a miracle, and with remarkable boldness and self confidence Muhammad appealed as a supreme

¹⁸ Rhetoric is the art or study of using language effectively and persuasively; it is a skill speaker and writers utilize in the construction of discourse so that it can sound effective and persuading. In its broadest sense, rhetoric is defined in the (Microsoft Bookshelf, 2008, p. 98) as "the theory and practice of eloquence, whether spoken or written. Spoken rhetoric is oratory. Rhetoric defines the rules that should govern all prose composition or speech designed to influence people's judgment or feelings". Majed Al-Quran and Bakri Al-Azzam, *Apostrophe: A Rhetorical Device of the Qur'an*, Zarqa: Hashemite University, 2009, Volume 7, p. 3.

¹⁹ To highlight the Qur'an's uniqueness, the following list has been provided to show that the Qur'an employs more rhetorical features than any other rhymed prose: Analogy (For example see Al-Ghashiyah [88]: 15-16); Alliteration (For example see Al-Ahzab [33]: 71); Antiphrasis (For example see Al-Dukhan [44]: 49); Antithesis (For example see Faṭir [35]: 7 & 9:82); Asyndeton (For example see Al-Ra'd [13]: 2); Assonance (For example see Al-Ghashiyah [88]: 25-26); Cadence (this is present in the whole Qur'an; it is a major rhetorical feature which is an inimitable feature of the Quran. The Qur'anic discourse uses assonance to deliver all the rhetorical features while employing the use of many phonetic features such as assimilation, nasalization, etc. No other text has done this before, especially in such frequency.); Chiasmus (See for example Ali Imran [3]: 27); Epizeuxis (See for example Alam Nashrah [94]: 5-6); Equivoque (See for example Al-Nur [24]: 43); Homonymy (See for example Al-Baqarah [2]: 14-15); Hyperbole (See for example Al-A'raf [7]: 40, and Al-Zumar [39]: 71-72); Isocolon (See for example Al-Talaq [65]: 7-10); Metaphor (See for example Maryam [19]: 4); Metonymy (See for example Al-Qamar [54]: 13); Parenthesis (See for example Al-Nisa' [4]: 73, and Al-A'raf [7]: 42); Polypton (See for example 'Abasa [80]: 25-26); Rhetorical Questions (See for example Al-Rahman [55]: 60, and Al-Saffat [37]: 91-92); Stress (See for example Ali Imran [3]: 92, and Al-'Ankabut [29]: 62 &); Synecdoche (See for example Al-Balad [90]: 12-13). This comprehensive subject requires further analysis. See Hamza Andreas Tzortzis, *The Unique Literary Form of the Qur'an*, retrieved from www.islam21c.com, on May 15 2010

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There is wide agreement among the commentators that this verse is a broad declaration of universal human equality, with piety (*taqwa*>) being the only valid basis for making distinctions between human beings.

This argument is supported by the placement of the verse in Al-Hujraat, which is concerned with setting out the mutual obligations and respect owed by members of the new Muslim community in seventh century Medina to each other and with eliminating the hard-hearted tribalism that plagued the life of the “desert Arabs.”

There is a very interesting shift in addressees for each of these verses. The verses condemning defamation, derision, sarcasm, and the like are addressed to Muslims (verses 11-12). However, the verse declaring that the human species comes from one source, and that piety (*taqwa*>) should be the only distinction made between human beings, is addressed to all humankind (verse 13). The verses criticizing the “desert Arabs” for their tribalism are addressed to the Prophet Muhammad (verses 14-18). He

is instructed to remind them that they have no faith and that adoption of the faith requires an abandonment of their “tribal preferences and prejudices.”²¹

On this basis, the following things should remain in consideration before understanding the Qur'an:

Firstly, comprehending indications and clues within the Qur'an. Once a person is able to ascertain the addressees of the discourse such that which among them are addressed directly and which indirectly; what is the phase whose circumstances the addressees are facing; what are the questions which have been raised by this phase whose answer is awaited by both friend and foe; what is the nature of the hostility by the enemies and what are the circumstances in which allies and friends find themselves in; what are various groups which have joined forces with the enemies while adopting various measures and tactics and what are the thoughts of the allies and associates, then the whole structure and sequence of the discourse shall become fully evident.²²

All these aspects speak of themselves within the drift of the discourse. Thus if they are ascertained through hard work, the whole sequence and arrangement of the Qur'an becomes fully evident and the effect of reading a chapter is the same as that of listening to an apt and timely oration of a great orator.

Secondly, the direction of address of the Qur'an should be ascertained at each place. The direction of address shifts a number of times in the Qur'an at very short intervals and sometimes even in a single verse. At one instant, Muslims would be addressees and at the next the *mushriku>n* (polytheists) would become the addressees; similarly, the People of the Book would be addressed in a verse and all of a sudden the

²¹ Bernard K. Freamon, *Some Reflection on Post-Enlightenment Qur'anic Hermeneutics*, Michigan: Michigan State Law Review, 2006, p. 1424-1425

²² Mohamed Sadek, *Principles of understanding the Qur'an*, retrieved from <http://www.ahl-alquran.com/English/articles.php> on May 16, 2010.

address would shift to the Muslims. A similar shift is experienced in singular and plural entities.

This change occurs both in the speaker and the spoken to. At one instant the speaker would be God and then suddenly Gabriel would assume the speaker's role. At another instant, the speaker would be Gabriel and the suddenly the discourse would emanate from the mouth of the Prophet. In short, just as an orator shifts from one addressee to another by shift in his tone, facial expressions and words used, in a similar manner, the address in the Qur'an also changes rapidly.

Thus it is essential that this aspect must be given full consideration while interpreting and explaining the Qur'an. It should be ascertained whether the speaker for example is God, Gabriel, the Prophet or the people. Similarly, it should be determined that the spoken to is God, the Prophet or the people. Among the people, it must be ascertained if they are Muslims or Hypocrites or the People of the Book or the Idolaters among the Ishmaelites or if they are two or three among these or if all of them are spoken to.

Then there may be instances of ambiguity in address as well. Sometimes, a verse would apparently address the Prophet; however, in reality the address would be directed at the Muslim *ummah*. Similarly, an apparent address to him would actually be directed at the leadership of the Quraysh or to the People of the Book. Examples of such addresses abound in the Qur'an. Thus it is essential that this differentiation be made with full caution, and it should be fully ascertained as to who is the actual addressee. Without this, the real purport of the Qur'an cannot be grasped.

Thirdly, general and specific verses should be differentiated. There are many places in the Qur'an where the words are general; however, the context testifies with full certainty that something specific is meant. The Qur'an uses the word الناس (people), but it does not refer to all the people of the world; and many a time they do not even refer to all the people of Arabia: the word refers to a group among them. It refers to المشركون

(polytheists) but they do not refer to all those who are guilty of polytheism. Similarly, the words *من اهل الكتاب* (And from these People of the Book) do not refer to all the People of the Book of the world.²³

Those three aspects are important to be recognized before getting close with the Qur'an. Further more, every individual starts to understand from their best advantage point to arrive at the meaningful sense.

4. Historically-Affected Consciousness: Dialoguing Past, Present and Future

In Gadamer's view, history is not a past event regardless of our actual consciousness and our present horizon. On the other hand, our actual contemporariness is not something isolated from the influence of traditions, which are transferred to us through history. Human existence is historical and at the same time is contemporary. Humans will not be able to exceed their actual horizon in understanding the historical phenomena. Humans will not be able to move in the past with the aim that he interacted with it and understand it objectively. Traditions (*sunnah* or *taqli>d*) is transferred to us through the corridors of time in which we live in it; the very thing that has shaped our consciousness.

When we begin to understand the past from the actual horizon, we will not (be) apart from the influence of various traditions and history. Human lives in a frame of historicity. This is a historical corridor/framework that are not visible to human but it is the place where they live, as water becomes a place for fish to live without realizing it, because the fish do not see the water. Based on that, then our concept of history is not start from nothing, but start from our actual horizon.²⁴

Gadamer's reinstatement of temporal horizon in understanding a text implies that time is no longer primarily a gap to be bridged, but in fact the ground in which the present is rooted. This point is what

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Al-Qur'an, Hermeneutik, dan Kekuasaan: Kontroversi dan Penggugatan Hermeneutik Al-Qur'an*, Trans. Dede Iswadi *et. al.*, Bandung: RQiS, 2003, p. 71

differentiates Gadamer from earlier philosophers who tried to find a way to close the temporal gap between text and interpreter. Gadamer has achieved this bridging process by rehabilitating the notions of tradition and prejudice.

Related to Makky and Madany science, the concept of historical understanding is demanding contemporaneity. Like enjoying a work of art, an understanding of the Qur'an is in fact experiencing contemporaneity with discourses it offers. The contemporaneity concept means making something foreign and distant, which previously did not exist here and is the property of others, be ours here and now. Without this concept, the understanding will not come to the subjectivity of experience that produces a masterpiece.²⁵

Readings are formed from a separate structure from the reading levels that divided into two things: the condition of the readers and the variety of readers who caused the difference of thought and ideological aspects. Obviously, the product of interpretation depends on the temporality of the reader or the interpreter. Because, an interpretation would involve the process of discourse transformation from a particular phase of civilization to others. In other contexts, an interpretation is a discourse transformation from native language (*al-lughah al-as}liyyah*) to other languages.

Let have a look at a historical texts in the Qur'an. For example, the verses about the people of Shu'ayb and some of his teachings. In order to have a better understanding of his teachings, we need basic historical data because the Qur'an ignores who these people were, where and when they lived, and what social structures they had. The interest of the Qur'an lies in how the people of Shu'ayb responded to the teachings and guidance of their prophet, whom they had rejected. In Al-A'raf [7] : 85-86, the Qur'an presents this as a lesson to Muslims:

²⁵ Inyiaq Ridwan Muzir, *Hermeneutika Filosofis Hans-Georg Gadamer*, Yogyakarta: Ar-Ruzz Media, 2008, p. 117-118.

Thus, one of the key objectives of the historically oriented texts of the Qur'an appears to be to teach and to present moral questions. The lessons to be learned from these historical events may be identified by exploring their impact on the first generations of Muslims, and by relating this to the modern reader of the Qur'anic text.

It is the interpreter's responsibility to find the meanings that lie 'behind' these texts as well as to explore relevance and provide reasonable accounts of lessons to be learned by contemporary people. From this, a set of principles and values can be construed to guide a current Muslim community in its quest for a clearer identity as it attempts to follow what it believes to be "true Islam". By expounding historical events without relating them to contemporary circumstances, the interpreter performs little service to the community of believers. Knowledge of basic facts alone, whether they are historical or otherwise, does not enhance the life of the believer. One of the roles of scripture is to guide the individual and the community to a better life in this world and in the Hereafter. The interpreter of historical texts can facilitate this by relating the past to the present, even if the interpretation leads to an approximate meaning.

B. The Relevance²⁶ of Gadamer's Hermeneutics with Makky and Madany Science

The contemporary Qur'anic studies have shaped variety of discourses, which is not only involving the study of normative content of the Qur'an but also seeing the historical aspects of all events associated with the selection of meaning and standardization in the sciences of the Qur'an (*Ulu>m al-*

²⁶ Richard E. Palmer suggests three dimensions of the word "relevance": 1) Current meaningfulness; 2) Critique, and; 3) Transformation. In this chapter, the writer chooses the third dimension: Transformation. A thing or text we encounter may be relevant if it redefines what we are doing, such that we understand it and ourselves in a new light, a new way. We begin to place different requirements on what we do. It offers an alternative possibility for seeing and doing to the present perspective. This is the transformative dimension.

Qur'a>n).²⁷ Among the studies that are concerned about the history and chronology of the Qur'an is the study of the verses and chapters classified as Makky and Madany. The study on Makky and Madany concept demonstrates that the process of gradual revelation of the Qur'an in some respects can be seen, beyond the traditional studies about the wisdom behind such graduation, as a witness to the progression of history passed by human beings, specifically referring to the Arabian at the time of the Prophet, in a particular period and social structure of community.

This philosophical dimension of Makky and Madany has relevance with Gadamer's hermeneutics. Hermeneutical phenomenon, for Gadamer, is not merely a matter of method *an sich*, not a problem of appropriate method to understand a text, nor a standardized science that could meet the criteria of modern science. Understanding the tradition is not only a matter of responding a text; rather it is capturing the inspiration and admitting the truth.²⁸ Gadamer's hermeneutics, categorized as philosophical hermeneutics, make itself busy with everything that makes understanding is possible and why it is possible to be. The question "How to read?" is replaced by the question, "How do we communicate at all?"²⁹

The relevance of Gadamer's hermeneutics with Makky Science and Madany is because for two reasons: *firstly*, Gadamer's emphasis on dialogue between past, present and future; *secondly*, Gadamer's concern to the universality of language as the (only) mean of dialogue as well as the medium of human existential.

The relevance of philosophical hermeneutics can be seen from its commitment to the metaphysics of the theory of understanding. It means that what makes Gadamer's hermeneutics called philosophic is a series of

²⁷ See Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), p. xi-xvi.

²⁸ Inyik Ridwan Muzir, *Hermeneutika Filosofis Hans-Georg Gadamer*, Yogyakarta: Ar-Ruzz Media, 2008, p. 97-101

²⁹ Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/> on January 17, 2009.

ontological claims about power and way of working of what is so called in traditional metaphysics as the human soul (*Geistmannlich*). Gadamer said:

*“I don’t intend to produce a manual for guiding understanding in the manner of the earlier hermeneutics. I did not wish to elaborate a system of rules to describe, let alone direct, the methodical procedure of the human sciences... my real concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing, since that which 'happens' to us over and above our explicit activities is the effective-historical constitution of our own knowing selves.”*³⁰

In general, all the main concepts of philosophical hermeneutics set afloat the philosophical relevance of this issue in every aspect of human understanding. That is why Gadamer claimed it (philosophical hermeneutics) as something universal.

The universality of philosophical hermeneutics is the motion of text towards experience. By mean, understanding is not an activity that done consciously and based on human choices when faced with an object (text). Instead, the continuous human experience is a constant stimulation to make an interpretation, because “the other” and something alien continually meet the human experience in daily life.

Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics and Makky and Madany science are not two contrasting disciplines. To oppose both disciplines is a big mistake, since each has its own domain and proportion. Makky and Madany science with its certain method as part of *Ulu>m al-Qur’a>n* can be operated on philosophical foundation of understanding concerned by Gadamer, since he did not offer any methodological procedures.

The study on Makky and Madany, as beside an effort to put the historic journey of revelation, is also describes the actual response of the people who receive and interact with the history of the social mission of the Qur’an, as well as a proponent data for knowledge about Muslim history

³⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, edited translation by Garrett Barden and John Cumming, New York: Seabury Press, 1975, p. xviii.

formation process as first recipient community and who that involved in revelation. For that reason this study is placed in the spectrum of contemporary study of the Qur'an as well as a response that utilize conventional findings about Makky and Madany science for the actualization of the functions of the Qur'an as an easily understood guide for those who really want to understand it.

To hold on the main functions of the Qur'an as a guidance for mankind based on five basic principles (*al-kulliyah>t al-khamsah*) (maintenance of religion, soul, mind, possessions, and guarantee the continuity of descent and honor) and based on considerations that religion (religious taught) is for the benefit and kindness of the human existential,³¹ then that should be considered as criteria related to the authority of Makky and Madany verses are:

Firstly, particularity and universality. The content of Qur'anic verses which are universal and cosmopolite must be carried out more than the particular. In this case, the verses containing about the principle-universal values such a commands to create justice to all human beings without discrimination (distinction), containing the principle of equality of dignity of all human beings (Muslim-Non-Muslim, male-female, master-servant), and containing all human beings to do justice without discrimination on the basis of fundamental rights (the principle of maintenance of the soul, religion, wealth, self esteem and guarantee the continuity of descent and honor) have precedence over the verses that contradict with those basic principles, although perhaps the principle-universal verses are revealed early.

It will be a very big risk, because at least many of the particular-individual verses must be "subjugated" by the universal verses. However, because the Qur'an should function also for the benefit of now people that required respecting others regardless of faith, ethnicity and race, without any

³¹ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Tekstualitas al-Qur'an: Kritik terhadap 'Ulumul Qur'an*, Op. Cit, p. 96.

discriminatory attitudes, the demand requires transformation.³² As an example can be mentioned: that the verses about *jizyah*, a mandatory for non-Muslims as a form of submission to the Muslim government for protection against them, regardless of whether it included in Makky or Madany verses, should be improved by selecting the verses that teach equality of rights and obligations between Muslim and non Muslim as modern citizens (nation state) that guaranteed their rights on the basis of human rights, cored on justice and equality and non-discriminatory and can be derived essentially from the Qur'an . Here the “conventional” concept of Makky and Madany is almost lost its relevance.

Secondly, the content of the verses that are more humane and friendly and emphasize principles of equality, equity and justice must take precedence over the others that significantly encourage attitudes of hostility, hatred, conflict and discrimination. For example: the verses that call for fighting non-Muslims who partly addressed to the pagans, idolaters, or non-Muslims in general, in the context of the modern state should be replaced with rules that prioritize persuasive and dialogic approach to solve existing problems. In modern context, it can be referred to the fact that if there are earthquake that strikes an area, irrespective of the religion of the residents who were there, every person whatever his religion is required to provide assistance as their ability. Thus some form and ideals that are expected from the approaches as set out above.

Thirdly, related to the importance of religious symbols. Religious symbols in the form of institutional religion are important because ignoring it would ignore the historical dimension. But the emphasis and priority to the

³²An interesting discussion about this issue in a whole book, see Gary Gutting (ed.), *Paradigms and Revolutions Appraisals and Applications of Thomas Kuhn Philosophy of Science* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), either it related with the aspect of philosophy, social sciences, the humanities or history of science.

symbol (having religion) rather than the essence of religiousness (being religious) is not a good choice to create a good inter-religious relationship.³³

Those three criterions must be synthesized with the interests and welfare of human beings who “read” the Qur’an to the context of the present. Since the light of the Qur’an is applicable for each who wants to make a dialogue with it and to receive any guidance “offered” by it.

The Qur’an is a living phenomenon, like the music played by the orchestra while the *Mus}h}af*, the written text, is analogous to the musical note; it is silent.³⁴ The Qur’an hermeneutics has to take seriously the living phenomenon and to stop reducing the Qur’an to be only a text. It is time now to shift our conceptual framework from the Qur’an as a “text” to the Qur’an as “discourse”. Discourse is a sharing and exchanging opinions or thoughts. So the discourse is the medium for a dialogue process among various individuals to enrich the knowledge and thinking in order to seek a higher truth.³⁵

For Muslim scholars the Qur’an was always a text, from the moment of its canonization until now. It is time now to pay close attention to the Qur’an as discourse or discourses. It is not sufficient any more to re-contextualize a passage or some passages when it is only needed to fight against literalism and fundamentalism or when it is needed to wave away certain historical practice that seems unfit in our modern context.

Regarding the Qur’an as discourse is an alternative approach in the frame of existential understanding of the Qur’an. By positioning it as partner of dialogue and enabling it to “speaks” freely, then the understanding (and

³³See Issa J. Boullata, “Fastabiqu al-Khairat : A Qur’anic Principle of Interfaith Relation” in YY Haddad and WY Haddad, *Christian-Muslim Encounters* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), p. 43-53.

³⁴ It was the Fourth caliph ‘Ali (656-660) the cousin of Muhammad and his son in law who claimed the *mushaf* as silent; it does not speak, but humans speak it out. ‘Ali made the differentiation between the silent *mushaf*, the text, in one hand, and the vocalized Qur’an by the people on the other hand. The context in which this statement emerged is important, because it could shed a lot of light on the present situation in which the political manipulation of the meaning of the Qur’an is hardly cancelled. E. Brill, ‘Ali b. Abu Talib, in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Leiden, vol. 1, p. 381. See also footnote no. 9.

³⁵ Komaruddin Hidayat, *Memahami Bahasa Agama: Sebuah Kajian Hermeneutik*, Jakarta: Penerbit Paramadina, 1996, p. 130

therefore interpretation) is beginning. “*Understanding begins...when something addresses us. This is the primary hermeneutical condition*”³⁶ said Gadamer.

Our understanding of literary text does not indicate our understanding of the experience of the author. However, it shows an understanding of existential experience that reveals itself through the text. Literary text is a media that remains located between the creator and recipient. While the process to understand it is always changing with the changing horizons and experience. However, the (being) fixed of the text, as a form, is a fundamental factor that makes the process of understanding becomes possible.³⁷

Recently, Muhammad Arkoun distinguished between the phenomenon of the Qur’an, the recited discourse, and the *Mus}h}af*, which contains what Arkoun identifies as the “Closed Corpus” or Scripture through the process of canonization. Modern scholars of the Qur’an share the concept of the Qur’an as a “text” despite the different paradigm of “meaning” each tries to grasp and deduce from the Qur’an. Dealing with the Qur’an as only a “text” enhances the possibility of interpretation and reinterpretation but allows as well the ideological manipulation not only of the meaning but also of the “structure”, following the pattern of polemic interpretation. Dealing with the Qur’an as only a “text” then reduces its status and ignores the fact that it is still functioning as a “discourse” in everyday life.³⁸

Without rethinking the Qur’an and re-invoking its living status as a “discourse”, whether in the academia or everyday life, meaningful approach cannot be achieved. It has to be democratically open hermeneutics because it is about the “meaning of life”. If we are serious and sincere in freeing religious thought from power manipulation, whether political, social, or

³⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, edited translation by Garrett Barden and John Cumming, New York: Seabury Press, 1975, p. 266.

³⁷ Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Al-Qur’an, Hermeneutik, dan Kekuasaan: Kontroversi dan Penggugatan Hermeneutik Al-Qur’an*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 71.

³⁸ Nasr Hamid Abi Zayd, *Rethinking the Qur’an: Towards a Humanistic Hermeneutic*, a shortened and modified version of Nasr Hamid’s inaugural lecture delivered on May 27, 2004 for Ibn Rushd Academic Chair, for Islam and Humanism, established by the University of Humanistics, Utrecht, The Netherlands, p. 2

religious in order to return the formulation of “meaning” back to the community of believers, we need to shift our way understanding.

With its style, the Qur'an has provided an opportunity for readers to discuss with. In a simple term, the Qur'anic style can be sorted into two categories: prescriptive and descriptive. Firstly, the conceived structure of meaning is always imperative and persuasive that requires the reader to follow the author's message it formulated in the text. The position of the author became the center of rotation, while the readers are asked to follow his call and advice. Unlike the first style, the second style, descriptive, is more democratic. The space is open widely for the reader to participate in discussing issues.³⁹ Discourse as a dialogue event can be viewed as an exposition of thought which is not yet final and is not going to the finals, because the insight and spirit to obtain the truth was always in front and the truth does not recognize an end.⁴⁰

The presence of the Qur'anic texts especially among Muslims has become a sustainable vortex center of Islamic discourse. Komaruddin Hidayat, in *Memahami Bahasa Agama*, described Islamic discourse vortex presented by the Qur'an as centripetal and centrifugal motion. In one hand, the centrifugal motion occurs because the texts of the Qur'an have such a big impetus for Muslims to perform a variety of interpretations to it. On the other hand, various forms of thought among Muslims always want to reconcile their ideas to the Qur'an, even though for the sake of mere justification.⁴¹

Like the Master, the Qur'an is always being loyal to wander and see the pupils, which spread across the face of the earth since the 14th century. With this existing strength, the Qur'an itself serves every question and objection from its readers, which come with various and unique individual horizon.⁴²

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 77-78

⁴⁰ Komaruddin Hidayat, *Op. Cit*, p. 130

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 15

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 14

Like a mirror, the Qur'an could reflect various faces according to the people who come to reflect and dialogue with it. If this assumption is approved, then the real meaning that emerged from the Qur'an was also strongly influenced by the natural mind, culture, and language of the readers (the horizon of the readers). Every reader, either consciously or unconsciously, doing the understanding which is considered authentic and suitable for him. Every person at certain moments has to do *ijtihad* for their self. Everyone is a *mujtahid* for themselves.⁴³

Gadamer's hermeneutics defines understanding as a way of the human existence. Gadamer's approach to understanding and interpretation is intended to give human beings the power and confidence they need to rely on themselves. All of us are in similar position of trying to understand and to interpret. All of us are capable of creating our own understanding based on our own tradition, experiences and knowledge. For this reason, each of us will create a unique understanding and interpretation. Therefore, if there are differences and disagreements among people over understanding and interpreting, this simply further evidence for what we are and who we are as human beings. In accordance with this matter, Gadamer has mentioned the value of authority in understanding. As in the case of tradition and prejudice, authority can be understood in fairer manner. Authority doesn't imply blind obedience or abdication on the part of people. Indeed, authority is based on the act of acknowledgment of knowledge.⁴⁴

The empirical diversity of the religious meaning is part of our human diversity about the meaning of life in general, which is supposed to be a positive value in our modern living context. In order to re-connect the question of the meaning of the Qur'an to the question of the meaning of life it is now imperative to indicate the fact that the Qur'an was the outcome of dialogue, debate, argumentation, accepting and rejecting, not only with pre-

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 16

⁴⁴ Yeni Ratna Yuningsih, *Op. Cit.*, p. 26

Islamic norms, practice and culture, but with its own previous assessments, presupposition, assertions etc.

According to 'Ata Al-Sid, the understanding of the Qur'an emphasizes the importance of re-strengthening of what so-called as *event-of-utterance* through interpretation struggle in a form of reflective dialectic and praxis of living. This agenda is merely done to confirm the faith, because faith is not a static situation. Affirmation on the existence of faith as a source of human authenticity is the very thing that allows people to experience the *event-of-utterance*. Faith is the *sine qua non* for understanding. Otherwise, all the things that cause the damage of faith means also prevents human to receive true understanding of the Qur'an. This authentic existence is then making a synergy with the *driving force* of the Qur'anic language. The term *driving force* is not only in the beauty and superiority of the Qur'anic language, but also in its ability and capability to present the ideas of divinity and humanity, for which the first recipient community is entirely a new discourse, but hard to deny its truth because its consistency with health mind and clear and open hearts.⁴⁵

Language of the Qur'anic text, as mapped through the Makky and Madany science, should be understood as a point on their growth historically, with the historicity of its meaning, language tools and syntax, and thus language emerged as varied forms of logic, experience, nature, including historical experience/tradition (also includes the experience of supernatural / spiritual).⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Muhammad 'Ata Al-Sid, *Op. Cit.*, p. 85-96.

⁴⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Ibid*, p. 394