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## **IRSHAD MANJI ON HERMENEUTICS: Reconsidering Her Method of Interpretation of LGBT-Q Verses in Al-Qur'an**

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**Abstract:** *A Canadian Muslim Reformist, Irshad Manji, has strived to introduce her thoughts concerning the emancipation of LGBT-Q rights around the world. Accordingly, She offered a 'reformed interpretation' of The Qur'an to reveal alternatives of theological understanding regarding some verses about LGBT-Q. This paper will enquire Manji's fundamental idea and the method in commenting and interpreting LGBT-Q verses in the Qur'an, as her endeavor was considered closely similar to Hermeneutics, a method of interpretation developed in the Catholic-Christian World. This paper found the domination of Hermeneutics on Manji's attempt in understanding the Qur'an constructing her argumentation about LGBT-Q. In the perspective of Science of Qur'an and Tafsir, Manji has manipulated Qur'anic verses to support her campaign emancipating LGBT-Q rights in the whole domains, especially in their sexual expression.*

**Keywords:** *Irshad Manji, Hermeneutics, Al-Qur'an, Tafsir, Ta'wil, Homosexuality, LGBT-Q*

## INTRODUCTION

A *Mufassir* or The Commentator of The Qur'an is required to master several branches of science in order to be able to interpret and comment on Qur'anic verses according to Islamic principles. As such, they will not be able to interpret, if they do not possess enough requirements to become a *Mufassir*. Following Manna' Qatthan, for instance, a *Mufassir* should not only become proficient in Arabic Language and fundamental sciences related to the Qur'anic Studies -*Naskh wa Mansukh* (abrogation of verses), *Asbab al-Nuzul* (Circumstances of Revelation), etc- but also demanded to occupy a sound faith to God (*Sibhatu-l-I'tiqad*). Moreover, a *Mufassir* should carry out the task of *Tafsir* (exegesis; Qur'anic commentary) by order in referring to the Qur'an, Sunnah, and the tradition of Companions (*Sahabah*). (Qatthan, 2000, pp. 329–331) Similar preconditions were also asserted by Ahmad von Denffer; said that: "... *Muslim Scholars have laid down certain basic conditions for sound tafsir. Any tafsir, which disregards these principles must be viewed with great caution, if not rejected altogether.*"(von Denffer, 1985, pp. 124–125) In general, *tafsir* should be executed properly in agreement with the strict field of study to avoid errors and misleading argumentations derived from the Qur'an.

But as of lately, Muslims are shocked by the various phenomenon of liberalization; carried out by Orientalists and Muslim Scholars who are influenced by Western thought. In the case of the Qur'an, Liberalization embraced a force transmutation of alien elements into the Qur'anic Sciences which is primarily employed for Biblical Studies. (Al-A'zami, 2003, pp. 208, 305–306) Consequently, the infiltration initiated the disruption of the Quranic interpretation; it altered Islam from its very foundation of values and thoughts and dismantled religious authority altogether. (Zarkasyi, 2010, pp. 8, 37) Arthur Jeffery, for instance, suspected the originality of the current *Mushaf* read by Muslims nowadays; said that Uthman ibn 'Affan had possibly modified The Qur'anic verses. Therefore, it is crucial for Muslim Scholars to revise and reconstruct The Qur'an as 'the Critical Edition'.(Jeffery, 1937) In another way, Jeffery wanted to refute the sacredness of The Qur'an as the Holy Book; as he believed that the codification of *Mushaf* is not based on religious jurisdiction but rather political-personal motives. Similarly, Felix Körner affirmed that this 'Western method of interpretation' relocates The Qur'an from its position as the 'Divine Revelation' to merely a historical text. This method, which later introduced as *Hermeneutics*, "... *focus has been chosen*

*because it is only through a conscious and reflected understanding of the text that a Koranic revision of Islam can prove and upright and lasting enterprise.”* (Körner, 2005, p. 193) The Qur’an, according to these ideas, was possibly adjusted to an analogous level of human writings.

A further implication from such a method of interpretation is the ‘change of meanings and values’ within the Qur’an itself. Irshad Manji, a Canadian Radical Feminist was one of the figures who utilized a ‘reformed interpretation’ of the Qur’an; altering the meaning of several concepts derived from the Qur’an. Making the Qur’anic verse as a reference, Irshad Manji argued that if a person wants to achieve a change, then he must be brave to reveal ‘the truth,’ even to his parents and relatives. (Manji, 2011, p. 7) This ‘truth’ will be related closely to the concept of ‘morality’ which became her argumentation to defend her opinion concerning LGBT-Q rights. This paper will elaborate on the hermeneutical aspect of Irshad Manji in commenting on and the interpretation of the Qur’an as her argumentation in legalizing LGBT-Q.

## RESEARCH METHOD

In order to arrive at a proper comprehension of the research objected intended, This paper will utilize the *‘Discourse Analysis’* method. This method is seen as suitable to be a basis of investigation as it will construct identities, relationships, beliefs, and knowledge systems in language use. This method incorporates an interpretation of texts; focuses on the ideology embedded within the discourse encompassing the recreation and transformation of relations between context (Hjelm, 2011, p. 134). *‘Discourse Analysis’* method will play its role in this research inspecting Irshad Manji’s interpretation of The Qur’an with regard to her LGBT-Q concern, before finally ended with a theological discussion based on *Tafsir* to evaluate Manji’s idea further.

*‘Discourse Analysis’* method will be accompanied by the *‘Document Analysis’* method (Davie & Wyatt, 2014, pp. 151–160). This method will aim attention particularly at Irshad Manji’s major work: *The Trouble with Islam Today*, and *Allah, Liberty, and Love*. Through an analysis of these documents, the valuable data about Irshad Manji’s thoughts will be derived and discussed; becoming a fundamental part of the inquiry of this research. This method, furthermore, will also scrutinize the literature available in order to advance the discourse dealing with Hermeneutics, *Tafsir*, and LGBT-Q issues.

## DISCUSSION

### IRSHAD MANJI'S BIOGRAPHY

Irshad Manji is a very productive woman. She was very busy as a journalist writing topics about "religious reformation" in Islam. She is a Muslim, born in Kampala, Uganda, in 1968. She was the second of three daughters in an upper-middle-class family. Her family was Expelled from the East Africa country in 1972 by the dictator Idi Amin. She and her family were finally settled in Richmond Canada as refugees (Hume, 2017).

Manji excelled at Burnett Junior and Senior Richmond Secondary School later. During her early academic ages, she was known as a girl who always rebelled against the Orthodox teaching of Islam. She was a very critical girl who asked many questions about Islam every time she went to *Madrasa* (Islamic School). Her teacher, once, warned her out to stop asking about Islamic doctrine, or else she will be expelled from school. The notice has not lasted long, before finally, one day, her teacher could not answer Manji's question and she was dropped out of school. Abandoned by her community since she was only a little girl, became the main reason when Manji was increasingly eager to learn Islam by herself (Manji, 2004, p. 14).

Manji has also experienced family issues, dealing with her violent father, in particular. Her father often beat her and her maid. When her mother came and wanted to treat their wounds secretly, and unfortunately her father found them, the father forbade the mother and scolded her, before eventually hit her mother as well (Manji, 2004, p. 6). For a long time, Manji seemed missed a 'daddy's love'. Her dream to find the true affection from a Man was certainly destroyed, as at the time she and her family were driven out of Uganda by Idi Amin and fled to Canada, Manji completely thought that Men were vicious creatures. They are fierce, powerful, hard, and compelled everyone to obey their order. Manji was traumatized by all the events of her childhood. As she also found that the figure of men according to Muslim Extremist, Manji was motivated more to fight a 'bias' and 'domination' of men toward women (Manji, 2004, pp. 6–7).

Manji was graduated with her bachelor's degree from the University of British Columbia in 1990. In 2002, Manji was registered as a writer-in-residence at the University of Toronto. It was a time when she wrote *The Trouble with Islam Today* (Rundle, 2005). Later, She became a visiting professor at New York University from 2008 to 2015. She found the 'Moral Courage Project', an initiative to aid youngsters to deliver their ideas before the public,

especially political elites. Within, Manji taught adolescent leaders to confront political correctness, proud of their intellectual conformity, and conquer self-censorship. It is enough to prove that Irshad Manji is a person who is quite influential in some circles even though she is also regarded as a controversial figure -a lesbian.(Manji, 2012) Considering Manji's childhood that was full of violence and discriminations, which notably she received from her father and her former national leader, it made Irshad a woman who aggressively voiced her opinion on freedom and human rights challenging religious authority; especially Islam.

Manji was also accustomed to communicate and deal with non-Muslims. At the time she and her family moved to Canada, Manji found her favorite teacher when she went to a secular school (Manji, 2004, p. 11). She loved this teacher because she was able to answer many of Manji's questions. The teacher also suggested Manji that she find answers to what she asked through reading various books. As such, Manji found out that there is no religious doctrine should be believed in without giving a chance to think about or criticize it.

Associated with her position as a 'Liberal Muslim', Irshad Manji once called herself a "*Refusenik Muslim*".(Manji, 2004, p. 5) She explained that the meaning of *Refusenik Muslim*, according to Manji, is not that she is a non-Muslim. The purpose of *refusenik* is an explanation that she does not want to join forces with 'robots'. 'Robots' is defined as a group of people or an army that is easily mobilized automatically to take action on behalf of God, for which they do not know the purpose and purpose clearly of the command (Manji, 2004, pp. 6–7). As a *Refusenik Muslim*, Manji rejected a number of fundamental Islamic teachings and seek 'freedom' from its authority. If we follow the conception of 'Liberal' correctly, the term *Refusenik Muslim* is not much different from it and sharing more similarities in the conception. As such, Manji, even she is a Muslim, Manji is not afraid to voice her doubts about the teachings of Islam; in particular, the doctrines about sex and gender issues which she noticed restrains human independence and stimulates the marginalization of women.

## THE ORIGIN OF HERMENEUTICS

The word '*Hermeneutics*' was originally Greek expression '*hermēneuō*' ἑρμηνεύω means 'to translate, to interpret'. Based on the constant root of words, we can also find its noun form, *hermēnēus* ἑρμηνεύς which means

‘translator’ or ‘interpreter’.(Beekes & Beek, 2010, p. 462) Following the origin of Hermeneutics as the derivation of Greek words, we can trace that this term was a ‘Pre-Greek origin’ in the first place.(Beekes & Beek, 2010, p. 462) Conceptually, Some Ancient Greece Philosopher has investigated Hermeneutics as part of their discussion. For instance, Plato in his *Politikos* 260 d11, *Epinomis* 975 c6, and *Definitiones* 414 d4. Similarly, Aristotle also wrote *Per Hermeneias*. These works confirm the usage of Hermeneutics concerning the art of interpretation since the Ancient Age (Grondin, 1994, pp. 21, 43).

In the Biblical Tradition, Hermeneutics was originally concerned more narrowly with interpreting sacred texts -The Holy Bible itself-, and acquired a much broader significance in its historical development and finally became a philosophical position in twentieth-century German philosophy (Audi, 1999, p. 377). Hermes (*Ἑρμῆς*) is one well-known supernatural being firmly associated with Hermeneutics. (Beekes & Beek, 2010, p. 462) He was the son of Zeus and Maia, in a job of ‘God of Messenger’ in the World of Ancient Greece. He delivered messages between Deities and humans and also between Deities Themselves. Moreover, Hermes also be responsible for guiding the dead souls to the Underworld (Hoy, 1982, p. 1). He was commonly illustrated as an adolescent with a ‘wide-brimmed hat’ and ‘winged sandals’. Hermes was also weaponized with a ‘herald’s staff crowned with two snakes’.(Cotterell, 2006, p. 49; Powell, 2002) According to Christian Tradition, Hermes symbolizes the way in that God’s Revelation in certain methods to comprehend the concrete meaning of the message embedded within the Holy Words. This method is what was later recognized as ‘*Hermeneutics*’. David C. Hoy emphasizes the urgency of Hermeneutics as the method of understanding the Biblical Verses and also general texts -in line with an affirmation of Hermes’s duty as a God, that, “... *In the absence of Hermes, the modern age needs hermeneutics. In a more limited sense, hermeneutics is the concern with speech and writing, and hence with the methodology of interpretation of text. When hermeneutics was largely an ancillary discipline of theology, the “word” to be interpreted was that of the Bible; interpretation involved spelling out the meaning of a word that already spoke to and claimed its hearers. ...*”(Hoy, 1982, pp. 1–2)

The theological aspect of Hermeneutics was particularly found on the hand of St. Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana* (Augustine, 1995, 2014). It is a work that subsists of four books explaining how people understand, interpret, and engage with the teaching activities regarding the Scriptures. The first three books were published in circa 397, before finally, the Saint of Hippo added

the fourth book in 426. *De Doctrina* was considered as the earliest fundamental writing in the tradition of Christianity concerning the method of Biblical interpretation, as in an introductory part of *De Doctrina*, St. Augustine himself asserted that this book is a work concerning the principle to behave towards Scripture (Augustine, 2014, sec. Prologue 1). Later, St. Augustine wrote that: “those... who explain to an audience what they understand in the scriptures are, as it were, performing the office of reader and pronouncing letters they know, while those who lay down rules about how they are to be understood are like the person who teaches literacy, who gives out the rules, that is, on how to read. So just as the person who knows how to read does not require another reader, when he gets hold of a volume, to tell him what is written in it, in the same way, those who have grasped the rules we are endeavoring to pass on will retain a knowledge of these rules, like letters, when they come across anything obscure in the holy books, and will not require another person who understands to uncover for them what is shrouded in obscurity...” (Augustine, 2014, sec. Prologue 9)

This statement conveyed at least two points, as it was commented Karla Pollmann. First, St. Augustine guarantees the necessity of ‘hermeneutic circle’ presuming an intimate relationship between “... the authority of a text and the exegetical principles applied to it and calls for fusion of the horizons (Horizontverschmelzung) of the text and its reader...” It is on account of in the view of St. Augustine, people possibly understand the text equipped even if they own a bare knowledge about the text. As such, the Hermeneutic method of St. Augustine instructed a technique that allows people to retrieve ideas they have already known, confirming a continued accord between the reader and the text; Second, Hermeneutics of St. Augustine indicated that a set of letters has advised us not only as of the reading passages but also a group of values should be understood. In other words. *De Doctrina* contributed without limitation as a ‘self-sufficient literary artifact’ but also as a document that signifies the field of knowledge beyond the text itself (Pollmann & Vessey, 2005, pp. 211–212). Accordingly, B. Hoon Woo stressed that the main intention of *De Doctrina* was to arrange essential direction so that Christians were able to comprehend Bible (*inveniendi ratio*) and instruct others (*proferandi ratio*) (Woo, 2013).

## **HERMENEUTICS AND THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION: THE CASE OF MARTIN LUTHER’S 95 THESES**

As the Medieval Age passed, and the century was 15<sup>th</sup>, the Protestant Reformation had initiated a revived involvement regarding Hermeneutics;

took a step aside from the Classical Tradition which has been developed by St. Augustine for centuries. Protestant Reformation, initiated by Martin Luther, promoted the '*Sola Scriptura*' as the single flawless origin of the authority of Christian faith and rituals. At the same time, Protestantism refuted any form of authentic jurisdiction other than the Bible itself; Resulting in the crucial ramification of *Sola Scriptura* is the Pope's interpretation of the Scripture was not comparable to the Scripture itself. *Sola Scriptura* has completely rejected The 'Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction'(Phillimore, 1911, pp. 853–866) and 'Magisterium' (Flinn, 2007b) which was considered as the final supremacy of Christian Institution up to the 15th Century (Flinn, 2007a, pp. 79, 106, 606). Hence, on the hand of Protestants, Hermeneutics became an instrument to discover the varied interpretation of the Bible; conflicting with the traditional one (Sproul et al., 2009, p. 10). This 'reformed interpretation' has commenced several developments of the Christian Theological System, as even they have referred their doctrine on the same Scripture,(Yarchin, 2004, p. xi) yet as the interpretation diverged, the teachings which were derived were contrasting as well (Ramm, 1970, p. 3).

The divergent interpretation between Catholicism and Protestantism originated from Luther's very well-known *Ninety Five Theses* or *Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum*.(Cummings, 2009, p. 32) The *Theses* was intended mainly to criticize the practice of 'Indulgences' (*Indulgentia*). Indulgences, as it was defined by Cathecism of Catholic Church, is "...a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints..."(*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2020). The Indulgences may remove either the *mortal* or *venial* sin; while the first crime should be punished in an absolute Hell, the second guilt, without losing the possibility of the punishment in the Hell, is possibly repented in this world through sufferings or satisfactory good works as temporal punishment (Comerford, 1876, pp. 1–2). The important note is that the sinners are demanded to repent their sin in the first place before committing Indulgences. According to the system of Indulgences, at the time of a Christian abused, they will be forgiven and no more responsible for receiving punishment in Hell, even they were still liable to earn temporal punishment. (Brecht, 1993, p. 176) If the temporal punishment was not satisfied in the world, then the Sinners are urged to atone



in a place between Heaven and Hell -*The Purgatory*. (Brecht, 1993, p. 176) Considering its application to atone both mortal and venial sin, Indulgences were possibly applied to both living and deceased humans (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2020).

Luther found that the practice of Indulgences in the Church is corrupt, as the priesthood was benefited by selling Indulgences, and the Pontiff grant an authorized sanction in exchange for the commission (Noll, 2016, p. 31). Later, Luther noticed that the Indulgences were misused more, as a Christian was able to receive an Indulgence only by venerating the massive selection of Church. According to Luther, it means that the dignity of Indulgences was reduced by the Popes rather than aimed to achieve true repentance (Brecht, 1993, p. 185). The Indulgences, as it was claimed to possibly remove the sin of the dead men, also catch Luther's attention as the great motivation for Christian to 'buy' the certificate (Stephenson, 2010, pp. 1–2). The *Theses* was intended to criticize such a system; enclosed with a letter sent to a number of Bishops such as Jerome Scultetus (*Jerome Schultz*), bishop of Brandenburg Albert of Brandenburg (*Albrecht von Brandenburg*), the Archbishop of Mainz on October 31, 1517. On the same day, Luther had also written the *Theses* on the door of All Saint's Church and other churches in Wittenburg with a huge pen. Luther, also This date is currently commemorated as the date of *Reformation Day* (Stephenson, 2010, pp. 39–40).

Luther's comments regarding the *Theses* rebelling the Church are for instance; in the earlier parts of the *Theses*, Luther advanced the ideas regarding the repentance should be conducted based on the Sinner's inner effort to atone rather than depending on an 'external system' of religious confession. Luther wrote:

*"1) Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said Poenitentiam agite, willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance. 2) This word cannot be understood to mean sacramental penance, i.e., confession and satisfaction, which is administered by the priests. 3) Yet it means not inward repentance only; nay, there is no inward repentance which does not outwardly work divers mortifications of the flesh. 4) The penalty [of sin], continues so long as hatred of self continues; for this is the true inward repentance, and continues until our entrance into the kingdom of heaven."*(Luther, 1915, pp. 29–30)

It turns out that Luther initiated his *Thesis* by reinterpreting Matthew 4:17, emphasizing that the principle of repentance, according to Jesus should began from the eagerness of the Sinner to ask for forgiveness. The verse as below:

“(17)From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”(The Holy Bible, New King James Version, 1982, Chapter Matthew 4: 17)

As such, Luther established an idea regarding the true source of repentance. The Church should not intervene in the way of Sinner atoned for their crimes in any way. In the next part of the *Theses*, we can also comprehend that Luther found that Popes freed the Trespassers not based on the guilt of the sin but on the system of penance or through themselves only:

“5) The pope does not intend to remit, and cannot remit any penalties other than those which he has imposed either by his own authority or by that of the Canons. 6) The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring that it has been remitted by God and by assenting to God's remission; though, to be sure, he may grant remission in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in such cases were despised, the guilt would remain entirely unforgiven. 7) God remits guilt to no one whom He does not, at the same time, humble in all things and bring into subjection to His vicar, the priest.”(Luther, 1915, p. 30)

Accordingly, Luther refuted Church’s authority guaranteeing the repentance result. It is no other than Jesus who can forgive human’s crimes and immorality. Again, Luther emphasized the Hermeneutic approach to correct and revise the Catholic Theological foundation and came with a new interpretation to offer. The reinterpretation process ran over to the end of the *Theses* presenting Luther’s global refutation to the system of Indulgences.

## **THE CURRENT USAGE OF HERMENEUTICS**

Jean Grondin declared that the evolution of scientific tradition in Western Civilization grew into the most indispensable element of the development of the usage of Hermeneutics. When Hermeneutics was operated mainly to comment and interpret Holy Scripture in the first place, it is considered as a common device to comprehend other branches of science especially in the context of social studies (Grondin, 1994, p. x). Hermeneutics nowadays is an advanced method that stands for commentary, interpretation, understanding, and communication with the texts beyond the Holy Scripture with sections of sciences as a whole (Zimmermann, 2015, p. 2); Law (Hamidi, 2011), Linguistics (Hanifiyah, 2020), Literature (Muthari, 2014), Technology (Zovko, 2020), Public Administration (Rahmatulloh, 2020), Phenomenology (R. Dangal & Joshi, 2020), Religious Pluralism,(Oostveen, 2017), etc. The

chronology of the development of Hermeneutics may refer to Grondin as below:

*“... During antiquity and the patristic period, there were at first fragmentary hermeneutic rules. Then Luther and Reformation theologians fashioned a systematic hermeneutics, which first became a universal theory of understanding in Schleiermacher. Dilthey broadened this hermeneutics into a universal methodology of the human sciences, and Heidegger located hermeneutic inquiry on the still more fundamental ground of human facticity. Gadamer ultimately reformulated universal hermeneutics as a theory of the ineluctable historicity and linguistically of our experience. Universal hermeneutics, finally, was extended into such fields as critique of ideology, theology, literary theory, theory of science, and practical philosophy...”*(Grondin, 1994, p. 3)

To sum up, the function of Hermeneutics has been developed further supporting the advancement of social and/or human sciences in general. Grondin's elaboration regarding the development of Hermeneutics emphasized the 'historical consciousness' concerning the historicity of each branch of humanities; putting itself under hermeneutical scrutiny (Heller, 1989, p. 300). As such, the advancement of particular sciences are related to a specific context, or, as it is defined by Agnes Heller, its 'dominant sphere' constructing the nature and the origin of the science itself (Heller, 1989, p. 301). Through Hermeneutics, science and the life-world are possibly mediated; particularly, between their respective 'languages'. Hermeneutics, in the context of social science, assisted the researcher to uncover the true understanding of branches of sciences; revealing the situation and context behind the science developed, also discerning the principal aim of the science intended by its creator. Deseure, affirmed that, *“... Hermeneutic reflection, then, forms a bridge between the special sciences and the life-world, making explicit the presuppositions of the sciences, their forms of abstraction, and most of all, their guiding concept of method.”*(Deseure, 1987, p. 63)

By consequence, the consciousness of Hermeneutics eliminated the 'self-understanding' of the researcher; concerning that, every text was situated from the 'preconceived ideas', as that text itself reflected upon the context of the history connecting perceiving subjects and its object altogether. The concrete information enclosed in the written sources should always relatively associated with the subjectivity of the writer. In order to reveal the most appropriate message from the text, Hermeneutics stressed the urgency of 'communication' between the text and the reader. As such, Hermeneutics stands for an *“...important scientific information into the language of the social life-*

*world;*”(Deseure, 1987, p. 73) Zygmunt Bauman also said that Hermeneutics attempted to look for an original and distorted message of the texts; it went beyond the simple ‘critique’ of the texts and started to question the complicated questions in respect to the nature and objectives of recorded knowledge, as such; “...*indeed, of social knowledge in general.*” (Bauman, 1978, p. 8)

As Hermeneutics accentuated a close relationship between the reader and the texts, an interrelationship itself is certainly the most crucial element in Hermeneutics, referring to the ‘Hermeneutic Circle’ principle encouraging an endless effort of interpretation. After understanding the origin of Hermeneutic’s role in Biblical Tradition and its duty in social sciences, now we will move to an inquiry concerning the Hermeneutic Aspect of Irshad Manji with regards to his idea supporting the LGBT-Q movement.

### **ISLAM-CULTURE RELATION: ENQUIRING BASIS OF THE HERMENEUTIC ASPECT OF IRSHAD MANJI**

In general, Irshad Manji's Hermeneutics intimately consorted with her effort to ‘reform’ traditional teaching of Islam as it has been revealed in the Qur’an. It is true that Manji did not confirm that she has utilized Hermeneutics, however, her steps in reading the Qur’an ‘beyond its traditional or orthodox understanding’ is indeed a Hermeneutic action. First of all, let us see how she defended Homosexuality: According to manji, Homosexuality does not oppose religious teaching but merely opposed the ‘Islam-tribalism’ -an infiltration of pre-Arab culture to the current religion of Islam (Manji, 2011, p. 77). Intrinsically, her voice supporting LGBT-Q’s rights altogether with their sexual orientation was intended not to confront Islam but against a ‘Primitive Culture’ that has been deeply emerged, precisely before the coming of Islam (Manji, 2011, p. 77).

Manji believes that opposing that ‘Islam-tribalism’ would not bring harm to Islam as a religion, so she continuously promoting her ideas about LGBT-Q’s right and precisely, Homosexuality. Manji also considers the veil (*hijab*) is not a part of Islamic teachings but only as a cultural dimension of Pre-Islamic Arab society. She traced the historicity of the veil, found that it has existed long before the prophecy of Muhammad. Considering Manji’s position opposing culture and expelled it out from the Islamic dimension, We can arrive at an assumption that according to Manji, cultures should not be

included within the sacred aspect of Islam. In conclusion, it should be opposed (Manji, 2011, p. 138). In her *Allah, Liberty and Love*, Manji argued:

"...*The custom of honor existed before Islam. If we hang on to culture in the name of Islam, then we're worshipping what man, not God, has created. Isn't that idolatry?*" (Manji, 2011, p. 75)

Moreover, Manji also said that:

"...*That's not the "Islamic" headscarf for women; it's the headscarf mandated by pre-Islamic tribal honor...*" (Manji, 2011, p. 96)

Following her argumentation, Manji has accused *Shari'a* as a cultural invention *an sich* as she has asserted. In one of the dialogues she conducted, Manji believed that rather than Islam came to 'Islamize' Pagan-Arab Culture, the Arab Culture has indeed conquered Islam (Manji, 2011, p. 77). It means that, according to Manji, Islamic rituals and teachings have been dominated-to not say infiltrated by Pre-Islamic Arab culture. The most disgusting problem confronted with Islam nowadays is Culture; the Culture has degraded the practice of Islam. (Manji, 2011, p. 72) Finally, Manji even believes in that *hijab*, alone from considering that Hijab is the pre-Arab Muslim culture, is only as a part of sexual acclimatization of Muslim Women, considering it as an act of 'fetish':

"...*I choose not to wear it (hijab), and if another woman decides the opposite for herself, I won't stop her. But what I will do is express my judgment that choosing hijab makes her a billboard for the most chauvinistic aspects of Arab tribal culture. Far from protecting herself against the "Western" disease of sexualizing breasts and other bodily bits, she's fetishizing her entire body as genitalia.*" (Manji, 2011, p. 146)

A logical consequence that emerged from such a conception is a way to look at the reality of mankind barely from their sexual drive. Somehow, we can see that Manji's model of critique was developed from a 'critical reading' of the Qur'an before associated it with an erotic issue. As we have understood that *Hijab* or veil is an obligation for every Muslim woman; it is mandatory that should be carried out from their earliest period as Muslim till the day they die. Muslims refer to the command of Hijab to Al-Qur'an Chapter *al-Nur* (Light) Verse 31:

"*And tell believing women that they should lower their glances, guard their private parts, and not display their charms beyond what [it is acceptable] to reveal; a they should let their headscarves fall to cover their necklines and not reveal their charms except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their womenfolk, their slaves, such men as*

*attend them who have no sexual desire, or children who are not yet aware of women's nakedness; they should not stamp their feet so as to draw attention to any hidden charms. Believers, all of you, turn to God so that you may prosper.*" (Abdel Haleem, 2005, p. 223)

At this stage, we have observed that Manji refuted the instruction to wear *Hijab* as been legislated in The Qur'an. This rebuttal was not solely a critique of the 'Pre-Islamic Culture' she claimed earlier but also implemented in a form of further interpretation of The Qur'an, which by consequence, contradicted the theological foundation of Islam itself. Religion -especially Islam-, to sum up, should be 'reformed' (Manji, 2004, pp. 30–34, 2011, p. 16). Accordingly, Manji admitted she has been evolved and matured 'from the anger to aspiration'; confirming her liberation of herself from the Pre-Islam Arab Culture (El Younssi, 2018).

Her argumentation regarding her status as a Lesbian was also derived from such groundwork; the 'reformation' of culture expected by Manji was defined as the '*gadflies*'; "...to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood..." As she emphasized that every culture, society, and even religion needs reformation, a concrete liberation in accordance with Manji is discarding religion with the whole doctrines, teachings, ideologies enclosed within (Manji, 2004, p. 180, 2011, p. 36). In *The Trouble with Islam*, Manji explicitly said that "*I'm openly lesbian. I choose to be "out" because, having matured in a miserable household under a father who despised joy, I'm not about to sabotage the consensual love that offers me joy as an adult.*" (Manji, 2004, p. 23) As regards her condition as a Muslim, in one interview held by BBC that "*I'm very much at peace with being gay and Muslim.*" ("I'm Very Much at Peace with Being Gay and Muslim": Irshad Manji," 2016) We can see a similar way conducted by both Manji and Luther concerning the confrontation done to the orthodox values of religion. According to them, religion has been dominated by a particular culture with specific attention; which in the context expanded by Manji, is refuting the traditional view of Islam about LGBT-Q. Now we will proceed to the practice of Hermeneutics done by Manji with reference to Qur'anic verses.

## MANJI AND AN INTERPRETATION OF LGBT-Q VERSES IN THE QUR'AN

In order to strengthen her argumentation concerning LGBT-Q's movement, Manji reinterpreted The Qur'an Chapter Ants (*al-Naml*) verse 54 to 58. This verse, as it is commonly known explained the of Prophet Luth and the great punishment sentenced by God to his people -the society of Sodom-who committed homosexuality. This verse as below:

54) *"We also sent Lot to his people. He said to them, 'How can you commit this outrage with your eyes wide open? 55) How can you lust after men instead of women? What fools you are!' 56) The only answer his people gave was to say, 'Expel Lot's followers from your town! These men mean to stay chaste!' 57) We saved him and his family—except for his wife: We made her stay behind— 58) and We brought rain down on them. How dreadful that rain was for those who had been warned!"*(Abdel Haleem, 2005, p. 242)

Regarding these theological sources, Manji wrote that:

*" There you go again, breaking faith with the simple Qur'anic passage that urges you not to get excited about ambiguous verses. The Sodom and Gomorrah story—Islam's parable of Lut—is ambiguous. You're certain it's about homosexuals, but it could be about the rape of straight men by other straight men as a display of power and control. God punished Lut's tribe for cutting off trade routes, hoarding wealth and dising outsiders. Male-on-male rape might have been the sin of choice to instill fear in travelers. I don't know that I'm right. According to the Qur'an, though, you can't be sure that you're right either. Now, if you're still obsessed with cursing homosexuals, aren't you the one who has a gay agenda? And while we're at it, you didn't answer my earlier question: what's with the disbelief in your heart?"*(Manji, 2011, p. 94)

According to Manji, the sin committed by the people of Sodom is not an LGBT-Q act but precisely because these people possibly raped one another, cut of the commerce avenue, greedy for wealth, and also disregarded their guests. In other words, Manji claimed that these verses do not prohibit Homosexuality, as it is believed by Major Muslims. As such, Manji refuted the authority of *Tafsir* as an authorized system of Qur'anic Interpretation. As her argumentation was built on the critique of tradition dominating Islam as religion, Manji emphasized that there is no other than God who owns the highest authority of Truth in Islam: *"All you need to hold your own with Islamo-tribalists is a laserlike focus on Islam's prime directive: that God and none other possesses*

*ultimate truth...*” (Manji, 2011, p. 94) It means that, similar with the ‘Protestant Spirit’ launched by Martin Luther, Manji believed in that the general interpretation of these verses regarding LGBT-Q was dominated by an assertive group, which is here intended, is a group of *Mufassirin* with their ‘Islam-Tribalism’.

As such, Manji also related her interpretation to Al-Qur’an Chapter The Family of ‘Imran (*Ali ‘Imran*) verse 7:

7) *“it is He who has sent this Scripture down to you [Prophet]. Some of its verses are definite in meaning—these are the cornerstone of the Scripture—and others are ambiguous. The perverse at heart eagerly pursue the ambiguities in their attempt to make trouble and to pin down a specific meaning of their own: only God knows the true meaning. Those firmly grounded in knowledge say, ‘We believe in it: it is all from our Lord’—only those with real perception will take heed—*”(Abdel Haleem, 2005, p. 34)

Based on her reading of this verse, Manji confirms her argumentation regarding our possibility to interpret the Qur’an before later submitting its ‘final’ meaning to God only. Following an earlier paragraph, Manji’s argument came as an analysis concerning ‘precise’ (*muhkam*) verse and ‘ambiguous’ (*mutasyabih*) of the Qur’an. As we can see, that Manji argued that ambiguous verses can be judged by relative truth, so anyone can interpret them somehow or according to the results of their respective thoughts. Accordingly, Manji confirmed that Al-Qur’an Chapter Ants explaining the people of Sodom is only ambiguous verses and probably interpreted by other meanings besides the general interpretation or commentary accepted by major Muslim. Manji, found that the feasibility to ‘reform’ Qur’anic interpretation is based on the ‘contradictory’ condition of The Qur’an: *“...but what's our excuse for reading the Koran literally when it's so contradictory an ambiguous?”*(Manji, 2004, p. 2)

It is noted by Howard Doughty, that Manji’s effort was closely related to her effort emancipating LGBT-Q’s right to express their sexual orientation; in the same way, challenging Muslim faith to undertake questions concerning this issue as a part of ‘Universal Human Rights’ discussion (Doughty, 2013). Furthermore, Manji confronted the general conception of Muslims as respects to LGBT-Q that they should be executed to death: *“How can we be so sure that homosexuals deserve ostracism—or death?”*(Manji, 2004, p. 2) To sum up, Manji has attempted to discard the traditional interpretation of Muslim scholars with respect to LGBT-Q’s status and punishment that should be delivered on them.



## RESPONDING TO MANJI'S HERMENEUTICAL INTERPRETATION ON LGBT-Q VERSES

As we can see, Manji has prominently opposed the prohibition of same-sex relations, as according to her, the ban of LGBT-Q is only an obstruction to the cultural products, which is not sacred (Manji, 2011, p. 77). She even affirmed that the story of Prophet Lut and Sodom People in Al-Qur'an are only ambiguous (*mutasyhabihat*) verses, so she believed in her competency to interpret The Qur'an with her own interpretation. Manji's interpretation relativized the message that God punished the Sodom Community on account they robbed the trade routes, monopolized wealth, and acted disrespectfully towards others (Manji, 2011, p. 94). In general, the sanction sentenced to them was not solely a result of homosexuality, but because of their heinous acts.

The most crucial problem that should be focused on is that, Manji does not own any authority to comment (*yufassir*) or interpret (*yuanwil*) Qur'anic Verses. It is clear that Manji's whole argumentation was intended mainly to codify LGBT-Q's rights, especially in their sexual interest. If we follow Manna Qatthan and Ahmad von Denffer's explanation regarding the principle of *Tafsir*, We did not find any preferences to Manji's commentary and interpretation either to the Qur'an itself, to the Prophetic Tradition, moreover to the tradition of Companions (*Shahabah*) (Qatthan, 2000, pp. 329–331; von Denffer, 1985, pp. 124–125). This scientific tradition is generally known as the *Tafsir bi al-Ma'tsur* (al-Dzahabi, 2000, p. 112). In general, Manji has not fulfilled any requirement for a proper Quranic interpretation.

Apart from her disqualification in the subject, we can see that Manji utilized her method merely based on her rational thinking, which is extremely forbidden by the discipline of Qur'anic interpretation. Imam Ibn Jarir al-Thabary, as was quoted by Muhammad Husayn al-Dzahabiy, this case, confirmed again a demand to refer to Companions in respect to achieve a sound understanding of the Qur'an (al-Dzahabi, 2000, p. 151). The method of rational exegesis (*Tafsir bi al-'Aqly*) is allowed as long as it is employed following the basis of The Qur'an, Prophetic Tradition, and tradition of Companions and not *vice versa* (al-Dzahabi, 2000, pp. 199–203). These Commentaries and Interpretations, moreover, have been already available since the earliest entry of Science of Qur'an and *Tafsir*; The literature provided rational approach in Qur'anic Interpretation and Commentaries, for instance: *Mafatih al-Ghayb* written by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, (al-Fakhr al-Razi, 1981) al-

Baydhawi's *Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil*, (al-Baydhawi, n.d.) al-Nasafi's *Madarik al-Tanzil wa Haqaiq al-Ta'wil*, (al-Nasafi, 1998) al-Khazin's *Lubab al-Ta'wil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil*, (al-Khazin, 2004) Abu Hayyan's *al-Bahr al-Mubith*, (al-Andalusi, 2010) al-Nisaburi's *Ghara'ib al-Qur'an*, (al-Nisaburi, 1996) al-Suyuthi and al-Mahalli's *Tafsir Jalalayn*, and (al-Mahalli & al-Suyuthi, 2003) al-Alusi's *Rub al-Ma'ani* (Syihab al-Din al-Alusi, n.d.). These references, as it was affirmed by al-Dzahabiy have took an advantage of rational approach without discarding the discipline of Qur'anic interpretation as it should be and enhanced global characteristic of Qur'anic Science, *Tafsir*, and *Ta'wil*. (al-Dzahabi, 2000, p. 205) Manji's interpretation of Qur'an, on the other hand, have executed the discipline of exegesis haphazardly and ended with the blunder grasp of The Qur'an (al-Khalidi, 2000, pp. 499–500).

Manji's method, again, was greatly influenced the Western Scholar way to look at the Qur'an; speculating on the certain origin of the Qur'an based on its historicity (Esposito, 1995, p. 387). It is, undeniably, *Hermeneutics*. Relating to this, Esposito even differed between Christian and Islamic view concerning the sacredness of their Scripture: "...Unlike the normative Christian view of the Bible as a divinely inspired discourse..., the words of the Qur'an are regarded by most Muslims as divine in and of themselves." (Esposito, 1995, p. 387) Prophet Muhammad, in contrast with the concept of Biblical Criticism, is only an instrument of God's Revelation. He is neither a writer nor an editor -with personal background- of the Qur'an, but an intermediary who received the command from God. (Esposito, John L., 2016, p. 23) Considering the concrete difference between Islam and Christianity, or *Tafsir-Ta'wil* and *Hermeneutics* in particular, altogether with the potential carnage appeared from it, therefore, the indecency of Hermeneutics in the Study of Islam is understandable. As Josef van Ess confirmed that "... This (*Hermeneutics*) is not necessarily so in Islamic studies." (Arif, 2008, p. 33; Bierman, 2004, p. 7)

Responding to the distorted interpretation done by Manji, let us see the commentaries and interpretations of Al-Qur'an Chapter Ant (*al-Naml*) from *Mufasssirun*. Ibn Katsir emphasized that these verses are explaining the Divine Punishment delivered to the people of Sodom; focusing on the term of *Fahisyah* (فاحشة) as a very erroneous habit. The manner was about the homosexual activity which never been done by any single normal human before. This outrageous act has abandoned women to have sex with another woman, as men do it with another men. (Katsiir, 1999, p. 200) The people of

Sodom, are incarcerated by God; drizzled with stones from Hell (Katsiir, 1999, p. 201).

Fairuzabadi has quoted ibn ‘Abbas regarding the condition of the People of Sodom. This community was ignorant; as they did not listen to the advice of Prophet Luth. Even Prophet Luth has warned them of their bad deeds, they still do *Fabisyah* -homosexuality- so that Allah delivered His Divine Punishment to them. Interestingly, Fairuzabadi literally commented *Fabisyah* as *Liwath* (لواط); an authentic translation of homosexuality in Arabic (al-Fairuzabadi, 2007, pp. 381–382). A Similar interpretation was also done by al-Tsa’labi in his *al-Kasyf wa al-Bayan*, as these people of Luth have transgressed the bounds of their nature as human beings; gave out their sexual desire to men. (al-Tsa’labi, 2002, p. 218) In general, there is no disagreement occurred between *Mufasssirun* that the crime that was committed by the Sodom people is homosexuality, as it has been criticized by Manji.

This argumentation has also delivered us to the proper identification regarding the serious error conducted by Manjid in the context of the precise (*Mubkam*) and ambiguous (*Mutasyabih*) verses. Manji, contrast with the preferences should be done in the discipline of *Tafsir*, which is announcing the ‘correct meaning’ (*al-Ma’na al-Rajih*)(Qatthan, 2000, p. 209) from the interpretation, she rather discarding the meaning of homosexuality in the verse with another ‘bad deeds’ -such as cutting off trade, etc-. In this case, Manji has clearly manipulated the accurate interpretation with her own, as it also provided misguided messages, straying her reader from the sins that has been forbidden by God.

## CONCLUSION

Irshad Manji has utilized her interpretation in respect to LGBT-Q verses in Al-Qur’an Chapter Ant (*Al-Naml*) verse 54 to 58. Her method in commentating and interpreting these verses, was strongly similar to Hermeneutics, the method of Biblical interpretation which was previously introduced by St. Augustine to interpret the Bible, before later used by Martin Luther to confront the practice of Indulgences before the authority of the Catholic Church. As Manji has only depended on her rational preferences, she considered the Divine Laws as a part of religious traditions only, discarding an affirmed discipline of Interpretation in Islam and resulted in serious error in achieving the correct meaning of the verses. Her interpretation, finally, was

intended mainly to support her effort in emancipating LGBT-Q rights, especially in their sexual interests.

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