



Women's Menstruation is a Dirt

The Application of *Ma'na-cum-Maghza* Approach in Qur'an

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Abstract. This article aims to reveal the primary messages in the Quran (2: 222) by employing a *ma'na-cum-maghza* hermeneutic approach. This descriptive-analytic study inspired by a particular interpretation of the term *adha* in the verse; as in some classical literature, it was interpreted as something dirty, disgusting, and ill. Women seem to be seen as an item rather than people. This product of misogynistic and euphemistic interpretation is the author's unease. Even so, in its development after going through an in-depth search using reference sources from classical and modern commentaries and studies through analysis of linguistic aspects and aspects of micro and macro historical contexts, QUR'AN (2:222) has two main messages, namely upholding the values of humanism and sex education to all married couples.

Keywords: Q.S. 2: 222 · *ma'na-cum-maghza* · *adha* · main messages

1 Introduction

Q.S. 2:222 states that women's menstrual blood is defined as *adha*. In several classical commentaries such as Tafsir at-Tabari, Tafsir al-Jalalayn, Tafsir Ibn Kathir states that the word *adha* in Q.S. 2:222 is *qadhar* (dirty) [1, 2]. This interpretation gives the impression of a euphemistic product. As a result, many products of misogynistic interpretation appear. At this point, women seem to be seen as disgusting objects rather than as complete human beings like men.

From the historical aspect, the product of the interpretation above is understandable because the Qur'an itself was revealed in the context of patriarchal pre-Islamic Arab society, where women are often seen as objects. In encounters with several other verses, the Qur'an upholds equality and partnership between men and women, for example, in Q.S. 33:35 [3]. The Koran also has a dialectical relationship between text and context. Rarely does the Koran transcend the culture of a particular place [4].

Then, what about contemporary commentators? In the work of Ibn 'Ashur and Quraish Shihab offers a new meaning of the term *adha*, which initially meant dirty, which became unpleasant for both men and women. [5] This interpretation raises a unique perspective in accommodating menstrual problems in Q.S. 2: 222. For example, from the aspect of sexual health, as in the research of Murni, Mazokopis, Dewi, Hosseini, and Esmaeilz [6–9]. From another element, it can be found in Mazuz, Haleem, and

Abdel's research which focuses on pre-Islamic socio-historical aspects of euphemism towards menstruating women [10, 11]. All of them enrich the repertoire of research on menstruation in the Qur'an.

From the previous explanations, this research will focus on reinterpreting the Qur'an (2:222) using the *ma'na-cum-maghza* approach to trace the verse's main message (maghza). This research was conducted based on the assumption that research on Qur'an (2:222) with the *ma'na-cum-maghza* approach is relatively new, based on all the previous explanations. Why should I employ the *ma'na-cum-maghza* approach? Because this approach succeeded in unifying the hermeneutical theories of Gadamer, Gracia, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Fazlur Rahman, and Abdullah Saeed. And also, this approach can surpass the approach of its predecessor, namely Fazlur Rahman's double movement and Abdullah Saeed's Contextualist Approach, which is only limited to legal verses [12]. In the end, with this effort, the Qur'an has always been a compatible book in every time and place (*salih li kulli zaman wa makan*).

1.1 The Text

It is stated in the Qur'an (2: 222)

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْمَحِيضِ ۗ قُلْ هُوَ أَذًى فَأَعْتَزَلُوا النَّسَاءَ فِي الْمَحِيضِ وَلَا تَقْرُبُوهُنَّ حَتَّىٰ يَطْهُرْنَ ۖ فَإِذَا تَطَهَّرْنَ فَأْتُوهُنَّ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَمَرَكُمُ اللَّهُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

And they ask you about menstruation. Say, "It is harm, so keep away from wives during menstruation. And do not approach them until they are pure. And when they have purified themselves, then come to them from where Allah has ordained for you. Indeed, Allah loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves."

Q.S. 33: 35

إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَنِينَ وَالْقَنِينَ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَشِيعِينَ وَالْخَشِيعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّابِغِينَ وَالصَّابِغَاتِ وَالْحَفِظِينَ وَالْحَفِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so - for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward.

2 Method

The focus of this research is Qur'an (2:222) regarding the portrait of menstruating women as dirty objects based on the comments of classical commentators [9]. In this case, the author will explore the main message behind the verse using the *ma'na-cum-maghza* approach.

This study employs research data sources into two types of sources, namely primary and secondary sources. The primary sources used are books of interpretation of the Qur'an, both classical and modern. The secondary sources are obtained from journal articles, books, encyclopaedias, videos and all other media that can help this research.

This research is a qualitative research, namely descriptive-analytic research with reference sources as the primary data (library research) [13]. The theoretical guide for this research uses the *ma'na-cum-maghza* approach. The following is Sahiron's explanation as the originator of this approach:

“What is meant by the term ‘*ma'na-cum-maghza* approach’ is an exegetical approach in which someone tries to grasp the original historical meaning (*ma'na*) of a text (i.e. the Qur'an) that was understood by its first audience, and to develop its significance (*maghza*) for the contemporary situation [1]2.”

The following are the operational steps of this research:

- 1) Paying attention to the meaning of the word by looking at the initial meaning, in this case, it is necessary to see whether there is a difference in meaning between the words *mahidl* and *adha* used by the Koran in the seventh century with the purpose of the word understood today.
- 2) Tracing the features of intratextuality, namely looking for the equivalent of the words *mahidl* and *adha* in the verse after and before (syntagmatic), or it could be with other verses as a whole.
- 3) Exploring intertextuality features, namely paying attention to the use of the word in texts outside the Koran such as hadith, poems, or other religious holy texts.
- 4) We are paying attention to the historical context on a micro basis, namely the cause of the revelation of the verse, and the macro situation, namely the socio-historical of the audience in Q.S. 2:222.
- 5) The search for significance or main message or spirit or *maghza* in Q.S. 2:222 in two aspects:
 - Phenomenal historical significance (*al-maghza at-tarikhyy*), namely the main message in the context of the verse revealed and accommodated by the people of the Prophet SAW.
 - Phenomenal dynamic significance (*al-maghza al-mutaharrik*), namely the step of contextualizing the verse in the present and hereeness context with other scientific tools. In this case, the author will employ the point of view of health sciences.

3 Discussion

Interpretation with the *ma'na-cum-maghza* approach considers the linguistic aspects of the verses to be discussed and their socio-historical context to understand (1) historical meaning (*al-ma'na at-tarikhiy*) or the original meaning (*al-ma'na al-asli*), (2) historical significance/main message (*al-maghza at-tarikhiy*), and (3) contemporary main messages (*al-maghza al-mu'thirah*) or dynamic phenomenal significance (*al-maghza al-mutaharrik*) during reinterpretation [12, 14]. To do these things, the author performs the following steps:

3.1 Linguistics Analysis

3.1.1 Wa yas'alunaka 'an al-mahidl

The plural pronoun in the verb *yas'aluna* refers to a person of the Prophet's followers when he saw the Jewish practice of his wife. In the opinion of as-Suddi, the one who asked was Thabit ibn ad-Dahjaj [15]. Use the plural pronoun *hum* because it is attached to the previous verse. Pronoun 'you' (*dlamir muttasil 'ka'*) as an object (*maf'ul bih*) is referring to the Prophet himself.

The Qur'an uses the word *al-mahidl* to describe menstruation. According to as-Sabuni, *al-mahidl* is a form of *masdar mim* which means menstruation [16]. This opinion is shared by Abu Zahrah [17]. The word *mahidl* is equivalent to the word *ma'ish* (life). Ru'bah stated *ilaika ashku shiddata al-ma'ish, wa marra a'wamin natafna rishiy* (to you I complain of the difficulties of life and the bitterness of the situation to the point of knocking out my hair). In al-Qurtubi's opinion, the word *al-mahidl* is used to describe time and place as an allusion to menstruation [18]. This opinion is similar in al-Jalalain [2].

Menstruation originally means *as-sayl* (flow). This opinion can be confirmed in the works of al-Baghawi and az-Zuhaili. [19, 20] It is said *hadla as-sail wa fadla* (the flood was flowing and overflowing). In another term it says *hadlat ash-shajarah* (the tree carries water). [21] That way, *hadla* can also mean something that flows. Al-Azhari provides additional information regarding the meaning of the lake as *haudl*, because water flows into the lake [22]. Al-Farra conveyed through his poems, "*kahaidhotin yuzna biha ghairi tahirin*" (like a woman who has intercourse in an impure condition) [17].

It can be concluded that menstruation referred to in the term *al-mahidl* is a woman's menstrual blood. However, there is another opinion which states that *al-mahidl* refers to a place of menstrual blood, so it means a woman's vagina. In this case, the author follows the first opinion because the arguments are strong.

3.1.2 Qul huwa adha

The form of the command verb *qul* in the verse above refers to God's command to Muhammad to answer the previous question of a Jewish person/group. The pronoun *huwa* as single refers to the phrase *al-mahidl*. The Qur'an directly refers to menstruation as *adha*. The phrase *adha* in Ata's opinion calls it as disgusting [23]. Linguistically, *adha* means something that someone does not like [16]. Ash-Shabuni provides the basis argument based on the verse in Q.S. 2:264, which reads:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَبْطُلُوا صَدَقَاتِكُمْ بِالْمَنِّ وَالْأَذَىٰ

O you who have believed, do not invalidate your charities with reminders or injury...

Az-Zuhaili states, “*adha ash-shai 'adha*” in line with the word *ta'iba*, which means dirty [20]. So, the *adha* referred to in Q.S. 2:222 is referred to as something that is considered disgusting. In this context, women’s menstrual blood is considered disgusted. At-Tabari added menstruation is called dirty because it smells terrible, awful, and unclean, so it must be avoided. [1] This is in line with the opinion of Rashid Rida and al-Jassas [23, 24]. The basis why the phrase *adha* means dirty and disgusting can be found in several oral sources, such as in the narrations of Ibn ‘Abbas, Mujahid, and Qatadah [17].

In contrast to the opinion of ibn ‘Ashur, *adha* is interpreted as an unpleasant condition because if intercourse is carried out during menstruation, it can hurt the menstrual area as prescribed in the Torah [25]. As a result, the word *mahidl* shows the meaning of menstruation itself because it is dirty and painful. Based on the first opinion, menstruation is dirt, while in the second opinion, menstruation is a painful condition.

3.1.3 Fa'tazilu an-nisa' fi al-mahidl wa la taqrabuhunna hatta yathurna

The command verb *fa'tazilu* comes from the word *i'tizal* which means to avoid something and stay away. As in Q.S. 19:48:

وَأَعْتَزَلْكُمْ وَمَا تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ

And I will leave you and those you invoke other than Allah...”

There is almost no contradictory opinion between classical and modern scholars regarding the interpretation of staying away from women during menstruation. All of them agree in understanding the phrase abstain from sexual intercourse [21]. As far as interacting or making out between husband and wife who menstruate is allowed. This is explicitly said by the Prophet, “*if'alu kulla shai'in illa an-nikah*” (do as you wish except having intercourse) [24].

The form of prohibition *wa la taqrabuhunna* (do not approach them) is the prohibition of intercourse with menstruating women. According to Ibn al-'Arabi the term *la taqrab* means “don't use it”, while the term *la taqrub* means “don't approach it”. As a result, the interpretation is that it is forbidden to have intercourse with a wife while she is menstruating [18].

Regarding the term *hatta yathurna*, the consensus of classical and modern scholars agrees to use that *qira'ah*, which means “stopping menstrual bleeding”. At the same time, Hamzah and Kisa'i read *yattaharna*. At-Tabrani supports that *qira'ah*, then it means taking a bath [6]. Al-Fakhr stated that these differences in *qira'ah* lead to different practice consequences [20]. In the first opinion, a woman can have sexual intercourse as long as her menstrual blood stops. In the second opinion, women can have sex as long as they have bathed.

3.1.4 **Faidha tatahharna fa'tuhunna min haithu amarakum Allah inna Allah yuhibbu at-tawwabina wa yuhibbu al-mutatahhirin**

Even though the consensus of classical and modern scholars agrees with the *qira'ah* "*hatta yatharna*", in the next verse it is explained "*faidha tatahharna fa'tuhunna*" the end still means "a woman who has stopped her menstrual bleeding can have intercourse as long as she has bathed". In az-Zamakhshari's opinion, those who support the first *qira'ah*, namely *hatta yathurna* as the *naqis* premise, as for the next term *faidha tatahharna* as the premise of *kamil*, the conclusion of the *naqis* premise. While the group that supports the term *hatta yatahharna*, it is the premise of *kamil* which is then strengthened by the next term, *faidha tatahharna* [22].

As for the next term, *min haithu amarakum Allah*, al-Alusi explained in the context of avoiding intercourse which is prohibited, for example, in the middle of the day in the month of Ramadan. [15] Az-Zajjaj quoted a statement from Ibn 'Abbas, Mujahid, Qatadah, and ar-Rabi' regarding God's regulation in the context of intercourse, namely the prohibition of intercourse with relatives and sex before marriage, because Allah loves those who guard themselves against immoral acts and people who always purify themselves (*inna Allah yuhibbu at-tawwabina wa yuhibbu al-mutatahhirin*) [26].

3.2 Contextual Analysis

3.2.1 Micro Historical Context: Asbab an-Nuzul

Based on oral sources, Q.S. 2:222 was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the city of Medina. The audience is the Jewish group in Medina. The Medina Jewish group was divided into several clans, including the Banu Nadhir, Banu Qainuqa', and Banu Quraidah [27]. The Jewish group as the target audience is general, namely the entire Jewish clan in Medina. They have a habit of isolating their menstruating women. They are forbidden to eat and drink together. Even forbidden to interact with his own family. In this regard, a man named Thabit ibn ad-Dahjaj, in another opinion, was Usaid ibn Hudair and 'Abd ibn Bishr, who asked about the Jewish tradition. Then the revelation of Q.S. 2:222 in answering the question. Meanwhile, Muhammad ordered every menstruating woman to eat and drink with their family as long as they did not have intercourse. The Jewish group knows this. They considered Muhammad to be insulting their tradition [10, 16, 17, 20, 24].

Based on the previous elucidation, it can be understood that the micro context of Q.S. 2:222 is in response to a question by one of the Companions regarding the Jewish tradition of their menstruating women. In this case, the Koran is doing a counter-narrative against the Jewish tradition. In short, the Koran seems to be deconstructing a paradigm deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition by introducing a new paradigm, namely, allowing menstruating women to interact with their families.

3.2.2 The Macro Historical Context; Jewish Perception of Women's Menstruation

In the Rabbi tradition, the originality of menstruation stems from Eve's sin, which tempted Adam to consume the fruit of the tree of knowledge (Gen. 3: 1-3) [28]. According to Yohanah, when the devil transformed into a snake and tempted Eve, Eve was

no longer pure. In the Talmud, the demon is named Lilith [29]. According to Midrash, Lilith is Adam's first wife with a sexually aggressive character [30]. That's why Lilith transformed into a snake on a mission to destroy their relationship because Adam loved Eve more. Regarding Eve's impurity, the Talmud does not provide a clear explanation, only based on Abot de-Rabbi Nathan's description. One of Eve's ten punishments is to feel the sorrow of menstrual blood [31, 32].

Jewish tradition considers menstruation to be an illness. For this reason, the Jews limited physical contact with their wives. During the Middle Ages, menstruating Jewish women wore certain clothes as markers. The Midrash literature states, "Whoever has intercourse with a menstrual wife, eventually she will have leper sons" [30]. However, in an emergency, a menstruating mother can breastfeed her child, so the child does not starve.

Judaism believes that the devil possesses menstruating women [33]. So, their families are afraid to approach him. As a result, menstruating women are prohibited from walking barefoot because if they walk barefoot, the ground will be cursed [28]. Hence, every time they get close to their period, they will be prepared to wear shoes called *jiba*. The Jews also believe that the words of a menstruating woman can transmit her impurity, even the wind that blows the woman's scent can bring impurity. That's why they are strictly isolated during menstruation in a room called *beyt ha-tmeot* which means room for dirty women [34]. The size of the room is very small with no windows and only one door. During menstruation, they are prohibited from touching soil, water, plants, animals, and humans.

Maimonides stated that this tradition generally occurs in Jewish groups living in the eastern world (Arab) [35]. He also noted that the Jewish tradition arose from the influence of the Zoroastrian tradition. However, this is disputed by experts from the Jews. According to them, the tradition of isolating menstruating women is based on *Halakh* sources. But basically, Jewish practice is very similar to the course in the Zoroastrian tradition in dealing with menstruating women. This tradition, which has been deeply rooted for thousands of years, has created a myth among the Arab Jewish community, especially in Medina. And the Jewish group is famous for its traditions passed down from generation to generation. That's why the Medinan Jews felt insulted when the Prophet Muhammad ordered all women in Medina to stay at home with their families even though they were menstruating. At this point, the Prophet Muhammad was seen ridiculing Jewish beliefs that were deeply rooted for thousands of years. This proves that the Qur'an deconstructs old habits with a new paradigm for the author. So, QUR'AN (2:222) becomes a verse that works in the context of a shifting paradigm.

3.3 What Maghza Means

After examining various reviews of data analysis and arguments described in the previous discussion, both through linguistic analysis and historical context analysis (micro and macro), the author will describe the phenomenal historical significance (*al-maghza at-tarikhy*) in Qur'an (2:222). The verse explains the necessity to stay away from menstruating women because menstrual blood is *adha*. In various works of literature, the word *adha* is interpreted as something dirty, disgusting, and ill. Please note that the Q.S. audience 2:222 is a group of Jews in Medina. In their tradition, they believe that

menstruating women should be shunned. The term *adha* is a dialectical term easily understood by the audience. That's why the next verse is also an order to stay away. It's just that staying away from here means not having sex. So women can interact as usual. This counterproductive narrative attempts the Koran to shift the paradigm that menstruating women are not as per Jewish belief. Therefore, Qur'an (2:222) has two functions (1) demythologizing, namely in the position of countering the myth of menstruating women in Judaism (2) shifting paradigm, namely shifting the old paradigm (menstruating women must be isolated) to a new paradigm (menstruating women may interact).

As for the phenomenal dynamic significance (*al-maghza al-mutaharrik*) Q.S. 2: 222, if drawn on the present and hereness, it can be seen from two aspects, namely (1) humanism, Q.S. 2:222 teaches that women, whether in good health or sick, still have the right to have access to public spaces like men, because basically, they are also human beings. Freedom in accessing public space is regulated with certain limitations, namely, paying attention to the rules and not harming oneself or others. (Inallaha yuhibbu at-tawwabina wa yuhibbu al-mutatahhirin). (2) Sex education, Qur'an (2:222) allows women to interact with their families as long as they do not have intercourse. From the health aspect, the impact of having sexual relations with menstruating women can cause disease for both men and women. For women, it may cause pain in the genitals and will cause other complications, such as bleeding, vaginal discharge, or cause vaginal infections. It will affect all the activities of his life. The men will get an infection in their genitals and feel pain when urinating.

4 Conclusion

Based on all the previous descriptions, it can be concluded that the meaning of the term female menstruation in Qur'an (2:222) is something dirty, disgusting, and an illness. The term *adha* refers to the dialectical aspect of the Koran towards the Medina Jewish audience with their belief system. From the *ma'na* part, Qur'an (2:222) uses the term *adha* because, socio-historically, the Jewish group living in Arabia is thick with a tradition similar to Zoroastrianism, namely isolating menstruating women in a particular room. The term *adha* is meant not in the realm of demeaning women but to make the audience, in this case, the Jews of Medina, readily accept the verse. From *maghza*, Qur'an (2:222) is a demythologising verse of the Medinan Jewish tradition and a paradigm shifter from the old paradigm (menstruating women are isolated) to the new paradigm (menstruating women may interact). So that the verse can be contextualized in the present and hereafter, Qur'an (2:222) has two important messages: first, uphold the value of equality between men and women; secondly, as sex education related to endangering the health of intercourse when women are menstruating, both men and women.

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