

## Angelika Neuwirth's Feminist Hermeneutics of Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7: The Interpretation of *Mutasyābihāt* Verses and *Muḥkamāt* Verses

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### Abstract

The reading of Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7, particularly in relation to the muḥkamāt verses (definite, firm, clear) and the mutasyābihāt verses (similar, vague, comparable to one another, unable to stand alone), generally has no connection to gender issues. Through a critical approach, particularly a literary and historical approach, Angelika Neuwirth presents a different interpretation, which implicitly reflects Feminist Hermeneutics, where gender analysis is incorporated into the interpretation of Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7. This study aims to describe the concept of muḥkamāt-mutasyābihāt from Angelika Neuwirth's perspective. The method used is the "qualitative-descriptive" method. The research data was obtained through literature study, taken from data sources in the form of Angelika Neuwirth's writings or statements regarding Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7, specifically "*The House of Abraham and the House of Amram: Genealogy, Patriarchal Authority, and Exegetical Professionalism*," as well as data from other sources related to muḥkamāt-mutasyābihāt verses. The data collected was then analyzed and interpreted following Huberman's three stages of analysis: data reduction, data display, and data verification. The verified data was analyzed interpretively, beginning with restatement, description, and interpretation. The results of the study show that the reading of Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7 is closely related to feminist hermeneutics, where the important points include: 1) that the interpretation process depends on one's response to women, in this case Maryam, as an analogy for the dependence of interpretation on muḥkamāt verses (umm al-kitāb) 2) Believers will believe that Maryam conceived Isa without the role of a husband by the will and omnipotence of Allah, an analogy for valid interpretation: interpretation that relies on or refers to the Mother of the Holy Book, which is found in the holy book itself, and 3) Believers affirm (accept) that Mary was not an adulteress, as an antithesis to the Jews who exploited the mutasyābihāt verses to spread slander and misinterpretation (accusing Mary of adultery).

**Keywords:** *Angelika Neuwirth; Feminist Hermeneutics; Muḥkamāt- Mutasyābihāt*



**Abstrak:**

Pembacaan Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7, khususnya terkait ayat-ayat *muḥkamāt* (pasti, kokoh, jelas) dan ayat-ayat *mutasyābihāt* (mirip, samar, serupa antara satu dan yang lain, tidak dapat berdiri sendiri), secara umum tidak ada kaitannya dengan permasalahan gender. Dengan pendekatan kritis, khususnya pendekatan sastra dan sejarah, Angelika Neuwirth menampilkan pembacaan yang berbeda, yang secara implisit menampilkan Hermeneutika Feminisme, di mana dimasukkannya analisis gender dalam pembacaan Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan konsep *muḥkamāt-mutasyābihāt* dari sudut pandang Angelika Neuwirth. Metode yang digunakan adalah metode "kualitatif-deskriptif". Data-data penelitian diperoleh melalui studi pustaka, yang diambil dari sumber-sumber data berupa tulisan-tulisan atau pernyataan-pernyataan Angelika Neuwirth mengenai Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7, khususnya "*The House of Abraham and the House of Amram: Genealogy, Patriarchal Authority, and Exegetical Professionalism*", serta data-data dari sumber-sumber lain terkait ayat-ayat *muḥkamāt-mutasyābihāt*. Data-data yang berhasil dikumpulkan, selanjutnya dianalisis dan diinterpretasi menguti tiga tahapan analisis Huberman: reduksi data, display data, dan verifikasi data. Data yang sudah diverifikasi dianalisis secara interpretis yang dimulai dari *restatement*, *description*, dan *interpretation*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembacaan Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7 erat kaitannya dengan hermeneutika feminisme, di mana poin penting, antara lain: 1) bahwa proses penafsiran bergantung pada tanggapan seseorang terhadap perempuan, dalam kasus ini Maryam, sebagai analogi bagi ketergantungan penafsiran pada ayat-ayat *muḥkamāt* (*umm al-kitāb*) 2) Orang-orang beriman akan percaya bahwa Maryam mengandung Isa tanpa peran seorang suami adalah atas kehendak dan kemahakuasaan Allah, analogi bagi penafsiran yang sah: penafsiran yang bersandar atau merujuk pada Ibu Kitab Suci, yang ada dalam kitab suci itu sendiri, dan 3) Orang-orang beriman meyakini (menerima) bahwa Maryam bukanlah seorang pezina, sebagai antitesis bagi orang-orang Yahudi yang memanfaatkan ayat-ayat *mutasyābihāt* untuk melakukan fitnah dan takwil (menuduh Maryam sebagai pezina).

**Kata Kunci:** Angelika Neuwirth; Hermeneutika Feminis; Muḥkamāt-Mutasyābihāt;

**Introduction**

The term Umm al-Kitāb in Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7, according to Angelika Neuwirth's analysis, combines two gender discourses: masculinity, discourse control, related to vertical acceptance (descent/kitāb, tanzīl); and a more submissive female discourse in relation to the concept of motherhood and reproduction (wad).<sup>1</sup> This assumption causes confusion for Muslims in general

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<sup>1</sup> Neuwirth, Angelika. (2019). *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage*. Translated by Samuel Wilder. New York: Oxford University Press. H. 329.

and Qur'anic scholars in particular, given that discussions of Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7, in the disciplines of 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān and Tafsīr, related to muḥkamāt and mutasyābihāt verses, have no connection, or are not connected, to gender issues, especially feminism, but rather purely related to the verses of the Qur'an that are muḥkamāt (certain, firm, clear) and mutasyābihāt (similar, alike, unable to stand alone).

In Neuwirth's analysis, the genealogical discourse is mentioned in the early part of Surah Al-Imran, verses 1-6, particularly in verse 6, though implicitly. While verses 3-4 speak of revelation, verse 6 speaks of procreation. Neuwirth, in this case, seeks to trace the Qur'anic community's new discovery of the ambiguity of the sacred text by contextualizing the verse with older interpretive traditions.<sup>2</sup> The discussion of the concept of muḥkamāt-mutasyābihāt verses in Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7, according to Neuwirth, can be resolved with what is called "self-reference" (self-referentiality), interpreting the Qur'an with the Qur'an, in which case verse 7 is interpreted with the previous verse, verse 6. By paying attention to the Christological debate in this interpretation, the central role of Christian tradition in this surah becomes apparent, a new discourse, a genealogical discourse, which is informed rhetorically and philosophically. Furthermore, the image of feminism in umm al-kitāb verse 7, which is preceded by a reference in verse 6 about procreation, becomes the starting point for discussing the issue of muḥkamāt-mutasyābihāt antagonism. By making such self-references, an implicit correspondence between the two verses becomes apparent. It is also evident that before a mother gives birth to her child, God "forms" the child in the mother's womb, where the child's gender is not yet clearly known (mutasyābih, ambiguous). However, the mother's existence here serves as a kind of guarantee for the child's clear emergence (muḥkam).<sup>3</sup>

Self-referential interpretation, in addition to raising the discourse of procreation and genealogy as explained above, also raises the discourse of revelation and the meaning of the holy book. The main point is that both discourses make women agents in the act of revelation, namely in passing on something vertically (tanzīl), with the term "core of the holy book" (umm al-kitāb), and in the act of procreation, an inclusive understanding of the nature of creation, using the term "mother's womb" (raḥim). There is a kind of unification of the two main discourses in verses 6 and 7 of Surah Āli 'Imrān. Given the importance of the role of women (umm al-kitāb) in God's act of revelation, the deviation of the unbelievers in verse 7 must also be explained in feminist terms, that they (the unbelievers) cling to the mutasyābihāt because they focus on a kind of sexual

<sup>2</sup> Neuwirth, Angelika. (2010). "The House of Abraham and the House of Amram: Genealogy, Patrarchal Authority, and Exegetical Professionalism", in Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, Michael Marx (ed.) *The Qur'ān in Context*. Leiden dan Boston: Brill. 499-531. H. 515.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., h. 519.

desire due to the power of women's seduction (ibtigā al-fitnah).<sup>4</sup> Ambiguity, for Neuwirth, must be viewed through the lens of "Feminist Hermeneutics," where muḥkamāt verses and mutasyābihāt verses are related to gender construction, particularly feminism.

On the other hand, studies on muḥkamāt verses and mutasyābihāt verses in the books of 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān and Tafsīr have, so far, remained within a normative-repetitive framework. In the view of Manna al-Qaththan, for example, muḥkamāt verses consist of nāsikh verses, verses about halal and haram, about punishment, obligations, promises, and threats. Meanwhile, mutasyābihāt verses are found in the group of verses about the names and attributes of Allah, as well as others.<sup>5</sup> Discussions about muḥkamāt verses and mutasyābihāt verses in books or treatises on 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān or Tafsīr are almost identical in their conclusions. The starting point of this difference is Neuwirth's question regarding the nature of the Qur'an itself: if the Qur'an is very clear (mubīn), why is there antagonism between muḥkamāt and mutasyābihāt? To answer this question, Neuwirth focuses on the terminology "umm al-kitāb" by linking it theoretically to feminist hermeneutics.

Neuwirth's idea, when linked to the general understanding of Muslims, will have an impact on the community's unease with established religious concepts, in this case the concepts of muḥkamāt verses, mutasyābihāt verses, and umm al-kitāb in Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7. Therefore, an in-depth study of Angelika Neuwirth's thoughts is important in order to explain how feminism is used by Orientalists in studying the Qur'an. In addition, Neuwirth contextualizes this verse with older traditions of interpretation, a methodological approach that is very different from the methodology that already exists in Muslim scholarship. Thus, ultimately, a comparison can be made between the internal methodology of Muslims and external methodologies outside Islam, such as those of Orientalists.

In line with this, there are three questions answered in this paper. First: what is the form of studying muḥkamāt verses and mutasyābihāt verses among Muslims in general? Second: what is the form of feminist hermeneutics in studying muḥkamāt verses and mutasyābihāt verses in Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7 by Angelika Neuwirth? Third: what are the implications of Angelika Neuwirth's feminist hermeneutics in the study of muḥkamāt and mutasyābihāt verses in Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7?

From previous studies, none have focused their research on Angelika Neuwirth's conclusions, which are related to feminist gender construction. The study of muḥkamāt verses and mutasyābihāt verses is still centered on the works of Muslim scholars, such as: 1) "*Kajian Terhadap Ayat-Ayat Mutasyabihat Menurut*

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., h. 520.

<sup>5</sup> al-Qaṭṭān, Mannā'. (N.D.). *Mabāḥiṣ fi 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, Mesir, Dār al-'Ilm wa al-Īmān. H. 208.

*Al-Khatib Al-Iskafi Dalam Kitab Durrah At-Tanzil Wa Gurrah At-Ta'wil,"* a dissertation written by Abak A.<sup>6</sup> The research topic is A Study of Mutasyabihat Verses According to Al-Khatib Al-Iskafi in *Durrah at-Tanzil wa Ġurrah at-Ta'wil*. This research analyzes the verses of the Qur'an that contain mutasyābihāt, especially mutasyābihāt al-lafziy, which are phrases that are similar to other phrases in the Qur'an. 2) "*Klasifikasi Ayat-Ayat Muhkamat dan Mutasyabihat Menurut Al-Zamakhsyari Dalam Tafsir Al-Kasysyaf*," by Abusiri and Faridho E.<sup>7</sup> 3) "*Tafsir Feminis (Studi Pemikiran Amina Wadud dan Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd)*," a thesis written by A. Baidowi.<sup>8</sup> The focus of this paper is to analyze the ideas of Amina Wadud and Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid regarding: First, the nature of Qur'anic interpretation. Second, the principles and methods of interpretation they have developed in their efforts to understand Qur'anic verses related to feminist issues. Third, the implications of their thoughts in Qur'anic studies. In addition, discussions related to this theme are linked to specific themes, such as: 1) "*Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Dari Adanya Term Muhkam dan Mutasyabih dalam Tafsir Al-Qur'an*," by Anugrah A Munir Z.<sup>9</sup> This research was conducted to analyze the concepts of muḥkam and mutasyābih and the educational values contained in both terms, and 2) "*Membincang Ayat-ayat Muhkam Dan Mutasyabih*," by Firdausi M.A..<sup>10</sup>

As far as the author is aware, there are no writings related to hermeneutics or feminist interpretation that have examined Angelika Neuwirth's work. Works on this topic include: 1) "*Hermeneutika Feminis Terhadap Wacana Kesetaraan Feminisme: Sebuah Studi Literatur*," by S. Islami.<sup>11</sup> This study discusses feminist hermeneutics in relation to the discourse of gender equality. Hermeneutics is a method of interpretation used by Muslim feminists to reconstruct existing and established interpretations. 2) "*Feminist Hermeneutics of The Quran and Epistemic Justice*," by V. R. de la Fuente.<sup>12</sup> This paper presents religion, and specifically the

<sup>6</sup> A. B., Abak. (2016). *Kajian Terhadap Ayat-Ayat Mutasyabihat Menurut Al-Khatib Al-Iskafi Dalam Kitab Durrah At-Tanzil Wa Gurrah At-Ta'wil*. Dissertation.

<sup>7</sup> E. Faridho, & Abusiri. (2021). *Klasifikasi Ayat-Ayat Muhkamat dan Mutasyabihat Menurut Al-Zamakhsyari Dalam Tafsir AL-Kasysyaf*. *Hikmah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 17(1), 31-47.

<sup>8</sup> Baidowi, A. (2009). *Tafsir Feminis (Studi Pemikiran Amina Wadud dan Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd)*. Thesis.

<sup>9</sup> Z. A., Munir, & Anugrah, A. T. (2021). *Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Dari Adanya Term Muhkam dan Mutasyabih dalam Tafsir Al-Qur'an*. *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadist*, 4(2), 199-212. <https://doi.org/10.35132/albayan.v4i2.134>.

<sup>10</sup> M. A., Firdausi. (2015). *Membincang Ayat-ayat Muhkam Dan Mutasyabih*. *ULUL ALBAB Jurnal Studi Islam*, 16(1), 80. <https://doi.org/10.18860/ua.v16i1.2930>.

<sup>11</sup> Islami, S. N., & Artikel, I. (2022). *Hermeneutika Feminis Terhadap Wacana Kesetaraan Gender: Sebuah Studi Literatur*. *Jurnal Hawa: Studi Pengarus Utamaan Gender Dan Anak*, 4(2). Retrieved from <https://ejournal.iainbengkulu.ac.id/index.php/hawa>.

<sup>12</sup> de la Fuente, V. R. (2015). *Feminist Hermeneutics of The Quran and Epistemic Justice*. *Analize: Journal of Gender and Feminist Studies*, (4), 39-57.

position of women in religion, as a narrative product. 3) "*Problematika Tafsir Feminis: Studi Kritis Konsep Kesetaraan Feminisme*," by A. Husaini and R. Husni.<sup>13</sup> This research not only attempts to elaborate on a number of reinterpretations based on the female model of Qur'anic hermeneutics, but also shows the history of feminist ideology and the inaccuracy of the use of hermeneutical interpretation. 4) "*Poligami dalam Hermeneutika Feminis Amina Wadud*," by H. F. Anam.<sup>14</sup> This article examines polygamy from the perspective of Amina Wadud's feminist hermeneutics. 5) "*Kepemimpinan Perempuan: Penerapan Metode Tafsir Hermeneutika Feminisme Amina Wadud*," by A. Arsal, B. Busyro, and M. Imran.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, regarding Angelika Neuwirth, particularly her interpretation of the Qur'an, no studies have been found that discuss her writings on muḥkamāt verses and mutasyābihāt verses. Among the writings found on this topic are: 1) "*Pemikiran al-Qur'an Angelika Neuwirth dalam Structure and The Emergency of Community*," by M. Fajri.<sup>16</sup> This article examines Angelika Neuwirth's thoughts in Structure and the Emergency of Community on the model of pre-canonization Qur'an reading (the Qur'an that existed during the time of the Prophet) based on the structure of the Qur'anic surahs that have been codified into the mushaf. 2) "*Angelika Neuwirth: Kajian Intertekstualitas dalam Qs. Al-Raḥmān dan Mazmur 136*," by Z. Rahman.<sup>17</sup> This paper concludes that the Qur'an is a living sacred book that reacts to other traditions at the time of its emergence. Through intertextuality studies, the influence of the Bible on the Qur'an is not seen as plagiarism but rather as the uniqueness and effectiveness of the Qur'an's messages. 3) "*Konteks Late Antiquity dan Analisis Struktur Mikro sebagai Counter atas Skeptisisme Orisinalitas Teks Al-Quran: Refleksi atas Pemikiran Angelika Neuwirth*," by A. Aini and A. Musadad.<sup>18</sup> This article discusses Angelika Neuwirth's reading of the Qur'an with

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<sup>13</sup> Husaini, A., & Husni, R. (2015). PROBLEMATIKA TAFSIR FEMINIS: Studi Kritis Konsep Kesetaraan Gender. *Al-Tahrir: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam*, 15(2), 367. <https://doi.org/10.21154/al-tahrir.v15i2.264>.

<sup>14</sup> Anam, H. F. (2020). Poligami dalam Hermeneutika Feminis Amina Wadud. *Musāwa Jurnal Studi Gender Dan Islam*, 19(1), 43-56. <https://doi.org/10.14421/musawa.2020.191.43-56>.

<sup>15</sup> Arsal, A., Busyro, B., & Imran, M. (2020). Kepemimpinan Perempuan: Penerapan Metode Tafsir Hermeneutika Feminisme Amina Wadud. *AL QUDS: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Hadis*, 4(2), 481. <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v4i2.1976>.

<sup>16</sup> Fajri, M. (2021). Pemikiran al-Qur'an Angelika Neuwirth dalam Structure and The Emergency of Community. *Al-Wajid: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir*, 2(1), 303– 318. Retrieved from <https://mail.jurnal.iain-bone.ac.id/index.php/alwajid/article/view/1667>.

<sup>17</sup> Rahman, Z. Abd. (2015). Angelika Neuwirth: Kajian Intertekstualitas dalam Qs. Al-Raḥmān dan Mazmur 136. *EMPIRISMA*, 24(1). <https://doi.org/10.30762/empirisma.v24i1.12>.

<sup>18</sup> Aini, A. F., & Musadad, A. N. (2017). Konteks Late Antiquity dan Analisis Struktur Mikro Sebagai Counter atas Skeptisisme Orisinalitas Teks Al-Qur'an: Refleksi atas Pemikiran



a historical-critical approach through a focus on the study of the Qur'an before the canonization phase (pre-canonical). 4) "*Genealogi Pemikiran Angelika Neuwirth tentang Tartib Nuzuli sebagai Metode Penafsiran Al-Qur'an*," by A. L. Azmi, N. N. Baihaqi, and A. M. Kumalasari.<sup>19</sup> 4) "*Membaca Metode Penafsiran Al-Qur'an Kontemporer di Kalangan Sarjana Barat Analisis Pemikiran Angelika Neuwirth*," by L. Fina.<sup>20</sup> This article examines the thoughts of Western scholars on methods of interpreting the Quran. Specifically, this article analyzes the thoughts of Angelika Neuwirth as one of the leading Western scholars in the field of the Qur'an. 5) "*Angelika Neuwirth, Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text*," by D. J. Stewart.<sup>21</sup> This article provides a comprehensive review of Angelika Neuwirth's thoughts on the Qur'an.<sup>22</sup>

This study aims to describe the concept of muḥkamāt-mutasyābihāt from Angelika Neuwirth's perspective. The method used is the "qualitative-descriptive" method. The research data was obtained through literature study, taken from data sources in the form of Angelika Neuwirth's writings or statements regarding Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7, specifically "The House of Abraham and the House of Amram: Genealogy, Patriarchal Authority, and Exegetical Professionalism," as well as data from other sources related to muḥkamāt-mutasyābihāt verses. The data collected was then analyzed and interpreted following Huberman's three stages of analysis: data reduction, data display, and data verification. The verified data was analyzed interpretively, beginning with restatement, description, and interpretation.

## Result and Discussion

### *Muḥkamāt* and *Mutasyābihāt* Verses

The word *muḥkam* is etymologically a corruption of the word *ihkām* or *aḥkama* which can mean solid. *Muḥkam* means something that is established, clear,

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Angelika Neuwirth. *SUHUF*, 10 (1), 173–192.  
<https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v10i1.249>.

<sup>19</sup> Azmi, A. L., Baihaqi, N. N., & Kumalasari, A. M. (2022). *Genealogi Pemikiran Angelika Neuwirth tentang Tartib Nuzuli sebagai Metode Penafsiran Al-Qur'an*. *Al'Adalah*. Retrieved from <http://aladalah.uinkhas.ac.id/index.php/aladalah/article/view/287>.

<sup>20</sup> Fina, L. I. N. (2017). *Membaca Metode Penafsiran Al-Qur'an Kontemporer di Kalangan Sarjana Barat Analisis Pemikiran Angelika Neuwirth*. *Ulumuna*, 18(2), 269–286.  
<https://doi.org/10.20414/ujs.v18i2.854>.

<sup>21</sup> Stewart, D. J. (2016). *Angelika Neuwirth, Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text*. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 18(3), 135–142.  
<https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2016.0257>.

<sup>22</sup> Stewart, D. J. (2016). *Angelika Neuwirth, Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text*. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 18(3), 135–142.  
<https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2016.0257>.

eloquent and beautiful. According to this definition, the entire Qur'ān can be said to be *muḥkam*. A *muḥkam* verse is a verse whose message can be seen clearly without interpretation or interpretation. Al-Zarqāniy explains that *muḥkam* is a verse whose meaning is known, either clearly or through interpretation. As for *mutasyābih*, it means *tasyābuh*, which is when one of two things is similar to the other. Allah, the Almighty, has characterized the Qur'ān as entirely *mutasyābihāt*, because the Qur'ān is similar to some of its contents in terms of its perfection and beauty, and some of them justify others and are in accordance with their meanings. *Mutasyābih* is a verse that cannot stand on its own, so it must be interpreted by linking it with *muḥkamāt* verses.<sup>23</sup>

The discussion of *mutasyābihāt* verses and *muḥkamāt* verses cannot be separated from the term "*Umm al-Kitāb*", another name for *muḥkamāt* verses. *Umm al-Kitāb* are verses that serve as a 'place of return' or reference for other *mutasyābihāt* verses.<sup>24</sup> The term *Umm al-Kitāb* is a form of borrowing (*isti'ārah*), in which the *muḥkamāt* verses borrow the word *Umm al-Kitāb* with the intention of analogizing the *muḥkamāt* verses as mothers on which children depend or follow. This means that *Umm al-Kitāb* is the main point of the Qur'ān on which the law depends.<sup>25</sup> Quraish Shihab adds that the plural *muḥkamāt* verses are replaced by the singular *Umm al-Kitāb* because it indicates a unity, so that the *mutasyābihāt* verses are easy to refer to.<sup>26</sup>

In 'Western' studies, *Umm al-Kitāb* is interpreted not only as the original source of the Qur'ān, but also of other scriptures. This is related to *Umm al-Kitāb*'s position as God's writing that contains all divine decrees.<sup>27</sup> *Umm al-Kitāb* signifies the heavenly prototype, the substance, the matrix, of all scripture: Qur'ān, Jewish scriptures, and Christian scriptures. The metaphorical expression *Umm al-Kitāb* further strengthens the connection between the three scriptures.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the most unanimous conclusion on this matter is that the concept of *Umm al-Kitāb* or another name for *muḥkamāt* verses, is confronted (contrasted) with *mutasyābihāt* verses.

<sup>23</sup> al-Zarqāniy, Muḥammad 'abd al-'Azīm. (1995). *Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. Juz 2. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabiyy. H. 216.

<sup>24</sup> al-Bayḍawīy, Nāṣir al-Dīn Abiy al-Khair 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar ibn Muḥammad al-Syirāziy al-Syāfi'iy. (n.d.). *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta'wīl*. Juz 2. Beirut: Dār al-Iḥyā' al-Turās al-'Arabiyy. H. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Az-Zuhaili, Wahbah. (2013). *Tafsir Al-Munir: Akidah, Syariah, Manhaj*. Vol. 2. Translated by Abdul Hayyie al Kattani. Jakarta: Gema Insani. 182.

<sup>26</sup> Shihab, M. Quraish. (2005). *Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*. Vol. 2. 4th printing. Tangerang: Lentera Hati. H. 14.

<sup>27</sup> Madigan, Daniel A. (2004). "Preserved Tablet", in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*. Vol. 4. Leiden dan Boston: Brill. H. 261.

<sup>28</sup> Fatani, Afnan H. (2006). "Mother of the Book" in Oliver Leaman (ed.) *The Qur'an: an Encyclopedia*. London dan New York: Routledge. H. 418.



### ***Muḥkamāt* and *Mutasyābihāt* Verses in Angelika Neuwirth Exegesis**

The discussion of Angelika Neuwirth's Feminist Hermeneutics of Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7 centers on the debate surrounding Maryam, who gave birth without a husband. She (Maryam) is portrayed from a feminist perspective, contrasting subversive desires (to overthrow) or incitement (*ibtigā al-fitnah*) (in interpreting the Qur'an, ed.) with the respectful attitude of believers who adhere to the original text (*umm al-kitāb*). Here, Neuwirth focuses on the term "*umm al-kitāb*," which she associates with rabbinic scholarship, a category of hermeneutics (Feminist Hermeneutics) where "reading according to the sacred text transmitted safely is a reading that has a mother, namely the sacred text itself." The sacred text as "mother" (*umm*), according to Neuwirth, unites two discourses: the vertical discourse of verbal revelation (*tanzīl*) that holds informational power and the submissive female discourse on the concept of motherhood and reproduction (*waḍ'*).<sup>29</sup>

The striking emphasis on female actors, particularly the act of giving birth, contrasts with the masculine protagonists in the story of Abraham's family, which is based on the masculine genealogy of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob/Israel, and Joseph. This parallelism, which is the first and only one in the Qur'an, pits two families against each other, and is certainly no coincidence. In verse 7, the anonymous interpreters who are criticized for their obsession with interpretation are described using "gender-specific metaphors." They are cursed for their efforts, their "desire" (*ibtigā*), to cause doubt, discord, temptation, or seduction (*fitnah*). The word *ibtigā* also appears in Q13:17 and in Q19:28, in the story of Maryam, from the root word *b-ḡ-y*, in the form *baḡī* (harlot, immoral woman). This usage in the context of *fitnah* appears in a subversive (undermining) sense. *Fitnah* can be interpreted in several ways: temptation, God's test, straying from the right path, or struggle within a community, usually as God's strategy in testing the faith of His servants. One manifestation of *fitnah* is women (Neuwirth 2019:328).<sup>30</sup>

In this context, the unbelievers appear not only hyper-skeptical but also morally suspect, as they exploit the ambiguity of the text in order to seek *fitnah*. Yet only God knows all that is ambiguous (*mutasyābihāt*). Clarity (*muḥkamāt*) is what God has revealed to humans, whether in the case of "motherhood" or "revelation." In both cases, a feminine "temporary storage place" is used: "the womb of the mother" (*raḥim/arḥām*) for sexual reproduction, and "the mother of the text" (*umm al-kitāb*) for the descent of revelation. Since the process of revelation involves a female agent (*umm al-kitāb*), the deviant interpretations of

<sup>29</sup> Neuwirth, Angelika. (2010). "The House of Abraham and the House of Amram: Genealogy, Patrarchal Authority, and Exegetical Professionalism", in Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, Michael Marx (ed.) *The Qur'ān in Context*. Leiden dan Boston: Brill. 499-531. H. 518.

<sup>30</sup> Neuwirth, Angelika. (2019). *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage*. Translated by Samuel Wilder. New York: Oxford University Press. H. 328.

skeptics must be presented in gender categories.<sup>31</sup>

The purpose of Neuwirth's study is vaguely apparent: she wants to open the door to data outside the Islamic tradition surrounding the revelation of the Qur'an, an epistemic space in late antiquity, as an element of Qur'anic interpretation (al-umm) that in fact contains ambiguous parts. The issue of ambiguity and clarity is not only a hermeneutical problem but also a theological one. In traditions outside the Qur'an, this issue is specifically related to the figure of Maryam, whose virginity and process of becoming a mother are unclear, even raising doubts. For Neuwirth, this issue is more easily resolved by reading Q.S. 3:7 contextually. One must connect two sources of authority: the authority of the Jewish community, as a long-standing interpretive practice, and the authority of the Christian community, which softens the ambiguity of fiction as exemplified by the behavior of its founders. This connection will help us see the main liturgical text of the Eastern Church tradition, which can be estimated to date back to the sixth century CE: "The Akathistos Hymn," a hymn (song of praise) to Mary. Mary herself appears here as the object of conflicting perceptions. For believers, Mary is clear, anamphibolos, a symbol of faith. For unbelievers, she is ambiguous, amphibolos, a figure who irritates others.<sup>32</sup>

From its contents, The Akathistos Hymn is not the mother of the holy book, it is "the mother of the incarnate Word," which is praised as an object of clear belief. Ambiguity only arises in the presence of unbelievers. It is this feminist construction that contains the guarantee of clarity (muḥkamāt) of the mutasyābihāt verses. In addition, Neuwirth realizes that the word ibtigā (to seek and desire) in Q.S. Āl 'Imrān: 7 is taken from the word baḡiyyan (prostitute) in Q.S. Maryam (19): 20. This is where feminist hermeneutics illustrates how the interpretation of the holy book depends on men's responses to women. Those who turn away from the muḥkamāt verses and lean toward the mutasyābihāt verses are like those who reject the reality that Mary conceived because of God's omnipotence and choose to call her (Maryam) a prostitute.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Implications of Angelika Neuwirth's Hermeneutics of Feminism in The Study of *Muḥkamāt* Verses and *Mutasyābihāt* Verses in Q.S. Āl 'Imrān (3): 7**

Normatively, as concluded in the exegesis books of Muslim scholars, the concept of Umm al-Kitāb or another name for muḥkamāt verses, is contrasted with mutasyābihāt verses without mentioning gender issues at all, especially regarding the figure of Maryam. However, Angelika Neuwirth's historical study concludes something different from the conclusions of Muslim scholars on this topic. This

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., h. 329.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., h. 330.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., h. 330-331.

can be understood by looking at the methodology Neuwirth uses in reading the Qur'an. In her latest work, Neuwirth explains her historical-literary interpretation model, with an emphasis on both the textual and scriptural dimensions of the Qur'an. Literary analysis is used to examine the logical character of the text, its claim to truth regarding transcendent sources as reflected in its rhetoric. Meanwhile, historical analysis serves as a new textual strategy, an important indicator of new discourse, the sequence of discourse traceable within the Qur'an, and the path toward the construction of community identity. Changing social conditions form the basis for the development of the Qur'an.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, Neuwirth uses internal data from the Qur'an as well as external data in the form of records from late antiquity, such as Jewish, Christian, and Arab data before and during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (intertextuality), and employs a thematic method to analyze an entire surah of the Qur'an. Neuwirth defines Late Antiquity as an epistemic space where various groups sought to reinterpret texts from ancient times. In this context, the Qur'an plays a vital and creative role.<sup>35</sup>



Figure 1. Political-geographic map of the Mediterranean and Near Eastern world in 575 AD.<sup>36</sup>

With the interpretation model as explained above, Angelika Neuwirth has succeeded in developing the existing concept of *mutasyābihāt* verses and *muḥkamāt* verses. In addition, she provides a place (role) for Feminist Hermeneutics in the process of reading Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7, with the note that Feminist Hermeneutics is not the main objective of her writing, but rather as a methodological demand that reads the Qur'an in its pre-canonized form. The

<sup>34</sup> Angelika Neuwirth, *The Qur'an: Text and Commentary, Volume 2.1, Early Middle Meccan Suras: The New Elect*, Terj. Samuel Wilder, New Heaven dan London: Yale University Press, 2024, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Neuwirth, Angelika. (2013). "Locating the Qur'an in the Epistemic Space of Late Antiquity", dalam *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 54(2). Doi: 10.1501/İlhak\_0000001396. 189-203. H. 193.

<sup>36</sup> Robinson, Chase F. (ed). (2010). *Volume I: The Formation of the Islamic World Sixth to Eleventh Centuries*. New York: Cambridge University Press. H. xviii

results of Neuwirth's reading can be used to expand the scope of feminist verses that call for gender equality in the Qur'an. Likewise, the results of Neuwirth's Pre-Canonical Reading of the Qur'an can be used as a source for contextual interpretation of the Qur'an. Finally, Neuwirth introduces the concept of "Late Antiquity" as an "Epistemic Space" that provides external data for reading the Qur'an. However, the significance of Neuwirth's conclusion lies in her use of feminist hermeneutics which is relatively new and unique. The main point of this feminist hermeneutics concept is the inclusion of gender analysis in interpreting the Qur'an, both in the linguistic aspects of the Qur'an, the content (message) of the Qur'an, and the socio-cultural structure of Arab society before and when the Qur'an was revealed.<sup>37</sup> As a comparison, a comparison can be made with Amina Wadud's use of hermeneutics related to Maryam, that according to Wadud, she (Maryam) is the only woman mentioned by name in the Qur'an. One of the reasons is that in the Qur'an, Jesus was created in Mary's womb with special and biologically abnormal provisions. Jesus is called "son of Mary" to demonstrate the significance of his birth. Family relationships in the Qur'an are usually labeled in relation to a father or male ancestor. Maryam was also given an honorific title common in the Arab era at that time and used in the Qur'an when certain women were mentioned, that Maryam was "the sister of Aaron". Later, Maryam was classified in the Qur'an as one of the "qānitīn" (66:12), which uses the masculine plural form, indicating a pious person to Allah. In essence, Maryam's virtues are not limited by gender.<sup>38</sup> It can be seen that feminist hermeneutics in the conceptualization of Maryam in the Qur'an according to Neuwirth and Wadud have differences. This difference implies the possibility of making Angelika Neuwirth's feminist hermeneutics model a practical insight in the use of feminist hermeneutics in reading or interpreting the Qur'an.

This research has implications for the expansion of the study of muḥkamāt and mutasyābihāt through the perspective of Angelika Neuwirth, who interprets umm al-kitāb not only as a central reference point for the text, but also as a symbol of gender construction that connects revelation and procreation. This approach encourages a reinterpretation of the Qur'an by considering the socio-cultural and cross-traditional dimensions of Late Antiquity. Methodologically, the integration of internal and external Qur'anic data opens up opportunities for contextual readings through intertextual and pre-canonization methods. Practically, these findings can serve as a reference for the development of gender-sensitive contextual exegesis and facilitate critical dialogue between Islamic exegesis methodologies and Orientalist Qur'anic studies to enrich the body of knowledge.

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<sup>37</sup> Rahtikawati, Yayan dan Dadan Rusmana. (2013). *Metodologi Tafsir Al-Qur'an: Strukturalisme, Semantik, Semiotik, dan Hermeneutik*. Bandung: Pustaka Setia. H. 474.

<sup>38</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, New York dan Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 39-40.

### Angelika Neuwirth's Contribution to Qur'anic Studies

Angelika Neuwirth has made a significant contribution to the development of Qur'anic studies through the historical-literary approach she has developed. She combines literary analysis to uncover the narrative structure, rhetoric, and internal coherence of the Qur'anic text with a historical approach that places revelation within the context of Late Antiquity. In her view, Late Antiquity is an epistemic space where the Qur'an actively interacts with previous traditions, such as Jewish rabbinic texts, Eastern Christian liturgy, and pre-Islamic Arab literary works. In this way, the Qur'an is understood not only as a normative religious text, but also as a literary work that was born, lived, and dialogued with the socio-cultural realities of its time.

Neuwirth also introduces the concept of Pre-Canonical Reading, which is the reading of the Qur'an as it circulated during the time of the Prophet Muhammad before it was compiled into the final mushaf. Through this approach, the Qur'an is seen as a dynamic text that directly responds to the social, political, and theological situations faced by the early Muslim community. This approach opens up new opportunities for more contextual studies and reveals the development of revelatory discourse over time.

One of Neuwirth's distinctive contributions is the integration of feminist hermeneutics in the reading of certain verses, such as Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7. She interprets the term *umm al-kitāb* with an analogy of the role of women as the "womb" of the sacred text, which connects the discourse of revelation and procreation. With this perspective, Neuwirth enriches feminist exegesis by showing how gender constructions are implied in the metaphors and structures of the Qur'anic text, while challenging normative interpretations that ignore this dimension.

Methodologically, Neuwirth combines internal data from the Qur'an with external data from Jewish, Christian, and pre-Islamic Arab sources, enabling a broader intertextual reading. This approach transcends the traditional framework of 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān and invites academic dialogue between Western Qur'anic studies and the Islamic exegetical tradition. Through his works, Neuwirth demonstrates that Orientalist studies of the Qur'an are not always polemical but can provide methodologies that enrich the scholarly heritage of Muslims. Thus, his contribution lies not only in conceptual findings but also in opening up productive critical discourse between two distinct scholarly traditions.

### Conclusion

Using a literary and historical approach, and giving a place (role) to Feminist Hermeneutics in reading Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7, Neuwirth provides a new and unique concept of *mutasyābihāt* verses and *muḥkamāt* verses. The inclusion of gender analysis in interpreting the Qur'an in Neuwirth's reading of Q.S. Āli 'Imrān (3): 7 yields several important points, including: 1) that the interpretation

process depends on one's response to women, in this case Maryam, as an analogy for the dependence of interpretation on muḥkamāt verses (umm al-kitāb) 2) Believers will believe that Maryam conceived Isa without the role of a husband was by the will and omnipotence of Allah, an analogy for valid interpretation: interpretation that relies on or refers to the Mother of the Holy Book, which is in the holy book itself, and 3) Believers accept that Maryam was not an adulteress, as an antithesis to the Jews who exploited the mutasyābihāt verses to slander and misinterpret (accusing Maryam of adultery).

Neuwirth's reading can be utilized to expand the scope of feminist verses advocating gender equality in the Qur'an. Neuwirth's pre-canonical reading model of the Qur'an can be used as an example for contextual interpretation of the Qur'an. Similarly, Neuwirth's idea of the concept of "Late Antiquity" as an "Epistemic Space" provides external data for reading the Qur'an. Neuwirth's contributions to the development of Qur'anic studies and exegesis cannot be fully presented in this paper. This is one of the limitations of this paper, alongside the possibility of misinterpreting Angelika Neuwirth's thoughts. The author hopes that corrections, critiques, or improvements to this paper will be made.

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