

BETWEEN FAITH AND FREEDOM: The Qur'an and the Childfree Lifestyle

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Abstract

This article deals with the childfree lifestyle through the lens of the Qur'an, a topic that has recently become controversial in Indonesia. Public opinion is divided: supporters argue that choosing not to have children is a matter of personal freedom, while opponents claim it contradicts social and religious expectations that married couples should try to have offspring. Using Gadamer's hermeneutical perspective alongside Qur'anic interpretation, the article highlights several verses that encourage procreation—such as calls to increase descendants, praise for having noble offspring, and descriptions of children as a source of reward in the afterlife. These verses suggest that Islam generally discourages couples from intentionally avoiding children. However, the study also emphasizes that Qur'anic meaning is dynamic and must continually engage with contemporary realities, including the childfree trend. In this light, the childfree choice is explicitly forbidden but may be considered acceptable when supported by reasonable motives and when it contributes to personal or social benefit. This approach allows Islamic teachings on family and lineage to be understood in dialogue with contemporary realities.



[Artikel ini mengkaji gaya hidup tanpa anak melalui kacamata al-Qur'an, suatu isu yang belakangan menjadi kontroversi di Indonesia. Opini publik terbagi menjadi dua: pendukung berpendapat bahwa memilih untuk tidak memiliki anak adalah kebebasan pribadi, sementara mereka yang kontra berpendapat bahwa hal itu bertentangan dengan harapan sosial dan agama Islam bahwa pasangan suami istri harus berusaha untuk memiliki keturunan. Dengan menggunakan perspektif hermeneutika Gadamer dan interpretasi al-Qur'an, artikel ini menyoroti beberapa ayat yang mendorong prokreasi—seperti seruan untuk memperbanyak keturunan, pujian karena memiliki keturunan yang mulia, dan gambaran anak sebagai sumber pahala di akhirat. Ayat-ayat ini menunjukkan bahwa Islam secara umum melarang pasangan yang sengaja memilih untuk tidak mempunyai anak. Namun, artikel ini juga menekankan bahwa makna ayat al-Qur'an itu bersifat dinamis dan harus terus-menerus berkaitan dengan realitas kontemporer, termasuk tren tanpa anak. Oleh karena itu, meskipun pilihan tanpa anak secara eksplisit dilarang, hal itu mungkin hanya dapat diterima jika didukung oleh motif yang masuk akal dan menawarkan manfaat yang jelas. Pendekatan ini memungkinkan ajaran Islam tentang keluarga dan silsilah dipahami secara dialogis dengan realitas kontemporer.]

Keywords: *Qur'anic Exegesis, Childfree, Hermeneutic*

Introduction

In Islam, marriage is regarded as a sacred and enduring bond between a man and a woman, representing a mutual commitment to live together in harmony and uphold moral integrity.¹ One of the primary objectives of marriage is to establish a happy and stable family, thereby uniting two families and contributing to social cohesion. Additionally, marriage serves as a means to ensure the continuation of human lineage through the upbringing of righteous offspring. The Qur'an emphasizes the value of family and material blessings in Surah al-Kahf (18:46), which states, “*Wealth and children are the adornment of worldly life.*” This verse highlights that wealth and children are among the sources of joy and

¹ Ahmad Atabik and Khoridatul Mudhiiah, “Pernikahan dan Hikmahnya Perspektif Hukum Islam” *YUDISLA: Jurnal Pemikiran Hukum dan Hukum Islam* 5, no. 2 (2014): 500.

fulfillment in life, while also reminding believers to use these blessings responsibly and in accordance with Islamic teachings.

Recently, a social phenomenon known as the childfree movement has gained attention, particularly among married couples. The term childfree refers to the conscious and deliberate decision by individuals or couples to live without having children. In Indonesia, public awareness of this issue emerged after a young influencer publicly announced that she and her husband had chosen to live a childfree life.² This disclosure drew significant public attention and sparked widespread debate across Indonesian society, generating both supportive and critical responses. In contrast, the childfree lifestyle has been present in Western societies since as early as the 16th century, although the term itself was first documented in a literary magazine in 1913.³

The childfree choice is often viewed unfavorably by segments of Indonesian society. Many people find it difficult to accept the decision not to have children, as cultural and religious norms in Indonesia strongly emphasize procreation within marriage. According to Hasto Wardoyo, Head of the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN), approximately 80 percent of married couples in Indonesia have children within the first year of marriage. Meanwhile, around 10 percent remain childless not because they choose to or intentionally delay pregnancy, but simply because they have not yet had the opportunity to conceive.⁴

Furthermore, Indonesia can be characterized as a pro-natalist society, reflected in its total fertility rate of 2.26 and the fact that approximately 93 percent of Indonesians believe that having children

² Puput Sapinatanajah, Tantan H Ermansyah, and Nasichah Nasichah, "Analisis Content Influencer Gitasav Pada Statement 'Childfree' dalam Prespektif Islam," *JKOMDIS : Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi dan Media Sosial* 2, no. 3 (2022): 181.

³ Zachary P Neal and Jennifer Watling Neal, "A Framework for Studying Adults Who Neither Have nor Want Children," *The Family Journal*, n.d., 4.

⁴ Ferdinan, 'Chidfree Bukan Efek Pandemi, BKKBN: 90 Persen Orang Indonesia Menikah Karena Ingin Punya Anak', <https://Voi.Id/Berita/81969/i-Childfree-Bukan-Efek-Pandemi-Bkkbn-90-Persen-Orang-Indonesia-Menikah-Karena-Ingin-Punya-Keturunan>, 2021.

is a fundamental component of marriage. This perspective underscores the deeply ingrained cultural expectation that procreation is not merely a personal choice but a social obligation for married couples. Consequently, it is unsurprising that considerable societal pressure is exerted on both newly married and long-established couples who remain childless, reinforcing the normative association between marriage and parenthood within Indonesian culture.⁵

As previously noted, there are also segments of society that accept the decision of married couples to remain childfree. They view parenthood as a matter of personal choice rather than a social or moral obligation. From a non-religious perspective, the decision to be childfree is not regarded as inherently wrong, provided that it is made through careful consideration and full awareness of its implications. Ultimately, the decision to have or not to have children is a matter of individual and marital autonomy.⁶

Individuals who choose to remain childfree often take various measures to prevent pregnancy, such as using contraceptive pills or other forms of contraception. From an Islamic perspective, efforts to limit pregnancy are permissible when supported by legitimate reasons. However, Islam distinguishes between limiting and preventing pregnancy. Limiting pregnancy refers to the temporary postponement or spacing of childbirth, whereas preventing pregnancy implies a permanent decision to avoid having children after reaching a certain number or by choice. The latter is generally not permitted within Islamic teachings.⁷

⁵ Miwa Patnani, Bagus Takwin, and Winarini Wilman Mansoer, "Bahagia Tanpa Anak? Arti Penting Anak Bagi Involuntary Childless," *Jurnal Ilmiah Psikologi Terapan* 9, no. 1 (2021): 118, doi:10.22219/jipt.v9i1.14260.

⁶ Jihan Salma Mubarak, Eva Meidi Kulsum, and Wahyudin Darmalaksana, "Syarah Hadis Seputar Fenomena Childfree di Indonesia dengan Pendekatan Ijmali," *Gunung Djati Conference Series* 8 (2022): 271.

⁷ Dasri, "Penundaan Kehamilan dengan Memakai Alat Kontrasepsi Bagi Pengantin Baru dalam Tinjauan Hukum Islam: Studi di Kecamatan Selebar Kota Bengkulu," *Qiyas* 1, no. 1 (2016): 107.

According to Abdullah bin Baaz, the use of contraceptives to permanently prevent pregnancy is generally considered *haram* (prohibited), as it contradicts the *maqāsid al-shari‘ah*—the higher objectives of Islamic law—which encourage the preservation and continuation of progeny. However, he acknowledges certain exceptions in cases of *darūrah* (necessity), wherein the prohibition may be lifted if there are legitimate and compelling reasons. In contrast, al-Ghazālī holds that family planning (*kafālat al-usrah*) is permissible. His view is based on the legal ruling regarding ‘*azl* (coitus interruptus), which is allowed in Islamic jurisprudence. According to al-Ghazālī, there is no explicit textual evidence prohibiting such practices. In the contemporary context, the practice of ‘*azl* can be analogized to the use of modern contraceptives, such as birth control pills or other similar methods.⁸

From a religious perspective, the choice to adopt a childfree lifestyle is generally regarded as incompatible with the normative expectations of Islamic teachings, which emphasize the preservation of lineage (*hifẓ al-nasl*) and the continuation of the Muslim community across generations. Within this framework, procreation is not merely a biological act but an integral component of fulfilling divine commands, sustaining social order, and contributing to the moral fabric of society.

This article seeks to discuss the childfree phenomenon from an Islamic perspective by grounding its analysis in the Qur’an and the prophetic traditions, which serve as the primary textual sources of religious authority within the Islamic tradition. Classical exegetical interpretations, legal opinions, and normative discourses provide the foundational framework through which the concepts of marriage, procreation, and family are traditionally understood. However, examining the childfree phenomenon solely through classical textual analysis risks overlooking the broader socio-cultural, psychological, and ethical

⁸ Rifdatus Sholihah, “Hukum Mencegah Kehamilan Perspektif Imam Ghazali Dan Syekh Abdullah Bin Baaz,” *The Indonesian Journal of Islamic Family Law* 09, no. 1 (2019): 99.

dimensions that shape contemporary Muslim choices.

Therefore, to produce a more comprehensive analytical perspective, this study also employs Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as a supplementary interpretive lens. Gadamer's emphasis on the historicity of understanding, the role of pre-understandings (*vorurteile*), and the dynamic "fusion of horizons" (*horizontverschmelzung*) offers valuable methodological tools for examining how religious texts engage with evolving social realities. Through this approach, the Qur'anic verses and prophetic teachings concerning lineage, family structure, and reproductive ethics are not treated as static pronouncements but as texts that continue to interact with the lived experiences and interpretive horizons of contemporary Muslim communities.

Childfree and the Purpose of Marriage in Islam

The term childfree generally refers to individuals or couples who consciously choose not to have children. *Merriam-Webster* defines childfree simply as "without children."⁹ whereas the *Macmillan Dictionary* emphasizes intentionality by defining it as a condition in which one "has decided not to have children." This conscious choice distinguishes childfree from childless, the latter referring to individuals who desire children but are unable to have them due to biological or medical conditions. Thus, while childlessness stems from circumstance, the childfree position is grounded in personal preference, psychological considerations, or lifestyle values.¹⁰

Historically, the practice of living without children predates the introduction of the term childfree. Rachel Chrastil notes that as early as the pre-French Revolution period, a significant proportion of adults in Europe voluntarily remained without children.¹¹ Similar patterns

⁹ 'Childfree', , <https://www.Merriam-Webster.Com/Dictionary/Child-Free>, n.d.

¹⁰ "Childfree," <https://www.Macmillandictionary.Com/Dictionary/British/Child-Free?Q=childfree>.; Victoria Tunggono, *Childfree & Happy Keputusan Sadar Untuk Hidup Bebas Anak* (Yogyakarta: EA: Books, 2021), 17.

¹¹ Amy Blackstone, *Childfree by Choice The Movement Redefining Family & Creating a New Age of Independence* (New York: Dutton, 2019), 7.

reappeared in the United States between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when approximately one in five women chose not to have children. The concept gained broader recognition in 1913 and became a subject of scholarly study in the West beginning in the 1970s, encompassing both those who currently have no children and those who do not intend to have children in the future.¹²

Although the childfree lifestyle is often associated with Western societies, it is also practiced in Asia and the Middle East. Japan, for instance, has exhibited childfree trends for the past two decades, reflected in declining fertility rates alongside increasing childcare enrollment demands. Scholars such as Maeda Masako predict that Japan may become an aging, low-birth society as more individuals choose to forego parenthood due to economic pressures and lifestyle preferences.¹³

Within religious contexts—including Islam—marriage is traditionally associated with procreation. In Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), marriage legally permits cohabitation and sexual relations between spouses.¹⁴ Classical scholars, including Muhammad Abu Zahrah, describe marriage as a contractual bond granting lawful conjugal rights. Indonesia's Marriage Law No. 1 of 1974 later unified diverse customary and religious understandings into a standardized legal framework.¹⁵

The Qur'an outlines several purposes of marriage. First, marriage functions as a means of safeguarding sexual morality by providing a lawful channel for desire, thereby preventing adultery as referenced in Surah An-Nur (24:30–31). Second, marriage serves to ensure the continuation

¹² Jennifer Watling Neal and Zachary P. Neal, "Prevalence and Characteristics of Childfree Adults in Michigan (USA)," *PLOS ONE* 16, no. 6 (2021): 2, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0252528.

¹³ Tunggono, *Childfree & Happy Keputusan Sadar Untuk Hidup Bebas Anak*.

¹⁴ Tihami Sahrani, *Fiqh Munakahat: Kajian Fiqh Nikah Lengkap* (Jakarta: PT. Raja Persada, 2014), 7.

¹⁵ Muhammad Abu Zahrah, *Al-Ahwal Asy-Syahsiyyah*, III. (Beirut: Dar Al-Fikr, 1957), 19; Muhammad Ashsubli, "Undang-Undang Perkawinan dalam Pluralitas Hukum Agama," *Cita Hukum* 3, no. 2 (2015): 290.

of human lineage. Verses in Surah An-Nahl (16:72) and Surah Al-A'raf, as well as prophetic traditions, encourage reproduction and emphasize the value of maintaining clear genealogical ties. Islamic teachings regard marriage as the legitimate institution through which lineage, inheritance rights, guardianship, and the child's right to care and protection are preserved. Consequently, procreation is embedded within the religious and ethical framework of marriage in Islam, even while marriage also fulfills broader social, emotional, and spiritual functions.¹⁶

The Position of Children in the Qur'an: A Hermeneutical Analysis

One of the most celebrated portrayals of children in the Qur'an is as sources of emotional comfort, spiritual solace, and familial joy. In Surah al-Furqān (25:74), God describes the prayer of the righteous:

*"Our Lord, grant us from among our spouses and offspring comfort to our eyes (qurrata a'yun), and make us leaders of the righteous."*¹⁷

Parents will feel happy if their child becomes a person who is obedient and obedient to Allah's commands, becomes a pious child, respects his parents, memorizes the Koran, becomes a person who is useful to others, becomes medicine when he is tired after work, and so on. This is where the role of children as a heartbreaker.

The expression *qurrata a'yun* conveys profound emotional satisfaction—children whose character, faith, and conduct soothe the hearts of their parents. Classical exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr interpret this comfort as arising from witnessing children who are obedient to God, morally upright, and socially beneficial.

¹⁶ Wahyu Wibisana, "Pernikahan dalam Islam," *Ta'lim* 14, no. 2 (2016): 191; Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar Jilid 7* (Pustaka Nasional, 2015), 4925; M. Khakim and Mukhlis Ardiyanto, "Menjaga Kehormatan Sebagai Perlindungan Nasab Perspektif," *Nizham* 8, no. 1 (2020): 38; Nurul Irfan, *Nasab & Status Anak dalam Hukum Islam*, 2nd ed. (Jakarta: Amzah, 2013), 19.

¹⁷ Agus Imam Kharomen, "Kedudukan Anak dan Relasinya dengan Orang Tua Perspektif Al-Qur'an," *Andragogi: Jurnal Diklat Teknis Pendidikan dan Keagamaan* 7, no. 2 (2019): 201.

Modern scholars, including Quraish Shihab, emphasize that this tranquility emerges not merely from biological parenthood but from witnessing children flourish in righteousness and dignity. For many parents, a child's piety, academic success, social contribution, or gentle character becomes a source of profound spiritual replenishment. Thus, the Qur'an frames children not only as emotional companions but as catalysts for spiritual growth.

Children are also described as among the chief adornments (*ẓīnah al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*) of worldly existence. Surah al-Kahf (18:46) states:

"Wealth and children are adornments of worldly life, but righteous deeds that endure are better with your Lord in reward and in hope."

Here, children are positioned alongside wealth as embodiments of worldly beauty, joy, and vitality. They enhance social happiness, family continuity, and communal life. The Qur'an acknowledges the natural human delight in children and assigns their presence a positive symbolic value.

Yet the verse immediately contextualizes this beauty. The Qur'an's rhetorical juxtaposition between transient adornments and enduring righteous deeds serves as a gentle reminder that while children are precious, they are not ultimate. This tension reflects the Qur'anic insistence on ethical stewardship: children must be nurtured, protected, and educated, yet parents must not lose sight of their ultimate spiritual responsibilities.¹⁸

Through a Gadamerian perspective, the term *ẓīnah* is not merely descriptive but evokes historical horizons shaped by Arab social norms, where lineage and offspring were crucial for tribal strength. The contemporary interpreter's horizon, shaped by modern values of education, psychological development, and individual autonomy, transforms the meaning of "adornment" into one that includes emotional

¹⁸ Sulaiman Saat et al., "Kedudukan Anak dalam Al-Qur'an: Suatu Pendekatan Pendidikan Islam," *Inspiratif Pendidikan* 7, no. 1 (2018): 52.

fulfillment, social identity, and even existential purpose.¹⁹

Gadamer's hermeneutics reveals that meaning is not fixed but unfolds dialogically between text and reader. The Qur'an's portrayal of children as adornments prompts ongoing reflection on how societies value children—whether as sources of joy, as extensions of self, or as individuals with intrinsic dignity.²⁰

The Qur'an introduces a provocative dimension by warning believers that spouses and children may become enemies:

“O you who believe, indeed among your spouses and your children are enemies to you, so beware of them.” (QS. At-Taghabun: 14).

This does not refer to hostility in the emotional or physical sense. Rather, classical exegetes explain it as relational tension arising when familial love distracts a believer from religious obligations. Quraish Shihab interprets this “enmity” as the subtle form of moral sabotage that occurs when children or spouses pressure a person into unethical actions or into abandoning acts of worship. This perspective recognizes the complex moral dynamics within family life. Love can cloud judgment, and the pursuit of family comfort or security can lead to compromising ethical principles. The Qur'anic text therefore warns believers to maintain moral vigilance even in their closest relationships.²¹

Gadamer's concept of application helps illuminate this verse. Every act of understanding involves applying the text to one's own situation. A modern reader may interpret “enmity” not in terms of tribal expectations but through the lens of contemporary social pressures—consumerism, academic competition, or social status, which can strain family ethics.²²

¹⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 2004).

²⁰ Richard Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*. (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1969).

²¹ Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar Jilid 6* (Pustaka Nasional, 2015), 4204. Muhammad Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an Jilid 14* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 278.

²² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

Through this application, the text's warning against moral distraction becomes newly relevant. Gadamer's view that understanding is always situated allows the verse to transcend its historical milieu and speak to ongoing tensions between familial affection and ethical integrity. In Surah al-Taghābun (64:15), the Qur'an further states: "*Indeed, your wealth and your children are but a trial (fitnah)...*"

The term *fitnah* refers to testing, purification, or moral challenge. Children test parental patience, discipline, generosity, and moral consistency. Classical exegetes such as al-Zamakhsharī and modern interpreters such as Quraish Shihab highlight that children can induce parents to either grow in gratitude or falter into miserliness, fear, or sin. The example of parents who feel pressured to compromise moral values for their children's desires illustrates how love can become a test of virtue. Historical reports, such as those cited by al-Bazzār, note that some parents become stingy or overly cautious because of excessive attachment to their children.²³

Meanwhile, in al-Azhar's interpretation, the meaning of this word is "trial." The meaning of "trial" here can mean the trials that God gives to humans, whether wealth and children can make them more grateful or vice versa. Al-Bazzaar's history from Abu Sa'id's *hadith* says that sometimes children can make someone become a curmudgeon and cowardly. Because of children, parents become unwilling to give alms, and find it difficult to give to others.²⁴ So if parents can maintain and always maintain the rights that they should protect towards their children, then Allah will give them a great reward, and if they fail, then they will fall into sin.²⁵

In this context, Gadamer argued that texts continually invite re-interpretation as new horizons emerge. Modern readers encounter new forms of *fitnah*: pressures of digital culture, consumer expectations for

²³ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an Jilid 14*.

²⁴ Mahmud Bin Umar Az-Zamakhshari, *Al-Kasyaf an Haqaiq Al-Tanzil Wa 'Uyun Al-Aqawil Fi Wujub Al- Ta'wil*, III (Bairut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 2009), 574.

²⁵ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an Jilid 14*.

children, competitive educational environments.²⁶ Thus, the verse speaks dynamically to shifting contexts. The interpreter's pre-understanding is not a barrier but a bridge, enabling the recognition of how children continue to serve as moral tests in evolving socio-cultural conditions.

Furthermore, Surah Āl 'Imrān (3:14) describes human attractions: *"Beautified for people is the love of desires—women, children, heaps of gold and silver, fine horses, livestock, and fertile land..."*

Children are listed among things humans naturally love. The Qur'an acknowledges that parental affection is part of human disposition (*fiṭrah*). Yet it simultaneously warns that the pursuit of worldly delights must be tempered by moral responsibility.

Here, children become symbols of emotional attachment, identity, and continuity. Their presence in this list highlights the depth of parental love while reminding believers that affection must be governed by ethical purpose, not unreflective desire.²⁷

Gadamer's hermeneutics emphasizes that the text speaks differently to each generation. While ancient communities valued children primarily for lineage and labor, modern readers interpret this affection through psychological and emotional frameworks. The fusion of horizons transforms the verse's meaning without severing it from its original context. In Gadamer's view, genuine understanding involves recognizing the legitimacy of both horizons. Thus, the verse remains a living discourse on human desire, emotional attachment, and ethical responsibility.²⁸

A Hermeneutical Reading of the Childfree Debate

The contemporary debate on the childfree lifestyle within Muslim societies can be examined more deeply through the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer's framework—

²⁶ Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*.

²⁷ Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar Jilid 2* (Pustaka Nasional, 2015), 720.

²⁸ Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1997).

centered on the concepts of prejudice (*vorurteil*), the fusion of horizons (*horizontverschmelzung*), and effective-historical consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches bewusstsein*)—provides a constructive lens through which Qur’anic perspectives on procreation may be dialogued with modern socio-cultural realities. Integrating Gadamer into this discussion reveals that understanding the Qur’an’s ethical position on procreation cannot be separated from the historical, linguistic, and experiential conditions of the interpreter.

Gadamer challenges the Enlightenment view of prejudice as inherently irrational, instead arguing that *prejudices* are necessary starting points for understanding.²⁹ Prejudices structure an interpreter’s horizon and shape the questions they bring to a text.

Historically, childfree is not an idea or thought that suddenly appeared. In this context, contemporary Muslim readers approach the Qur’an with modern prejudices shaped by liberalism, feminist critiques of domestic labor, environmental anxiety, and psychological discourses concerning trauma. These prejudices influence how they perceive verses about marriage, sustenance, and the blessing of children.³⁰

On the other hand, classical Islamic exegetical traditions also embody their own inherited prejudices: a worldview in which lineage preservation (*hifẓ al-nasl*), communal solidarity, and the social value of children were taken as normative. These traditions inform how scholars historically interpreted verses such as QS. An-Nahl:72 and QS. Al-Isra’:31.

A Gadamerian analysis does not seek to eliminate prejudices but to recognize them as historically conditioned lenses. Awareness of prejudices is what opens the space for a more truthful understanding.

²⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 273–74.

³⁰ Norsaleha Mohd Salleh et al., ‘Pemikiran Liberal dalam Peradaban Barat dan Islam’, 2021, 5; Moch Tolchah, ‘Pendidikan dan Faham Liberalisme’, *At- Ta’dib* 3, no. 2 (n.d.): 165..

Fusion of Horizons: Dialoguing Past and Present

For Gadamer, the act of interpretation is a fusion of horizons between the world of the text and the world of the interpreter.³¹ In this study, the Qur'anic horizon includes the socio-cultural conditions of 7th-century Arabia, where procreation ensured tribal continuity, economic resilience, and demographic survival. The modern horizon includes contemporary realities such as financial precarity, reproductive autonomy, ecological concerns, and the availability of medical diagnoses that shape reproductive decisions.

A fusion of horizons does not mean subordinating one perspective to the other; rather, it creates a new shared horizon wherein the timeless Qur'anic message encounters contemporary lived realities. Through this process, verses on procreation, divine sustenance, and lineage can be understood both as normative guidance and as responses to specific historical concerns.

The hermeneutical process therefore opens the possibility that while procreation is normatively encouraged, Islam also accommodates exceptions where harm (*darar*) is anticipated, aligning with the principle that religious commands are tied to benefit (*maslahah*) and the avoidance of harm.³²

Tradition and Effective-Historical Consciousness

Gadamer's concept of effective-historical consciousness asserts that understanding is shaped by the interpreter's place within a living tradition.³³ Texts like the Qur'an are not understood solely through their original historical context, but also through centuries of interpretive history—from early *tafsir* to modern scholarship.

Thus, contemporary Muslims interpreting verses on procreation do so within a tradition that has consistently affirmed the value of children.

³¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 305.

³² Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Shari'ah Law: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2008), 115–118.

³³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 276.

However, tradition is not static. As Fazlur Rahman has emphasized, Islamic interpretation evolves through the interplay of revelation and changing socio-historical conditions.³⁴ A Gadamerian approach highlights that tradition should not be viewed as a mere inheritance, but as an active, dialogical process.

This concept supports interpretations that the Qur'anic encouragement to have children does not constitute an absolute obligation in all circumstances. Instead, the interpreter must assess contemporary realities within an ongoing hermeneutical dialogue.

Gadamer argues that understanding occurs through the art of questioning.³⁵ Texts provide answers to implicit questions within their original context; the interpreter must therefore ask what existential or social concerns a verse originally addressed.

When the Qur'an prohibits killing children due to fear of poverty (QS. Al-Isra':31), the original question concerned infanticide rooted in tribal honor and economic scarcity. This is distinct from modern voluntary childfree decisions rooted in psychological trauma, ecological ethics, or structural economic pressures.

By asking new questions, contemporary readers allow the Qur'an to speak meaningfully into their context, without collapsing the text's historical meaning into modern assumptions. This aligns with Gadamer's claim that every genuine dialogue with a text opens new possibilities of meaning.³⁶

Toward a Hermeneutical Ethic of Responsibility

Rather than beginning from categorical moral claims or assumed religious obligations, a hermeneutical ethic of responsibility calls religious discourse to approach childfree individuals as moral agents with

³⁴ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

³⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 356.

³⁶ Nicholas Davey, *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 45–48.

legitimate experiences and concerns. Many Muslims who consider or adopt a childfree lifestyle do so because of concrete realities—economic pressures, health considerations, environmental anxieties, or personal life projects—and these lived contexts carry moral weight.³⁷ A Gadamerian model therefore discourages reductionist interpretations of Islamic teachings and instead supports dialogical exploration of how Qur’anic values can continue to speak meaningfully in the present.

Interpreting Qur’anic verses on procreation through this lens requires historical consciousness. Classical discussions of fertility, lineage, and communal continuity emerged from pre-modern socio-economic conditions very different from today’s globalized, technologically advanced world. Recognizing this context does not diminish the authority of the Qur’an; rather, it affirms that religious meaning develops dynamically as communities confront new challenges.³⁸ Such an approach aligns with broader Islamic ethical frameworks, including *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*, which emphasize human flourishing, justice, and welfare.³⁹

Ultimately, evaluating reproductive decisions through a fusion of horizons—bringing together the Qur’an’s moral vision with contemporary lived realities—allows Muslims to uphold fidelity to Islamic principles while acknowledging the complexity of modern life.⁴⁰ This hermeneutical ethic neither romanticizes parenthood nor stigmatizes voluntary childlessness. Instead, it seeks a compassionate and dialogical engagement grounded in mutual respect, shared moral striving, and an openness to understanding the diverse experiences that shape reproductive choices today.

³⁷ Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*.

³⁸ Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Qur’an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach* (London and New York: Routledge, n.d.).

³⁹ Jasser Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law* (London: IIIT, 2008).

⁴⁰ R. J. Ramsey, “The Fusion of Horizons: Gadamer and the Philosophy of Dialogue”, *Philosophy Today* 37, no. 01 (1993): 9–17.

Conclusion

A Gadamerian hermeneutical framework offers a powerful lens through which Muslims can approach the contemporary childfree phenomenon without compromising the integrity of the Islamic tradition. By foregrounding the dialogical understanding, Gadamer demonstrates that interpretation is never a unilateral act imposed by either the past or the present. Instead, meaning emerges through a dynamic interplay—a fusion of horizons—where inherited textual teachings meet the lived realities and ethical challenges of each generation.

In Islamic contexts, this resonates with the long-standing roles of *tafsir*, *hadith* transmission, and scholarly reasoning, which collectively shape the community's interpretive horizon. These intellectual and spiritual inheritances cannot simply be set aside when new social phenomena arise. Rather, they function as the ground from which new understandings must grow. The emergence of voluntary childlessness introduces a new experiential horizon, but this horizon must enter into negotiation—not conflict—with the established textual and interpretive tradition.

A genuinely hermeneutical reading of the Qur'an therefore does not deny its normative encouragement of procreation. Parenthood is honored as a blessing, a means of spiritual growth, and a contribution to community continuity. Yet Gadamer helps clarify that blessings are not commands, and textual values must be enacted through *phronesis*—practical wisdom. Ethical decisions, including the choice to have or not have children, must take into account concrete circumstances, potential harms, emotional well-being, and the overarching Qur'anic principles of justice, compassion, and human flourishing.

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