

Reinterpretation of the Ḥadīth of *Tashabbuh*: Application of the Double Movement Fazlur Rahman's Theory in Understanding the Ḥadīth

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Abstract:

The Double Movement theory, introduced by Fazlur Rahman, is primarily used for interpreting the Qur'an. Rahman encourages interpreters to understand the Qur'an by considering the historical context in which it was revealed, extracting its universal principles, and then applying them to contemporary circumstances. This paper applies Rahman's theory to analyze the hadith on *tashabbuh* (emulation of non-Muslims). The application of this theory leads to the conclusion that the hadith about *tashabbuh* emerged in a time when the Muslim community was small, and identity politics were necessary for its survival. However, in the present day, with Muslims widespread around the globe, this hadith is no longer relevant when applied literally.

Keywords: Double Movement, Hadith, *Tashabbuh*, Political Identity.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, many non-Muslim traditions have been unconsciously adopted by Muslims in Indonesia. One of these traditions is the practice of wishing non-Muslims a Merry Christmas. Some argue that wishing Merry Christmas constitutes imitation of non-Muslims, citing a hadith narrated by Abu Dawood (No. 3512), which states, "Whoever imitates a people is one of them." Consequently, some believe that when a Muslim wishes Merry Christmas, they are assimilating with non-Muslims.

In the author's view, the concept of *tashabbuh* in this hadith carries a broad meaning. It implies that some aspects of non-Muslim culture are prohibited to imitate, while others may be permissible. Furthermore, the hadith on *tashabbuh* should not be understood literally or in isolation; a deeper contextual analysis is necessary to avoid confusion in its interpretation.

Hermeneutics, as defined by Friedrich Schleiermacher, is the art of understanding the language of others, particularly written language. Hans Georg Gadamer expands on this by describing hermeneutics as not just an art of understanding but as a discipline that methodologically justifies interpretive activity. It involves transforming ignorance into understanding, as well as explaining and uncovering the deeper meaning of ambiguous, contradictory, or unclear statements, as noted by Zygmunt Bauman.

Fazlur Rahman, a Muslim scholar, pioneered the hermeneutical approach to reading the Qur'an contextually. His Double Movement theory encourages understanding the Qur'an by considering both the historical context in which it was revealed and its broader, universal principles, which can then be applied to contemporary issues. While

Rahman's theory was primarily developed for interpreting the Qur'an, the author adapts this framework to understand the hadith on *tashabbuh*. The first step involves exploring the historical context of the hadith (*asbab al-wurud*), both from a micro and macro perspective. The second step is analyzing how the hadith can be understood in the present day.

This paper will explore the hadith on *tashabbuh* using Rahman's Double Movement theory. It will begin with a brief biography of Fazlur Rahman and an explanation of his Double Movement theory, followed by an overview of the hadith on *tashabbuh*. The application of the Double Movement theory to interpret this hadith will be discussed next. Finally, the paper will conclude by addressing the issue of understanding the hadith of *tashabbuh*, particularly in relation to wishing Merry Christmas to non-Muslims, using Rahman's hermeneutical framework, and will offer a critical reflection on this interpretation.

METHOD

In this study, the method used to reinterpret the ḥadīth of *tashabbuh* (emulating non-Muslims) is based on the application of Fazlur Rahman's Double Movement theory. The approach follows two key movements that aim to understand the ḥadīth in both its historical context and its relevance to contemporary circumstances. The methodology can be outlined as follows:

1. **Historical Context (First Movement)**

The first movement focuses on the historical understanding of the ḥadīth in its original context. This involves a deep exploration of the *asbāb al-wurūd* (the circumstances or reasons behind the revelation or narration of the ḥadīth). This step requires investigating the socio-political and religious environment at the time the ḥadīth was narrated, particularly during the early Islamic period when the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his companions were actively interacting with various non-Muslim communities. Understanding the specific situations that the ḥadīth addresses helps to clarify the intended message and the practical implications of *tashabbuh*. This step also involves identifying any specific practices or behaviors related to non-Muslims that the Prophet was warning against, which may be crucial in defining the boundaries of permissible imitation.

2. **Generalization of Moral Principles (First Movement Conclusion)**

After understanding the specific context of the ḥadīth, the next step is to generalize the moral and social principles it conveys. In this stage, we extract universal lessons from the ḥadīth that are not confined to its immediate historical context but can be applied across different eras. This process is about identifying the core ethical values that the Prophet's teachings sought to promote, such as the preservation of Islamic identity and the avoidance of actions that may compromise this identity, while also taking into consideration the broader moral teachings of Islam.

3. **Contemporary Relevance (Second Movement)**

The second movement brings the findings from the first movement into the contemporary context. This step involves a thorough analysis of the modern

social, cultural, and religious landscape, where Muslims interact with non-Muslim communities, particularly in multicultural societies like Indonesia. Here, we examine how the principles derived from the ḥadīth can be applied today without compromising the Islamic worldview. We take into account the evolving nature of interfaith relationships and societal norms, asking questions about what constitutes *tashabbuh* in today's context. For instance, we explore whether actions such as greeting non-Muslims on their religious holidays (e.g., saying "Merry Christmas") are inherently problematic, or if there are acceptable ways to engage with non-Muslims that do not result in adopting practices that contradict Islamic beliefs.

4. **Practical Application and Conclusion**

In the final phase, the study assesses how the reinterpretation of the ḥadīth can influence practical behavior in contemporary Muslim communities. By considering the general ethical principles from the ḥadīth and applying them within modern-day realities, the study aims to provide guidance on how Muslims can navigate interfaith interactions in a manner that is respectful, socially responsible, and true to Islamic values. The analysis also critiques the limitations of traditional interpretations of *tashabbuh* and calls for a balanced approach that respects both Islamic teachings and the practicalities of contemporary society.

Through this method, this study aims to provide a nuanced, contextually relevant understanding of the ḥadīth of *tashabbuh*, guided by Fazlur Rahman's Double Movement theory. This approach ensures that the interpretation of Islamic teachings remains dynamic, responsive to the changing circumstances of the modern world, while firmly rooted in the foundational principles of the religion.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Biography of Fazlur Rahman

Fazlur Rahman (hereafter referred to as Rahman) is recognized as a prominent Islamic thinker who engaged deeply with the challenges of modernism while formulating the concept of Islamic identity. Born on September 21, 1919, in the Hazara region, located to the west of the Sea of Pakistan, Rahman grew up in a devout Muslim family adhering to Hanafi traditions—a Sunni sect known for its rationalist approach compared to other Sunni schools like the Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali sects. Despite being raised in the Hanafi school, Rahman distanced himself from the narrow perspectives within Sunni orthodoxy from a young age. His intellectual development was influenced by a range of free thinkers from his region, such as Syah Waliyullah al-Dahlawi, Amir Ali, M. Iqbal, and Sayyid Ahmad Khan, allowing his ideas to flourish freely.

Rahman's father, Maulana Sahab ad-Din, was a scholar from Doeband, educated in traditional Islamic thought. However, unlike many of his contemporaries, who viewed modern education as detrimental to faith and morality, his father believed that Islam should confront modernity as both a challenge and an opportunity. This progressive attitude toward education was evident in Rahman's upbringing, as by the age of 10, he had already memorized the entire Qur'an. His mother played a pivotal role in instilling

in him the values of truth, love, and honesty, especially the importance of love, which Rahman embraced deeply throughout his life.

Rahman's educational journey began at a traditional madrasa in Deoband, after which he attended a modern school in Lahore in 1933. He then pursued higher education in Eastern Studies, majoring in Arabic, at Punjab University, where he completed his B.A. in 1940. Two years later, in 1942, he earned his Master's degree from the same department. Rahman's dedication to learning Western languages further broadened his academic scope.

In 1946, Rahman moved to England to continue his studies at the University of Oxford under the guidance of professors S. Van Bergh and H.A.R. Gibb. He completed his Ph.D. in 1949, with a dissertation on the philosopher Ibn Sina, which was later published by Oxford University Press in 1951 under the title *Avicenna's Psychology*. In 1959, he also published an edited version of Ibn Sina's *Kitab An-Nafs* as *Avicenna's De Anima*.

Rahman's academic career began in 1950, when he became a lecturer in Persian studies and Islamic philosophy at Durham University, England. By 1958, he had been appointed an associate professor at the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University in Montreal. Three years later, in 1961, Rahman was invited to Pakistan by President Ayub Khan to become a visiting professor at the Central Institute of Islamic Research. In 1962, he was appointed the director of the research center and also served as a member of the Islamic Ideology Advisory Council.

Rahman is known for being a highly productive intellectual. His published works include: (1) *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (1975), (2) *Major Themes of the Quran* (1980), (3) *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (1982), (4) *Health and Medicine in the Islamic Tradition: Change and Identity* (1987), along with his edited works on Avicenna, such as *Psikologi Avicenna* and *De Anima Avicenna*. He also authored other significant works on Islamic philosophy, including *Philosophy of Mulla Sadra Shirazi*, and numerous articles, some of which were included in encyclopedias.

Rahman spent the final years of his life in Chicago, where he resided for about 18 years. In the mid-1980s, his health began to deteriorate due to diabetes and heart disease, but he remained active in his academic pursuits, continuing to deliver lectures and discussions to both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences. Rahman passed away on July 26, 1988, at the age of 69 in Chicago, after a period of hospitalization.

Theory of Double Movement

According to Rahman, understanding the Qur'an as a unified message involves studying it within its historical and social context. The immediate backdrop to this understanding is the activities and struggles of the Prophet over the twenty-three years during which the Qur'an was revealed. Rahman proposes a method of interpretation that he believes is best suited to understanding the Qur'an. In his article "*Toward Reformulating the Methodology of Islamic Law: Shaikh Yamani on Public Interest in Islamic Law*," Rahman refers to this approach as the systematic interpretation method, which he later refines in his work *"Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition"*

through the theory of the "double movement." This interpretive process, according to Rahman, consists of a dual approach: first, moving from the present situation to the time when the Qur'an was revealed, and then returning to the present to apply the lessons learned.

Rahman's proposed method of interpretation involves this two-step process: moving from the present to the past and then back to the present. The Qur'an, as Rahman explains, is a divine response to the moral and social challenges faced by the Arabs during the Prophet's time, particularly issues relevant to the trading society of Mecca. To contextualize the Qur'an in the present, it is essential to understand the historical background of the revelations, including the socio-political and economic conditions of pre-Islamic Mecca, the role of the Quraysh tribe, and the power dynamics among the Arabs.

The first movement in Rahman's theory consists of two distinct steps:

1. **Understanding the Historical Context:** The first step involves understanding the significance of a Qur'anic statement by examining the historical problem it addresses. This step allows for a broader comprehension of the Qur'an's teachings, both as responses to specific situations and as general moral-social principles.
2. **Generalizing Specific Responses:** Once the context and meaning of the specific teachings are understood, the next step is to generalize these responses into broader moral and social objectives. These general principles, derived from the verses, should be coherent with one another, reflecting the Qur'an's claim of internal consistency. Rahman emphasizes that this step can benefit from examining the views of early Muslim scholars, as little effort has been made thus far to understand the Qur'an as a whole.

The first movement involves interpreting the Qur'an in light of the context of its revelation (*asbab al-nuzul*), resulting in an objective understanding. This interpretation is then generalized to reveal the moral ideals embedded in the verses. When applying this method to hadith, the first step is to consider the context of the hadith's emergence (*asbab al-wurud*), both on a micro and macro level. The moral ideals found in the hadith are then generalized to uncover their broader lessons.

The second movement in Rahman's theory is as follows:

While the first movement moves from specific situations to general moral principles, the second movement takes these general principles and applies them to the present context. This means that the general teachings of the Qur'an must be realized within the contemporary socio-historical context. To do this effectively, one must carefully study the current situation and align it with the moral priorities established in the first movement. If both movements are carried out correctly, the Qur'an's commands will regain their relevance and become effective in the present. The second movement also acts as a corrective to the first, ensuring that the interpretation aligns with the current reality. If the results of the interpretation fail to be applicable today, it indicates a failure to understand both the Qur'an and the present situation. Rahman asserts that what was once possible and practically realized in the past should also be achievable in the current context.

In applying this to understanding hadith, the second step is to examine the contemporary context and apply the moral ideals derived from the first step. This ensures that the interpretation remains relevant and aligned with the current circumstances, while still considering the context in which the hadith was originally revealed.

The Hadith on *Tashabbuh*

Linguistically, the word *tashabbuh* comes from the Arabic root word *sha-ba-ha*, which means to imitate or resemble something, including similarities in color and characteristics. It is also referred to as *syibh*, *syabah*, and *syabih*. According to Ibn Manzur, *tashabbuh* refers to something that resembles or imitates something else. In terms of terminology, according to Imam Muhammad al-Ghazi al-Shafi'i, *tashabbuh* is defined as the effort of an individual to imitate the figure they admire, whether in terms of behavior, appearance, or even attributes. This effort is a deliberate practice intended to be applied in daily life.

A general hadith on *tashabbuh* can be found in the narration of Abu Dawud (No. 3512) and Ahmad (No. 4868) as follows:

“Uthman bin Abi Shaybah narrated to us, Abu An-Nadhr narrated to us, Abdurrahman bin Tsabit narrated to us, Hassan bin Athiyah narrated from Abu Munib Al Jurashi from Ibn Umar, who said: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: 'Whoever imitates a people, then he is one of them.'” (HR. Abu Dawud)

This hadith was declared authentic by Al-Albani in *Ash-Shahihah*.

“Muhammad bin Yazid, meaning Al-Wasithi, narrated to us, Ibn Tsawban narrated to us from Hassan bin 'Athiyah from Abu Munib Al Jurashi from Ibn Umar, who said: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: 'I have been sent with the sword until Allah is worshiped with no partners, my sustenance is under the shadow of my spear, and humiliation and disgrace have been placed upon those who oppose my command. Whoever imitates a people, then he is one of them.'” (HR. Ahmad)

According to al-Qari, the phrase “*man tashabbaha bi qawmin*” refers to someone who imitates non-Muslims, either in terms of clothing or other aspects, or imitates immoral individuals, sinners, Sufis, or righteous people. Meanwhile, the phrase “*fahuwa minhum*” means to be part of them in both bad and good aspects.

Al-Ilqami argued that if someone imitates the righteous, they will be honored like the righteous. However, if someone imitates the immoral, they will not be honored.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah contended that this hadith covers only a small part of the prohibition of *tashabbuh*, as mentioned in the Quran:

“O you who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are [in fact] allies of one another. And whoever is an ally to them among you – then indeed, he is one of them. Indeed, Allah guides not the wrongdoing people.” (Q.S. al-Maidah [5]:51)

Abdullah bin Amr held the view that anyone who imitates polytheists and dies in that state will be gathered with them on the Day of Judgment. If someone is disbelieving and rebellious against Allah, they will follow the example of what they have imitated. Ibn Umar narrated from the Prophet (peace be upon him) that he forbade imitating non-Arab people.

As-Sahawi stated that this hadith is weak, but it has supporting evidence, while Ibn Taymiyyah said that its chain of narration is good, and Ibn Hajar stated that it is hasan.

From the explanation found in the *Sharh Abu Dawud* (Commentary on Abu Dawud), it can be concluded that the hadith *"Whoever imitates a people, then he is one of them"* refers to all forms of imitation of both Muslims and non-Muslims. The imitation referred to here is in both good and bad aspects. Therefore, when someone imitates the righteous, they are honored just as the righteous are. Conversely, when someone imitates the immoral, they do not receive honor.

Furthermore, it is important to note that before the advent of Islam, Mecca was inhabited by various tribes and religions. Mecca held a special place in the eyes of the Arabs because of the Ka'bah, which was a sacred place. They placed their idols there, hoping that their requests made to the idols in the Ka'bah would be granted.

In line with this, the Prophet (peace be upon him) once said, *"Whoever imitates a people, then he is one of them."* This hadith was revealed during the Battle of Uhud. At that time, there was a discussion regarding the strategy to be used to confront the enemy at Mount Uhud. One of the Prophet's companions asked, *"How can I distinguish between the Muslims and the polytheists, when they all look the same?"* In response to this question, one of the companions suggested that the Muslims mark their clothing, so that the sign would differentiate them from the enemy's clothing. Finally, the Prophet (peace be upon him) approved this suggestion and said, *"Whoever imitates a people, then he is one of them."*

Additionally, there are specific hadiths that discuss *tashabbuh* in greater detail, as follows:

1. **The prohibition of making graves into mosques because it resembles the practices of the People of the Book.** The Prophet said five days before his death in a hadith narrated by Jundab bin Abdullah Al-Bajali: **Hadith:**

Abu Bakr bin Abi Shaybah and Ishaq bin Ibrahim narrated to us, and the wording is from Abu Bakr. Ishaq said that he was informed, and Abu Bakr said that Zakariya' bin 'Adi narrated to us from Ubaidullah bin Amru from Zaid bin Abi Unaisah from Amru bin Murrah from Abdullah bin al-Harith al-Najran, who said: "Jundab narrated to me that he heard the Prophet (peace be upon him) say five days before his death: 'I declare myself free to Allah from taking any of you as a close friend, because Allah the Almighty has made me His close friend as He made Ibrahim His close friend. And if I were to take any of my followers as a close friend, I would have taken Abu Bakr as a close friend. Know that those who came before you used to make the graves of their prophets and righteous people into mosques, so do not make the graves as mosques, for I forbid you from doing that.'" (HR. Muslim)

2. **The obligation to shave the mustache and grow the beard to distinguish from polytheists.** The Prophet instructed in a hadith narrated by Ibn Umar: **Hadith:**
Sahl bin Uthman narrated to us, who narrated from Yazid bin Zurai' from Umar bin Muhammad who narrated from Nafi' from Ibn Umar, who said: "The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: 'Oppose the polytheists, shave the mustache and grow the beard.'" (HR. Muslim)
3. **The law of eating suhoor to distinguish from the People of the Book.** As the Prophet said: **Hadith:**
Qutaibah bin Sa'id narrated to us, who narrated from Laits from Musa bin Ulayy from his father from Abu Qais, the freedman of Amru bin Ash, from Amru bin Ash, who said: "The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: 'The difference between our fasting and the fasting of the People of the Book is eating suhoor.'" And Yahya bin Yahya and Abu Bakr bin Abu Shaybah both narrated from Waki' in another chain, and Abu Tahir narrated to us that Ibn Wahb informed them both from Musa bin Ulayy with this chain of narration. (HR. Muslim)

From the above hadiths, both in general and specifically, such as the prohibition of making graves into mosques, the law of shaving the mustache and growing the beard, and the law of eating suhoor, it can be concluded that all of these rulings have one common goal, which is to distinguish between Muslims and non-Muslims. Although scholars have agreed on the prohibition of resembling non-Muslims, the author believes that these hadiths should not be understood literally. The historical context in which these hadiths were understood is very different from the context of today. Therefore, a theory is needed to understand these hadiths in the contemporary context.

Application of the Double Movement Theory to the Hadith of *Tashabbuh*

The hadith about *tashabbuh* (emulating non-Muslims) carries a very universal meaning, which is that any form of resemblance to non-Muslims is prohibited. However, there are some aspects that can be adopted by Muslims. In this discussion, the author attempts to apply the Double Movement theory introduced by Rahman, as explained in the previous section. In general, the application is focused on the hadith about *tashabbuh*, which will then be concluded on whether wishing a Merry Christmas falls under the *tashabbuh* described in the hadith or not. Here is the application:

First, examining the context in which the hadith was revealed (asbab al-wurud), both from a micro and macro perspective. The micro context of this hadith refers to the time when the Prophet (peace be upon him) became a military commander, and the companions who participated in the war were confused about distinguishing between Muslims and non-Muslims. The intended audience of the hadith was the companions who participated in the Battle of Uhud at that time. The purpose of the hadith was to provide a means of distinguishing Muslims from non-Muslims, specifically focusing on the Muslim archers to ensure they did not target the wrong people during battle.

The macro context of the hadith emerges from the Prophet's (peace be upon him) desire to distinguish his followers from non-Muslims. At that time, Islam was a new religion, and before its arrival, there were many other faiths, most of which involved idol

worship. The Prophet (peace be upon him) then established an identity politics to affirm Islam's existence as a new religion that corrected the erroneous beliefs of the majority of Arab society. Thus, the ideal moral objective of the hadith was to distinguish between Muslims and non-Muslims, who at that time were difficult to differentiate.

Second, considering the contemporary context of how this hadith is understood. In today's reality, many people claim to be Muslims and may exhibit a Muslim identity but fail to perform actions in line with Islamic teachings. The Arab world in the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) is very different from the Arab world today, let alone places outside of the Arab region, such as Indonesia, where geographic and sociological conditions are not the same.

At that time, *tashabbuh* was used as a form of identity politics to distinguish between Muslims and non-Muslims. However, in the current context, the author believes that this cannot be applied literally. Similarly, regarding the issue of wishing non-Muslims a Merry Christmas, it can be said that it is permissible to wish them Merry Christmas, but it should be done differently than how non-Muslims do it, in accordance with the context in which the Prophet (peace be upon him) distinguished between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Specifically, there is no hadith prohibiting wishing non-Muslims a Merry Christmas. This issue is more related to mu'amalah (social interactions) rather than aqidah (belief). There is no information found suggesting that the Prophet (peace be upon him) ever wished non-Muslims a Merry Christmas, but there is also no evidence that he forbade it. Scholars such as Prof. Dr. Yusuf al-Qardawi, Prof. Dr. Abdul Sattar, and Prof. Dr. Musthafa Zarqa have allowed wishing non-Muslims a Merry Christmas. According to them, this is considered good character, as it reflects mutual respect and recognition of each other's beliefs. Additionally, according to Dr. Abdul Mustaqim, the Prophet (peace be upon him) did more than just wish safety; he ensured protection for Christians during their celebrations.

CONCLUSION

The hadith about *tashabbuh*, when approached using the hermeneutic approach and the Double Movement theory introduced by Rahman, can be concluded as follows: In the first movement, Rahman examined the context in which the hadith emerged. It was found that the hadith was revealed when the Prophet (peace be upon him) became the commander in the Battle of Uhud, where the Muslim community was still very small, and the companions, especially the archers, were confused about distinguishing Muslims from non-Muslims. At that time, it was difficult to differentiate between Muslims and non-Muslims, so to maintain existence and identity, identity politics were needed.

In the second movement, Rahman observed how this hadith is understood in the contemporary context. In today's context, where the Muslim community is widespread across the world, it can be said that this hadith is no longer relevant for literal application. This means that Muslims can wish non-Muslims a Merry Christmas, as long as it is done in a way that differs from how non-Muslims do it. For example,

Muslims may wish a Merry Christmas, but they do not believe what non-Muslims believe. The issue of wishing Merry Christmas, according to the author, does not fall under the category of *tashabbuh* mentioned in the hadith. This is because the hadith does not specifically mention prohibiting wishing non-Muslims a Merry Christmas. Furthermore, wishing Merry Christmas is more related to social interaction, aimed at respecting and honoring the beliefs of others, and has no connection to aqidah.

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