

## KARL POPPER'S FALSIFICATIONISM AND ITS RELEVANCE TO ISLAMIC SCHOLARLY DISCOURSE (A Study on the Dialectics of Inheritance Distribution in Islam)

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### **Abstract**

*This article aims to explain Karl Popper's epistemology of falsificationism and its relevance to Islamic scholarly discourse, particularly regarding the dialectics of inheritance distribution in Islam. The study is a library research employing a qualitative approach, using Karl Popper's works and related literature as primary data sources. The analysis is conducted inductively and comparatively to examine the relevance of falsificationism within the discourse on Islamic inheritance laws. The falsificatory approach encourages openness to criticism and reinterpretation in understanding inheritance provisions in Islam. Although the Qur'anic texts are explicit, social changes demand a more contextual and just reading. Thinkers such as Muhammad Syahrur, Amina Wadud, and Asma Barlas offer progressive reinterpretations. While their perspectives differ significantly from classical scholars, they emphasize that their interpretations remain grounded in the objectives of Islamic law (maqāṣid al-sharī'ah). This approach helps prevent intellectual stagnation without disregarding the authority of sacred texts.*

**Keywords:** Karl Popper; Falsificationism; Islamic discourse, Inheritance.

### **Abstrak**

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan tentang epistemologi falsifikasionisme Karl Popper dan relevansinya dengan diskursus ilmu keislaman, khususnya berkenaan dengan dialektika pembagian warisan dalam Islam. Penelitian ini merupakan studi pustaka dengan pendekatan kualitatif, menggunakan karya Karl Popper dan literatur terkait sebagai sumber data. Analisis dilakukan secara induktif dan komparatif untuk mengkaji relevansi falsifikasionisme dalam diskursus pembagian warisan Islam. Pendekatan falsifikatif mendorong keterbukaan terhadap kritik dan reinterpretasi dalam memahami ketentuan pembagian waris dalam Islam. Meski teks Al-Qur'an bersifat eksplisit, perubahan sosial menuntut pembacaan yang lebih kontekstual dan adil. Tokoh seperti Syahrur, Amina Wadud, dan Asma Barlas menawarkan reinterpretasi progresif, meski tampak berbeda secara signifikan dengan interpretasi ulama klasik, namun mereka tetap yang menyebut bahwa interpretasinya tetap berpegang pada *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah*. Pendekatan ini mencegah stagnasi pemikiran tanpa mengabaikan otoritas teks suci.

**Kata Kunci:** Karl Popper; Falsifikasi; Diskursus ilmu keislaman; Pembagian warisan.

## A. INTRODUCTION

The debate surrounding the epistemology of science has been a long-running discourse from the classical era to the contemporary period. Among the central figures in modern philosophy of science is Karl Raimund Popper (1902–1994), an Austrian-British philosopher who introduced the theory of falsificationism as a response to the limitations of the verificationist approach in assessing the scientific status of a theory.<sup>1</sup> Popper rejected the notion that science can be built solely on cumulative empirical justification, instead proposing that scientific progress lies in a theory's ability to be tested and possibly falsified.<sup>2</sup> According to Popper, a theory that cannot be falsified is unscientific.

Popper's ideas have deep implications for how we understand the scientific process, including within Islamic sciences. On one hand, Islamic sciences are deeply rooted in tradition, sacred texts, and scholarly authority; on the other, they represent a dialectical field that continuously evolves with changes in time, social context, and intellectual challenges.<sup>3</sup> The emergence of new approaches in Islamic studies, such as historical-critical methods, hermeneutics, and contemporary discourse analysis, indicates efforts to reconstruct a more dynamic and responsive epistemology for Islamic sciences in line with global scholarly developments.<sup>4</sup>

In this context, Popper's falsificationism offers an interesting proposal for developing a contemporary Islamic epistemology that is critical and open to the possibility of error. Popper's principle of fallibilism—the acknowledgment that every theory or understanding can be wrong and must be open to re-examination—aligns with the spirit of *ijtihad* in Islam, an intellectual effort to continually explore and renew understanding of texts and realities.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Popper opposed dogmatic attitudes that claim final truth within any knowledge system. This resonates strongly with internal challenges in Islamic discourse, which often face intellectual stagnation due to resistance to criticism.

Islamic scholarly discourse itself sits at the intersection of traditional authority and the demands of modern rationality. In fields such as *tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegesis), *fiqh* (Islamic

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Raimund Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 17–20.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Raimund Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (Routledge 1963, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge Classic, 2002), 33–34.

<sup>3</sup> Mohamad Abdalla, *Islamic Science: The Myth of the Decline Theory* (Germany: VDM Verlag, 2008), 45–47.

<sup>4</sup> Naşr Hāmid Abū Zayd, "Rethinking the Qur'an: Towards a Humanistic Hermeneutics," in *Human Rights and Renewing of Religious Discourse: How Can the Arab World Benefit from the Experiences of the Non-Arab Islamic World?* (Utrecht: Humanistics University Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, ed. Robert D. Lee (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 65–66.

jurisprudence), and theology (*kalām*), there are significant challenges in dialoguing between textual authority and contemporary contexts.<sup>6</sup> When Popper's falsificationist principle is applied contextually and prudently, it can serve as a tool for building a more open, dialogical, and reflective scholarly discourse without sacrificing the sanctity of revelation.

It is undeniable that the discourse on Islamic law (*fiqh*) is one of the areas with frequent debate and mutual correction among scholars. For example, the division of inheritance in Islam has generated various views, each believed to be true by its proponents. This occurs due to differing perspectives in interpreting Islamic religious texts (the Qur'an and hadith). The dialectics on this topic have intensified alongside growing narratives of justice and gender equality within Islam.<sup>7</sup> Even the classification of texts as *qat'ī* (definitive) and *ẓannī* (speculative) in this matter remains debated.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, it is particularly interesting to examine the dialectics of inheritance distribution in Islam through the lens of Karl Popper's falsificationism, aiming to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

However, it must be noted that falsificationism cannot be applied uncritically in Islamic studies. The nature of Islamic sciences, which blend empirical, rational, and transcendental dimensions, demands epistemological adaptation. Thus, this article aims to explore Karl Popper's falsificationism and examine how its core principles can contribute to revitalizing Islamic scholarly discourse, especially concerning the dialectics of inheritance distribution in Islam, which remains a subject of ongoing scholarly correction in *fiqh*.

The method used to achieve this research objective is qualitative in approach. In terms of data collection, this study is categorized as library research. Data collection was conducted using documentation techniques. The primary data sources in this study are various writings of Karl Popper in multiple forms. Secondary sources include literature from books, journals, and other studies discussing Karl Raimund Popper and his ideas on falsificationist epistemology, as well as the application of his thought to the development of Islamic religious sciences. To gain knowledge about the dialectics of inheritance distribution in Islam, opinions from scholars with differing and mutually corrective viewpoints were utilized. The collected data were then analyzed inductively and comparatively before drawing conclusions and revealing findings

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<sup>6</sup> Abdul Mustaqim, *Epistemologi Tafsir Kontemporer* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2010), 49–52.

<sup>7</sup> Endang Sriani, "Fiqh Mawaris Kontemporer: Pembagian Waris Berkeadilan Gender," *Tawazun: Journal of Sharia Economic Law* 1, no. 2 (2018): 133, <https://doi.org/10.21043/TAWAZUN.V1I2.4986>.

<sup>8</sup> Ratu Haika, "Konsep Qath'i Dan Zhanni Dalam Hukum Kewarisan Islam," *Mazahib* 15, no. 2 (2016): 183–84, <https://doi.org/10.21093/MJ.V15I2.632>.

concerning falsificationist epistemology and its relevance to the discourse on inheritance distribution in Islam.

## **B. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. The Intellectual Trail of Karl Popper**

#### **a. Biography of Karl Popper**

Karl Raimund Popper was born on July 28, 1902, in Vienna. His parents, who were Jewish, raised him in an environment he later described as "very bookish."<sup>9</sup> His father was a lawyer but was also deeply interested in classical works and philosophy, passing on to his son an interest in social and political issues. His mother instilled in him a great passion for music, so much so that for a time he considered pursuing it as a career; initially, he chose music history as his second subject for his Ph.D. exams. Later, his love for music became one of the inspirational forces in developing his thought and manifested in his very original interpretation of the relationship between dogmatic and critical thinking, in his explanation of the difference between objectivity and subjectivity, and most importantly, in the growth of his hostility toward all forms of historicism, including historicism's idea of a "progressive" nature in music. Young Karl attended the local Realgymnasium, where he was dissatisfied with the teaching standards, and after falling ill, he went on to attend the University of Vienna in 1918, enrolling four years later.

In 1919, he became heavily involved in left-wing politics and for a time was a Marxist. However, he quickly became disillusioned with the doctrinal character of Marxism and soon abandoned it altogether. He also encountered the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Adler (he briefly served as a volunteer social worker with underprivileged children in one of Adler's clinics in the 1920s) and heard Einstein lecture on the theory of relativity. The dominance of critical spirit in Einstein, and its complete absence in Marx, Freud, and Adler, was, according to Popper, crucial: the pioneers of psychoanalysis, he thought, formulated their theories in terms that only allowed confirmation, while Einstein's theory, most importantly, had testable implications that, if falsified, would invalidate the theory itself.<sup>10</sup>

Popper took some time to decide on his career; he trained as a cabinetmaker, obtained a primary school teaching diploma in 1925, and qualified to teach mathematics and physics at

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<sup>9</sup> Don C. Grant and Edwin Harari, "Psychoanalysis, Science and the Seductive Theory of Karl Popper," *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 39, no. 6 (2005): 447, <https://doi.org/10.1080/J.1440-1614.2005.01602.X>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

secondary school in 1929. He undertook a doctoral program in the psychology department at the University of Vienna, then supervised by Karl Bühler, a founding member of the Würzburg experimental psychology school. Popper's project was initially designed as a psychological investigation of human memory, which became the basis of his early research. However, the planned introductory chapter on methodology took an increasingly prominent position and was welcomed by Bühler, who, as a Kant scholar (a professor of philosophy and psychology), had famously addressed the problem of the "crisis in contemporary psychology." This "crisis," for Bühler, related to questions about the unity of psychology and was caused by the proliferation of competing paradigms within the discipline that undermined the previously dominant associationist framework and questioned questions of method.

Thus, under Bühler's guidance, Popper shifted his topic to the methodological problems of cognitive psychology and received his doctorate in 1928 for his dissertation "*Zur Methodenfrage der Denkpsychologie*" ("On the Methodological Question of Thought Psychology"). Expanding Bühler's Kantian approach to the crisis in his dissertation, Popper criticized Moritz Schlick's neutral monist program to make psychology a science by turning it into the science of brain processes. This latter ideal, according to Popper, was misunderstood, but the problem it raised ultimately redirected Popper's attention from Bühler's question about the unity of psychology to the question of its scientific status. His philosophical focus on questions about method, objectivity, and claims to scientific status became his main concern throughout his life, aligning his thinking with contemporary "analytical" philosophers like Frege and Russell, as well as many members of the Vienna Circle.

Popper married Josephine Anna Henninger ("Hennie") in 1930, and she served as his personal assistant until her death in 1985. Early in their marriage, they decided they would never have children. In 1937, he took a teaching position in philosophy at Canterbury University in New Zealand, where he lived during World War II.

The annexation of Austria in 1938 became a catalyst that drove Popper to refocus his writings on social and political philosophy. He published *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, his critique of totalitarianism, in 1945. In 1946, he moved to England to teach at the London School of Economics and became professor of logic and scientific method at the University of London in 1949. From then on, his reputation and position as a philosopher of science and social thinker grew, and he continued to write prolifically—several of his works, especially *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1959), are now widely regarded as pioneering classics in the

field. However, he combined a combative personality with a spirit of self-promotion that did not endear him to his professional colleagues. He felt uncomfortable in the postwar British philosophical environment, which, as he saw it, was obsessed with trivial linguistic problems dictated by Wittgenstein, whom he regarded as his arch-enemy. Popper's commitment to the primacy of rational criticism was offset by hostility toward anything less than total acceptance of his own thinking, and in Britain—as in Vienna—he became increasingly isolated, though his ideas continued to inspire admiration.

In subsequent years, Popper was criticized for his prescriptive approach to science and his emphasis on the logic of falsification. This approach was supplanted by the socio-historical approach taken by Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). In that work, Kuhn, who argued that competing scientific paradigms are incommensurable, challenged the idea that science grows linearly through the accumulation of truth. Popper was knighted in 1965 and retired from the University of London in 1969, remaining active as a writer, broadcaster, and lecturer until his death in 1994.

#### b. Karl Popper's Epistemology of Falsificationism

Popper's epistemological thought was inspired by David Hume's problem, which stated that the law of causality cannot be trusted. The conclusions produced by the inductive method, i.e., general conclusions from particulars, are not valid. Hume even ended with a skeptical stance expressed in his proposition that past experience does not provide a firm basis for predicting future events because the course of nature may change. This is the problem of induction posed by Hume, which Karl Popper sought to solve.<sup>11</sup>

Epistemology deals with problems related to knowledge and science. However, in Popper's epistemology, the issue is not the structure of knowledge or science but the problem of its growth. This is evident in the common theme of his writings that knowledge grows through the method of conjecture and refutation, not by induction. This is because the inductive method does not provide new knowledge but merely repeats it in another form.<sup>12</sup>

Here are some epistemological issues according to Karl Raimund Popper's view:

##### 1) Source of Knowledge

Philosophers have differing views on the source of knowledge. Rationalists like

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<sup>11</sup> Sumedi, "Kritisisme Hikmah: Ke Arah Epistemologi Pendidikan Islam Humanis," in *Antologi Pendidikan Islam*, ed. Nizar Ali and Sumedi (Yogyakarta: Program Pascasarjana UIN Sunan Kalijaga & Penerbit Idea Press, 2008), 63.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 64.



Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza believe knowledge is obtained through reason and logic, rejecting anything contrary to reason. In contrast, empiricists like Locke, Berkeley, and Hume emphasize sensory experience as the primary source of knowledge, claiming all ideas come from experience.<sup>13</sup>

Karl Popper does not explicitly side with either rationalism or empiricism. He calls himself an empiricist in rejecting induction, but also acknowledges being a critical rationalist. For Popper, knowledge can be obtained through a combination of reason and experience, where scientific theories are the product of creative reasoning but must still be empirically tested. Therefore, he is known as a figure of critical empiricism and rationalism.

Popper rejects the idea of an absolute single source of knowledge. For him, many things can be sources of knowledge, but none has full authority. He replaces the classic question “What is the source of your knowledge?” with a critical approach: “How to detect and eliminate errors?” According to him, all knowledge is provisional conjecture that must be continuously criticized and tested to approach the truth.

## 2) Method of Acquiring Knowledge

Initially, Karl Popper wanted to solve the demarcation problem in science. He formulated the principles of falsifiability, refutability, and testability as criteria to distinguish science from non-science, replacing the verifiability principle of the Vienna Circle. After that, he began to consider the problem of induction, which had long been the basis of empirical scientific methods. Popper approached this issue through David Hume’s critique, who doubted the logical validity of generalization from limited observations.

Popper rejected the inductive method despite supporting empiricism. He questioned how many observations are sufficient to form a general conclusion and highlighted the possibility of errors due to incomplete premises. He considered that laws produced by induction were more based on habit than rational reasoning. This view criticized scientific determinism, which assumes all events are predetermined, a view that Popper found unsuitable for the indeterministic nature of social sciences.

In his book *Of Clouds and Clocks*, Popper declared himself an indeterminist. He rejected claims that all physical events are certain. He also asserted that metaphysical statements like “God is One” cannot be judged by empirical testing but lie outside the scope of science. Popper saw that both inductive and deductive methods have weaknesses: deduction

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<sup>13</sup> Jan Hendrik Rapar, *Pengantar Filsafat*, ed. Kanisius, 1st ed. (Yogyakarta, 1996), 39.

relies on premises that need empirical proof, which ultimately returns to induction that cannot be fully trusted. As a solution, Popper offered an approach combining rationalism and empiricism through the theory of falsifiability. He placed inductive reasoning only as a preliminary, non-scientific step, which must be tested through deduction and falsification. Thus, Popper did not reject rationality or empirical methods but formed a stronger model of scientific knowledge through critical hypothesis testing and openness to error.

## 2. Islamic Knowledge and Epistemological Challenges

Islamic knowledge is a system of understanding built upon revelation, reason, and the historical experiences of the Muslim community. Since the classical era, Muslims have developed various branches of knowledge such as *tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegesis), *hadīth*, *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), and *kalām* (Islamic theology). However, in its development, these sciences have often become trapped in overly textual and normative approaches. This is largely due to the dominance of bayani epistemology—a method that emphasizes text and authority as the primary sources of truth.<sup>14</sup>

This tendency has led to limited space for rational (*burhānī*) and intuitive (*ʿirfānī*) approaches, resulting in a scholarly discourse that appears stagnant and unresponsive to contemporary dynamics.<sup>15</sup> In some cases, religious interpretations are treated as final and immune to critique, as highlighted by Mohammed Arkoun through his concept of the sacralization of reason.<sup>16</sup> Yet, within the Islamic tradition, the principle of *ijtihād* exists to allow for the renewal of thought.

Epistemological challenges become even more pronounced when Islamic sciences are confronted with developments in contemporary philosophy of science, which emphasize the importance of critique and revision of existing theories. Fazlur Rahman's approach, for example, seeks to address this through his double movement method of interpreting texts and contexts.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, such approaches are not yet widely accepted in many Islamic institutions.

In this context, Popper's falsificationism offers a critical approach that can enrich Islamic epistemology. His principle of fallibilism, which rejects absolute truth and stresses the need to

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<sup>14</sup> Muḥammad ʿĀbid Al-Jābirī, *Bunyah Al-ʿAql Al-ʿArabī* (Beirut: Al-Markaz al-Šaqāfī al-Arabī, 1990), 92.

<sup>15</sup> Osman Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge In Islam : A Study In Islamic Philosophies of Science* (Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 1998), 73.

<sup>16</sup> Mohammed Arkoun, *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (London: Saqi Books, 2002), 49.

<sup>17</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 7.



test every theory,<sup>18</sup> aligns well with the spirit of Islamic *ijtihad*. Therefore, the critical integration of falsificationist thought can be a path toward renewing Islamic epistemology in a more open, dialogical, and contextual manner.

### 3. The Relevance of Karl Popper's Epistemology in the Discourse of Islamic Sciences

The concept of falsificationism developed by Karl Popper emerged as a critique of inductive reasoning in the philosophy of science. In his approach, Popper emphasized that scientific truth is not absolute, but is always open to testing and potential refutation (falsifiability).<sup>19</sup> According to Popper, science does not progress through verification, but rather through the process of disproving existing hypotheses. Thus, falsificationism serves as the foundation for a dynamic, critical, and anti-dogmatic epistemology.

When we examine the discourse of Islamic sciences, particularly at the epistemological level, several parallels emerge between Popper's falsificationist spirit and foundational principles of Islamic methodology—especially *ijtihad*. *Ijtihad*, in simple terms, is a rational process to derive legal rulings or understand texts in the absence of explicit scriptural evidence. In this process, a *mujtahid* does not claim absolute truth, but arrives at conclusions that may be right or wrong.<sup>20</sup> In this context, Popper's falsificationism can reinforce the paradigm of *ijtihad* as an intellectual process open to critique, revision, and correction.

Furthermore, Popper's approach stresses the importance of critique as a control mechanism in scientific development. In Islamic intellectual history, scholarly critique has actually been a vital part of academic dynamics—as seen in hadith sciences with *jarh wa ta'dīl* (critique and validation of narrators),<sup>21</sup> or in *fiqh* through the practice of scholarly disagreement (*ikhtilāf*).<sup>22</sup> However, in recent decades, this critical spirit has diminished, replaced by a culture of *taqlid* (blind following) and epistemological authoritarianism. This highlights the urgent relevance of Popper's falsificationist ideas to help revive a healthy culture of critique in contemporary Islamic studies.

Applying falsificationism in Islamic sciences also enables a more scientific approach to

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<sup>18</sup> Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, 44.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Yūsuf Al-Qardāwī, *Al-Ijtihad Fī Al-Syarī'ah Al-Islāmiyyah* (Kuwait: Dār al-Qalam, 1996), 18.

<sup>21</sup> Abdul Hafidz, "Kritik Ulama Hadits: Ilmu Jarh Wa Ta'dīl Sebagai Upaya Dalam Menjaga Orisinalitas Hadits," in *The 1st International Conference on Islamic Studies (ICIS)* (Pamekasan: PP. Darul Ulum Banyuwangi Poto'an Daya Palengaan, 2020), 152, <https://ejournal.iaforis.or.id/index.php/icois/article/view/83>.

<sup>22</sup> Habib Maulana Maslahul Adi, "Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Toleransi Dalam Kegiatan Bahs Al-Masā'il Di Pesantren Tradisional," *Asatiza: Jurnal Pendidikan* 3, no. 1 (2022): 20, <https://doi.org/10.46963/asatiza.v3i1.438>.

developing Islamic theories. For instance, in tafsir studies, this approach can inspire the emergence of methodological frameworks that allow interpretive theories of specific verses to be systematically tested and critiqued.<sup>23</sup> This would produce a more reflective rather than merely repetitive exegesis. As Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd stated, the text (the Qur'an) is open and always interacting with the reader's social context.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, a falsificationist approach could help build a methodology of interpretation that is responsive to social dynamics and not trapped in the sacralization of classical exegesis.

Beyond *tafsīr*, the relevance of falsificationism also emerges in the discourse of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *kalām*. In *uṣūl al-fiqh*, principles such as *istihsan* and *maslahah mursalah* reflect an openness to social change, enabling the reinterpretation of Islamic law according to context.<sup>25</sup> Popper's approach would provide an epistemological foundation that such reinterpretation is not merely a pragmatic choice, but part of a scientific process to test the applicability of legal rulings in new contexts. In *kalam*, falsificationist methods can be used to re-evaluate theological doctrines rationally and historically—something exemplified by classical theologians such as Al-Juwayni, Al-Ghazali, and Fakhruddin al-Razi.

Falsificationism also helps to instill the awareness that intellectual products in Islam—be they in *tafsīr*, *fiqh*, or *kalām*—are human interpretations and therefore not immune to critique. This is crucial to avoid what Arkoun called historical dogmatism—the sanctification of classical scholars' thoughts as if they are infallible.<sup>26</sup> Here lies the role of falsificationism as a paradigm that cultivates awareness that all knowledge, including Islamic sciences, is a continuous process toward better truth—not a claim to absolute truth.

In general, the application of falsificationism in Islamic sciences will encourage a more inclusive, open, and critical scholarly attitude. Such an attitude is greatly needed in responding to the challenges of our time, including the plurality of Islamic views, technological developments, and contemporary problems that require adaptive and reflective approaches.

#### 4. Popperian Falsificationism in Depicting the Dialectic of Inheritance Distribution in Islam

<sup>23</sup> Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (London: Routledge, 2005), 28, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203016770>.

<sup>24</sup> Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Maḥmūd Al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsah Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Al-Markaz al-Ṣāqāfi al-'Arabī, 2014), 35.

<sup>25</sup> Wael B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunni Usul Al-Fiqh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 124–26, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511801266>.

<sup>26</sup> Arkoun, *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, 49–50.

The epistemology of falsificationism introduced by Karl Popper offers a new approach to testing the validity of theories and truth claims, including in the realm of religion. The main principle of falsificationism is that a scientific theory must be open to testing and the possibility of being refuted. In the context of Islamic studies, this approach opens space for critiquing religious assumptions and practices that have become dogmatic, including those related to inheritance distribution.

Islamic inheritance law is part of sharia law with explicit formulation in the Qur'an, particularly in Surah al-Nisā' [4]: 11, 12, and 176. These verses detail the distribution of inheritance to heirs such as sons, daughters, parents, and spouses. Because of its detailed textual formulation, inheritance law is often considered *qaṭ'i al-dalālah wa al-ṣubūt*—definitive in both textual form and meaning.<sup>27</sup>

Islam explicitly sets a system of inheritance distribution in the Qur'an, especially in Q.S. An-Nisā' [4]:11–12. The verses state that the share of a son is twice that of a daughter. In the context of 7th-century Arabian society—patriarchal and based on male financial responsibility—this distribution reflected justice grounded in economic needs and responsibilities.<sup>28</sup> In line with Fazlur Rahman's view, such provisions were historically contextual, wherein men bore full economic responsibility for the family during the Prophet's era.<sup>29</sup> In modern societies, where women also serve as breadwinners, the social relevance of these provisions warrants reevaluation. The shift in the social and economic structure of modern societies, where women also carry financial responsibilities, raises the question: is this gender-based inheritance system still relevant and fair.

From a falsificationist perspective, the claim of justice in the gender-based inheritance system must be open to scrutiny, not accepted as an absolute dogma. If social realities have changed significantly, then the justice premise underlying the law must be falsified—that is, tested and potentially rejected if it no longer aligns with modern notions of public good.<sup>30</sup> Within the history of Islamic thought itself, inheritance is not merely a matter of textuality but also of contextualization. For example, Al-Shāṭibī (d. 790 AH) in *Al-Muwāffaqāt* emphasized that sharia must be understood through its objectives (*maqāṣid*), not merely its literal texts.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Wahbah Al-Zuhailī, *Al-Fiqh Al-Islāmī Wa Adillatuh* (Damaskus: Dār al-Fikr, 2005), vols. VIII, 162.

<sup>28</sup> Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), 107–8.

<sup>29</sup> Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of Intellectual Tradition*, 17–19.

<sup>30</sup> Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, 48–50.

<sup>31</sup> Abū Iṣḥāq Al-Syāṭibī, *Al-Muwāffaqāt Fī Uṣūl Al-Syarī'ah*, ed. 'Abd Allāh Darrāz (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1973), vols. II, 292.

According to him, laws that no longer align with public interest can be re-evaluated, provided they do not contradict the core principles of sharia.

Contemporary Islamic thinkers like Muhammad Shahrur propose the theory of limitation or boundary hermeneutics (*ḥadd al-a'lā wa al-ḥadd al-adnā*), whereby Qur'anic laws are understood not as absolute values but as a flexible range.<sup>32</sup> In the context of inheritance, the 2:1 (two-to-one) rule is not a fixed value but rather a minimum and maximum limit that can be adjusted according to social context and broader justice values. He calls this approach *ḥudūdiyyah*—understanding Qur'anic texts as setting boundaries, not sacred numbers.<sup>33</sup> Thus, for Shahrur, inheritance distribution may be contextualized as long as it does not violate the minimum and maximum boundaries of social justice outlined by the Qur'an. It is evident that Shahrur does not reject the text but rather opposes rigid interpretations that are no longer relevant.

Meanwhile, classical thinkers like Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah had already opened the door for Islamic legal reform by stating, "Where there is justice, there is God's law."<sup>34</sup> This principle affirms that Islamic law must never be detached from its moral essence: justice and public welfare.

Criticism of gender-based inheritance systems also comes from Muslim feminist thinkers. Amina Wadud, in *Qur'an and Woman*, emphasizes that the 2:1 distribution must be read within the ethical framework of the Qur'an as a whole, not merely literalistically.<sup>35</sup> She rejects the notion that this distribution implies male superiority. Instead, she proposes a reading that considers the roles and contributions of women in modern society.

Asma Barlas, in *Believing Women in Islam*, argues that patriarchal interpretations of inheritance verses do not represent the true message of the Qur'an.<sup>36</sup> She points out that dominant interpretations have long been shaped by male scholars who imposed gender biases onto the text. Therefore, reinterpretation must be carried out in the spirit of *tawḥīd* (divine unity) and justice.

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<sup>32</sup> Muḥammad Syahrūr, *Naḥw Al-Uṣūl Al-Jadīdah Li Al-Fiqh Al-Islāmī (Fiqh Al-Mar'ah)* (Damaskus: Al-Aḥālī, 2000), 145–50.

<sup>33</sup> Muḥammad Syahrūr, *Al-Kitāb Wa Al-Qur'ān: Qirā'ah Mu'āṣirah* (Damaskus: Al-Aḥālī, 1992), 370–72.

<sup>34</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah, *I'lām Al-Muwaqqi'īn*, ed. Muḥammad Ajmal Al-Iṣlāḥī and 'Umar bin Sa'dī, 2nd ed. (Riyadh: Dār 'Atā'āt al-'Ilm, 2019), vols. I, 89.

<sup>35</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 18–23.

<sup>36</sup> Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 45–55.

Ziba Mir-Hosseini, through her anthropological approach to Islamic law, views fiqh as a historical product of Muslim communities that can and must be reformed.<sup>37</sup> In her article “Muslim Legal Tradition and the Challenge of Gender Equality,” she states that inheritance practices that ignore the realities of contemporary women constitute a form of injustice that must be rejected, while still respecting the sacred text. She advocates using the *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* approach to reconstruct a more socially just inheritance system.

Likewise, Khaled Abou El Fadl, in *Speaking in God’s Name*, stresses that Islamic legal authority must be grounded in moral values, not mere textual formalism. He asserts that literalist readings resulting in gender injustice represent a misuse of religious authority.<sup>38</sup> Legal interpretation, including inheritance law, must be carried out ethically and with accountability for its real-life consequences.

By combining the Popperian approach with progressive Islamic thought, the discourse on inheritance becomes part of an interpretive arena that must remain open to critique and renewal. Falsificationism does not aim to cancel the sharia but to preserve its spirit from historical dogmatism. Justice, as the highest Islamic value, must be the compass in determining whether an inheritance system should be maintained or reformulated in the spirit of *maqāṣid*.

### C. CONCLUSION

Popper offers a critical approach to truth claims in science by emphasizing that a theory must be open to testing and potential refutation (falsifiable), rather than merely seeking verification. This principle, known as falsificationism, aligns with the spirit of *ijtihād* in Islam, where religious understanding is not final but continues to evolve through critique and reinterpretation.

In the context of Islamic inheritance law, which has long been regarded as *qaṭ‘ī al-dalālah* (definitive in meaning), a falsificatory approach enables a more contextual re-reading. The inheritance verses in the Qur’an (Q.S. An-Nisā’: 11–12) do provide explicit rulings, but their application in modern societies—where social structures and gender roles have shifted—requires re-evaluation based on the principle of justice (*maqāṣid al-syarī‘ah*). Thinkers like

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<sup>37</sup> Ziba Mir-Hosseini, “Muslim Legal Tradition and the Challenge of Equality,” in *Men in Charge? Rethinking Male Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition*, ed. Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Mulki Al-Sharmani, and Jana Rumminger (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015), 27.

<sup>38</sup> Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God’s Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*, London (Oneworld Publications, 2021), 96–112.

Muhammad Shahrur, Amina Wadud, and Asma Barlas have proposed progressive reinterpretations, emphasizing that inheritance law must adapt to contemporary realities without neglecting the spirit of the sharia.

This study finds that Popperian falsificationism does not contradict Islamic sciences; rather, it enriches its epistemology. By adopting the principle of fallibilism (acknowledging that human knowledge is fallible), Islamic discourse can avoid stagnation and dogmatism. However, its application must be careful to avoid falling into radical deconstruction that neglects the authority of sacred texts. Instead, the integration of falsificationism must be done selectively, while upholding the framework of *maqāṣid* and the authentic tradition of Islamic scholarship.

The implications of this research highlight the necessity of methodological reform in Islamic legal studies, especially through combining textual and contextual approaches. Furthermore, Islamic education must emphasize a critical and open attitude toward reinterpretation, without losing its traditional roots. Thus, Popperian falsificationism is not only relevant but also serves as a vital tool for responding to contemporary challenges—making Islamic scholarship more dynamic and just.

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