ALSYS
Jurnal Keislaman dan Ilmu Pendidikan

e-ISSN : 2808-540X
p-ISSN : 2808-7119

**Terindeks**: Copernicus, Sinta 5, Dimensions, Scilit, Lens, Semantic Scholar, Garuda, Google, Base, etc.

https://doi.org/10.58578/alsys.v5i4.6495

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEORETICAL STUDY OF SOCIAL INTERPRETATION: SOCIAL RELATIONS

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**Article Info:**

| Submitted: | Revised: | Accepted: | Published: |
|---|---|---|---|
| May 16, 2025 | Jun 13, 2025 | Jun 25, 2025 | Jun 30, 2025 |

**Abstract**

This article explores the historical and epistemological development of social commentary (*al-tafsīr adabī al-ijtimāʿi*) within the Islamic scientific tradition and its relevance to addressing contemporary social issues. Grounded in the premise that the Qur'an offers comprehensive guidance for all dimensions of human life, the study traces the evolution of Qur'anic interpretation from a predominantly textual-linguistic paradigm to a more contextual and socially engaged approach. Employing a qualitative methodology within a literature study framework, the research analyzes seminal works such as *Tafsir al-Manar*, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qurʾān*, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, and *Tafsir al-Miṣbāḥ*, alongside the intellectual contributions of scholars including Muḥammad ʿAbduh, Sayyid Quṭb, Fazlur Rahman, and M. Quraish Shihab. The study investigates the epistemological foundations of social commentary through key Islamic concepts such as *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, the principle of *maṣlaḥah*, and the Theory of Double Movement. It proposes a typology of social commentary comprising four interpretive orientations: reformist, revolutionary, contextual, and transformative. The findings demonstrate that social interpretation effectively integrates Qur'anic values with real-world societal contexts, offering a dynamic and responsive framework for engaging with modern challenges. As such, it


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serves as a viable model for fostering a just, inclusive, and ethically grounded society.

**Keywords:** Social Interpretation; Hermeneutics; The Qur'an; Social Context; Social Transformation

## INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an is not only a spiritual guide, but also a guide to a just social order. (Shihab 2019). The interpretation is closely related to social reality, as Rahman stated (1980), "The Qur'an is a book that is intimately concerned with the building of a social order." The paradigm of interpretation has evolved from a textual-linguistic to a contextual-social approach, marking the development of the scientific tradition of interpretation over more than 14 centuries.

The history of Islamic interpretation shows continuity and discontinuity. The classical era is characterized by *bi al-ma'thur* and *bi al-ra'y* interpretations, which focus on linguistics and theology (al-Suyuti 1974). In contrast, the modern era emphasizes social, political, and cultural contexts (Abu Zayd 2003). Arkoun (Arkoun and Lee 2019) stated, "*interpretation is always a dialogue between the text and the interpreter's social context*." Social interpretation emerged during the era of the Prophet Muhammad (al-Tabari, 1974). Still, it developed systematically in the 19th and 20th centuries through the works of Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida (Tafsir al-Manar), Sayyid Qutb (Fi Zilal al-Qur'an), and Fazlur Rahman, who introduced the double movement Theory (Rahman, 1982).

In Indonesia, Hamka (Tafsir al-Azhar) and M. Quraish Shihab developed contextual social interpretation. (HAMKA 1982; Shihab 2002). Social interpretation responds to issues such as social justice, human rights, democracy, and pluralism. (Esack 1997). Engineer (2005) stated, "*Social interpretation of the Qur'an becomes imperative to address contemporary social challenges faced by Muslim communities worldwide*." However, social interpretation faces criticism because of its potential for subjectivity and reduction of spiritual meaning (Kerr 1966).

The Qur'an presents a comprehensive vision of social relations, characterized as vertical about Allah, horizontal among humans, and structural within the social system. (Maududi 1965). Hanafi (1977) confirms, "The Qur'an provides a comprehensive

framework for understanding and transforming social relations based on principles of justice, equality, and human dignity." This study aims to map the historical-epistemological development of social interpretation, analyze the theoretical and methodological framework, and evaluate its contribution to contemporary social problems. Its significance includes the development of interpretation epistemology, responsive methodology, and a model of da'wah based on Qur'anic values.

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach, combining descriptive-analytical and historical-philosophical library research methods, to examine the theoretical development of social interpretation within the Islamic scientific tradition. The primary data sources of this study are works of interpretation that have a social orientation, including Tafsir al-Manar by Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, Fi Zilal al-Qur'an by Sayyid Qutb, Tafsir al-Azhar by Hamka, Tafsir al-Mishbah by M. Quraish Shihab, and theoretical works such as Islam and Modernity by Fazlur Rahman and Rethinking Islam by Mohammed Arkoun, while secondary data sources include books, scientific journal articles, and other academic works that discuss the Theory of interpretation, hermeneutics, and methodology of Qur'anic studies.

Data collection techniques were carried out through documentation studies of classical and contemporary interpretation literature, bibliographic analysis of the works of commentators using a social approach, and genealogical tracing of the thoughts of social interpretation figures from various periods of Islamic history. The collected data were then analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify the characteristics and methodology of each interpretation work, comparative analysis to compare approaches between commentators and determine the typology of social interpretation, and theoretical synthesis to formulate a comprehensive epistemological framework for the development of social interpretation studies, with a critical hermeneutic approach used to understand the historical-social context that underlies the emergence of various approaches to social interpretation.

## RESULT

### Epistemological Foundations of Social Interpretation

#### 1. Conceptual Definition of Social Interpretation

Social interpretation (*al-tafsīr adabi al-ijtimā'i*) as an approach in the science of interpretation represents a significant epistemological evolution in the tradition of Qur'anic interpretation. Etymologically, the term "al-tafsīr adabi al-ijtimā'ī" consists of two main components: "al-tafsir," which comes from the root word fa-sa-ra, which means *kashf wa bayan* or to reveal and explain, and "al-ijtima'i," which comes from the root *ja-ma-'a*, which is related to the collective and social dimensions of society (Khoiri 2023). According to Muhammad Husayn al-Dhahabi in his monumental work *al-Tafsir wa al-Mufassirun*, social interpretation is defined as: "A method of interpreting the Qur'an that focuses on extracting meanings and laws relating to social affairs and human relations from Qur'anic texts, taking into account the historical and social context in which the verses were revealed" (al-Dhahabi 1976, 347).

This definition is reinforced by Fazlur Rahman's view, which emphasizes that social interpretation is "*an interpretive approach that seeks to understand the Qur'anic message in its dynamic relationship with social realities, both in its original context and contemporary applications*" (Rahman 1980, 15). Meanwhile, M. Quraish Shihab in Grounding the Qur'an emphasizes that social interpretation is "an effort to understand the messages of the Qur'an relating to community life by taking into account social, cultural and historical conditions both at the time it was revealed and at present." (Shihab 2019, 89).

The fundamental difference between social interpretation and other interpretation approaches lies in the orientation and focus of the interpretation. Suppose the *bi al-ma'thur* interpretation emphasizes the aspects of *riwayah* and transmission, and the *bi al-ra'y* interpretation prioritizes rational-linguistic analysis. In that case, the social interpretation integrates the socio-historical dimension as a fundamental hermeneutical variable (Mustaqim 2020). The scope of social interpretation includes various dimensions of social relations contained in the Qur'an, including: first, vertical relations between humans and God in a social context; second, horizontal relations between fellow humans; third, structural relations concerning criticism of the social system; and fourth, transformative relations oriented towards social change (Engineer 2005).

## 2. Classical vs. Modern Paradigms in Interpretation

The paradigmatic evolution from classical to modern-contextual interpretation marks a significant epistemological transformation in the Qur'anic hermeneutical tradition. Classical scholars such as al-Tabari (w. 310 H), al-Zamakhshari (w. 538 H), and al-Qurtubi (d. 671 AH) have laid a strong methodological foundation. However, their approach is still limited to linguistic-textual analysis with little contextual elaboration (al-Suyuthi 1974). Ibn Taymiyyah in *Muqaddimah fi Usul al-Tafsir* emphasized the fundamental principle which later became the basis of social interpretation: "Indeed the Qur'an was revealed to be put into practice, so if the interpretation has been understood, it must be put into practice, and practice requires understanding the reality to which the text is applied." (Ibn Taimiyah 1995, 52).

This statement indicates that the embryo of the contextual approach has existed in the classical tradition, but has only developed systematically in the modern era. Modernity brings fundamental transformations in the methodology of interpretation through several factors: first, the encounter with Western civilization, which gave rise to the need for reinterpretation; second, the development of social sciences, which provide new analytical tools; and third, socio-political dynamics, which demand a theological response (Arkoun and Lee 2019). Muhammad Abduh, as a pioneer of modern interpretation, in Tafsir al-Manar asserted: "Indeed, understanding the Qur'an in our era demands attention to the condition of humans and their social circumstances, because the Qur'an is a book of guidance for humanity in every time and place." (Abduh and Ridha 1947, 17).

The dialectic between revelation and social reality in interpretation reflects the concept of *al-wahy wa al-waqi'*, which is characteristic of social interpretation. Hassan Hanafi in *Min al-Aqidah ila al-Thawrah* emphasizes that "revelation without reality is mere abstraction, while reality without revelation lacks transcendent meaning" (Hanafi 1988, 23).

## 3. Theoretical Basis of Social Interpretation

The theoretical foundation of social interpretation rests on three main epistemological pillars*: maqashid al-shari'ah*, the principle of *maslahah*, and the Theory of contextualization. The concept of maqashid al-shari'ah as developed by *al-Shatibi in al-Muwafaqat* provides a teleological framework for understanding the universal goals of sharia, which include *hifz al-din* (protection of religion), *hifz al-nafs* (protection of the soul), *hifz al-'aql* (protection of the mind), *hifz al-nasl* (protection of descendants), and *hifz al-mal*

(protection of property) (Asy-Syatibi 1997). Asy-Syatibi emphasized: "Indeed, the *Shari'a* was established for the benefit of Allah's servants in this world and the Hereafter, and this benefit cannot be realized except by understanding the texts in their social and historical context." (Asy-Syatibi 1997, 1–4:8).

The principle of *maslahah* in the context of social interpretation is understood as "bringing benefit and preventing harm within the framework of Qur'anic values and social justice" (Kamali 2003, 267). *Maslahah* is understood not only in individual dimensions but also in collective and social dimensions, encompassing distributive justice, social cohesion, and structural transformation. Fazlur Rahman developed the Theory of contextualization in Qur'anic hermeneutics through the concept of "double movement" which involves: first, movement from the present situation to the Qur'anic era to understand the meaning and ratio legis of the verses; second, movement from the Qur'anic era back to the present to apply universal principles in the contemporary context (Rahman 1980).

Abdullah Saeed in "Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach" strengthens this Theory by stating that "contextual interpretation requires a sophisticated understanding of both the original context and the contemporary context, to identify the underlying principles and values that can be applied across different temporal and spatial contexts" (Saeed 2014, 117). The integration of these three theoretical foundations yields a social interpretation methodology that bridges textual authenticity with contextual relevance, enabling the Qur'an to remain "guidance for all times and places" (*hudan li al-nas*) without compromising its transformative dimension in responding to contemporary social challenges.

## Historical Genealogy Social Interpretation

### 1. Embryo of Social Interpretation of the Classical Era

The genealogy of social interpretation can be traced back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW and his companions, where the process of interpreting the Qur'an was not separated from the social reality that surrounded it. Rasulullah saw, as the first and foremost mufassir, has exemplified a contextual approach in understanding revelation, as seen in the hadith narrated by Abu Dawud: "From Ibn Abbas said: Rasulullah Saw" (Abu Dawud, 1998, Hadits No. 1342).

This statement indicates that from the beginning, the Qur'an was understood not only as a theological text but also as a guide for social action. Analysis of this hadith reveals that the Prophet Muhammad established the fundamental principle that understanding the Qur'an should lead to social implementation (*ta'mil ijtima'i*), which later became a key characteristic of social interpretation.

The companions continued this tradition with a more explicit approach. Umar ibn al-Khattab, for example, in interpreting QS. Al-Taubah verse 60, regarding mustahiq *zakat*, does not provide a literal understanding of the verse, but rather an analysis of the socio-economic conditions of the community. Ibn Sa'd in *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra* noted: "Umar ra. said: 'Indeed Allah did not reveal a single verse except that it contains social wisdom and benefits for the people." (Ibn Sa'd, 1990, Volume 3, p. 287). Analysis of Umar's statement shows a deep epistemological awareness of the social dimension of revelation. The use of the terms "hikmah ijtima'iyyah" (social wisdom) and "maslahah li al-ummah" (benefit of the people) indicates that the companions understood the Qur'an as a book that not only regulates individual ritual aspects but also promotes social and collective transformation.

The Tabi'in period marked a further systematization of the contextual approach. Sa'id ibn Jubayr (d. 95 AH), a student of Ibn Abbas, in *Tafsir Sa'id ibn Jubayr* asserted: "The correct interpretation is that which connects the meaning of the verses with human reality, because the Qur'an was revealed for humans, not for angels." (Ibn Jubayr, 1985, p. 45). This statement shows a significant methodological evolution. Sa'id ibn Jubayr not only emphasized the importance of the social context but also formulated epistemological criteria for "correct interpretation" (*al-tafsir al-sahih*). Further analysis reveals that the concept of "yarbitu bayna" (connecting between) has become the foundational methodology that later developed in the contemporary social interpretation tradition.

## 2. Developments in the Medieval Era

The medieval era marked the institutionalization and systematization of interpretation with the emergence of monumental works that had an explicit social dimension. Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (224-310 H) in J*ami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an* demonstrates sensitivity to the social context, albeit within the framework of *tafsir bi al-ma'thur*.

Al-Tabari in interpreting QS. Al-Baqarah verse 188 concerning the prohibition of consuming wealth in vain states: "Indeed, Allah SWT forbids consuming human property in vain because in it there is social damage and the collapse of a just system in society" (al-Tabari 1974, 567). This analysis of al-Tabari's interpretation reveals a profound understanding of the social implications of the Qur'anic commands and prohibitions. The use of the terminology "al-fasad al-ijtima'i" (social decay) and "al-nizam al-'adil" (the just system) indicates that al-Tabari understood the verse not only in its legal-formal dimension, but also in its structural-social consequences.

Abu Bakr al-Qurtubi (d. 671 H) in *al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an* is more explicit in his social approach. In interpreting Q.S. al-Hasyr verse 7 on the distribution of wealth for example, al-Qurtubi stated: "The purpose of this verse is to uphold social justice and prevent the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small group of people, and this is a major principle in building a Muslim society." (al-Qurtubi, 1964, Volume 18, p. 12). Analysis of al-Qurtubi's interpretation above shows significant developments in social interpretation. The concept of "al-'adalah al-ijtima'iyyah" (social justice) and "man' tarakuz al-tharwah" (preventing the concentration of wealth) show that al-Qurtubi has developed a structural analysis of the political-economic system. Furthermore, the use of the term "asl 'azim" (major principle) indicates that distributive justice is understood as the epistemological foundation in building a Muslim society.

Ibn Katsir (d. 774 H) in his *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim* also shows a strong social orientation. In interpreting Q.S. al-Nisa verse 58 about trust and justice for example, Ibn Kathir stated: "This verse is the basis for the obligation to return trust to its owner and to uphold justice among humans, and it is a rule of the rules of social and political reform."(Ibn Katsir 1999, 347). This interpretation of Ibn Kathir shows a further evolution in social interpretation through the concept of "al-islah al-ijtima'i wa al-siyasi" (social and political reform). Analysis of this statement suggests that Ibn Kathir has interpreted the Qur'an as a charter for social transformation, rather than just individual guidance.

### 3. Renaissance Social Interpretation of the Modern Era

The renaissance of modern social interpretation began with the revolutionary work of Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida in Tafsir al-Manar. Abduh, influenced by his encounter with European modernity, developed a methodology of interpretation that explicitly integrated socio-contextual analysis. In interpreting Q.S. al-Ra'd verse 11 on social

change, Abduh in Tafsir al-Manar stated: "Indeed Allah SWT makes changes in the conditions of people related to changes in what is in themselves, and this is a fixed social law that never deviates, so people who want to rise must change their understanding, morals, and social systems." (Abduh and Ridha 1947, 143).

Analysis of Abduh's interpretation shows a fundamental epistemological basis. First, the concept of "qanun ijtima'i tsabit" (permanent social law) indicates that Abduh has integrated the Theory of social laws into Qur'anic hermeneutics. Second, the use of the terminology "anzimataha al-ijtima'iyyah" (social systems) indicates a sophisticated structural analysis. Third, the concept of social change is understood as a dialectical process between individual transformation and structural transformation.

Rashid Rida, continuing and developing Abduh's thoughts, in interpreting QS. Al-Anfal verse 53, asserts: "This verse establishes an important principle in the philosophy of Islamic history, namely that Allah does not change the blessings or punishments of a people until they change what is within themselves, so social change begins from within and is then reflected in external reality." (Abduh and Ridha 1947, 76). This interpretation of Rashid Rida shows extraordinary methodological sophistication. The use of the term "falsafat al-tarikh al-islamiyyah" (philosophy of Islamic history) indicates the integration of philosophical perspectives in hermeneutics. Furthermore, the concept of "al-taghyir al-ijtima'i" (social change) is understood in terms of the dialectical relationship between the internal (spiritual-psychological) and external (structural-institutional) dimensions.

Sayyid Qutb in *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* developed a more radical approach. In interpreting Q.S. al-Baqarah verse 30 regarding the caliphate on earth, Qutb stated: "Indeed the concept of caliphate on earth includes comprehensive social and political responsibility, so humans are assigned to uphold a just social system that realizes Allah's will on earth, and this demands a revolution against all forms of tyranny and despotism." (Qutb 1972, 1–6:89). Analysis of Qutb's interpretation shows the radicalization of social interpretation. The concept of "mas'uliyyah ijtima'iyyah wa siyasiyyah shamilah" (total social and political responsibility) indicates that Qutb understood the caliphate not only in a spiritual dimension, but also as a mandate for socio-political transformation. More revolutionary still, the use of the term "al-thawrah" (revolution) shows that Qutb advocated fundamental structural change.

In the context of the Nusantara, Hamka in *Tafsir al-Azhar* developed a contextual approach to local culture. In interpreting Q.S. al-Hujurat verse 13 on *ta'aruf*, Hamka stated: "This verse teaches that differences in ethnicity, nation, and culture are not to be hostile to each other, but to get to know each other and work together. In the context of a pluralistic Indonesia, this verse becomes the theological foundation for unity in diversity" (HAMKA 1982, 1–30:156). Analysis of Hamka's interpretation shows brilliant contextualization. Hamka not only understands the verse in the context of 7th-century Arabic, but also applies it to the reality of Indonesian diversity. The concept of "unity in diversity" becomes a local manifestation of the universal principle of *ta'aruf*.

M. Quraish Shihab in Tafsir al-Misbah continues this tradition with a more systematic approach. In interpreting Q.S. al-Rum verse 41 on environmental damage, Shihab states: "This verse describes the law of cause and effect in social life. The damage that occurs on land and sea is a consequence of human actions. In the contemporary context, this verse is very relevant to the global ecological crisis facing humanity." (Shihab 2002, 1–15:87). Shihab's interpretation shows the evolution of social interpretation towards environmental consciousness. Analysis of this statement reveals that Shihab integrates ecological awareness into Qur'anic hermeneutics, demonstrating the dynamic nature of social interpretation in responding to contemporary global challenges.

## DISCUSSION

### Typology and Characteristics of Social Interpretation

In the development of contemporary interpretation studies, social interpretation (al-tafsīr al-ijtimā'ī) has shown a diversity of approaches and methodologies that reflect the dynamics of Islamic thought in responding to the challenges of the times. The typology of social interpretation can be understood as a systematic categorization of various types of interpretation that place the social dimension as the main focus in understanding the messages of the Qur'an. As expressed by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, "Social interpretation represents a qualitative leap in understanding the text of the Qur'an from merely a sacred text to a text that is active in social reality." (Zayd 2014, 45).

This categorization is important because each typology has its own unique characteristics, methodology, and different transformative orientations. However, all of

them aim to actualize the values of the Qur'an in social life. As explained by Fazlur Rahman in Major Themes of the Qur'an, "The social dimension of Qur'anic interpretation requires a sophisticated understanding of both the text's historical context and its contemporary applications" (Rahman 1980, 12). In this context, the typology of social interpretation can be classified into four main categories: reformist, revolutionary, contextual, and transformative..

**1. Social-Reformist Interpretation**

Social-reformist interpretation (*al-tafsīr al-iṣlāḥī al-ijtimā'i*) is an interpretive approach that focuses on social change through gradual and moderate reform. This typology emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a response to the stagnation of Islamic civilization and the challenges of Western modernity. The main characteristics of this approach are the integration of rationality with revelation, an emphasis on education and public enlightenment, and efforts to harmonize Islamic values with the development of modern science.

The main figures in this tradition are Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) and Rashid Rida (1865-1935), as exemplified in their monumental work, Tafsīr al-Manār. Abduh, as quoted by Hourani, emphasized that Islam is a religion of reason and knowledge, not an enemy of civilization and progress. This reformist approach emphasizes the importance of ijtihad in interpreting the Qur'an in light of contemporary developments, without undermining the authority of the sacred text. In a methodological context, social-reformist interpretation uses the following principles: first, a rational approach in understanding the verses of the Qur'an; second, contextualization of the universal messages of the Qur'an with contemporary reality; third, the use of modern science as a tool in understanding the meaning of the text; and fourth, orientation towards building a just and civilized society.

As a concrete example, in interpreting QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 30: "And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels: 'Indeed, I will make a caliph on earth." Muhammad Abduh in Tafsīr al-Manār interprets the concept of the caliph not only as a substitute for Allah on earth, but as a mandate to be an active agent of social change. Abduh emphasized: "The caliphate on earth requires humans to be agents in improving and developing society, not just worshipers isolated from social reality." (Abduh and Ridha 1947, 253). Likewise, Rashid Rida, in interpreting the same verse, emphasizes the social dimension by stating that the caliphate contains a mandate to realize social justice and advance civilization. Rida

stated: "The true caliphate is to realize social justice and advance human society towards perfection" (Abduh and Ridha 1947, 255).

### 2. Social-Revolutionary Interpretation

Social-revolutionary interpretation (*al-tafsīr al-thawrī al-ijtimā'ī*) is an interpretive approach that uses the Qur'an as a basis for sharp criticism of the established social system and advocates radical transformation in the structure of society. This typology was developed in the mid-20th century, especially after World War II, as a response to Western domination, colonialism, and systemic social injustice. The primary characteristics of this approach are an ideological interpretation of the Qur'anic text, an emphasis on the dimensions of conflict and struggle in Islamic history, an orientation towards the liberation of the oppressed, and a revolutionary vision for fundamentally transforming the social order. The main figures in this tradition are Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) through his work *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān*, and Ali Shariati (1933-1977) with his revolutionary Islamic sociological approach.

Sayyid Qutb, as analyzed by Shepard, developed the concept of "contemporary *jāhiliyyah*" as a critique of the modern social system, which he considered to be based on non-Islamic principles. Qutb asserted: "The *jāhiliyyah* society is every society other than the Muslim society, and every society which does not submit to Allah alone in its *shari'a* and its system" (Qutb 1972, 1–6:515). In interpreting Q.S. al-Nisa verse 75: "Why don't you want to fight in the way of Allah and (defend) the weak, both men, women and children." Sayyid Qutb provided a revolutionary interpretation, emphasizing that this verse obligates Muslims to fight against systems of social oppression. Qutb stated: "Jihad in the way of Allah is not just self-defense, but a comprehensive movement to liberate humans from all forms of slavery and social injustice" (Qutb 1972, 1–6:684). This revolutionary approach is also evident in the work of Ali Shariati, who integrates sociological analysis with the interpretation of the Qur'an. Shariati in Islamic Sociology asserts that Islam is a liberation ideology that opposes all forms of social exploitation (Shariati 1979, 67).

### 3. Social-Contextual Interpretation

Socio-contextual interpretation (*al-tafsīr al-siyāqī al-ijtimā'ī*) is an interpretive approach that emphasizes the adaptation of the universal messages of the Qur'an to the local and temporal socio-cultural context. This typology was developed in the late 20th

century in response to globalization, cultural pluralism, and the need for interpretations that are relevant to contemporary realities. The main characteristics of this approach are the use of double movement hermeneutics, as developed by Fazlur Rahman; an emphasis on historical consciousness in understanding the text; an appreciation of cultural diversity and local contexts; and an orientation towards civilizational dialogue and tolerance. The main figures in this tradition are Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988), Mohammed Arkoun (1928-2010), and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (1943-2010).

Fazlur Rahman developed a double movement methodology consisting of two stages: first, understanding the meaning of the Qur'an in the historical context of the revelation; second, applying these universal principles in a contemporary context. Rahman emphasized: "The Qur'an is the divine response, through the Prophet's mind, to the moral-social situation of the Prophet's Arabia, particularly to the commercial Meccan society of his day" (Rahman 1980, 5).

In the Indonesian context, this approach was developed by figures such as Nurcholish Madjid and Quraish Shihab, who emphasized the importance of contextualizing the message of the Qur'an with the pluralistic social reality of Indonesia. For example, in interpreting QS. al-Hujurat verse 13: "O mankind, indeed We created you from male and female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another." Quraish Shihab in *Tafsir al-Mishbah* provides a contextual interpretation, emphasizing that the diversity of ethnic groups is the will of Allah, which must be respected and utilized as a means to foster mutual understanding and knowledge (*ta'aruf*). Shihab stated: "This verse emphasizes that differences in ethnicity, race, and culture are not to be hostile to one another, but to get to know one another and work together in building a just civilization." (Shihab 2002, 1–15:261).

Mohammed Arkoun also developed a contextual approach by emphasizing the importance of critical thinking in understanding the Qur'an. Arkoun asserted: "We must distinguish between the Qur'an as a linguistic fact and the Qur'an as a religious fact that is actualized in different historical contexts" (Arkoun and Lee 2019, 78).

### 4. Social-Transformative Interpretation

Social-transformative interpretation (al-tafsīr al-tahwīlī al-ijtimā'ī) is an interpretive approach that integrates social criticism with a transformative program aimed at changing

the social structure towards justice and liberation. This typology, developed in the 1970s and 1990s, synthesized various previous approaches and was influenced by liberation theology within the Christian tradition. The main characteristics of this approach are a focus on the structural transformation of society, an emphasis on human agency in social change, an integration between spirituality and social activism, and an orientation towards empowering the marginalized and oppressed. The main figures in this tradition are Hassan Hanafi (1935-2021), who introduced the concept of "Left Islam," and Asghar Ali Engineer (1939-2013), who developed the Islamic liberation theology approach.

Hassan Hanafi developed the concept of "al-yasār al-Islāmī" (Islamic left) as an alternative to capitalism and secular socialism. Hanafi asserted that Islam has the potential to transform unjust social structures. Hanafi stated: "Islam is essentially a social revolution against injustice and exploitation, not merely a ritual of worship that is separate from reality" (Hanafi 1988, 142). In interpreting Q.S. al-Anfal verse 53, the meaning is: "Indeed, Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves." Asghar Ali Engineer offers a transformative interpretation, emphasizing that this verse illustrates the fundamental principle of human agency in social change. Engineer states: "This verse establishes the fundamental principle that human beings are agents of their destiny and that social transformation requires conscious effort and commitment from the people themselves" (Engineer 2005, 98).

Hassan Hanafi also provides a similar interpretation by emphasizing that this verse shows the dialectic between Divine will and human effort in the process of social transformation: "This verse emphasizes that social change requires conscious and organized human effort, and that God does not change the condition of human beings without their active participation in the process of change" (Hanafi 1988, 256). This transformative approach also emphasizes the importance of praxis in implementing Qur'anic values. As stated by Farid Esack in the South African context, "*The Qur'an is not merely a book to be read but a reality to be lived and a program to be implemented for social transformation*" (Esack 1997, 89). A thorough analysis of these four typologies reveals that, despite differences in methodology and orientation, they all share a commonality in positioning the Qur'an as a source of inspiration for social transformation. The main differences lie in the level of radicality of the desired change, the methodology used, and the socio-political context that underlies the emergence of each typology.

The contribution of each typology to the development of contemporary social interpretation is very significant. The reformist typology provides a methodological basis for integrating rationality with revelation, the revolutionary typology offers a critical dimension to unjust social structures, the contextual typology offers a hermeneutical framework for adapting universal messages to local realities, and the transformative typology integrates spirituality with social activism. In the context of future social interpretation development, these four typologies can be synthesized to produce a more comprehensive and holistic approach. As expressed by Abdolkarim Soroush, "Islamic hermeneutics must be flexible enough to accommodate both the universal principles of the Qur'an and the particular needs of contemporary Muslim societies" (Soroush 2000, 134).

## Theoretical Framework of Social Relations in Interpretation

The theoretical framework of social relations in interpretation provides a fundamental foundation that demonstrates how the Qur'an positions itself as a book that not only addresses the individual-spiritual dimension but also offers a comprehensive blueprint for an ideal social order. In the context of social interpretation (at-tafsīr al-ijtimā'ī), understanding social relations becomes the gateway to revealing the transformative dimensions of the Qur'an in responding to the complexity of social life. As expressed by Sayyid Qutb in his magnum opus *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān*, the Qur'an is a "comprehensive *manhaj* of life" that covers all aspects of human life, including its social dimension (Qutb 1972).

The social interpretation approach (*al-tafsīr al-ijtimā'ī*) in understanding social relations cannot be separated from efforts to contextualize the Qur'an's messages within contemporary social reality. This view aligns with that of Muhammad Abduh, who emphasized that the Qur'an is a book of guidance and social reform (Abduh and Ridha 1947). This theoretical framework is important because it provides an epistemological foundation for understanding how the Qur'an constructs a vision of a just, harmonious, and transformative society.

### 1. Terms of Social Relations in the Qur'an

The Qur'an has a wealth of terminology that describes various dimensions of human social relations. These terms not only serve as theoretical concepts but also as operational principles in constructing an ideal social order. In the context of social interpretation, this terminology is key to understanding the Qur'anic vision of society. The

concept of *ummah* is one of the central terms that describes the communal dimension in the Qur'an. Fazlur Rahman, in Major Themes of the Qur'an, explains that an ummah is not just a collection of individuals, but "a community bound together by common beliefs, common goals, and a common way of life" (Rahman 1980, 37). The term ummah in the Qur'an appears in various contexts, starting from the ideal ummah (QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 143) to criticism of the deviant ummah (QS. al-A'raf [7]: 164). Muhammad Asad in The Message of the Qur'an emphasizes that the concept of *ummah* encompasses the meaning of a "justly balanced community" that acts as a witness for all humanity (Asad 1980).

The term *mujtama'* and its derivatives in the Qur'an indicate the collective dimension of human life. Although this term does not appear explicitly in the Qur'an, the concept of "gathering" or "coming together" contained in the root word j-m-' describes the social nature of humans. Sayyid Qutb noted that the Qur'an employs various terms to describe social phenomena, such as *qawm*, *nās*, and *jamā'ah*, each of which carries distinct nuances of meaning. (Qutb 1979).

The concept of *ta'aruf* as stated in QS. al-Hujurat verse 13, "O mankind, indeed We created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another", is an epistemological foundation for understanding diversity as the sunnatullah. Quraish Shihab in *Tafsir al-Mishbah* explains that *ta'aruf* is not just a superficial introduction, but "an introduction that leads to cooperation and complementarity" (Shihab 2002, 1–15:260).

The term *tanāṣuḥ* is found in QS. al-'Asr verse 3, "and they enjoin each other with the truth and enjoin each other with patience", shows the communicative dimension in social relations. Ibn Katsir, in his interpretation, explains that *"tanasuh*" is "enjoining each other for good and forbidding evil," which is a characteristic of a believing society (Ibn Katsir 1999).

The concept of *takāful*, or social solidarity, although not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an, is reflected in various verses that regulate *zakat*, *sadaq*ah, and other social concerns. Yusuf al-Qaradawi in *Fiqh al-Zakah* asserts that *takāful* is "an Islamic social security system that connects members of Muslim society in a bond of brotherhood" (Qardhawi 1994, 45).

The term *'adalah* as a fundamental principle of social relations appears in various forms in the Qur'an. This concept does not only mean distributive justice, but also procedural and restorative justice. Mohammad Hashim Kamali in Principles of Islamic

Jurisprudence explains that *'adalah* in the social context includes "*fairness, balance, temperance, and justice in all its forms*" (Kamali 2003, 367).

**2. Vertical Dimension: Human-God Relationship in Social Context**

The vertical dimension in the theoretical framework of social relations describes how the relationship between humans and God (ḥabl min Allāh) serves as the foundation and orientation for building harmonious social relations. From the perspective of social interpretation, this vertical dimension cannot be separated from the horizontal dimension, because both form an integral unity in the Islamic worldview. The concept of tauḥīd as the foundation of social relations is a distinctive contribution of Islam in establishing social order. Ismail Raji al-Faruqi in Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life explains that tauhid is not only theological in meaning, but also "*a worldview that integrates all aspects of life under the sovereignty of Allah*" (Al-Faruqi 1998, 23). In the context of social relations, monotheism eliminates all forms of artificial hierarchy and creates fundamental equality before God.

The implementation of divine values in community life is reflected in the concept of the caliphate, as stated in Q.S. al-Baqarah, verse 30. Sayyid Qutb interprets this verse as "the assignment of humans to prosper the earth according to Allah's method" (Qutb 1972, 1–6:23). The concept of the caliph in social interpretation is not only related to political leadership, but also the collective responsibility of humanity in realizing a just social order. Social spirituality in the Qur'anic perspective connects the dimensions of ritual worship with social praxis. Fazlur Rahman emphasized that in Islam, "worship and social action are inseparable" because both are manifestations of devotion to Allah (Rahman 1979, 87). It is reflected in the concept of ṣalāh, which not only means ritual, but also "connection" with the social dimension of society.

**3. Horizontal Dimension: Human Relations**

The horizontal dimension in the theoretical framework of social relations describes the Qur'anic vision of how humans should interact with each other in a societal context. This dimension is the primary focus in social interpretation because it is directly related to societal transformation. The principle of social justice ('adālah ijtimā'iyyah) is a fundamental pillar in horizontal relations. The Qur'an uses the terms qisṭ and 'adl to describe comprehensive justice. In QS. an-Nisa [4]: 135, "O you who believe, be upholders of

justice, witnesses for Allah even though it is against yourselves, your parents and your relatives", the Qur'an emphasizes that justice must be upheld regardless of primordial ties.

Muhammad Asad interpreted this verse as "the principle of absolute justice," which is characteristic of Muslim society (Asad 1980, 134). In the context of social interpretation, justice is not only related to the distribution of wealth, but also access to opportunities, respect for human dignity, and protection of fundamental rights. The concept of universal brotherhood (ukhuwwah insāniyyah) in the Qur'an transcends ethnic, tribal, and national boundaries. Q.S. al-Hujurat verse 10 states, "The believers are truly brothers." However, in a broader context, the Qur'an also recognizes the brotherhood of humanity, as seen in QS. Al-Isra verse 70, which states the glory of the children of Adam universally.

Quraish Shihab explains that ukhuwwah in the Qur'an has gradations: ukhuwwah *fi al-insaniyyah* (brotherhood of humanity), *ukhuwwah fi al-watan* (national brotherhood), and *ukhuwwah fi al-din* (religious brotherhood) (Shihab 1996, 289). From a social interpretation perspective, this concept serves as the foundation for building an inclusive and tolerant society. Tolerance and pluralism in the Qur'an are reflected in the principle of "no compulsion in religion" in Q.S. al-Baqarah verse 256. Abdullah Yusuf Ali in "The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary" explains that this verse affirms "the principle of religious freedom," which is the foundation of religious tolerance (A. Y. Ali 1989, 109). In the context of social interpretation, pluralism is not only the acceptance of differences, but also the appreciation of diversity as a divine blessing.

**4. Structural Dimension: Critique of Social Systems**

The structural dimension in the theoretical framework of social relations reveals how the Qur'an not only presents a vision of an ideal society but also offers a sharp critique of exploitative and oppressive social systems. From a social interpretation perspective, this dimension becomes relevant to understanding the transformative role of the Qur'an in the context of contemporary social issues. The Qur'an serves as a critique of social inequality, as evident in various verses that condemn the concentration of wealth and economic exploitation. Q.S. al-Hasyr verse 7 states, "so that wealth does not circulate among the rich among you alone". Sayyid Qutb interprets this verse as "Islam's rejection of exploitative capitalism" and emphasizes the need for a just distribution of wealth (Qutb 1979, 234).

Asghar Ali Engineer expands on this interpretation by emphasizing that the Qur'an "consistently sides with the oppressed and marginalized" and provides a theological basis

for social transformation. (Engineer 1990, 45). In the context of social interpretation, this structural criticism is not only destructive but also constructive in offering alternative social systems. The concept of empowering the marginalized (mustaḍ'afīn) is a central theme in the Qur'an. Q.S. al-Qasas verse 5 states, "And We intend to bestow bounty on the earth and make them leaders and inheritors."

Ali Shariati, in On the Sociology of Islam, interprets this verse as a "divine promise for the empowerment of the oppressed" and bases it on "*Islamic liberation theology*" (Shariati 1979, 67). In the context of contemporary social interpretation, this concept is particularly relevant to understanding the Qur'an's stance on issues of poverty, marginalization, and structural injustice. The vision of an ideal society from a Qur'anic perspective is reflected in the concept of madinah fadilah, or a just civil society. The Qur'an not only critiques the existing system but also provides a blueprint for an alternative society. QS. An-Nahl verse 90 provides a comprehensive formula: "Indeed Allah enjoins justice and good deeds and gives to relatives and forbids indecency, evil and hostility".

Muhammad Iqbal interprets this verse as a "comprehensive social charter" which includes the dimensions of justice, altruism, and social solidarity (Iqbal 1934, 156). In the context of social interpretation, this vision serves as a guide for transforming society into a more just and humane order. The theoretical framework of social relations in this interpretation suggests that the Qur'an addresses not only individuals but also society as a collective entity. The social interpretation approach (*at-tafsīr al-ijtimā'ī*) provides analytical tools to understand how the messages of the Qur'an can be actualized in the context of complex and dynamic social life. In the contemporary era, this framework becomes increasingly relevant for addressing various social challenges and offering an alternative vision for a just and sustainable social transformation.

## Contemporary Social Interpretation Methodology

The methodology of contemporary social interpretation (*manhajiyyat at-tafsīr al-ijtimā'ī al-mu'aṣir*) represents a systematic development of the classical Qur'anic hermeneutic tradition, responding to the epistemological challenges of the modern era. In this context, methodology is not only concerned with the technique of interpretation, but also with the philosophical framework and interdisciplinary approach that enable the Qur'an to speak relevantly to contemporary society. As emphasized by Hassan Hanafi in *Min al-'Aqīdah ilā*

*al-Thawrah*, the methodology of social interpretation must be able to "transform the text from the past to the present and from Theory to application" (Hanafi 1988, 234).

Contemporary social interpretation methodology was developed as a response to the limitations of conventional interpretation approaches in responding to the complexity of modern social issues. Mohammed Arkoun, in "Rethinking Islam," asserts that "contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics must engage with modern critical methods while maintaining its Islamic authenticity" (Arkoun and Lee 2019, p. 45). It requires the development of a methodology that is capable of bridging textual authenticity with contextual relevance..

**1. Social Hermeneutics Approach**

The social hermeneutics approach in contemporary interpretation is a synthesis between the Western philosophical hermeneutics tradition and authentic Islamic epistemology. However, in this context, the adoption of hermeneutics does not mean total acceptance of the secular worldview, but rather selective appropriation that is in line with the fundamental principles of Islam. The integration of philosophical hermeneutics with interpretation begins with an understanding of the dialogical nature between the text and the reader. Hans-Georg Gadamer in Truth and Method asserts that understanding always involves a "fusion of horizons" between the horizon of the text and the horizon of the interpreter (Gadamer 1989, 306). However, in the context of Islamic social interpretation, this concept must be modified to recognize the divine authority of the Qur'an. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd in *Mafhūm an-Naṣṣ* explains that hermeneutics in Islam must consider the "divine nature of the Qur'anic text," which distinguishes it from other texts (Zayd, Nasr Hamid Abu 1992, 87).

The dialectic between the text horizon and the reader's horizon in social interpretation does not imply relativism of interpretation, but rather a dynamic interaction guided by strict methodological principles. Fazlur Rahman developed the "double movement" method, which involves movement from the present situation to the Qur'anic era and then returning to the present situation with an enriched understanding (Rahman 1980, 5). This method enables the interpreter to grasp the situational context of the Qur'an verses while simultaneously extracting universal principles applicable to the contemporary context.

Contextualizing meaning in contemporary social settings requires a sophisticated understanding of both textual semantics and social dynamics. Abdullah Saeed, in "Interpreting the Qur'an," emphasizes the need for a "contextual approach" that takes into account the "socio-historical context of revelation, linguistic context, and contemporary context of interpretation" (Saeed 2014, 127). In practice, this means that the interpreter must possess not only traditional Qur'anic knowledge but also expertise in contemporary social sciences. Quraish Shihab in *Membumikan Al Qur'an* develops an approach that he calls "contextual-intertextual interpretation," which combines an understanding of internal coherence within the Qur'an with external social context (Shihab 1992, 67). This approach allows social interpretation to maintain textual integrity while achieving social relevance.

**2. Socio-Historical Analysis Methods**

The method of socio-historical analysis in contemporary social interpretation is a development of the *asbāb an-nuzūl* tradition, which is expanded with analytical tools from modern social sciences. This method not only focuses on the immediate circumstances of the revelation but also on the broader social structures and historical processes that form the context of the Qur'an's reception and interpretation. Historical criticism of the social conditions surrounding the revelation involves the reconstruction of the social reality of 7th-century Arab society, utilizing multiple sources and a critical methodology. Montgomery Watt, in Muhammad at Mecca and Muhammad at Medina, demonstrates that understanding the social structure, economic systems, and political dynamics of pre-Islamic Arab society is crucial to comprehending the revolutionary character of the Qur'anic message (Watt 1956).

However, in the context of Islamic social interpretation, historical criticism must be conducted within the Islamic epistemological framework. It means that the acceptance of the historicity of revelation does not lead to historical relativism, which reduces the universal validity of the Qur'an's message. As emphasized by Seyyed Hossein Nasr in “Islamic Philosophy in Contemporary Persia”, that "historical consciousness dalam Islam harus balanced dengan awareness terhadap trans-historical dimension wahyu" (Fitriono 2023). Sociological analysis of pre-Islamic Arab society provides a background understanding of the transformative impact of Islam. Jawad Ali in *al-Mufaṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-'Arab Qabl al-Islām* provides a comprehensive analysis of the social stratification, tribal organization, economic systems, and religious practices of the Jahiliyyah society (J. Ali

1970). This understanding is crucial for appreciating the revolutionary character of social reforms introduced by the Qur'an.

Projecting Qur'anic values into the contemporary context requires a careful analysis of the continuities and discontinuities between past and present social conditions. Abdolkarim Soroush, in Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam, develops the concept of "contraction and expansion of religious knowledge," which allows for a dynamic interpretation of religious values in changing social contexts (Soroush 2000, 56). In contemporary social interpretation practice, this socio-historical method is applied to issues such as gender relations, economic justice, political authority, and interfaith relations. Amina Wadud, in Qur'an and Woman, demonstrates how socio-historical analysis can be employed to reinterpret verses related to women's roles in society (Wadud 1999, 23).

**3. Interdisciplinary Approach**

The interdisciplinary approach in contemporary social interpretation acknowledges the complexity of social phenomena, which necessitates the use of multiple analytical tools. This approach does not mean eclectic borrowing from various disciplines, but systematic integration guided by the Islamic worldview and methodological coherence. The integration of sociology, anthropology, and social psychology in interpretation enables a deeper understanding of the social dimensions of the Qur'an's verses. Sociology provides tools for analyzing social structures, institutions, and processes. Anthropology contributes to understanding cultural dimensions and symbolic systems. Social psychology helps in understanding individual behavior in social contexts. Akbar Ahmed, in Postmodernism and Islam, demonstrates how anthropological insights can enrich the understanding of Qur'anic concepts such as ummah, hijrah, and jihad in contemporary contexts (Ahmed 2013, 134). However, he also warns against uncritical adoption of Western social science paradigms that may conflict with the Islamic worldview.

The utilization of contemporary social theories in interpretation must be done selectively and critically. Theories that are compatible with Islamic anthropology and cosmology can be integrated, while those that contradict fundamental Islamic principles must be rejected or modified. Ziauddin Sardar, in Islamic Futures, emphasizes the need for the "Islamization of knowledge" that allows for the utilization of modern academic tools without compromising Islamic authenticity (Sardar 1985, 78). The synthesis between tradition and modernity in the methodology of social interpretation requires a sophisticated

understanding of both traditional Islamic scholarship and contemporary academic developments. It is not a superficial syncretism, but a creative synthesis that produces new forms of knowledge that are both Islamic and contemporary in nature.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in "Knowledge and the Sacred," argues that true synthesis between tradition and modernity is only possible if modernity is approached from the perspective of tradition, not the other way around (Nasr 1972, 145). In the context of social interpretation, this means that Islamic traditional scholarship provides a foundational framework, while modern tools are used as auxiliary instruments. Nurcholish Madjid, in Islam, Doctrine, and Civilization, develops an approach he calls "renewed traditionalism," which maintains Islamic authenticity while engaging constructively with modern intellectual developments (Madjid 2019, 234). This approach allows social interpretation to remain rooted in Islamic tradition while being responsive to contemporary challenges.

Muhammad Iqbal in The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam provides a philosophical foundation for an interdisciplinary approach by emphasizing that "Islam as a dynamic worldview must constantly engage with new forms of knowledge to maintain its vitality." (Iqbal 1934, 178). However, this engagement must be guided by Islamic epistemological principles and not lead to intellectual dependency.

In its practical application, this interdisciplinary approach has produced various innovative studies in social interpretation. For example, studies on Islamic economics that integrate Qur'anic principles with modern economic theories, or studies on Islamic political thought that combine Qur'anic concepts with contemporary political science. This contemporary social interpretation methodology demonstrates that the Islamic interpretation tradition possesses the capacity for constant renewal and adaptation without compromising its essential character. In the era of globalization and rapid social change, this methodology is essential for maintaining the relevance of the Qur'an as a guide for human society while preserving its transcendent and universal message.

## CONCLUSION

The Qur'an serves as a comprehensive guide to establishing a just and harmonious social order. The social interpretation of the Qur'an has evolved from a classical textual approach to a modern contextual one, responding to contemporary social dynamics. Its historical contribution began during the time of the Prophet, was systematized by classical

scholars, and enriched by modern figures such as Muhammad Abduh, Sayyid Qutb, Hamka, and Quraish Shihab. Based on maqashid al-shari'ah and maslahah, this interpretation is relevant to issues of justice and pluralism. There are four types of social interpretation—reformist, revolutionary, contextual, and transformative—that offer different approaches to social transformation. Contemporary methodology combines hermeneutics and socio-historical analysis to maintain a balance between the authenticity of the text and the relevance of the context. Thus, social interpretation of the Qur'an becomes an important instrument in responding to modern social challenges without ignoring the original values of the Qur'an.

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