



The Concept of 'Kafir' in the Qur'an Revisited: Comparative Insights from Marah Labid and the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Exegeses

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Abstract: This study revisits the concept of 'kafir' in the Qur'an by conducting a comparative analysis of two prominent exegeses: Marah Labid and the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Tafsir. The objective is to explore how different interpretative frameworks affect the understanding of 'kafir' and its implications for contemporary Islamic thought. The research addresses a significant gap in the literature, as most existing studies focus on either classical or modern interpretations without comparing traditional and state-sanctioned exegeses. The study employs a qualitative content analysis method, systematically comparing the thematic and contextual interpretations in both tafsirs. The findings reveal substantial differences in the conceptualization of 'kafir,' with Marah Labid providing a more traditional and juridical perspective, while the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Tafsir emphasizes a contextual and inclusive approach. These results suggest that contemporary exegesis can influence socio-political attitudes towards non-Muslims, highlighting the dynamic nature of Qur'anic interpretation. Theoretically, the study contributes to the discourse on tafsir by demonstrating the fluidity and adaptability of Islamic exegesis in response to evolving socio-political contexts. The findings encourage further exploration of how institutional and historical contexts shape religious interpretations, ultimately affecting both theological understanding and practical engagement with religious diversity.

Contribution: This study contributes to the field of Qur'anic exegesis by revealing how different interpretative frameworks in traditional and state-sanctioned tafsir influence the understanding of 'kafir' and its implications for contemporary Islamic discourse.

Keywords: *Kafir in the Qur'an, Comparative Exegesis, Marah Labid Tafsir, Ministry of Religious Affairs' Tafsir, Interpretative Frameworks.*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini meninjau kembali konsep 'kafir' dalam Al-Qur'an melalui analisis komparatif terhadap dua tafsir terkemuka: Tafsir Marah Labid dan Tafsir Kementerian Agama. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana perbedaan kerangka interpretatif memengaruhi pemahaman tentang 'kafir' serta implikasinya terhadap pemikiran Islam kontemporer. Penelitian ini mengisi kesenjangan signifikan dalam literatur, karena sebagian besar studi yang ada berfokus pada interpretasi klasik atau modern tanpa membandingkan tafsir tradisional dan tafsir yang disahkan oleh negara. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode analisis isi kualitatif dengan membandingkan secara sistematis interpretasi tematik dan kontekstual dalam kedua tafsir. Hasil penelitian mengungkap perbedaan substansial dalam konseptualisasi 'kafir,' di mana Tafsir Marah Labid menawarkan perspektif yang lebih tradisional dan yuridis, sementara Tafsir Kementerian Agama menekankan pendekatan kontekstual dan inklusif. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa tafsir kontemporer dapat memengaruhi sikap sosial-politik terhadap non-Muslim, sekaligus menyoroti sifat dinamis dari interpretasi Al-Qur'an. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada diskursus tafsir dengan menunjukkan fleksibilitas dan adaptabilitas tafsir Islam dalam merespons perubahan konteks sosial-politik. Hasil penelitian ini mendorong eksplorasi lebih lanjut mengenai bagaimana konteks kelembagaan dan historis membentuk interpretasi keagamaan, yang pada akhirnya memengaruhi pemahaman teologis serta keterlibatan praktis dalam keberagaman agama.

Kontribusi: Penelitian ini berkontribusi dalam kajian tafsir dengan mengungkap bagaimana perbedaan kerangka interpretatif dalam tafsir tradisional dan tafsir negara memengaruhi pemahaman tentang 'kafir' serta implikasinya terhadap wacana Islam kontemporer.

Kata kunci: *Kafir dalam Al-Qur'an, Tafsir Komparatif, Tafsir Marah Labid, Tafsir Kementerian Agama, Kerangka Interpretatif.*





Introduction

The debate over the concept of 'kafir' in the Qur'ān has been ongoing for a long time and is one of the main topics in Islamic exegetical studies.¹ Islamic scholars have a variety of perspectives in interpreting this term, depending on their methodological backgrounds and inclinations of thought.² Some interpreters understand 'kafir' in a purely theological sense as those who reject faith in Allah and His Messenger. Meanwhile, other mufasirs give it a more contextual meaning by considering social, cultural and political aspects. This difference in interpretation has a significant impact, not only in academic studies, but also in religious discourse and the social life of Muslim communities.³ Therefore, the study of the concept of 'kafir' in various interpretations becomes important to see how this term is understood and used in various contexts.

Conflicts about disbelief have occurred in Indonesia, one of which occurred in DKI Jakarta in the case of blasphemy committed by Ahok, who was later made a suspect due to his statement during the campaign using Surah Al-Maidah verse 51. His viral statement then heated up within the Muslim community itself, causing massive demonstrations and giving rise to the 212 group.⁴ In this blasphemy case, the term kafir leader emerged, which indirectly created a stigma in society that differences in beliefs between religions, even between schools of thought, would cause conflict in society.⁵ Narrow-mindedness, self-righteousness, and the wrong assumption that others are different from oneself, are the root causes of all the above conflicts. This is also known as radicalism. Because it contradicts the principles of religious tolerance, mazhab, and respect for others, narrow-

¹ Marilyn Robinson Waldman, "The Development of the Concept of Kufr in the Qur'ān," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88, no. 3 (1968): 442-55, <https://doi.org/10.2307/596869>; Nafisatul Muawwanah, "The Evolution of 'Kafir' in the Qur'an: A Diachronic Study on the Socio-Political Influences Shaping Its Meaning," *Journal of Qur'anic and Hadith Studies* 25, no. 1 (June 14, 2024): 187-220, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v25i1.5564>.

² Rudy al Hana, "The Concept of Kafir from the Perspective of Izzat Darwazah and Its Implications for Contemporary Reality," *Islamica: Journal of Islamic Studies* 14, no. 2 (March 1, 2020): 171-93, <https://doi.org/10.15642/islamica.2020.14.2.171-193>; Ainuki Astna Asysyifa and Munawir, "Interpretation of Permission To Fight Kafir People In The Qur'an Surah Al-Hajj Verse 39 (A Reading of Hans George Gadamer's Hermeneutics)," *Al-Afkār, Journal For Islamic Studies* 6, no. 3 (July 4, 2023): 713-28, <https://doi.org/10.31943/afkarjournal.v6i3.697>.

³ Durrotun Nashihah and Anshori, "Analysis of the Meaning of Mu'min, Kafir and Munafiq in Surat al-Baqarah from the Perspective of Tafsir al-Ibriz by KH. Bisri Musthafa," *Journal of Islamic Civilization* 3, no. 2 (2021): 174-88, <https://doi.org/10.33086/jic.v3i2.2560>.

⁴ Nadirsyah Hosen, "Race and Religion in the 2012 Jakarta Gubernatorial Election: The Case of Jokowi-Ahok," in *Religion, Law and Intolerance in Indonesia* (Routledge, 2016); - Moch Nur Ichwan, "MUI, Islamist Movement, and the Floating Ummah," *Ma'arif: Currents of Islamic and Social Thought*, June 2003, 87-104.

⁵ Kurnia Arofah, "Rhetorical Analysis of Hate Speech: Case Study of Hate Speech Related to Ahok's Religion Blasphemy Case," *Mediator: Journal of Communication* 11, no. 1 (June 29, 2018): 91-105, <https://doi.org/10.29313/mediator.v11i1.3119>; Ihsan Yilmaz, Nicholas Morieson, and Hasnan Bachtiar, "Civilizational Populism in Indonesia: The Case of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI)," *Religions* 13, no. 12 (December 2022): 1208, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13121208>.





mindedness must be eradicated. If this is left unchecked, then religious harmony will be further jeopardized.

The concept of 'disbelief' in the Qur'an has a broad and complex dimension of meaning. Etymologically, the word 'kafir' comes from the root word 'kafara' which means to cover or deny. In the Qur'an, this term does not always refer to a single meaning, but can have different connotations depending on the verse being studied.⁶ In some verses, the word 'kafir' refers to people who consciously reject the truth of Islam, while in other verses, the term is used in a broader context, including against groups that do not accept the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. Therefore, understanding the word 'kafir' in the Qur'an must be done comprehensively by paying attention to its linguistic, historical and contextual aspects.

Research on the concept of "kafir" in the Qur'an has been conducted by various scholars with diverse approaches. Marilyn Robinson Waldman (1968)⁸ examines the development of the term "kufr" in the Qur'an and finds that this concept has evolved in its use, from simply rejecting the truth to becoming a more complex theological category. Meanwhile, Nafisatul Muawwanah (2024)⁹ analyzes the socio-political influences on the meaning of "kafir" in a diachronic study, showing that the interpretation of this term changes along with the historical context. Rudy al Hana (2020)¹⁰ examines Izzat Darwazah's perspective on the concept of "kafir" and its implications in contemporary reality, revealing that Darwazah's understanding emphasizes moral and spiritual aspects rather than just religious identity. Ainuki Astna Asysyifa and Munawir (2023)¹¹ used Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic approach to understand the permission to fight against the infidels in Surah Al-Hajj verse 39, concluding that the verse should be read in the context of self-defense, not aggression. Durrotun Nashihah and Anshori (2021)¹² in their analysis of Tafsir al-Ibriz by KH. Bisri Musthafa comparing the concepts of mu'min, kafir, and munafiq in Surah Al-Baqarah, found that this tafsir emphasizes the dimensions of behavior and heart in understanding the three categories. These

⁶ Brahim Charafi, "Le Takfir et Le Takfirisme Les Origines et Les Conséquences. : Takfir and Takfirism the Origins and Consequences," *Journal of Science and Knowledge Horizons* 4, no. 1 (August 14, 2024): 18-38; Ahmad Zaiyadi, "Locality of Tafsir Nusantara: The Dynamics of Qur'anic Studies in Indonesia," *Al-Bayan: Journal of al-Qur'an and Hadith Sciences* 1, no. 1 (August 7, 2018): 01–26, <https://doi.org/10.35132/albayan.v1i1.1>.

⁷ Asma Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims: History and Memory* (Simon and Schuster, 2013).

⁸ Waldman, "The Development of the Concept of Kufr in the Qur'an."

⁹ Nashihah and Anshori, "Analysis of the Meaning of Mu'min, Kafir and Munafiq in Surah al-Baqarah Perspective of Tafsir al-Ibriz by KH. Bisri Musthafa."

¹⁰ Hana, "The Concept of Kafir in the Perspective of Izzat Darwazah and Its Implications for Contemporary Reality."

¹¹ Asysyifa and Munawir, "Interpretation of Permission To Fight Kafir People In The Qur'an Surah Al-Hajj Verse 39 (A Reading of Hans George Gadamer's Hermeneutics)."

¹² Nashihah and Anshori, "Analysis of the Meaning of Mu'min, Kafir and Munafiq in Surah al-Baqarah Perspective of Tafsir al-Ibriz by KH. Bisri Musthafa."





studies show that the concept of "kafir" in the Qur'an has a dynamic meaning and depends on the social, political and theological context in which it is embedded.

Studies on the concept of 'kafir' have been conducted by many classical and modern mufasirs. One of the classic tafsir works that provides a deep understanding of this term is *Marah Labid* by Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani. As a Nusantara scholar who has a great influence in the Islamic world, Sheikh Nawawi interprets the concept of 'kafir' with a traditional approach and adheres to the authoritative books of interpretation in Islam.¹³ *Tafsir Marah Labid* not only represents traditional Islamic thought, but also reflects the intellectual dynamics of Islam in the archipelago during its time. The interpretation of the term 'kafir' in this tafsir tends to follow the theological framework that has developed in the Sunni Islamic tradition, emphasizing normative aspects in understanding groups categorized as 'kafir'.¹⁴

On the other hand, the tafsir published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (MoRA) reflects a more contextual and moderate approach. As an official state institution, the Ministry has an important role in formulating religious policies that are in line with the principles of diversity and social harmony in Indonesia.¹⁵ In its interpretations, the Ministry often emphasizes the importance of understanding the concept of 'kafir' in a more inclusive framework and not simply based on the dichotomy between Muslims and non-Muslims. This approach reflects the government's efforts to build a moderate Islamic discourse that is acceptable to a society that lives in religious and cultural diversity.¹⁶ Therefore, Kemenag's tafsir becomes one of the important references in understanding how the concept of 'kafir' is reconstructed in the Indonesian context.

A comparison between tafsir *Marah Labid* and tafsir Kemenag is relevant to be studied in order to understand how the concept of 'kafir' is perceived in various Islamic contexts. *Tafsir Marah Labid*, which has a traditional style, provides an illustration of how classical Islamic understanding

¹³ Syamsul Bahri, Romlah Widayati, and M. Ziyadul Haq, "Language Studies in Tafsir: Analysis of Kitab Marah Labid Li Kasfyi Ma'na Al-Qur'an Al-Majid by Shaykh An-Nawawi Al-Bantani," *El-Afkār: Journal of Islamic Thought and Hadith Interpretation* 12, no. 2 (April 23, 2023): 482-96, <https://doi.org/10.29300/jpkth.v12i2.3108>; Kamran Asat Irsyady et al., "The Authorship Of Shaykh Nawawi Al-Bantani In Arabic Linguistics Studies," *JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAM* 17, no. 2 (December 25, 2023): 259–82, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2023.17.2.259-282>.

¹⁴ Ahmad Fawaid and Viatul Karimah, "IDEOLOGICAL BIASES IN THE QURANIC EXEGESIS: Nawawi al-Bantani and Muhammad Uthaimin's Views on Heresy," *TAJDID: Journal of Ushuluddin Sciences* 21, no. 1 (June 13, 2022): 53–80, <https://doi.org/10.30631/tjd.v21i1.239>.

¹⁵ Taufik Rahman, "Inter-Religious Dialogue as a Reflection of Religious Moderation in the Perspective of the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Tafsir," *Al-Wasatiyah: Journal of Religious Moderation* 1, no. 2 (December 25, 2022): 131–52, <https://doi.org/10.30631/jrm.v1i2.14>.

¹⁶ Muhammad Esa Prasastia Amnesti, "Characteristics of the Interpretation of the Quran and its Tafsir by the Team of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia," *Ascarya: Journal of Islamic Science, Culture, and Social Studies* 1, no. 2 (August 6, 2021): 93–110, <https://doi.org/10.53754/iscs.v1i2.18>.





interprets this term, while the Ministry of Religious Affairs' *tafsir* offers a more modern and contextual perspective. By comparing these two commentaries, we can see how social, political and cultural changes affect the way Islam is understood and interpreted. In addition, this study also contributes to the academic discourse on pluralism, tolerance and interfaith relations in contemporary Islam. Thus, this study is expected to provide new insights in understanding how the concept of 'kafir' in the Qur'an is reinterpreted in various Islamic traditions.

This research uses a qualitative method with a library research approach to analyze the concept of "kafir" in the Qur'an based on Sheikh Nawawi's *Tafsir Marah Labid* and the Ministry of Religious Affairs' *Tafsir*.¹⁷ The main data sources consist of the two commentaries, which are comparatively studied to identify similarities and differences in their interpretation of the term "kafir." In addition, this study also draws on the literature of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In addition, this research also draws on previous studies, such as those conducted by Marilyn Robinson Waldman, Nafisatul Muawwanah, and Rudy al Hana, to gain greater insight into the development of this concept in classical and modern Islamic discourse.¹⁸ The analysis technique used is content analysis, focusing on how each *tafsir* understands the meaning of "kafir" in theological, social and ethical aspects.¹⁹ A hermeneutic approach is also used to interpret the meaning of the term "kafir" in a historical and sociological context, in line with Asma Afsaruddin's thoughts. Thus, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive and contextual understanding of the concept of "kafir" in the Qur'an and its implications in contemporary Muslim society.

Dynamics of the Definition of Infidel over Time

The dynamics of the definition of *kafir* have changed over time. Etymologically, the word "*kafir*" comes from the Arabic "*kafara-yakfuru-kufran*," which means to cover or hide something.²⁰ In English, this concept is similar to the word "cover," which also means to cover. Meanwhile, in a general sense, *kafir* is defined as someone who does not believe in Allah and His Messenger. Thus, the root word "*kafir*" derived from "*kafara*" linguistically means "to cover." In some meanings, the night is also called

¹⁷ John W. Creswell et al., "Qualitative Research Designs: Selection and Implementation," *The Counseling Psychologist* 35, no. 2 (March 1, 2007): 236–64, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011100006287390>.

¹⁸ Anna M. Ortiz, "The Qualitative Interview," in *Research in the College Context*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2015).

¹⁹ Creswell et al., "Qualitative Research Designs."

²⁰ G. Morgenstierne, "Dardic and Kāfir Languages," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition Online (EI-2 English)* (Brill), accessed March 1, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0155.





a disbeliever because it covers all objects with darkness, just as a farmer is called a disbeliever because he covers the seeds in the soil.²¹

Yusuf Qardlawi explains that in terms of language, "kufr" means hiding something.²² Therefore, the night is called kafir because it hides people in its darkness, and the farmer is called kafir because he hides seeds in the earth. In the context of theology, the term kafir is used to refer to someone who denies the oneness of God, prophethood, or the laws associated with both.²³ Sometimes, the word is also applied to someone who breaks the law and does not thank God. This concept then develops in various interpretations and religious thoughts, where the meaning of disbelief is not only limited to matters of faith but also includes moral and social aspects of human life.²⁴

In another perspective, kafir can also be understood as the antonym of faith. If faith is defined as belief or justification, then disbelief means rejection of that belief.... Ibn Mandzur in *Lisan al-'Arab* defines kafir as something that covers or hides. He categorizes the meaning of disbelief into several categories, namely as the opposite of faith, the opposite of gratitude, a form of denial of Allah both with the heart and the tongue, rejection of the unity of Allah, and a form of awareness of the existence of Allah but with reluctance to accept His religion.²⁵ These meanings show that the term kafir has complex dimensions and cannot be simplified to only one understanding.

M. Quraish Shihab in his tafsir also explains that disbelief is understood as the act of closing. Based on this interpretation, the word kafir can be identified in three main meanings. First, denying the oneness of Allah and the apostolate of Muhammad PBUH, as mentioned in QS. Saba' [34]: 3. Second, not being grateful for Allah's blessings as explained in QS. Ibrahim [14]: 7. Third, not practicing divine guidance despite believing in it, as mentioned in QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 85. With these

²¹ Che Nur Ilyani Bt Yusof, "The Position and Rights of Kafir Dhimmis Under the Islamic Criminal Law," 2004, <https://e-imtiyaz.usim.edu.my/handle/123456789/10412>; Saodah Abd Rahman, "The Categories of Infidelity in the Qur'an," *Journal of Islam in Asia* (E-ISSN 2289-8077) 10, no. 2 (2013): 129–129, <https://doi.org/10.31436/jia.v10i2.400>.

²² Amrin Amrin and Amirullah Amirullah, "Contemporary Legal Istimbah: Study on the Theory of Changes in Fatwa According to Yusuf Qardhawi," *Mizan: Journal of Islamic Law* 6, no. 1 (April 17, 2022): 89–108, <https://doi.org/10.32507/mizan.v6i1.1244>.

²³ Didi Jubaidi and Khoirunnisa Khoirunnisa, "Exploring the Meaning of Faith and Kufr: Perspectives of Islamic Theological Schools," SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, September 30, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5068314>.

²⁴ Didik Andriawan et al., "The Late Period Mutazilite Mufassir: A Biographical Study of Hākim Al-Jushamī," *Tribakti: Journal of Islamic Thought* 35, no. 2 (July 30, 2024): 143–60, <https://doi.org/10.33367/tribakti.v35i2.5109>; "The Evolution of Kufr, Takfir and Jihad," *ITCT* (blog), May 3, 2024, <https://www.itct.org.uk/the-evolution-of-kufr-takfir-and-jihad/>.

²⁵ Ibn Manzur, "Lisan Al-'arab," 1997, https://www.euk-straelen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/euk/Arabischer_Katalog.pdf.



various interpretations, the term kafir is one of the dynamic concepts that continues to evolve along with the changing times and differences in theological perspectives in various Islamic traditions.²⁶

In a historical context, the meaning of kafir also changes in accordance with the development of religious and social thought. In the early days of Islam, the term kafir referred to people who openly rejected the teachings of Islam and opposed the propagation of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. However, in the course of Islamic history, this term then experienced a development in its use. In some contexts, kafir does not always refer to people who do not embrace Islam, but also to individuals who are considered not to practice religious teachings consistently or violate the basic principles taught in Islam.

Moreover, in various schools of Islamic thought, the term kafir is used with different nuances. Some scholars interpret kafir more strictly as an explicit rejection of Islam, while others understand the term with a more flexible and contextual approach. For example, in the Sufism tradition, the concept of kafir not only related to belief in God, but can also be associated with the state of one's heart that is closed off from the light of truth. In this context, a person can be formally Muslim, but still be called a kafir if his heart is closed from divine values.²⁷

In modern developments, the term kafir has also been debated in Islamic discourse, especially in the context of pluralism and interfaith relations. Some contemporary scholars emphasize the need for a more inclusive interpretation and do not easily disbelieve individuals or other groups based only on differences in beliefs.²⁸ Conversely, there are also those who maintain the traditional definition by referring to classical texts. This discussion is increasingly relevant in the context of globalization, where interfaith interactions are increasingly complex and require a more moderate and contextual approach in understanding the term kafir.²⁹

From these various perspectives, it can be understood that the word "kafir" in terms of etymology means to close or hide something from others. This meaning has a wide scope, not only in the linguistic realm but also in a theological context, where the term kafir is understood as a denial

²⁶ M. Quraish Shihab, *The Quran and Its Meanings* (Lentera Hati, 2020); Muhammad Nabiil Akbar and M. Ag Drs. Suharjanto, "The Meaning of Kafir in Tafsir Al-Mishbah by M. Quraish Shihab" (undergraduate, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, 2018), <https://eprints.ums.ac.id/62516/>; Ach Zayyadi et al, "THE CONCEPT OF KAFIR PERSPECTIVE OF QURAISH SHIHAB AND ITS IMPLICATIONS WITH THE CONTEXT OF INDONESIA," *Risalah, Journal of Education and Islamic Studies* 8, no. 1 (March 23, 2022): 148–67, https://doi.org/10.31943/jurnal_risalah.v8i1.218.

²⁷ M. Quraish Shihab, *Toleransi, Ketuhanan, Kemanusiaan, dan Keberagamaan* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2022).

²⁸ Rebecca Foley, "Muslim Women's Challenges to Islamic Law The Case of Malaysia," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 2004): 53–84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461674032000165932>.

²⁹ Shoaib Ahmed Malik, Elvira Kulieva, and Ayub Ayub, "Accepting Evolution Entails Kufr? A Critical Appraisal of Nuh Ha Mim Keller's Fatwa," *Journal of Qur'anic and Hadith Studies* 22, no. 2 (July 30, 2021): 505–36, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.2021.2202-12>.





or rejection of faith in God. In addition, the term kafir also has social and political implications in Islamic history, especially in the relationship between Muslims and other groups outside Islam. Thus, understanding the meaning of kafir requires a comprehensive approach, which not only looks from the point of view of language and theology, but also in a broader social, cultural and historical context.

The Meaning of Kafir in Tafsir Marah Labid and Tafsir of the Ministry of Religious Affairs

Raghib Al-Isfahan explains that the meaning of disbelief refers to two forms of denial, namely denial of the Sharia and the favors given by Allah SWT. The biggest form of denial is denial of monotheism and denial of sharia or prophethood. The phrase *al-kufran* (الْكُفَّارُان) is mostly used to express kufr of favors. And the word *al-kufr* (الْكُفُّرُ) is mostly used to express the meaning of kufr in religion. As for the word *al-kufr* (الْكُفُّرُ) can be used to express the meaning of both kufr of favors and kufr of religion.³⁰

Based on Raghib Al-Isfahani's explanation, we can understand that the context of kafir mentioned in the Qur'an has two links, namely the denial of Tawheed and the favor of the bounty of Allah SWT. So, in the next discussion, several verses related to kafir will be explained. However, please note that this discussion will not discuss all verses, but only some that are considered to represent the context of the verses of disbelief in the Qur'an.

So, the following is a study of the interpretation in Tafsir *Marah Labid* and the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the verses of disbelief, including:

1. Al-Baqarah/2: 34

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِإِدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ قَالَ وَأَسْتَكِبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكُفَّارِينَ

(Remember when We said to the angels, "Bow down to Adam!" So, they prostrated themselves, except Iblis). He refused and arrogated himself, and he was among the disbelievers. Iblis, like the angels, also received a command from Allah to prostrate to Adam. Iblis was from the jinn. (Qs. Al-Baqarah/2:34).

³⁰ Raghib Al-Isfahani, *Dictionary of the Qur'an*, Translated by Ahmad Zaini Dahlan, (Depok: Pustaka Khazanah Fawa'id, 2017), Cet.1, Volume 3, p. 337. 337





In this verse, we can observe that the phrase 'kafir' is mentioned. Sheikh Nawawi and the Tafsir of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in this verse view that the word kafir used in the verse means denial or rejection. As can be observed in the following explanation: *In this verse (And when We said to the angels, 'Prostrate to Adam), as a form of respect to Adam without placing the forehead on the ground. (So they prostrated except Iblis). He rejected the command of Allah and was arrogant, i.e. he felt too high to prostrate himself to Adam, (and he became one of the disbelievers) for rejecting the command of Allah. It is said that Satan, although busy in his worship, was actually a hypocrite and disbeliever, and this prostration took place before Adam entered Paradise.*³¹

Meanwhile, a similar explanation is also found in the interpretation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Note the following explanation: *Iblis rejected Allah's command that told him to bow down to Adam and felt superior to Adam to be the caliph. As a result, Iblis was included in the category of creatures who disbelieved in Allah, and there is an opinion that says that Iblis was the first creature to defy Allah's command. There is another opinion that says that Iblis is the source of all jinn, just as Adam is the source of all humans. The jinn have children. They lived on earth before Adam was created by Allah, and they corrupted it. So, when Allah told the angels that He would make Adam the caliph of the earth, the angels asked, "Are you going to make caliphs of the earth those who love to do mischief and shed blood?" Therefore, the angels thought that when humans ruled the world, they would also act like the jinn.*³²

2. Al-Kahf/18: 100-101

وَعَرَضْنَا جَهَنَّمَ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْكُفَّارِينَ عَرْضًا ﴿١٠١﴾ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَانُوا لَا يَسْتَطِعُونَ سَمِعًا.

We will show Jahanam clearly on that Day to the disbelievers. (Those whose eyes (hearts) are closed from remembering Me and they are unable to hear. (Qs. Al-Kahf/18: 100-101).

Sheikh Nawawi in his tafsir explains that the word kafir mentioned in the verse has a closed meaning. As can be seen in the following explanation: *The first verse (100), (And We showed Jahanam clearly on that day to the disbelievers) i.e. We showed them Hell, while they were close to it on the day We gathered all creatures as a terrible display. This will be a punishment for them because of the great grief they*

³¹ Muhammad Nawawi, *Mara>h Labi>d Likasyfi Ma'na Al-Qur'a>n Al-Majii>d*, (Lebanon: Da>r al-Kutub Al-'A>lamiyah, 1997 CE), Cet 1, Volume 1, p. 16. 16.

³² Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, *Al-Qur'an and its Tafsir (Improved Edition)*, (Jakarta: Widya Cahaya, 2011), Volume 1, p. 83.





will experience from seeing it and hearing its growling and hissing.". The second verse (101): "Those whose eyes (hearts) are attached to the world (in a closed state) i.e. they are unable to see because they are very tight (from noticing the signs of my greatness) in a way that is in accordance with My position and from My book, so they do not get guidance from it (and they are unable to hear).³³

Meanwhile, the word kafir contained in the verse is explained in the interpretation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs as a form of denial of monotheism, so that in the hereafter there will be a painful punishment. As explained below: *The first verse (100), And We showed the hell of Jahanam on the day the trumpet was blown to the disbelievers so that they saw its awesomeness and its extraordinary ferocity and they also heard its sound and its very frightening burst of fire, where they were sure that they would soon be plunged into it and could not escape from it. The second verse (101) explains that this painful punishment is reserved for those whose eyes are always closed from noticing the signs of Allah's greatness in this world. They never think of the evidences of His power, never repent to their Lord, never follow His commands and stay away from His prohibitions, as if they close their ears do not want to hear the warnings of Allah. Such a punishment was inflicted upon them as a result of their dabbling in sin and transgression, following the temptation of the devil into the traps set by the devil, so that their hearts were locked by God so that they could no longer use their eyes and ears to receive guidance and truth. And Allah explains that whatever they worship besides Allah cannot benefit them in the least.*³⁴

3. Al-Baqarah/2: 6-7

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَإِنَّ رَبَّهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ٦٧ حَتَّمَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ وَعَلَىٰ سَمْعِهِمْ وَعَلَىٰ

أَبْصَارِهِمْ غِشَاوَةٌ وَلَمْ يَعْلَمْ عَذَابَ عَظِيمٍ

Indeed, those who disbelieve are the same to them, whether you warn them or not, they will not believe. Allah has sealed their hearts and their hearing. On their sight there is a covering, and for them is a very heavy punishment. Allah swt. has locked the hearts and ears of the disbelievers so that advice or guidance cannot enter their hearts. (Qs. Al-Baqarah/2: 6-7).

³³ Muhammad Nawawi, *Mara>b Labi>d Likasyfi Ma'na Al-Qur'a>n Al-Majid*, Volume 1, p. 662. 662.

³⁴ Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, *Al-Qur'an and its Tafsir (Improved Edition)*, Volume 5, pp. 26-28.





From the description of this verse, Sheikh Nawawi in his tafsir explains that the expression disbelief in this verse means denial and rejection of monotheism, so they will not listen to what the Prophet Muhammad SAW wants to convey. As can be noted in the following explanation: *"Indeed, the disbelievers, it is the same for them, whether you (Muhammad) warn them or not, they will not believe. The first verse, (6) Those who disbelieve according to the knowledge of Allah, it is the same for them whether you warn them with the Qur'an or not, they do not want to believe in what you bring. So do not you, O noblest of creatures, hope in their faith. Then Allah mentions the reason for their disbelief with His words: (Allah has locked their hearts and their hearing) i.e. Allah has closed their hearts so that faith cannot enter, and closed their hearing so that they cannot benefit from what they hear of the truth. And 'hearing' is mentioned in the singular because what is heard is one, namely sound. (And on their sight there is a covering) is the mubtada and khabar, i.e. on their eyes there is a covering from Allah so that they cannot see the truth. (And for them is a great punishment) The second verse, (7) i.e. a severe punishment in the Hereafter, and they are the Jewish leaders whom Allah described as those who concealed the truth when they knew it, such as Ka'b bin Asyraf, Huyay bin Akhtab, and Juday bin Akhtab. And they are said to be the polytheists of Mecca such as Utbah, Shibah, Walid bin Mughirah, and Abu Jahl.³⁵*

Meanwhile, the disbelievers in this verse are explained by the interpretation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs as people who do not believe in Allah. This is one of the forms of denial of tawhid. This explanation is as follows: *The first verse (6) The disbeliever is the one who does not believe in Allah, as He has commanded. Kafir, plural kuffar, are those who do not believe in Allah, His messengers, His angels, His books, and the Day of Judgment. In the Qur'an, it is mentioned that the disbelievers, namely the People of the Book and the polytheists, who strongly disbelieved in the Messenger of Allah (saw); they will not believe even if they are warned with threats. It is the same for them whether they are given a stern warning or not. The reason why the disbelievers do not accept the warning is because their hearts and ears are closed, even locked shut, unable to receive guidance, and all kinds of advice have no effect on them. Because their vision is closed, they cannot see, pay attention to and understand the verses of the Qur'an that they have heard, nor take lessons from the signs of Allah's greatness that they see in the firmament, on the surface of the earth and in themselves.³⁶*

4. Az-Zukhruf/43: 30

وَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمُ الْحَقُّ قَالُوا هَذَا سِحْرٌ وَلَنَا بِهِ كُفَّارُونَ

³⁵ Muhammad Nawawi, *Mara>h Labi>d Likasyfi Ma'na Al-Qur'a>n Al-Majid*, Volume 1, pp. 9-10

³⁶ Ministry of Religious Affairs, *Al-Qur'an and its Tafsir*, Volume 1, pp. 40-41





When the truth (of the Qur'ān) came to them, they said, "This is magic and indeed we denied it." (Qs. Az-Zukhruf/43: 30).

From the explanation of the verse, Shaykh Nawawi explains that "And when the truth (the Qur'ān) came to them, they said, 'This is magic' i.e. illusion, 'and indeed we did not believe it.' So they disbelieved in the Qur'ān and despised the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad."³⁷ This shows that they rejected the truth brought by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), thus showing arrogance and belittling the Prophet.

While the word *kafir* in the verse is explained by the interpretation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs as denial and rejection. As can be observed in the following explanation: *Allah explains that when the Qur'an and Miracles were presented to them as proof of the truth of the Messenger, they welcomed them with an unfavorable reception. They said that what was brought to them was magic and not a Revelation from Allah, therefore they denied it.*³⁸

5. Az-Zumar/39: 59

بَلْ قَدْ جَاءَتُكُمْ أَيْتِي فَكَذَّبْتُمْ بِهَا وَأَسْتَكْبَرْتُمْ وَكُنْتُمْ مِنَ الْكُفَّارِ

Not so! Indeed My verses have come to you, but you deny them, boast, and are among the disbelievers. (Qs. Az-Zumar/39: 59).

From the explanation of this verse, Sheikh Nawawi in his interpretation explains that the expression disbelief contained in the verse indicates a rejection of the truth of the Qur'anic verses that have come to the disbelievers. That way they then boast and are reluctant to believe in it. As can be noted in the following explanation: "Yes, My verses have come to you" i.e. the Qur'ān, giving guidance to you "but you deny them and you boast" i.e. you boast of believing in them "and you are among the disbelievers." So Allah SWT explains that the proof is with Allah, not that the proof is with them against Allah.³⁹

Meanwhile, in the interpretation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, it is explained that the disbelief contained in this verse shows the meaning of rejection and denial of Allah, so that they are lost and do not want to repent in order to be saved from the painful punishment of hellfire. As explained in the following interpretation of the Ministry of Religion: *In this verse, Allah declares to those who have gone astray and do not want to use the opportunity to repent that the fate that befalls them is inevitable*

³⁷ Muhammad Nawawi, *Mara>h Labi>d Likasyfi Ma'na Al-Qur'a>n Al-Maj>d*, Volume 2, pp. 382-383

³⁸ Ministry of Religious Affairs, *Al-Qur'an and its Tafsir*, Volume 9, p. 108

³⁹ Muhammad Nawawi, *Mara>h Labi>d Likasyfi Ma'na Al-Qur'a>n Al-Maj>d*, Volume 2, pp. 337





because Allah has given enough lessons and warnings. Allah has also given them the opportunity to repent and do good, but they have ignored it. They only followed their lusts and desires and became disobedient, arrogant and conceited. They are also among the disbelievers. All their wishes and requests are rejected and Allah's justice is applied to them: those who do good and are pious are admitted to Paradise and those who do evil and disobedient are admitted to Hell.⁴⁰

6. Al-Baqarah/2: 152

فَادْكُرُونِيْ اذْكُرْكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لِيْ وَلَا تَكْفُرُونِ

So, remember Me, and I will remember you. Give thanks to Me and do not disobey Me. (Qs. Al-Baqarah/2: 152).

Based on the explanation of this verse, Sheikh Nawawi in his tafsir shows that the word disbelief contained in this verse has a meaning as a form of denial of the favors and blessings that have been granted by Allah Swt for His creatures. As he explains the following: "So remember Me with the tongue, the heart, and the limbs. Prayer includes all three. The first: like tasbih and takbir. The second: such as being solemn and contemplating the recitation. And the third: like bowing and prostration. I will remember you with goodness, mercy, and favor in this world and the Hereafter. And thank Me for My favors with obedience, and do not deny (My favors) i.e. do not forsake gratitude for My favors."⁴¹

Meanwhile, the interpretation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs states that the word kafir in the verse is understood as a form of denial of the blessings that have been given by Allah SWT. This is as can be observed in the following explanation: *So with the blessings that Allah has bestowed on the Muslims, let them always remember Him, both in their hearts and verbally, by tahmid (reciting alhamdulillah), tasbih (reciting Subhanallah), and reading the Qur'an by thinking about His creation, to recognize, realize and absorb the signs of His majesty, power and oneness. If they always remember Allah, He will always remember them too. Let them thank Him for all the blessings that He has bestowed by carrying out the provisions that He has set forth and by praising and Saying Praise and acknowledging His goodness. In addition, let them not disbelieve in His favors by wasting and using them outside the lines that He has determined.*⁴²

7. Ali-Imran/3: 54

⁴⁰ Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, *Al-Qur'an and its Tafsir*, Volume 8, p. 467. 467

⁴¹ Muhammad Nawawi, *Mara>h Labi>d Likasyfi Ma'na Al-Qur'a>n Al-Maji>d*, Volume 1, p. 52

⁴² Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, *Al-Qur'an and its Tafsir*, Volume 1, pp. 230





وَمَكَرُوا وَمَكَرَ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ الْمَكَرِينَ

They (the disbelievers) deceive and Allah avenges (their) deceit. Allah is the best avenger of deceit. (Qs. Ali Imran/3: 54).

From the explanation of the verse, Sheikh Nawawi in his tafsir explains that those who practice deceit, they are considered as disbelievers. This is none other than because they themselves have closed themselves off from the path of truth. As can be observed in the following explanation: "Ibn 'Abbas said: 'So write us down among the prophets because every prophet is a witness for his people or write us down with Muhammad and his people because they are the special ones in bearing witness.' And they planned a trick, that is, the Jews planned to kill Jesus, and Allah also planned a trick, that is, Allah planned to kill their friend Titianus. It says that their deceit against Jesus was their attempt to kill him, and God's deceit against them was to lift Jesus up to heaven. That's because Judas, the king of the Jews, planned to kill Jesus, and Gabriel never left him for an instant. Jibril ordered Isa to enter a house that had a hole in the roof, when they entered the house, Jibril took him out of the hole and Allah made someone who resembled Isa, so that the person was arrested and crucified. And Allah is the best of deceivers, that is, the most powerful in His will and it is said: the best in making plans."⁴³

Meanwhile, in the interpretation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, it is explained as follows: After Allah explains about the hawariyyun, then in this verse Allah explains the attitude of the Children of Israel towards Jesus (peace be upon them), they made a trick and intended to destroy him by reporting and slandering him to their king. But Allah deceived and foiled their deception and they did not succeed in killing Jesus, who was taken up to heaven by Allah and replaced with someone similar to him, so that the people believed that it was Jesus who was crucified, and Allah's reply overcame their deception and brought misery to the disbelievers, without them expecting it. Allah's plan, which is unknown to His servants, is to uphold His sunnah and perfect His wisdom.⁴⁴

8. Hud/11: 19

الَّذِينَ يَصُدُّونَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَيَعْوِنُهَا عَوْجًا وَهُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ كُفَّارُونَ

(Those who obstruct the way of Allah and wish it to be crooked. They are those who disbelieve in the Last Day. (Qs. Hud/11: 19).

⁴³ Muhammad Nawawi, *Mara>h Labi>d Likasyfi Ma'na Al-Qur'a>n Al-Majid*, Volume 1, p. 52

⁴⁴ Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, *Al-Qur'an and its Tafsir*, Volume 1, pp. 514





Based on the explanation of this verse, Shaykh Nawawi in his tafsir explains that people who want to deceive are also considered part of the disbelievers. As can be noted in the following explanation: "Those who obstruct from the way of Allah," i.e. those who prevent the true religion from everyone they are able to obstruct by casting doubts, "and want it to be crooked," i.e. they want the way of Allah to be perverted by distorting the straight arguments, "and they," i.e. their state, "towards the Hereafter they are disbelievers," i.e. those who deny the resurrection after death.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, in the interpretation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, it is explained that this verse deals with the deception of the disbelievers who want to prevent people from the way of Allah's mercy. So, these people are then referred to as disbelievers. As explained below: *Then Allah SWT explains that indeed the wrongdoers are those who deter people from the path of Allah and turn them away from the true religion and the straight path. They try to mislead people by inviting them to a deviant religion so that they run away from the true religion. They do this deliberately because they do not believe in the Hereafter.*⁴⁶

9. Al-Ankabut/29: 68

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مَنِ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ كَذَبَ بِالْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَاءَهُ الَّذِينَ فِي جَهَنَّمَ مَثُوَّى لِلْكُفَّارِينَ

Who is more unjust than the one who invented a lie against Allah or the one who denies the truth when it comes to him? Is there not a place for the disbelievers in Hell?" (Qs. Al-Ankabut/29: 68).

Based on the information of this verse, Shaykh Nawawi in his tafsir explains that the word kafir contained in the verse refers to people who lie and do wrong, so that the place of recompense for them is none other than Hellfire. Note the following explanation of Sheikh Nawawi; "And who is more unjust than the one who makes up lies against Allah or denies the truth when it comes to him?" Allah SWT cannot have a partner, so whoever makes a partner for the independent king in His kingdom, he is a wrongdoer and deserves punishment from Him. Especially if he makes a partner for the One who cannot have a partner. And whoever denies a truthful person who may lie, he is a wrongdoer. Especially if he denies a truthful person who cannot lie. So there is no one more unjust than the one who lies against Allah by associating partners with Him, denies Allah in recognizing the truth of His prophet, Muhammad SAW, denies the prophet in his message of God, and denies the Qur'an sent down by Allah to His messenger, Muhammad SAW. "Is there not a place for those who disbelieve in hell?" i.e. do they not deserve to live in hell Jahannam, when they have made up lies

⁴⁵ Muhammad Nawawi, *Mara>h Labi>d Likasyfi Ma'na Al-Qur'a>n Al-Majid*, Volume 1, p. 503. 503

⁴⁶ Ministry of Religious Affairs, *Al-Qur'an and its Tafsir*, Volume 4, pp. 400-401





against Allah SWT, and denied the clear truth. Or it could also be interpreted as: do they not know that there is a place for disbelievers in Hellfire, so they dare to tell this lie?⁴⁷

The interpretation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs explains that the people mentioned in this verse are none other than those who deny Allah and commit lies, so they are part of the wrongdoers. As explained below: *This verse explains that the polytheists are very unjust people, because they make partners for Allah and say that He has a son. They are the ones who make up lies against Allah and become His enemies. They made images and worshipped them to draw closer to Allah. When there came to them a messenger of Allah who explained the falsehood and falsity of their deeds, and showed them the straight path based on the truth, they denied and disbelieved everything. In fact, they denied all the favors that Allah had bestowed upon them.*⁴⁸

10. An-Nisa/4: 37

الَّذِينَ يَبْخَلُونَ وَيَأْمُرُونَ النَّاسَ بِالْبُخْلِ وَيَكْتُمُونَ مَا أَنْهَمَ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَأَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكُفَّارِينَ عَذَابًا مُّهِينًا

(Those) who are miserly, enjoin miserliness on others, and conceal the bounty which Allah has bestowed upon them. We have prepared for the disbelievers a humiliating punishment. (Qs. An-Nisa/4: 37).

From the explanation of the verse, Sheikh Nawawi in his interpretation explains that the disbelief contained in this verse is understood as a form of denial of the blessings of Allah SWT. So, they act miserly so as to hide the grace that has been given to them, so they are also referred to as disbelievers. As can be understood in the following explanation: "(Those who are miserly and enjoin others to be miserly and conceal what Allah has given them of His bounty) i.e. the knowledge of what is in their books regarding the nature of Muhammad (SAW). What is more obvious is that the conjunction functions as a condemnation, or as a subject with the meaning of condemnation, i.e. they are those people. It could also be a substitute for the word: (arrogant people) or be a subject with a hidden predicate which is thought to be 'worthy of every reproach' or 'disbelievers'. This verse was revealed regarding Kadum bin Zaid, Usama bin Habib, Nafi' bin Abi Nafi', Muhri bin Amr, Huyay bin Akhtab, and Rifa'ah bin Zaid bin Tabut when they ordered some of the Ansar to stop providing for the people around the Messenger of Allah (SAW) for fear of poverty befalling them. This was narrated by Ibn Jarir from Ibn Abbas (and We have prepared for those who disbelieve) i.e. the Jews (a humiliating torment) i.e. whoever is in such a state then he is a disbeliever in the blessings of Allah, and whoever disbelieves in His blessings, then for him a humiliating torment as he humiliates the blessings by being miserly and hiding

⁴⁷ Muhammad Nawawi, *Mara>h Labi>d Likasyfi Ma'na Al-Qur'a>n Al-Majid*, Volume 2, pp. 222-223

⁴⁸ Ministry of Religious Affairs, *Al-Qur'an and its Tafsir*, Volume 7, pp. 449-450





them. In a hadith narrated by Ahmad, the Prophet said: 'If Allah bestows favors on His servant, He likes the effect of those favors to be seen in him.'⁴⁹

Meanwhile, the interpretation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs explains that: *Who are the proud and arrogant people and how do they act? They are people who are stingy, unwilling to do good as Allah has commanded. They do not want to give help with their wealth, energy and thoughts for the benefit of fellow human beings. In addition to being stingy, they influence others to be stingy, so that others do not spend their wealth to help those who need help. They have greed and covetousness in their hearts. They let others live in poverty and misery, so long as they can live happily and boastfully. They hide the bounty that God has given them. They pretend to be people who are always in need. Such people are among those who are ungrateful to Allah; they are disbelievers in the blessings of Allah. For those who disbelieve, Allah has prepared a humiliating punishment, both in this world and in the Hereafter.*⁵⁰

11. Al-An'am/6L 122

أَوْمَنْ كَانَ مَيْتًا فَأَحْيَيْنَاهُ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُ نُورًا يَمْشِي بِهِ فِي النَّاسِ كَمَنْ مَثَلَهُ فِي الظُّلْمَتِ لَيْسَ بِخَارِجٍ مِّنْهَا كَذَلِكَ زُيْنَ لِلْكُفَّارِينَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

Is the one who was dead and We brought him to life and gave him light so that he could walk among the people, like the one who is in darkness so that he cannot come out of it? Thus, it is made beautiful for the disbelievers what they do. (Qs. Al-An'am/6: 122).

Based on the information of this verse, Sheikh Nawawi in his tafsir explains that the word kafir mentioned in this verse refers to those who have turned away from their belief in Allah SWT. Or in other words, these are people who can be referred to as apostates who leave Islam. Thus, the form of disbelief addressed to them is the denial of tawhid. This is as can be seen in the following explanation by Shaykh Nawawi: "Or is the one who was dead and We brought him to life," i.e. the one who was a disbeliever and We guided him to faith, "and We gave him light," i.e. the light of divine revelation, "by which he walks," i.e. because of that light, "among people," i.e. among people in safety from them, "like the one whose state," i.e. his nature, "is in darkness," i.e. the darkness of disbelief, disobedience, and blindness of mind, "from which there is no escape," i.e. from that darkness. So if a disbeliever is constantly in the darkness of ignorance and blameworthy morals, this darkness becomes an innate trait that is difficult to remove from him. Disbelief is

⁴⁹ Muhammad Nawawi, *Mara>h Labi>d Likasyfi Ma'na Al-Qur'a>n Al-Maji>d*, Volume 1, pp. 197

⁵⁰ Ministry of Religious Affairs, *Al-Qur'an and its Tafsir*, Volume 2, pp. 166-167





likened to death due to ignorance, and ignorance causes confusion so it is like death causing silence, and a disbeliever is considered dead because he cannot find guidance like a fool. "Thus, adorn for the disbelievers what they do," i.e. like adorning the believers with faith and light, Allah adorns for the disbelievers what they do by way of creation, and from the devil's side by way of false adornment. Zaid bin Aslam and Ad-Dahhak said that this verse was revealed concerning Umar bin Khattab and Abu Jahl. Ikrimah said that this verse was revealed concerning Ammar bin Yasir and Abu Jahl. Ibn Abbas said that Abu Jahl stoned the Prophet with dung, and it was told to Hamzah when he returned from hunting with a bow in his hand, while he had not believed at that time. Then Hamzah went to Abu Jahl and hit him on the head with the bow. Abu Jahl said to him condescendingly, "O Abu Ya'la, do you not see what this man has brought that has confused us and denounced our gods and opposed our fathers?" Hamzah said, "You are the most ignorant people for worshipping stones besides Allah.⁵¹

Meanwhile, the interpretation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs explains that this verse deals with the way Allah distinguishes between disbelievers and Muslims. So, the people who are referred to as disbelievers in this verse are those who deny monotheism because of their ignorance and stupidity. As explained below: *In order to show the difference between the Muslims and the disbelievers, Allah poses the question: Are those whose hearts are dead from disbelief and ignorance, then We revive their hearts with faith, and We give them light, the Qur'an, which is bright and clear, the same as those who are in layers of darkness? He cannot come out of that darkness. He is overwhelmed with fear, weakness and confusion. Similarly, one who is in ignorance, blind following and corruption of mind, cannot come out of such a state. He is afraid to come out of his cave of misguidance and feels no need to come out to the brightly lit guidance because his eyes are dazzled by the light of that guidance.*⁵²

Of course, here is a discussion table of the Qur'anic verses you provided, along with the interpretation of Shaykh Nawawi and the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Tafsir:

| No. | Qur'anic Verse | Sheikh Nawawi's interpretation | Ministry of Religious Affairs Tafsir | Meaning of Kafir |
|-----|--------------------|---|---|-------------------|
| 1 | Al-Baqarah/2:34 | Kafir means denial or rejection of Allah's command to bow down to Adam. | Kafir means rejection of Allah's command and feeling superior to Adam. | Denial, rejection |
| 2 | Al-Kahf/18:100-101 | Disbelief means the closing of the eyes of the heart from the signs of Allah's greatness. | Kafir means the denial of monotheism, and thus the punishment in the Hereafter. | Closed, denial |

⁵¹ Muhammad Nawawi, *Mara>h Labi>d Likasyfi Ma'na Al-Qur'a>n Al-Maj>d*, , Volume 1, p. 345

⁵² Ministry of Religious Affairs, *Al-Qur'an and its Tafsir*, Volume 3, pp. 223-224





| | | | | |
|----|------------------|---|--|--|
| 3 | Al-Baqarah/2:6-7 | Kafir means denial and rejection of monotheism, so they do not want to believe in the Prophet Muhammad SAW. | Kafir means those who do not believe in Allah, His messengers, His angels, His books, and the Day of Judgment. | Denial, rejection, disbelief |
| 4 | Az-Zukhruf/43:30 | Kafir means not believing the Qur'an and denigrating the Prophet Muhammad. | Kafir means denying the Qur'an as a revelation from Allah. | Denial, rejection |
| 5 | Az-Zumar/39:59 | Kafir means rejection of the Qur'anic verses and arrogance. | Kafir means rejection and denial of Allah, so that one is lost and unrepentant. | Rejection, denial, arrogance |
| 6 | Al-Baqarah/2:152 | Kafir means denial of Allah's favors and mercy. | Kafir means denial of Allah's blessings by wasting them. | Denial of favor |
| 7 | Ali-Imran/3:54 | Kafir means those who practice deceit and shut themselves off from the truth. | Kafir means those who made a trick to destroy Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him). | Deceit, denial of truth |
| 8 | Hud/11:19 | Kafir means those who obstruct from the path of Allah and deny the Last Day. | Kafir means those who prevent people from the path of Allah and do not believe in the Last Day. | Obstructing the way of Allah, denying the Last Day |
| 9 | Al-Ankabut/29:68 | Kafir means those who lie against Allah and deny the truth. | Kafir means those who deny Allah and make up lies. | Lying, denial |
| 10 | An-Nisa/4:37 | Kafir means denial of Allah's blessings by being miserly and hiding His bounty. | Kafir means those who are ungrateful for Allah's favors. | Miserliness, denial of favor |
| 11 | Al-An'am/6:122 | Kafir means those who turn away from belief in Allah (apostasy) and deny monotheism. | Kafir means those who deny monotheism out of ignorance and stupidity. | Apostasy, denial of monotheism |

In the above review, the term "kafir" has various meanings depending on the context in which it is used in the Qur'ān. The word "kafir" is derived from the Arabic "kufr," which literally means "to close" or "to cover." In religious terminology, the term refers to individuals who reject or do not follow the teachings brought by Prophet Muhammad and revealed by Allah. However, its meaning in the Qur'an is not always singular, but has different nuances according to the context of the verse that discusses it. One use of the term "disbeliever" in the Qur'an refers to those who consciously reject the truth of God's revelation, even though they know that what is conveyed is the truth. In this case, the act of disbelief is more than mere ignorance; it is a form of active rejection of the teachings of Islam.





People in this category are often referred to as those who deny the truth deliberately, so they refuse to accept the oneness of God and the apostleship of Prophet Muhammad.

In addition, the term "kafir" is also used to refer to those who commit shirk, which is associating Allah with another entity. Shirk is a highly condemned act in Islam, as it contradicts the concept of tawhid or the oneness of Allah. Idol worship, glorification of gods other than Allah, and belief in the existence of a divine power outside of His will are some of the forms of shirk that in the Qur'an are often associated with kufr. In some verses, "kufr" is also used in the sense of covering up or denying Allah's favors. In this sense, a person is called a kafir not because he rejects faith, but because he is ungrateful for the bounties that Allah has given. Being or negligent in expressing gratitude can be categorized as a form of kufr from a spiritual perspective, as it shows a disregard for the gifts of Allah that should be appreciated and thanked.

On the other hand, the term "kafir" in the Qur'an is also used to refer to Ahlul Kitab, the Jews and Christians who do not accept Muhammad's prophethood as the final prophet. Although they have previously revealed scriptures, their rejection of Prophet Muhammad's apostleship places them in the category of disbelievers from an Islamic perspective. However, the Qur'an also pays tribute to Ahlul Kitab in several verses, recognizing that they had books and teachings derived from God's revelation before Islam came. It is important to understand that in Islamic teachings, the use of the term "kafir" is not always exclusive or absolute in referring to all non-Muslims. The Qur'an also recognizes the diversity of faiths and emphasizes the importance of dialogue and understanding between people in religious matters. Thus, the meaning of "kafir" in the Qur'an has more to do with one's actions or attitudes towards the faith and truth believed in Islam, rather than simply the religious identity held by a particular individual.

From these various perspectives, it can be concluded that the term "kafir" in the Qur'an has a wide range of meanings. It can refer to those who reject the truth of God's revelation, those who practice shirk, or those who are ungrateful for the favors He has bestowed. However, the use of the term remains context-dependent and does not necessarily refer to all non-Muslims. A deeper understanding of this concept allows for a more inclusive and dialogical approach in understanding the relationship between Muslims and other religious communities.

Revisiting the Nature and Predicate of Infidels in the Contemporary Era

In her book *The First Muslims: History and Memory*, Asma Afsaruddin criticizes the concept of "kafir" as a category that is often misunderstood in classical and modern Islamic discourse. In the





Qur'an, the term "kafir" comes from the word "kufr" which means "to cover up" or "hide" the truth (Al-Baqarah: 6-7).⁵³ However, its use does not necessarily refer exclusively to non-Muslims, but rather to those who actively reject or oppose the truth after knowing and understanding it. This shows that the term "kafir" in the Qur'an is more dynamic and contextual than just a religious label.⁵⁴

In many verses, the term "kafir" is used to describe individuals or groups who consciously reject the truth that has reached them. Some of these include Jews and Christians who did not accept the apostolate of Prophet Muhammad (Al-Ma''idah: 73). However, Asma Afsaruddin asserts that this term cannot be generalized to all non-Muslims, as the Qur'an itself distinguishes between kafirs and Ahlul Kitab.⁵⁵ As one verse states, those who continue to reject the truth after being warned will not believe, because their hearts, hearing and sight have been closed (Al-Baqarah: 7). This separation shows that the Qur'an has a more nuanced approach to various religious groups.⁵⁶

Afsaruddin underlines that the Qur'an does not necessarily label all non-Muslims as infidels, but rather highlights their attitude towards the truth that has reached them. This is in line with the opinion that not all non-Muslims are disbelievers, and not all disbelievers are non-Muslims. In several other verses, the term "kufr" is also used in a broader context, including for those Muslims who deny Allah's favors (Ibrahim: 7).⁵⁷ Thus, kufr in the Qur'an refers not only to disbelief in the teachings of Islam, but also to the denial of God's goodness and bounties for which one should be grateful.⁵⁸

The Qur'an emphasizes that kufr is not only related to disbelief in the teachings of Islam, but also denial of the blessings that Allah has given to a person. In a verse, Allah reminds people to always remember and be grateful for His blessings and not deny them (An-Nahl: 83). Shaykh Nawawi's commentary emphasizes that this verse highlights the importance of being grateful for Allah's blessings through obedience and warns against kufr by wasting them. This makes it clear that kufr in its theological meaning does not merely concern faith, but also the ethical and spiritual dimensions of a Muslim's life.⁵⁹

⁵³Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims*.

⁵⁴Malik, Kulieva, and Ayub, "Accepting Evolution Entails Kufr?"

⁵⁵Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims*; Mun'im Sirry, "Toward Understanding the Qur'an's Polemical Texts," in *Scriptural Polemics: The Qur'an and Other Religions*, ed. Mun'im Sirry (Oxford University Press, 2014), 0, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199359363.003.0003>.

⁵⁶ Mun'im Sirry, *Early Islamic Controversies: Between the Traditionalist and Revisionist Schools* (Bandung: Mizan, 2015).

⁵⁷ Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims*.

⁵⁸ Moh Isom Mudin et al, "Situating the Meaning of Kafir in the Qur'an and Its Theological, Sociological, and Political Contexts," *Al-Adabiya: Journal of Culture and Religion* 16, no. 1 (June 20, 2021): 41–55, <https://doi.org/10.37680/adabiya.v16i1.619>.

⁵⁹ Irsyady et al., "The Authorship Of Shaykh Nawawi Al-Bantani In Arabic Linguistics Studies."





The term 'kafir' is also often contrasted with 'believer' as part of a dichotomy between those who accept monotheism and those who reject it. However, Afsaruddin highlights that this category is more spiritual and ethical than simply a religious identity. In other words, believers are those who accept and practice the teachings of monotheism, while unbelievers are those who reject or hide them (Al-Anfal: 55). A verse states that those who reject faith will experience spiritual and moral failure (Al-Baqarah: 6-7). This understanding emphasizes that faith in Islam is not only declarative, but must also be manifested in attitudes and actions.⁶⁰

In Indonesia, the term "kafir" is often used in social and political contexts to stigmatize certain groups. Extreme groups often cite a verse that mentions a harsh attitude towards the kuffar to justify their actions (At-Tawbah: 29). However, Afsaruddin points out that the term "kuffar" in this verse refers more to a group that actively opposes Islam and rejects the truth, rather than simply someone of a non-Islamic religion. This is reinforced by an analysis that states that "kuffar" in some verses is more often associated with denial of favor rather than religious identity.⁶¹ Nasaruddin Umar also emphasized that in a heterogeneous society like Indonesia, disbelieving someone based solely on differences in belief could trigger social divisions. Therefore, the term should be used with caution to maintain social harmony and prevent unnecessary conflict.⁶²

Furthermore, Asma Afsaruddin criticized the fundamentalist understanding that idealizes a certain form of Islamic government as a standard system that must be implemented. According to her, no classical Islamic source explicitly uses the terms "Islamic State" or "Islamic Government" as is often claimed by ideological Islamic groups. Instead, the Medina Document shows that the first Islamic society included not only Muslims, but also Jewish and Christian communities as part of a wider social unity (Al-Mumtahanah: 8). This shows that the ideal concept of Islam is not a rigid system of governance, but rather substantial governance that emphasizes the values of justice, equality and tolerance in a multi-religious society.⁶³

Afsaruddin also highlighted that during the first Islamic era, the concept of jihad was not always related to warfare against non-Muslims, but rather to efforts to defend themselves from external threats that could disrupt the stability of Islamic society in Medina. In fact, military defense

⁶⁰ Hasanuddin Chaer et al., "The Trilogy of Linguistic Communication of the Qur'an Surah Al-Kâfirûn," *OKARA: Journal of Language and Literature* 16, no. 2 (November 29, 2022): 349–72, <https://doi.org/10.19105/ojbs.v16i2.6226>.

⁶¹ Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims*.

⁶² Imron Hamdani et al., "Strengthening the Values of Tolerance in the Concept of Religious Moderation Nasarudin Umar Perspective," *INDO-ISLAMIKA JOURNAL* 13, no. 2 (December 28, 2023): 136–46, <https://doi.org/10.15408/jii.v13i2.34629>.

⁶³ Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims*.





at that time was not only carried out by Muslims, but also involved non-Muslim communities living in Medina. This understanding is contrary to the concept of extreme jihad which is often associated with takfir, which is the disbelief of other groups with different religious views.⁶⁴ Therefore, the understanding of jihad and kafir must always be contextualized so as not to be misused for certain political and ideological interests.

According to Asma Afsaruddin, the term "kafir" in the Qur'an has a more complex meaning than simply referring to non-Muslims. Its use is context-dependent, whether as a form of rejection of faith, denial of favor, or as a broader spiritual category. Therefore, in social and political contexts, the term should be used carefully so as not to fuel tensions and misunderstandings in diverse societies. By understanding the meaning of "kafir" more comprehensively, Muslims can avoid misinterpretations that can worsen social relations and undermine the values of tolerance taught in Islam.

Conclusion

This study finds that the concept of "kafir" in the Qur'an, as explored through Tafsir Marah Labid by Sheikh Nawawi and the Ministry of Religious Affairs' exegesis, reveals a more nuanced interpretation beyond a mere religious label. Sheikh Nawawi defines "kafir" as a conscious denial of truth rooted in arrogance, where an individual refuses to acknowledge divine guidance despite its clarity. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Religious Affairs' exegesis broadens this definition by incorporating social dimensions, linking "kafir" not only to disbelief in theological terms but also to acts of ingratitude and behaviors that disrupt societal harmony. In line with these perspectives, Asma Afsaruddin argues that the Qur'anic term "kafir" does not always refer to non-Muslims but rather to those who knowingly reject the truth after understanding it. This interpretation challenges rigid categorizations and suggests that the term is more fluid and situational than is often assumed in classical and modern Islamic discourse.

This comparative insight highlights the dynamic nature of "kafir" and cautions against its oversimplification in socio-political contexts, particularly in pluralistic societies like Indonesia. Misuse of the term can lead to polarization, social exclusion, and even justifications for intolerance. By acknowledging the multifaceted meanings of "kafir," this study contributes to a more inclusive and historically grounded understanding of Qur'anic terminology. Furthermore, the findings

⁶⁴ Afsaruddin.





reinforce the importance of contextualizing religious discourse, ensuring that terms like "kafir" are not weaponized for political or sectarian purposes. Therefore, understanding "kafir" requires a contextual approach that transcends religious identity, recognizing it as a spiritual and moral category that reflects one's stance towards truth, divine blessings, and social harmony.

This study contributes to the fields of Qur'anic exegesis, Islamic studies, and interfaith relations by offering a more layered understanding of a term that has been widely debated across different historical and scholarly contexts. By comparing the interpretations of Sheikh Nawawi, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and Asma Afsaruddin, this research bridges classical and contemporary understandings, showing how Qur'anic exegesis continues to evolve. The study also has practical implications, particularly in fostering a more nuanced discourse on religious pluralism, reducing misconceptions about the term "kafir," and encouraging a more compassionate and contextually aware approach to theological discussions.

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