

Deconstruction of Local Culture: Misbah Musthofa's Critique in *Tafsir Al-Iklil Fi Ma'ani Al-Tanzil* on the Traditions of Javanese Islamic Societies

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Abstract

This research aims to respond to the tendency to read the interpretation of the archipelago which is often understood descriptively and traditionally, especially in its relationship with local culture. The focus of the study is directed to *Tafsir al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* by Misbah Musthofa as a representation of the interpretation of Javanese pesantren that not only reproduces traditions, but also contains criticism of the religious and social practices of the community. This study uses a qualitative method based on literature studies with the main source of *Tafsir al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil*, supported by tafsir literature, cultural studies, and sociological theories of tafsir. The purpose of this study is to analyze how Misbah Musthofa positions the Qur'an as a living revelation as well as an instrument of theological, ritual, and socio-political criticism in the context of Javanese Muslim society. The study's findings reveal that Misbah Musthofa's interpretation extends beyond the mere reproduction of textual meaning, evolving into an analytical practice that affirms monotheism, evaluates the function of rituals, and dismantles symbolic power relations in social life. Criticism of the tradition of tahlilan, MTQ, grave pilgrimage, cults of religious leaders, state programs, and usury economic practices show a pattern of reading the Qur'an that is contextual and oriented towards the critical awareness of the ummah. This research has implications for strengthening the perspective of interpretation as a reflective and transformative cultural practice, as well as affirming the position of pesantren interpretation as an important arena in building critical Islamic reasoning without losing the normative foothold of the Qur'an.

Keywords: *Tafsir Al-Iklil*, Misbah Musthofa, local culture, deconstruction, Javanese Islam, social criticism

Introduction

The relationship between the Qur'an and local culture is one of the central issues in the study of contemporary interpretation, especially in non-Arab Muslim societies such as Indonesia. The

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Qur'an is present and understood through continuous interaction with the social and cultural context in which it is interpreted and practiced.¹ However, the model of the relationship between the Qur'an and local culture that plays a role in the process of cultural formation is not fully able to support the purification approach.² The rapid rise of social and cultural dynamics has penetrated to the essential layers of Muslim life.³ This development is a challenge in maintaining the purity of Islamic teachings and is seen as an inevitable need by the ummah itself.⁴ In this context, if the cultural entity is strong, local contents will emerge in religion, such as Javanese Islam. On the other hand, if a strong Islamic entity influences culture, then Islamic culture will emerge.⁵

Local culture has its own significance in shaping the pattern of people's religious understanding and praxis towards Islamic teachings.⁶ However, the dominance of traditional interpretations that are textualist and tend to be homogeneous often ignore the inherent cultural diversity in Muslim societies.⁷ Abdullah Saed said that the emphasis on interpretation on the range of socio-historical contexts in society is still limited.⁸ As a result, there is a tension between the normative values of religion and the reality of local culture. This condition indicates the urgency to reconstruct the Qur'anic interpretation approach through a process of deconstruction of the interpretation paradigm that does not consider the socio-cultural context.⁹ The goal is to present a more inclusive, contextual, and relevant interpretive model to the dynamics of contemporary society's life. The result of this interpretation begins with the dialogue of the Qur'an with social reality which then produces conclusions about solutions and offers to the problems that are occurring.¹⁰ Abdul Mustaqim emphasized that a mufassir basically positions the Qur'an as a living book. A book that always gives instructions to its readers in solving the problems that surround it.¹¹

Tafsir in the Islamic scientific tradition can be understood as an intellectual product as well as a social construction influenced by the historical, cultural, and ideological conditions of its interpreters.¹² Badruzzaman added that tafsir is a form of intellectual response to the dynamics of Muslims' understanding of the Qur'an which is always influenced by social, cultural, and historical

¹ Ingrid Matson, *The Story of the Qur'an: Its History and Place in Muslim Life*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013).

² Shahzadi Pakeeza and Mariam Bushra, "The Idea of Context and Contextual Qur'anic Interpretation," *Al-Qantara* 8, no. 4 (2022): 222–35.

³ Aksin Wijaya, "Relasi Al-Qur'an Dan Budaya Lokal (Sebuah Tatapan Epistemologis)," *Jurnal Hermeneia* 4, no. 2 (2015): 1–18.

⁴ Mohammad Arif, *Studi Islam Dalam Dinamika Global, Islamic* (Kediri: STAIN Kediri Press, 2017), <http://repository.iainkediri.ac.id/28/>.

⁵ Ratu Vina Rohmatika, "Pendekatan Interdisipliner Dan Multidisipliner Dalam Studi Islam," *Al-Adyan: Jurnal Studi Lintas Agama* 14, no. 1 (2019): 115–32, <https://doi.org/10.24042/ajsla.v14i1.4681>.

⁶ Agung Setiawan, "Budaya Lokal Dalam Perspektif Agama," *Esensi* 12, no. 2 (2012): 203–22.

⁷ Chusnul Chotimah Bimbo, "Islam Today In Modern West Fazlur Rahman's and Tariq Ramadan's Views on Jihad," *Ulumuna* 23, no. 1 (2019): 71–89.

⁸ Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting The Qur'an Towards a Contemporary Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁹ Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century, Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315870922>.

¹⁰ Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Relasi Antara Tafsir Dan Realita Kehidupan* (Yogyakarta: elSAQ Press, 2011).

¹¹ Abdul Mustaqim, *Epistemologi Tafsir Kontemporer* (Yogyakarta: LkiS, 2010).

¹² Dewi Rahmawati et al., "Investigating Online Quran Interpretation : Methods and Sources on Muslimah . or . Id and Its Contribution to Online Islamic Discourse," *QiST: Journal of Quran and Tafseer Studies* 4, no. 1 (2025): 75–90, <https://doi.org/10.23917/qist.v4i1.7322>.

contexts.¹³ One of the aspects that colors the interpretation process is local culture, which plays a role in shaping people's perspective on Islamic teachings.¹⁴ In Javanese Muslim society, the interaction between Islamic teachings and local culture gave birth to various forms of distinctive religious practices.¹⁵ Tahlilan, haul, grave pilgrimage, tumpengan, and belief in certain days are practices that are accepted as part of an established religious tradition and passed down from generation to generation.¹⁶ However, the acceptance of traditions that are deeply rooted in people's religious practices often creates tension with the normative values of the Qur'an, especially those related to monotheism and sharia.¹⁷ This tension is what makes the interpretation of the Qur'an function as a medium for interpreting texts and instruments of social and cultural criticism, especially the Javanese Muslim community. In this context, it is important to see how contemporary interpretation can be used as a social construct through author relationships, social conditions of society, the ideological interests of the author of the interpretation, and cultural dynamics.¹⁸

In the context of Javanese Islam, one of the interesting works of tafsir to study is *Tafsir al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* by Misbah Musthofa. Tafsir written in Javanese and born from the pesantren environment. This interpretation reflects the direct involvement of the interpreter with the social reality of the Javanese Muslim community. In contrast to the tafsir which only focuses on explaining the literal meaning of the verses, Misbah Musthofa explicitly uses the Qur'an as a basis for criticizing various religious practices and cultural traditions that he considers deviated from the principles of monotheism and sharia values. The criticism includes issues of ritual, social, economic, and religious authority. Thus, the study of the interpretation of the archipelago has shown a tendency to read the Qur'an contextually by considering social and cultural realities. This is in line with Brad East's research which explains the approach to contemporary interpretation by looking at the context of the times that have been carried out by previous mufassir with various missions.¹⁹

Various studies on the tafsir of *Al-Iklil Fi Ma'ani Al-Tanzil* So far have been carried out by many previous researches. First, research that includes elements of the customs and culture of the Javanese Islamic community in the tafsir of *Al-Iklil Fi Ma'ani Al-Tanzil*. Rosyid Afandi with research on the Social Construction of the Tradition of the Bangilan Tuban Community Post KH. Misbah Musthofa: An Analysis of the Impact of Tafsir *Al-Iklil Fi Ma'ani Al-Tanzil* and *Taj Muslimin min Kalami Rabbi al-Alamin* on Tradition using the social construction theory of Thomas Luckmann and

¹³ Abad Badruzaman, "Toward An Indonesian Current In Islamic Exegesis: An Attempt to Contextualize the Maqasid Al-Quran," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 13, no. 2 (2019): 505–24, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2019.13.1.505-524>.

¹⁴ Ahmad Zainul Hamdi, "Constructing Indonesian Religious Pluralism: The Role of Nahdlatul Ulama in Countering Violent Religious Extremism," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 15, no. 2 (2021): 433–64, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2021.15.2.433-464>.

¹⁵ Sumper Mulia Harahap, "Akomodasi Hukum Islam Terhadap Kebudayaan Lokal (Studi Terhadap Masyarakat Muslim Padangsidimpuan)," *Istinbâth Jurnal of Islamic Law* 15, no. 2 (2016): 320–34.

¹⁶ Mohamad Abdun Nasir, "Revisiting The Javanese Muslim Slametan Islam , Local Tradition , Honor and Symbolic Communication," *Al-Jâmi'âb: Journal of Islamic Studies* 57, no. 2 (2019): 329–58, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2019.572.329-358>.

¹⁷ Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (New York: The Free Press of Glenco, 1960).

¹⁸ Sahiron Syamsuddin, "Pendekatan Dan Analisis Dalam Penelitian Teks Tafsir: Sebuah Overview," *Subuf* 12, no. 1 (2019): 131–49.

¹⁹ Brad East, "The Hermeneutics of Theological Interpretation: Holy Scripture, Biblical Scholarship and Historical Criticism," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 19, no. 1 (2017): 30–52, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/ijst.12186>.

Peter Berger,²⁰ Aunillah Reza Pratama with the title Puritan Ideology in the *Tafsir* of Coastal Java: A Study of the Interpretation of Misbah Musthofa using Hans George Gadamer's hermeneutic approach.²¹ Islah Gusmian by discussing Criticism of Social, Political, and Religious Problems in Indonesia: A Study on *Al-Iklil fi Ma'āni al-Tanzil* by Misbah Bin Zainil Mustafa (1917-1994).²² Ahmad Baidowi who explained the Locality Aspect of *Tafsir Al-Iklil Fi Ma'āni Al-Tanzil* by Kh Misbah Musthofa who discussed the aspect of *tafsir* by relating the locality elements of Javanese society.²³ Similar research was also conducted by Abd. Majid Abror with research on the Locality and Textuality of *Tafsir al-Iklil Fi Ma'Ani al-Tanzil* in Traditional Javanese Society.²⁴

Second, research that has relevance to the needs of the Islamic community. This research is like that conducted by Fahma Maulida Wasathiyah The Perspective of Misbah Mustofa: A Study of *Tafsir Al-Iklil Fi Ma'āni Al-Tanzil*.²⁵ Ridho Margo Waluyo with the title Dayn (debt and receivables) in the Qur'an: An Analysis of the Book of *Tafsir Al-Iklil Fi Ma'āni Al-Tanzil* by Misbah Musthofa.²⁶ Syaddad Ibn Hambari who discusses Religious Tolerance in the *Tafsir* of Javanese Scholars (A Study of the Thoughts of Kh. Misbah Musthofa in *Tafsir Al-Iklil*).²⁷ Imam taufiq who examines Misbah Musthofa's thoughts on *ṣulḥ* in an effort to achieve peace and conflict resolution in Indonesia which is carried out by obeying the rules set by the government, and is realized through dialogue and openness.²⁸

A number of previous studies have examined the *Tafsir Al-Iklil Fi Ma'āni Al-Tanzil* from various perspectives, such as aspects of locality, puritan ideology, religious tolerance, and the social construction of the traditional Javanese society. Nevertheless, these studies generally still place the interpretation of *Al-Iklil Fi Ma'āni Al-Tanzil* as a representation of the response to local culture, without examining in depth how the practice of interpretation operates as a form of systematic discourse critique of the hegemony of tradition and religious authority. In other words, there are still limitations to studies that place this interpretation as an interpretive practice that actively dismantles the relationship between sacred texts, cultural traditions, and symbolic power in Javanese Islamic society.

²⁰ Rosyid Efendi, "Konstruksi Sosial Tradisi Masyarakat Bangilan, Tuban, Pasca KH. Misbah Musthofa: Analisis Dampak *Tafsir Al-Iklil Fi Ma'āni Al-Tanzil* Dan Tāj Al-Muslimīn Min Kalāmi Rabbī Al-'Alamīn Terhadap Tradisi" (Yogyakarta: Program Studi Ushuluddin dan Pemikiran Islam Konsentrasi, 2024).

²¹ Aunillah Reza Pratama, "Ideologi Puritan Dalam *Tafsir* Jawa Pesisir: Kajian Terhadap Penafsiran Misbah Musthofa," *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadith* 9, no. 2 (2019): 214–36.

²² Islah Gusmian and Mustaffa Abdullah, "Criticism of Social, Political, and Religious Problems in Indonesia: A Study on *Al-Iklil Fi Ma'āni Al-Tanzil* by Misbah Bin Zainil Mustafa (1917-1994)," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 18, no. 1 (2023): 215–30.

²³ Ahmad Baidowi, "Aspek Lokalitas *Tafsir Al-Iklil Fi Ma'āni Al-Tanzil* Karya Kh Mishbah Mustafa," *Nun: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Tafsir Di Nusantara* 1, no. 1 (2015).

²⁴ Abd. Majid Abror, "Lokalitas Dan Tekstualitas *Tafsir Al-Iklil Fi Ma'āni Al-Tanzil* Dalam Masyarakat Tradisional Jawa," *Ta'wiluna: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an, Tafsir Dan Pemikiran Islam* 4, no. 1 (2023): 150–67, <https://doi.org/10.58401/takwiluna.v4i1.937>.

²⁵ Fahma Maulida and Amalia Anindita, "Wasathiyah Perspektif Misbah Mustofa (Studi *Tafsir Al-Iklil Fi Ma'āni Al-Tanzil*)," *Shad: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 1, no. 1 (2023): 62–77.

²⁶ Ridho Margo Waluyo, Muhammad Nur Amin, and Eka Prasetyawati, "Dayn (Utang Piutang) Dalam Al-Qur'an Analisis Terhadap Kitab *Tafsir Al-Iklil Fi Ma'āni Al-Tanzil* Karya Misbah Musthofa," *Berkala Hukum, Sosial Dan Agama* 1, no. 1 (2024): 1–17.

²⁷ Syaddad Ibnu Hambari, "Toleransi Beragama Dalam *Tafsir* Ulama Jawa (Telaah Pemikiran KH. Misbah Musthofa Dalam *Tafsir Al-Iklil*)," *Qof* 4, no. 2 (2020): 185–200, <https://doi.org/10.30762/qof.v4i2.2399>.

²⁸ Imam Taufik, "As Sulh Inda As-Syaikh Misbach Bin Zayn Al-Musthafa Fi Kitabihi Al-Iklil Fi Ma'āni Al-Tanzil : Dirasah an Ittijah at-Tafsir Al-Qur'an Fi Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 8, no. 2 (2014): 299–324.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to examine how Misbah Musthofa through *Tafsir al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* criticizes the local cultural practices of the Javanese Muslim community by placing the Qur'an as an instrument of theological and social evaluation. This research views tafsir as a product of the meaning of the text as well as a discourse practice that functions to dismantle the legitimacy of traditions that have been sacred and are no longer critically questioned. Within this framework, a deconstruction approach is used to understand the way in which Misbah Musthofa challenges the establishment of religious traditions while opening up space for more contextual and reflective reinterpretation. The focus of the study is directed at Misbah Musthofa's forms of criticism of the local cultural practices of the Javanese Muslim community. The mapping of criticism in the theological, ritual, social, and understanding of the practice of interpretation as a strategy for interpreting and contextual interpretation of the Qur'an is critical. Through this approach, this research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of the study of Qur'an interpretation in Indonesia, especially in understanding tafsir as a practice of socio-cultural criticism operating in the context of Javanese Islam.

Method

This study uses a qualitative design based on literature studies that focuses on the analysis of the interpretation of the Qur'an as a practice of socio-cultural discourse. The analytical framework used is the sociology of interpretation, which views the interpretation of the Qur'an as a discursive practice formed through the interaction between mufassir, the text of the Qur'an, and the socio-historical context in which the interpretation is produced. In this perspective, tafsir is understood as an intellectual and social construction that reflects the theological orientation, cultural position, and response of mufassir to the religious reality that lives in society. The material object of this research is *Tafsir al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* by KH. Misbah Musthofa. The formal object of this research is a critique of the local cultural practices of the Javanese Muslim community as represented in the discourse of Misbah Musthofa's interpretation. The analysis focuses on Qur'anic verses that are explicitly used to evaluate religious practices that have been institutionalized in Javanese Islam, including tahlilan, grave pilgrimage, tumpengan, belief in certain days, cult of religious authority, and other ritual practices that have theological and social implications.

The selection of verses and cultural practices in this study is based on measurable criteria. The verses analyzed are accompanied by explanations of tafsir that directly refer to the social and cultural phenomena of Javanese society. These verses serve as normative references in theological evaluation of religious practice and show a consistent and repetitive pattern of criticism throughout the work of commentary. The analysis technique is carried out through several interrelated stages. The first stage is a textual reading of *Tafsir al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* to identify parts of the interpretation that contain criticism of local cultural traditions and practices. The second stage is in the form of contextual analysis by placing the interpretation in the socio-cultural landscape of Javanese Islam as well as the historical context of the life and thought of Misbah Musthofa. The third stage is the grouping of findings into analytical categories that include theological criticism, ritual criticism, and social criticism. The fourth stage is in the form of analytical interpretation by utilizing the perspective of sociological interpretation and contextual reading of the Qur'an to explain the function of interpretation criticism in the religious and cultural dynamics of society.

In this study, the concept of deconstruction is used as a critical analytical tool to examine the process of sacralization and naturalization of religious traditions in social practice. Deconstruction

is understood as a strategy of re-reading the relationship between Qur'anic texts and cultural traditions with the aim of uncovering the assumptions, hierarchies of meaning, and claims of religious authorities working in established religious practices. Through this approach, Misbah Musthofa's interpretive practice is analyzed as a form of interpretive criticism that opens up space for more reflective, contextual, and emancipatory reinterpretation. This methodological framework allows research to produce a systematic and academically accountable analysis in understanding the interpretation of the Qur'an as a socio-cultural practice as well as as a medium of criticism of the establishment of religious traditions.

Result and Discussion

Living Qur'an and the Construction of Islamic Culture

The Qur'an is understood as a collection of normative texts and as a *living tradition* that is always in dialogue with the dynamics of the times. As a holy book, the Qur'an has the capacity to answer various social, political, and cultural problems that arise in each of its historical contexts. At the time of revelation, the significance of the Qur'an lay in its ability to respond to the needs of the early Islamic community through a lively and functional oral language.²⁹ Ahmad Rafiq explained that when it was first revealed, the Qur'an did not immediately have an important meaning for the entire society at that time, because its existence was still closely related to specific events and contexts.³⁰ In the current context, the Qur'an still has an initial meaning, even though the original meaning is no longer alive as it was when it was manifested in oral language.³¹ The initial meaning in this phase is in the form of text, therefore it is in a dead state, which requires further study by relating the text to the context of the time.³² The Qur'an in this form has two elements of meaning, namely the initial meaning and significance.³³ Thus, the Qur'an not only functions as a text that is passively interpreted by its readers, but also as an entity that actively influences, shapes understanding, and gives direction to the behavior and social construction of society.³⁴ The Qur'an is not only a reflection of reality, but also an agent of change that has a role in shaping reality itself.

In addition, the Qur'an is understood as an active subject that helps define meaning and shape religious practices, not just a passive object that acquires meaning through community understanding and practice.³⁵ This explanation indicates that the Qur'an has two dimensions of meaning, namely the historical meaning that has been inherent since the beginning of revelation and the functional meaning that arises through interaction with the current situation. In this context, the Qur'an becomes an agent of change that has a role in shaping reality and redefining

²⁹ Nasaruddin Umar, *Memahami Al-Qur'an Di Masa Post Truth* (Jakarta: Grasindo, 2022).

³⁰ Ahmad Rafiq, "Living Qur'an: Its Texts and Practices in the Functions of the Scripture," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 22, no. 2 (2021): 469–83, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.2021.2202-10>.

³¹ Quraish Shihab, *Menabur Pesan Ilahi: Al-Qur'an Dan Dinamika Kehidupan Masyarakat* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2006).

³² Angelika Neuwirth, *Structure and the Emergence of Community, The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

³³ Wildana Zulfa and Masruchan Masruchan, "Interrelasi Teks Tafsir Dan Budaya Jawa Dalam Kitab Faidl Al-Rahman Karya Kiai Sholeh Darat," *An-Nisa': Jurnal Kajian Perempuan Dan Keislaman* 14, no. 2 (2021): 185–202, <https://doi.org/10.35719/annisa.v14i2.65>.

³⁴ Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an In Its Historical Context* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

³⁵ Ihwan Agustono, "From Oral Tradition to Written Text: Neuwirth's Insights on the Spoken Aspects of the Qur'an," *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadith* 14, no. 2 (2024): 215–37, <https://doi.org/10.15642/mutawatir.2024.14.2.215-237>.

values in society.³⁶ The Qur'an was revealed to instill ideal values in its adherents and become the driving force for cultural transformation in society.³⁷ As revealed by Quraish Shihab, the Qur'an has presented itself as a holy book that carries the mission of positive social change. This function is illustrated through terms such as *hudā* (guidance), *baijināt* (clear explanation), and *furqān* (the distinction between right and wrong).³⁸ This shows that revelation is not passive or only on a spiritual level, but is also active in responding to socio-cultural realities and guiding the direction of its change towards the values of justice, humanity, and equality.

The relationship between the Qur'an and culture is constantly changing and impacting each other. In such a situation, the Qur'an is not only a religious text but also has an influence on various aspects of culture. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, in his book "*The Concept of the Text*", refers to the Quran as a cultural product.³⁹ Hajjin Mabrur in this case said that the Qur'an was revealed to instill moral and moral values for Muslims who have the power for cultural transformation.⁴⁰ This context of interpretation as a cultural product is not the Qur'an in its essence as the word of God, but how humans interpret, practice, and reconstruct the messages of the Qur'an in daily life according to their times.⁴¹ *Tafsir* as the result of the intellectual construction of the mufassir, was greatly influenced by the social, political, and cultural conditions of his time. This example is like the interpretation in the classical Islamic world which is influenced by the context of dynastic politics, while the interpretation in Indonesia cannot be separated from the influence of local culture such as pesantren traditions, local wisdom, and national values.⁴²

Understanding the Qur'an's relationship to culture is a strategic step to explore the relevance of divine revelation in contemporary realities. This approach avoids rigid textualist readings and opens up space for contextual, inclusive, and transformative meanings.⁴³ Within this framework, the Qur'an is maintained in its purity, and the interpretation is the result of a dynamic cultural process. Mufassir in various regions also interpret and understand the Qur'an from their own perspective. For example, before the advent of Islam, pre-existing religious practices were often accommodated in the context of Islam. As a result, there are differences in religious understanding and practice.⁴⁴ This means that traditional or customary values are influenced by the arrival of Islam. Islam does not erase all the traditions that have been carried out by the community, but the

³⁶ Ali Muhammad Bhat and Afroz Ahmad Bisati, "Rationality in the Qur'an: Integrating Reason and Revelation for Contemporary Islamic Education," *Dirasah International Journal of Islamic Studies* 3, no. 1 (2025): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.59373/drs.v3i1.40>.

³⁷ M Djidin, "Qur'anic Values as a Foundation for Social Change in Modern Society," *IQRO: Journal of Islamic Education* 7, no. 2 (2024): 234–43, <https://doi.org/10.24256/iqro.v7i2.5613>.

³⁸ M. Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan Al-Qur'an (Fungsi Dan Peran Wahyu Dalam Kehidupan Masyarakat)* (Bandung: Mizan, 1996).

³⁹ Muḥammad Bahrāmī, "The Relation between Religion and Culture from the Viewpoint of the Qur'an," *Qur'anic Reserves* 14, no. 54 (2008): 172–203, <http://journal.bungabangsacirebon.ac.id/index.php/misykah>.

⁴⁰ Hajjin Mabrur, "Transformasi Kebudayaan Dalam Prespektif Al-Quran," *Misykah: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Studi Islam*, 7, no. 1 (2022): 58–67, <http://journal.bungabangsacirebon.ac.id/index.php/misykah>.

⁴¹ Matson, *The Story of the Qur'an: Its History and Place in Muslim Life*.

⁴² Johanna Pink, *Qur'an Translation in Indonesia Scriptural Politics in a Multilingual State* (London: Routledge, 2024).

⁴³ Farid Esack, *Qur'an Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (London: One World Oxford, 1997).

⁴⁴ Muhammad Hasbiyallah, "Paradigma Tafsir Kontekstual:Upaya Membumikan Nilai-Nilai Al-Qur'an," *AL-DZIKRA: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Al-Hadits* 12, no. 1 (2018): 1–26, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24042/al-dzikra.v12i1.2924>.

traditions that are considered good are maintained and reaffirmed in the Qur'an.⁴⁵ This context that is known about the relationship between the Qur'an and culture is the Qur'an which is used as a living revelation and used as a *problem solving* or able to answer all problems that arise in the midst of society.

The Qur'an does not explicitly convey technical guidelines regarding social dynamics in society. Nevertheless, the Qur'an contains normative principles that represent the basic characteristics and qualities of a culture.⁴⁶ These principles require a process of interpretation by a deep mufassir and reflective and complex thinking to be operationalized at the level of cultural praxis. Furthermore, the Qur'an motivates humans to contemplate the process of the formation of a civilization and its developmental dynamics, including in the aspects of values, social structure, and the vision of humanity.⁴⁷ Therefore, it is possible for Muslims to reconstruct an ideal culture based on the framework of Qur'anic values, which are transcendent and relevant to the historical and cultural context of society.

As a living tradition, the Qur'an serves not only as a passive object to be interpreted, but also as an active subject that shapes and directs social constructions, cultural values, as well as the orientation of civilization.⁴⁸ This explanation emphasizes the importance of a socio-cultural approach in the interpretation of the Qur'an, because revelation does not descend in a vacuum, but in the context of a certain society that is undergoing transformation. Therefore, *tafsir* is a cultural product that is influenced by the social, political, and intellectual conditions of the time. Ideas such as those put forward by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd show that the interpretation of the Qur'an is a contextual historical activity, which in turn influences and is influenced by local culture.⁴⁹ This can be seen in the context of Indonesian interpretation which is heavily influenced by pesantren traditions, national values, and local wisdom. The Qur'an in this context has regulated the technical dynamics of society, containing universal normative principles that are the basis for the formation of an ideal culture. Therefore, through a reflective and contextual interpretation process, Muslims can reconstruct cultural values based on the spirit of the Qur'an which remains holy and applicable to the changing times.

Criticism of Misbah Musthofa's Tafsir as an Analytical and Emancipatory Practice

In the early 1960s, the study of the Qur'an emerged and spread to various regions of the archipelago.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, Nashruddin Baidan argues that the development of *tafsir* in Indonesia only began in the 20th century.⁵¹ This activity is marked by the rise of writing translation and interpretation of the Qur'an separately, so that in the writing process there are various local

⁴⁵ Siti Ruqiyah, "Tradisi Bangsa Arab Pra-Islam Dan Nilai-Nilai Al-Qur'an," *TAFAKKUR: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 4, no. 1 (2023): 122–39.

⁴⁶ Badruddin and Aditya Prastian Supriyadi, "Dinamika Hukum Islam Indonesia: Reaktualisasi Norma Islam Dalam Menalarkan Hukum Positif Merespon Sosio-Kultural Era Kontemporer," *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum Dan Syar'iah* 14, no. 1 (2022): 38–57, <https://doi.org/10.18860/j-fsh.v14i1.15512>.

⁴⁷ Ali Ridho, "Al-Quran Dan Budaya: Al-Quran Dalam Siklus Kehidupan Muslim," *MAGHZA: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 4, no. 1 (2019): 53–73, <https://doi.org/10.24090/maghza.v4i1.2441>.

⁴⁸ Dede Rosyada, "A Contextual Method of Interpreting the Qur'an: A Search for the Compatibility of Islam and Modernity," *Education and Humanities Research (ASSEHR)* 137 (2018): 1–6, <https://doi.org/10.2991/icqhs-17.2018.1>.

⁴⁹ Kusuma, "Hermeneutika Humanistik Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd : Al-Qur'an Sebagai Wacana," *Kanz Philosophia: A Journal for Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism* 2, no. 2 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.20871/kpjpm.v2i2.33>.

⁵⁰ Cholid Ma'arif, "Kajian Alquran Di Indonesia : Telaah Historis," *Qaf* 1, no. 2 (1938): 117–27.

⁵¹ Nashruddin Baidan, *Perkembangan Tafsir Al-Qur'an Di Indonesia* (Solo: Tiga Serangkai Pustaka Mandiri, 2003).

languages used in translating and interpreting the Qur'an, both using Javanese, Sundanese, Batak, Bugis, Madurese and so on.⁵² The diversity in the interpretation process gives an idea that the Nusantara mufassir aims to ground the values and shari'a enshrined in the holy book of the Qur'an.⁵³ In this context, mufassir experiences internalization of the socio-cultural scope in the process of writing tafsir. The diverse socio-cultural diversity makes the interpretation of the archipelago have its own characteristics by emphasizing the locality aspect of each region.

The relationship between the Qur'an and today's cultural reality has been codified in the form of written texts such as *Mushaf 'Usmani*, and the form of interaction has also changed.⁵⁴ The relationship focuses more on the interpretive aspect. That is, the Qur'an no longer functions directly as a living entity as it did at the time of revelation. The Qur'an is present as a silent text, whose meaning can only be revived through the reading and interpretation by the mufassir.⁵⁵ In other words, it is not the Qur'an that speaks, but the mufassir who make him speak through interpretation according to the scope of his time. As the interpretation of *Al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* with the nuances of Javanese culture and the aspect of locality is very distinctive.⁵⁶

Tafsir Al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil by Misbah Musthofa is a Javanese commentary born from the cultural and social context of the Islamic community in Java.⁵⁷ This interpretation is proof that the understanding of the Qur'an never stands in a vacuum, but always interacts with the social, political, and cultural spaces that surround it. In this case, local culture is an important medium in shaping approaches, language styles, and interpretive emphasis on Qur'anic interpretation. In addition, the tafsir written by Misbah Musthofa has a purpose and motivation in writing a tafsir. In addition to the method of da'wah and inviting people to follow the guidelines of the teachings of the Qur'an, it also aims to make it easier for someone who wants to learn the Qur'an whose notes are written in Arabic, then translated into language that is easy to understand.⁵⁸ In this context, Misbah Musthofa uses the Javanese language. Through a writing delivered through this book of tafsir, the Muslim community in Java is expected to learn more easily remembered than lectures. With the existence of this tafsir writing, it can also be read and studied from time to time with a discussion that is in accordance with the problem at that time which is not yet known for sure.

The pattern of tafsir *Al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* can be categorized as *adabi al-Ijtima'i*, meaning that the interpretation of the verse contains a social nuance or issues of events that occurred at that time and is responded to through the book of tafsir. As Ahmad Baidhowi explained, that in explaining the meaning of verses, Misbah Musthofa sometimes relates to problems that are happening in the midst of society.⁵⁹ For example, the interpretation that is explained about the issues that are happening such as the response and criticism of the family planning program, the

⁵² Irsyad Al Fikri Ys, "Kekhasan Dan Keanekaragaman Bahasa Dalam Tafsir Lokal Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Iman Dan Spiritualitas* 1, no. 2 (2021): 157–63, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jis.v1i2.11792>.

⁵³ Munzir Hitami, "Nilai-Nilai Pluralisme Dalam Tafsir Nusantara," *Nusantara; Journal for Southeast Asian Islamic Studies* 17, no. 1 (2021): 8, <https://doi.org/10.24014/nusantara.v17i1.13826>.

⁵⁴ Muhammad HS Alwi, "Epistemologi Tafsir: Mengurai Relasi Filsafat Dengan Al-Qur'an," *Substantia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 21, no. 1 (2019): 1–16, <https://jurnal.ar-raniry.ac.id/index.php/substantia>.

⁵⁵ Wijaya, "Relasi Al-Qur'an Dan Budaya Lokal (Sebuah Tatapan Epistemologis)."

⁵⁶ Ahmad Baidowi, "Aspek Lokalitas Tafsir Al-Iklil Fi Ma'ani Al-Tanzil Karya Kh Mishbah Musthafa."

⁵⁷ Islah Gusmian, "K.H. Misbah Ibn Zainul Musthafa (1916-1994 M): Pemikir Dan Penulis Teks Keagamaan Dari Pesantren," *Jurnal Lekture Keagamaan* 14, no. 1 (2016): 115, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlk.v14i1.474>.

⁵⁸ Interview with Abdullah Abid, Misbah Musthofa's grandson, accessed on May 2, 2025

⁵⁹ Ahmad Baidowi, "Pégon Script Phenomena in the Tradition of Pesantren's Qur'anic Commentaries Writing," *Journal of the Study of the Sciences of the Qur'an and Hadith* 21, no. 2 (2020): 469, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.2020.2102-12>.

existence of Riba in the Bank system, the MTQ competition, and the tradition of Tahlilan, tumpengan, grave pilgrimage, attending haul, attending kondangan, teacher cult, blind taklid, ruwatan, the use of amulets or mystical practices, social inequality and gender bias.⁶⁰ This context shows that the relationship between tafsir and local culture in this work reflects the paradigm of contextual interpretation, in which the Qur'an is read and explained in dialogue with socio-cultural dynamics. *Tafsir Al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* thus becomes a dialectical space between revelation and local reality, in which sacred texts are not only repeated, but revived according to the needs of society. This means that Misbah Musthofa makes the Qur'an a living revelation and is used as a *problem solving* and answer to all problems that arise in Javanese Muslim society.

Misbah Musthofa's interpretation of people's lives, especially in his commentary *work Al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil*, is a form of response to socio-cultural practices that are considered to be contrary to Islamic values as enshrined in the Qur'an. The responses and criticisms written by Misbah Musthofa in his commentary are not merely normative, but contextual and progressive, with a sociological and cultural approach. Through this approach, Misbah Musthofa tries to build a relationship between the text and the context, meaning that the verses of the Qur'an are reinterpreted in order to be able to answer social challenges, including cultural practices that he considers to be contrary to Islamic values. As Farid Essack said, the importance of the position of mufassir as an emancipator in the interpretation process.⁶¹ The emancipatory figure is depicted in the experience of Misbah Musthofa before interpreting the verse based on the theme to be written, namely the interpretation of the Qur'an by departing from social reality to express what has been explained in the text.

The interpretive practice carried out by Misbah Musthofa cannot be separated from the cultural influence and political dynamics that surround him. In interpreting the text of the Qur'an, he applies a critical and contextual approach, departing from the complexity of social problems that demand a more applicative elaboration of the meaning of the verse. Misbah Musthofa emphasized that the interpretation of the Qur'an is not only aimed at revealing the literal meaning of the verses, but also adapts the meaning to the social context of the community. Through this approach, the Qur'an is positioned as a source of social criticism of life practices that deviate from Islamic shari'a values. Ummi Kultsum said that the Qur'an has a transformational function in shaping social, cultural, and even civilizational structures. This civilization in essence cannot be separated from the power of the text that is the basis of the orientation of people's lives.⁶²

Misbah Musthofa's orientation in interpreting Qur'anic verses is basically influenced by the reality of society in Indonesia. Through his book of tafsir, Misbah Musthofa shows something that is not only new, but also indicates that the construction of the interpretation of reason that is written has a close relationship with the reason of his thought.⁶³ This means that when there are things happening in the community, and there are irregularities, Misbah Musthofa is present in delivering his explanation aimed at responding or countering the situation. This phenomenon is as Misbah Musthofa opposes the new order policy that socializes programs that are considered to have followed the customs of the ignorant people and the traditions carried out by the community.

⁶⁰ Misbah Musthofa, *Al-Iklil Fi Ma'ani Al-Tanzil* (Surabaya: Al-Ihsan, 1985).

⁶¹ Esack, *Qur'an Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*.

⁶² Lilik Ummi Kultsum, "Tafsir Al-Qur'an: Pemahaman Antara Teks Dan Realitas Dalam Membumikkan Al-Qur'an," *Jurnal Al-Fanar* 3, no. 2 (2020): 221–33, <https://doi.org/10.33511/alfanar.v3n2.221-233>.

⁶³ Islah Gusmian, *Khasanah Tafsir Indonesia: Dari Hermeneutika Hingga Ideologi* (Yogyakarta: LkiS, 2011).

Theological Criticism: The Affirmation of Tawheed and the Rejection of the Sacredization of Tradition

Misbah Musthofa's interpretation of QS. al-Baqarah (2): 140 shows a serious effort in affirming the principle of monotheism as a theological foundation in assessing the religious practices of the community. This verse is used to criticize the tendency of Muslims who rely on blind *taqlid* to ancestral traditions, including the practice of *tahlilan* that is carried out without critical reflection. In his view, deeds are personal and cannot be transferred or delegated to others, so spiritual salvation is not determined by mere collective rituals. The tradition of *tahlilan* being treated as a guarantee of safety for the deceased is seen as potentially obscuring a Muslim's individual responsibility for his or her own charity and worship.⁶⁴ This interpretation shows that Misbah wanted to dismantle (*deconstruct*) the claims to the sanctity of traditions that had been socially institutionalized, but lacked a solid theological basis. At the same time, his interpretation is in line with Fazlur Rahman's contextual hermeneutics which emphasizes the importance of linking the universal moral message of the Qur'an with individual ethical awareness.⁶⁵ Through this approach, monotheism is understood not simply as an abstract theological concept, but as a praxis principle that demands the spiritual independence and moral responsibility of each individual.

The rejection of the sacredization of tradition is also evident in the interpretation of QS. al-Baqarah (2): 170 which is directed at the practice of *tumpengan* and belief in *nogo dino*. Misbah Musthofa assessed that many Muslims accept these practices based on traditional authority and social legitimacy, without conducting a critical evaluation of their conformity with the principles of the Islamic faith. The tradition of *tumpeng* and the belief in good and bad days are understood as a residue of pre-Islamic culture that continues to be reproduced in the religious life of the community. The critical hermeneutic approach used by Misbah Musthofa places the Qur'an as a normative evaluation tool for established cultural practices. By referring to the Prophet's hadith about the prohibition of reviving the tradition of *jahiliyah*, he strengthens the argument that the sustainability of the tradition is not always directly proportional to its theological truth.⁶⁶

More broadly, Misbah Musthofa's theological criticism does not stop at the rejection of tradition, but is directed at the formation of an emancipatory religious consciousness. In the framework of Farid Esack's liberation hermeneutics, the interpretation of Misbah Musthofa can be understood as an effort to free the ummah from symbolic dependence on rituals and cultural authorities that limit religious reason.⁶⁷ The Qur'an is not treated as a text that legitimizes the status quo, but as a source of criticism of religious practices that lose the orientation of monotheism. With this approach, traditions are tested not on the basis of their popularity or heritage, but on their contribution to the formation of rational and responsible monotheistic ethics. *Tafsir al-Iklil* thus becomes a space in which revelation interacts critically with the local culture, rather than being subject to it. Through this theological criticism, Misbah Musthofa emphasized that piety is not measured by the intensity of communal rituals, but by the conformity of charity with the principles

⁶⁴ Misbah Musthofa, *Al-Iklil Fi Ma'ani Al-Tanzil*.

⁶⁵ Arief S. Arman, "The Discourse Of Renewal: Assessing Fazlur Rahman's Hermeneutics And Its Contemporary Relevance," *Al-Shajarah: Journal of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC)* Desember (2024): 315–55.

⁶⁶ Misbah Musthofa, *Al-Iklil Fi Ma'ani Al-Tanzil*.

⁶⁷ Farid essack, *Qur'an, Liberation, & Pluralism*, Terj (Bandung: MMU, 2000).

of monotheism and justice of the Qur'an. The Qur'an is present as a living revelation, which actively corrects, assesses, and guides the religious practices of the people.

Ritual Criticism: Evaluation of the Function of Worship and Religious Ethics

The practice of rituals in the religious life of the community occupies an important position because it is a space for the actualization of the relationship between man and God.⁶⁸ Worship is not only understood as a symbolic act, but also as a medium for the formation of ethics, moral awareness, and life orientation of a Muslim. This perspective demands that every ritual practice be tested not only in terms of its formal legality, but also in terms of the spiritual and social functions it produces.⁶⁹ The interpretation of the Qur'an, in this context, acts as an evaluative instrument that directs the ummah not to be trapped in the formalism of worship. This kind of approach places revelation as a living and responsive guide to the dynamics of religion. This framework is used by Misbah Musthofa when reading the ritual practices that developed in the Javanese Muslim society. Through its interpretation, the ritual is tested to the extent that it is still in line with the ethical goals of the Qur'an and does not undergo a reduction in meaning.

Misbah Musthofa's interpretation of QS. al-A'rāf (7): 2 shows a sharp criticism of the phenomenon of Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ) which he considers to have shifted from the original purpose of the Qur'an's revelation. The Qur'an is understood as a revelation that serves to lead humans to the practice of divine values, not just as an aesthetic object of sound or a commodity of competition. The practice of chanting verses of the Qur'an and making them a means of competition is seen as risky to obscure the ethical function of revelation. This criticism is directed at the tendency to use the Qur'an as a tool for material search and social prestige, even as a source of economic livelihood.⁷⁰ This orientation shift shows the occurrence of ritualization without internalization of values. Misbah Musthofa's interpretation shows that when the Qur'an is reduced to a performance, its transformational power as a guide to life will be weakened. This approach is in line with a critical hermeneutic view that places sacred texts as a source of praxian ethics, rather than merely a religious symbol.

Ritual criticism is also directed at the practice of grave pilgrimage and haul commemoration as interpreted through QS. al-Mā'idah (5): 35. Pilgrimage to the guardians is basically recognized as a practice that has spiritual legitimacy, especially if interpreted as a means of getting closer to Allah. However, Misbah Musthofa emphasized the importance of re-examining the intention and orientation of the pilgrims. Love for the guardian of Allah should be reflected in the attitude of zuhud, self-control, and the improvement of the quality of faith, not just a symbolic attachment to a certain tomb or figure. The practice of pilgrimage that is carried out without spiritual reflection has the potential to turn into an empty tradition that loses its ethical meaning. Therefore, *muhasabah* is an important element before and after the implementation of the pilgrimage. The question of post-pilgrimage moral and spiritual change is the main measure of the validity of the ritual.⁷¹

⁶⁸ M. Yahya, "Al-Qur'an Dalam Kebudayaan Hikmah Pesantren: Pemaknaan, Performasi-Diskursif Dan Produksi Kultural" (Disetasi di UIN Sunan kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2021).

⁶⁹ Ahmad Rafiq, "Living Qur'an: Its Texts and Practices in the Functions of the Scripture Living Quran: Teks Dan Praktik Dalam Fungsi Kitab Suci," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 22, no. 2 (2021): 2548–4737, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.2021.2202-10>.

⁷⁰ Nehru Millat Ahmad, *Kritik Sosial Dalam Tafsir Al-Iklil* (Kendal: Eksystika, 2023).

⁷¹ Misbah Musthofa, *Al-Iklil Fi Ma'ani Al-Tanzil*.

The interpretation of QS. al-Nisā' (4): 171 expands Misbah Musthofa's criticism of the practice of *haul* (commemoration of one's death)⁷² and the excessive glorification of religious figures. The prohibition of *lā tagħlu fi dñikum* is understood as a warning so that the ummah does not go beyond the limit in expressing religious respect. The phenomenon of culting certain figures, including displaying photos of guardians or tarekat figures excessively, is considered to have the potential to shift the orientation of monotheism. Respect for scholars and guardians is still necessary, but it must be in a proportionate and rational corridor.⁷³ The history of Islam shows many exemplary figures with high standing in the sight of Allah, ranging from the Companions to the imams of the sect, who were respected without excessive cults. This awareness is important, especially for ordinary people so that they are not trapped in symbolic forms of religion. Judging from the way Misbah thinks in this context, it seems that he places ritual as an instrument of spiritual education, not as the ultimate goal of a religion.

The overall criticism of ritual put forward by Misbah Musthofa shows an orientation of interpretation that emphasizes the ethical and transformational functions of worship. Ritual is understood as a practice that must always be tested for its relevance to the moral purpose of the Qur'an.⁷⁴ *Tafsir* does not stop at the justification or rejection of religious practices, but moves on efforts to build the critical awareness of the ummah. This approach emphasizes that authentic religiosity requires a balance between ritual forms and value substances. The Qur'an is positioned as a source of correction to worship practices that have been distorted in meaning. In this way, interpretation serves as an instrument of liberation from empty ritualism. The criticism of ritual in *Tafsir al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* finally affirms that valuable worship is one that forms ethics, deepens faith, and brings about real changes in the social life of the ummah.

Socio-Political Criticism: The Qur'an as an Instrument of Critical Consciousness

The socio-political interpretation in *Tafsir al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* shows that Misbah Musthofa reads the Qur'an not only as a normative text, but as a tool of criticism of power relations and oppressive social practices. The verses of the Qur'an are positioned as a medium of historical reflection that allows for parallel readings between past events and contemporary reality. This approach is evident in his interpretation of QS. al-Qaṣaṣ (28): 4–5 which tells of the tyranny of Pharaoh. The story is not understood only historically, but is read as a recurring pattern of power in various social and political contexts. Thus, the Qur'an serves as a critical lens for reading the mechanisms of domination that work systemically.

In his interpretation of the verse, Misbah Musthofa highlighted the Pharaoh's policy of dividing society into social classes and controlling the population of the Children of Israel through forced labor. This strategy is read as a systematic attempt to weaken groups that are considered to have the potential to threaten power stability.⁷⁵ This interpretation is then drawn into the modern context through criticism of the Family Planning (KB) program during the New Order period. The

⁷² Supriyanto, "Al-Qur'an Dalam Ruang Keagamaan Islam Jawa: Respons Pemikiran Keagamaan Misbah Mustafa Dalam *Tafsir Al-Iklil Fi Ma'ani Al-Tanzil*," *Jurnal Theologia* 28, no. 1 (2017): 29–54, <https://doi.org/10.21580/teo.2017.28.1.1294>.

⁷³ Misbah Musthofa, *Al-Iklil Fi Ma'ani Al-Tanzil*.

⁷⁴ H. Zuhri, "Beyond Syncretism: Evidence of the Vernacularization of Islamic Theological Terms in Javanese Literature in the 19th Century," *Al-Jami'ah* 60, no. 2 (2022): 373–98, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2022.602.373-398>.

⁷⁵ Nehru Millat Ahmad, "Kritik Misbah Musthofa Dalam *Tafsir Al-Iklil* Terhadap Kebijakan Program 'KB' Di Era Orde Baru," *Spiritualis: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam Dan Tasawuf* 8, no. 2 (2022): 198–211.

program is not only read as a demographic policy, but as a form of state control over the body and reproduction of the community.⁷⁶ The power relationship between the state and the citizens is understood to work with a similar logic: population control is used as an instrument of political stabilization. Where the Qur'anic narrative is operationalized as a criticism of state policies that are considered to repeat the pattern of historical oppression.

The same logic of structural criticism is also applied in the interpretation of QS. al-Baqarah (2): 275 related to the practice of usury carried out by the People's Credit Agency (Bank BPR).⁷⁷ Misbah Musthofa places this verse as a criticism of the economic system that normalizes inequality through the mechanism of interest. The practice of borrowing with an additional percentage is understood as a form of exploitation that is socially legitimized. The modern banking system, although wrapped in reasons of efficiency and security, is still positioned within the framework of usury as it generates one-sided profits.⁷⁸ This interpretation is not directed at individuals alone, but at the economic structures that shape people's behavior.

Misbah Musthofa's attention to the social impact of modernity can also be seen in his interpretation of QS. Luqmān (31): 8 and 13. The verse is used to read *the phenomenon of labw al-hadīth* in the context of modern entertainment such as television, radio, and cinema. Entertainment media is understood not just as a neutral technology, but as part of a lifestyle that has the potential to keep humans away from spiritual awareness.⁷⁹ This criticism is directed at a lifestyle that is oriented towards pleasure and consumption, not at the technology itself. Within this framework, modernity is read as an ambivalent space or a double-edged sword that can strengthen or weaken religious orientation, depending on how humans manage it.

Interpretation of QS. Luqmān (31): 13 then directed at a shift in social priorities in religious practice. Misbah Musthofa compared the tendency to attend condolences with the reluctance to attend condolences. These two social practices are positioned as representations of different value orientations. Condolences are understood as spaces of existential reflection reminiscent of the transience of life, while condolences are more often associated with the expansion of worldly pleasures.⁸⁰ This interpretation does not reject social practices absolutely, but proposes a hierarchy of values in the religious life of the community.

The dimension of criticism of authority relations is seen in the interpretation of QS. al-Mā'idah (5): 21 on the prohibition of total submission to humans. This verse is used to criticize the cult practices of teachers and religious leaders who are considered immune from criticism. Submission without reason is understood as a form of symbolic slavery that undermines the individual's freedom of thought and moral responsibility. Misbah Musthofa emphasized that respect for teachers is not synonymous with the elimination of critical power. This interpretation is reinforced by the story of Umar bin Khattab who was willing to withdraw his opinion after being criticized by a woman. The story serves as a Qur'anic and historical legitimacy for the importance of rational correction in the Islamic tradition.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Misbah Musthofa, *Al-Iklil Fi Ma'ani Al-Tanzil*.

⁷⁷ Misbah Musthofa, *BPR NU Dalam Tinjauan Al-Qur'an* (Surabaya: Al-Ihsan, 1990).

⁷⁸ Misbah Musthofa, *Al-Iklil Fi Ma'ani Al-Tanzil*.

⁷⁹ Misbah Musthofa.

⁸⁰ Misbah Musthofa.

⁸¹ Misbah Musthofa.

The pattern of socio-political reading in Misbah Musthofa's interpretation shows how the Qur'an is operated as a tool of critical awareness of oppressive social structures and religious practices that are considered final. The verses of the Qur'an are not treated as legitimacy for the established order, but rather as a medium to test power relations, the rationality of public policy, and symbolic authority that has the potential to move away from the principle of justice. Within this framework, the interpretation moves from the text to social reality without reducing the Qur'an to mere historical documents. On the contrary, revelation is understood as a normative discourse that continues to interact with the dynamics of the times and is able to produce criticism of social practices that are considered deviant.

This way of reading has a conceptual closeness to Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's idea of the Qur'an as a text that lives in social and historical space. Abu Zayd asserts that the meaning of revelation is not statically present, but is formed through the interaction between the text, the context, and the subject of the interpreter.⁸² In the practice of Misbah Musthofa's interpretation, this interaction is seen when the text of the Qur'an is used to reassess state policies, economic systems, and religious culture that develops in society. Interpretation does not stop at the repetition of normative meanings, but rather serves as a process of ethical rationalization that challenges dogmatic readings. At this point, the Qur'an is present not only as a source of moral legitimacy, but as an instrument of critical reflection that shapes the social consciousness of the ummah in a sustainable manner.

Discussion

The meaning of deconstruction has been popular among Westerners, one of which is Jacques Derrida, a modern philosopher who criticized the ideas, theories, and concepts of previous modern philosophers.⁸³ Derrida's ideas speak of an approach to understanding the meaning of the text by not having to rely on the previous meaning, but the understanding of the text needs to be explored through re-reading to find the hidden meaning and so on. In this context, the truth that emerges from the process of interpretation does not mean erasing the previous meaning or truth, but rather is present as an interpretation that stands side by side. Like Derrida's explanation that the truth of meaning should not be considered as a single final or absolute truth, because in the perspective of deconstruction, meaning is always open, fluid, and will continue to provide a new understanding of meaning.⁸⁴ Christopher Norris also reveals that meaning is never static or final. This means that the meaning is always open to re-reading and reinterpretation. Something that is believed to be a reflection of reality, according to this approach, is not permanent and will undergo changes. Meaning does not stand firmly in a single point, but rather moves actively, constantly changing, and allows for an infinite variety of new interpretations.⁸⁵

Deconstruction can also be used as literary criticism that includes interpretive activities to examine the structural and semantic complexities of texts that are hidden from the reader's understanding. This approach aims to uncover the implicit meanings hidden behind textual

⁸² Tahar Rachman, "Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd Dan Teori Interpretasinya," *Angewandte Chemie International Edition*, 6(11), 951–952, 2018, 10–27.

⁸³ Irfan, "Semiotika Dekonstruksi Dan Post-Strukturalis Pemikiran Jacques Derrida Dan Roland Barthes," *Jurnal Tanra: Desain Komunikasi Visual* 9, no. 2 (2022): 97–104, <https://doi.org/10.26858/tanra.v9i2.33302>.

⁸⁴ Jacques. Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978).

⁸⁵ Christopher Norris, *Derrida* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

discourse.⁸⁶ In the context of Qur'anic interpretation, the deconstruction approach plays a role in expanding the space to critique a single interpretation of the text and opening up a more dynamic interpretation.⁸⁷ This is in line with Fazlur Rahman's thinking which emphasizes the understanding of the Qur'an through contextual and historical approaches.⁸⁸ Fazlur Rahman views that the text of the Qur'an has a moral and social dimension that must be studied in depth in the context of changing times, so that its meaning is not understood statically, but is always open to reinterpretation that is relevant to the needs of modern society.⁸⁹

It is related to the deconstruction of the interpretation of local Javanese culture, which is a critical effort to dismantle, correct, or rearrange the meaning of the Qur'an that develops in Javanese culture, especially traditional interpretations that are strongly influenced by the symbolism of local culture, customs, and cosmology to be more in line with Islamic normative principles or contemporary contexts.⁹⁰ This is like the interpretation of Qur'anic verses by Misbah Musthofa trying to read the text critically by involving community issues as objects. From the process of observing the behavior of the people that are not in line with the rules of the Qur'an, he formulates his interpretation based on his thoughts. Where when there is a deviation of Muslims from the rules of the Qur'an, Misbah Musthofa will respond to this condition and criticize firmly. Misbah Musthofa said that Muslims have been given a crown like a king, the crown is the Qur'an. As the saying goes, Muslims have been revealed revelations in the form of the Qur'an to be used as a guideline or guide in daily life, but Muslims actually answer based on their desires when there is a problem.⁹¹

Through the explanation above, Misbah Musthofa wants to restore and change the perspective of Muslims, especially the Indonesian Muslim community who should refer to the Qur'an when there is a problem. As for the steps taken by Misbah Musthofa by departing from the reality of Muslims at that time, then he dialogued his understanding in accordance with Islamic shari'a obtained through his interpretation of the Qur'an. Like Farid Essack's approach to liberation hermeneutics in understanding the Qur'an. This approach aims to read the texts of the scriptures critically and contextually and as a response to those who claim the truth through the scriptures. In addition, the liberation hermeneutic approach explains that an interpretation cannot be considered neutral because it interferes with political, social and cultural interests that can directly affect the understanding of how to read a scriptural text.⁹²

The practice of interpreting Misbah Musthofa is basically also inseparable from the cultural and political influences that surround it. Misbah Musthofa in understanding the text, uses a critical and contextual approach based on very complex problems and the need for an elaboration and

⁸⁶ Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2009.108.1.1>.

⁸⁷ Alwi Shobri, Masruhan, and Moh Hasbulloh, "Implementasi Pemikiran Hermeneutika Jacques Derrida Dalam Memahami Hadis Nabi SAW," *Jurnal Filsafat Indonesia* 8, no. 1 (2025): 170–80.

⁸⁸ Arman, "The Discourse Of Renewal: Assessing Fazlur Rahman's Hermeneutics And Its Contemporary Relevance."

⁸⁹ Prisilia Maya Safa, Moh. Nor Ichwan, and Auwal Salisua, "Hermeneutics of Religious Freedom in Modern and Contemporary Interpretation: A Comparative Analysis between *Tafsir Al-Manar* and Fazlur Rahman," *Millati, Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 10, no. 1 (2025): 83–101, <https://doi.org/10.18326/millati.v10i1.4194>.

⁹⁰ Jamali Sahrodi, *Metodologi Studi Islam Menelusuri Jejak Historis Kajian Islam Ala Sarjana Orientalis* (Bandung: CV Pustaka Setia, 2008).

⁹¹ Misbah Musthofa, *Al-Iklil Fi Ma'ani Al-Tanzil*.

⁹² Farid Esack, *al-Qur'an, Liberalism, Pluralism: Liberating the Oppressed*, ed. (Bandung: Mizan, 2000).

answer based on the verses of the Qur'an. Directly, Misbah Musthofa wants to explain that the interpretation of the Qur'an is not only about explaining the meaning of verses based on text, but how a text of the Qur'an can be explained based on the social context in order to answer problems and problems, even a social criticism of something that deviates from Islamic shari'a in the midst of society. This means that the Qur'an as a holy book has a role in shaping socio-culture as well as forming civilization, where a civilization has a relationship with the role of text.

In addition, the interpretation of the Qur'an shown by Misbah Musthofa comes mostly from the product of his thoughts. Indirectly, there is a dynamism of thought that affects the perspective in explaining the verses of the Qur'an, both in terms of politics, social conditions and the development of the times. As a product of thought, interpretation is present not only to understand the text as a whole, but how the interpretation of the Qur'an can be dialectic and transformed based on the context that is happening. As Muhammad Syahrūr argued, this dialectic of interpretation occurs because there is an empty space that needs to be filled by a mufassir. The Qur'an has indeed been codified in one mushaf and is a final revelation, but the reality and conditions of society continue to change with the times.⁹³ From this condition, Misbah Musthofa is present as a figure who is able to dialogue the Qur'an by relating the condition by producing criticism of the situation at that time. Through its interpretation, being able to answer and respond to the problems and problems that are occurring, then the problem is dialogued with the verses of the Qur'an.

The interpretation of the Qur'an as a social criticism has been carried out by mufassir from various generations, both from the classical, middle and contemporary eras with different criticism focuses.⁹⁴ This interpretation cannot be denied by the conditions felt by the mufassir, such as intimidation, persecution, criminalization, limited space of movement and opinions.⁹⁵ As the product of interpretation in Indonesia, and Egypt experience differences in terms of their social, cultural and civilizational space. Such as between the *tafsir of Al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* written by Misbah Musthofa and the *tafsir of Fi Zilal Al-Qur'an* written by Sayyid Qutb. The situation and anxiety experienced by the mufassir were then outlined in his book of *tafsir*. With this circumstance, it is often in the interpretation of verses that talk about tyranny, resistance to the government, and criticism of human behavior with the aim of jihad or against conditions that deviate from the teachings of the Qur'an.⁹⁶ A similar thing has also been called by Farid Essack about the treatment of intimidation and marginalization by the South African government to the marginalized population.⁹⁷

Criticism in the interpretation of the Qur'an is present as an answer to social problems that are associated or analogous to the verses of the Qur'an, and in one book of *tafsir* only a few discussions contain a criticism. But there are benefits if the meaning of the Qur'an aims to provide answers related to the problems that are occurring. As explained by Abdul Majid al-Muhtasib, contextualizing and acknowledging the Qur'an, it is necessary for the mufassir to do so that the

⁹³ Muhammad Syahrur, *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur'an: Qira'ah al-Mu'aṣirah*, (Damascus: al-Ahali, 1990).

⁹⁴ Nicolai Sinai, "Historical Criticism and Recent Trends in Western Scholarship on the Quran: Some Hermeneutic Reflections," *Journal of College of Sharia & Islamic Studies* 38, no. 1 (2020): 136–46, <https://doi.org/10.29117/jcsis.2020.0259>.

⁹⁵ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering, *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁹⁶ Sayyid Quṭb, *Tafsir Fi Dzilal Al-Qur'an*, ed., As'ad Yasin, (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2000).

⁹⁷ Esack, *Qur'an Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*.

problems that occur in society can be responded to through its interpretation.⁹⁸ The meaning of social criticism when associated with tafsir, has two functions, namely; *al-hukm* (determination) which means to make an assessment of something, and *al-tafsīr* (interpretation) or *al-taḥlīl* (analysis), which is an attempt to analyze and interpret the verses of the Qur'an in depth by critically relating the phenomenon that is happening in the midst of society.⁹⁹ This context is as Misbah Musthofa through *Tafsir al-Iklil fi Ma'āni al-Tanzīl* criticizes the culture of tahlilan which is considered to be far from the maqāsid of shari'ah, corrects the motivation of the pilgrimage to the grave and the practice of tumpengan, rejects the Javanese tradition which is considered superficial in monotheism, questions the courage and validity of scholars in determining the law, and reconstructs the public's understanding of customs and culture that is believed to come from Islamic law.

Conclusion

Misbah Musthofa through *Tafsir al-Iklil fi Ma'āni al-Tanzīl*, deconstructed the local culture of Java which was considered to have been mixed with religious practices that deviate from Islamic teachings. This interpretation not only explains the literal meaning of the verses of the Qur'an, but also presents a socio-cultural critique of the traditions of the Javanese people. Through a sociological approach to interpretation, Misbah Musthofa interprets the verses of the Qur'an contextually and progressively, departing from the social reality of the ummah and the actual problems of their time. He rejects forms of blind taqlid against the customs of ancestors, rejects rituals derived from Hindu-Buddhist traditions, and rejects the use of religious symbols for worldly purposes such as in the MTQ competition.

Misbah Musthofa also points out that interpretation is not value-free, meaning that its interpretation is influenced by social reality, ideology, and community conditions. Thus, the results of the reconstruction of Misbah Musthofa in his commentary can function as a tool of social emancipation and reinterpretation of the text of the Qur'an, namely re-criticizing cultural practices that are considered contrary to monotheism and the principles of Islamic shari'a. This research confirms that interpretation as a cultural product is not neutral, and therefore must continue to be criticized and contextualized. Misbah Musthofa was present as one of the local mufassir who showed that the tafsir not only explains the text, but also presents solutions and criticisms to the dynamics of society living in cultural diversity.

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⁹⁸ Abdul Majid Abdul al-Salam al-Muhtasib, *Itibad Tafsir fi al-'Asr al-Hadits*, ed., (Bangil: al-Izzah, 1997).

⁹⁹ Muhammad Ulinnuha, *Reconstruction of the Methodology of Criticism of Tafsir*, (Jakarta: Azzamedia, 2015).

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