

## Exploring the Construction of “Indonesianness” in Mahmud Yunus’s *Tafsir Qur’an Karim*

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### Abstract

This article examines Mahmud Yunus’s *Tafsir Qur’an Karim* in order to explore the meanings of “Indonesianness” embedded in his ways of understanding, interpreting, and contextualizing the Qur’anic text. The study employs a qualitative approach in the form of library research, using *Tafsir Qur’an Karim* as the primary source and supported by works on Mahmud Yunus’s intellectual biography, Nusantara exegesis, and contextual–humanistic theories of interpretation. Data were collected through systematic identification, classification, and coding of exegetical passages related to the themes of education, poverty, family livelihood, nationalism, social justice, and the management of religious and social diversity. Content analysis is combined with a hermeneutical–contextual reading in order to examine the relationship between the exegetical text, the socio-historical context of early twentieth-century Indonesia, and the contemporary needs of Indonesian society. The findings show that Mahmud Yunus constructs an exegetical approach characterized by social engagement, rationality, and communicative clarity, through which the Qur’an is presented as an ethical–practical guide for the Indonesian socio-national project. This project emphasizes education, diligence, family responsibility, social solidarity, and religious moderation. The study thus affirms the continuing relevance of Mahmud Yunus’s exegetical legacy for strengthening contemporary Indonesian discourses on Islam, nationalism, and social justice.

**Keywords:** Mahmud Yunus; *Tafsir Qur’an Karim*; Indonesian exegesis; contextual interpretation; Nusantara tafsir

## Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji Tafsir Qur'an Karim karya Mahmud Yunus untuk menggali makna keindonesiaan yang hadir dalam cara ia memahami, menjelaskan, dan membumikan ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis studi kepustakaan, dengan sumber utama Tafsir Qur'an Karim dan sumber pendukung berupa karya tentang biografi intelektual Mahmud Yunus, tafsir Nusantara, serta teori tafsir kontekstual-humanistik. Data dikumpulkan melalui penelusuran, pemilahan, dan pengkodean bagian tafsir yang berkaitan dengan tema pendidikan, kemiskinan, nafkah keluarga, kebangsaan, keadilan sosial, dan pengelolaan kemajemukan. Analisis isi dipadukan dengan pembacaan hermeneutik-kontekstual untuk melihat hubungan antara teks tafsir, konteks sosial Indonesia awal abad ke-20, dan kebutuhan keindonesiaan masa kini. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Mahmud Yunus membangun tafsir yang bercorak sosial kemasyarakatan, rasional, dan komunikatif, sehingga Al-Qur'an dihadirkan sebagai pedoman etis-praktis bagi proyek keindonesiaan yang menekankan pendidikan, kerja keras, tanggung jawab keluarga, solidaritas sosial, dan moderasi beragama. Studi ini menegaskan relevansi warisan tafsir tersebut bagi penguatan wacana Islam, kebangsaan, dan keadilan sosial kontemporer di Indonesia.

**Kata kunci:** Mahmud Yunus, Tafsir Qur'an Karim, tafsir keindonesiaan, tafsir kontekstual, tafsir Nusantara

## INTRODUCTION

Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsīr*) constitutes a central field of study within Islamic scholarship, particularly in the context of social transformation and the emergence of new challenges faced by Muslim societies. The Indonesian-oriented approach to *tafsīr*, commonly associated in Qur'anic studies with the paradigm of *al-adabī al-ijtimā'ī* (socio-literary interpretation), emphasizes the importance of social and cultural contexts in understanding the Qur'anic message. This approach resonates with the contextual model of interpretation proposed by Abdullah Saeed, which underscores sensitivity to the socio-historical context of revelation and interpretation alike.<sup>1</sup>

Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā, through their *Tafsīr al-Manār*, conceptualized the Qur'an as guidance for humanity (*hudā li al-nās*) that must be read in relation to the social problems of its time.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, M. Quraish Shihab emphasizes that Qur'anic interpretation cannot be separated from the context of its readership,<sup>3</sup> since the Qur'an was revealed to guide human beings within lived social realities rather than within a social vacuum.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, the *al-adabī al-ijtimā'ī*

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<sup>1</sup> M. K. Ridwan, "Metodologi Penafsiran Kontekstual; Analisis Gagasan Dan Prinsip Kunci Penafsiran Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed," *Millatī Journal Of Islamic Studies And Humanities* 1, No. 1 (2016): 1–22.

<sup>2</sup> Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'an Al-Hakīm Al-Mushtabāh Bi Ism Tafsīr Al-Manār*, 2nd Ed. (Kaherah: Dār Al-Manār, 1947).

<sup>3</sup> M. Quraish Shihab, "Membumikan" *Al-Quran: Fungsi Dan Peran Wahyu Dalam Kehidupan Masyarakat* (Bandung: Mizan, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> M Quraish Shihab, *Kaidah Tafsīr*, 4th Ed. (Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2019).

approach provides a methodological framework<sup>5</sup> that enables the integration of Qur’anic values with Indonesian social realities while maintaining the foundational principles of Islamic teachings.

Studies on the development of Qur’anic interpretation in Indonesia demonstrate how changing historical periods and social structures have shaped educational practices and public understandings of the Qur’an.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Qur’anic insights into multiculturalism, as highlighted by Falihin et al., encourage proactive dialogue and cooperation among diverse religious communities—an imperative for nurturing social harmony in Indonesia’s pluralistic society.<sup>7</sup> Such perspectives contribute to the emergence of Qur’anic interpretations that are increasingly relevant and contextually grounded within the Indonesian setting.

Within this framework, an Indonesian-oriented approach to Qur’anic interpretation becomes particularly significant. It allows for a more holistic and comprehensive engagement with the sacred text by taking into account Indonesia’s distinctive social, cultural, and historical conditions.<sup>8</sup> Historically, Indonesian Muslim scholars have already practiced such contextualized approaches to understanding the Qur’an. One prominent example is Mahmud Yunus and his exegetical work *Tafsir Qur’an Karim*, in which he sought to bridge the sacred Qur’anic text with the everyday lived experiences of Indonesian society.<sup>9</sup> For Mahmud Yunus, the Qur’an as a guide for Muslim life cannot be detached from surrounding social and cultural realities.<sup>10</sup> By engaging local customs, traditions, and socio-economic conditions, this mode of interpretation aims to render the Qur’an more relevant and practically applicable to the religious life of Indonesian Muslims.

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach in the form of library research, focusing on close reading and in-depth analysis of Mahmud Yunus’s *Tafsir Qur’an Karim* in order to identify and examine the characteristics of “Indonesian-oriented tafsīr” marked by socio-communal and contextual-humanistic features. The primary data source is the complete text of *Tafsir Qur’an Karim*, including its introductory sections and exegetical discussions of Qur’anic verses related to Indonesian social

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<sup>5</sup> Muḥammad Ḥusayn Al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Mufasssīrīn* (Dār Al-Kutub Al-Ḥadīthah, 1976).

<sup>6</sup> Fazida Safitri, “Gelora Tafsir Al-Qur’an Di Indonesia Pasca Kemerdekaan (Era Orde Lama Dan Orde Baru),” *Lathaif Literasi Tafsir Hadis Dan Filologi* 3, No. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.31958/Lathaif.V3i1.10933>.

<sup>7</sup> Dalilul Falihin Et Al, “Multiculturalism Insight Based On Qur’an And Its Relevance To Plurality In Indonesia,” *Jurnal Adabiyah* 24, No. 1 (2024): 90–118, <https://doi.org/10.24252/Jad.V24i1a5>.

<sup>8</sup> M. Nurdin Zuhdi, “Hermeneutika Al-Qur’an: Tipologi Tafsir Sebagai Solusi Dalam Memecahkan Isu-Isu Budaya Lokal Keindonesiaan,” *Esensia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 13, No. 2 (2022): 241–62, <https://doi.org/10.14421/Esensia.V13i2.740>.

<sup>9</sup> Alina Isac Alak, “The Impact Of The Islamic Theories Of Revelation On Humanist Qur’anic Hermeneutics,” *Studia Islamica* 119 (2024): 1–33.

<sup>10</sup> Verena Meyer, “Grave Matters: Ambiguity, Modernism, And The Quest For Moderate Islam In Indonesia,” *Journal Of The American Academy Of Religion* 9, No. 1 (2024): 160–79, <https://doi.org/10.1093/Jaarel/Lfae061>.

themes such as education, poverty, family livelihood, nationalism, and the relationship between religion and Indonesian social realities. Secondary sources consist of books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and previous studies on Mahmud Yunus, Nusantara exegesis, and contextual theories of Qur'anic interpretation. Data were collected through documentary analysis, involving systematic identification, selection, and recording of relevant exegetical passages, which were then organized into thematic categories. Data analysis combined qualitative content analysis with a hermeneutical–contextual approach through iterative processes of coding, data reduction, thematic clustering, and interpretive synthesis guided by theories of contextual interpretation. This analytical process enabled the formulation of conclusions regarding the defining features of Mahmud Yunus's Indonesian-oriented tafsīr and its contemporary relevance within Indonesian socio-religious contexts.

## DISCUSSION

### *Mahmud Yunus: Intellectual Biography and Scholarly Journey*

Several studies on the history of Qur'anic interpretation in Indonesia situate Mahmud Yunus within the broader current of modernist reform (*tajdid*) that was connected to transregional scholarly networks linking the Nusantara and the Middle East in the early twentieth century. The scholarly journeys (*riḥlah 'ilmiyyah*) undertaken by Indonesian students to Mecca and Cairo during the 1920s served as a crucial medium for the transmission of reformist ideas, including the call for Qur'anic interpretation and translation in local and accessible languages that resonated with the everyday experiences of readers.<sup>11</sup>

In 1924, Mahmud Yunus was granted the opportunity to study at al-Azhar University in Cairo. His intellectual sojourn to Mecca and Cairo during the 1920s is widely recognized in both Indonesian and international scholarship as a major turning point in his intellectual formation. There he studied *uṣūl al-fiqh*, Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), and Ḥanafī jurisprudence, among other disciplines. Upon completing his studies at al-Azhar, Mahmud Yunus felt that his education had been largely confined to religious and linguistic sciences. He therefore chose to pursue further studies in general and pedagogical sciences by enrolling at *Dār al-'Ulūm al-'Ulyā*, a higher education institution that trained teachers of religion and Arabic for government schools. Through this experience, he studied not only the classical Islamic scholarly tradition but also modern pedagogical methodologies.

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<sup>11</sup> Muhamad Aidul Mubarak Et Al., “The History And Development Of Tafsir Thought In Indonesia: Reformist- Modernist Islamic Ideology In Exegesis,” *Senarai: Journal Of Islamic Haritage And Civilization* 1 (2024): 41–54.

In his influential monograph *Popular Indonesian Literature of the Qur'an*, Howard M. Federspiel classifies *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* as one of the earliest works marking the transition from Jawi (Arabic–Malay) script to modern Indonesian and as the first complete Qur'anic commentary to consistently employ Indonesian as the language of national communication.<sup>12</sup> Federspiel's classification demonstrates that from the perspective of global Qur'anic studies, Mahmud Yunus's work is significant not merely as a local historical exegetical tradition but also as an example of how the sacred text was appropriated into a modern national language in order to expand public access to the Qur'an.<sup>13</sup> Khairunnas Jamal's study on “Indonesian consciousness” (*wawasan keindonesiaan*) in *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* adds a further dimension by emphasizing that Mahmud Yunus was not only an exegete but also an agent of reform actively involved in educational renewal, curriculum development, and even nationalist discourse in Indonesia before and after independence. Similarly, Iskandar in his study observes that in the introduction to *Tafsir Qur'an Karim*, Mahmud Yunus explicitly states the noble purpose of his commentary: to explain the guidance of the Qur'an so that it may be practiced by Muslims and by humanity at large, in a style that is simple, practical, and accessible to all readers. He adopts a format that combines word-by-word translation with brief explanatory footnotes, and he adds a concluding section summarizing the “essential contents of the Qur'an.” These features reflect a synthesis between the academic depth acquired through his transregional scholarly training and a pedagogical concern for ordinary Indonesian readers.

### ***Theoretical Framework: Contextual and Humanistic Approaches to Tafsir***

The development of contemporary Qur'anic interpretation cannot be separated from the reformist ideas initiated by early modern Muslim thinkers. One of the key figures in this phase is Muḥammad ‘Abduh, who, through his reform project, emphasized that the Qur'an must be understood as guidance for life that is relevant to the social realities of the community, rather than merely as a normative text read in a literal and ahistorical manner. In *Tafsir al-Manār*, developed together with Rashīd Riḍā, ‘Abduh foregrounded rationality, social ethics, and the function of the Qur'an as a guide for social reform.<sup>14</sup> This orientation later became known as *tafsir al-adab al-ijtimā'i*, an approach that pays particular attention to the moral and social dimensions of revelation.

This contextual mode of reading was subsequently given a more systematic methodological formulation through the work of Fazlur Rahman. Rahman proposed the theory of the “double

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<sup>12</sup> Howard M. Federspiel, *Popular Indonesian Literature Of The Qur'an* (New York: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Howard M. Federspiel, *Popular Indonesian Literature Of The Qur'an*.

<sup>14</sup> Riḍā, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-Hakim Al-Mushtabar Bi Ism Tafsir Al-Manār*.

movement,” namely, a hermeneutical movement from the present context back to the socio-historical context of revelation in order to grasp the general moral principles of the Qur’an, and then a return movement to the present context to formulate relevant ethical norms.<sup>15</sup> Through this approach, Rahman rejected textualist readings that freeze the meaning of Qur’anic verses and instead argued that the Qur’an contains moral objectives that must be interpreted dynamically in response to social change.

Fazlur Rahman’s thought laid an important foundation for the subsequent development of contextualist approaches, including that of Abdullah Saeed. In *Reading the Qur’an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach*, Saeed explicitly elaborates a contextualist methodology of interpretation, emphasizing the importance of understanding the social, political, economic, and intellectual conditions of the first recipients of revelation before translating the Qur’anic message into contemporary contexts. He formulates a set of operational steps for interpretation, including awareness of the interpreter’s pre-understandings, critical engagement with the text, reconstruction of its historical meaning, and ethical contextualization for present-day societies.<sup>16</sup>

Analyses of Saeed’s thought, such as those by M. K. Ridwan, highlight that this approach stresses the distinction between universal foundational values and normative prescriptions tied to specific historical contexts.<sup>17</sup> Within this framework, tafsīr is understood as a dialogical process between text and reality, rather than as a mere reproduction of classical exegetical authority. In its further development, Abdullah Saeed, together with Ali Akbar, extends this contextualist approach to sensitive issues such as religious freedom and Islamic criminal law. They demonstrate that contextual readings enable the extraction of the Qur’an’s moral purposes in a more ethical and humanistic manner, without being confined to literalist and ahistorical applications.<sup>18</sup> This orientation corresponds with broader trends in humanistic tafsīr, which foreground values such as justice, human dignity, and human rights as central considerations in Qur’anic interpretation.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam And Modernity: Transformation Of An Intellectual Tradition* (University Of Chicago Press, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> Abdullah Saeed, *Reading The Qur’an In The Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach*, 1st Ed. (London: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Ridwan, “Metodologi Penafsiran Kontekstual; Analisis Gagasan Dan Prinsip Kunci Penafsiran Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed.”

<sup>18</sup> Abdullah Saeed And Ali Akbar, “Contextualist Approaches And The Interpretation Of The Qur’ An,” *Religions* 12, No. 527 (2021): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.3390/Rel12070527>.

<sup>19</sup> Nabila Fajriyanti Muhyin, “The Concepts Of Contextual Interpretation Of The Qur’an Abdullah Saeed Nabila,” *Tanzil: Jurnal Studi Al-Quran* 6, No. 1 (2023): 1–16.

### ***Contextual–Humanistic Tafsīr and Indonesian Exegesis***

In the Indonesian context, contextual and humanistic approaches to interpretation intersect with the traditions of *tafsīr al-adab al-ijtimā'ī* and Indonesian-oriented exegesis (*tafsīr keindonesiaan*), both of which seek to position the Qur'an as a source of solutions for concrete social problems such as poverty, inequality, and social conflict.<sup>20</sup> From this perspective, Mahmud Yunus's *Tafsīr Qur'an Karim* can be understood not merely as a traditional exegetical work but as one of the earliest efforts to contextualize the Qur'anic message within the Indonesian language and socio-cultural realities.<sup>21</sup>

Indonesian-oriented tafsīr emerges as a mode of interpretation that seeks to adapt Qur'anic understanding to local values rooted in Indonesian society. Within this framework, *al-adabī al-ijtimā'ī* functions as a key approach that emphasizes the relationship between religious texts and social realities. It advances the argument that Qur'anic interpretation must be aligned with cultural contexts and local wisdom so that the moral messages of the sacred text can be more readily received and implemented by society.<sup>22</sup> Globally, *al-adabī al-ijtimā'ī* is understood as an exegetical style that prioritizes the social relevance of the Qur'an, focusing on ethics, education, and contemporary social problems rather than on purely philological analysis or intra-legal school debates.<sup>23</sup> In Indonesia, historical studies show that this orientation developed alongside the rise of modernist reformist ideas that emphasized the importance of returning directly to the Qur'an as a foundation for building a just, educated, and democratic society.<sup>24</sup>

Indonesian-oriented tafsīr is not limited to shifts in language and terminology; it also entails a fundamental transformation in perspectives on religion itself. By prioritizing humanistic values such as egalitarianism, social justice, and human dignity, this approach functions as a bridge between the sacred text and complex social realities.<sup>25</sup> The relevance of *al-adabī al-ijtimā'ī* is particularly evident given the diverse challenges faced by Indonesian Muslims today, including economic inequality, social discrimination, and unequal access to education. In this sense, tafsīr is

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<sup>20</sup> M. Nurdin Zuhdi, “Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an: Tipologi Tafsir Sebagai Solusi Dalam Memecahkan Isu-Isu Budaya Lokal Keindonesiaan,” *Esensia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 13, No. 2 (2012): 241–62, <https://doi.org/10.14421/Esensia.V13i2.740>.

<sup>21</sup> Mahmud Yunus, *Tafsīr Qur'an Karim Bahasa Indonesia* (Klang Book Centre, 1988).

<sup>22</sup> Hasani Ahmad Said, “Mengenal Tafsir Nusantara: Melacak Mata Rantai Tafsir Dari Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapura Hingga Brunei Darussalam,” *Refleksi* 16, No. 2 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.15408/Ref.V16i2.10193>.

<sup>23</sup> Ahmad Muttaqin, “From Contextual To Actual Approach: Towards A Paradigm Shift In Interpreting The Qur'an,” *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadith* 11, No. 1 (2021): 203–30, <https://doi.org/10.15642/Mutawatir.2021.11.2.203-230>.

<sup>24</sup> Mubarak Et Al, “The History And Development Of Tafsir Thought In Indonesia: Reformist- Modernist Islamic Ideology In Exegesis.”

<sup>25</sup> Ali Akbar, “Towards A Humanistic Approach To The Quran: New Direction In Contemporary Islamic Thought,” *Culture And Religion* 20, No. 1 (2019): 82–103, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2018.1532919>.

not merely an intellectual exercise but also a form of social engagement that has the potential to encourage transformation and social progress.<sup>26</sup>

Through Indonesian-oriented tafsīr, interpretive efforts are expanded to address the everyday problems encountered by society. By drawing upon Qur'anic principles of social justice, Indonesian Muslim scholars are able to offer concrete ethical guidance for responding to issues such as poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion.<sup>27</sup> This approach seeks to ensure that Islamic values have tangible positive effects on daily life, thereby narrowing the gap between theory and practice.<sup>28</sup> Studies by Abdullah Saeed and Ali Akbar<sup>29</sup> on contextual approaches emphasize that excessively textualist ethico-legal interpretations often fail to capture the Qur'an's moral purposes. They therefore call for hermeneutical frameworks that take into account historical context, social conditions, and temporal change. What is now recognized as a major trend in global Qur'anic studies was, in fact, already being applied intuitively by Mahmud Yunus when he interpreted legal and social verses with careful attention to Indonesia's condition as a pluralistic and developing nation.<sup>30</sup>

In contemporary Indonesian Qur'anic studies, the "Living Qur'an" approach was introduced to examine the Qur'an as a text that is lived within social, cultural, and religious practices rather than merely read as a normative scriptural source.<sup>31</sup> This approach highlights how the Qur'an is experienced, negotiated, and given meaning in everyday life.<sup>32</sup> Within this framework, Dalilul Falihin and his colleagues employ the Living Qur'an perspective to analyze how Qur'anic values of dialogue, tolerance, and multiculturalism are embodied in Indonesia's plural society.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Eni Zulaiha, Restu Ashari Putra, And Rizal Abdul Gani, "Selayang Pandang Tafsir Liberal Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Iman Dan Spiritualitas* 1, No. 2 (2021), <https://doi.Org/10.15575/Jis.V1i2.11700>.

<sup>27</sup> Ismail Sirageldin, "Elimination Of Poverty: Challenges And Islamic Strategies," *Islamic Economic Studies* 8, No. 1 (2000): 1–16.

<sup>28</sup> Mohsen A. El-Hazmi, "Islamic Teachings Of Bioethics In Relation To The Practice Of Medical Genetics," *Saudi Medical Journal* 28, No. 12 (2007): 1781–87.

<sup>29</sup> Saeed And Akbar, "Contextualist Approaches and The Interpretation of The Qur' An."

<sup>30</sup> Muttaqin, "From Contextual To Actual Approach: Towards A Paradigm Shift In Interpreting The Qur'an."

<sup>31</sup> M Mansur, *Living Qur'an Dalam Lintasan Sejarah Studi Al-Qur'an*, In *Metodologi Penelitian Living Qur'an Dan Hadis* (Yogyakarta: Th-Press, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> Ahmad Rafiq, "The Reception Of The Qur'an In Indonesia: A Case Study of The Place of The Qur'an In A Non-Arabic Speaking Community" (The Temple University Graduate Board, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Dalilul Falihin Et Al., "Multiculturalism Insight Based On Qur'an And Its Relevance to Plurality In Indonesia," *Jurnal Adabiyah* 24, No. 1 (2024): 90–118, <https://doi.Org/10.24252/Jad.V24i1a5>.



***Mahmud Yunus’s Indonesian-Oriented Tafsīr in Tafsīr Qur’an Karim***

In his effort to interpret the Qur’an, Mahmud Yunus adopts an approach that is both distinctive and innovative. Research by Rumi Chafidhoh et al<sup>34</sup> demonstrates that Yunus integrates a scholarly style with the *al-adabī al-ijtimā’ī* orientation by combining transmitted (*bi al-ma’thūr*) and rational (*bi al-ra’y*) sources of interpretation and concluding his work with a summary of the Qur’an’s contents that synthesizes legal, ethical, economic, epistemological, and historical themes. This finding is consistent with Nuris Syarifah’s study,<sup>35</sup> which identifies three primary dimensions of Mahmud Yunus’s exegetical approach: scientific, social, and intellectual. All three are grounded in his effort to connect the Qur’anic message with the realities of modern Indonesian society.

The scientific dimension of Yunus’s tafsīr is reflected in his frequent efforts to relate Qur’anic verses to the knowledge available in his time, for example, when explaining natural phenomena, social structures, or health-related issues, thereby inviting readers to recognize the close relationship between revealed text and empirical knowledge. The social dimension appears in his emphasis on moral values, justice, education, and interpersonal relations in his interpretations of verses concerning *mu‘āmalāt* and ethical conduct (*adab*), aiming to cultivate a society that is orderly, tolerant, and responsive to problems such as poverty and social inequality. The intellectual dimension is evident in his systematic presentation of arguments, his engagement with diverse scholarly opinions, and his display of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*), including his willingness to adopt views beyond the four Sunni legal schools when he considered them to be more strongly supported by evidence.<sup>36</sup>

In contrast to many classical tafsīr works that concentrate primarily on linguistic, textual, and doctrinal concerns, Mahmud Yunus deliberately moves away from certain elements of traditional exegetical discourse.<sup>37</sup> He instead fills the interpretive space with practical moral guidance intended to address the contemporary problems faced by Muslims. This interpretive orientation is clearly illustrated in his reading of Q. al-Baqarah (2): 200–202. These verses address supplication for well-being in this world and the next. Mahmud Yunus emphasizes that those who seek only worldly

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<sup>34</sup> Rosyida Amalia Et Al., “Tafsīr Intelektual Qur’an Karim: Epistemologi Keunikan Dan Kebaruan Karya Mahmud Yunus,” *Jurnal Semiotika-Q: Kajian Ilmu Al-Quran Dan Tafsīr* 3, No. 1 (2023): 121–36, <https://doi.org/10.19109/jsq.V3i1.23092>.

<sup>35</sup> Nuris Syarifah, “Tafsīr Akademik Karya Mahmud Yunus: Corak Ilmiah, Sosial Dan Intelektual Dalam Tafsīr Al-Qur’an Al-Karim,” *Jurnal At-Tibyan Jurnal Ilmu Alqur’an Dan Tafsīr* 5, No. 1 (2020): 104–19, <https://doi.org/10.32505/at-tibyan.V5i1.1157>.

<sup>36</sup> Wahyudi, “Corak Fikih Dalam Tafsīr Qur’ān Karīm Karya Mahmud Yunus (Studi Qs. Al-Mā’idah - Qs. Al-Taubah)” (Iain Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2024).

<sup>37</sup> Ahmad Murtaza Mz Et Al., “In Defense Of Rationality: Mahmud Yunus’ Interpretation Of The Qur’an On Religious Tolerance,” *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsīr Hadith* 14, No. 1 (2024): 21–40, <https://doi.org/10.15642/Mutawatir.2024.14.1.21-40>.

benefit without concern for what is lawful or unlawful will not attain happiness in the Hereafter. The ideal, he argues, is to seek both worldly and otherworldly well-being. However, such supplication must be accompanied by effort and hard work, not merely by prayer alone.<sup>38</sup> He further insists that if a person prays for paradise, they must perform righteous deeds; if they pray for wealth, they must work for it; if they pray for health, they must observe the principles of medical science. Prayer without sincere effort, in his view, becomes a mere formality. True supplication consists of heartfelt reliance on God accompanied by serious human endeavor.<sup>39</sup>

Mahmud Yunus adopts a socio-cultural interpretive approach that emphasizes the relevance of Islamic teachings to the conditions of Indonesian society. In *Tafsir Qur'an Karim*, he integrates local expressions and cultural nuances, demonstrating a clear commitment to making religious texts meaningful within Indonesia's modern social context. His adoption of the *al-adabī al-ijtimā'ī* approach can thus be understood as an effort to bridge the gap between the Qur'anic text and lived social realities.<sup>40</sup> His contribution to the development of Qur'anic exegesis in Indonesia is therefore significant, as his works have served as important references for subsequent generations seeking to develop interpretive models responsive to social change and contemporary challenges.<sup>41</sup>

The *al-adabī al-ijtimā'ī* orientation introduced by Mahmud Yunus focuses explicitly on adaptation to the Indonesian context. In other words, his project is one of contextualization: the effort to apply meanings derived from earlier discursive contexts to different historical and social settings in the present. The Qur'an contains key conceptual resources for shaping ethical encounters across religious and cultural boundaries; however, these resources can function effectively only when interpreted in relation to Indonesia's plural social realities.

Mahmud Yunus's emphasis on social ethics, respect for human dignity, and critique of customary practices that contradict justice may thus be read as an early form of interpretive praxis supportive of multiculturalism and peaceful coexistence in Indonesia.<sup>42</sup> From the perspective of the epistemology of tafsīr, Matsna Afwi Nadia's study of *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* highlights that Mahmud Yunus draws upon a wide range of sources: the Qur'an itself, hadith, the opinions of the

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<sup>38</sup> Matsna Afwi Nadia, "Epistemologi Tafsīr Qur'ān Karīm Karya Mahmud Yunus," *Tanzīl: Jurnal Studi Al-Quran* 5, No. 2 (2023): 113–30, <https://doi.org/10.20871/Tjsq.V5i2.244>.

<sup>39</sup> Mahmud Yunus, *Tafsir Quran Karim Bahasa Indonesia* (Klang Book Centre, 1988).

<sup>40</sup> Muhammad Khai Hanif Yuli Edi, Halimatussadiyah, And Zulkipli Jemain, "Analisis Aspek Lokalitas Mahmud Yunus Dalam Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-Karim," *Jurnal Kajian Pendidikan Islam* 2, No. 2 (2023): 83–110, <https://doi.org/10.58561/Jkpi.V2i2.90>.

<sup>41</sup> Syarifah, "Tafsir Akademik Karya Mahmud Yunus: Corak Ilmiah, Sosial Dan Intelektual Dalam Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-Karim."

<sup>42</sup> Khairunnas Jamal, "Wawasan Keindonesiaan Dalam Tafsir Al Qur'an Al Karim Karya Mahmud Yunus," *Al-Fikra : Jurnal Ilmiah Keislaman* 16, No. 1 (2017): 28–44, <http://dx.doi.org/10.24014/Af.V16i1.3665>.

Companions and classical scholars, as well as modern social sciences.<sup>43</sup> The *al-adabī al-ijtimāʿī* orientation he constructs is therefore grounded in a synthesis of traditional authority and contemporary scholarly sensitivity.

This integrative approach corresponds closely with the trend identified by Abdullah Saeed, namely the shift from purely textual readings toward contextual interpretations that situate the text within networks of social, political, and economic contexts,<sup>44</sup> precisely what Mahmud Yunus sought to do when explaining verses on family, education, and social relations to Indonesian readers in the twentieth century. Fazlur Rahman similarly emphasized the need for exegetes to interpret the Qurʾān in ways that are responsive to contemporary issues while remaining rooted in the original context of revelation. This view became known as the “double movement” approach, which rests on two fundamental assumptions: first, that the Qurʾān functions as guidance for humanity (*budā li al-nās*), requiring its principles to be applicable within modern life; and second, that the Qurʾān’s universal messages must remain accessible across time and place, transcending specific historical contexts.<sup>45</sup> Through this hermeneutical movement, exegetes may extract the Qurʾān’s core moral ideals and apply them to present-day social issues, thereby ensuring the continued relevance and ethical force of the revelation.

Contextualization, in this sense, refers to the effort to interpret the Qurʾān by taking into account ongoing socio-cultural conditions so that Islamic teachings remain applicable to lived reality. A concrete illustration of this practice can be found in Mahmud Yunus’s interpretation of Q. al-ʿAlaq (96): 1–5. When writing his tafsīr, Mahmud Yunus observed that Indonesia lagged significantly behind more industrialized nations, such as Japan, in literacy and education. Against this backdrop, he interpreted the Qurʾānic command to read and write as a call for Indonesian Muslims to overcome this educational backwardness. He famously noted that literacy rates in Japan reached approximately ninety-nine percent, whereas in Indonesia—despite its Muslim majority—only around seven percent of the population was literate.<sup>46</sup> This interpretation illustrates how he directly connected revelation to concrete social problems within Indonesian society. Similarly, when discussing a husband’s obligation to provide for his family, Mahmud Yunus refers to Q. al-Isrāʾ (17): 26: “Give the near of kin their due, as well as the needy and the traveler, and do not squander wastefully.” He interprets this verse as establishing financial responsibility as a

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<sup>43</sup> Nadia, “Epistemologi Tafsīr Qurʾān Karīm Karya Mahmud Yunus.”

<sup>44</sup> Saeed, *Reading The Qurʾān In The Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach*.

<sup>45</sup> Rahman, *Islam And Modernity: Transformation Of An Intellectual Tradition*.

<sup>46</sup> Yunus, *Tafsīr Quran Karim Bahasa Indonesia* (Klang Book Centre, 1988).

foundational ethical principle for family life and social stability, thereby linking Qur'anic norms to practical structures of social welfare and responsibility.<sup>47</sup>

Drawing on the foregoing examples, it becomes evident that Mahmud Yunus consistently sought to formulate Qur'anic guidance in a manner that could function as a practical ethical compass for Muslim life. This orientation is reflected in the strong socio-communal character of his interpretations and in the prominence of Indonesian contextualization as a central concern in his exegetical project. Through this approach, Mahmud Yunus attempted to ensure that Qur'anic guidance could be applied effectively and meaningfully within the lived realities of Indonesian Muslims.

*Tafsir Qur'an Karim* is therefore significant not only as the first complete Qur'anic commentary written in Indonesian, but also as a model of Indonesian-oriented tafsīr that integrates rationality, cultural locality, and a sense of national orientation.<sup>48</sup> Ahmad Murtaza MZ et al, for example, demonstrate how Mahmud Yunus rationalizes the concept of religious tolerance in his tafsīr by balancing theological commitments with humanistic values when interpreting verses concerning religious freedom and relations with adherents of other faiths.<sup>49</sup> In this reading, tolerance is not understood merely as passive permissiveness but as an active ethical stance aimed at preserving justice and respect for others' beliefs, grounded in both rational and theological argumentation. This emphasis on rationality places Mahmud Yunus's tafsīr in resonance with the global reformist discourse described by Mohammad Rezaei as a "non-fundamentalist return to origins," namely a return to the foundational text through hermeneutical tools sensitive to history, context, and modern ethical challenges.<sup>50</sup>

A study by Muhammad Khai Hanif Yuli Edi Z and colleagues identifies three principal forms of Minangkabau locality in *Tafsir Qur'an Karim*: the use of local maxims and expressions, the employment of widely known Indonesian proverbs, and social critique of customary practices and educational systems in West Sumatra and Indonesia more broadly.<sup>51</sup> Expressions such as "*Mulutmu harimaumu*" ("your mouth is your tiger") or "*Hemat pangkal kaya, rajin pangkal pandai*" ("frugality leads to wealth; diligence leads to knowledge") are not mere rhetorical embellishments but function as cultural bridges linking Qur'anic moral messages to idioms familiar to Indonesian readers.

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<sup>47</sup> Yunus, *Tafsir Quran Karim Bahasa Indonesia* (Klang Book Centre, 1988).

<sup>48</sup> Jamal, "Wawasan Keindonesiaan Dalam Tafsir Al Qur'an Al Karim Karya Mahmud Yunus."

<sup>49</sup> Mz Et Al., "In Defense Of Rationality: Mahmud Yunus' Interpretation Of The Qur'an On Religious Tolerance."

<sup>50</sup> Mohammad Rezaei, "A Non-Fundamentalist Return To Origin: The New Islamic Reformers' Methodology Of (Re)Interpretation," *Critical Research On Religion* 8, No. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050303219900247>.

<sup>51</sup> Edi, Halimatussadiyah, And Jemain, "Analisis Aspek Lokalitas Mahmud Yunus Dalam Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-Karim."

Khairunnas Jamal further observes that Mahmud Yunus deliberately incorporates themes of nationhood, such as unity, social justice, and civic responsibility, into his interpretations, enabling the tafsīr to be read as a response to Indonesia’s nation-building process.<sup>52</sup> The systematic presentation, the use of clear Indonesian language, and the sustained attention to educational issues give the work a dual function: as a scholarly religious text and as a pedagogical medium shaping the reader’s sense of Indonesian identity. Andriawan notes that *Tafsir Qur’an Karim* presents a complete translation and concise explanation of the Qur’an in Indonesian, following the canonical order of the muṣṣḥaf, written in a simple and accessible style for general readers.<sup>53</sup> It employs multiple exegetical methods, including interpretation of the Qur’an by the Qur’an, reference to hadith, classical scholarly opinions, occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), thematic coherence (*munāsabah*), as well as rational and mystical perspectives. He also highlights Yunus’s use of modern scientific approaches, particularly when explaining aspects of the Qur’an’s inimitability, thereby positioning the tafsīr as a bridge between classical Islamic scholarship and contemporary scientific discourse.

Sulaiman Ibrahim’s research indicates that approximately sixty percent of the content of *Tafsir Qur’an Karim* consists of literal translation (*tarjamah ḥarfīyyah*), while the remaining forty percent appears in the form of explanatory footnotes clarifying terms, concepts, and thematic issues.<sup>54</sup> Iskandar adds that Mahmud Yunus also includes interpretive (meaning-based) translations in parentheses and footnotes designed to prevent anthropomorphic or reductionist readings of complex verses.<sup>55</sup> This tendency reflects a distinctive combination of fidelity to the literal text and hermeneutical sensitivity to deeper meanings—a feature also emphasized in Tanzil’s epistemological analysis of Mahmud Yunus’s methodology.<sup>56</sup>

Rosyida Amalia et al identify four main aspects of the originality of *Tafsir Qur’an Karim*: its orientation toward *da’wah* and education, its integration of scholarly and *al-adabi al-ijtimā’i* styles, its combination of transmitted (*bi al-ma’tḥūr*) and rational (*bi al-ra’y*) sources, and the inclusion of a systematic concluding section summarizing the principal themes of the Qur’an.<sup>57</sup> From the perspective of contemporary Qur’anic studies, Mahmud Yunus’s interpretive approach can thus be understood as an effort to render Qur’anic meaning accessible and relevant for Indonesian Muslim

<sup>52</sup> Jamal, “Wawasan Keindonesiaan Dalam Tafsir Al Qur’an Al Karim Karya Mahmud Yunus.”

<sup>53</sup> Didik Andriawan, “Mahmud Yunus And His Work Titled Tafsir Quran Karim,” *Nisar* 3 (2023): 61–82.

<sup>54</sup> Sulaiman Ibrahim, “Karakteristik Tafsir Al-Qur’ân Al-Karim Karya Mahmud Yunus,” *Jurnal Al-Ulum* 11, No. 2 (2011): 397–420.

<sup>55</sup> Iskandar, “Tafsir Qur’an Karim Karya Mahmud Yunus Kajian Atas Karya Tafsir Nusantara,” *Subuf* 3, No. 1 (2010): 1–11.

<sup>56</sup> Nadia, “Epistemologi Tafsir Qur’ân Karim Karya Mahmud Yunus.”

<sup>57</sup> Amalia Et Al., “Tafsir Intelektual Qur’an Karim: Epistemologi Keunikan Dan Kebaruan Karya Mahmud Yunus.”

readers through communicative language and contextual explanation.<sup>58</sup> Although it is not articulated within a fully systematized contextualist methodology, this orientation nonetheless reflects a sustained concern for social realities and practical communal needs, particularly in the domains of education and religious guidance.

### ***The Contemporary Relevance of Mahmud Yunus's Indonesian-Oriented Tafsīr***

Revisiting Mahmud Yunus's *Tafsīr Qur'an Karim* within the context of contemporary Indonesia demonstrates that this work is not only of historical significance but also of practical relevance for addressing a range of current socio-national challenges. First, with regard to the promotion of religious moderation and national cohesion, Mahmud Yunus's Indonesian-oriented tafsīr offers a framework that resonates strongly with the contemporary discourse of *Islam wasatiyyah* (the middle path) promoted by many religious institutions in Indonesia today.<sup>59</sup> His emphasis on moral values, justice, legal responsibility, and social accountability is consistently articulated throughout *Tafsīr Qur'an Karim*. In interpreting socially oriented Qur'anic verses, Yunus persistently links Qur'anic teachings with obligations to uphold social order, respect the rights of others, and cultivate harmonious coexistence within a plural society.

For example, in his interpretation of Q. al-Nisā' (4): 58, which commands believers to fulfill trusts and judge with justice, Mahmud Yunus stresses that the verse has universal applicability and is not limited to intra-Muslim relations but extends to justice in governance and public life more broadly. He argues that justice constitutes the primary foundation for the stability of society and the state, and that it represents a fundamental obligation for every Muslim in social life.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, in his interpretation of Q. al-Mumtaḥanah (60): 8, Mahmud Yunus explicitly affirms that Islam permits, and indeed encourages, Muslims to act kindly and justly toward non-Muslims who live peacefully alongside them. He rejects hostility grounded solely in religious difference and emphasizes the importance of social relations founded on mutual respect and shared humanity. This interpretation illustrates that religious difference is not, in his view, an obstacle to social cooperation or national solidarity.<sup>61</sup>

Second, in the field of education, *Tafsīr Qur'an Karim* was historically composed with a strong pedagogical orientation and explicitly intended to serve the educational needs of Indonesian

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<sup>58</sup> Yunus, *Tafsīr Qur'an Karim Bahasa Indonesia* (Klang Book Centre, 1988).

<sup>59</sup> Muhammad K. Ridwan, "Jalan Baru Gerakan Moderasi Islam Di Indonesia; Reagensi Lembaga Pendidikan Muhammadiyah Sebagai Basis Gerakan Moderasi," *Maarif* 16, No. 1 (2021): 60–78.

<sup>60</sup> Yunus, *Tafsīr Qur'an Karim Bahasa Indonesia* (Klang Book Centre, 1988).

<sup>61</sup> Yunus, *Tafsīr Qur'an Karim Bahasa Indonesia* (Klang Book Centre, 1988).

Muslims. Mahmud Yunus’s concern for education is not merely normative but is expressed through interpretations that are explicitly contextualized to Indonesian conditions. In his reading of Q. al-‘Alaq (96): 1–5, he interprets the command to read and write as the ethical foundation of societal progress. He relates this command to the low literacy rates among Indonesian Muslims in his time and contrasts this condition with the near-universal literacy achieved in Japan.<sup>62</sup> This interpretation presents the Qur’an not simply as a ritual text but as an ethical impetus for intellectual advancement and formal education.

This pedagogical orientation is consistent with studies of Iskandar<sup>63</sup> and Amalia et al<sup>64</sup> that emphasize that *Tafsir Qur’an Karim* was written primarily for *da’wah* and educational purposes and employs accessible Indonesian language in order to reach students and the wider public. Mahmud Yunus explicitly states that his purpose in writing this tafsīr was to enable students and ordinary readers to understand the Qur’an through clear and systematic Indonesian rather than through complex Arabic grammatical analysis typical of classical commentaries.<sup>65</sup> This educational emphasis is reflected in his concise interpretive style, his focus on the direct meaning of verses, and his explanation of key terms relevant to the moral and social lives of readers. Several studies note that *Tafsir Qur’an Karim* was used as instructional material in madrasahs and Islamic educational institutions in the mid-twentieth century,<sup>66</sup> particularly because it aligned with modern Islamic educational policies promoting Indonesian as the language of instruction.<sup>67</sup>

Further examination of Mahmud Yunus’s work shows that his exegetical approach aligns closely with broader agendas of Islamic educational reform in Indonesia, particularly the effort to simplify religious materials so that they are accessible to younger generations and students in formal educational institutions.<sup>68</sup> For example, in his interpretation of Sūrat al-Mā‘ūn, Mahmud Yunus does not engage in extended theological debate but instead foregrounds the social dimension of the verses, explaining that the denial of religion is manifested in neglecting orphans and the poor. This approach highlights the Qur’an’s moral–practical function for ordinary readers rather than its speculative or doctrinal dimensions.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Yunus, *Tafsir Quran Karim Bahasa Indonesia* (Klang Book Centre, 1988).

<sup>63</sup> Iskandar, “Tafsir Qur’an Karim Karya Mahmud Yunus Kajian Atas Karya Tafsir Nusantara.”

<sup>64</sup> Amalia Et Al., “Tafsir Intelektual Qur’an Karim: Epistemologi Keunikan Dan Kebaruan Karya Mahmud Yunus.”

<sup>65</sup> Yunus, *Tafsir Quran Karim Bahasa Indonesia* (Klang Book Centre, 1988).

<sup>66</sup> Jajat Burhanuddin, *Ulama Dan Kekuasaan: Pergumulan Elite Muslim Dalam Sejarah Indonesia*, 1st Ed. (Jakarta: Mizan, 2012).

<sup>67</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *Pendidikan Islam: Tradisi Dan Modernisasi Menuju Milenium Baru* (Logos Wacana Ilmu, 1999).

<sup>68</sup> M. Atho Mudzhar, *Pendekatan Studi Islam Dalam Teori Dan Praktik* (Pustaka Pelajar, 1998).

<sup>69</sup> Yunus, *Tafsir Quran Karim Bahasa Indonesia* (Klang Book Centre, 1988).

Values such as social justice, trustworthiness (*amānah*), solidarity, and respect for human dignity in Mahmud Yunus's thought do not appear as abstract ideals but are directly articulated through his interpretations of Qur'anic verses addressing social life and moral education. In his interpretation of Q. al-Nisā' (4): 58 concerning trust and justice, Mahmud Yunus emphasizes the obligation of human beings—especially those in positions of authority and educators—to fulfill their responsibilities honestly and fairly in social life, not merely within formal legal frameworks. This reading reflects his view that *amānah* and justice are ethical values that must be internalized through education and daily social practice.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, in his interpretation of Q. al-Hujurāt (49): 13, Mahmud Yunus affirms that differences of ethnicity, nationality, and social background do not constitute grounds for human hierarchy. He stresses that human dignity is determined by moral character and God-consciousness (*taqwā*), not by social status or origin, thereby expressing a strong commitment to human dignity and social equality.<sup>71</sup> Mahmud Yunus also interprets Sūrat al-Mā'ūn (107): 1–7 as a critique of formalistic religiosity devoid of social concern. He argues that worship lacking solidarity with the poor and vulnerable loses its ethical significance. This interpretation underscores the social orientation of his thought, in which solidarity and social responsibility are integral to religious life.<sup>72</sup>

Third, the relevance of Indonesian-oriented tafsīr is particularly evident in contemporary discourses on social justice and poverty alleviation. Mahmud Yunus consistently interprets Qur'anic verses with a strong emphasis on social ethics and communal responsibility. In his reading of Sūrat al-Mā'ūn (107): 1–7, he insists that the denial of religion is not limited to doctrinal rejection but is equally manifested in neglect of the poor and orphans, indicating that religiosity without social concern is morally deficient.<sup>73</sup> This *al-adabī al-ijtimā'ī* orientation reflects Mahmud Yunus's understanding of the Qur'an as a guide for social ethics aimed at shaping a just and civilized society in accordance with Indonesian social realities.<sup>74</sup>

In *Tafsir Qur'an Karim*, when interpreting Q. al-Tawbah (9): 60, Mahmud Yunus explains zakat not merely as a ritual obligation but as a social instrument intended to reduce inequality and protect the poor, the needy, and structurally vulnerable groups. He emphasizes that zakat distribution should function as a mechanism of social justice that prevents the concentration of wealth within limited segments of society.<sup>75</sup> Likewise, in his interpretation of Sūrat al-Mā'ūn (107): 1–7, Mahmud

<sup>70</sup> Yunus, *Tafsir Quran Karim Bahasa Indonesia* (Klang Book Centre, 1988).

<sup>71</sup> Yunus, *Tafsir Quran Karim Bahasa Indonesia* (Klang Book Centre, 1988).

<sup>72</sup> Yunus, *Tafsir Quran Karim Bahasa Indonesia* (Klang Book Centre, 1988).

<sup>73</sup> Yunus, *Tafsir Quran Karim Bahasa Indonesia* (Klang Book Centre, 1988).

<sup>74</sup> Jamal, "Wawasan Keindonesiaan Dalam Tafsir Al Qur'an Al Karim Karya Mahmud Yunus."

<sup>75</sup> M Yunus, *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* (Jakarta: Hidakarya Agung, 1973).



Yunus explicitly links the denial of religion to neglect of the poor and orphans, reading the passage as a critique of religious practices that separate ritual devotion from social responsibility. Economic exploitation and oppression are thus understood as forms of moral deviation within religious life.<sup>76</sup> Finally, in his interpretation of Q. al-Nisā’ (4): 58 concerning trust (*amānah*), Mahmud Yunus extends the concept to encompass the ethical management of wealth and power, not only at the personal level but also within social institutions and governance. This interpretation reflects his ethical orientation toward viewing Islamic economic principles as normative foundations for public policies aimed at justice and the protection of vulnerable populations.

Fourth, in the context of multiculturalism and interreligious relations, the Indonesian-oriented character of Mahmud Yunus’s tafsīr is clearly reflected in his interpretations of verses concerning relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. In *Tafsīr Qur’an Karim*, his moderate stance is evident in his reading of interfaith verses. When interpreting Q. al-Baqarah (2): 256, Mahmud Yunus affirms that there is no compulsion in religion, since faith must arise from inner conviction rather than from social or political pressure. This interpretation reflects an inclusive orientation that is highly relevant to Indonesia’s religiously plural society.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, in his interpretation of Q. al-Mumtahanah (60): 8, he emphasizes the obligation to act justly and benevolently toward non-Muslims who live peacefully alongside Muslims.<sup>78</sup> This reading affirms that religious difference does not preclude social cooperation or respect for human dignity—an attitude that resonates strongly with the realities of Indonesian pluralism.<sup>79</sup>

Fifth, the relevance of Mahmud Yunus’s Indonesian-oriented tafsīr is also evident in its contribution to the development of an indigenous Islamic epistemology in Indonesia. This is reflected in his consistent combination of classical exegetical authorities, such as *Tafsīr al-Ṭabari* and *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, with rational analysis and the scientific knowledge available in his time. For example, in his interpretation of cosmological verses such as Q. al-Ra’d (13): 3, Mahmud Yunus explains natural phenomena not only through linguistic analysis and classical reports but also by referring to modern geography and natural sciences to reinforce the meaning of the verse.<sup>80</sup> This approach illustrates his tendency to treat modern knowledge as an interpretive aid rather than as a rival to classical authority.

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<sup>76</sup> Yunus, *Tafsīr Qur’an Karim*.

<sup>77</sup> Yunus, *Tafsīr Qur’an Karim*.

<sup>78</sup> Jamal, “Wawasan Keindonesiaan Dalam Tafsir Al Qur’an Al Karim Karya Mahmud Yunus.”

<sup>79</sup> Edi, Halimatussadiyah, And Jemain, “Analisis Aspek Lokalitas Mahmud Yunus Dalam Tafsir Al-Qur’an Al-Karim.”

<sup>80</sup> Yunus, *Tafsīr Qur’an Karim*.

In the contemporary academic climate—where Qur’anic studies are increasingly developed in both Islamic and secular universities—*Tafsir Qur’an Karim* can serve as a starting point for articulating a locally grounded exegetical tradition with intellectual autonomy. Rather than merely importing interpretive paradigms from the Middle East or the West, scholars may treat local works such as Mahmud Yunus’s tafsīr as equal partners in methodological dialogue and in addressing social challenges. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the historical limitations of Mahmud Yunus’s Indonesian-oriented tafsīr. The work emerged in the early twentieth century, when dominant concerns included colonialism, illiteracy, educational reform, and debates between traditionalist and reformist groups. Issues that are now highly salient, such as environmental ethics, gender equality in more explicit forms, and digital transformation, are not extensively articulated in the tafsīr. For this reason, Indonesian-oriented tafsīr should be approached not as a closed set of final answers but as a foundational model that invites further development. Its greatest strength lies precisely in its willingness to connect revelation to the concrete problems of its time—a methodological courage that must be continued by later generations of exegetes in response to new challenges.

Moreover, the language and social examples employed by Mahmud Yunus reflect the socio-cultural conditions of mid-twentieth-century Indonesia. Some expressions and illustrations may appear dated to contemporary readers. This makes further scholarly work, such as new annotated editions, critical readings, or contextual reinterpretations, both necessary and valuable. For instance, Mahmud Yunus’s comparisons between Indonesia and Japan regarding work ethic and discipline could be updated through contemporary data on human development indices, digital literacy, and economic productivity. Similarly, his critiques of unjust customary practices could be extended to address new social phenomena emerging in the age of globalization and digital capitalism.

Additional relevance can be observed in contemporary discussions on the development of Islamic law in Indonesia. The juristic orientation of *Tafsir Qur’an Karim* is characterized by an emphasis on ethical and social dimensions rather than on formal legalism. Several studies identify this tafsīr as an early Indonesian exegetical work that goes beyond mere translation by offering contextual explanations linking Qur’anic meanings to Indonesian social realities.<sup>81</sup> In interpreting legal and transactional verses, Mahmud Yunus consistently highlights the moral objectives of the Shari‘ah, such as justice, trustworthiness, and the prohibition of harm, thereby presenting Islamic law as an instrument for social order and justice rather than as a purely formal regulatory system.

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<sup>81</sup> Federspiel, *Popular Indonesian Literature Of The Qur’an*.

This orientation is consistent with the general character of Mahmud Yunus’s tafsīr, which situates Qur’anic teachings within a framework of social ethics and collective responsibility. Through this approach, values such as the protection of vulnerable groups, the rejection of injustice in economic and social relations, and the prioritization of ethical conduct in social transactions become central to his interpretation of legal verses.<sup>82</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Mahmud Yunus’s *Tafsir Qur’an Karim* constitutes a significant milestone in the development of Indonesian-oriented Qur’anic exegesis, integrating the foundations of classical Islamic scholarship with a strong sensitivity to Indonesia’s social, political, and national contexts. Through a rational, accessible, and socially engaged interpretive style addressing issues such as education, poverty, family livelihood, social justice, and nationhood, Mahmud Yunus presents the Qur’an as a living ethical guide that is closely connected to social reality and relevant to the project of modern Indonesian nation-building. The Indonesian-oriented tafsīr he developed corresponds closely with contemporary contextual–humanistic approaches to Qur’anic interpretation, even though it emerged long before such approaches were formally theorized at the global level. In the present context, this exegetical legacy holds substantial potential for strengthening religious moderation, enriching Islamic educational curricula, cultivating ethical work values and economic justice, and managing social and religious diversity within Indonesia. At the same time, the historical and linguistic limitations inherent in Mahmud Yunus’s work open productive spaces for creative and critical re-engagement. Rather than diminishing its value, these limitations invite reinterpretation and renewal, enabling *Tafsir Qur’an Karim* to continue functioning as a vital reference in articulating Qur’anic meanings that are just, inclusive, and oriented toward the common good in contemporary Indonesian society.

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<sup>82</sup> Iskandar, “Tafsir Qur’an Karim Karya Mahmud Yunus Kajian Atas Karya Tafsir Nusantara.”

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