

Socio-Political Criticism in Buya Hamka's Tafsir Al-Azhar: A Thematic Study of the Value of Justice

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the dimension of socio-political criticism in Tafsir Al-Azhar by Buya Hamka with a focus on the value of justice as the central theme. The Tafsir of Al-Azhar is not only a monumental work in the Islamic scientific treasures in the archipelago, but also a reflection of the thinking of a scholar who is responsive to the socio-political dynamics of his time. Hamka, as a mufasir as well as a social activist, integrates the textual understanding of the Qur'an with the historical context and empirical reality of society, resulting in contextual and applicative interpretations. This study uses a qualitative method with a hermeneutical-critical approach to analyze how Hamka constructs the concept of socio-political justice through his interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an. The findings of the study show that Hamka's socio-political criticism in Tafsir Al-Azhar includes three main dimensions: first, criticism of the arbitrariness of rulers and abuse of power; second, advocacy for the rights of the oppressed and marginalized groups; and third, emphasis on the principles of deliberation and political participation as a mechanism for the realization of justice. Hamka emphasized that justice is a fundamental value in Islam that must be implemented concretely in the political system and social structure. The concept of justice in Tafsir Al-Azhar is not limited to the individual-spiritual dimension, but extends to the collective-structural level that includes economic distribution, legal equality, and political participation. This research makes a theoretical contribution to the study of Indonesian contextual interpretation and a practical contribution to the development of Islamic political ethics based on the Qur'an.

Keywords : *Tafsir Al-Azhar, Buya Hamka, socio-political criticism, justice, contextual interpretation.*

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an as the holy book of Muslims not only serves as a spiritual-ritualistic guide, but also as a source of ethical values that govern the social, economic, and political dimensions of life. As a text that is revealed in a specific historical context but contains a universal message that transcends time and space, the Qur'an requires a contextual interpretation effort so that its universal values can be actualized in various situations and conditions of society. In the Islamic scientific tradition, this interpretation effort is known as tafsir, which is a dialogical process between the text of revelation and the empirical reality of humanity.

In the treasures of Indonesian interpretation, Tafsir Al-Azhar by Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah or better known as Buya Hamka (1908-1981) occupies a strategic position as one of the most important works of interpretation produced by Indonesian scholars in the 20th century. In contrast to classical tafsir works that tend to be textual and conservative, Tafsir Al-Azhar comes with a more contextual, progressive, and responsive approach to the contemporary problems of the

Indonesian Muslim community. Hamka, as a scholar who was also active in socio-political movements, managed to integrate a deep understanding of the text of the Qur'an with a critical awareness of the socio-political realities that surrounded the lives of Muslims in his time.

The context of writing Tafsir Al-Azhar cannot be separated from the socio-political dynamics of Indonesia in the mid-20th century. Hamka wrote this commentary in the period 1959-1964, which was the period when Indonesia was under the leadership of President Soekarno with a system of Guided Democracy characterized by the centralization of power, restrictions on civil liberties, and ideological tensions between Islamic, nationalist, and communist groups. This repressive political condition had a significant influence on Hamka's interpretation pattern, especially in responding to verses related to power, justice, and human rights. In fact, the writing of Tafsir Al-Azhar was interrupted when Hamka was arrested and imprisoned by the Old Order regime in 1964 on charges of involvement in a political conspiracy.

In the intellectual context, Hamka belonged to a generation of modernist scholars who were influenced by the thoughts of Islamic reformist figures such as Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Ridha, and Sayyid Quthb. This influence can be seen from his approach that emphasizes rationality, contextuality, and the relevance of Islamic teachings to the development of the times. However, Hamka does not just adopt the thoughts of these figures, but contextualizes and privatizes them by considering the specific conditions of Indonesia's plural and multicultural Muslim society.

One of the prominent aspects of Tafsir Al-Azhar is its sharp socio-political critique of various forms of injustice, oppression, and abuse of power. Hamka consistently emphasized that Islam is a religion that upholds the value of justice ('adl) as a fundamental principle that must be implemented in all aspects of life, both individual and collective. Justice, in Hamka's perspective, is not just an abstract-normative concept, but must be concretely realized in the social, economic, and political systems. For this reason, Muslims have a moral responsibility to make constructive criticism of structures and policies that are not in line with the values of Qur'anic justice.(Hamka, 2002)

Although several studies have been conducted on the Tafsir of Al-Azhar, studies that specifically analyze the dimensions of socio-political criticism with a focus on the value of justice are still limited. Previous studies tend to examine the Tafsir of Al-Azhar in general from the aspect of methodology, characteristics, or comparison with other works of interpretation. In fact, understanding Hamka's socio-political criticism in the historical context of writing Tafsir Al-Azhar has very important relevance, both for academic and practical purposes in the context of national and state life in contemporary Indonesia.(Hidayat, 2021)

This research seeks to fill this gap by conducting a thematic study of the value of justice in Tafsir Al-Azhar, especially in relation to Hamka's socio-political criticism. The main question to be answered in this study is: how does Hamka construct the concept of socio-political justice through his interpretation of the

verses of the Qur'an? What are the forms of socio-political criticism conveyed by Hamka in Tafsir Al-Azhar? And how is the relevance of Hamka's thoughts on socio-political justice to the contemporary Indonesian context?

To answer these questions, this study uses a hermeneutical-critical approach that allows the analysis of interpretive texts not only at the semantic-linguistic level, but also at the ideological and contextual levels. With this approach, this study seeks to uncover the philosophical assumptions, ideological orientation, and socio-political agenda that underlie Hamka's interpretation of verses related to justice. In addition, this study will also analyze how the historical-sociological context influences the process of Hamka's interpretation and how the interpretation then contributes to the discourse of socio-political justice in the Indonesian Islamic tradition of thought. (Hanafi, 2002)

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a qualitative research with a library research approach that focuses on text analysis. The object of the research material is the Tafsir of Al-Azhar by Buya Hamka, especially verses and interpretations related to the theme of socio-political justice. The formal object of the research is the socio-political criticism contained in Hamka's interpretation of these verses.

The approach used in this study is a hermeneutical-critical approach that allows researchers to not only understand the literal meaning of the interpretive text, but also to uncover the philosophical assumptions, ideological orientation, and historical-sociological context behind Hamka's interpretation. This hermeneutical-critical approach is in line with the Frankfurt School's tradition of thought that emphasizes the importance of critique of dominant power structures and ideologies in analyzing texts. (Rahman, 1982)

The primary data source of this research is the 30-juz Tafsir Al-Azhar published by Gema Insani Press. Secondary data sources include other works of Hamka such as *Life Memento*, *Philosophy of Life*, and *Modern Sufism* to comprehensively understand the context of Hamka's thought. In addition, this research also uses various supporting literature in the form of books, scientific journals, and articles that discuss interpretation, Hamka's thoughts, and socio-political justice issues in Islam.

The data collection techniques used are documentation and literature study. The researcher conducts intensive readings of Tafsir Al-Azhar with a focus on verses related to the themes of justice, power, human rights, and other socio-political issues. The reading process is carried out repeatedly (close reading) to understand the nuances and layers of meaning contained in Hamka's interpretation. The researcher also records interpretations that contain socio-political criticism both explicitly and implicitly. (Siradj, 2009)

Data analysis is carried out through several stages. First, the stage of identification and inventory of verses and interpretations related to the theme of socio-political justice. At this stage, the researcher categorizes various forms of

socio-political criticism conveyed by Hamka. Second, the interpretation and contextualization stage, where the researcher tries to understand the meaning of Hamka's interpretation in the historical-sociological context of the writing of Tafsir Al-Azhar. Third, the stage of comparative analysis to compare Hamka's interpretation with other interpretations and with the thoughts of contemporary scholars.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, a source triangulation technique was used by comparing various literature and perspectives on the theme studied. The researcher also conducts member checking through consultation with experts in Islamic interpretation and thought to verify the resulting interpretation. In addition, the researcher performs reflexivity by being aware of subjective positions and biases that may affect the interpretation process.

This research uses a thematic analysis method (*mawdhu'i*) in which verses that have the same theme or topic are collected and analyzed comprehensively to get a complete understanding of the views of the Qur'an and Hamka on a certain issue. This method allows researchers to identify Hamka's thought patterns and fundamental principles that underlie his socio-political critique. (Saeed, 2006)

In analyzing the historical context, this study uses a historical-critical approach method that places the text in the historical and cultural context in which the text was produced. It is important to understand why Hamka interpreted certain verses in a certain way and how the political conditions during the Guided Democracy period influenced his interpretation.

The theoretical framework used in this study is the theory of justice in an Islamic perspective developed by contemporary Muslim thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman, Khaled Abou El Fadl, and Asghar Ali Engineer. In addition, this study also uses concepts from social criticism theory as developed by Jurgen Habermas and Antonio Gramsci to analyze the ideological and structural dimensions of Hamka's socio-political criticism. (Madjid, 1992)

The limitation of this study is that the analysis is focused on the text of Tafsir Al-Azhar and does not conduct a field study on the implementation of Hamka's thought in the socio-political practices of Indonesian Muslim communities. Nevertheless, this focus on textual analysis allows for an in-depth study of Hamka's thought as contained in his monumental work.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Intellectual Biography of Buya Hamka and Background Of Writing Tafsir Al-Azhar

Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, popularly known as Buya Hamka, was born in Sungai Batang, Maninjau, West Sumatra on February 17, 1908. He was the son of Sheikh Abdul Karim Amrullah (Haji Rasul), a prominent reformist scholar who became a central figure of the Youth movement in Minangkabau in the early 20th century. His family background was thick with Islamic scientific traditions and

the spirit of renewal had a significant influence on the formation of Hamka's intellectual character.

Hamka's formal education was relatively limited. He only studied basic education at the Village School for three years and had studied in Sumatra Thawalib Padang Panjang for six months before continuing his self-taught learning. This limited formal education actually shaped Hamka into a self-taught person who has strong intellectual independence. He intensively studied various disciplines through reading classical and contemporary works, both in Arabic, Malay, and Indonesian.

Hamka's intellectual journey began when he emigrated to Java in 1924 and was active in the Muhammadiyah organization. In Yogyakarta and Solo, Hamka interacted with figures of the national movement and Islamic modernists such as Ki Bagus Hadikusumo and K.H. Mas Mansur. This experience enriched Hamka's insight into Indonesia's socio-political dynamics and strengthened his commitment to the Islamic reform movement. (Shihab, 1996)

In 1927-1929, Hamka traveled to Mecca to perform the Hajj as well as to study Islamic sciences. In the holy land, he not only studied tafsir and hadith, but also interacted with scholars from various countries who brought new perspectives on Islam and modernity. This experience in Mecca opened the horizons of Hamka's thought and inspired him to develop Islamic thought that was responsive to the challenges of the times.

As a Muslim intellectual, Hamka was very productive in producing written works. Throughout his life, he has written more than a hundred books covering various fields such as tafsir, Sufism, history, philosophy, literature, and socio-politics. His famous works include *Modern Sufism* (1939), *Philosophy of Life* (1950), *History of Muslims* (1952), and of course *Tafsir Al-Azhar* (1959-1964). Hamka's intellectual productivity reflects his strong commitment to the development of progressive and contextual Islamic thought.

The *Tafsir of Al-Azhar* itself is the fruit of the recitation delivered by Hamka at the Al-Azhar Grand Mosque in Jakarta since 1959. This recitation was attended by various groups, ranging from academics, politicians, to the general public. In his study, Hamka not only conveyed a textual interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an, but also related them to the socio-political reality of Indonesia at that time. This contextual approach makes his studies very interesting because it provides spiritual enlightenment as well as relevant social criticism. (Hamka, 2002)

However, in 1964, Hamka was arrested by the Old Order government on charges of involvement in a political conspiracy. Ironically, this arrest actually provided an opportunity for Hamka to finish writing *Tafsir Al-Azhar* in prison. In a condition isolated from the outside world, Hamka uses his free time to write more focused and deep. This experience as a political prisoner also strengthened Hamka's sensitivity to issues of justice, freedom, and human rights.

After his release in 1966, Hamka was again active in various intellectual and organizational activities. He was appointed Chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) in 1975, a position he held until the end of his life. In this capacity,

Hamka plays an important role in formulating fatwas related to the lives of Indonesian Muslims, including contemporary socio-political issues.

Hamka's thoughts on Islam and politics can be understood as a synthesis between the classical Islamic scientific tradition and modernist thought. He believed that Islam could not be separated from politics because the Qur'an itself regulates various aspects of the social and political life of mankind. However, Hamka also emphasized that Islamic politics must be based on ethical and moral values, not just the pragmatism of power. The principles of justice, deliberation, *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*, and general welfare are foundations that must be used as a foothold in politics.

The Concept Of Justice In The Perspective of The Qur'an And Tafsir Al-Azhar

Justice is one of the fundamental values that is emphasized repeatedly in the Qur'an. The term 'adl and its derivatives are mentioned in various forms 28 times, while the term *qisth* and its derivatives appear 25 times. In addition, the Qur'an also uses various other terms that are semantically related to the concept of justice, such as *mizaaan* (scales), *wazan* (weighing), and *istiqamah* (straightness). The intensity of this mention shows how important the value of justice is in Islamic teachings. (Ma'arif, 1985)

In the Qur'an's perspective, justice is not only an ethical principle in human relationships, but it is also an inherent attribute of God Almighty. Allah SWT in the Qur'an introduces Himself as *Dzul 'Adl* (The One Who Has Justice) and affirms that He has not done any wrongdoing to His servants. This Divine Justice then becomes a normative model that must be emulated by human beings in their social lives.

The Qur'an uses the concept of justice in various contexts, ranging from justice in witnessing (QS. Al-Baqarah: 282), justice in the treatment of orphans (QS. An-Nisa: 2-3), justice in law (QS. An-Nisa: 58), justice in marriage (QS. An-Nisa: 129), to justice in inter-group relations (QS. Al-Maidah: 8). From the various contexts of this use, it can be understood that justice in the Qur'an includes individual, social, economic, legal, and political dimensions.

In Tafsir Al-Azhar, Hamka develops a comprehensive understanding of justice by integrating linguistic, contextual, and philosophical analysis. According to Hamka, justice in Islam has three interrelated dimensions. First, the theological dimension, namely justice as an attribute of God that every Muslim must believe in. Second, the ethical dimension, namely justice as a moral value that must be used as a guideline in behaving and behaving. Third, the socio-political dimension, namely justice as a principle that must be implemented in the social and state system.

Hamka emphasized that justice cannot be understood in a partial or reductionist way. Justice in Islam is holistic and encompasses all aspects of human life. He criticized an understanding that separates spiritual justice from social justice, or between individual justice and structural justice. According to Hamka, true faith must give birth to a commitment to social justice, and the struggle to uphold justice is an integral part of worship to God. (Hidayat, 2021)

In interpreting the verses about justice, Hamka uses a contextual approach that considers the cause al-nuzul (the context of the descent of the verse) while relating it to contemporary reality. For example, in interpreting QS. An-Nisa: 58 which reads: "Indeed, Allah has commanded you to convey the message to those who are entitled to receive it, and when you establish the law among men, you may establish it justly," Hamka not only explains the literal meaning of the verse, but also relates it to the phenomenon of abuse of power and corruption that is rampant in Indonesia.

Hamka emphasized that justice in Islam requires a balance between rights and obligations, between individual interests and collective interests, and between material and spiritual demands. Justice also requires respect for human dignity and dignity without discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, or social status. This principle is explicitly stated in QS. Al-Hujurat: 13 which affirms that humans were created into nations and tribes to know each other, and that the most noble in the sight of Allah is the most pious.

One of Hamka's important contributions to justice discourse is his emphasis on the distributive dimension of justice. In Hamka's view, justice does not only mean providing appropriate punishment for the perpetrators of crimes (retributive justice), but also ensuring the distribution of economic resources and fair social opportunities for all members of society. This is in line with the principles of the Qur'an in QS. Al-Hasyr: 7 which emphasizes that wealth should not only circulate among the rich. (Hanafi, 2002)

Hamka also criticized the understanding of justice that is formalistic and procedural. According to Hamka, true justice is not enough just with good regulations and legal institutions, but must be realized in empirical reality. A law that is formally fair but in practice benefits only a certain group cannot be called justice in the Qur'anic sense. Therefore, Hamka emphasized the importance of social supervision (hisbah) and public criticism of the administration of government to remain in line with the principles of justice.

Criticism of The Arbitrariness Of Rulers and Abuse Of Power

One of the central themes of socio-political criticism in Tafsir Al-Azhar is about the arbitrariness of rulers and the abuse of power. Hamka consistently emphasizes that power in Islam is not a privilege that can be used arbitrarily, but a mandate that must be accounted for before God and the people. Rulers who abuse their power for personal or group interests have betrayed their trust and violated the principle of justice taught by the Qur'an.

In interpreting the stories of the rulers in the Qur'an, such as Pharaoh, Namrud, and Qarun, Hamka does not merely recount historical chronology, but extracts moral-political lessons that are relevant to the contemporary context. Hamka emphasized that arrogance of power (istikbar) is the main source of tyranny and injustice. When a ruler feels superior and not bound by the law, there will be arbitrariness that is detrimental to the people. (Saeed, 2006)

In the Indonesian context at the time of writing Tafsir Al-Azhar, Hamka's criticism of the arbitrariness of the rulers can be understood as a response to the authoritarian practices of the Guided Democracy regime under President Soekarno. Although Hamka does not explicitly mention his name for security considerations, critical readers can understand that his criticisms are directed at rulers who abuse power, restrict civil liberties, and practice individual cults.

One of the verses that became the basis of Hamka's criticism was QS. Shad: 26 which says: "O David, verily We have made you caliphs (rulers) in the earth, so judge between men justly and do not follow lust, for it will lead you astray from the way of Allah." In interpreting this verse, Hamka emphasized that power is a mandate that must be carried out fairly, without being influenced by personal or group interests. Rulers who follow lust in making decisions have deviated from the path of Allah and will be punished severely.

Hamka also criticized the practice of nepotism and patronage that often occurs in the political system. In his interpretation of QS. Al-Qashas: 4 about the Pharaoh who divided his people into factions and weakened some of them, Hamka alluded to the phenomenon of divide et impera (divisive politics) that the ruler used to perpetuate his power. According to Hamka, this kind of politics is contrary to the principles of unity and justice in Islam.

Hamka's criticism of the abuse of power also includes criticism of corruption and embezzlement of state assets. In interpreting QS. Al-Baqarah: 188 which prohibits eating other people's property in a null and void manner and bribing it to the judge, Hamka emphasized that corruption is a very big crime because it deprives the people of their rights and undermines the order of justice. Hamka called corruption a "chronic disease" that eats away at the government system and must be firmly eradicated.

In Hamka's perspective, the accountability of the rulers is a fundamental principle in the Islamic political system. The ruler must be accountable to God, the people, and the law. No ruler is above the law or immune from criticism. Hamka quoted the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW: "The best human being is the most beneficial to other human beings" as a standard to assess leadership quality. A good ruler is one who serves the people, not one who is served by the people.

Hamka also emphasized the importance of social control mechanisms for power. In Islam, the people have the right and obligation to do amar ma'ruf nahi munkar (enjoining good and preventing evil), including criticizing the unjust policies of the rulers. This principle is reflected in QS. Ali Imran: 104 who calls on Muslims to form a group that invites virtue and prevents evil. Hamka interprets this verse as a theological basis for people's political participation and social control of power.

Advocacy For The Rights Of The Oppressed And Marginalized Groups

The second dimension of Hamka's socio-political criticism in Tafsir Al-Azhar is advocacy for the rights of the oppressed and marginalized. Hamka consistently emphasized that Islam is a religion that sides with the mustadh'afin (the oppressed)

and opposes all forms of exploitation and social injustice. This partiality is not only a moral-spiritual dimension, but must also be embodied in concrete actions to change the unjust social structure.

In interpreting Qur'anic verses related to poverty, social inequality, and economic exploitation, Hamka uses a structural approach that criticizes not only individual behavior, but also socio-economic systems that perpetuate injustice. For example, in interpreting QS. Al-Ma'un who denounced those who deny religion and abandon orphans and do not care about the poor, Hamka emphasized that ritual piety is meaningless if it is not accompanied by social concern and the struggle for justice.

Hamka is very critical of the capitalistic economic system that creates extreme inequality between the rich and the poor. In his interpretation of QS. Al-Hasyr: 7 emphasizing that wealth should not only circulate among the rich, Hamka emphasized the need for the redistribution of wealth through the mechanisms of zakat, infaq, shadaqah, and economic policies that are pro-small people. According to Hamka, the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few people is a form of structural tyranny that is contrary to the principles of Islamic justice.

One of the marginal groups that receives special attention in Tafsir Al-Azhar is women. Hamka criticized patriarchal practices that discriminate against women and limit their rights. In interpreting the verses about women's inheritance rights (QS. An-Nisa: 7-11), Hamka asserts that Islam had granted economic rights to women long before Western civilization recognized it. The granting of inheritance rights to women is a social revolution that changes the status of women from mere objects to subjects who have economic rights.

Hamka also criticized the practice of polygamy that does not meet the requirements of justice as stipulated in the Qur'an. In his interpretation of QS. An-Nisa: 3 and 129, Hamka affirms that monogamy is the ideal principle in Islamic marriage, while polygamy is allowed only in emergency conditions and on the condition that it is fair. The practice of polygamy based on lust or inability to act justly is a form of tyranny against women and children.

Other marginal groups that received Hamka's advocacy were orphans and the poor. In interpreting verses about orphans, such as QS. An-Nisa: 2 and 10, Hamka emphasized that the protection of the rights of orphans is an indicator of social justice in a society. A society that ignores the plight of orphans and allows them to be exploited is a society that is far from Islamic values.

Hamka also criticized discrimination based on race, ethnicity, and skin color. In his interpretation of QS. Al-Hujurat: 13 which affirms that humans were created into nations and tribes in order to know each other, Hamka emphasizes the principle of human equality before God. What distinguishes human beings is not race, ethnicity, or social status, but the quality of piety and righteous deeds. Hamka condemned the practice of racism and tribalism that is still deeply rooted in Muslim society.

In the context of multicultural Indonesia, Hamka emphasized the importance of respecting the rights of minorities, both religious minorities, ethnicities, and other vulnerable groups. Hamka interprets the principle of "lakum dinukum wa liya din" (for you your religion and for me my religion) in QS. Al-Kafirun is not an attitude of apathy, but as a respect for religious freedom and plurality. The state has a responsibility to protect the rights of minorities from discrimination and violence.(Siradj, 2009)

The Principle Of Deliberation And Political Participation As A Mechanism Of Justice

The third dimension of Hamka's socio-political criticism is the emphasis on the principle of deliberation (shura) and political participation as a mechanism for realizing justice. In Hamka's perspective, the Islamic political system is not a theocracy that places power in the hands of a certain religious class, but a democratic system based on ethical-religious values. Deliberation is a fundamental principle that distinguishes the Islamic political system from authoritarian and anarchic systems.

The Qur'an explicitly commands deliberation in QS. Ali Imran: 159 and QS. Ash-Shura: 38. The first verse is addressed to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH to deliberate with the companions in public affairs, while the second verse mentions deliberation as one of the characteristics of an ideal Muslim society. From these two verses, Hamka concludes that deliberation is not just a moral encouragement, but a religious obligation that must be implemented in the political system.(Nirwana & al., 2021)

In interpreting QS. Ali Imran: 159, Hamka emphasizes that if the Prophet Muhammad PBUH who received revelation directly from Allah was commanded to deliberate, then moreover the rulers who did not receive revelation had to deliberate in making important decisions. Rulers who ignore deliberation and make decisions unilaterally have deviated from the guidance of the Qur'an and towards arbitrariness.

Hamka developed a concept of deliberation that is not only limited to the political elite, but also involves the participation of the people at large. According to him, in the context of a modern country with a large population, deliberation can be realized through representative mechanisms such as parliament or the House of Representatives. What is important is that strategic decisions must involve legitimate representation of the people and reflect public aspirations.(Shihab, 1996)

However, Hamka also gave a critical note on democratic practices that are procedural and formalistic. According to him, deliberation in Islam is not just voting or counting the majority vote, but a dialogical process to seek truth and the common good. The decision taken must be based on considerations of maslahat (public interest) and justice, not just the wishes of the majority that may be wrong or influenced by propaganda.

In the context of Indonesia in the era of Guided Democracy, Hamka's criticism of the restriction of the deliberation space is very clear. He criticized political practices that marginalized parliament and other democratic institutions. Hamka emphasized that the centralization of power in the hands of the executive and the silencing of opposition voices are contrary to the principle of deliberation in Islam. The people have the right to voice their opinions, including criticizing government policies that are not in line with the public interest.

Hamka also emphasized the importance of freedom of opinion and expression as a prerequisite for effective deliberation. In a repressive and authoritarian political system, deliberation is only a formality ritual without substance. For this reason, the state must guarantee civil liberties, including freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and freedom of politics. Restrictions on these freedoms are a form of tyranny that is contrary to the teachings of Islam. (Hamka, 2002)

In addition to deliberation, Hamka also emphasized the principle of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* as a form of people's political participation. In his interpretation of QS. Ali Imran: 104 and 110, Hamka affirms that Muslims have a collective obligation to uphold good and prevent evil in socio-political life. This obligation is not only imposed on scholars or political elites, but also on all members of society according to their respective capacities.

Hamka criticized the apathy and passivity in the face of socio-political injustice. In his interpretation, the silent attitude towards tyranny means complacent towards sin and taking responsibility for the perpetuation of injustice. Muslims must be active in fighting for justice, both through formal channels such as state institutions, and informal channels such as social movements and civil activism.

Hamka's Methodology Of Interpretation And Hermeneutic Approach

In order to comprehensively understand the socio-political criticism in Tafsir Al-Azhar, it is necessary to first study the methodology of tafsir used by Hamka. The methodology of tafsir is a conceptual and procedural framework that guides a mufasir in interpreting the verses of the Qur'an. In the context of Hamka, his interpretation methodology is inseparable from his intellectual background and ideological orientation as a modernist scholar who is responsive to the development of the times.

Hamka uses the method of tafsir bi al-ra'yi, which is the interpretation of the Qur'an using rational *ijtihad* and not fixated on classical interpretations. Nevertheless, Hamka still refers to authoritative sources such as the commentary of Ibn Kathir, al-Thabari, al-Zamakhsyari, and al-Razi as references, while criticizing these interpretations when they are considered irrelevant to the contemporary context. This approach shows Hamka's critical-dialogical attitude towards the classical interpretation tradition.

One of the characteristics of Hamka's interpretation methodology is its contextual and holistic approach. Hamka does not interpret the verses of the Qur'an atomistically or in isolation, but considers the textual context (reasonable verse), historical context (asbab al-nuzul), and contemporary sociological context. This holistic approach allows Hamka to extract universal messages from verses that are literally contextual-specific.

Hamka also uses a thematic approach (mawdhu'i) in interpreting the Qur'an. He not only interprets verse by verse sequentially, but also connects verses that have the same theme or topic to get a comprehensive understanding. This thematic approach is particularly effective for examining issues such as justice, power, and freedom scattered throughout the various suras and verses in the Qur'an.

In the linguistic aspect, Hamka pays serious attention to the analysis of the Arabic language, including grammatical, semantic, and stylistic structures. However, Hamka's linguistic analysis does not stop at the technical-philological level, but rather is directed at uncovering the substantive meaning and practical implications of the Qur'anic verses. Hamka avoids sterile linguistic debates and focuses more on the applicative aspects of interpretation.

One of the uniqueness of Hamka's methodology is the use of a literary approach in interpreting the Qur'an. As a prolific writer, Hamka is very sensitive to the aesthetic and rhetorical dimensions of the Qur'an. He often uses analogies, metaphors, and narratives to explain the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an to make it easier for ordinary readers to understand. Hamka's literary style makes Tafsir Al-Azhar not only informative but also inspiring.

Hamka also integrates historical and sociological perspectives in his interpretation. When interpreting verses about the stories of the prophets and the previous people, Hamka not only tells the historical chronology, but also analyzes the social patterns, political dynamics, and laws of history that can be studied. This approach is in line with the principle of the Qur'an which states that the stories in the Qur'an contain lessons (ibrah) for the intellectual.

In the context of socio-political criticism, Hamka's methodology has distinctive characteristics. He uses a hermeneutical-critical approach that seeks not only to understand the literal meaning of the text, but also to uncover the ideological assumptions and power structures that underlie social practices. Hamka realizes that the interpretation of religious texts is never neutral, but is always influenced by the interests and social position of the mufasir.

Hamka also uses the method of qiyas (analogy) to apply the principles of the Qur'an to contemporary cases that are not explicitly mentioned in the text. For example, Hamka analogizes the practice of modern corruption with the practice of ghulul (embezzlement of spoils of war) which is prohibited in the Qur'an. Although the context is different, the substance of the crime is the same, namely taking the rights of others illegally.

The Historical-Political Context Of Indonesia At The Time Of Writing Tafsir Al-Azhar

A deep understanding of socio-political criticism in Tafsir Al-Azhar requires knowledge of the historical-political context of Indonesia at the time of writing the tafsir. The Tafsir of Al-Azhar was written in the period 1959-1964, which was a very crucial period in the political history of modern Indonesia. This period was marked by the transition from a parliamentary democratic system to a Guided Democracy led by President Soekarno. (Binder, 2021)

The political background at that time was very complex and full of tension. After Indonesia's independence in 1945, the Indonesian nation experienced experiments with various political systems. In the 1950s, Indonesia implemented a parliamentary democratic system which turned out to result in political instability due to frequent cabinet changes. This instability was taken advantage of by President Soekarno to propose a return to the 1945 Constitution and implement the Guided Democracy system in 1959.

Guided Democracy is conceptually claimed to be a democracy that is in accordance with the personality of the Indonesian nation which prioritizes deliberation and mutual cooperation. But in practice, this system resulted in the centralization of power in the hands of President Soekarno and the restriction of democratic space. Parliament, which is supposed to be the people's representative institution, loses its control function over the executive. Political parties critical of the government were suppressed and dissolved. (Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004)

During this period, there was also a sharp ideological polarization between Islamic, nationalist, and communist groups. President Soekarno tried to balance these three forces through the concept of NASAKOM (Nationalist, Religious, Communist). However, this policy actually sharpens ideological tensions and creates horizontal conflicts in society. Islamist groups, including Masyumi, which became the largest party in the 1955 elections, felt marginalized in the political constellation.

In the economic context, Indonesia at that time faced a serious crisis. Inflation has increased dramatically, the budget deficit has swelled, and the people's standard of living has decreased. The government is more focused on prestigious projects such as the construction of monuments and sports courts for the Asian Games than on improving the welfare of the people. Economic inequality is widening inequality, with a handful of political elites and businessmen close to power enjoying prosperity while the people mostly suffer.

Restrictions on civil liberties are also an important characteristic of the Guided Democracy period. Press freedom was restricted, newspapers critical of the government were banned, and opposition activists were arrested on charges of subversion. Hamka himself became a victim of this political repression when he was arrested in 1964 on charges of involvement in a conspiracy to overthrow the government. Hamka's arrest shows that even respected religious leaders are not immune to the regime's repressive actions.

In the context of Islam-state relations, the period of Guided Democracy was marked by heightened tensions. Islamist groups feel that their aspiration to make Islam the basis of the state is not accommodated by the government. Meanwhile, the government considers Islamist groups as a threat to state ideology and national unity. These tensions reached a peak when the Masyumi Party was dissolved in 1960 on charges of involvement in the PRRI/Permesta rebellion.

This repressive socio-political condition had a significant influence on Hamka's interpretation in the Tafsir of Al-Azhar. Hamka's direct experience as a victim of political injustice makes his interpretation of the verses about tyranny, freedom, and human rights sharper and more contextual. Hamka used Tafsir Al-Azhar as a medium to convey criticism of political practices that are contrary to Islamic values.

However, Hamka also had to be careful in conveying his criticism because of the censorship and strict repression. Therefore, socio-political criticism in Tafsir Al-Azhar is often conveyed indirectly through the interpretation of the stories in the Qur'an. Critical readers can understand that Hamka's criticism of Pharaoh, Qarun, or other tyrannical rulers in the Qur'an is actually also directed at contemporary rulers who do the same. (Kassab, 2006)

Comparative Analysis: Tafsir Al-Azhar And Other Contemporary Tafsir

To understand the uniqueness and contribution of Tafsir Al-Azhar in the discourse of Indonesian interpretation, it is necessary to conduct a comparative analysis with other contemporary tafsir works. This comparison is not intended to assess which is superior, but rather to identify the distinctive characteristics of each work and its contribution to the development of interpretive scholarship in Indonesia.

One of the works of tafsir that is often compared to Tafsir Al-Azhar is Tafsir Al-Misbah by M. Quraish Shihab. These two interpretations have some similarities, such as the use of easy-to-understand Indonesian, a contextual approach, and attention to contemporary issues. However, there are significant differences in the pattern and orientation of the two interpretations.

The Tafsir of Al-Azhar is more nuanced in socio-political and critical of the power structure, while the Tafsir Al-Misbah focuses more on the spiritual-ethical dimension and tends to avoid political controversy. Hamka does not shy away from criticizing the rulers and the unjust system, while Quraish Shihab is more careful in dealing with sensitive political issues. This difference can be understood from different historical contexts: Hamka writes in a repressive political situation where criticism becomes a moral imperative, while Quraish Shihab writes in an era of reform that is more democratic but also more politically complex. (Kassab, 2006)

In terms of methodology, Tafsir Al-Misbah is more systematic and academic with an orderly structure and more complete references. Each verse is discussed in detail by including various opinions of classical and contemporary scholars. While Tafsir Al-Azhar is more literary and narrative in nature, with a more flowing

language style and easy to understand by lay readers. Hamka often uses stories, analogies, and concrete examples to explain the meaning of verses, while Quraish Shihab uses an analytical-discursive approach.

Another comparison can be made with Tafsir Al-Ibriz by KH. Bisri Mustafa, which is one of the popular Javanese interpretations. In contrast to Tafsir Al-Azhar which uses Indonesian as a medium, Tafsir Al-Ibriz uses Javanese so that it is more accessible to traditional Javanese people. In terms of patterns, Tafsir Al-Ibriz is more nuanced in *sufistic* and *fiqh*, while Tafsir Al-Azhar is more nuanced in socio-political and reformist.

However, both have similarities in terms of concern for the condition of the *ummah* and efforts to contextualize the teachings of the Qur'an with local realities. Both are also products of scholars who not only dwell on academic ivory towers, but are also active in the socio-religious life of the community. The differences in educational backgrounds and ideological orientations of the two *mufasir* produce different interpretations but both make important contributions to the development of the archipelago's interpretation. (Soliman, 2025)

When compared to classical commentaries such as Tafsir Al-Thabari or Ibn Katsir, Tafsir Al-Azhar shows very different characteristics. Classical interpretations tend to focus more on textual interpretation by using *hadith* narrations and the opinions of companions and *tabiin*. The approach is more *tafsir bi al-ma'tsur* (interpretation based on narration), while Tafsir Al-Azhar uses *tafsir bi al-ra'yi* (interpretation based on rational *ijtihad*) while still referring to classical sources.

What is interesting is that Hamka does not reject classical interpretations, but rather uses them as a reference while doing criticism and contextualization. Hamka realizes that classical interpretations are written in a different historical and cultural context from modern Indonesia, so not all interpretations can be applied just like that. This critical-selective approach shows Hamka's intellectual maturity in interacting with Islamic scientific traditions.

In the context of the modernist interpretation of the Middle East, the Tafsir of Al-Azhar can be compared to the Tafsir Al-Manar by Muhammad Abduh and Rasyid Ridha. Both are products of the Islamic reformist movement that seeks to integrate Islamic teachings with the development of modernity. Both also criticize *taqlid* (blind following) and encourage *ijtihad* in understanding the Qur'an.

However, the Tafsir of Al-Azhar has a strong local-contextual dimension that is not found in the Tafsir Al-Manar. Hamka not only adopts modernist Middle Eastern thinking, but also privatizes it by considering the specific conditions of Indonesia's plural and multicultural Muslim society. Hamka is also more sensitive to social and structural justice issues than Muhammad Abduh who focuses more on thought reform and education. (Vićentić, 2023)

The uniqueness of Tafsir Al-Azhar also lies in its integration with literature and philosophy. Hamka as a Muslim writer and philosopher integrated these perspectives in his interpretation. He often quotes Malay poems, proverbs, and *hikayat* to explain the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an. This interdisciplinary

approach makes Tafsir Al-Azhar not only a work of interpretation in a narrow sense, but also an intellectual work rich in philosophical and aesthetic insights.

In terms of target readers, Tafsir Al-Azhar is aimed at educated Muslims who have a concern for contemporary socio-political issues. The language used by Hamka is a formal but not rigid standard Indonesian, with technical terms that are explained in an accessible manner. This is different from academic interpretations aimed at specialists with more technical language and more detailed references. (Ateş, 2003)

The contribution of Tafsir Al-Azhar in the discourse of Indonesian tafsir can be seen from several aspects. First, Tafsir Al-Azhar pioneered a tradition of contextual interpretation that is responsive to contemporary problems. Before Hamka, interpretations in Indonesia tended to be textual and conservative. Hamka showed that interpretation can be a medium for social criticism and societal transformation.

Second, Tafsir Al-Azhar shows that tafsir does not have to be written by scholars who have a background in traditional Islamic boarding school education. Hamka is a self-taught person who learns independently, but managed to produce monumental works of interpretation. This paved the way for the development of tafsir by non-pesantren Muslim intellectuals. (Sulaiman, 2022)

Third, Tafsir Al-Azhar contributes to the development of Indonesian as the language of Islamic science. Previously, the tafsirs in the archipelago were written in Arabic or regional languages. Hamka's use of Indonesian facilitates the spread of understanding of the Qur'an to the wider community who do not master Arabic or certain regional languages.

The Relevance Of Hamka's Thoughts On Socio-Political Justice For Contemporary Indonesia

Although the Al-Azhar Tafsir was written more than half a century ago, Hamka's thoughts on socio-political justice still have strong relevance for contemporary Indonesia. Various problems criticized by Hamka, such as the arbitrariness of the rulers, corruption, social inequality, discrimination, and restrictions on civil liberties, are still the actual issues faced by the Indonesian nation to this day.

In the context of the current Indonesian political system, Hamka's emphasis on the principles of deliberation and political participation has great significance. Indonesia's relatively young democracy faces various challenges, such as the practice of money politics, political dynasties, and oligarchs that threaten the quality of people's representation. Hamka's thinking about substantive deliberation, not just procedural, can be the basis for criticism of formalistic and elitist democratic practices. (Roose & Turner, 2019)

Hamka's criticism of corruption and abuse of power is also very relevant to the condition of contemporary Indonesia. Although there have been various efforts to eradicate corruption, corruption practices are still rampant at various levels of

government. Hamka's perspective that places corruption not only as a crime of law but also as a grave sin and betrayal of trust can strengthen the moral base of the anti-corruption movement.

In the context of social inequality and poverty, Hamka's thoughts on distributive justice have significant relevance. Indonesia is currently facing the problem of widening economic inequality, where a small number of people control most of the national wealth while millions of people still live below the poverty line. Hamka's emphasis on wealth redistribution and alignment with the *mustadh'afin* can be the basis for the formulation of a more just economic policy.

Hamka's advocacy for women's rights also has relevance in the context of the struggle for gender equality in Indonesia. Although there has been significant progress in women's empowerment, various forms of gender discrimination still occur, both in the domestic and public spheres. Hamka's progressive interpretation of verses on women's rights can be a reference for the Muslim feminism movement that seeks to fight for gender equality while remaining grounded in Islamic values. (Krasnova & Grinavica, 2024)

In the context of pluralism and religious tolerance, Hamka's thoughts on respect for minority rights are particularly relevant. A plural and multicultural Indonesia, it faces the challenges of intolerance and radicalism that threaten national unity. Hamka's emphasis on the principle of human equality and respect for differences can strengthen the theological basis for the development of tolerance and dialogue between religious communities. (Aggarwal, 2011)

However, in applying Hamka's thinking to the contemporary context, contextualization and reinterpretation efforts are needed. Some of Hamka's views that are contextual need to be adjusted to the development of the times and different socio-political dynamics. What needs to be maintained are fundamental principles such as justice, equality, freedom, and accountability, while their technical applications can be adapted to the context.

The Tafsir of Al-Azhar can also be a source of inspiration for the development of Islamic liberation theology discourse in Indonesia. Hamka's thinking that integrates the spiritual dimension with socio-political struggle shows that Islam is not an apolitical religion or ignores worldly problems. True faith must give birth to a commitment to social justice and resistance to all forms of oppression. (Alinejad, 2002)

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Tafsir Al-Azhar by Buya Hamka contains a sharp and comprehensive socio-political criticism with the value of justice as the central theme. Hamka developed a holistic concept of justice, covering theological, ethical, and socio-political dimensions. Justice in Hamka's perspective is not just an abstract-normative principle, but must be concretely realized in the social, economic, and political systems.

Hamka's socio-political criticism in Tafsir Al-Azhar can be categorized into three main dimensions. First, criticism of the arbitrariness of the ruler and the abuse of power. Hamka emphasized that power is a mandate that must be carried out fairly and responsibly. Rulers who abuse power, commit corruption, or restrict civil liberties have deviated from the guidance of the Qur'an and will be rewarded accordingly. This criticism was conveyed by Hamka through the interpretation of the stories of tyrannical rulers in the Qur'an such as Pharaoh, Namrud, and Qarun, which were then contextualized with the political conditions of Indonesia during the Guided Democracy period.

Second, advocacy for the rights of the oppressed and marginalized groups. Hamka consistently emphasized Islam's partiality towards the *mustadh'afin* and opposed all forms of socio-economic exploitation. Marginal groups such as the poor, orphans, women, and minorities have rights that must be protected and fought for. Social inequality and discrimination are forms of structural tyranny that are contrary to the principles of Islamic justice. Hamka emphasized that ritual piety is meaningless if it is not accompanied by social concern and the struggle for distributive justice.

Third, the emphasis on the principles of deliberation and political participation as a mechanism for the realization of justice. Hamka developed a concept of substantive deliberation, not just procedural. Deliberation must involve the participation of the people widely and be based on freedom of opinion. The people have the right and obligation to exercise social control over power through the mechanism of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*. This principle becomes the theological basis for democracy in an Islamic perspective that emphasizes the accountability of rulers and public participation in decision-making.

The historical context of writing Tafsir Al-Azhar during the repressive period of Guided Democracy had a significant influence on Hamka's interpretation pattern. Hamka's experience as a political prisoner reinforces his sensitivity to issues of justice, freedom, and human rights. However, Hamka's socio-political criticism is not purely reactive-situational, but is based on a deep understanding of the universal principles of the Qur'an that go beyond the specific context of the time of writing.

The interpretation methodology used by Hamka has unique characteristics. He integrates linguistic, historical, sociological, and philosophical approaches in interpreting the Qur'an. The contextual and thematic approach used by Hamka allows the extraction of universal messages from verses that are literally contextual-specific. Hamka also uses a hermeneutical-critical approach that not only seeks to understand the literal meaning of the text, but also uncovers the ideological assumptions and power structures that underlie social practices.

Comparative analysis with other contemporary interpretations shows that the Tafsir of Al-Azhar is unique in terms of a critical and progressive socio-political orientation. In contrast to the interpretations that focus more on the spiritual-ritualistic dimension, the Tafsir of Al-Azhar pays serious attention to issues of social justice, economic inequality, and human rights. Hamka is also more courageous in

expressing criticism of the rulers and the unjust system, even though he has to face the risk of political repression.

Hamka's thoughts on socio-political justice in Tafsir Al-Azhar have strong relevance for contemporary Indonesia. The various problems that Hamka criticized are still actual issues faced by the Indonesian nation, such as corruption, social inequality, discrimination, and undemocratic political practices. The fundamental principles emphasized by Hamka can be the basis for the development of a more just and democratic political system and the formulation of pro-people economic policies.

This research makes a theoretical contribution to the study of Indonesian contextual interpretation by showing that tafsir is not only a textual elaboration of the Qur'an, but also a critical response to socio-political reality. The interpretation of Al-Azhar shows that the interpretation of the Qur'an cannot be separated from the historical-sociological context of mufasir and must be responsive to contemporary problems. Thus, tafsir has a transformative function in society, not only as a source of religious knowledge but also as an instrument of social criticism and liberation.

Practically, this research can be a reference for the development of Islamic political ethics based on the Qur'an. Hamka's thoughts on justice, accountability of power, advocacy for the oppressed, and political participation can be an inspiration for Muslim socio-political movements in the fight for justice and democracy in Indonesia. In the context of the life of the nation and the state, the principles developed by Hamka can be used as a basis for the formulation of public policies that are more just, inclusive, and in favor of the welfare of the people.

However, efforts are needed to contextualize and reinterpret so that these principles can be applied effectively in a contemporary context that is different from Hamka's time. Indonesia's current socio-political dynamics are much more complex with new challenges such as globalization, digitalization, and climate change requiring creative and innovative responses. What needs to be maintained is the critical spirit and commitment to justice that characterize Hamka's thinking, while its concrete application can be adapted to the times.

Finally, this study emphasizes the importance of developing contextual interpretations that are responsive to contemporary problems. The Qur'an as a universal and eternal holy book requires continuous interpretation efforts so that its universal values can be actualized in various contexts of space and time. The Tafsir of Al-Azhar provides a concrete example of how a mufasir can integrate a depth of textual understanding with a sensitivity to social reality to produce an interpretation that is not only informative but also transformative.

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