SEMIOTICS AS A STANDARD FOR INTERPRETATION OF ISLAMIC TEXTS: STUDIES BASED ON SCIENCE OF *BALAGAH* AND EXEGESIS

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ABSTRACT

Among the problems of Islamic studies is the view of Islamic fundamentalists and conservatives who see semiotics as a theory of the study of texts that is prohibited by Islam. This article discusses Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, both in the sense of denotative/heuristic reading which looks at the text coherently and connotative/hermeneutical reading which requires looking at the social context of the text. The method used is a comparative study of literature, between Barthes' semiotics, balāgah science (classical Arabic stylistics), and tafsir science. Data was obtained from literature and the results of in-depth interviews with several experts. This article finds that semiotics does not conflict with the Koran, in fact it is a necessity as a standard text study method. Without semiotics, an interpretation of the Koran and hadith is not an Islamic standard interpretation. However, the term known in the Islamic tradition is not semiotics, but naẓm. Apart from that, the terms tafsir al-āyāt bi al-āyāt and tafsīr al-āyāt bi al-hadīŝ or vice versa, also the method of interpreting mauḍū'ī (thematic). In interpreting, you are required to master asbāb al-nuzūl, asbāb al-wurūd, and mastery of Meccan and Medina verses as the social context of the text. Semiotics and the study of text studies in Islam,

therefore, not only make interpretations of the Al-Qur'an (Islamic texts) that show the intention of the Koran, namely public benefit, but also make Islamic studies scientifically accountable.

Keywords: *Structural Semiotics, Naẓm, Naḥw, Balāgah, Interpretation of al-Āyāt bi al-Āyāt/bi al-Ḥadīŝ,/ Interpretation of Mauḍū'ī.*

ABSTRAK

Di antara problem kajian keislaman adalah adanya pandangan kaum fundamentalis dan konservatif Islam yang melihat semiotika sebagai teori kajian teks yang dilarang Islam. Artikel ini membahas teori semiotika Roland Barthes, baik dalam arti pembacan denotatif/heuristik yang melihat teks secara koherens maupun pembacaan konotatif/hermeneutis yang mengharuskan melihat konteks sosial teks. Metode yang digunakan adalah studi banding kepustakaan, antara semiotika Barthes, ilmu balāgah (stilistika Arab klasik), dan ilmu tafsir. Data diperoleh dari literatur dan hasil wawancara mendalam terhadap beberapa ahli. Artikel ini menemukan bahwa semiotika tidak bertentangan dengan Al-Qur'an, bahkan merupakan suatu keharusan sebagai metode kajian teks yang baku. Tanpa semiotika, sebuah penafsiran atas Al-Qur'an dan hadis bukan sebagai penasiran yang standar secara Islam. Namun, istilah yang dikenal dalam tradisi Islam bukan semiotika, tetapi naẓm. Selain itu dikenal juga istilah tafsir al-āyāt bi al-āyāt dan tafsīr al-āyāt bi al-hadīŝ atau sebaliknya, juga metode tafsīr mauḍū'ī (tematik). Dalam melakukan penafsiran diharuskan menguasai asbāb al-nuzūl, asbāb al-wurūd, dan penguasaan ayat-ayat Mekah dan Madinah sebagai konteks sosial teks. Semiotika dan studi kajian teks dalam Islam, karenanya, bukan hanya membuat tafsir atas Al-Qur'an (teks-teks Islam) yang memperlihatkan maksud Al-Qur'an, yaitu kemaslahatan publik, melainkan juga menjadikan sebuah kajian Islam bisa dipertanggungjawabkan secara ilmiah.

Kata kunci: *Struktural Semiotik, Naẓm, Naḥw, Balāgah, Penafsiran al-Āyāt bi al-Āyāt/bi al-Ḥadīŝ, Tafsīr Mauḍū'ī.*

INTRODUCTION

In reading texts, semiotics is a theory to study and explain the meaning of texts, not only in the narrow sense, but also in the broader sense. Any phenomenon in nature can be (invisible) signs, such as culture, advertising, music, paintings, films, non-verbal communication, language verbal communication, and religious texts. Several contemporary Muslim scholars, such as

Mohammed Arkoun (born 1928), Fazlurrahman (1919-1988 AD), Hasan Hanafi (born 1935), and Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, have used this semiotic theory in Islamic studies. Even previously, Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905) in Egypt and Ahmad Khan in India (born 1817) also applied this theory, although both of them only used hermeneutics as an approach to Islamic studies, not discussing it specifically as a theory or methodology.[1]

Like Derrida, Arkoun rejected a single interpretation of Islamic texts, especially the Qur'an, and the necessity of opening up opportunities for other (new) meanings, if it is possible. Through semiotics, Qur'an/Hadis researchers can rediscover meaning that has been marginalised, pushed aside/forgotten due to various processes of closure and freezing/concealment that have occurred in the history of Islamic thought since classical times, due to particular domination/hegemony. He suggested dismantling meaning because meaning or knowledge, in general, is often determined by power, as structuralists believe. Apart from that, both Derrida and Arkoun also rejected logocentrism and phonocentrism. Logocentrism means the desire for a center. This word is taken from *logos* in the New Testament, which concentrates on the word as the central origin of God's presence. Because the words are spoken, logocentrism is also called phonocentrism (according to the meaning expressed/spoken). In this way, Islam can answer the challenges of modernity.[2]

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[1] Mohammed Arkoun, *Nalar Islami dan Nalar Modern: Berbagai Tantangan dan Jalan Baru* (Jakarta: INIS, 1994), 12-25, 230-237, Mohammed Arkoun, *Berbagai Pembacaan Qur'an,* (Jakarta: INIS, 1997), 51-60, 93-137, 228-24; Roland Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988), 222–23; Diane Macdonell, *Teori-Teori Diskursus,* Translation from *Theories of Discourses: An Introduction,* (Jakarta: Teraju, 2005), viii–x; Benny H. Hoed, *Semiotik dan Dianamika Sosisal Budaya* (Depok: Komunitas Bambu, 2011), 16–17.

[2] Arkoun, *Nalar Islami dan Nalar Modern: Berbagai Tantangan Dan Jalan Baru*; Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge*, 222–23; Macdonell, *Teori-Teori Diskursus,* Translation from *Theories of Discourses: An Introduction,* viii–x; Hoed, *Semiotik dan Dianamika Sosisal Budaya*, 16–17. See also Sufrianti Ramdhani and Muhammad Said Said, "Semiotics As a Tafsirs Approach: A Review of Mohammed Arkoun's Thoughts, in *Jurnal Alif Lam Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities,* Vol. 2 No. 1, January 2021, 112-

Semiotics, a product of modern Western thought, has encountered resistance from Islamic fundamentalism. Islamic fundamentalism is a traditional and reactionary religious ideology that advocates a return to what is perceived as the original teachings as outlined in the holy scriptures, with some followers resorting to extreme methods to defend their beliefs.[3] In their view, semiotics, including hermeneutics, is popular at State Islamic Universities in Indonesia, due to its Western origin and the prestige it bestows upon its practitioners. They assert that hermeneutics, as a non-Islamic Western concept, is propagated by Islamic figures who have studied in or engaged with the West in a bid to undermine Islam. According to these fundamentalists, the use of hermeneutics contradicts Qur'an Surah 59:7, which mandates following only the teachings of Allah and His Messenger.

Critics such as Hafidz Abdurrahman argue that semiotics and hermeneutics approach understanding, including religious understanding, as a subjective interpretation, which they deem as relative rather than absolute. They contend that even an expert's interpretation is not equivalent to the religion itself. This perspective, they argue, is dangerous when applied to verses of the Qur'an (*muḥkamāt* verses) that have a clear meaning, particularly those related to belief (*aqīdah*). They fear that this could lead to the desacralisation of the Qur'an. As such, Adian Husaini and Abdurrahman Al-Baghdadi authored the book Hermeneutics and

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137, https://journal.staidk.ac.id/index.php/aliflam/article/view/287, Accessed November 28, 2024.

[3] A. Scott-Baumann and S. Cheruvallil-Contractor, "Islamic Education in Britain: New Pluralist Paradigms" (books.google.com, 2015), https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=x8HNCQAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=islamic+education&ots=MDqxPhu27f&sig=QAfl2_E6EH5jEvviu-pFVi1Y8zA; Budhy Munawar-Rachman, *Islam Pluralis, Wacana Kesetaraan Kaum Beriman* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2004), 589–93; Abdurrahman Kasdi, "Fundamentalisme Islam Timur Tengah: Akar Teologi, Kritik Wacana, dan Politisasi," *Tashwirul Afkar, Jurnal Refleksi Pemikiran Keagamaan dan Kebudayaan*, no. 13 (2002): 19–33; Depdiknas, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2015), 400.

Tafsir Al-Qur'an to articulate the potential perils of using hermeneutical methods in interpreting the Qur'an.[4]

H.G. Gadamer (1889-1976) proposed a subjective theory of hermeneutics as a component of semiotics. He posited that the chasm between researchers and authors should be seen as an opportunity for enriching meaning through the convergence of the researcher's horizon with that of the author. Thus, interpretation, in his view, is not merely reproductive, but also constructive and productive. An ideal interpretation could transcend the author's intention, providing meaning that is relevant to the researcher's socio-cultural context, rather than being confined to the author's socio-cultural milieu. He further argued that language carries an autonomous meaning, independent of the author's intention and the social and cultural context of the original audience/ *mukhāṭab*. This perspective aligns with the semiology/hermeneutics theory of Roland Barthes (1915-1980), although Barthes' theory is somewhat more moderate. His theory celebrates the multiplicity of textual meanings, including new interpretations that arise in response to the challenges of new social contexts. Barthes famously declared the death of the author, implying a shift in emphasis from the author's intended meaning to the reader's interpretation.

Among the numerous semiotic theories that exist, the semiotic frameworks proposed by Michael Riffaterre and Roland Barthes stand out due to their operational applicability even at microtext levels, yielding comprehensive results in scholarly studies. These theorists suggest a two-step semiotic approach to literary works—including Arabic literature—comprising heuristic/denotative reading and hermeneutic/retroactive reading (also known as re-reading, connotative, or myth reading). Heuristic reading hinges on the structure of language or the primary semiotic system, also known as denotational reading or micro-text reading. This step involves a structuralist analysis of literary prose—such as novels—focusing on the intrinsic elements of the prose: characters, plot, setting, theme (ideas), language style, and

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[4] Adian Husaini dan Abdurrahman Al-Baghdadi, *Hermeneutika dan Tafsir Al-Qur'an,* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 2007), 1-107.

the coherence among these elements, viewed as an indivisible whole.[5]

The structural or heuristic reading becomes necessary as the semiotic approach often aligns with structural semiotics or semiotic structuralism.[6] This theory combines structuralism with semiotics, integrating concepts such as symbols from de Saussure, the idea of index and continuous semiosis from Peirce, theories of connotation and myth from Barthes, myth or secondary symbols from Paul Ricoeur, and Riffaterre's heuristic and hermeneutic reading. Semiotic structuralism critically assimilates structuralism theory, emphasising the study of the intrinsic aspects of literary works (including formal aesthetics), especially the coherence among the intrinsic elements of the works. Texts are viewed as inseparable units, allowed to self-reveal without interference from reviewer bias. However, semiotic structuralism, in contrast to pure structuralism, highlights not only the study of the beauty and coherence of intrinsic elements but also the interpretation of the text as a sign and the external assumptions within the text—signifying the need for extrinsic analysis, particularly of the social setting.[7]

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[5] Salah Fadal, *Nazariyah Al-Binaiyyah: Fi al-Naqd al-Adabi* (Al-Qahirah: Dar al-Syuruq, 1998), 249, 278; Suwardi Endraswara, *Metodologi Penelitian Sastra, Epistimologi Model Teori dan Aplikasinya* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Widyatama, 2003), 67.

[6] Endraswara, *Metodologi Penelitian Sastra, Epistimologi Model Teori dan Aplikasinya,* 67.

[7] Hoed, *Semiotik dan Dianamika Sosial Budaya.* 3-115, Winfried Noth, *Handbok of Semiotics,* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 310-313, Sukron Kamil, *Teori Kritik Sastra Arab Klasik dan Modern,* (Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, 2012), 201-212, and Peter Pericles Trifonas, *Barthes and Empirer of Sign,* (UK: Icon Book, 2003), 1-71. See also Sara Hatam Jadon and Imm M. M. Muawafq Al-Ghabra, "Barthes' Semiotic Theory and Interpretation of Signs", in *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*, Vol. 11, Issue: 3, July-September 2021, 471-482, https://www.ijrssh.com/past_paper.php?volid=42, Accessed November 28, 2024 and Vicky Dianiya, "Representation of Social Class in Film (Semiotic Analysis of Roland Barthes Film Parasite)", in *Profetik: Jurnal Komunikasi,* Vol. 13, No. 2 (2020), 212-224, https://ejournal.uin-suka.ac.id/isoshum/ profetik/issue/view/266. Accessed November 28, 2024.

The hermeneutical or connotative reading, highlighted by semiotics post the heuristic, denotative, or micro reading of texts, entails a retroactive re-reading of a text, such as a literary work, following the heuristic reading. Semiotics, in the context of hermeneutical reading, refers to the process of decoding, transitioning from the visible content or meaning to the concealed, latent meaning. In a hermeneutical reading, a reviewer of texts, including literary texts, is encouraged to innovatively and creatively comprehend the meaning of the literature/text hidden beneath the visible structure/text.

In this context, hermeneutics pertains to the inner, transcendental, and latent meaning (or the hidden, connotative meaning) of the text, rather than the manifest or natural meaning (based on denotative or dictionary meaning). The objective is to uncover the true horizon desired by the text, which might have been hidden or marginalised. This is especially relevant in most literary texts, notably in poetry, which often employs symbolic and metaphorical language as opposed to ordinary language. In symbolic language, there is an initial layer of meaning (referential or denotative meaning), which can be understood simply, and a deeper, higher connotative or suggestive meaning concealed behind this initial layer. This is achieved by employing inner vision, fully utilising the contemplative mind and creative imagination, and maintaining attention to the text and context to prevent chaos.[8]

The question that arises is whether the view of the above-mentioned fundamentalists is accurate or if it is a precipitous view that contradicts the Qur'an and its interpretation. This paper aims to discuss this with a focus on structural semiotics (semiotics as a coherent heuristic/denotative reading and hermeneutical/connotative reading) as theory and practice in the Islamic science tradition. The study will be rooted in Islamic sciences, namely: *naḥw* (Arabic syntax), *balāgah* (classical Arabic stylistics), the science of Islamic exegesis, the science of

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[8] Abdul Hadi Wiji Muthari, *Hermeneutika, Estetika, Dan Religiusitas* (Yogyakarta: Matahari, 2004), 70-89; Sumaryono, *Hermeneutik, Sebuah Metode Filsafat* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1993), 23 – 30.

uṣūl al-fiqh (Islamic legal methodology), and the rules of Islamic law (*qawā'id al-fiqhiyyah*). Both classical and modern Islamic interpretive texts will be examined.

This paper employs a qualitative research method, prioritysing data accuracy over quantity, emphasising depth and holisticity, essential attributes in the study of cultural sciences. In this manner, complex human reality, distinct from natural reality, is not perceived merely as numbers, as in the literary perspective, which views humans holistically. The paper utilises both primary and secondary data; the former comprises the text of the Qur'an, while the latter includes interpretations of the Qur'an by Hadis, viewed as a coherent whole, considering the context of the text and its social context. Literary theory, particularly structural semiotics (semiotics as a coherent heuristic reading), as described above, serves not only as the object of study but also as an analytical tool and object of comparison with Islamic sciences in this paper. The findings from the study of the Qur'anic text and interpretation are reaffirmed in other Islamic and literary textbooks discussing the same research object. Data collection involves literature study techniques and in-depth interviews, with the literature study encompassing various sources such as books, articles, newspapers, magazines, and other mass media. In-depth interviews with figures and experts were conducted to explore the views of individuals deemed to have extensive knowledge about the object of study.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION
Theoretical Perspective of Semiotic Structuralism in Islamic Sciences

Muhammad 'Abd Mun'im Khafaji asserts that the concept of words or sentences serving as symbols, a key tenet of contemporary semiotic structuralism, can be traced back to 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani's literary theory (400 – 471 H) around the 10th century AD. Al-Jurjani, a notable Arab critic during the classical era, primarily sought to underscore the divine and poetic superiority of the Qur'an through his theory, positioning it as not merely the language of God, but an array of signs. This perspective appears to have been influenced by Ibn Jini (392 H)

and his book, *al-Khaṣā'iṣ*. According to al-Jurjani's analysis of Qur'anic texts, as reflected in his book *Dalāil al-I'jāz* (Evidence of the Miracles of The Qur'an), a word or sentence (*lafẓ*) serves as a symbol for its meaning. This symbolic representation extends to experiences and emotions. The value of a word or sentence lies not in its literal context, but in the idea or sentiment it signifies. Al-Jurjani argued that language is not merely a collection of words or sentences but a system of symbols, in which words, sentences, and their meanings are inextricably linked.

In al-Jurjani's view, signifiers would hold no value in other languages without the contained meaning (signified), and a meaning (signified) cannot be communicated without a marker or signifier, which he termed as *al-Naẓam*. He defined *al-Naẓām* as the relationship between words that determines the function of one word in relation to another. This relationship could be between nouns, a noun and a verb, or a conjunction with both. Al-Jurjani emphasized that the beauty of language lies not in individual words but in their function within a sentence or structure (*majmū'ah min al-'alāqāit*). Hence, al-Jurjani could be considered the progenitor of Arab structuralism, which parallels modern semiotic structuralism as proposed by de Saussure.

Al-Jurjani's approach diverged from classical Arab formalists like al-Jahiz (w 253 H/868 AD), Abu Hilal al-'Askari (w 395 H), al-Amidi (w 371 H), and Ibn Khaldun, who focused on *lafẓ* (word/sentence forms). These formalists posited that the value of literature lies in creating wazan/bahar (prosody/rhythm) and diction. Al-Jurjani disputed this premise, placing higher emphasis on meaning over pronunciation. He held that the true beauty of literature lies not in the form of pronunciation or expression, but in the meaning embedded within it. Hence, al-Jurjani argued that the meaning (logic) should guide the construction of a sentence, whether simple or compound. While he acknowledged the importance of diction, for al-Jurjani, the selected words or sentences are inconsequential if they do not carry a significant meaning.

For al-Jurjani, the primary value of a word or sentence lies in its meaning, which captivates the reader or connoisseur. When examining the arrangement of words or relationship between

sentences in compound structures, it is the order of meaning, not words, that takes precedence. The quality of language, he repeatedly asserted, is found in the signified meaning behind the language, rather than in the language itself. In this regard, al-Jurjani prioritizes the study of *ma'āni* (a part of the science of *Balāgah* or Arabic stylistics, aimed at preventing inaccuracies in expressing the desired word's meaning) and *bayān* (a segment of *Balāgah* which explores how to express a single meaning through various sentences, ensuring clarity of the intended meaning) over *badī'* (the science of language decoration), particularly *al-muḥassināt al-lafẓiyyah* (decoration of word/sentence). For him, the essence of language expression lies in the inner aspect - the ideas, feelings, or imagination - which forms the basis of the external, visible facet of language. A literary phrase or expression loses its value if its meaning is compromised. Hence, the meanings of words and sentences must be logically interrelated, shaped by the harmony between the meanings of words and phrases. This principle is embodied in the Arabic tradition of *naḥw* (syntax) and stylistics such as *ma'āni* science. For example, reverse structure *(al-taqdīm wa al-ta'khīr* [prioritising the object rather than the subject and predicate]), specialisation (*al-ḥasr*) [such as the sentence "There is no god but Allah"]), and elliptical (*haẕf)* [removing words like predicates in a question and answer structure]). Therefore, The structure of language, according to him, must represent an orderly (organized/systematic) and coherent mind and soul/solid.

Al-Jurjani also underscores the importance of *ta'wīl* in textual studies, a classical Arabic Islamic concept that corresponds to modern hermeneutics in the Western tradition, emphasized in Riffaterre's theory of semiotic structuralism as hermeneutical reading, in addition to heuristic reading. However, al-Jurjani also stresses the sonic qualities in poetry, *'arūḍ* (old rhythm), forms of *jinās* (use of homographs)[9], *tasybīh* (simile), *isti'ārah*, and *majāz*, both *majāz lugawī* and *majāz mursal,* where

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[9] Ahmad al-Hasyimi, *Jawahir Al-Balaghah Fi al-Maʻ ani Wa al-Bayan Wa al-Badi*ʼ (Cairo: Dar Ihya al-Kutub al-ʻArabiyyah, 1960), 396 ‒ 401.

all forms of Arabic stylistics are present in the Qur'an. According to him, *majāz* accommodates the mind and soul more than *isti'ārah*, and he regarded *majāz* as the pinnacle of language model.

Based on these explanations, it can be stated that al-Jurjani was the first Arab semiotic structuralist[10], even though he used the term *naẓm.* Al-Jurjani's *naẓm* (language harmony), whether between words or phrases, is formed by *naḥw* (syntax) and the science of *balāgah* (the science of Arabic stylistics) such as *ma'āni*. Syntax in Arabic refers to *jumlah ismiyyah* (sentences that start with a noun) and *jumlah fi'liyyah* (sentences that start with a verb). *Balāgah*, or Arabic stylistic science, is the discipline that explores the accurate and succinct expression of the heart's meaning (ideas/feelings) through language, affecting the listener's feelings or mind due to the correct and appropriate diction. This discipline is divided into three topics: ma'ānī, bayān, and badī'. *Ma'ānī* (part of the science of *balāgah* which aims to prevent the examiner from making mistakes in uncovering the meaning of the desired word [examining the structure of sentences with a variety of meanings]); *bayān* (part of *balāgah* which discusses how to express one meaning through various sentences, so that the meaning to be conveyed is clear/ unambiguous [elaborating word-based sentences or complete or partial metaphor/comparison sentences); and *badī'* (which parses sentences based on word decoration or sentences based on their sound such as rhyme and also sentences based on meaning decoration).

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[10] 'Abd al-Qahir Al-Jurjani, *Dalail Al-I'jaz Fi 'Ilm al-Ma'Ani* (Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1992), 199-253, 295-312 and published in Kairo: al-Madani, 4, 49-99, 251-262, 360, 395-400; Muhammad Barakat Abu 'Ali Hamdi, *Ma'alim al-Manhaj al-Balagi 'Inda 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani* (Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 71–109; Muhammad abd al-Min'im Khafaji, *Madaris An-Naqd al-Adabi al-Hadis* (ad-Dar al-Miṣriyyah al-Lubnaniyyah, 1995), 90–91; Garib Iskandar, *Al-Ittijah as-Sima'i Fi Naqd as-Syi'r al'Arabi* (al-Majlis al-'Ala li as-Saqafah, n.d.), 144–46; Isa 'Ali al-'Akubi, *Al-Tafkir an-Naqdi 'Inda al-'Arab* (Dar al-Fikr, 2002), 204-9; M. Nur Kholis Setiawan, *Alquran, Kitab Sastra Terbesar* (eLSAQ, 2005), 252–75; 'Abd al-Karim Mujahid, *Al-Dilalah al-Lugawiyyah 'Inda al-'Arab*, 1985, 57–90.

Al-Jurjani's concept of *naẓm*, or coherent structure, extends beyond the realm of individual words and sentences. It encompasses the entirety of discourse, including spoken and written text in various forms such as sermons, discussions, papers, articles, conversations, histories, poetry, jokes, and tragedies. The structure of the entire text, its context, and the surrounding sociocultural and political contexts are all integral to *naẓm*.

In the Islamic tradition, semiotics is also reflected in the concept of literary beauty in the classical Malay literary tradition, which appears to draw inspiration from the Qur'an. The beauty of literature in this tradition lies in the harmony of language forms (signifiers) that impart pleasure to the soul (signified) due to their harmonious and musical qualities, and the harmony between language (signifier) and content or ideas (signified). Literature is seen as the intellectualized emotions (signified) expressed through language as a signifier. The parallels between the literary theory in classical Malay Islamic literature and semiotic structuralism are evidenced by the view of the macrocosm (the universe) and the microcosm (humans) as texts in both. Humans (microcosm) reflect (symbolize) the macrocosm, while the written text (*muṣhaf* [Al-Qur'an]) symbolizes the macrocosm and microcosm at the same time (V.I. Braginsky 1998, 199–200, 220–23, 555–56).

Therefore, it is not an exaggeration if modern semiotics in the Islamic context is interpreted by literary experts such as Tommy Christomy from the University of Indonesia, as an auxiliary science for dissecting Allah's verses (ayat/*signs*), both *qauliyah* verses (His words) contained in The Qur'an or its derivatives as well as the *kauniyyah* (universe) verses which are spread across the vast universe,[11] according to the broad definition of signs in semiotic. In other words, semiotics is the science of deciphering texts, both written (*qauliyah* verses [Qur'an and its various derivatives]) and unwritten (*kauniyyah* verses), as a substitute/equivalent for three terms in semiotics: *icon* (the relationship between signifiers and signified due to

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[11] Tommy Christomy, Lecturer of University of Indonesia: In-depth Interview, December 7, 2022.

similarity); symbol (relationship between signifier and signified due to habit), and index of relationship between signifier and signified due to cause-and-effect relationship).

Apart from classical Arabic literature (*balāgah* [stylistics]) and classical Malay literary traditions, structural semiotic (heuristic reading of texts as coherent buildings) is also the object of discussion in the study of Qur'anic tafsir, hadis science, and also *uṣūl al-fiqh* (Islamic legal methodology). From the perspective of these Islamic sciences, a verse or text of the Qur'an is unseen as an independent verse/text. It is not meaningful just because of itself. All texts of the Qur'an are coherent, as an inseparable unit. Therefore, the correct interpretation of a verse or text of The Qur'an must be made by interpreting it with other verses *(tafsīr al-āyāt bi al-āyāt)*. Indeed, in contemporary Qur'anic exegesis, there is a known method of *tafsīr mauḍū'ī* (thematic exegesis), a method that necessitates the collection of all verses related to a specific theme for discussion. This method enables the Qur'an to speak for itself regarding a sought/discussed theme (*istanṭiq al-Qur'ān*), without any person's prejudice or worldview influencing the interpretation. Researchers/interpreters embedded in interpretive research can affect the objectivity of the resulting interpretation, as highlighted in Edmund Husserl's phenomenology.[12] Without the recognition of the Qur'an's text as a coherent whole, individual verses can appear contradictory, as mentioned in QS an-Nisa/4: 82.

Based on QS an-Nisa/4: 82, semiotics, in the sense of a coherent structural reading, should not only follow the Qur'an but must be utilized as an approach in studying or interpreting the Qur'an. This approach is known as interpreting *al-āyāt bi al-āyāt* and the method of interpreting *mauḍū'ī*. In fact, in the three sciences (*tafsīr*, hadis studies, and *uṣūl al-fiqh*), the coherence extends beyond the verses of the Qur'an to include the verses of the Qur'an and hadits, at least with *mutawātir* hadis (those narrated by more than ten people and considered valid due to the

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[12] Peter Connolly, ed., *Aneka Pendekatan Studi Agama,* Translation from *Approaches to the Study of Religion* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2002); Kusmana, Professor of UIN Jakarta: In-depth Interview, November 9, 2022.

large number of narrators in each generation) and with *āhad* hadiths (those narrated by fewer than ten people, but meeting the requirements for validity).

This method, known as the tafsir *al-āyāt bi al- hadīs* method and *tafsīr al-hadi bi al-āyāt,* views both as an inseparable unit (*wiḥdah 'udwiyyah*), where understanding the two must be reciprocal. Understanding/interpreting Qur'anic verses must include the Hadis, and understanding the Hadis must include the Qur'an. This approach is evident in tafsir books such as the Book of Tafsir Ibn Katsīr, and in the Book of Riyād al-Sālihīn, which introduces Qur'anic verses before hadis.

In the context of understanding Qur'anic verses with hadis, hadis also function as confirmation/ strengthening of Qur'anic verses; explanation/interpretation of the Qur'an, especially verses that contain broad outlines such as matters of prayer, hajj, and zakat;[13] and serve as an independent source of law. Likewise, *vice versa* (interpreting Hadis with verses), where this method is emphasized in the science of hadith| matan (text) criticism. A Hadis if it contradicts the verse as a source of higher Islamic teachings, then the position of the Hadis automatically becomes weak in its eyes. Some experts suggest ignoring such Hadis like that.[14]

Viewed as an integrated unit, Muslims are encouraged to implement the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith in a holistic manner, rather than in a fragmented or partial way. The Qur'an, for instance, advocates avoidance of pork no more than it does avoidance of indolence in seeking and disseminating knowledge. Both are to be eschewed. Acts of charity are not deemed more essential than upholding law and justice. Fasting and other forms of worship should not lead Muslims to neglect their physical needs, including sexual relations, which some may misconstrue

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[13] 'Abdul Karim Zaidan, *Al-Wajiz Fi Syarah al-Qawa'id al-Fiqhiyyah Fi as-Syari'ah al-Islamiyyah* (Beirut: Mu'assasah ar-Risalah an-Nasyirun, 2019), 134–35.

[14] Muhammad Thahir Al-Jawabi, *Juhud Al-Muhaddisin Fi Naqd al-Matn al-Hadis al-Nabawi al-Syarif* (Tunis: Muassah Abd Karim Ibn Abdillah, 1986), 469–79; Muchtar Adam, "Ijtihad: Antara Teks Dan Konteks," in *Ijtihad dalam Sorotan*, ed. Jalaluddin Rahmat (Bandung: Mizan, 1988), 135.

as unclean. The Qur'an requires Muslims to embrace their humanity fully, as both spiritual and physical beings, and as individual and social entities.[15]

Furthermore, in the aforementioned three Islamic sciences, understanding the text of the Qur'an and Hadis also necessitates an awareness of the socio-cultural and political context. This requirement is emphasized in semiotics as a hermeneutical or connotative reading. This understanding is referred to as mastery of *asbāb al-nuzūl* (the causes of the revelation of the Qur'an) and *asbāb al-wurūd* (the causes of the emergence of the Hadis). Without knowledge of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, a reader of the Qur'an may fail to grasp the true meaning of a verse, leading to doubts or disputes regarding Qur'anic verses. Renowned Indonesian interpreter, M. Quraish Shihab, asserts that lacking an understanding of *asbāb al-nuzūl* could lead to interpretive errors when studying the Qur'an. This is because *asbāb al-nuzūl* relates to the events, people, and temporal context associated with the verses.[16] Recognizing other influencing factors, such as lack of attention to the verse's context, societal conditions, and an interpreter's

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[15] M. Quraish Shihab, *Mukjizat Al-Qu'an, Ditinjau Dari Aspek Kebahasaan, Isyarat Ilmiah, Dan Pemberitaan Gaib* (Bandung: Mizan, 2007), 247.

[16] A. Hanafie, *Usul Fiqh,* Jakarta: Widjaya, 1989, 106-109; M. Quraish Shhab, *Membumikan al-Qur'an,* (Bandung: Mizan, 2007), 119, 131, 135; Manna al-Qatthan, *Studi Ilmu-Ilmu al-Qur'an,* Translation from *Mabahits fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an,* (Bogor: Litera Antar Nusa, 1998), 196-143; 'Abdul Hakim, *al-Bayan,* Padang Panjang: Sa'diyah Putra, No Year, 49, 165-166; Abu Ishaq as-Syathibi, *al-Muawafaqat,* Vol 2: 4, (Cairo: Dar al-Fadhilah, 2010), 9-12; M. Hasbi ash-Shiddiqy, *Sejarah dan Pengantar Ilmu al-Qur'an, (*Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1954), 64-66; ; Dirjen Binbaga Islam Kemenag RI, *Filsafat Hukum Islam* (Jakarta: Binbaga Islam Kemenag, 1987), 122-124,; MH Thabathabai, *Mengungkap Rahasia Alquran,* Translaion from *Alquran Fi al-Islam* (Bandung: Mizan, 1990), 31; Muhammad Thahir Al-Jawabi, *Juhud Al-Muhaddisin Fi Naqd al-Matn al-Hadis al-Nabawi al-Syarif,* 469–73; Abd Al-Hay Al-Farmawi, *Metode Tafsir Maudhu'iy,* Translation from *al-Bidayah Fi al-Tafsir al-Maudu'i (1977)* (Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, 1994), 48-57.; Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Islam dan Negara Sekuler: Menegosiasikan Masa Depan Syari'ah* Translation from *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Sharja,* (Bandung: Mizan, 2007), 191.

limited knowledge about the subject matter, also play crucial roles in accurate interpretation. In *uṣūl al-fiqh*, rules exist regarding the potential for legal amendments due to shifts in socio-cultural or political contexts. However, some experts argue that these rules only apply to laws based on *'urf* (custom).

In the science of the Qur'an, the importance of understanding the social context in interpreting the Qur'an and Hadith is also reflected in the necessity of mastering the vision of Makki and Madani verses. This concerns the verses or letters revealed in Mecca and Medina, as well as the verse or letter that was revealed before the Prophet's migration to Medina or after it. Mastering the vision of Makki and Madani verses can aid in understanding the verse being studied and thus enable its correct interpretation.

The Makki verses typically begin with the universal exclamation "O people", while the Madani verses start with "O people who believe", indicating that the audience of the Makki verses are non-Muslims. The messages or mandates addressed in the Makki verses thus provide a broader context. These Makki and Madani verses evoke a sense of historicity in the scholar, encouraging them to critically study the historical context. This is because Mecca and Medina represent not only geographical but also chronological or historical contexts.

The Makki verses, which also include verses revealed in Medina but addressed to the people of Mecca (deemed as Madani verses but with Makki status), typically contain stories of previous prophets and people, with notable exceptions such as Surah al-Baqarah and stories about Adam and the Devil. The Makki verses center on themes of monotheism, the obligation to worship only Allah, the day of retribution in the afterlife, proof of Prophet Muhammad's prophethood, and Islamic arguments based on rational and empirical evidence (*kauniyyah* verses) along with general principles (philosophy) of Islamic law. In contrast, the Madani verses discuss *Syari'ah* (Islamic individual/family and social law), ranging from aspects of worship (prayer, fasting, zakat, and hajj), family law (marriage and inheritance), to economic interactions (*mu'āmalah*), criminal law, war law, and Islamic statecraft. They also touch on the envy of the Ahlul

Kitab (Jews and Christians), the behavior of the hypocrites, and are typically longer than the Makki verses.[17]

Perspectives on Contemporary Practice of Semiotic Structuralism

Semiotics as a method of coherent structural reading, inclusive of the social context of verses, is not only practiced by classical interpreters but also by modern ones. This method of coherent structural reading becomes the standard for interpreting verses of the Qur'an or Hadis. Without this method, interprettations can be non-standard and erroneous, potentially portraying Islam or the Qur'an as inconsitent with their *maqāsid* (to provide benefit to as many people as possible, especially Muslims, and the benefit of the universe), or making Islam appear unsuitable for all times and spaces. However, when the method of coherent structural reading is practiced, these issues can be mitigated.

In modern times, M. Quraish Shihab, a renowned Indonesian interpreter, is one practitioner of this method. He advocates for social justice for women, including their right to participate in the public sector or even become public leaders. Shihab challenges conservative and fundamentalist interpretations of the Qur'an that disapprove of women's public roles, specifically interpreting QS. An-Nisā: 34, a verse often cited by such groups. According to Shihab, the verse should be understood within its full context, with all parts of the sentence taken into account. Referring to this verse, Shihab argues that leadership in Islam is a matter of capability, not gender.

Furthermore, Shihab conducts a lexical analysis based on lexemes (one or more words) as markers for their signified as a semiotic study. He aligns with the Syrian Sharia expert, Muhammad Syahrur, in interpreting the term "men" in the verse as referring to those who meet certain qualifications.[18] They

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[17] Manna Khalil Al-Qatthan, *Studi Ilmu-Ilmu al-Qur'an (*Translation from *Mabahits Fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an Alquran)* (Litera Antar Nusa, 1998), 69–88; See also Lois Lamya al-Faruqi Ismail R. al-Faruqi, *Atlas Budaya Islam* (Mizan, 1998), 273–74.

[18] Shihab, *Wawasan Alquran*, 313–14.

argue that the term "al-Rijāl" used in the verse refers to the social role of individuals, not their gender. Shihab strengthens his feminist interpretation by viewing the Qur'an as a unit where one verse interprets another (*tafsīr al-āyāt bi al-āyāt*) and seeing the Qur'an and Hadis as integrated (*tafsīr al-āyāt bi al-ḥadīš*). He also realised how, in Islam, the enactment of a law depends on the *'illāt* (reasons).[19] He interprets QS. Al-Nisā/4: 34 in light of QS. Ali Imrān/3: 195, which proclaims: "Indeed, Allah does not disregard the efforts of those who perform good deeds, regardless of gender" that promote equality and cooperation between men and women. Ultimately, Shihab argues that these verses undermine the view that the Qur'an differentiates between men and women in humanitarian matters.

This verse is further interpreted in conjunction with QS. at-Taubah/9: 71, which advocates for men and women to jointly participate in social criticism (*amar ma'rūf* and *nahi munkār*), prayer, zakat and obedience to Allah. Lastly, Shihab interprets this in context with QS. 16: 58-59, which strongly rebukes the *jahiliyah* community for their disgruntled reaction upon hearing the birth of a female child, which they perceived as a source of humiliation. Shihab posits that these verses collectively dismantle the notion that the Qur'an discriminates between men and women concerning humanitarian issues.

Shihab's interpretation extends to Hadis in context with Islamic feminist verses. For instance, the Hadis of Bukhari and Muslim pronounce women as having been created from a crooked rib. Shihab interprets this as a metaphorical expression (*majāzī*) advising men to interact with women wisely, due to their inherent nature and propensities. This likely refers to the delicate disposition of women which necessitates gentle treatment. Shihab substantiated his viewpoint with the Hadis *taqrīrī* (omission) of the Prophet, which merely acknowledged the historical/social reality that during the Prophet's lifetime, prominent women such as Umm Salamah, Shafiyyah, Laila al-Ghaffariyah, Umm Sinam al-Aslamiyyah, and Zainab bint Jahsy acti-

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[19] M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan Alquran* (Bandung: Mizan, 1985), 313–14; Hanafie, *Usul Fiqh*, 36.

vely participated in war, engaged in economic activities, and held public offices. Shihab emphasizes that only the role of a head of state is restricted for women,[20] according to religious scholars, and even this is a topic of ongoing debate.

Significantly, Shihab's interpretation of verses and Hadis reflects his consideration of the socio-cultural and political context of Islamic social history during the era of the Prophet and his companions. This approach aligns with the semiotic theory's emphasis on hermeneutical/connotative reading, in addition to prioritizing a consistent text context, which is highlighted in semiotics as a coherent heuristic reading. By this method, the interpretation can address contemporary social challenges and promote current social ethics. Shihab's Islamic interpretation maintains its relevance for the modern age while staying firmly rooted in the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadis.

Shihab did not address certain Hadis interpretations of verses, such as: "People who entrust their affairs to women will not prosper." This Hadis interpretation can be understood in light of As-Shan'ani's perspective. He posits that this Hadis may discourage assigning women as judges. However, Imam Hanafi (died 767 AD) restricts this prohibition to Islamic criminal cases, perhaps due to the specific demands of such roles. On the other hand, Ibnu Jarir (died 923 AD) contends that women can preside as judges in all matters.[21] Both interpretations seem to take into consideration the social context of their respective times, aligning with the semiotics of Roland Barthes and Gadamer.

This Hadis should also be evaluated based on its *asbāb al-wurūd* (reasons for emergence), an aspect underscored in semiotic theory as hermeneutical/connotative reading. The Hadis appears misplaced when it is employed to reject female leadership. Indonesian Hadis scholar, Muhibbin, clarifies that the Prophet

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[20] Shihab, *Membumikan Alquran*, 419–36. See Mohammad Nor Ichwan, "Quraish Shihab's Interpretation Of Gender Equality In Tafsir Al-Misbah", In *Humanisma: Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 06, No 01, January – June 2022, 57-69, Quraish Shihabs Interpretation of Gender Equality.pdf, Accessed November 28, 2024.

[21] Subul as-Salam As-Shan'ani, *Syarah Bulug Al-Maram*, 3rd ed. (Bandung: Diponegoro, 2020), 123.

Muhammad made this statement when Bauran, a woman, was crowned queen of the Sassanid (Persian) dynasty, succeeding her father, Kisra. Kisra had previously violated international law by tearing up the Prophet's diplomatic letter inviting him to convert to Islam.[22]

While this Hadis, narrated by Bukhari, is not problematic in terms of its *sanad* (transmission), its *matan* (content)[23] should be critically assessed, as emphasized in the science of critical Hadis. This can be achieved by interpreting the Hadis in light of Islamic meritocracy verses such as QS. al-Hujurāt/49: 13 (*tafsīr al-ḥadīṡ/ bi al-āyāt*), as has been the norm in Islamic interpret-tative science since the classical era. This verse asserts that Allah does not discriminate based on gender; a characteristic bestowed by Allah and beyond human control, but rather on the basis of piety and integrity, aspects that individuals can strive for.

Additionally, the historical reality should also be consi-dered in interpreting this verse. The Hadis appears inconsistent with the historical reality of the Muslim community itself. For instance, the 17th-century Islamic Aceh was ruled by a queen, Queen Shafiatuddin Taj al-'Alam (1641-1637 AD), who reigned for 30 years.[24] Furthermore, Sulthanah (Queen) Radhiyah of Delhi (1236 AD) and Sulthanah Syajarah al-Dur of Egypt (1250 AD) held power, and Queens Asma and Arwah of San'a ruled towards the end of the 11th century.[25]

Tafsir, both classical and modern, often utilize semiotic structuralism based on classical Arabic stylistics (*balāgah*) for interpretation. This technique has been employed by scholars

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[22] Muhibbin, *Hadis-Hadis Politik* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1996), 75.

[23] See Muhammad Thahir Al-Jawabi, *Juhud Al-Muhaddiṡin Fi Naqd al-Matn al-Hadiṡ al-Nabawi al-Syarif* (Muassah Abd Karim Ibn Abdillah, 1986), 469–79.

[24] Ali Yasa' Abubakar, *Syariah Islam Di Provinsi NAD, Paradigma, Kebijakan, Dan Kegiatan* (Banda Aceh: Dinas Syariah Islam NAD, 2000), 134–46.

[25] See Fatima Mernissi, *Ratu-Ratu Islam Yang Terlupakan* (Mizan, 1994), 24 – 32.

such as Az-Zamakhsyari and Muhammad Ali as-Shabuni.[26] Al-Jurjani's perspective on *naẓm* (coherent text) in a stylistic structure (*balāgah*) or syntax (*naḥw*) aligns with the views of Noam Chomsky, a contemporary Western linguist. According to Chomsky's generative transformation theory, the meaning of a text changes when its linguistic structure is altered. Chomsky advises that text reviewers should examine the sentence structure under study by transforming it into another form, whether this is optional or mandatory. Optional transformations include changing active sentences to passive ones, declarative sentences to interrogative ones, or positive sentences to negative ones. This is because human communication through verbal language merely encapsulates thoughts or ideas; as al-Jurjani suggests, the ideas conveyed vary with different languages, and the emphasis can change according to the context of the text. Sentences that must be transformed are those with incorrect structures, either logically chaotic or non-compliant with grammatical rules.[27]

In the context of Arabic stylistics, Chomsky's theory of generative transformation, in line with al-Jurjani's views, suggests changing the form of a *khabar* sentence (a statement that may be true or false) into *insyā* (a statement that does not contain the possibility of being false or true), like a sentence of commands, prohibitions, and interrogative sentences. It also suggests changing the regular sentence structure into a reverse structure sentence (*al-taqdīm wa al-ta'khīr*); a specialization structure (*al-ḥasr/al-qasr*) with a sentence-like form starting with the word

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[26] Muhammad Ali as-Shabuni, *Safwah At-Tafasir*, 1st–2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2001), Vol. 1, 18–21.

[27] Mahmud Sulaiman Yaqut, *Manhaj Al-Bahs al-Lugawi* (Iskandariyah: Dar al-Mah'rifah al-Jami'ah, 2002), 216–17; Judith Greene, *Al-Tafkir Wa al-Lugah* (Iskandariyah: al-Hai'ah al-Mishriyyah, 1992), 157–69; Hassan Obeid Alfadly and Atef Abdel Aziz Moawad, "Transformational - Generative Theory: A Study on Al-Jurjani's Linguistic Theory," *International Journal of Linguistics and Communication* 6, no. 1 (2018): 30–35, https://doi.org/10.15640/ijlc.v6n1a3.

nafī (no) and ending *illā* (except); or removing an element such as the subject or predicate (*ḥazf*).[28]

The semiotic theory, as a coherent structural reading based on classical Arabic stylistics, has been used in Indonesia by Nurcholish Madjid, a neo-modernist Islamic figure. He applied this approach to the text *Lā ilah illā Allāh* (there is no God but Allah), the core creed of Islam. Based on this text, Madjid (known as Cak Nur) argued that the greatest challenge for religious people is not atheism, but shirk/polytheism. He concluded that Islam is total submission to Allah, an interpretation based on the Arabic lexical meaning of *al-inqiyāz*. Cak Nur also translated the sentence Lā ilah illā Allāh as "There is no god (with a small g) but God (with a big G").

Despite the long-standing use of the semiotic theory as a coherent structural and hermeneutic reading in interpretation, some interpretations among certain Muslim circles, particularly conservatives and fundamentalists, do not adhere to the standard science of interpretation in Islam. Consequently, interpretations not based on a coherent structural (text heuristic) reading result in a confusion of meaning, which does not reflect Islam in line with the maqashid Al-Qur'an (the purpose of the Qur'an being revealed), namely public benefit.

In Indonesia, a prevailing interpretation of QS. al-Māidah/ 5: 51, along with interpretations of QS. al-Baqarah/2: 120 and QS. Ali 'Imrān/3: 118, by the 212 movement group, has sparked controversy. This group, which emerged from a demonstration on December 2, 2016, in Jakarta, prohibits non-Muslims from occupying public leadership positions, including the governorship. They opposed the candidacy of Ahok (Basuki Tjahaya Purnama), a non-Muslim, for the second term as governor of Jakarta.

However, Rasyid Ridha and Muhammad Abduh in Tafsir al-Mannar suggest that the prohibition against electing non-Muslims to public leadership is conditional, not absolute. The election of non-Muslims to public leadership positions is only

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[28] Alfadly and Moawad, "Transformational - Generative Theory: A Study on Al-Jurjani's Linguistic Theory," 30–35.

prohibited under certain conditions, specifically when the non-Muslim leaders are belligerent and unjust towards Muslims. Therefore, the aforementioned verses must be interpreted in conjunction with other verses, such as QS. al-Mumlahanah/60: 8, which do not impose such prohibitions. The Qur'an is a coherent unity, and verses should not be interpreted in isolation, as one verse interprets another (*tafsīr al-āyāt bi al-āyāt*). This approach ensures that the Qur'an does not contradict itself, as stated in QS. Al-Nisā/4: 82. Rasyid Ridha, citing Ibn Jarir, relates that verses like QS. Ali Imran/3:118 pertain to the Jews' betrayal of Muslims during several wars with the non-Muslims of Mecca.[29] Therefore, these Jews were deemed untrustworthy and faced expulsion or death according to the applicable Jewish law. Thus, these verses do not apply to non-Muslims who are just and whose existence is recognized by Islam, as stated in QS. Ali 'Imrān/3: 114.

In addition to QS. Al-Mumlahanah/60: 8, the verses in question should also be interpreted alongside QS. Al-Hujurāt/49: 13 and QS. Hud/11; 118. QS. Al-Hujurāt/49: 13 promotes meritocracy, with rewards for those who excel and punishment for those who err. Differences in gender or nationality are not grounds for conflict but are intended to foster dialogue and cooperation among diverse people. This principle is reinforced by a Hadis of the Prophet narrated by Bukhari and Muslims. The Prophet, when asked about the best thing in Islam, responded: "Give food and read *salām*/greetings (peace) to people you know and do not know." This *salām* (peace) extends to people of different ethnicities, nationalities, and religions and promotes dialogue, peacebuilding, and cooperation. In peace theory, ideal peace is not only refraining from conflict but also dialogue and building positive peace by building relationships and cooperation broadly, including allowing non-Muslims to become public leaders to eliminate mutual suspicion. In Islamic teachings, this is known as *ihsān*. Based on these verses and Hadis, Allah does not differentiate between people because of something that is not

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[29] See M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan Alquran* (Mizan, 1985), 430–31.

the result of their efforts, such as differences in gender and ethnicity as part of His gift.

QS. Hud/11: 118 explains that diversity, including religious diversity, is a *sunnatullah* (natural law that must be accepted). If Allah had willed, all people in the world would be Muslims. However, He allows humans to be different, including in their choice of religion, and they may choose to either strive for heaven or risk hell (see also QS. Al-Baqarah/2: 256). Abdurrahman Wahid, an Islamic figure of Nahdlatul Ulama and former President of Indonesia, argues that the verse QS. Ali 'Imrān/3: 38, which uses the word "auliyā" like QS. Al-Māidah/ 5: 51, prohibits making evil non-Muslims protectors. The word used is not "umarā", which would imply a prohibition against making non-Muslims rulers or governors. Therefore, these verses cannot be used as arguments against appointing non-Muslims as public leaders.[30]

In Indonesia, the discussions from Baḥṡ al-Masāil in Nahdlatul Ulama Jakarta indicate that the three verses mentioned earlier are inaccurately used as an argument that a non-Muslim should not hold a public office below the level of head of state, especially when these verses are interpreted through the lens of the *fi'li Ḥadīṡ/* (the actions of the Prophet). These Hadis show that Jews, including the Bani Qainuqa, assisted the Prophet in several wars and had a good relationship with him. According to Imam al-Mawardi, a renowned expert in classical Islamic constitutional law, non-Muslims are permitted to serve as implementing officials outside the realm of legislation.[31]

Amien Rais, an Indonesian Muslim modernist figure, asserts that the prohibition against non-Muslims assuming leadership roles applies only to positions of the head of state, and only when the non-Muslims are a minority. This is akin to the convention in democratic countries like the United States, where the majority are Protestant Christians, and only one President has

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[30] Sukron Kamil, *Islam Dan Demokrasi, Telaah Konseptual dan Historis* (Jakarta: Gaya Media Pratama, 2002), 72.

[31] Mukti Ali al-Qusyairi et al., *Moderasi Paham Keagamaan,* (LBM PW NU Jakarta, n.d.), 26 – 27.

been Catholic to date.[32] Therefore, these verses do not prohibit the appointment of non-Muslims to public positions below the head of state, including the position of prime minister.

However, interpretations that deviate from standard methods based on text coherence, such as those of contemporary jihadist fundamentalists (Islamic terrorists), can deteriorate Islam's image. For instance, Imam Samudra, the Bali bomber, interpreted QS. Al-Taubah/9: 5 and Al-Taubah/9: 29 without considering QS. At-Taubah/9: 4, QS. Al-Mumlahanah/60: 8, and QS. At-Taubah/9: 1. Other terrorists often cite QS al-Nisā /4: 89 without considering the following verse (QS al-Nisā/4: 90), or QS. Al-Anfāl/8: 60 without considering QS. Al-Anfāl/8: 61. Such interpretations are not standard in Islam and misrepresent the religion.[33]

In addition to the tafsir *al-āyāt bi al-āyāt* method as explained above, the *tafsīr mauḍū'ī* method, a form of semiotic structural reading in Islam, has been widely used by modern tafseer experts. It allows the Qur'an to provide accurate answers to various new social problems facing Muslims, giving rise to fresh ideas that align with modernity. This method has been employed by commentators like Quraish Shihab in Indonesia, whose views on the rights of non-Muslim public leadership and women reflect the demands of modernity and justice. His interpretations, collected in the book Insights of the Koran, present the coherent relationships between verses on a given topic/theme, highlighting the principle of *sālih li kulli zamān wa makān* (suitability for all time and space) in Islam.

Mushthafa Salim attempted a comprehensive interpretation of QS. al-Kahf/18, identifying three key themes: the story of young people who maintain their faith, attitudes that lead to

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[32] Kamil, *Islam Dan Demokrasi, Telaah Konseptual dan Historis*, 72.

[33] See Sri Hidayati Sukron Kamil, "Semiotics Deconstructive Study Towards Arabic Loanword Related to Jihad in the Book Aku Melawan Teroris by Imam Samudra," *Arabi : Journal of Arabic Studies* 6, no. 2 (2021), https://doi.org/10.24865/ajas.v6i2.413; Imam Samudra, *Aku Melawan Teroris* (Solo: Jazeera, 2004), 182-190,; Et al Karen Amstrong, *Islampofobia, Melacak Akar Ketakutan Terhadap Islam di Dunia Barat,* Translation from *Islamophobia: Guidebook* (Mizan, 2018), 55.

glory, and the narrative of Zulkarnain. Salim underscores certain attitudes that foster glory, such as not being overly concerned with those who are unfavourable, like the disbelievers during the Prophet's time; recognizing real happiness as spiritual, not a material mirage; and that the rewards in this life and the afterlife are contingent on charity and good deeds.

Similarly, commentators like Quraish Shihab in Indonesia have provided interpretations that align with the demands of modernity, such as humanism and justice. His interpretations, compiled in the book 'Wawasan al-Qur'an/ Insights of the Koran', are based on the *mauḍū'ī* interpretation method, which collects all verses related to a specific theme and presents an interpretation that sees the relationship between the verses in a coherent manner. This approach, known as semiotic structural as coherent heuristic/denotative reading (*binā'iyyah*), illustrates how Islam remains suitable for all time and space (*sālih li kull zamān wa makān*).

Fazlur Rahman, a renowned Muslim intellectual, is well-known for presenting Qur'anic verses based on the *tafsīr mauḍū'ī* method. His interpretations, collected in a book titled 'Major Themes of the Qur'an' (translated into Indonesian as 'Tema-Tema Pokok AlQur'an'), provide fresh and insightful perspectives. For instance, in discussing the topic of God, Rahman stresses the importance of perceiving the natural order as divine verses to be rationally contemplated, asserting the existence of God, rather than dismissing it as mere coincidence. Rahman, based on various Qur'anic verses, refutes the idea that individuals are misguided or guided solely because of Allah. He emphasizes that the Qur'an frequently states that individuals receive guidance or go astray due to their own choices, not because of Allah. As such, Rahman criticizes Muslims who distort the Qur'an by projecting their views or schools of thought onto it, rather than allowing the Qur'an to speak for itself on a particular topic. Rahman also understands destiny as merely a human limitation, where individuals have restricted potential, based on his analysis of Qur'anic verses regarding destiny. According to Rahman, men and women are essentially equal. The Qur'an acknowledges women's complete economic freedom,

exemplified by the Prophet's first wife, who owned a business. In the realm of religion, men and women have absolute equality.[34]

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that semiotics, both as a heuristic (structural/denotative) reading and a hermeneutical (connotative/ *ta'wīl*) reading, are in harmony with the Qur'an. Semiotics are a necessity in textual interpretation, being both recommended and required, particularly when analysing the Qur'an and Hadis. Without this methodology, an interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadis would not adhere to the standard Islamic interpretative principles. Therefore, semiotic theory has been employed by classical Islamic/tafsir experts, especially in the contemporary period, even though the term "semiotics" is a product of the modern West.

As a coherent structural/denotative/heuristic reading, the term known in the Islamic tradition is "naz}m". This term, coined by 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, suggests that a sentence becomes meaningful due to the relationships between the words that form it, both in syntactic analysis (*naḥw*) and in stylistic analysis (*balāgah*). If the structure is changed, whether optionally or mandatorily, the meaning changes. Therefore, he emphasised the importance of the intended meaning rather than the

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[34] Fazlur Rahman, *Tema-Tema pokok al-Qur'an*, Translation from *Major Themes of the Qur'an,* Bandung: Pustaka, 1996, x, 23-25, 35, 71-75. Regarding his views on semiotics as hermenuetic reading, see Muhammad Yusuf, Nahdhiyah, and Anwar Sadat, "Fazlur Rahman's Double Movement and It's Contribution to the Development of Religious Moderation", in *International Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities,* Vol 4. No. 1 April 2021 51-71, 322f004b3fa1e67f11c989702f976fa28aba.pdf, Accessed November 28, 2024 and Kharis Nugroho, Muhammad Zawil Kiram, and Didik Andriawan, "The Influence Of Hermeneutics In Double Movement Theory (Critical Analysis Of Fazlurrahman's Interpretation Methodology)", in *QiST: Journal of Quran and Tafseer Studies,* Vol 2, No 3, 2023, 275-289, https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ab26/59e47895fa2b3fa6a7151a7c7fdad930690a.pdf?_gl=1*1e3903t*_ga*MTQwNjIzMjU0Ny4xNjg3NjIxMjI3*_ga_H7P4ZT52H5*MTcwMTE2NzI0OC4xMS4xLjE3MDExNjc4MjEuNTguMC4w, Accessed November 28, 2024.
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literal words or external forms of the language. On the other hand, semiotics as a coherent structural reading, is also known in the Islamic tradition as *tafsīr al-āyāt bi al-āyāt* and *tafsīr al-āyāt bi al-ḥadīš/*. This means interpreting a verse of the Qur'an with other verses of the Qur'an, even if they are far apart in different surah. This approach views the Qur'an as a coherent whole, where one verse interprets another, preventing contradictions within the Qur'an, as mentioned in QS. Al-Nisā/4: 82.

In modern Islamic interpretation theory, the *tafsīr mauḍū'ī* (thematic) method, a form of semiotics as a coherent structural reading, necessitates the collection of all verses related to a particular theme for interpretation. This method allows the Qur'an to explain its meaning regarding a theme without any preconceived views of the researcher. This is crucial because a biased interpretation can lead to incorrect results, as seen in certain Islamic conservative interpretations and the interpretations of terrorist or jihadist fundamentalism.

The Islamic tradition also emphasises the necessity of understanding *asbāb al-nuzūl* (the causes of the revelation of the Qur'an), *asbāb al-wurūd* (the causes of the birth of the Hadis), and the verses of Mecca and Medina, both geographically and socially. In modern semiotics or discourse analysis theory, this is known as the necessity to master and appreciate the author's social context. Without this understanding, a Qur'an reviewer cannot grasp the true meaning of the verse, leading to potential disputes and errors in interpretation.

At last, by using semiotics, as both a coherent heuristic and a hermeneutic reading, interpretations of the Qur'an and Islamic texts can better reflect the *maqāṣid al-Qur'ān* (the purpose of the Qur'an) and become scientifically justifiable.

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