



Submitted:
11 April 2025
Revised:
10 May 2025
Published:
30 May 2025

CONTACT

Correspondence Email:
yusufutama1@gmail.com

Address: Jl. Walisongo
No.3-5, Tambakaji, Kec.
Ngaliyan, Kota
Semarang, Jawa Tengah
50185

KEYWORDS

Middle Eastern
Mufassirs; Postcolonial,
Modernists, Revivalists,
Conservatives.

WHAT'S NEW IN THE MIDDLE EAST? CLASSIFICATION OF MUSLIM SCHOLARS AS POSTCOLONIAL MUFASSIRS

**MUHAMMAD YUSUF PRATAMA¹, SAFFANA ZAHRO DINAYAH²,
DEWI FATIMATUL KHOIRIYAH³, SITI FATIMAH AZZAHRO⁴, AGUS
IMAM KHAROMEN⁵**

¹²³⁴⁵ Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang

ABSTRACT

The postcolonial Middle East faces complex dynamics between colonial legacies, religious identity and the demands of modernity. The development of Qur'ānic interpretation by contemporary Muslim scholars is a critical response to the hegemony of colonial thought as well as an attempt to reconstruct the meaning of religion in a new socio-political context. The tension between the authenticity of tradition and the need to reinterpret the text marks the intellectual struggle in this area. This article analyzes the contribution of postcolonial Muslim thinkers in transforming tafsir discourse. It also explores the influence of their thought on the development of Islam in the Middle East. This is a qualitative research using a descriptive-interpretative analytical approach to primary and secondary data (study of related literature). Through this research, it can be seen that postcolonial Muslim scholars are divided into three groups, from those who maintain classical theories to those who introduce contextual-historical approaches in tafsir, integrating social criticism, hermeneutics, and epistemological decolonization. Their thinking encourages a religious dialectic that is more inclusive and responsive to global issues. This research contributes to enriching the discussion of contemporary Islamic studies by highlighting the interaction between postcolonialism and Muslim intellectual transformation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Post-colonialism in the Middle East has not only left a legacy of artificial geopolitical boundaries but also created a crisis of interpretive authority within Islam. Religious identity has re-asserted itself as a reaction to Western secularism, making Qur'ānic interpretation a battleground between tradition and modernity. The failure of countries in the region to establish

stable and inclusive political systems, as well as the rise of extremism such as ISIS, shows that the ideological foundations of Islam depend heavily on how the Qur'ān is understood and taught. In this context, *tafsir* becomes a crucial arena in shaping the discourse of justice, gender, and human rights in contemporary Muslim societies. The role of postcolonial *mufassirs* is important to bridge universal values with local contexts. This issue becomes increasingly urgent as the younger generation begins to question the validity of old Islamic narratives that are no longer considered relevant to current social realities and globalization (Fahmy & Mohamed, 2020).

A number of studies highlight the contribution of modernist thinkers to the reinterpretation of sacred texts. Adam (2017) underlines the importance of the reformation of Islamic thought by Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh as a response to Western colonial hegemony. Susilawati added that criticism of traditional interpretations by figures such as Rasyid Ridha encouraged the birth of a more rational and contextual approach (Susilawati, 2022). Meanwhile, Hadziq and Muzadi note that the contextual interpretation method hasn't fully replaced the dominant traditional approach, leading to an ongoing "tug-of-war" between conservatism and innovation in interpretive discourse (Hadziq & Muzadi, 2025). The three studies you mentioned highlight a theoretical and practical gap between the discourse of renewal in Islamic thought and the public's acceptance of new interpretive approaches. While methods like hermeneutics and literary criticism have indeed penetrated *tafsir* studies, there's still a lack of exploration into classifying *mufassirs* based on their postcolonial affiliation and how these impacts epistemological transformation in the Islamic world. Therefore, it's crucial to re-map the contributions of postcolonial *mufassirs* in developing Qur'ānic interpretations that are more responsive to contemporary challenges.

This study aims to classify postcolonial Muslim scholars of the Middle East based on their approach to interpreting the Qur'ān. It will also evaluate their contribution to shaping inclusive, contextualized, and decolonial interpretations. By dividing the *mufassirs* into three groups modernists, revivalists, and conservatives the study seeks to explain the epistemological dynamics in postcolonial interpretation as a response to geopolitical, ideological, and cultural challenges. It also aims to examine how these *mufassirs* integrate traditional Islamic heritage with modern discourses such as social justice, women's rights, religious pluralism, and resistance to Western hegemonism. Utilizing a descriptive-interpretative approach to the primary and secondary works of the *mufassirs*, this study hopes to contribute to contemporary *tafsir* discourse and redefine the role of *tafsir* in shaping transformative religious identity discourses in the postcolonial era.

This research operates on the hypothesis that postcolonial Qur'ānic interpretation isn't merely a response to a religious crisis, but rather a strategic medium of epistemological decolonization. *Mufassirs* like Amin al-Khuli, Hasan Hanafi, and Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri exemplify this by not only offering new methods but also by challenging the dominance of Western

epistemology. They achieve this through reconstructing the meaning of revelation based on the historical and social context of Muslims. Their approach demonstrates that sacred texts can be reread to address modern problems without sacrificing their divine authenticity. This hypothesis assumes that contextual and historical interpretations are better equipped to bridge the needs of contemporary Muslims for relevant, just, and humanist religious interpretations. Conversely, a failure to reform interpretive approaches risks strengthening fundamentalism and intellectual stagnation. Therefore, the success of decolonizing Islamic epistemology largely hinges on the intellectual will and methodological courage of *mufassirs* to reinterpret the text with a critical and progressive postcolonial perspective.

II. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach grounded in library research, with a central focus on analyzing the works of postcolonial exegetes in the Middle East. Its primary goal is to understand the methodological transformation in Qur'anic interpretation as a form of resistance against colonial legacies. The research positions *tafsir* as a strategic medium for the decolonization of Islamic epistemology. The formal object of this research is the methodology of interpretation within the context of postcolonialism. Meanwhile, the material object encompasses the ideas of three distinct groups of exegetes: modernists, revivalists, and conservatives. These groups are analyzed based on their approaches to interpreting sacred texts and their responses to modernity, colonialism, and the geopolitical dynamics prevalent in the Middle East.

The data sources for this study will comprise both primary and secondary materials. Primary data will specifically include *tafsir* works, scholarly articles, and intellectual writings from key figures categorized into three distinct exegete groups: modernists (Amin al-Khuli, Hasan Hanafi, Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri), revivalists (Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Wahbah Az-Zuhaili, Hasan al-Turabi), and conservatives (Ash-Shinqiti, Ash-Shawkani, Sayyid Qutb). Complementing these, secondary data will encompass reference books, academic journals, and other documents relevant to *tafsir* discourse and contemporary Islamic studies. Data collection will involve a two-pronged approach: documentation and an in-depth examination of argumentative patterns within the primary texts, along with mapping the intellectual contributions derived from credible secondary sources.

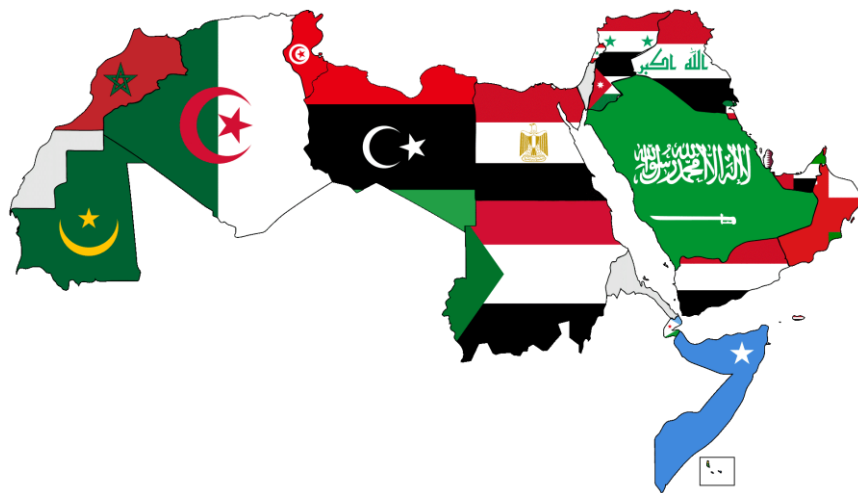
The data analysis technique for this study is descriptive-interpretative. Collected data will be classified based on the methodological characteristics and exegetical orientations of each exegete. This will then be analyzed to identify ideological and epistemological patterns in the construction of Qur'anic meaning. The interpretation process will be conducted hermeneutically, considering the historical, social, and cultural contexts in which these interpretations developed. The research will also identify differences in approach among the three groups of exegetes when addressing issues such as social justice, gender, and power relations. The analysis aims to provide a

comprehensive picture of how the dynamics of postcolonial *tafsir* reflect the negotiation between text, tradition, and contemporary realities in the Islamic world.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Middle East region: Geographic Fragmentation, Geopolitical Strategies, and Resources

The postcolonial Middle East was largely shaped by agreements made by Western powers, specifically the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) and the San Remo Conference (1920). These agreements carved up the former Ottoman Empire into states with artificial borders, largely disregarding existing ethnic, sectarian, and cultural distinctions. This disregard has fueled persistent tensions in the region. Similarly, Sunni-Shiite conflicts are frequently linked to struggles for political influence (Hama, 2020). while Sunni-Shiite conflicts are often related to the struggle for political influence (Humaini, 2019). The term "Middle East" itself originated from a Western perspective in the 15th century, viewing the Mediterranean region as lying between Europe and the Far East. However, people within the region use their own terms. Some Arab societies refer to it as the "Arab World," emphasizing an Arab national identity. For Pan-Islamists, the region is more accurately described as the "Islamic World" or "Muslim World," encompassing the broader Muslim community.



Picture 1. Map of the Middle East Region

Source: <https://ibtimes.id/timur-tengah-bukan-berarti-arab/>

The Middle East refers to cultural aspects rather than definite geographical boundaries (Ashutosh, 2021). In general, the Middle East loosely includes countries such as Bahrain, Cyprus, Iran, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, United Arab Emirates, Israel, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, and Yemen (Madaminova, 2022). Iran is often considered the easternmost boundary of the region, though some opinions also include Afghanistan and western Pakistan due to ethnic and religious affinities with the majority of Iranians (Ivashchuk & Zastavnyy, 2023). Historically, these

regions were once part of a large empire that encompassed Iran and beyond (Lewis & Taan, 2021). The region encompasses various tribes and cultures, including Iranians, Jews, Berbers, Arabs, Kurds, Assyrians, and Turks. Languages spoken in the region include Persian, Turkish, Hebrew, Assyrian, Kurdish, and Arabic (Madaminova, 2022). In many Western literatures, the Middle East is often identified with countries in Southwest Asia, stretching from Iran (Persia) to Egypt. Since the mid-20th century, the Middle East has been the focal point of major world events and a region of immense strategic, economic, cultural, political, and religious importance. The region possesses abundant oil reserves and is notably the birthplace and center of major religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Ivashchuk & Zastavnyy, 2023).

The Middle East is a highly complex and dynamic region, characterized by intense interplay between internal factors like sectarian conflict, political rivalries, and development challenges, and external factors such as the intervention of global powers and geopolitical competition. The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 served as a major catalyst for fragmentation and protracted conflict, especially in the Palestine-Israel issue, which continues to be a focal point of regional instability to this day (Novák, 2018). Its strategic location as a crossroads of three continents Europe, Asia, and Africa—and its abundant oil reserves make this region a battleground for global interests. Countries such as the United States, Russia, and China are actively building strategic alliances to secure trade routes and energy supplies (Dorraj & English, 2012). However, various foreign interventions such as the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and proxy conflicts between Saudi Arabia and Iran in Syria and Yemen have only deepened the crisis of stability (Garlick & Havlová, 2020). On the other hand, Gulf states like the UAE and Qatar have tried to strengthen their positions through economic diplomacy and infrastructure investment. However, geopolitical tensions continue to hinder regional integration (Moons & van Bergeijk, 2017). Therefore, scholarly research into the political, economic, and social dynamics of the Middle East is essential. This research can help us understand the region's challenges and opportunities, and in turn, formulate more effective strategies for regional cooperation.

Postcolonial dynamics in the Middle East highlight how colonial legacies have shaped state boundaries and national identities, often imposed, which creates tensions among religious, ethnic, and national identities. A similar phenomenon occurred in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, where the decolonization process presented challenges in building an inclusive national identity amidst cultural and religious diversity. For example, in the Indonesian context, Abdurrahman Wahid's "Islam pribumization" approach emphasized integrating Islamic values with local culture, serving as a response to the dominance of global Islamic narratives often rooted in the Middle East (Sholikhah, 2024). In addition, studies on the representation of Muslim identity in Indonesian films reveal a tendency towards "auto-orientalism." This is where Indonesians unconsciously reproduce orientalist views of themselves, reflecting the complexities inherent in postcolonial

identity construction. Therefore, comparing identity dynamics in the Middle East and Southeast Asia can offer deeper insights into how colonial legacies and interactions with global forces shape national and religious identities in both regions.

The Postcolonial Middle East: Religious, Cultural, Socio-Political, and Economic Shifts

Post-colonial Middle Eastern culture is heavily influenced by the rise of religion as the foundation of identity, especially Islam, which has become both a unifying and a divisive force. In the post-colonial era, movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Iranian Revolution (1979) emerged, emphasizing Sharia as the basis of the state in response to Western secularization (Fahmy & Mohamed, 2020). However, sectarian differences, particularly between Sunni and Shia Muslims, are often manipulated for political purposes, as seen in the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Conversely, ethnic diversity (such as Kurds, Persians, and Turks) and religious minorities (like Yazidis, Christians, and Druze) frequently face marginalization due to exclusive identity politics. This is evident in discrimination against Kurdish communities in Turkey or Iraq. Globalization and modernity have brought significant cultural changes to the Middle East, especially among the younger generation. Cities like Dubai and Tel Aviv have become symbols of modernization, boasting futuristic infrastructure and cosmopolitan lifestyles. Yet, traditional values remain strong in rural areas or conservative countries such as Saudi Arabia. Social media and Western education accelerate the polarization between groups advocating for greater freedoms (for example, the feminist movement in Iran) and those resisting foreign influence. This cultural conflict is also visible in art, music, and film, which often serve as mediums for expressing resistance or maintaining tradition (Kujath, 2019).

Post-colonialism presented significant challenges for Middle Eastern countries striving to build national identities, largely due to the artificial borders imposed by colonial powers. This legacy didn't just create fragile state structures; it also profoundly influenced the complex formation of religious and ethnic identities. The Pan-Arabism movement, spearheaded by Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s, aimed to unify the Arab world under a socialist, anti-imperialist ideology. However, internal divisions and Cold War interventions ultimately led to its failure, underscoring the inherent difficulty of forging a collective identity in such a fragmented region (Dodge, 2012).

In contrast, authoritarian regimes, such as the Ba'ath Party in Syria and Iraq, used military coups to consolidate their power, relying on repression and political patronage. These systems endured with the backing of global powers like the United States and the Soviet Union, but they sidelined public participation, ultimately sparking the dissatisfaction that exploded during the Arab Spring of 2010–2011. Political instability was further exacerbated by proxy conflicts between regional powers like the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran and foreign interventions such as

the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. These actions destroyed political order and fueled the rise of extremist groups like ISIS. Civil wars in Syria and Yemen vividly illustrate the fragility of the nation-state concept in the region, where non-state actors such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and tribal militias have become decisive forces (Fakih & Khayat, 2022).

In this context, applying postcolonial theoretical frameworks, such as those proposed by Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha, is essential to understanding how colonial legacies continue to shape identity and political dynamics in the Middle East. Postcolonial theory emphasizes that the construction of religious and ethnic identities often results from complex social processes influenced by both external and internal forces. For instance, Said's concept of "Orientalism" explains how the West has constructed stereotypical views of the East, which in turn has shaped policies and political interactions in the region. Meanwhile, Bhabha introduces concepts like "ambivalence" and "mimicry" to describe how colonial and postcolonial identities influence each other, thereby generating complex power dynamics.

Social movements, like the anti-government protests in Iraq (2019) and Lebanon (2020), show that younger generations are demanding transparency and justice. However, ruling elites often repress or co-opt these movements. Therefore, it's crucial to research the political, economic, and social dynamics of the Middle East to grasp the region's complexity and identify its opportunities and challenges. By combining postcolonial theoretical frameworks and interdisciplinary approaches, such studies can offer deeper analyses of the link between colonial legacies and the formation of religious identity, ultimately capturing the phenomenon's complexity and nuances.

Economically, the post-colonial Middle East is largely dominated by oil wealth, particularly in Gulf states like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait. While the discovery of oil in the 20th century spurred significant economic transformation, it also led to the "resource curse." This phenomenon results in wealth concentration, neglect of other economic sectors, and widespread corruption. Countries such as Iraq and Libya, for example, have struggled to build inclusive economies due to conflict and mismanagement. Non-oil economies, including Egypt and Jordan, rely heavily on tourism and remittances, yet they face significant hurdles from corrupt bureaucracies and water crises. Since the 2000s, diversification programs like Saudi Vision 2030 have aimed to reduce reliance on oil. However, fluctuations in global oil prices and the COVID-19 pandemic have exposed the inherent structural vulnerabilities of the region's economies (Poulis, 2015). The younger generation in the Middle East faces a significant challenge with high unemployment rates, often ranging from 25-30%. This widespread lack of opportunities fuels considerable social frustration, making them crucial players in the demand for change across the region.

Classification of Modernist Mufassirs: The Emergence of Western Innovations in Islam

Modernity is a concept with diverse meanings, varying by scholarly context. In the Islamic world, modernism emerged in the 19th century as a direct response to the civilizational crisis brought on by Western colonialism and domination. Modernist Muslim thinkers like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida actively sought to reform Islamic thought, aiming to align it with modern values such as democracy, social justice, and scientific progress (Adam, 2017). This movement called for a reinterpretation of Islam's primary sources, especially the Qur'ān. Traditional interpretations, once considered rigid, faced criticism and were gradually replaced with a more contextual approach (Susilawati, 2022).

In this regard, thinkers such as Amin al-Khuli, Hasan Hanafi, and Mohamed 'Abid al-Jabiri played an important role. They adopted modern Western theories of hermeneutics and literary criticism to understand the Qur'ān as a historical text that must be read in light of the cultural, linguistic, and social context of seventh-century Arab society. These scholars didn't reject the divine aspect of the Qur'ān. Instead, they emphasized that the revelation is embodied in human language and can therefore be textually analyzed like any other literary work. This approach, though heavily criticized by conservatives, opened up space for more inclusive interpretations, including issues such as human rights, gender equality, and social justice in Islam. Hasan Hanafi, Amin Al-Khuli, and Muhammad 'Abid Al-Jabiri are pivotal figures in the development of modernist groups within the Islamic world, particularly in the field of Qur'ānic interpretation. They are termed "modernists" due to their efforts to formulate methods for understanding religious texts that align with the challenges of contemporary times. Amin Al-Khuli is renowned as a pioneer of the literary approach in Qur'ānic studies. He emphasized the critical importance of analyzing language, structure, and cultural context to grasp the message of revelation in a rational and communicative manner. Hasan Hanafi, through his *turats wa tajdid* (heritage and renewal) project, underscored the necessity of rereading the Islamic tradition with an ideological and praxis orientation, enabling religion to contribute to social liberation and justice. Meanwhile, Muhammad 'Abid Al-Jabiri offers a profound critique of the structure of Arabic-Islamic reason in his work *Naqd Al-'Aql Al-'Arabi*. In this work, he categorizes the Islamic intellectual heritage into three epistemological systems: *bayani*, *'irfani*, and *burhani*, advocating for a rational and philosophical *burhani* approach as a means of renewing Islamic thought. Despite their differing approaches, all three scholars advocate for renewal in *tafsir* and Islamic thought. They consistently emphasize the importance of contextual, historical, and rational approaches in response to the crisis of modernity, colonialism, and the broader challenges of their era (Hadziq & Muzadi, 2025).

First, let's look at Amin Al-Khuli. He was born on May 1, 1895 CE. His early education began with his grandfather, after which he attended the Al-Qadha Al-Syaria Madrasah, a school associated with the reformist supporters of Muhammad Abduh. Here, he extensively studied both scientific and theological subjects. It was from this *madrasa* that Amin Al-Khuli began to engage with various activists and frequently served as a delegate abroad. He started teaching in 1927 at Madrasah Al-Qadha and Al-Azhar University in Cairo. Following a long period of service, he was appointed as a professor of Al-Quran at Al-Azhar University, Cairo (Ramadhani, 2017).

Amin Al-Khuli's literary works include *Fi Al-Adab Al-Misr: Fikr wa Manhaj, Fann Al-Qawl*, and *Manahij Tajdid Fi Al-Nahw wa Al-Balagh wa Al-Tafsir wa Al-Adab*. In the field of Islamic studies, his notable works are *Al-Mujaddidun Fi Al-Islam 'Ala Asas Kitab: Al-Tanbi'ah Biman Ya'asuhullah 'Ala Kulli Mi'at Lissuyuti Wa Bughyat Al-Muqtadin Wa Minhaj Al-Muhiddin 'Ala Tuhfat Al-Muhtadin Li Al-Maragi Al-Jurjawi, Silat Al-Islam Bi Islah Al-Masihiyah*, and *Al-Jundiyah Wa Al-Salam*. Among his contributions, *Manahij Tajdid Fi Al-Nahw wa Al-Balagh wa Al-Tafsir wa Al-Adab*, which focuses on the theory of interpreting the Qur'ān, remains a frequently referenced work to this day (Ramadhani, 2017). Amin Al-Khuli's interpretation method places strong emphasis on Arabic literature, recognizing its profound historical and cultural value. He explained that a correct approach to understanding the Qur'ān involves a precise progression, beginning with comprehending the historical context and prevailing circumstances, and then extending to other aspects relevant to that era (Mofid & Hamdy, 2021).

Second, we turn to Muhammad Al-Jabiri. Known as a contemporary Muslim intellectual, he was born in the Moroccan city of Feji (Fekik) in 1936. His education commenced at the Hurrah Wathaniyyah Madrasah, a school founded by the independence movement. He went on to complete his diploma studies at the Arab College of Science and also pursued further education abroad (Saputra, 2016). Of his many works, two specifically discuss the theme of the Qur'ān: *Madkhal Ila Al-Qur'ān Al-Karim* and *Fahm Al-Qur'ān Al-Karim: Al-Tafsir Al-Wadih Hasba Tartib Al-Nuzul*.

Through his *Madkhal*, Al-Jabiri defines the Qur'ān and offers commentary on its central themes. These themes, for example, relate to the similarity of reference sources found in heavenly religions and the study of stories within the Qur'ān. While his *Fahm Al-Qur'ān Al-Karim* is substantially similar in content to his previous works, especially *Nahnu Wa Al-Turats* and *Naqd Al-'Aql Al-'Arab*, it is through these two works directly addressing the Qur'ān that Al-Jabiri's interpretive method becomes apparent. For Al-Jabiri, the Qur'ān possesses three interconnected elements: the independence of time, spiritual society, and social society. This understanding allows Al-Jabiri's interpretation to be achieved through the perspective of *nuzuli* (revelation-order) interpretation. To make the Qur'ān contemporary to the time of its revelation, Al-Jabiri distinguished between *Naṣ al-Qur'ān* (the Qur'anic text itself) and Qur'ānic Discourse. The latter

refers to the ideologies that subtly infiltrate the interpretations of *mufassirs* (interpreters) as they engage in interpretive activities on the *Naş al-Qur'ān* (Al Ma'mun, 2022).

The third figure is Hasan Hanafi, born on August 28, 1935, in Cairo, Egypt, during the period of British colonization. He completed his undergraduate studies at Cairo University in 1956 before pursuing higher education in France. In 1966, he earned his Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Sorbonne. Upon his return to Cairo, Hanafi dedicated himself to teaching and sharing the knowledge he had acquired. His academic focus centered on cultivating self-awareness through the research, study, and interpretation of classical Islamic heritage (*turats*) (Mulyaden, Ridwan, & Riyani, 2022).

Hasan Hanafi is a figure strongly associated with leftist and occidental Islam. His ideas encompass the project of Muslim revival and resistance to modern colonialism. His works include *Ad-Din wa Al-Tsaurah fi Mishri* (1989), *Dirasat Islamiyah* (1982), *At-Turats wa Al-Tajdid* (1983), *Min Al-Aqidah Ila Al-Tsaurah* (1988), and *Muqaddimah fi 'Ilmi Al-Istiqhrab* (1992). Notably, his 2000 book, *Islam in the Modern World*, ideologizes religion, positioning its role and function within the development of nations worldwide (Nugroho, 2016). Hasan Hanafi, in his interpretation, critiques two main aspects: first, the crisis of interpretive orientation, and second, the weakening of the epistemological reasoning behind interpretation. In response, Hanafi endeavors to develop a hermeneutical epistemology for the Qur'ān. Furthermore, when interpreting *mu'amalah* (social transactions) verses, he frequently employs the discourse of *usul fiqh* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence), given that *mu'amalah* teachings do not primarily emphasize theology but rather focus on *Maqashid Al-Syari'ah* (the objectives of Islamic law) (Sulaeman, 2020).

Thinkers such as Amin al-Khuli, Hasan Hanafi, and Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri played significant roles in developing modern Western hermeneutic and literary criticism approaches to understanding the Qur'ān. They viewed it as a historical text that must be read in light of the cultural, linguistic, and social context of seventh-century Arab society. Al-Khuli specifically emphasized the importance of literary and rhetorical analysis for grasping the Qur'ān's structure and message. He rejected scientific approaches that attempted to extract modern scientific knowledge from the sacred text. Hasan Hanafi developed the "Heritage and Renewal" project, aiming to reconstruct Islamic thought by blending Islamic tradition with Western modernity, and stressing the importance of social and political liberation within the Islamic context. Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri critiqued traditional Arabic rationality and advocated for the renewal of Islamic thought through a critical approach to the Islamic intellectual heritage. The influence of these three thinkers extends across the Islamic world, including Indonesia, where their approaches inspire intellectual movements and religious reforms that prioritize contextualization and rationality in understanding Islamic teachings.

Classification of Revivalist Mufassirs: Moderate Interpretation for the Times

The revivalist movement in the Middle East represents a Muslim response to Western modernity and colonialism. This movement aims to revive pure Islamic teachings (*tajdīd*) without necessarily embracing Westernization. Revivalists posited that the decline of Muslim societies stemmed from adherence to rigid old traditions (*taqlīd*) and deviation from true Islamic values. Consequently, they advocated for reform through the reinterpretation (*ijtihād*) of the Qur'ān and Sunnah, employing a contextual, rational, and Islamic values-based approach (Gökkır, 2014).

One of the main concepts within this movement is the focus on religious objectives (*maqāṣid al-syarī'ah*). This emphasizes the importance of general welfare (*maṣlaḥāt*) and the protection of five basic human needs: religion, soul, mind, offspring, and property. Figures such as Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, Wahbah Az-Zuhaili, and Hasan Al-Turabi were among the pioneers who contributed to developing this idea. The revivalist movement gained significant traction in Egypt and Syria, as it sought to retain Islam's intellectual heritage while rejecting the complete assimilation of Western culture (Jan Ashik Ali & Orofino, 2018). In essence, the movement argues that Islam possesses the inherent capacity to modernize society without compromising its core identity. Thus, it can be understood that revivalists represent a group of Muslim intellectuals who strive to revive the pure teachings of Islam, uninfluenced by Western thought. They adhere to classical methods of interpretation but endeavor to update them, aiming for greater relevance in the modern world (Iner & Cufurovic, 2022).

One of the figures who contributed greatly to the development of revivalist groups is Yusuf Al-Qaradawi. He was born in Egypt in 1926 and is renowned for his extensive knowledge, da'wah thoughts, and advocacy for jihad, both in the Middle Eastern Islamic world and in the West. He is also noted as one of the students of Shaykh Hasan Al-Banna (Izza, 1970). While Yusuf Al-Qaradawi's thought has been influenced by Al-Azhar scholars, he has also significantly contributed many new breakthroughs in *ijtihad* concerning contemporary Islamic legal issues (Dahlan, 1996).

Qaradawi has authored approximately 125 books covering various aspects of Islam, including *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *aqīdah* (creed), *da'wah* (proselytizing), Islamic economics, and the modern Islamic revival. His education began with memorizing the Qur'ān from an early age, followed by studies at Al-Azhar University, where he earned a doctorate with a dissertation on *zakat* (charity) and poverty (Putra & Rumondor, 2020). Al-Qaradawi is recognized as a contemporary '*Ulama* who champions the concept of renewal (*tajdīd*) in Islam. For him, *tajdīd* is not limited to mere scientific *ijtihād* (independent reasoning in Islamic law), but also encompasses concrete changes in the actions of Muslims to ensure their relevance in the modern era. Furthermore, he consistently applies the principle of moderation (*wasatīyyah*). This principle advocates for a middle ground, avoiding both absolute rejection of change and uncritical acceptance. Consequently, Islamic reform, in Al-Qaradawi's view, must remain firmly rooted in the

Qur'ān and Sunnah, maintaining a crucial balance between fixed values (*tsawabit*) and changeable matters (*mutaghayyirat*) (Azizah & Elhady, 2024).

Apart from Egypt, Syria also produced a prominent revivalist figure, namely Wahbah Az-Zuhaili, whose full name is Wahbah bin Musthafa al-Zuhaili. This esteemed scholar was born in 1932 CE in Dar 'Atiyah, Faiha, Damascus, Syria (Nyanyang, 2020). He is a great scholar who graduated from Al-Azhar Cairo, concentrating in the field of Islamic law, and completed his doctorate in 1963 (Anas, 2021). Wahbah Az-Zuhaili is an 'Ulama with expertise in both *tafsir* and *usul fiqh*. One of his significant *tafsir* works is *Tafsir Al-Munir*, which is characterized by an *adabi ijtima'i* approach. This means it is a *tafsir* that seeks to interpret the Qur'an by considering the social conditions of society at the time of revelation.

Wahbah Az-Zuhaili's thinking is remarkably moderate. He advocates for the necessity of renewal (*tajdid*) in Islamic law, particularly within the domain of *mu'amalah* (transactions). However, this call for renewal does not imply altering the entirety of Sharia law. Instead, Az-Zuhaili emphasizes the inherent flexibility of Sharia, allowing it to remain applicable across various eras without contradicting established religious arguments (Muhammadun, 2017). This positions Wahbah Az-Zuhaili as a revivalist scholar because he adeptly blends classical methods with an openness to contemporary changes and developments, embracing modernity without succumbing to Westernization. It can also be understood that he rejected the Westernization approach largely adopted by modernists. Instead, he sought to renew Islam from within, leveraging established Islamic methods such as *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and *maqashid* (objectives of Islamic law) (Muhammadun, 2017).

In addition to Egypt and Syria, Sudan also boasts a prominent revivalist figure in Hasan Al-Turabi. Born in 1932 CE, he hailed from a family deeply rooted in Islamic and Sufi traditions. His academic journey began with a graduation from the Faculty of Law at the University of Khartoum in 1955. He then pursued higher education abroad, completing his Master's in Law in London in 1957, and subsequently earning his Ph.D. in Constitutional Law from the Sorbonne University in Paris in 1964 (Jamaluddin, 2017).

Hasan Al-Turabi emphasized the importance of renewal (*tajdid*) in both understanding and applying Islamic teachings, encompassing both religious and political spheres. He promoted the idea that Islam must be continuously renewed to remain relevant in confronting the challenges of modern times. Al-Turabi's concept of *tajdid* is thus not merely spiritual, but also embodies the spirit of social and political revolution (Maram, Aziz, & Nasir, 2023). Hasan Al-Turabi offered significant reforms in *usul fiqh* by introducing the concepts of al-Qiyas al-Wasi (broad analogy) and al-Istishab al-Qasi (broad presumption of continuity). Through this approach, he encouraged the use of analogies and the good customs (*'urf*) of society as valid bases for determining Islamic

law, provided they do not contradict the Shari'ah. This methodology allows Islamic law to be more dynamic and responsive to the evolving times (Jamaluddin, 2017).

Although the Islamic revivalist movement has made a significant impact in maintaining Islam's intellectual heritage, revivalist *mufassirs* often face difficulties in engaging with modernity. This challenge stems from the inherent tension between upholding Islamic tradition and the imperative to respond to contemporary social, political, and cultural dynamics. As a result, some revivalist *mufassirs* can become constrained by conservative and traditional thinking, rendering them less adaptable to changing times. A study Ali (2022) indicates that Islamic revivalism movements frequently aim to "Islamize modernity" as a response to the crisis of modernity. However, this approach can, at times, lead to internal tensions within Muslim communities. Therefore, a more inclusive and dialogical approach is needed in understanding and responding to the challenges of modernity, so that the Islamic intellectual heritage can continue to be relevant and make a positive contribution in the contemporary context.

Classification of Conservative Mufassirs: An Effort to Preserve the Textuality of the Qur'ān

Conservative groups emerge from the inclination of individuals or collectives to uphold and preserve existing conditions, customs, and traditional *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān within society. According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), "conservative" is defined as a way of thinking or behaving that seeks to maintain existing circumstances, habits, and traditions. Thus, conservative individuals tend to support long-standing or traditional values (Helvira, WS, & Nurizzati, 2013). As cited by Faruki, conservative Islam is often referred to as "Puritan Islam." The term "Puritan" describes a rigid and inflexible ideology, as adherents believe in an absolute truth with no room for compromise. Authority, in this understanding, is strict and exclusive, thus disallowing differing opinions or other views. They perceive diversity (plurality) as a threat that could pollute what they consider to be pure religious truth (Faruki, 2019). Among the figures who contributed to the development of postcolonial conservative groups in the Middle East are the following:

Among the first figures who contributed to the development of postcolonial conservative groups in the Middle East is Muhammad Al-Amin bin Muhammad Al-Mukhtar bin 'Abd Al-Qadir bin Muhammad bin Ahmad Nuh bin Muhammad Al-Jakni Ash-Syinqithi, a descendant of Al-Thalib Oubek. Born in 1325 H (1905 CE) in Tanbah village, Kifa region, Shinqith (now Mauritania), Ash-Syinqithi came from a prosperous family with a deep love for knowledge. His lineage traced back to the Himyar tribe in Yemen, who later settled in Africa. By the age of 10, he had already memorized the Qur'ān under his uncle's guidance. Ash-Syinqithi was also known as a scholar who mastered various Islamic sciences, including *tafsīr*, *fiqh*, and Arabic. Among his monumental works is *Tafsīr Adhwa' Al-Bayan fi Idhah Al-Qur'ān bil Qur'ān*. He wrote this *tafsīr* to make the

Qur'ān more accessible for Muslims to understand, driven by a concern that future generations might become reluctant to study and comprehend the Qur'ān (Assagaf, 2013).

Muhammad al-Amin Ash-Syinqithi's thought in the study of *tafsīr* is known for its conservative style, as he strongly emphasizes maintaining the purity of the Qur'ān's meaning. In his monumental work, *Adhwa' Al-Bayan fī Idhahī Al-Qur'ān bil Qur'ān*, he employs the method of interpreting the Qur'ān with the Qur'ān (*Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān bi Al-Qur'ān*). This approach involves explaining one verse with other related verses in terms of theme and meaning, while actively avoiding interpretations that deviate significantly from the textual meaning. This methodology indicates Ash-Syinqithi's caution when interpreting verses that might have multiple interpretations, leading him to largely uphold established traditional understandings. Furthermore, Ash-Syinqithi heavily relies on the understanding of the early generations of Islam (*Salaf Al-Salih*) in elucidating the meanings of the Qur'ān. Ash-Syinqithi does not extensively utilize modern philosophical or hermeneutic approaches often found in contemporary interpretations. This stance demonstrates a strong inclination to preserve old traditions and eschew new ideas that could potentially destabilize religious understanding. Ash-Syinqithi's interpretive method also tends to be strict, adhering closely to the text (*naṣ*) and offering little room for free interpretive efforts not grounded in robust religious arguments (ADAE, 2013).

In addition, Ash-Syinqithi's conservative stance is also evident in his view of Islamic law, particularly concerning the issue of *talfiq* (combining opinions from various *madhhabs* in the practice of worship). Ash-Syinqithi tends to reject the practice of *talfiq* if it's done freely without clear conditions. He believed this could lead to confusion in worship and weaken commitment to established *fiqh* principles. Ash-Syinqithi emphasized the importance of consistency in following a particular *mazhab* and cautioned against methods that could deviate from the *manhaj* (methodology) of previous scholars. This way of thinking reflects his concern about rapid socio-religious changes that could potentially weaken the roots of traditional Islamic understanding. This tendency aligns with his concern for future generations, who, in his view, were becoming increasingly unwilling to understand the Qur'ān correctly (Dani, 2023).

Second, Ash-Syaukani from Yemen. His full name is Muhammad bin 'Ali bin Muhammad bin 'Abdullah Ash-Syaukani Al-Ṣan'ani Al-Qadhi. Ash-Syaukani was born on the 28th of Dhulqa'dah 1173 H, specifically in the village of Al-Syaukan, Yemen. He passed away on 27 Jumadail Akhir 1250 H, in the city of Ṣana'a, Yemen, and his body was buried in Khuza'ah, Ṣana'a, Yemen (Al-Anshary & Hamzah, 2022).

Ash-Syaukani's thinking in Qur'ānic interpretation is often considered conservative due to his approach of adhering to the principles of the *salaf* and his strong rejection of *taqlid* (blind following of precedent). Despite being brought up in the rationalist Zaidiyah school of thought, Ash-Syaukani opted to follow the *salaf* approach in interpreting the Qur'ān, particularly on

theological matters. For instance, in his *Tafsir Fathul Qadir*, regarding Surah al-A'raf verse 54, concerning the phrase "ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ" (then He dwells above A'rsy), Ash-Syaukani interpreted the verse to mean that Allah's *Istiwa'* (establishment) is on the 'Arsh without asking "how," but in accordance with the understanding of the *salaf* who emphasized the sanctity of Allah SWT from the attributes of creatures. Typically, Arabs interpret *istiwa'* as *Al-'Uluw wa Al-Istiqrār*, meaning high and settled (Ash-Syaukani, n.d.). This reflects Ash-Syaukani's caution in maintaining the purity of *aqidah* and avoiding interpretations that could lead to *tashbih* (the likening of Allah to creatures).

In performing *ijtihad*, Ash-Syaukani primarily relies on four methods: *qiyas* (analogical reasoning), *istishab* (presumption of continuity), *istislah* (consideration of public interest), and *sadd al-dzari'ah* (blocking the means). These methods are applied when there is no definitive evidence (*qath'i*) available to serve as a direct basis. However, he maintained that these four *ijtihad* methods can be operationally applied to various contemporary issues, provided they do not conflict with the interests of the people (Surur, 2016). In addition, Ash-Syaukani did not hesitate to present various opinions of previous 'Ulama, subsequently choosing the strongest opinion based on available evidence. In *Tafsir Fathul Qadir*, he uniquely combines the approaches of *tafsir bil-ma'tsur* (interpretation based on tradition/narration) and *tafsir bil-ra'yi* (interpretation based on reasoned opinion), while still exercising caution in using weak or invalid narrations. This demonstrates Ash-Syaukani's unwavering commitment to scientific integrity and carefulness in interpreting the sacred text. Nevertheless, Ash-Syaukani remained open to *ijtihad* and was not bound to any particular school of thought, reflecting a spirit of renewal within the framework of tradition (Sormin, Zulheldi, Kartika, & Lutfiah, 2025).

Next, we consider Sayyid Qutb. His full name was Sayyid Qutb Ibrahim Husain Shadzili. He was born on October 9, 1906 CE, in the village of Musha (not Qaha), Asyut Governorate, Egypt (not Asyu province). He was indeed the son of al-Haj Qutb ibn Ibrahim. Sayyid Qutb produced numerous works, with his most monumental including *Al-'Adalah Al-Ijtima'iyah fi Al-Islam* (Social Justice in Islam), and *Fi Zilal Al-Qur'an* (In the Shade of the Qur'an), which he notably completed while imprisoned (Muhajirin, 2017). Sayyid Qutb's exegetical thought, particularly in his monumental work *Fi Zilal Al-Qur'an*, is often considered conservative due to its strict approach to the concepts of God's sovereignty (*hakimiyyah*) and ignorance (*jahiliyyah*).

In his interpretation, Sayyid Qutb attempts to combine the method of *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* (interpretation based on tradition) and *tafsir bi al-ra'y* (interpretation based on reasoned opinion) with a concise, direct, yet profoundly meaningful delivery style. Even so, his interpretation of verses containing the theme of *jahiliyyah* often shows a lack of proportional balance; an explanation for one verse might be exceedingly long, while others are very brief. Sayyid Qutb consistently demonstrates a strong methodological consistency in his interpretive process. He interpreted

verses broadly and deeply, paying close attention to the relationship between verses (*munasabah*) and connecting them to Hadith and the socio-political conditions of the time. This consistent approach is also evident in how he ideologically understands the term *jahiliyyah*, without excessively reviewing changes in word forms or conducting in-depth linguistic analysis. This perspective is reflected in his *tafsir*, which advocates for the necessity of struggle to establish a pure Islamic system and reject all forms of systems that do not align with God's teachings (Rafsanjani, 2021).

IV. CONCLUSION

This study successfully classifies postcolonial mufassirs (interpreters of the Qur'an) in the Middle East into three main groups: modernists, revivalists, and conservatives, based on their methodological approaches and ideological orientations towards Qur'anic interpretation. Modernists, including Amin Al-Khuli, Hasan Hanafi, and Muhammad Abid Al-Jabiri, advocate for a contextual-historical approach that emphasizes rationality, hermeneutics, and the decolonization of textual understanding. Revivalists, such as Yusuf Al-Qaradawi and Wahbah Az-Zuhaili, adopt a middle path, combining classical methods with updates rooted in maqashid sharia (the objectives of Islamic law). Meanwhile, conservative groups, exemplified by Ash-Syinqithi and Sayyid Qutb, maintain a literal and textual approach to preserve what they view as the purity of the meaning of revelation. Each group exhibited distinctive intellectual responses to the challenges of modernity, colonial legacies, and the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East. Thus, postcolonial *tafsir* is not a singular process, but rather an arena of contestation between tradition and innovation within contemporary Islamic discourse.

This research makes a significant contribution to the discourse of *tafsir* and contemporary Islamic studies, particularly in the realm of postcolonial epistemology. By compiling a typology of *mufassirs* based on their interpretive approaches and socio-political backgrounds, this study reveals the intricate relationship between changes in Qur'anic interpretation and historical dynamics in the Middle East. In this context, *tafsir* is positioned not merely as a way of understanding the sacred text, but also as a strategic instrument in the process of decolonizing thought and shaping a new religious identity that is more contextual and humanist. The transformation of interpretation observed across the three groups of *mufassirs*—modernists, revivalists, and conservatives—demonstrates that the dynamics of interpretation are inextricably linked to the ongoing negotiation between tradition and modernity, as well as the influence of political power and social structure. The primary contribution of this study lies in providing a systematic and argumentative classification framework. This framework can be effectively utilized in the study of interpretation across different periods and in other Muslim regions. For example, developing countries like Indonesia and Malaysia in Southeast Asia, or Muslim communities in South Korea and Japan, also experience similar dynamics when elements of Islam from the East

(presumably referring to the Middle East as the origin of many Islamic intellectual traditions) encounter local contexts and modern challenges.

The main advantage of this research lies in its rich and comprehensive comparative analysis approach to *tafsir* thought from various groups of *mufassirs*, thereby illustrating the complexity of postcolonial Islamic epistemology as a whole. This research also makes extensive use of primary and secondary sources and is able to link the phenomenon of interpretation with regional and global socio-political dynamics. However, it lacks geographical and historical representation. The focus of this research is still dominated by figures from the Egyptian, Syrian, and Moroccan regions, meaning the contribution of *mufassirs* from other regions such as the Gulf, Yemen, or South Asia has not been fully optimized. In addition, the qualitative approach used has limitations in measuring the direct impact of interpretation on socio-political policies or the response of the wider community. Therefore, these findings still need to be complemented with empirical approaches, such as field studies or surveys of public acceptance of contemporary interpretation models.

Future research is suggested to expand the geographical scope by including *mufassirs* from other regions in the Islamic world, such as Southeast Asia, North Africa, or the Muslim diaspora in the West. The study can also be deepened through an interdisciplinary approach involving anthropology, sociology, and political science to assess the extent to which postcolonial interpretations affect the social life of Muslims. In addition, an exploration of the influence of postcolonial interpretations in shaping gender discourse, religious pluralism, and democratization in Islamic countries would be a promising direction. Empirical research through observation, interviews, or case studies can be used to examine how these *tafsir* ideas are internalized in education, legal, or proselytization policies. Finally, it is worth examining how digital technology and social media have become new spaces for the distribution and contestation of postcolonial interpretations among younger generations of Muslims who are more open to progressive interpretations.

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