

Exploring the Face of Nusantara Islam: A Comparison of the *Tafsir Marāḥ Labīd* and *Tafsir al-Azhar* as Representations of Tradition and Modernity

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Abstract

The tradition of interpretation in the archipelago presents a unique face of Islam: a blend of classical orthodoxy and modern social context, yet rarely studied comparatively within a complete epistemological framework. This research aims to uncover the continuity and transformation of Nusantara Islamic thought through a comparison between Syaikh Nawawi al-Bantani's *Tafsir Marāḥ Labīd* and Hamka's *Tafsir al-Azhar*. Using a qualitative-descriptive method with a literature review approach, this study analyzes the methods, orientations, and social contexts of the two commentators. The results show that Nawawi emphasized the purity of the chain of transmission, linguistic accuracy, and the theology of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, while Hamka prioritized morality, rationality, and social relevance. Both represent the dialectic between tradition and modernity, affirming that Nusantara interpretation is not merely a derivative of the Middle East, but a dynamic intellectual tradition that connects sacred texts with local realities.

Keywords: Modernity; *Tafsir al-Azhar*; *Tafsir Marāḥ Labīd*; *Tafsir Nusantara*; Tradition

Abstrak

Tradisi tafsir di Nusantara menghadirkan wajah Islam yang unik: berpadu antara ortodoksi klasik dan konteks sosial modern, namun jarang dikaji secara komparatif dalam kerangka epistemologis yang utuh. Penelitian ini bertujuan menyingkap kesinambungan dan transformasi pemikiran Islam Nusantara melalui perbandingan antara *Tafsir Marāḥ Labīd* karya Syaikh Nawawi al-Bantani dan *Tafsir al-Azhar* karya Hamka. Menggunakan metode kualitatif-deskriptif dengan pendekatan studi pustaka, penelitian ini menganalisis metode, orientasi, dan konteks sosial kedua mufasir. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa Nawawi menekankan kemurnian sanad, ketepatan linguistik, dan teologi *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, sedangkan Hamka mengedepankan moralitas, rasionalitas, dan relevansi sosial. Keduanya merepresentasikan dialektika antara tradisi dan modernitas, menegaskan bahwa tafsir Nusantara bukan sekadar turunan Timur Tengah, melainkan tradisi intelektual dinamis yang menghubungkan teks suci dengan realitas lokal.

Kata Kunci: Modernitas; *Tafsir al-Azhar*; *Tafsir Marāḥ Labīd*; *Tafsir Nusantara*; Tradisi

INTRODUCTION

Tafsir Nusantara represents the result of a long historical engagement between the sacred text of the Qur'an and the socio-cultural context of the Malay–Indonesian archipelago.¹ The scholars (*ulama*) in this region developed distinctive interpretive patterns that combine the classical Islamic scholarly tradition with local wisdom. Historically, the characteristics of *Tafsir Nusantara* can be categorized into two major streams: the traditional-theological approach, which emphasizes the authority of *sanad* (chains of transmission) and textual purity, and the contextual-modernist approach, which seeks to address the social problems of the Muslim community through rational and moral frameworks.² These differing approaches do not represent opposition, but rather demonstrate the continuity of Islamic thought that adapts to changing times and societal needs.

Within this tradition, two exegetical works stand out as representatives of two significant phases in Indonesian Islamic scholarship: *Marāḥ Labīd* by Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani and *Tafsir al-Azhar* by Hamka. Shaykh Nawawi, a 19th-century scholar who lived in Mecca, composed his *tafsir* in classical Arabic using the *ijmālī-tahlīlī* method, grounded in the Shāfi'ī school of law and Ash'arite theology.³ His work symbolizes the traditional *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) scholarship that strongly upholds the purity of *tafsir bi al-ma'thūr* (interpretation based on transmitted reports). Conversely, Hamka, a modern 20th-century scholar, wrote his *tafsir* in the Indonesian language employing a contextual–*tahlīlī* approach. He sought to make the Qur'an relevant to modern Indonesian society by linking divine revelation to moral values, nationalism, and social progress.⁴

Although numerous studies on Tafsir Nusantara have examined the dynamics of interpretation among modern Indonesian scholars, the focus of these studies remains varied and fragmented. For instance, Rohmah's study investigates Tafsir Nusantara as presented through YouTube channels;⁵ Ismail explores thematic parallels between Hamka's *tafsir* and those of 20th-century Egyptian scholars;⁶ Amir discusses the legal interpretive method in *Tafsir al-Azhar* using the *maqāṣid* (objectives of Islamic law) approach within the context of *fiqh Nusantara*;⁷ while

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- 1 Ahmad Zaiyadi, "Lokalitas Tafsir Nusantara: Dinamika Studi Al-Qur'an Di Indonesia," *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadist* 1, no. 1 SE-Articles (August 2018): 1–26, <https://doi.org/10.35132/albayan.v1i1.1>.
 - 2 Fawaidur Ramdhani, "Tipologi Tafsir Al-Qur'an Di Madura: Tafsir Tradisionalis, Modernis, Dan Tradisionalis-Progresif," *SUHUF* 16, no. 2 SE-Articles (December 2023), <https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v16i2.793>.
 - 3 Erlan Dwi Cahyo, Hamdan Maghribi, and Andri Nirwana, "Tafsir Nusantara: Karakteristik Pemikiran Syekh Nawawi Al-Bantani Dalam Tafsir Marāḥ Labīd," *Bulletin of Indonesian Islamic Studies* 1, no. 2 SE-Articles (December 2022): 87–100, <https://doi.org/10.51214/biis.v1i2.435>.
 - 4 Hanna Salsabila et al., "Menelusik Tafsir Modern-Kontemporer Di Indonesia Abad 20 M," *Jurnal Dirasah Islamiyah* 5, no. 1 (April 12, 2023): 290–305, <https://doi.org/10.47467/jdi.v5i1.2878>.
 - 5 Laily Nur Rohmah, "Mediated Quranic Interpretation in the Digital Era: Buya Yahya's Perspective on Mahram via Al-Bahjah TV YouTube Channel," *Theosinesis: Journal of Integrative Understanding and Ethical Praxis* 1, no. 1 (2025): 14–24, <https://doi.org/10.20625/theosyn.v1i1.010>.
 - 6 Norbani B. Ismail, "Shared Themes, Different Countries: Qur'anic Interpretation in the Twentieth Century Indonesia and Egypt," in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Qur'an and Hadith Studies (ICQHS 2017)* (Paris, France: Atlantis Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.2991/icqhs-17.2018.3>.
 - 7 Ahmad Nabil Amir, "Manhaj Penafsiran Hamka," *Peradaban Journal of Religion and Society* 2, no. 1 (January 2023): 20–31, <https://doi.org/10.59001/pjrs.v2i1.46>.

Muhammad et al. trace the construction of Jewish antagonism in Hamka's exegesis.⁸ Igisani outlines the historical development of Indonesian *mufassirūn* (exegetes), including Shaykh Nawawi and Hamka.⁹ Nevertheless, no study has yet conducted a comparative analysis that systematically examines the methodological relationships, social contexts, and interpretive patterns between *Marāḥ Labīd* by Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani and *Tafsir al-Azhar* by Hamka within a unified analytical framework of *Tafsir Nusantara*.

Based on the aforementioned research gap, this study aims to comparatively analyze the characteristics of *Marāḥ Labīd* and *Tafsir al-Azhar* in terms of their methodological approaches and interpretive orientations. This research is expected to reveal the continuity and transformation of the epistemology of *Tafsir Nusantara*, while at the same time emphasizing the role of local scholars in bridging the global Islamic intellectual tradition with the Indonesian socio-cultural reality. Thus, this study does not merely compare two monumental works, but also seeks to uncover the integrative values that position *Tafsir Nusantara* as a model of religious understanding that is moderate, contextually grounded, and deeply rooted in the Islamic scholarly heritage.

From an academic standpoint, a comparative study between *Marāḥ Labīd* and *Tafsir al-Azhar* is significant because both works not only represent two distinct periods in the intellectual history of Islam in Indonesia but also illustrate a paradigmatic shift in epistemology—from a text-centered exegetical model grounded in traditional authority to a socially relevant interpretive framework. Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani sought to preserve the purity of *sanad* (transmission) and classical methodology within the framework of Islamic orthodoxy, whereas Hamka endeavored to contextualize the values of the Qur'an through moral, rational, and contextual approaches. These differing orientations do not signify opposition; rather, they constitute an intellectual dialectic that enriches the corpus of *Tafsir Nusantara*. Therefore, this study argues that understanding the continuity and transformation of epistemological paradigms between these two major exegetes is a strategic step toward affirming the identity of *Tafsir Nusantara* as a dynamic, adaptive, and contributive intellectual tradition within the broader development of global Islamic thought.

Method

This study employs a qualitative–descriptive comparative approach using a library research design.¹⁰ This approach was chosen because the primary focus of the research is the analysis of exegetical texts rather than empirical field data. The study involves tracing and examining the contents of two major works of *tafsir*: *Marāḥ Labīd li Kashf Ma'nā al-Qur'an al-Majīd* by Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani and *Tafsir al-Azhar* by Hamka. These two works were selected because they represent distinct periods and paradigms of Qur'anic exegesis—classical and modern. The purpose of this study is to describe and compare their methods and interpretive orientations in order to identify epistemological continuities in the development of *Tafsir Nusantara*.

The data sources for this research consist of both primary and secondary materials. The primary data are drawn directly from the two aforementioned *tafsir* works, while the secondary

8 Muhammad Muhammad et al., "Jewish Antagonism as Portrayed by Hamka in the Book of Tafsir Al-Azhar," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 24, no. 2 (August 2024): 513, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v24i2.19900>.

9 Rithon Igisani, "Kajian Tafsir Mufassir Di Indonesia," *Potret Pemikiran* 22, no. 1 (July 1, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.30984/pp.v22i1.757>.

10 Mestika Zed, *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan* (Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2008).

data are obtained from books, scholarly journal articles, and relevant prior studies. Data were analyzed using content analysis, which includes three main stages: identification, categorization, and interpretation.¹¹ Each verse or theme examined was compared systematically to identify similarities, differences, and distinctive interpretive patterns between the two exegetes. The analysis was conducted by interpreting the meaning of the texts within the social, cultural, and intellectual contexts of their authors, enabling the findings to portray the characteristics of each *tafsir* in a comprehensive and proportional manner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of *Marāḥ Labīd* by Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani

Marāḥ Labīd li Kashf Ma'nā al-Qur'ān al-Majīd is a monumental work of Qur'anic exegesis authored by Shaykh Muhammad Nawawi al-Bantani, one of the most prominent Nusantara scholars of the 19th century.¹² This work reflects the intellectual rigor and depth of a Javanese scholar who made significant contributions while residing in the holy city of Mecca. In general, the *tafsir* serves as a bridge between the classical exegetical traditions of the Middle East and the Islamic scholarly context of the Malay–Indonesian world. Its composition demonstrates that Nawawi did not merely replicate the ideas of earlier scholars, but rather refined and adapted them through his own interpretive style, shaped by the cultural background and needs of the Malay-Indonesian Muslim community of his time. Written in eloquent classical Arabic, *Marāḥ Labīd* presents interpretations that are accessible to *santri* (students) and *pesantren* scholars, making it an essential reference in Qur'anic studies across Southeast Asia.

From a methodological perspective, *Marāḥ Labīd* combines the *ijmālī* (concise) and *taḥlīlī* (analytical) methods of exegesis.¹³ Nawawi employed the *ijmālī* method to explain the general meanings of verses in a succinct and comprehensive manner, facilitating understanding among general readers, while the *taḥlīlī* method was applied to unpack verses with deeper theological, legal, or linguistic dimensions. This combination reflects Nawawi's precision in tailoring his interpretive approach to the needs of his audience. He avoided speculative interpretation, grounding his explanations in authoritative sources such as the Qur'an, Hadith, the opinions of the Companions, and classical *tafsir* works by scholars including al-Rāzī, al-Bayḍāwī, and Abū al-Su'ūd. This approach endows *Marāḥ Labīd* with high scholarly value while preserving the moderate character of the Sunni exegetical tradition.

In its theological orientation, *Marāḥ Labīd* firmly adheres to the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* framework, particularly influenced by the Ash'arite and Maturidite schools of thought. Shaykh Nawawi strongly rejects anthropomorphic interpretations that liken God to His creation. For example, when interpreting verses that mention the “hand of God,” he asserts that such

11 Muhammad Yusuf Pratama et al., “Living the Qur'an: Exploring Dalā'il Al-Khairāt in Indonesia as a Bridge Between Devotional Tradition and Emotional Experience,” *Millati: Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 9, no. 2 (June 27, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.18326/millati.v9i2.3944>.

12 Mutamakin et al., “Exegetical Hybridity in Nusantara Qur'anic Interpretation: A Study of *Marāḥ Labīd* by Syekh Nawawi Al-Bantani,” *QOF* 9, no. 2 SE-Articles (September 2025): 227–44, <https://doi.org/10.30762/qof.v9i2.3001>.

13 Anam. Saichul, “Menelusik Metodologi Tafsir Kontemporer: Studi Atas Safīnah Kallā Saya'lamūn Fī Tafsīri Shaikhinā Maimūn Karya Ismail Al-Ascholīy,” *Nun: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Tafsir Di Nusantara* 10, no. 1 SE-Articles (June 2024): 14–35, <https://doi.org/10.32495/nun.v10i1.447>.

expressions are metaphorical and must not be understood literally.¹⁴ This interpretive stance demonstrates a balanced relationship between *naql* (revealed text) and *'aql* (reason), as Nawawi seeks to preserve the purity of the Qur'anic message while allowing space for controlled rational reflection. His theological approach aligns with the spirit of classical exegesis that carefully guards against doctrinal deviation, yet remains intellectually open and relevant to modern readers.

Another important characteristic of *Marāḥ Labīd* lies in its strong linguistic approach. Shaykh Nawawi devoted great attention to the Arabic language, including the etymology, grammatical structure, and semantic nuances of every word in the Qur'anic verses.¹⁵ He often explained the meaning of a term by tracing it back to its root word — for example, the term *qalb* (heart), which literally denotes something that frequently turns or changes, symbolizing the human tendency toward fluctuation in feelings and beliefs. Such linguistic precision reflects Nawawi's expertise in *tafsīr bi al-lughah* — interpretation based on linguistic analysis. Through this approach, readers are invited to understand the Qur'an not merely through literal translation, but through a deeper comprehension of the linguistic structures that shape the divine message itself.

Beyond its linguistic depth, *Marāḥ Labīd* also reveals strong social and spiritual dimensions. Although composed in Mecca, the *tafsīr* is not detached from the cultural influences and social realities of the Malay–Javanese world. In several passages, Nawawi addresses the moral and social concerns of the Nusantara community, such as the importance of maintaining morality, honesty, and social harmony.¹⁶ This local nuance gives his exegesis a vivid and contextual character, resonating with the lived experiences of Muslims in the region. Nawawi also emphasizes the Sufi dimension in parts of his interpretation, presenting a balanced view between the *zāhir* (exoteric/*sharī'ah*) and *bāṭin* (esoteric/*ḥaqīqah*) aspects of Islam. Consequently, his *tafsīr* functions not only as an intellectual work but also as a spiritual guide for readers seeking a holistic understanding of the Qur'an.

The compositional style of *Marāḥ Labīd* demonstrates Nawawi's remarkable ability to integrate multiple Islamic disciplines into a coherent framework. He harmoniously combines *tafsīr*, *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *ḥadīth* studies, *kalām* (theology), and *taṣawwuf* (mysticism) without creating conceptual overlap between them.¹⁷ This structural coherence makes the text highly accessible, especially within the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) tradition, which values the integration of religious sciences. Despite being written in Arabic, Nawawi's style is concise, clear, and communicative, which has contributed to the text's enduring popularity among Islamic students in the Malay–Indonesian region. These qualities make *Marāḥ Labīd* not merely a classical *tafsīr*, but also a reflection of the intellectual ethos of the Nusantara scholars — an effort to connect the universality of Islamic scholarship with the particularities of local social and cultural contexts.

14 Rofik Maftuh, “Konsep Ahl Al-Fatrah Ash‘Ariyah Dan Salafi (Studi Komparasi Penafsiran Shaykh Nawawi Al-Bantani Dalam Tafsir Marāḥ Labīd Dan Shaykh Al-Shinqiti Dalam Tafsir Adwa' Al-Bayan),” *Jurnal Ilmiah Spiritualis: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam Dan Tasawwuf* 8, no. 1 SE-Satu (April 2022), <https://doi.org/10.53429/spiritualis.v8i1.382>.

15 Kamran, “Aspek Gramatikal Syaikh Nawawi Al-Bantani (Perspektif Linguistik Arab),” *Jurnal Al Bayan: Jurnal Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 9, no. 2 (February 8, 2017): 296–307, <https://doi.org/10.24042/albayan.v9i2.2256>.

16 Nur Dina Agustianti, Nurul Mubin, and Ngatoillah Linnaja, “Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Karakter Islami Dalam Perspektif Kitab Al-Arbain An-Nawawiyah Karya Syaikh An-Nawawi,” *Moral: Jurnal Kajian Pendidikan Islam* 2, no. 2 (June 2025): 288–98, <https://doi.org/10.61132/moral.v2i2.1088>.

17 Kasan Bisri, *Tafsīr & Hadis Pendidikan: Sebuah Pendekatan Interdisipliner* (Penerbit Lawwana, 2025).

Characteristics of Tafsir al-Azhar by Hamka

Tafsir al-Azhar is a monumental work by Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (HAMKA), marking the pinnacle of modern Qur'anic exegesis in Indonesia. Written in the Indonesian language, this work was intended to make the Qur'an's messages accessible to the wider Nusantara community without losing their depth of meaning or spiritual substance. Hamka began writing *Tafsir al-Azhar* from his early morning sermons delivered at the al-Azhar Mosque in Kebayoran Baru, Jakarta, during the 1950s.¹⁸ These sermons were later expanded into a complete exegetical text during his imprisonment under the Old Order regime. This process reveals that the *tafsir* emerged from a direct engagement between revelation, social reality, and the author's lived experience. Consequently, *Tafsir al-Azhar* is not merely a scholarly work, but also a living reflection of spiritual and social struggle. In his introduction, Hamka emphasized that the purpose of writing this *tafsir* was to make the Qur'an a down-to-earth guide for life—comprehensible to all levels of society while remaining firmly rooted in the pure values of Islam.

In general, the characteristics of *Tafsir al-Azhar* reflect a synthesis between fidelity to classical Islamic tradition and the spirit of modern reform.¹⁹ Hamka did not approach Qur'anic interpretation merely as a scholar quoting earlier exegetes, but as a thinker striving to explain the Qur'an within the context of an Indonesian society seeking identity in the postcolonial era. He presents a moral, social, and contextual exegesis, positioning the Qur'an as a source of inspiration for national and civic life. Through his simple and communicative style, Hamka successfully bridges the sacred text with the lived realities of his readers. His narrative is reflective and argumentative, often supported by relevant stories, parables, and historical events. As such, *Tafsir al-Azhar* functions not only as an academic reference but also as a source of moral and spiritual enlightenment for the broader public.

From a methodological standpoint, Hamka employs the *tahlili* method—an exegetical approach that interprets Qur'anic verses sequentially according to the order of the *mushaf*, while exploring their content thematically and contextually. Each chapter in *Tafsir al-Azhar* begins with an introduction explaining the circumstances of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), the overarching themes, and the moral lessons to be conveyed.²⁰ Hamka then presents the Arabic text of the verses along with their translation, followed by clear and accessible commentary. His interpretation integrates both *bi al-ma'thūr* (based on transmitted reports from the Companions and Hadith) and *bi al-ra'y* (based on independent reasoning and reflection). However, Hamka tends to emphasize moral and social dimensions rather than intricate linguistic or grammatical analysis. His interpretive style is dynamic and conversational, allowing readers to feel as though they are engaging in a dialogue with the author himself.

Although Hamka maintained a deep respect for classical sources as his intellectual foundation, he did not rely on them uncritically. In many instances, he referred to major classical

18 Bitsanie Zujajmahir Ramanda, "Makna Surah An-Nisa' Ayat 148 Dalam Al-Qur'an Perspektif Tafsir Al-Azhar Karya Buya Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah," *Al-Mizan* 1, no. 1 SE-artikel (October 2024): 1–19.

19 Umi Wasilatul Firdausiyah, "Tafsir Modern Perspektif Mun'im Sirry Dalam What's Modern about Modern Tafsir? A Closer Look at Hamka's Tafsir Al-Azhar," *Nun: Jurnal Studi Al-Quran Dan Tafsir* 6, no. 2 (2020): 83–115.

20 Tiara Hidayah B, Edi Hermanto, and Wardah Mardiana Tambunan, "Metodologi Penafsiran Al-Qur'an (Tahlili Dan Ijmali)," *Journal of Multidisciplinary Inquiry in Science, Technology and Educational Research* 2, no. 3 SE-Articles (June 2025): 3953–64, <https://doi.org/10.32672/mister.v2i3.3384>.

tafsirs such as those of al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī, and al-Qurṭubī, yet he did not merely reproduce their views. Instead, he evaluated their interpretations using reason and contextual relevance.²¹ When encountering differences among Islamic legal schools (*madhāhib*), Hamka adopted a moderate and pragmatic approach, prioritizing the principles of public welfare (*maṣlahah*) and the higher objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*). Through this approach, *Tafsir al-Azhar* presents a vision of Islam that is open, adaptive, and harmonious with the plural and dynamic character of Indonesian society. Furthermore, Hamka integrated elements of modern rationalism with Sufi spirituality, emphasizing the importance of purity of heart, sincerity, and noble character as the core of Qur'anic understanding. The Sufism he articulated was not expressed in the form of a formal *ṭarīqah* (order), but as neo-Sufism—a spiritual discipline oriented toward moral cultivation and inner balance within modern life.

The content of *Tafsir al-Azhar* encompasses themes closely connected to the realities of Indonesian society. Hamka discusses moral, social, educational, and political issues in clear and relatable language. He highlights the importance of leadership responsibility, social justice, and poverty eradication as integral parts of the Qur'an's universal message.²² For instance, when interpreting the verse about human vicegerency (*khalifah*) in *Surah al-Baqarah*, Hamka explains that humanity was created not to dominate, but to prosper the earth and uphold justice. In this regard, his exegesis reveals the ethical and social function of revelation, directly engaging with the dynamics of contemporary society. Such interpretation serves as an effective medium of *da'wah*, as it not only elucidates the meaning of verses but also guides the moral behavior and mindset of Muslims in accordance with Qur'anic values.²³

In terms of style and structure, *Tafsir al-Azhar* is highly readable, written in beautiful, poetic, and persuasive Indonesian, imbued with the spirit of *da'wah* (religious outreach). Hamka writes with the sensitivity of a literary author, making his exegesis emotionally engaging and inspirational rather than dry or overly academic.²⁴ He does not confine himself to rigid scholarly language but skillfully blends religious discourse with literary expression that appeals to both intellect and emotion. Each commentary is accompanied by personal reflections and contemplative insights, inviting readers to think critically while also engaging spiritually. Moreover, Hamka interprets not only the literal meaning of the verses but also their symbolic and moral dimensions. Thus, *Tafsir al-Azhar* functions as a bridge between revelation and reality, between the sacred text and social life, between knowledge and faith. Through this work, Hamka successfully presents a distinctly Nusantara model of Qur'anic exegesis—rooted in the global Islamic tradition yet nourished by the soil and spirit of the Indonesian people.

21 Wan Helmy Shahrman Wan Ahmad and Azarudin Awang, “Pendekatan Tafsir Al-Ilmi Hamka Terhadap Ayat-Ayat Al-Kawniyyah (Embriologi): Al-Ilmi Hamka’s Interpretation Approach To Al-Kawniyyah Verses (Embriologi),” *KQT EJournal* 2, no. 1 SE-Articles (2022): 43–52.

22 Fadillah Ulfa and Eti Efrina, “Relevansi Metode Dakwah Hamka Dan Implementasinya Di Indonesia,” *Journal of Communication and Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 SE-Articles (2024): 45–53, <https://doi.org/10.61994/jcss.v2i1.604>.

23 Muhammad Yusuf Pratama and Ahmad Nabil Annuha, “Digital Da’wah Transformation of Nahdlatul Ulama: Religious Moderation Strategies in the Technological Era,” *NAHNU: Journal of Nahdlatul Ulama and Contemporary Islamic Studies* 2, no. 2 (December 31, 2024): 321–38, <https://doi.org/10.63875/nahnu.v2i2.53>.

24 Armini Arbain, “Pemikiran Hamka Dalam Novel-Novelnya: Sebuah Kajian Sosiologis,” *Puitika* 13, no. 2 (2017): 75–88, <https://doi.org/10.25077/puitika.13.2.75--88.2017>.

Comparative Analysis of *Marāḥ al-Labīd* and *Tafsir al-Azhar*

Qur'anic exegesis in the Islamic world of the Malay–Indonesian archipelago (*Nusantara*) exhibits a rich diversity of methods and interpretive orientations that have evolved over time.²⁵ Among the most influential works are *Marāḥ Labīd li Kashf Ma'nā al-Qur'ān al-Majīd* by Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani and *Tafsir al-Azhar* by Prof. Dr. Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (Hamka). These two monumental works emerged from distinct socio-intellectual contexts yet complement one another in shaping the continuity of the *Nusantara* exegetical tradition. Nawawi lived in the 19th century, an era marked by traditional scholarship centered in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) and the authority of classical *ulama*,²⁶ whereas Hamka lived in the 20th century, a period characterized by the encounter between Islam, modernity, and national identity.²⁷ This comparative study seeks to explore how both figures interpreted the Qur'an through their respective methodologies, content orientations, and socio-theological perspectives.

Shaykh Nawawi's exegetical approach represents a combination of *tafsīr ijmālī* (concise or global interpretation) and *tafsīr tahlīlī* (analytical interpretation). He offered brief explanations of general verses for lay readers while providing more in-depth commentary on verses related to theology (*'aqīdah*) and Islamic law (*fiqh*).²⁸ His sources were grounded in the Qur'an, *hadith*, the opinions of the Companions, and the works of classical commentators such as al-Rāzī and al-Bayḍāwī. Nawawi adhered to the *manhaj* of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, particularly the Ash'arī–Māturīdī schools of theology.²⁹ He emphasized a balanced relationship between text (*naql*) and reason (*'aql*), yet exercised caution toward excessive rational interpretation to safeguard the orthodoxy of theological meaning. Consequently, *Marāḥ Labīd* is distinguished by its linguistic precision, grammatical rigor, and unwavering commitment to monotheistic principles (*tawḥīd*) within the framework of classical Sunni scholarship.

In contrast, Hamka adopted a contextual *tahlīlī* method, interpreting the Qur'an verse by verse while connecting its messages to the social and moral realities of Indonesian society. He integrated *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* (interpretation based on transmitted reports) with *tafsīr bi al-ra'yī* (interpretation based on reasoned reflection or *ijtihad*).³⁰ For Hamka, Qur'anic exegesis should function as a practical guide for life, not merely an academic discourse. Accordingly, he developed a style of Indonesian prose that is communicative, rhetorical, and imbued with moral and spiritual

25 Ahmad Fadly Rahman Akbar et al., "The Dynamics of Qur'anic Tafsir in Indonesia: Historical Periodization and the Role of Local Scholars," *Dirosat: Journal of Islamic Studies* 10, no. 1 (June 9, 2025): 65, <https://doi.org/10.28944/dirosat.v10i1.2079>.

26 Khoirul Amin and Maragustam Siregar, "Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani: Thoughts, Educational and Relevance to Islamic Contemporary Education," *Syaikhuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pranata Islam* 13, no. 02 (September 12, 2022): 109–21, <https://doi.org/10.36835/syaikhuna.v13i02.5694>.

27 Erwin Erwin et al., "HAMKA's Thoughts on the Integration of Islamic Values and Indonesian Nationalism," *Tasfīyah: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 8, no. 2 (August 3, 2024): 267–96, <https://doi.org/10.21111/tasfīyah.v8i2.11978>.

28 Cahyo, Maghribi, and Nirwana, "Tafsir Nusantara: Karakteristik Pemikiran Syekh Nawawi Al-Bantani Dalam Tafsir *Marāḥ Labīd*."

29 Ahmad Nabil Amir, "Imam Al-Nawawi: Latar Pemikiran Dan Pengaruhnya (Imam Al-Nawawi: Historical Context of His Thought and Influence)," *Online Journal of Research in Islamic Studies* 10, no. 2 (December 30, 2023): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.22452/ris.vol10no2.1>.

30 Ilyas Daud, "Qur'anic Exegesis as Social Criticism: The Case of Tafsīr Al-Azhâr," *ULUL ALBAB Jurnal Studi Islam* 21, no. 1 (June 29, 2020): 24, <https://doi.org/10.18860/ua.v21i1.7828>.

exhortation. His commentary does not end at the literal meaning of the text but extends to moral formation, social ethics, and spiritual consciousness. This distinction makes Hamka's tafsir more dynamic and accessible to a wider audience, while Nawawi's tafsir remains renowned for its intellectual depth and continuity with classical scholarly authority.

The interpretive distinctions between *Marāḥ Labīd* and *Tafsir al-Azhar* can be clearly observed in their respective commentaries on several Qur'anic verses. The first example is Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah [2]:30 — “وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ اِنِّيْ جَاعِلٌ فِى الْاَرْضِ خَلِيْفَةً”.³¹ In *Marāḥ Labīd*, Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani interprets the term *khalīfah* as humankind entrusted with the responsibility to implement the divine law (*ḥukm Allāh*) on earth and to maintain the balance of God's creation.³² Nawawi emphasizes the aspects of obedience and divine trusteeship (*amānah ilāhiyyah*). In contrast, Hamka, in *Tafsir al-Azhar*, understands *khalīfah* as an ethical mandate to uphold justice and prosperity.³³ He relates this verse to social leadership and the moral responsibility of the human community. While Nawawi's interpretation centers on legal obedience to the *Shari'ah*, Hamka highlights human moral and social accountability as stewards of the earth.

The second example is Qur'an, Surah Al-Fath [48]:10 — “يَدُ اللّٰهِ فَوْقَ اَيْدِيْهِمْ”.³⁴ For Shaykh Nawawi, this verse must be understood according to the principle of *tafwīd* — entrusting the true nature of the divine attribute to Allah without negating the wording of the verse.³⁵ He firmly rejects any literal or anthropomorphic interpretation (*tashbīh*), explaining that the “hand” here symbolizes divine power and support granted to the believers. Meanwhile, Hamka interprets the phrase symbolically, viewing “the hand of Allah” as the manifestation of divine moral strength and justice that sustains the struggle of the faithful.³⁶ For Hamka, the verse carries spiritual motivation: whoever pledges themselves to the path of truth will receive divine support. Thus, Nawawi's reading is more theological and doctrinal, whereas Hamka's is more humanistic and moral.

The third example concerns Qur'an, Surah Al-Ikhlās [112]:1–4 — “قُلْ هُوَ اللّٰهُ اَحَدٌ (١) اللّٰهُ (٢) لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُوْلَدْ (٣) وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَّهٗ كُفُوًا اَحَدٌ (٤) ”.³⁷ Nawawi interprets this surah within a strict theological framework, affirming pure monotheism (*tawḥīd*) and rejecting any form of association or anthropomorphism.³⁸ He explains *aḥad* as the absolute unity of God's essence, and *ṣamad* as God's self-sufficiency and independence from all creation. Hamka, on the other hand, reads this surah through a spiritual and psychological lens. He views *Al-Ikhlāṣ* as a source of inner

31 Translate: “(Remember) when your Lord said to the angels, ‘I am going to place a successive (human) authority on earth.’” – Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah [2]:30

32 Muhammad Nawawi, *Marāḥ Labīd Li Kashf Ma'Nā Al-Qur'Ān Al-Majīd* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1997).

33 Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar* (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1982).

34 Translate: “Allah's Hand is over theirs” – Qur'an, Surah Al-Fath [48]:10

35 Nawawi, *Marāḥ Labīd Li Kashf Ma'Nā Al-Qur'Ān Al-Majīd*.

36 Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*.

37 Translate: “Say, (O Prophet,) ‘He is Allah—One (and Indivisible) (1) Allah—the Sustainer (needed by all) (2) He has never had offspring, nor was He born (3) And there is none comparable to Him.’ (4)”

38 Nawawi, *Marāḥ Labīd Li Kashf Ma'Nā Al-Qur'Ān Al-Majīd*.

tranquility for modern humans in search of meaning.³⁹ By affirming God's oneness, humanity learns not to depend on anything but Him. Thus, while Nawawi emphasizes orthodox creed and theological precision, Hamka stresses the existential and ethical relevance of monotheism in everyday life.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that *Marāḥ Labīd* by Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani and *Tafsir al-Azhar* by Hamka represent two pivotal historical and epistemological phases in the development of Qur'anic exegesis within the Indonesian–Malay world. Shaykh Nawawi, a 19th-century scholar grounded in the classical Islamic intellectual tradition, employed an *ijmālī–taḥlīlī* exegetical method that emphasized textual authority, linguistic precision, and fidelity to the theology of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*. His work symbolizes the continuity of Middle Eastern exegetical scholarship adapted to the intellectual and cultural context of the Malay-Indonesian archipelago. Conversely, Hamka, a modernist scholar of the 20th century, reformulated Qur'anic interpretation through a *contextual taḥlīlī* approach, integrating moral, social, and spiritual dimensions. Through *Tafsir al-Azhar*, he sought to make the Qur'an a living guide for modern Indonesian society grappling with questions of identity, faith, and nationhood. Accordingly, this study identifies a transformative epistemological shift within Nusantara exegesis, from a text-centered and normative orientation toward a rational and contextual understanding.

The primary contribution of this research lies in its comparative analytical framework, which reinforces the academic discourse on Nusantara Qur'anic exegesis that has often been fragmented along philological, theological, or historical lines. The study elucidates how Islamic scholarship in the archipelago has evolved not merely as a reproduction of Middle Eastern thought but as a dynamic and adaptive tradition responding to the needs of its time. Theoretically, it enriches the epistemological understanding of Indonesian tafsir by highlighting its distinctive synthesis of classical rationalism and Sufi spirituality, as well as its integrative approach bridging the sacred text and lived realities. Practically, this study contributes to the development of tafsir studies in higher Islamic education by proposing a model of *Nusantara hermeneutics* that embodies moderation, contextual relevance, and cultural rootedness within global Islamic scholarship.

Nevertheless, this research acknowledges several methodological and scope limitations. The analysis is confined to two primary figures, thus not fully encompassing the wider diversity of Indonesian Qur'anic interpretation, which also includes prominent exegetes such as Quraish Shihab, Hasbi ash-Shiddieqy, and Mahmud Yunus. Moreover, the study's focus on textual comparison does not extend to empirical inquiry concerning the reception, dissemination, and influence of these tafsirs within contemporary Muslim communities. Future research should therefore adopt interdisciplinary approaches, combining discourse analysis, contextual hermeneutics, and reception theory to explore how these exegetical traditions are interpreted and practiced in different sociocultural settings. The use of digital tools such as text mining and corpus-based linguistic analysis may further illuminate linguistic patterns and semantic developments in Nusantara tafsir literature. Through such approaches, the study of Qur'anic exegesis in Indonesia can evolve beyond descriptive and historical analysis into a dynamic and responsive scholarly field that engages with the intellectual, social, and spiritual challenges of the modern Muslim world.

³⁹ Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*.

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