

## Just a Philomath, not a Polymath: Did the Paradigm of Integration-Interconnection of Sciences Obscure or Illuminate the Study of the Qur'an and Tafsir in Academic Institution?

*Hanya Philomath, Bukan Polymath:*

*Apakah Paradigma Integrasi-Interkoneksi Ilmu Mengaburkan atau Mencerahkan Studi Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir di Institusi Pendidikan Tinggi?*

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### Abstract

“You can blame me, that I started (the Integration-Interconnection of Science, hereinafter referred to as I-Con) from a theological (agenda), but my theology is not your theology. The difference (between them) is in the cross-reference of (sciences)”. This was Amin Abdullah’s response to a question addressed to him on whether the I-Con mega project is better regarded as an academic or theological agenda, a query that will always haunt it for years to come, as long as one still wonders if academic and theological studies to religious texts can swim in the same pool. This article is written to divulge some challenges and pitfalls in the mainstreaming of the I-Con paradigm for lecturers and students of the Qur'an and Tafsir Studies program in Indonesian Islamic Universities. Foremost is the nature of this paradigm as a reformist preaching orientated towards contextual-thematic interpretation, thus diverting the main attention of researchers in Qur'anic studies from uncovering many other important elements of the Qur'an. This article further argues that I-Con has significantly contributed to the establishment of what is referred to as the academic echolalia in applying foreign theories to tafsir studies, an oversight that should be rethought before it goes too far away.

**Keywords:** *Integration-Interconnection of Science, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Studies of the Qur'an and Tafsir, Academic Echolalia*

### Abstrak

“Anda dapat menyalahkan saya, bahwa saya memulai (Integrasi-Interkoneksi Ilmu Pengetahuan, selanjutnya disebut I-Con) dari sebuah (agenda) teologis, tetapi teologi saya bukanlah teologi Anda. Perbedaannya (di antara keduanya) ada pada referensi silang (ilmu)”. Ini adalah jawaban Amin Abdullah terhadap pertanyaan yang ditujukan kepadanya tentang apakah mega proyek I-Con lebih baik dianggap sebagai agenda akademis atau teologis, sebuah pertanyaan yang akan selalu menghantui selama bertahun-tahun yang akan datang, selama orang masih bertanya-tanya apakah studi akademis dan teologis terhadap teks-teks agama dapat “berenang di kolam yang sama”. Artikel ini ditulis untuk memaparkan beberapa tantangan dan jebakan dalam pengarusutamaan paradigma I-Con bagi para dosen dan mahasiswa program studi Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir di Universitas Islam Indonesia. Yang paling utama adalah sifat dari paradigma ini sebagai agenda dakwah-reformis yang berorientasi pada penafsiran kontekstual-tematik, sehingga mengalihkan perhatian utama para peneliti dalam studi



Al-Qur'an dari mengungkap banyak elemen penting lainnya dari Al-Qur'an. Artikel ini lebih lanjut berargumen bahwa I-Con telah secara signifikan berkontribusi pada pembentukan apa yang disebut sebagai academic echolalia dalam menerapkan teori-teori asing dalam studi tafsir, sebuah kekeliruan yang harus dipikirkan kembali sebelum melangkah terlalu jauh.

**Kata Kunci:** *Integrasi-Interkoneksi Ilmu, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Studi Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir, Academic Echolalia*

## Introduction

The Semi-permeability of knowledges is one of the three basic traits of M. Amin Abdullah's (b. 1953)<sup>1</sup> integration-interconnection of science, a jargon that marked the transformation of Sunan Kalijaga Islamic Institute to a University.<sup>2</sup> He yearns for Muslim scholars of various disciplines to be open to communicating with each other and receiving input from specialist subject outside their field, allowing for complementary, affirmative, corrective, verificative or transformative dialogue, as illustrated in his "scientific spider web" that consists of dotted lines, signifying the necessity for each discipline to interact with other fields at everywhere and anytime.<sup>3</sup> Abdullah's ideals were warmly received by his colleagues, although critical notes also emerged. Ten years after I-Con was established as the official academic orientation of Sunan Kalijaga Islamic State University in 2004, Fachruddin Faiz saw a confusion in the understanding of the academic community within the university concerning the philosophical concepts underlying it, resulting in a disparity in terms of how the paradigm should be implemented,<sup>4</sup> although Faiz believes in the aptness

1 He is an Indonesian Muslim philosopher and scholar known for his jargon of integration-interconnection between sciences which he promoted when he served as Rector of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta for 2 terms (2001-2010). He is a prolific writer with many works related to the issue. He was also the deputy chairman of the Muhammadiyah Central Leadership (2000-2005). In November 2024, he received the Habibie Prize for his outstanding contribution in philosophy, religious and cultural studies.

2 In Indonesia, three kinds of higher education institutions are known: the State Islamic higher education (Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri, STAIN), the state Islamic institute (Institut Agama Islam Negeri, IAIN) and the state Islamic university (Universitas Islam Negeri, UIN)

3 Amin Abdullah, 'Agama, Ilmu Dan Budaya: Kontribusi Paradigma Integrasi-Interkoneksi Ilmu Dalam Menghadapi Isu-Isu Islamic Studies Kontemporer', in *Praxis Pradigma Integrasi-Interkoneksi Dan Transformasi Islamic Studies Di UIN Sunan Kalijaga* (Yogyakarta: Pasca Sarjana UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2014), 6-7.

4 As far as the survey he conducted in 2014, there are four types of practices of I-Con: (1) confirmation/parallelization, (2) criticism and complementation such as the emergence of anthropological studies of the Qur'an and Living Hadith, (3) integration of two or more scientific fields so as to give birth to new theories and concepts such as Islamic Economics, and (4) identification of new fields of study which are usually carried out by showing the urgency of integration-interconnection of certain scientific fields. Fachruddin Faiz, 'Anomali-Anomali Paradigma Integrasi Interkoneksi: Sebuah Catatan Setelah 10 Tahun Implementasi', in *Praxis Pradigma Integrasi-Interkoneksi Dan Transformasi Islamic Studies Di UIN Sunan Kalijaga* (Yogyakarta: Pasca Sarjana UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2014), 109-11.

of Abdullah's paradigm to produce thinkers who could read whatever social and religious phenomena in front of them in an un-monolithic reading model, while labelling those who are reluctant to it as mentally-blocked.<sup>5</sup>

However, some also believe that transforming I-Con into a bureaucratic level is near to impossible. While demanding the multidisciplinary nature of the teaching-learning process, it has not yet been successfully converted in a more practical level such as the design of lecture and research curricula in each faculty and department within Sunan Kalijaga Islamic university. I-Con is also accused for obscuring the concept of excellence of each scientific department which is only judged by the extent to which they dialogue with each other.<sup>6</sup> This article is written to continue some agitation about the proper place of I-Con, particularly in the field of the Quran and Tafsir studies, on which I-Con has coloured. The fact that Abdullah was the former Rector of UIN Sunan Kalijaga should guide us to begin our trajectory from this university. This research gains significance if we consider the interesting position of UIN Sunan Kalijaga as a barometer of the development of Islamic studies in Indonesia. As the oldest Islamic university, this campus often becomes a trend-setter in several strategic discourses,<sup>7</sup> including the academic orientation headed to by other similar institutions in the country. Shortly after UIN Yogyakarta launched its integrative-interconnective bent, other campuses also resonated this project in a similar jargon, such as the integration of science at UIN Jakarta, the Tree of Science at UIN Malang, the metaphor of the wheel at UIN Bandung, the Andromeda Spiral Cross at UIN Riau, and the Fir Tree Cell at UIN Makassar.<sup>8</sup> In accordance with our background in the field of the Qur'an and Tafsir studies, the two identical but different fields of study,<sup>9</sup> the anomalies that we will propose will be specifically

5 Faiz, 113–16.

6 Zainal Abidin Bagir, 'The Burden of Integration-Interconnection and Some Unexpected Consequences' (Conference Talk, Ushuluddin International Conference (USICON) 2023, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, 9 November 2023), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQirU9YJtHo>. Starting from 2:05.57.

7 See recent development of the studies conducted in many Islamic universities, based on the theorization of Ma'nā-Cum-Maghzā, Tafsīr Maqāsidī and the living Qur'an phenomena, emerging from the hands of some lecturers from UIN Sunan Kalijaga: See: Sahiron Syamsuddin, 'Metode Penafsiran Dengan Pendekatan Ma'nā-Cum-Maghzā', in *Pendekatan Ma'nā-Cum-Maghzā Atas al-Qur'an Dan Hadis: Menjawab Problematika Sosial Keagamaan Di Era Kontemporer*, ed. Sahiron Syamsuddin (Yogyakarta: AIAT dan Ladang Kata, 2020), 1–18; Abdul Mustaqim, *Al-Tafsīr al-Maqāsidī* (Yogyakarta: Idea, 2024); Ahmad Rafiq, 'The Reception of the Qur'an in Indonesia: A Case Study of Place of the Qur'an in a Non-Arabic Speaking Community' (Dissertation, Philadelphia, Temple University, 2014).

8 Siswanto Masruri, 'The Collaboration of Science and Religion?' (Conference Talk, Ushuluddin International Conference (USICON) 2023, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, 9 November 2023), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgbku9IuBt0>. Start from minutes 3:04:28.

9 The study of the Qur'an and the study of Tafsir are two different things. They once merged before scholars underlined the importance of separating the two, both in terms of material and formal objects. See:

related to the (in)compatibility of I-Con in developing them. At a certain point, we will question whether the implementation of the I-Con paradigm still matters, or whether it should be abandoned if it is proven to further isolate the scholars of Qur'anic and Tafsir studies from conducting appropriate research on each subject.

### The Genealogy of *I-Con*

The last point we allude to above has to do with the very nature of the Qur'an and Tafsir studies, on which this article addresses, that fall within the realm of humanities which closely intersect with social sciences,<sup>10</sup> and has nothing to do with the clash of natural sciences and religion, the I-Con's departure point.<sup>11</sup> Natural sciences are at odds with social sciences in at least two ways: their disregard for the value of history (as a branch of science and as a phenomenon), and ignorance for the ethics that prevail in society.<sup>12</sup> It is not difficult to detect Abdullah's genealogy in this stream of thought on the heated relationship between natural science and religion, a contentious issue over the last two decades. Ian G. Barbour was always behind Abdullah's *I-Con*<sup>13</sup> and some of his colleagues were already questioned that tendency from the very beginning.<sup>14</sup> Munir Mulkhan, for example, says while rejecting the idea that *I-Con* was the only prototype for the "interdisciplinary dialogue" promoted at the university, that "the solution to the problem of learning at UIN Sunan Kalijaga does not lie solely in Ian G. Barbour's analytical framework of integration".<sup>15</sup>

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Muammar Zayn Qadafy, 'Melepas Studi Tafsir Dari Bayang-Bayang Studi Qur'an (Part 1): Perspektif IQSA', Studitafsir.Com (blog), 29 March 2022, <https://studitafsir.com/2022/03/29/melepas-studi-tafsir-dari-bayang-bayang-studi-quran-part-1-perspektif-iqsa/>.

- 10 The main concern of the social sciences is with human behavior in relation to its psychological levels, while the humanities target people's reactions to events and the meanings they give to experiences as a function of culture, historical era, and life history. The primary sources of the social sciences are behaviors, verbal statements, and sometimes biological actions, collected under uncontrollable conditions. While the primary sources of the humanities are written texts and human behavior collected in slightly influenceable circumstances. See: Jerome Kagan, *The Three Cultures: Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and The Humanities in The 21st Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 4.
- 11 Some philosophers of science might say that religion is more than just a part of social science. This claim does not negate the existence of religious studies within the large umbrella of social studies. See the following classic article: Harry F. Ward, 'Social Science and Religion', *The Journal of Religion* 2, no. 5 (1922): 476–89.
- 12 See closer the differences between the three in: Kagan, *The Three Cultures: Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and The Humanities in The 21st Century*, 4–7.
- 13 Ian G. Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion*, 1st ed (San Francisco: Harper, 2000), 27–38; Compare with: R. I. Damper, 'Science and Religion in Conflict, Part 2: Barbour's Four Models Revisited', *Foundations of Science*, 2 September 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10699-022-09871-z>; Ian G. Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues*, Rev., expanded ed (London: SCM Press, 1998).
- 14 Abdullah, 'Agama, Ilmu Dan Budaya: Kontribusi Paradigma Integrasi-Interkoneksi Ilmu Dalam Menghadapi Isu-Isu Islamic Studies Kontemporer', 1, 6, 9, 13.
- 15 Abdul Munir Mulkhan, 'Saintifikasi Dan Piritualisasi Multi-Wajah Realitas', in *Praxis Pradigma Integrasi-*

Abdullah's rhetoric, however, has convinced many that *I-Con*, which was originally designed to bridge science and religion,<sup>16</sup> should be used as a universal catchphrase to also bring about dialogue between religion and the social sciences and humanities. The first thing he did was to separate normative religious studies from historical ones. The former produces doctrinal-normative Islamic studies, while the latter manifests in cultural-historical and or critical-philosophical styles of Islamic studies.<sup>17</sup> In many of his writings, he emphasizes the importance of recognizing these two sides of Islamic normativity and historicity at once. A failure to understand them will result in ambiguous stances, such as when areas of profane religious conversations and issues are sacralised.<sup>18</sup> His second move was to make a distinction between *'ulūm al-dīn* (Islamic science), *al-fikr al-Islāmī* (Islamic thought) and *dirāsah islāmiyyah* (Islamic studies), which he defined as follows:

‘Ulūm al-Dīn is a representation of the Islamic “local tradition” based on “language” and “texts” or religious texts, al-Fikr al-Islāmī is based on “intellect-ratio”, while Dirāsāt Islāmiyyah or Islamic Studies is a new scientific cluster based on the critical-comparative social scientific paradigm as it involves the entire “experience” of humanity in an extremely diverse historical-empirical realm.<sup>19</sup>

Abdullah then makes a rather bold classification. He says that the tradition of *'ulūm al-dīn* led to the birth of compartmentalized types of studies such as *kalām*, *fiqh*, *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, *Qur'ān*, *Farā'idh*, *'Aqīdah*, *akhlāq*, *'Ibādah*, and so on.<sup>20</sup> The teaching and learning of *ulūm al-dīn* in the society, according to Abdullah, is still local, superficial, partial, provincial, and parochial, making it prone to intra-party violence. Thus, Abdullah calls for the importance of *al-fikr al-islāmī* whose

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Interkoneksi Dan Transformasi Islamic Studies Di UIN Sunan Kalijaga (Yogyakarta: Pasca Sarjana UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2014), 40.

- 16 Prinsip ini sangat jelas dalam hymne UIN Sunan Kalijaga yang dipakemkan pada masa kepemimpinan Abdullah sebagai rector pada fase transisi dari IAIN menjadi UIN. Liriknya berbunyi: “UIN Sunan Kalijaga Islam asa tujuannya. Membangun citra keagungan bangsa berdasar Pancasila. Integrasikan-Interkoneksikan agama dan ilmu semesta. Kembangkan daya patriot nusa tanah air pinta baktimu. Jayalah negara, jayalah bangsa. UIN berkarya nyata.”
- 17 M. Amin Abdullah, *Studi Agama: Normativitas Atau Historisitas?*, Cet. 1 (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1996), v.
- 18 M. Amin Abdullah, ‘Pengantar’, in *Metodologi Studi Agama*, ed. Ahmad Norma Permana (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2000), 3.
- 19 M. Amin Abdullah, ‘Mempertautkan Ulum Al-Diin, al-Fikr al-Islamiy Dan Dirasat Islamiyyah: Sumbangan Keilmuan Islam Untuk Peradaban Global’, *Aminabd.Wordpress.Com* (blog), 20 June 2010, <https://aminabd.wordpress.com/2010/06/20/mempertautkan-ulum-al-diin-al-fikr-al-islamiy-dan-dirasat-islamiyyah-sumbangan-keilmuan-islam-untuk-peradaban-global/>.
- 20 Abdullah claims that this reasoning is also shared by the great thinker al-Jābirī. Mu ammad Abid al-Jābirī, *Bunyah Al- Aql al- Arabi: Dirāsāt Ta liliyyāh Naqdiyyah Li Nu ūm al-Ma rifah Fi abaqāt al- Arabiyyah* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi, 1991); Abdullah, ‘Mempertautkan Ulum Al-Diin, al-Fikr al-Islamiy Dan Dirasat Islamiyyah: Sumbangan Keilmuan Islam Untuk Peradaban Global’.

approach is more intact, systematic, historical, and non-sectarian.<sup>21</sup> In the midst of the contestation of the two, then emerged a new cluster called Islamic studies, which is strengthened by field research and objective historical-empirical observations about social dynamics. This new cluster, according to him, prioritizes critical and comparative approaches and gives sufficient attention to the operations of history, psychology, anthropology and sociology. The distinction between these three types of disciplines by Abdullah is then juxtaposed with the four gradual phases of religious studies ranging from local, canonical, critical and global phases. This juxtaposition has a very clear purpose in that the *‘ulūm al-dīn* is a depiction of the local and canonical phases of religious studies while *dirāsah Islāmiyyah* is the critical and global type of the field.<sup>22</sup>

Hence, the main point of distinction between the three is not the material object, as all three deal with traditional branches of Islamic science, but rather the nature of the study undertaken. The delineating line between *al-fikr al-islāmī* and *al-dirāsah al-Islāmiyyah* compared to *‘ulūm al-dīn* is also not entirely straightforward, with Abdullah referring to the former two as sharing a more comprehensive methodology and approach than the latter, without specifying the exact degree. Nevertheless, Abdullah's attempt to draw a distinction between them is commendable yet ambitious in uncovering the root causes of the problems of contemporary Islamic societies that fail to distinguish between normative and historical Islam.

### ***I-Con's "Preaching" DNA: Abdullah and Contextual Exegesis of the Qur'an***

The genealogy of Abdullah's thought has been well explained by Karool Kersten in his recent presentation at the Ushuluddin International Conference (USICON) 2023 forum, where Kersten identifies four lines of thought.<sup>23</sup> First, in terms of Islamic thought reform, Abdullah is indebted to Muhammad Iqbal,<sup>24</sup>

21 Abdullah, 'Mempertautkan Ulum Al-Diin, al-Fikr al-Islamiy Dan Dirasat Islamiyyah: Sumbangan Keilmuan Islam Untuk Peradaban Global'.

22 Even so, Abdullah said, it does not mean that the relationship between the three is hierarchical, in the sense that the latter is better than the former. The relationship between the three is dialogical and negotiative. Abdullah.

23 Carool Kersten, 'M. Amin Abdullah: An Interconnective Intellectual Predigree' (Keynote Speech, Ushuluddin International Conference (2023) on The Legacy of Integrative-Interconnective Approach: A New Appraisal on Discourse and Practive, Yogyakarta, 9 November 2023), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQirU9YJtHo>.

24 See Iqbal's book: Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 1st ed (New Delhi: Shivalik Prakashan, 2011).

Fazlurrahman,<sup>25</sup> Alparsian Acikgenc,<sup>26</sup> and Nurcholis Madjid (1939-2005).<sup>27</sup> Second, institutionally, Abdullah inherited the model of Religious Studies brought by the McGill community<sup>28</sup> which was at least represented by figures of the calibre of Wilfrid Cantwell Smith (1916-2000),<sup>29</sup> Mukti Ali (1923-2004),<sup>30</sup> and Harun Nasution (1919-1998).<sup>31</sup> Third, in terms of the philosophy of science, Abdullah is inspired by Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996)<sup>32</sup> and Imre Lakatos (1922-1974).<sup>33</sup> From the former Abdullah took the theory of paradigm shifts, and from the latter he learned about the hardcore-protective belt and developed it into a theory about the elements that are fixed in religion (thawābit) and those that change (mutaḥawwalāt).<sup>34</sup> Fourth, regarding how a thinker should break out of the confines of turāth (tradition), the influence of al-Jābirī (1935-2010)<sup>35</sup> and his megaproject, the critique of Arabic reason, is very strong. Abdullah, according to Kersten, is the culmination of the convergence of three variables: elite thinkers, the Muhammadiyah network, and the Indonesian

25 Fazlur Rahman, *Islam & Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, Publications of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, no. 15 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

26 He was Abdullah's mentor in Ankara and the author of: *Alparslan Acikgenc, Being and Existence in Şadrā and Heidegger: A Comparative Ontology* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1993); From this particular book, Abdullah took many inspirations for his dissertation on al-Ghazālī and Kant. See: M. Amin Abdullah, *Antara Al-Ghazali dan Kant: Filsafat Etika Islam* (Bandung: Mizan, 2002).

27 Nurcholis Madjid, 'The Necessity of Renewing Islamic Thought and Reinvigorating Religious Understanding', in *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*, ed. Charles Kurzman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

28 On the role of Islamic studies played by the McGill connection, see: Megan Brankley Abbas, *Whose Islam? The Western University and Modern Islamic Thought in Indonesia, Encountering Traditions* (Stanford Calif.): Stanford University Press, 2021), 52–91.

29 Smith was the founder of the Institute of Islamic Studies di McGill and the author of two books on religious studies: *Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Islam in Modern History*, 1st Princeton paperb. ed (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977); *Wilfred Cantwell Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion*, Republ (London: SPCK, 1978).

30 Ali was the first Head of the Department of Comparative Religion at UIN Sunan Kalijaga (launched in 1960). He was well-known for his ideas on the scientific cum doctrinaire approach to the study of Islam. See for example: Mukti Ali, 'Muhammadiyah Menjelang Abad Ke-21', in *Muhammadiyah Dalam Tantangan Masa Depan, Sebuah Dialog Intelektual*, ed. Sujarwanto (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 1990).

31 An Alumnus from McGill, a former rector of IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah, and an author of: Harun Nasution, *Islam Ditinjau dari Berbagai Aspeknya*. Jilid I, Cet. 5 (Jakarta: Penerbit Universitas Indonesia, 1985).

32 See: Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, ed. Ian Hacking, Fourth edition (Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).

33 Imre Lakatos, *The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes*, *Philosophical Papers 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

34 Kersten, 'M. Amin Abdullah: An Interconnective Intellectual Predigree'. Minutes: 5: 20: 00 – 5: 23: 00.

35 Muḥammad 'Ābid al-Jābirī, *Naqd al-'aql al-'arabī: Takwīn al-'aql al-'arabī, at-Ṭab'a 14* (Beirut, 2019); al-Jābirī, *Bunyah Al-'Aql al-'Arabī: Dirāsāt Taḥlīliyyāh Naqdiyyah Li Nuzūm al-Ma'rifah Fī Ṭabaqāt al-'Arabiyyah*.

Islamic thought reform movement.<sup>36</sup>

In interpreting the Qur'an, the above four elements are evident in Abdullah's endorsement of what is called contextual exegesis<sup>37</sup> that strongly emphasizes the discovery of the context of revelation on the one hand, and the context of the commentator on the other.<sup>38</sup> A commentator is called a contextual if he or she is able to place the text in its historical context and then make it relevant for contemporary life, when it is reinterpreted,<sup>39</sup> while understanding the Qur'an as a scripture with universal values that are transformable into new principles more compatible with the demands of the present times if approached appropriately with the aid of the emerging socio-historical awareness.<sup>40</sup> Note that Abdullah lists the following names as those who should be appreciated for their contribution to the promotion of contextual tafsir in the Islamic world:<sup>41</sup> Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905), Fazlurrahman (1919-1988), Mohammad Iqbal (1877-1938), Abdullah Saeed,<sup>42</sup> Jasser Auda and Fathullah Ghulen.<sup>43</sup> They, according to Abdullah, have successfully integrated and interconnected fiqh, kalām, and tafsir with natural and social disciplines such as history, sociology, and anthropology.<sup>44</sup>

Abdullah's first article on his propensity for contextual exegesis was a note (written in 1991) that he delivered at a workshop on the establishment of

36 Kersten, 'M. Amin Abdullah: An Interconnective Intellectual Predigree'. Minutes: 5: 32: 00 – 5: 34: 00.

37 See in more details: Muhammad Amin Abdullah, 'Metode Kontemporer Dalam Tafsir Al-Qur'an: Kesalingterikatan Asbāb al-Nuzūl al-Qadīm Dan al-Jadīd Dalam Tafsir al-Qur'an Kontemporer', *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu al-Qur'an Dan Hadith* 13, no. 1 (2012).

38 Abdullah Saeed, *The Qur'an: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2008), 221.

39 Muammar Zayn Qadafy, *Buku Pintar Sababun Nuzul dari Mikro hingga Makro : Sebuah Kajian Epistemologis* (Yogyakarta: IN AzNa Books, 2015), 115.

40 Qadafy, 117–18.

41 Abdullah, 'Agama, Ilmu Dan Budaya: Kontribusi Paradigma Integrasi-Interkoneksi Ilmu Dalam Menghadapi Isu-Isu Islamic Studies Kontemporer', 19; See also Abdullah's explanation on Khaled Abou al-Fadhl in: Abdullah, 'Mempertautkan Ulum Al-Diin, al-Fikr al-Islamiy Dan Dirasat Islamiyyah: Sumbangan Keilmuan Islam Untuk Peradaban Global'.

42 Read the following: Abdullah Saeed, 'Some Reflections on the Contextualist Approach to Ethico-Legal Texts of the Qur'an', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 2008.

43 I have contributed to the discussion on these contextualist commentators, if only in the way I have extracted the thoughts of seven of them on the so-called macro sabab al-nuzūl. In addition to the names above, I add Nasr Ḥamd Abū Zaid (1943-2010), Amina Wadūd (b. 1952), Khaled Abū al-Fadl (b. 1963), Muhammad Arkoun (b. 1928) and Muḥammad Shahrūr (b. 1938). See: Muammar Zayn Qadafy, *Buku Pintar Sababun Nuzul dari Mikro hingga Makro : Sebuah Kajian Epistemologis* (Yogyakarta: IN AzNa Books, 2015), 120-124.

44 Abdullah, 'Agama, Ilmu Dan Budaya: Kontribusi Paradigma Integrasi-Interkoneksi Ilmu Dalam Menghadapi Isu-Isu Islamic Studies Kontemporer', 21.



the tafsir hadith department (TH)<sup>45</sup> in order to celebrate the transfer of this department from the Faculty of Islamic Law (Sharī'ah) to the Faculty of Ushūluddīn. There, Abdullah questioned the continuing need for medieval-era tafsir books that were too oriented towards linguistic aspects to be studied by students, a process that according to Abdullah was redundant because students would not find answers to the problems of environmental sustainability, peace, and the development of modern science in them.<sup>46</sup> Abdullah then proposed that in the curriculum of this department, the Major Themes of the Qur'an (hereinafter referred to as MTQ) by the late Fazlurrahman<sup>47</sup> should also be included, comparative studies of various books of tafsir should be mainstreamed, and a contextual tafsir paradigm should be solidified.<sup>48</sup>

MTQ was a monumental work by Rahman that is often credited with its demythologization of the Qur'an.<sup>49</sup> In MTQ, Rahman is quite optimistic about the ability of Qur'anic chronology to reveal the exact dating of the revelation of a verse, an effort that, according to Andrew Rippin (1959-2016), was troublesome when dealing with verses whose chronology is unclear.<sup>50</sup> The second thing that is predominant in MTQ and echoes also in Abdullah's writings is his proclivity for modern exegesis rather than the classical one.<sup>51</sup> Rahman was critical of the traditional thinking of the classical commentators, such as the predeterminism of the Ash'ariyyah, the retributionism of the Mu'tazilah and the pantheism of the Sufi groups, and he echoed the imperative of rereading the classical rules of jurisprudence through a modernist lens that positions the Qur'an as an ethical guide rather than a legal system.<sup>52</sup> In addition to the methodological matters above, Gaffney underlines something interesting about MTQ, particularly on how Rahman shows his apologetic tendencies opposing ideas about the Qur'an from reductionists and rationalists such

45 Now the department is split into two more specific concentrations: IAT (Ilmu al-Qur'an and Tafsir) and ILHA (Ilmu Hadith).

46 M. Amin Abdullah, 'Bentuk Ideal Jurusan TH (Tafsir Hadist) Fakultas Ushuluddin IAIN Sunan Kalijaga', *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, no. 47 (1991): 90-91.

47 Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, ed. Ebrahim Moosa, 2nd ed (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

48 Abdullah, 'Bentuk Ideal Jurusan TH (Tafsir Hadist) Fakultas Ushuluddin IAIN Sunan Kalijaga', 96.

49 Reinterpreting certain concepts so that they are not considered mystical. Andrew Rippin, 'Review of Major Themes of the Qur'an by Fazlurrahman', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 44, no. 2 (1981): 361.

50 This is quite contrary to Rahman's own claim that MTQ focuses more on synthesizing the central themes of the Qur'an, rather than interpreting the Qur'an in a literal or chronological manner. Rippin regards the book as having methodological uncertainty. Rippin, 362-363.

51 Frederick Mathewson Denny, 'Review of Major Themes of the Qur'an by Fazlur Rahman', *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 15, no. 1 (1981): 63.

52 William A. Graham, 'Review of Major Themes of the Qur'an by Fazlurrahman', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103, no. 2 (1983): 446.

as Bell (1876-1952), Hurgronje (1857-1936) and Wansbrough (1928-2002), while simultaneously appreciating the contributions of Nöldeke-Schwally, Goldziher (1850-1921) and Rudi Paret<sup>53</sup> (1901-1983),<sup>54</sup> although Rahman was also concerned about the too sharp separation between Meccan and Medinan verses.<sup>55</sup>

What does Abdullah's favouring of Rahman, Islamic reformist movement and contextual commentary mean? As a foundation of thought, Islamic reform provides general guidelines for the birth of an apologetic style<sup>56</sup> of Islamic studies that crystallizes in the application of contextual exegesis. The Islamic reform was a common social phenomenon in the Islamic world at the end of the second millennium. In Indonesia, we witnessed that around 2000 until approximately fifteen years later, there was a massive wave of translations of books by Arab modernist thinkers, through the role of book publishers in major cities such as Yogyakarta (including LKis,<sup>57</sup> Pustaka Pelajar,<sup>58</sup> Islamika,<sup>59</sup> dan eLSAQ press),<sup>60</sup> Bandung (Penerbit Pustaka)<sup>61</sup> and Jakarta (Serambi Ilmu Semesta).<sup>62</sup> In the same period, MTQ also received a festive welcome

53 On him, see: Mu'ammarr Zayn Qadafy, 'Wajah Studi Alquran Di Jerman Akhir Abad Ke-20: Terjemahan Alquran Rudi Paret Dan Beberapa Pemikirannya', Mutawatir, vol. 7, no. 1 (1 June 2017): 1-23, <https://doi.org/10.15642/mutawatir.2017.7.1.1-23>.

54 Patrick D. Gaffney, 'Review of Major Themes of the Qur'an by Fazlurrahman', The Journal of Religion 62, no. 1 (1982): 88-89.

55 Graham, 'Review of Major Themes of the Qur'an by Fazlurrahman', 446.

56 Daneshgar says this on what apologetic Islam looks like: "Islamic apologetics allows an author to censor a text, misrepresent it, and be selective in choosing various types of sources. Islamic apologetics is a specific method of studying Islam that is not and, from an insiders' perspective, should not be compatible with modern (Western) scholarship. In Islamic apologetics, a "relentlessly erudite researcher" is not to be an archaeologist of knowledge, aiming to "dig up [different] documents, raiding archives, rereading and demystifying texts"; instead, he is forced to trust, follow, study, and live with his past and tradition. Islamic apologetics both is and is not an indigenous approach toward teaching and studying the Qur'an in Muslim academic contexts, one which is tied in with reformism, nationalism, and sectarianism." Majid Daneshgar, *Studying the Qur'an in the Muslim Academy, AAR Reflection and Theory in the Study of Religion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 22.

57 Naşr Hāmid Abū Zaid, *Kritik Wacana Agama*, trans. Khoiron Nahdliyyin (Yogyakarta: LKis, 1994); Asghar Ali Engineer, *Pembebasan Perempuan*, trans. Agus Nuryatno, Cet. 1 (Yogyakarta: Lembaga Kajian Islam dan Sosial (LKIS), 2003).

58 Mohammed Arkoun, *Pemikiran Arab*, trans. Yudian Wahyudi Asmin (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1996); Mohammed Arkoun, *Islam Kontemporer: Menuju Dialog Antar Agama*, trans. Ruslani (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2001).

59 Muḥammad 'Abid al-Jābirī, *Kritik Kontemporer Atas Filsafat Arab-Islam*, trans. Moch Nur Ichwan (Yogyakarta: Islamika, 2003).

60 Muḥammad Shaḥrūr, *Metodologi Fiqih Islam Kontemporer*, trans. Sahiron Syamsuddin (Yogyakarta: eLSAQ Press, 2008); Muḥammad Shaḥrūr, *Prinsip Dan Dasar Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an Kontemporer*, trans. Sahiron Syamsuddin (Yogyakarta: eLSAQ Press, 2008).

61 Mohammed Arkoun, *Kajian Kontemporer Al-Qur'an*, trans. Hidayatullah (Bandung: Pustaka, 1998); Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, trans. Ahsin Muhammad (Bandung: Pustaka, 2003).

62 Khaled M. Abou El Fadl, *Atas Nama Tuhan: dari Fikih Otoriter ke Fikih Otoritatif*, trans. Cecep Lukman Yasin (Jakarta: Serambi Ilmu Semesta, 2004).

in the Islamic world with the translation of this book into Turkish (2012),<sup>63</sup> Arabic (2013),<sup>64</sup> Bosnian (2017),<sup>65</sup> Persian<sup>66</sup> and Indonesian (2018)<sup>67</sup>.

In our opinion, the proliferation of the thematic-contextual interpretation in Indonesian Islamic universities today<sup>68</sup> is an indirect impact of the contextual paradigm promoted by, among others, Abdullah. It goes without saying that once a particular research model dominates, it puts other kinds aside, being left behind and losing prestige. Not only has this mainstreaming of contextual thematic research, which focuses on the compatibility of the universal values of religious texts with the lives of modern people, decreased the appeal of historical tafsir studies, but it has also narrowed the opportunities for literary research on the Qur'an as it is considered too theocentric and has no real contribution to society. To be specific, thematic study here means a type of study that carries a certain theme, then compiles Qur'anic verses that are considered related to it, before being analysed either diachronically and synchronically.<sup>69</sup> Although it proves to be very effective in constructing a particular Qur'anic theology regarding the targeted issue, such thematic exercise to the Qur'an leads to vicious consequences, among which is its potential to divert researchers' attention from diving to the Qur'an's solitary literary features and its connection with materials of late antiquity, such as ancient semitic languages and cultures, the Jahilī hymns and biblical subtexts.

One example of underestimated but potential study on the Qur'an is what we referred to as the surah-based research of the Qur'an that emerges from a different starting point in compared to the overwhelming thematic-contextual studies (defined above). If the latter paradigm considers the Qur'an as a unit, making its verses refer to and explain each other, the former narrows the idea of unity to one or several Qur'anic

63 Fazlur Rahman, *Ana konularıyla Kur'an*, trans. Alparslan Açıkgenç, 12.baskı (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2012).

64 Fazlur Rahman, *al-Masā'il al-Kubrā fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, trans. Muḥammad A'iff (Beirut: Dār Jadāwil, 2013).

65 Fazlur Rahman, *Glavne Teme Kur'ana*, trans. Enes Karic (El-Kalem, 2017).

66 Fazlur Rahman, *Madhāmin Aṣlī Qur'ān*, trans. Fāṭimah 'Alāqah Bandī (Nashr Karkadan, 2018).

67 Fazlur Rahman, *Tema-Tema Pokok Al-Qur'an*, trans. Ervan Nurtawab (Bandung: Mizan, 2018).

68 According to Rohman's survey, the thematic-contextual exegesis to the Qur'an was the second most popular research type in Indonesian PhD research. Nur Rohman and Hamdi Putra Ahmad, 'New Trajectories of Qur'anic Studies in Indonesia: A Critical Dissertation Review', *Dinika* 7, no. 1 (2022): 40; Compare with: Fejrian Yazdajird Iwanebel, 'Genealogi Dan Tipologi Tafsir Maudhu'i Di Indonesia', in *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Di Nusantara* (Yogyakarta: AIAT dan Ladang Kata, 2020), 353–85; Mu'ammam Zayn Qadafy, 'Jurnal Nun Dan Matinya Kajian Tafsir Klasik: A Preliminary Research', *Studiatafsir.Com* (blog), 2 July 2021, <https://studiatafsir.com/2021/07/02/jurnal-nun-dan-matinya-kajian-tafsir-klasik-a-preliminary-survey/>.

69 See for instance: Lilik Umami Kaltsum and Ahmad Syaifuddin Amin, 'The Development of Qur'anic Thematic Exegesis in Indonesia: Historical Landscape and Shifts of Authority', *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 25, no. 2 (20 September 2024): 296–319.

surahs to reveal a deeper understanding on them that the latter cannot. Sinai's note on this point is interesting: A surah-centred perspective will not only reduce the body of text under study to a particular surah, but will in principle also pay comprehensive attention to the totality of linguistic, literary, intertextual and other features that a particular surah exhibits. Thus in this sense, a surah-centred approach does not only limit the scope of interpretation, but simultaneously expands it.<sup>70</sup>

The second major contrast between them lies in how the process of 'tafsir' works in each. As a modern trend, reading the Qur'an thematically means making it an undisputable source for the formulation of ideologies that correspond to modern humanitarian values. On the other hand, the surah-based study of the Qur'an attempts to divulge the Qur'anic meanings, regardless of their compatibility (*ṣalāhiyyatuhā*) with the current needs of the society.<sup>71</sup> The term *al-Qur'ān Ṣāliḥ li-kulli zaman wa makān*, which literally means that the Qur'ān is compatible for all time and places, is like a two-sided coin: on the one hand, it will enshrine the Qur'ān on the highest podium of the source of Islamic norms and teachings, a position that is believed of making the Qur'ān the gatekeeper for the rectification of human morals and civilization. On the other hand, this new paradigm will uproot tafsir from the foundation of Islamic scholarship that has catapulted its name, for the sake of "usefulness" and "compatibility" with contemporary needs. It is actually a form of coercion so that the Qur'an is adaptive and accommodating to the values of Western rationalism and modernism to prevent Muslims from falling behind the advances achieved by the West.<sup>72</sup>

From the bureaucratic perspective of IAT (stands for Ilmu al-Qur'an and Tafsir) study program, the uproar of *I-Con* and contextual interpretation is a constant answer to its obsession to produce a qualified exegete (in a beginner level) and social practitioner, two of its three graduate profiles, other than being a researcher. In the official document of the IAT program at UIN Sunan Kalijaga, graduates who are in the corridor of the first two profiles are indeed directed to become individuals who are able to explain and implement Islamic teachings in the Qur'an and Tafsir, a "noble" task that is not imposed on the third profile.<sup>73</sup> Some concerns have been

70 Nicolai Sinai, *Mendekati Al-Qur'an Surat Demi Surat: Beberapa Komentar Metodologis Dengan Perhatian Khusus Pada Surat al-Baqarah*, ed. Mu'ammarr Zayn Qadafy, trans. Nadhif Fathin Affatih et al. (Yogyakarta: studitafsir.com, 2024), 3.

71 See how this jargon is important to modern contextual thinkers, for instance: Syamsuddin, 'Metode Penafsiran Dengan Pendekatan Ma'nā-Cum-Maghzā', 15.

72 Johanna Pink, 'Striving for a New Exegesis of the Qur'ān', ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford University Press, 3 March 2014), 3, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199696703.013.013>.

73 Prodi IAT, 'Visi Dan Misi Prodi IAT', accessed 15 November 2023, <https://iat.uin-suka.ac.id/id/page/prodi/1253-Visi-dan-Misi-Prodi>.

raised about the existence of these two contradictory traits in an institution, which in turn affects the direction of learning, discourse, curriculum and research developed there, including research in the intellectual history of the Tafsir works.<sup>74</sup>

## How should one Conduct Studies on the Qur’anic Exegetical Tradition?

As aforementioned, we find the compatibility of the I-Con paradigm with the study of Qur’anic commentaries that are directed at constructing a certain type of theology. It is not surprising then, if the spirit of I-Con echoes in some reformist Qur’anic interpretation approaches, such as the idea of the Qur’an as a book of mercy.<sup>75</sup> Among the reformists (especially those affiliated with Muhammadiyah), there has been quite a drastic shift in the way they handle the classical exegetical works. Nurcholis Madjid’s jargon of *al-rujū‘ ilā al-Qur’ān and Sunnah* (back to the Qur’an and Sunnah),<sup>76</sup> which has been the mantra of Islamic reform for a long time, has been challenged by later thinkers. It is Sukidi Mulyadi who, since his return from Harvard a few years ago, has introduced a new slogan: *al-rujū‘ ilā al-Qur’ān wa al-tafsīr al-salafī* (back to the Qur’an and the salafī exegesis).<sup>77</sup> Further research needs to be done to explore the extent to which different readings of classical tafsir have evolved among this reformist Islamic movement.

We argue that in the hands of the right people, I-Con may help formulate a type of what Coppens called as a “historically informed normativity”.<sup>78</sup> Meanwhile, for descriptive-historical<sup>79</sup> studies of tafsir that aim to reveal intellectual history

74 See for instance: Fadhli Lukman, ‘Menjadi Sejarahwan Tafsir: Beberapa Asumsi Metodologis Penelitian Tafsir Indonesia’, in *Dialektika Keilmuan Ushuluddin: Epistemologi, Diskursus Dan Praksis*, ed. Mahbub Ghazali (Yogyakarta: Q-Media, Bina Mulia Press, MIAT UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2021), 67–69.

75 Hamim Ilyas, ‘Pengembangan Integrasi-Interkoneksi Dalam Ilmu-Ilmu Agama Islam: Al-Qur’an Kitab Rahmat Paradigma Tafsir Otentik’, in *Praksis Paradigma Integrasi-Interkoneksi Dan Transformasi Islamic Studies Di UIN Sunan Kalijaga* (Yogyakarta: Pasca Sarjana UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2014), 79–106.

76 On it, see: Yudian Wahyudi, ‘The Slogan “Back to the Qur’an and the Sunnah”: A Comparative Study of the Responses of Hasan Hanafi, Muhammad ‘Abid al-Jābirī and Nurcholish Madjid’ (Doctoral Thesis, Montreal, McGill University, 2002).

77 Muammar Zayn Qadafy, ‘Sukidi Keluar Dari Mulut Buaya, Masuk Mulut Harimau’, *Studitafsir.Com* (blog), 15 October 2021, <https://studitafsir.com/2021/10/15/sukidi-keluar-dari-mulut-buaya-masuk-mulut-harimau/>; Fadhli Lukman, ‘Dalam Tradisi, Sukidi Membuang Makna al-Quran’, *Studitafsir.Com* (blog), 14 October 2021, <https://studitafsir.com/2021/10/14/dalam-tradisi-sukidi-membuang-makna-al-quran/>.

78 See: Pieter Coppens, ‘Tafsir Studies and the Conundrum of Normativity’, *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 11, no. 1 (14 February 2022): 36–51, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22117954-bja10041>; Baca juga: Muammar Zayn Qadafy, ‘Melepas Studi Tafsir Dari Bayang-Bayang Studi Qur’an (Part 2): Studi Tafsir Sebagai “Titik Temu” Pendekatan Normatif Dan Obyektif’, *Studitafsir.Com* (blog), 2 July 2022, <https://studitafsir.com/2022/07/02/melepas-studi-tafsir-dari-bayang-bayang-studi-quran-part-2-studi-tafsir-sebagai-titik-temu-antara-pendekatan-normatif-dan-obyektif/>.

79 See the typology of tafsir studies that are theological-constructive and descriptive-historical in the

by positioning the exegetical books as nothing more than a “reader’s response” to the Qur’an, I-Con’s position appears to be vague and confusing. To elaborate on this point, we would like to present a latent phenomenon that has been growing in the research on the tafsir traditions at UIN Sunan Kalijaga, something we call as “academic echolalia”. The term echolalia refers to the repetition of words or sounds one hears. In children, echolalia is an important step in developing their linguistic sensitivity, but if it persists, echolalia may be a sign of autism.

Academic echolalia is a condition where an academic reads (or hears) new things (often in the form of foreign theories), perceives them as something cool, and then blatantly inserts them into their research report, without trying to figure out the core assumptions of that theory and dialogue with that core. The one and foremost example of this echolalia is when social theories are forced to be the main variable and attraction of a research draft. Michel Foucault (1926-1984) is one of its victims. His name is one of the many great thinkers mentioned in academic texts born in Islamic universities in Indonesia, especially those that carry “power relations” as a keyword. Our point of objection is not to the use of Foucault’s power relations theory as a thinking partner in reading the text or phenomenon being researched, but to the use of Foucault’s name and anything attributed to him (and anyone who shares his fate) as the key character of a written work, thus affecting the level of seriousness of a researcher towards the process of studying the actual research object. Often, the discussion of Foucault is devoted to a separate sub-chapter, accompanied by a boring biographical description of him.<sup>80</sup> Especially in research on classical tafsir, this is a type of “excessive engagement”, as it will divert the attention of researchers and readers from the tafsir work being studied.

How does social science theory work in the research on tafsir?. Although this is by no means a satisfactory answer, we can learn from the extensive research conducted by a renowned scholar of tafsir history, Walid Saleh as his *The Formation of*

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following presentation: Lien Iffah Naf’atu Fina, ‘Potret Riset Konstruktif-Teologis Dan Deskriptif Historis Dalam Kajian al-Qur’an Dan Tafsir’ (PKM, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, 11 November 2022), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18k8I0V8ECU>.

80 See for instances: Suci Wulandari, ‘Ideologi Kanca Wingking: Studi Relasi Kuasa Pengetahuan Dalam Tafsir al-Huda’, *Al-A’raf: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam Dan Filsafat* 15, no. 1 (2018): 101–26; Tinggal Purwanto, ‘Kesetaraan Gender Dan Relasi Kuasa Dalam Tafsir Al-Qur’an Tematik Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia’, *Palastren* 12, no. 1 (2019): 30–63; Istianah Istianah, ‘Melawan Hegemoni Kekuasaan Dengan Nuansa Sufistik: Telaah Tafsir Faidh Al-Rahman Karya Kiai Shaleh Darat’, *HERMENEUTIK* 12, no. 1 (18 October 2019): 76, <https://doi.org/10.21043/hermeneutik.v13i2.5929>; Heki Hartono, ‘Relasi Kuasa Dalam Penafsiran Jihad Tafsir Al-Qur’an Tematik Kementerian Agama RI’ (Master Thesis, Yogyakarta, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2019); Muhammad Khoiril Anwar, ‘Relasi Kuasa Dalam Terjemahan The Message of the Qur’an: Tafsir al-Qur’an Bagi Orang-Orang Yang Berpikir Karya Muhammad Asad’, *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Al-Qur’an Dan Tafsir* 7, no. 2 (2022): 88–97.

Classical Tafsir Tradition<sup>81</sup> can serve as a standard: First, there is no need for a separate discussion of a particular social humanities theory. Until Saleh tells his own story, we will never know whether Saleh did or did not read Foucault, and whether the French thinker influenced the way the Toronto scholar reads the history of tafsir, although how he does it is highly suggestive of a Foucauldian mindset. The similarity between what Saleh calls the “genealogical tradition of exegetical material”<sup>82</sup> and genealogical analysis in Foucault’s historiography<sup>83</sup> is undeniable. The point is, there is no need for Saleh to give excessive credit to Foucault, who doesn’t want either, and there is no need for Saleh to perpetually live (as a scholar) in the shadow of the theories he reads from others.

Second, the use of common sense for analytical purposes. Saleh, for example, suggests that his research stands in two areas: at the macro level, he juxtaposes al-Tha‘labī’s tafsir (1035/1036) with other related tafsir, while at the micro level, he looks in detail at the content of al-Tha‘labī’s tafsir.<sup>84</sup> No complicated reasoning are needed to explain why this macro-micro level of analysis is important, except that any given tafsir work must not be studied in isolation. We argue that in many cases, a researcher should just rely on his or her common sense to determine the research direction and analyse the findings, without being obsessed with adopting foreign theories in the process, for the sake of integrating and interconnecting the sciences. What we want to emphasize is that any kind of common sense in historical research could serve as an analytical blade to dissect the intellectual history of a particular commentary. Take, for example, the conference that Saleh organized together with Mohammed Gharaibeh in Berlin in mid-2023,<sup>85</sup> under the title “bridging the gap: texts, commentaries and new audiences”, that was held to see how the books produced by scholars continued to develop over time and continued to dialogue with each other to produce many works in the genre of *sharḥ*, *ḥāshiyah*,<sup>86</sup> and *mukhtaṣar*. This conference challenges the old idea that the era in which these genres of works

81 Walid A. Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition: The Qur’ān Commentary of al-Tha‘labī (d. 427/1035) by Walid A. Saleh, Texts and Studies on the Qur’ān, v. 1* (Boston: Brill, 2004).

82 Saleh, 14.

83 This theory states that a certain system of thought is an outcome of a deliberate historical turnaround by its actors. Gary Gutting, *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, UK ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

84 Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition*, 11–12.

85 Muammar Zayn Qadafy, ‘Commentaries and New Audience Sebagai Framework Kajian Sejarah Intelektual: Oleh-Oleh Dari Berlin (Part 1)’, *Studitafsir.Com* (blog), 28 June 2023, <https://studitafsir.com/2023/07/28/commentaries-and-new-audience-sebagai-framework-kajian-sejarah-intelektual-oleh-oleh-dari-berlin-part-1/>.

86 Tentang genre ini, baca: Walid A. Saleh, ‘The Gloss as Intellectual History: The Ḥāshiyahs on al-Kashshāf’, *Oriens by Brill* 41 (2013): 217–59.

were produced was the era of the decline of Islam, as it perpetuated the tradition of repetition and duplication from one work to another. In particular, we believe that the idea of bridging the gap between a work and the work that follows it (including the context of the audience in which the two works were created) is a fresh and replicable approach.

## Conclusion

Through this article, we do not aim to argue that a scholar of the Qur'an and Tafsir should refrain from reading other things outside his field of study. Rather, in order to avoid superficial dialog as in the case of "academic echolalia" above, social sciences such as anthropology and sociology need to be read properly and in sufficient portions, given the massive reading and disciplinary developments in them. Apart from that, this article has underlined how the I-Con initiated by Abdullah had actually a greater impact than what he and we could imagine. It not only became a slogan that accompanied the transformation of the Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic Institute into a State Islamic University, but managed to become a universal motto used by higher education institutions in Indonesia moving towards the same institutional reform. It is not an exaggeration to say that I-Con is a major breakthrough in shaping the type of Islamic studies developed in Indonesia.

Specifically in the study of the Qur'an, Abdullah and I-Con, through the mainstreaming of MTQ and the call not to overly discuss the heritage of classical tafsir, have sparked what is referred to as thematic-contextual tafsir, a model of engaging with the text that is expected to portray the face of Islam that is adaptive and compatible with contemporary needs. However, this very modern model of interaction has inevitable implication: the confinement of the imagination of the Qur'an researchers from studying it more freely with various orientations and methodologies. The example we mention here is the *sūrah*-based research of the Qur'an which seems to be marginalized and does not get the attention it deserves. Other models of Qur'anic studies also need to be considered more seriously and if necessary mainstreamed.

In terms of tafsir studies, the I-Con excitement have encouraged academics to read new things outside their usual object of study. We see that the dialogue between historical studies and social studies in the study of tafsir has not yet really embedded and has not produced an integrative style of research. We argue that the tafsir researcher should bear in mind that their historical kind of study is unique and solemn in itself, and that it has its own independent and complex way of operating if undertaken in a committed manner. Likewise, every specialist (expert in a particular



field) must be profound in his/her field, but in the same time open to other readings outside his/her field. Instead of pushing students and lecturers of the Quran and tafsir to master everything and be a polymath, I-Con should encourage them to just read with passion for many disciplines, without forgetting their own academic core, and be a philomath, someone who loves learning.

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## **Authors' Contribution**

I did this research by myself, from preparing the materials, writing the paper, reviewing, and revising.

## **Data availability statement**

All data underlying the results are available as part of the article and no additional source data are required.

## **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors affirm that there are no conflicts of interest that could potentially influence the research outcomes or compromise its integrity.

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