

## Mandailing Exegetes in Modern Indonesia: A Review of Sheikh Abdul Halim Hasan's and His Disciples' Thoughts on Banī Isrā'īl

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**Abstract:** This study aims to examine the Quranic exegesis of the Three 'Ulamā' or *Ulama Tiga Scrangkai*—Sheikh Abdul Halim Hasan, Sheikh Zainal Arifin Abbas, and Sheikh Abdurrahim Haitami—focusing specifically on verses related to the Banī Isrā'īl (Children of Israel), and to evaluate their intellectual legacy within Indonesia's socio-political context. The research employs a *tafsīr tahfīfī* approach with an *adabī ijtimā'ī* orientation, complemented by social-political hermeneutic theory, to explore how this exegesis engages with historical and social contexts. The author argues that despite using the *tahfīfī* method, the exegesis demonstrates a dynamic approach that integrates science, history, and social movements to challenge colonial hegemony and propose the liberation of the Muslim community. The findings reveal that this exegesis not only conveys textual meanings but also reflects profound social struggles, drawing upon Max Weber's theory of authority and Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony as analytical frameworks. The Quranic interpretations of the Three Ulama played a crucial role in advocating for independence and offering critical insights into the dominant ideologies of the time.

**Keywords:** scholars, exegesis, authority, hegemony, Banī Isrā'īl

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## Introduction

In the Indonesian context, particularly in North Sumatra (East Sumatra), an exegesis with an *adabī ijtīmāʿī* orientation is represented by *Tafsir Al-Qurʿanul Karim*, authored by the Three ‘*Ulamāʿ*’ or *Ulama Tiga Serangkai*: Sheikh Abdul Halim Hasan, Sheikh Zainal Arifin Abbas, and Sheikh Abdurrahim Haitami. These scholars, of Mandailing ethnicity, wrote their exegesis uniquely in the Indonesian language and Latin script. By the 1930s, alongside local languages and scripts, Indonesian and Latin scripts began to be widely adopted by Quranic exegetes in the Nusantara. Apart from works by Mahmud Yunus and A. Hassan, *Tafsir Al-Qurʿanul Karim* by the Three ‘*Ulamāʿ*’ also utilized the Indonesian language in its writing.<sup>1</sup> The content of this tafsir predominantly comprises excerpts from credible Arabic-language exegetical works, most notably *Tafsīr al-Manār* and *Tafsīr al-Jawāhir*. The authors employed the *taḥlīlī* method in interpreting the Quran, while addressing specific issues such as magic, usury, gambling, and intercession in dedicated discussions. These issues were generally relevant to societal concerns at the time of writing and widely debated within the community.<sup>2</sup>

The language used in the Three ‘*Ulamāʿ*’s tafsir is emotionally stirring. The interpretive style is consistent from the first to the sixth *juz*. However, from the seventh to the eighth *juz*, there is a marked difference in the presentation, particularly in explaining the meanings of specific terms (*mufradāt*), along with a significantly greater volume of content. Although this tafsir was not completed for all thirty *juz*, many researchers acknowledge its significance in the history of Quranic

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<sup>1</sup> Islah Gusmian, “Bahasa dan Aksara dalam Penulisan Tafsir Al-Qurʿan di Indonesia Era Awal Abad 20 M,” *Mutawâtir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadis* 5, no. 2 (Desember 2015): 231; Zaini Dahlan, *Ulama Tiga Serangkai: Sejarah, Kontribusi dan Tradisi Intelektual*, Laporan Penelitian, UIN Sumatera Utara, 2021, 58.

<sup>2</sup> Abdul Qadir Umar al-Hamidy, “Menelaah Metodologi Tafsir Syekh H. Abdul Halim Hasan, H. Zainal Arifin Abbas dan Abdurrahim Haitami,” *Al-Fikra: Jurnal Ilmiah Keislaman* 8, no. 1 (Januari-Juni 2009): 37. See also: Nor Syamimi Mohd, Haziyah Hussin, and Wan Nasyrudin Wan Abdullah, “Scientific Exegesis in Malay Qurʿanic Commentary,” *Asian Social Science* 10, no. 10 (2014): 236–42, <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v10n10p236>; Shahzadi Pakeeza and Ali Asghar Chishti, “Critical Study of Approaches To the Exegesis of the Holy Qurʿan,” *Pakistan Journal of Islamic Research* Vol 10, no. 4 (2012): 19–26, <http://www.bzu.edu.pk/PJIR/vol10/cng2/ShehzadiPakeezaNew24-05-13v10.pdf>.

exegesis in Indonesia. It is often studied alongside the works of other prominent Indonesian exegetes such as Nawawi al-Bantani, Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, and M. Quraish Shihab.<sup>3</sup> Some researchers have examined various aspects of the works of the Three ‘*Ulamā*’.<sup>4</sup>

This study focuses on the tafsir written by the Three ‘*Ulamā*’ or *Ulama Tiga Serangkai*—Sheikh Abdul Halim Hasan, Sheikh Zainal Arifin Abbas, and Sheikh Abdurrahim Haitami—specifically analyzing their intellectual legacy in interpreting Quranic verses related to the Children of Israel. Using the *tahfīfī* method with an *adabī ijtīmā’ī* orientation and a socio-political hermeneutic framework, this research explores how the tafsir not only elucidates Quranic texts but also reflects efforts for social change through a more critical understanding of historical and social contexts. The author argues that despite employing a structured *tahfīfī* method, the tafsir of the Three ‘*Ulamā*’ introduces a dynamic approach that integrates science, history, and social movements, significantly contributing to the struggle for independence and the liberation of Muslims in Indonesia while challenging existing hegemonic narratives. To deepen this understanding, Max Weber’s theory of authority and

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<sup>3</sup> See: Rithon Igisani, “Kajian Tafsir Mufassir di Indonesia,” *Jurnal Potret: Jurnal Penelitian dan Pemikiran Islam* 1, no. 1 (Januari-Juni 2018): 13; Islah Gusmian, “Bahasa dan Aksara dalam Penulisan Tafsir Al-Qur’an di Indonesia Era Awal Abad 20 M,” *Mutawâtir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadis* 5, no. 2 (Desember 2015): 231; Masrul Anam, “Sejarah Tafsir Indonesia dalam Perspektif History of Idea,” *Al-I’jaz* 2, no. 1 (Juni 2020), 47.

<sup>4</sup> Nadzrah Ahmad, “‘Ulama’ Tiga Serangkai’ and Their Contribution towards Reviving Islamic Education in the Early Post-Colonial Indonesia (Sumbangan Ulama’ Tiga Serangkai Dalam Menghidupkan Semula Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia Pada Awal Pasca-Kolonial),” *Journal of Islam in Asia (E-ISSN 2289-8077)* 18, no. 2 (2021): 122–43, <https://doi.org/10.31436/jia.v18i2.1055>; Zaini Dahlan, “The Intellectual Tradition of Mandailing Ulama in East Sumatra: Zainal Arifin Abbas, 1912-1979,” *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 4, no. 1 (2020): 23, <https://doi.org/10.30821/jcims.v4i1.7025>; Muhammad Reza Fadil and Suparwany Suparwany, “Ulama Tiga Serangkai’s Tafsir Al-Qur’ānul Karim: Source, Method and Profiles of the Interpreters,” *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 6, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.30821/jcims.v6i2.12644>; M. Jamil and Ja’far Ja’far, “Pemimpin Perempuan Dan Non-Muslim Perspektif Ulama Tiga Serangkai,” *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 6, no. 1 (2018): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2018.8.1.31-54>.

Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony are employed as analytical tools.<sup>5</sup> Weber's theory elucidates how these scholars established strong intellectual and spiritual authority, while Gramsci's theory analyzes how the tafsir served as an instrument to undermine colonial hegemony and ideological domination.

## Methods

The author observes that, in mapping the exegetical works from classical to contemporary periods, no standard framework exists as a definitive guideline for tafsir methodologies. Terminologies are often used interchangeably, with little clarity regarding the distinction between "method" and "approach." Moreover, the categorization of terms into "method" or "approach" lacks precision. Due to the diverse opinions of exegetes within this field, the author adopts the framework presented in *Sejarah & Ulumul Qur'an* by M. Quraish Shihab et al.<sup>6</sup> This book outlines four main tafsir methods along with their derivatives:<sup>7</sup> The *taḥlīlī* method<sup>8</sup> (*Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr*,<sup>9</sup> *Tafsīr bi al-Ra'y*,<sup>10</sup> *Fiqhī* exegesis, *sufistic exegesis (ishārī)*,<sup>11</sup> philosophical exegesis, scientific exegesis

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<sup>5</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, trans. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971),

<sup>6</sup> M. Quraish Shihab, *et. al, Sejarah & Ulum Al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 2008), 172-194. Although this book is considered a primary reference in this field, the author still has critical notes regarding the mapping pattern of the tafsir books presented in this work. The book also lacks consistency in determining whether Tafsir Bilma'tsūr should be referred to as a method of tafsir or a style of tafsir.

<sup>7</sup> In this book, the term "method" is used, but in the author's opinion, the more accurate term would be "style," as it is not possible to have a method within a method. Alternatively, the correct term might be "sub-method".

<sup>8</sup> It is also known as *tafsīr tazjī'īy*.

<sup>9</sup> It is also known as *tafsīr bi al-riwāyah* dan *tafsīr bi al-manqūl*.

<sup>10</sup> It is also known as *tafsīr ijtihādīy* or *tafsīr bi al-ijtihād*. There are also, especially among the more extreme groups, those who refer to this tafsir as *tafsīr bi al-hawā*.

<sup>11</sup> It is also known as *tafsīr al-fāḍīy*.

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dan *adabī ijtimā'ī* exegesis); the *ijmālī* method; the *muqārin* method (comparison of Qur'anic verses with other Qur'anic verses, comparison of Qur'anic verses with Hadith, and comparison of interpretations by different exegetes); and the *maudū'ī* method (analysis of a specific surah and examination of a specific theme).<sup>12</sup>

The author assumes that while the Three '*Ulamā'*'s or *Ulama Tiga Serangkai* was written using the *tahfīfī* method and reflects an *adabī ijtimā'ī* approach, its content could potentially be adapted to other methods and approaches mentioned above. This assumption is based on the observation that, even though Qur'anic scholars attribute specific methods or approaches to exegetical works, no tafsir adheres exclusively and rigidly to these categorizations. For instance, a tafsir following the *tahfīfī* method often contains thematic discussions, and vice versa. Similarly, tafsir employing the *muqārin* method inevitably includes elements of the *ijmālī* method, and vice versa.<sup>13</sup>

Based on this analysis, the author intends to reinterpret the Three '*Ulamā'*'s without strictly adhering to the methodological frameworks established by tafsir scholars. Due to the extensive scope of this tafsir, covering *juz* one to *juz* eight, the author will focus the discussion exclusively on verses related to Banī Isrā'īl. This narrowed scope will prevent the discussion from becoming overly broad. By concentrating solely on these verses, the author aims to derive key insights and significant points from this tafsir.

## Results and Discussion

### Biographical Sketch of the Three '*Ulamā'*'

The authors of this tafsir consist of three individuals: Sheikh Abdul Halim Hasan, Sheikh Zainal Arifin Abbas, and Sheikh Abdurrahim Haitami. These three *mufasssir* (Quranic exegetes) hail from the Mandailing ethnic group. Abdul Halim Hasan carries the family name Daulay, while Zainal Arifin Abbas and Abdurrahim Haitami carry the family name Hasibuan. The following biographical sketch will not comprehensively discuss the intellectual journeys of these three tafsir writers. Instead,

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<sup>12</sup> Shihab, *ct. al, Sejarah*, 172-194.

<sup>13</sup> To substantiate this claim, compare Shihab, *Sejarah*, page 192 with page 180 regarding the case of *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*.

it will briefly present them to highlight the historical awareness and epistemological precision of the tafsir of the Three *'Ulamā'*.

Sheikh Abdul Halim Hasan was born in Binjai, Deli Serdang, North Sumatra, on May 15, 1901.<sup>14</sup> In addition to writing *Tafsir al-Quranul Karim* by Three *'Ulamā'*, he also authored *Tafsīr Aḥkām*. Regarding his educational background, there is a divergence of opinion among scholars as to whether he studied in the Middle East. However, it is certain that, although not an alumnus of the Middle East, he did study in Saudi Arabia for a year under an Indonesian scholar named Sheikh Mukhtār al-Ṭarid.<sup>15</sup> He passed away at the age of 68 years and 6 months, on Friday, November 14, 1969.<sup>16</sup>

Zainal Arifin Abbas was born in Kampung Lalang, Deli Serdang, North Sumatra, on March 12, 1912.<sup>17</sup> His father, Muhammad Abbas Hasibuan, and his mother, Rajiah Lubis,<sup>18</sup> were both from the same region. He faced significant financial struggles during his education due to his father's dismissal from his permanent job, which led him to spend two years without schooling. Eventually, with the assistance of his grandmother, he was able to return to school in Binjai. His intellectual inclination toward Islam was not obtained from formal education, as he previously studied at the Anglo-Chinese School, a non-religious

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<sup>14</sup> Anam, *Sejarah*, 47.

<sup>15</sup> See: Muhammad Alpan et al., "Peranan Syaikh H. Abdul Halim Hasan Dalam Pengembangan Pendidikan Islam di Kota Binjai pada tahun 1927-1969," *Edu Riligia* 2, no. 4 (Oktober-Desember 2018): 565–566.

<sup>16</sup> Anam, *Sejarah*, 47. See also: Nadzrah Ahmad, Ahmad Nabil Amir, and Sohirin M Solihin, "Abdul Halim Hasan Dan Manhajnya Dalam Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Karīm," *Sultan Alauddin Sullaiman Shah* 5, no. 2018 (2018): 309–27, <https://jsass.uis.edu.my/index.php/jsass/article/view/70>; Adzrah Ahmad, "Abdul Halim Hasan and His Methodological Approach in Tafser Al- Quran Al-Karim," *Journal of Islam in Asia* 14, no. 2 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.31436/jia.v14i2.619>.

<sup>17</sup> M. Yakub, "Sejarah Sosial Intelektual Islam Zainal Arifin Abbas (1912-1979 M) 'Perspektif Sosio-Kultural,'" *Dakwah: Jurnal Kajian Dakwah dan Kemasyarakatan* 22, no. 1 (2018): 90; M. Yusuf Habibi, Safria Andy, and Uqbatul Khoir Rambe, "Analysis of the Concept of Al-Hubb in the Thought of Zainal Arifin Abbas (1911-1977)," *Ishlah: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin, Adab Dan Dakwah* 5, no. 2 (2023): 235–48, <https://doi.org/10.32939/ishlah.v5i2.284>.

<sup>18</sup> Yakub, "Sejarah Sosial Intelektual," 90.

<sup>19</sup> Yakub, "Sejarah Sosial Intelektual," 90-91.

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institution. Initially, he struggled to follow religious lessons at the Madrasah. However, through his persistence, he succeeded in becoming a Muslim intellectual.<sup>19</sup> Due to his expertise, he became one of the writers of the tafsir of the Three ‘*Ulamā*’ or *Ulama Tiga Serangkai*. He passed away in 1979.<sup>20</sup>

Abdurrahim Haitami was born in Binjai, Deli Serdang, North Sumatra, in 1910. The names of his parents are not clearly known, although it is confirmed that his father carried the family name Hasibuan. He was a student of Abdul Halim Hasan and a colleague of Zainal Arifin Abbas. During his childhood, he lived in Binjai. Based on his keen religious inclination, it is believed that he was a diligent student from a young age, coming from a family that valued education. He started attending the Sekolah Rakyat in 1917. Furthermore, he also studied informally with religious scholars in Binjai. He also received instruction from Sheikh Hasan Ma’sum. His religious education was obtained from the Arabiyyah School, led by one of his colleagues in writing tafsir, Abdul Halim Hasan. In addition to his religious studies, he expanded his knowledge by learning secular sciences to complement his tafsir expertise. He passed away in Langsa, Aceh, on July 13, 1948.<sup>21</sup>

In summary, it can be said that the three tafsir authors were reformers, fighters, intellectuals, and lovers of knowledge. Their struggle was not only in the form of writing and speech but also physically, in their efforts to resist colonial oppression. In the introduction to the

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<sup>20</sup> Yakub, “Sejarah Sosial Intelektual,” 90-91.

<sup>21</sup> See also, Zaini Dahlan, *Ulama Tiga Serangkai: Sejarah, Kontribusi dan Tradisi Intelektual*, 71-72. For the biography of Sheikh Hasan Ma’sum, see: Maisyaroh Maisyaroh and Muhammad Iqbal, “Malay Ulama in Deli Land: The Life, Manuscripts, and Intellectual Networks of Shaykh Hasan Ma’sum (d. 1936),” *Nahrasiyah: Journal of Aceh and Malay Archipelago Heritage* 1, no. 1 (2023): 39–68, <https://doi.org/10.47766/nahrasiyah.v1i1.2038>; Radinal Mukhtar Harahap, Aidilfithrah Aidilfithrah, and Ihsan Sa’dudin, “Ulama and Authority in the Deli Kingdom: A Brief History of Shaykh Hasan Ma’sum,” *Journal of Indonesian Ulama* 1, no. 1 (2023): 51–62, <https://doi.org/10.30821/jiu.v1i1.2>; Maisyaroh Maisyaroh, “Academic Ethics in Modern Indonesia: Shaykh Hasan Ma’sum’s Thought on Students Ethics in His Tazkir Al-Muridin Suluk Thariqah Al-Muhtadin,” *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 47, no. 1 (2023): 18–35, <http://dx.doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v47i1.1082>; Ja’far Ja’far, “Tarekat Dan Gerakan Sosial Keagamaan Shaykh Hasan Maksum,” *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 5, no. 2 (2015): 269–293, <https://jurnaluf.uinsby.ac.id/index.php/teosofi/article/view/107>.

tafsir of the Three *'Ulamā'*, they clearly stated that the motivation behind their tafsir writing was to resist the West. From this assertion, it can be concluded that they lived in a political situation that was unfavourable to the Muslim community. In their long biographies, the detailed accounts of their struggles against colonizers are explained. This struggle against colonization is one of the reasons why the tafsir was not completed up to the thirtieth *juz*.<sup>22</sup>

From Max Weber's perspective, authority exists in three ideal forms: traditional authority, charismatic authority, and rational-legal authority. The Three *'Ulamā'* above can be viewed as representations of charismatic authority, where their influence stems from intellectual capacity, spirituality, and personal struggle against colonial powers. Abdul Halim Hasan, Zainal Arifin Abbas, and Abdurrahim Haitami were respected not only for their expertise in Quranic exegesis but also for their prominent roles as scholars who defended Islam under colonial oppression. Their personalities, shaped by their educational backgrounds, experiences, and dedication to society, provided a strong legitimacy to the tafsir they produced as a tool to resist Western hegemony. In this context, their charismatic authority became a form of social and spiritual capital that was widely accepted by the Muslim community around them.

On the other hand, their works also display elements of rational-legal authority within the context of tafsir. The emphasis on systematic methodology, deep textual analysis, and historical relevance to the struggles of the Muslim community demonstrates the use of structured approaches that were legitimized by Islamic scholarship. The tafsir of the Three *'Ulamā'* can be seen as evidence of how intellectual authority based on expertise (expert authority) was combined with traditional values to provide solutions to political and social challenges. Thus, through a Weberian analysis, these three scholars not only exercised authority in the spiritual and moral dimensions but also in their intellectual capacities, which provided a rational foundation for the Muslim resistance against colonialism.

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<sup>22</sup> See also, Zaini Dahlan, "Syekh Abdul Halim Hasan, 1901-1969: Akar Tradisi Intelektual di Sumatera Timur Awal Abad XX," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 2, no. 1 (Januari-Juni 2018).

## The Ulama Tiga Serangkai and Their Method of Interpretation

### a. *Tahliīlī* Method: The *Ma'thur* Approach

When interpreting Quranic verses related to the Banī Isrā'īl (Children of Israel), this exegesis links them to other verses. This interpretative approach is known in Quranic studies as *bi al-ma'thūr*, meaning “based on authentic sources.” Such interpretation is crucial, as the verses of the Quran interenterprise one another; *al-Qur'ān yufassiru ba'duhū ba'dhan* (The Quran explains one part with another).

For instance, when interpreting Sūrah al-Fātihah, particularly the sixth verse concerning the Banī Isrā'īl, the *Ulama Tiga Serangkai* or Three '*Ulamā'* connect the interpretation of the terms *al-magḍūb* (those who have incurred God's wrath) and *al-ḍāllīn* (those who have gone astray) with Sūrah al-Mā'idah/5: 60, al-Mā'idah/5: 77, and al-Isrā'/17: 15.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, when interpreting Sūrah al-Baqarah/2: 40-43, they relate it to Sūrah al-Nisā'/4: 157.<sup>24</sup> In the interpretation of Sūrah al-Baqarah/2: 44-46, they connect the verses with Sūrah al-Baqarah/2: 8,<sup>25</sup> Sūrah Yūsuf/12: 51,<sup>26</sup> al-Taubah/9: 35,<sup>27</sup> al-Shūrā/41: 13,<sup>28</sup> and al-Ma'ārij/70: 19-22.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, when interpreting Sūrah al-Baqarah/2: 47-48, which concerns the Banī Isrā'īl, the Three '*Ulamā'* refer to Sūrah Āli 'Imrān/3: 110,<sup>30</sup> al-Aḥzāb/33: 46,<sup>31</sup> al-Zumar/39: 69,<sup>32</sup> al-Zalzalah/99:5-6,<sup>33</sup> al-Isrā'/17: 14,<sup>34</sup> Maryam/19: 59, al-A'rāf/7: 168, al-Baqarah/2: 218),<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> A. Halim Hasan, H. Zainal Arifin Abbas, and Abdurrahman Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 6th ed. (Medan: Firma Islamiyah Medan, 1973), 1: 51–51.

<sup>24</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 138.

<sup>25</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 150.

<sup>26</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 152.

<sup>27</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 155.

<sup>28</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 155.

<sup>29</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 156.

<sup>30</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 159.

<sup>31</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 162.

<sup>32</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 163.

<sup>33</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 166, 171.

<sup>34</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 166.

<sup>35</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 169.

al-Isrā’/17: 72,<sup>36</sup> Yūsuf/12: 105,<sup>37</sup> al-Baqarah/2: 218,<sup>38</sup> and al-Muddaththir/74: 48-49, among others.<sup>39</sup>

In interpreting Sūrah al-Baqarah/2: 49, which narrates the salvation of the Banī Isrā’īl, the Three ‘*Ulamā*’ relate it to Sūrah al-Baqarah/2: 40<sup>40</sup> and Āli ‘Imrān/3: 103.<sup>41</sup> When interpreting Sūrah al-Baqarah/2: 50, which recounts the parting of the sea by Prophet Mūsa and the drowning of Pharaoh by Allah, the Three ‘*Ulamā*’ refer to Sūrah Ṭahā/20: 77<sup>42</sup> and al—Shu‘ārā’/26: 60-63.<sup>43</sup> When interpreting Sūrah al-Mā’idah/5: 12, the Three ‘*Ulamā*’ link it to Surah al-Taubah/9: 29,<sup>44</sup> as well as Sūrah al-Mā’idah/5: 14 and al-Taubah/9: 109.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, when interpreting Sūrah al-Baqarah/2: 246-247, which narrates the appointment of a new king for the Banī Isrā’īl, the Three ‘*Ulamā*’ draw connections to Sūrah al-Anfāl/8: 13 and al-Anbiyā’/21: 105.<sup>46</sup>

### b. *Taḥlīlī* Method: ‘*Ilmiy Approach*

The author disagrees with those who limit the interpretation of the Qur’an in the scientific domain solely to the natural sciences. Such an interpretation, in this context, can be expanded to encompass other branches of knowledge, such as history, which is part of the humanities.<sup>47</sup> The Three ‘*Ulamā*’ or *Ulama Tiga Serangkai* have extensively discussed the history of the Banī Isrā’īl (Children of Israel). There are two key

<sup>36</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 171.

<sup>37</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 172.

<sup>38</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 173.

<sup>39</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 177.

<sup>40</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 178.

<sup>41</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 159.

<sup>42</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 184.

<sup>43</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 185.

<sup>44</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, Vol. 6, 347.

<sup>45</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 353.

<sup>46</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, Vol. 2, 476-482.

<sup>47</sup> For more details, refer to “Undang-Undang Nomor 12 tahun 2012 tentang Pendidikan Tinggi,” <https://diktis.kemenag.go.id/prodi/dokumen/UU-Nomor-12-Tahun-2012-ttg-Pendidikan-Tinggi.pdf>

references in the field of history that these scholars utilize to underscore the importance of linking history with the interpretation of the Qur'an. These texts are *al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyyah* by Ibn Hishām and *Tārīkh al-Umām wa al-Muluk* by al-Ṭabarī.<sup>48</sup> When interpreting Sūrah al-Fātiḥah, the Three 'Ulamā' emphasize the importance of studying history. The most crucial aspect to be drawn from history is the lesson it offers. To support this argument, the scholars quote Sūrah al-Ra'd/13: 7.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, due to the significance of historical knowledge, the Three 'Ulamā', in interpreting the word *Fir'aun* in Sūrah al-Baqarah/ 2: 49, also link it with the historical contexts of Rome, where their rulers were called Emperors; Persia, where the king was known as Kisra; and Ethiopia, where the monarch was called Negus.<sup>50</sup>

In examining the authenticity of the Torah, the Three 'Ulamā' of the Triad also rely on historical data. According to them, the Torah written by Prophet Mūsa, and the covenants he made with the Banī Isrā'īl, have not been found to this day. This historical fact is also acknowledged by historians among the Banī Isrā'īl.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, because this interpretation understands the urgency of history in Qur'anic exegesis, the Three 'Ulamā' interpret the phrase *wa annī faḍḍaltukum 'ala 'ālamīn* in a way that differs from the common understanding. The public tends to believe that the Banī Isrā'īl are a privileged nation throughout time. However, for the Three Scholars of the Triad, this privilege or distinction was only present in certain historical periods. They interpret the verse *wa annī faḍḍaltukum 'ala 'ālamīn* accordingly,<sup>52</sup> because historical facts show that the Jews living during the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) were no longer a favoured nation by God. On the contrary, they were a people in turmoil. This historical fact is further supported by the Qur'anic verse which states that the *ummah* of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is *khaira ummah* (the best nation).<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, Vol. 1, 5.

<sup>49</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 53.

<sup>50</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 178.

<sup>51</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, vol. 6, 344-345.

<sup>52</sup> See: Q.S. al-Baqarah/2: 47 and 122. See also, Q.S. al-Jāthiyah/45: 16, and Q.S. al-Isrā'/17: 70.

<sup>53</sup> Q.S. Āli 'Imrān/3: 110.

Subsequently, this argument is further solidified by the Three ‘*Ulamā*’ through the use of *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*<sup>54</sup> and *Tafsīr al-Manār*.<sup>55</sup> Such a counter-logic, which challenges common public perceptions, would not emerge from the thoughts of the Three ‘*Ulamā*’ without their comprehensive knowledge of the history of the Banī Isrā’īl.

The interpretation of the Three ‘*Ulamā*’ in Sūrah al-Baqarah/2: 246-247 does not neglect the importance of history. At length, they elaborate on the history of the Banī Isrā’īl, who were in a state of confusion due to their lack of leadership. As a result, they were often at war with a people known as the *Amaliqah*. This group, according to the Three ‘*Ulamā*’, inhabited the coastal regions between Egypt and Palestine and was led by a king named Jalut (Goliath). The Children of Israel, who had already been abandoned by Prophets Musa, Harun, Ilyas, and Ilyasa’, found themselves in a state of confusion as they frequently faced attacks from the *Amaliqah*. During their distress, they sought the counsel of an elder and a prophet, named Samuel. Initially, the Banī Isrā’īl hoped that the son of Prophet Samuel would lead them against the *Amaliqah*. However, due to the son’s corruption and greed, they asked Prophet Samuel to pray for God’s guidance in appointing a new king. Eventually, Prophet Samuel conveyed that God had chosen Talut (Saul) as their new king. The Banī Isrā’īl initially rejected this decision, as they believed their king should be from the lineage of their ancestor Yahuda, whereas Talut was from the lineage of Bunyamin.<sup>56</sup> The Three ‘*Ulamā*’ accurately narrate this historical account, further demonstrating their reliance on authoritative sources in their understanding of the history of the Banī Isrā’īl.

In their approach to the history in the Qur’an, the Three ‘*Ulamā*’ emphasize the importance of drawing lessons (‘*ibrah*’). Readers of the historical narratives in the Qur’an should not focus solely on the data and factual events. When the Qur’an presents a historical fact in a non-systematic order,<sup>57</sup> as some Orientalists suggest, the Three ‘*Ulamā*’

<sup>54</sup> See: Muḥammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ul Bayān Fi Ta’wīlil Qur’ān*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2023), 303.

<sup>55</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsīr Al-Quranul Karim*, vol. 1, 159.

<sup>56</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsīr Al-Quranul Karim*, vol. 2, 476-482.

<sup>57</sup> Concerning the entry of the Children of Israel into the *Tih* desert and their command to enter the promised land, or when Moses struck the rock, causing twelve springs to flow.

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respond that the most essential aspect of history is the lesson it imparts. For them, providing an overly detailed historical account would be tedious and tiresome. The most effective way to present history is to highlight only the essential points that capture attention. This approach, according to the Three ‘*Ulamā*’, is in line with the Qur’an’s purpose as a book of guidance and not merely a historical chronicle or narrative. The method of presenting history in this manner has been widely adopted by European historians.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, the discussion on the importance of history—and more importantly, drawing lessons from it—becomes clear. Without understanding the significance of history from the perspective of the Three ‘*Ulamā*’, one might assume that they overly expand the interpretation of Qur’anic verses related to the history of the Banī Isrā’īl.

### c. *Tahliīlī* Method: *Ādābī Ijtimā’iy* Approach

This finding can be observed from the references listed by the author on the second page of this commentary, in the first volume, under the heading “Guidelines for this Commentary.” There, twenty-eight primary references to this commentary are presented, and number fourteen mentions the *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Hakīm*, a work by Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Rāshid Riḍā. Although this commentary has sparked controversies due to its reformist ideas,<sup>59</sup> the Triumvirate of Scholars has used it as a reference since 1930 CE. This includes their interpretation of verses related to the Banī Isrā’īl, where this commentary has also been cited by the Three ‘*Ulamā*’ or *Ulama Tiga Serangkai*.<sup>60</sup>

One of the innovative features of the commentary, introduced by Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Rāshid Riḍā, is the social-activist literary approach. According to scholars, the commentary by the Triumvirate of Scholars fits within this approach. The author observes an additional value in the social-activist literary approach employed by the Three ‘*Ulamā*’. This added value is the element of activism within it. In the textual interpretation of *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, traces of this approach

<sup>58</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, vol. 1, 195-196.

<sup>59</sup> See the in-depth study on the controversy surrounding this tafsir book in M. Quraish Shihab, *Rasionalitas al-Qur’an: Studi Kritis atas Tafsir al-Manar* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2006).

<sup>60</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, vol. 1, 179.

proposed by the two scholars can also be found. The passage is verbatim as follows: “Then, God directed His scripture to the Jews, commonly referred to as the Banī Isrā’īl. They were commanded to ponder the Qur’ān, just as they were commanded to fulfill the commandments that were already promised in their Torah.”<sup>61</sup>

Further, the Three ‘*Ulamā*’ wrote, and the author quotes verbatim:

As for the Banī Isrā’īl, they were known as a people who had long advanced in civilization, and they were the first nation to receive a scripture from God. Therefore, if they were to contemplate the Qur’ān, this movement would become a powerful one, drawing everyone’s attention to reflect on the pure Qur’ān. This is why God directly addressed them with His scripture. This is not the case with the Christians, who came later than the Jews. Thus, had the Jews contemplated what God had commanded, it would have been inevitable for all people, both Christians and disbelievers, to have no excuses for rejecting belief in the Qur’ān, as Sheikh Muḥammad ‘Abduh stated in his commentary.<sup>62</sup>

The quotation above demonstrates a social-activist tone, as expressed in the writers’ intent to make the Qur’ān a tool for movement towards the resurgence of Islam. This social-activist spirit is not surprising in this commentary, as from the outset, the interpretations of the verses in this work were aimed at advancing the intellectual and activist movements of the Muslim community in response to the attacks from the West, the Jews, and the Christians.<sup>63</sup>

This activist spirit emerged because, at the time, Islamic books that carried themes of social movement and national revival were banned from entering Indonesia. A deeper examination reveals that Qur’anic commentary books were the primary victims of this ban. Only commentaries that focused on linguistic issues were allowed, and even the Qur’an itself was prohibited from being read in public forums and meetings.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 133.

<sup>62</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 133.

<sup>63</sup> See the introduction of the eighth and ninth editions of this tafsir, written in 1955 and 1960.

<sup>64</sup> See the introduction of the eighth edition of this tafsir, written in 1955 and 1960.

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One such movement-oriented commentary is *Tafsīr fī Dīlāl al-Qurʾān* by Sayyid Quṭb, first published in 1951.<sup>65</sup> This style of commentary, initially conceived by Sayyid Quṭb, closely mirrors the approach of the Three ‘*Ulamā*’, which does not solely engage in debating the etymology of Qurʾānic vocabulary.<sup>66</sup> This style of interpretation is both significant and apt, considering that the Three ‘*Ulamā*’ wrote their commentary while actively fighting to expel the colonizers.

From the above discussion, it is evident how the spirit conveyed by the authors of the Three ‘*Ulamā*’ commentary emphasizes that if the Banī Isrāʾīl, from the Jewish side, had embraced Islam, it would not have been as difficult to invite others into Islam. This is because they were the first people to receive a heavenly scripture, and many societies believed they were a favored people by God.<sup>67</sup>

#### d. *Tahfīlī* Method: *Munāsabah* Consistency

The science of correlation (‘*ilm al-munāsabah*’) is crucial for interpreting the Qurʾān. Without this knowledge, an interpreter (*mufasssīr*) may easily misinterpret the verses of the Qurʾān.<sup>68</sup> The Three ‘*Ulamā*’ consistently applies correlation in interpreting verses, particularly those related to the Banī Isrāʾīl. This has implications for religious arguments that were previously thought to be directed solely toward Muslims. Upon tracing the context, it becomes clear that these verses were originally addressed to the Banī Isrāʾīl. A prominent example of this is found in Sūrah al-Baqarah/2: 43, which is often cited by scholars of Uṣūl al-Fiqh as evidence for the obligatory five daily prayers for all Muslims.

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<sup>65</sup> Muhsin Mahfudz, “Fi Zhilal Al-Quran: Tafsir Gerakan Sayyid Qutb,” *Tafsire* 1, no. 1 (2013): 122. See also: Mhd. Syahnan, “A Study of Sayyid Qumb’s Quran Exegesis in Earlier and Later Editions of His Fī ‘ilāl al-Qurʾān with Specific Reference to Selected Themes” (McGill University, 1997), <https://escholarship.mcgill.ca/concern/theses/bg257g921>.

<sup>66</sup> Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Dīlāl al-Qurʾān*, 34th ed. (Kairo: Dār al-Syurūq, 2004).

<sup>67</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsīr Al-Quranul Karim*, vol. 1, 133.

<sup>68</sup> See further details in M. Quraish Shihab, *Kaidah Tafsir: Syarat, Ketentuan dan Aturan yang Patut Anda Ketahui Dalam Memahami Ayat-Ayat al-Qurʾān, Dilengkapi Penjelasan Kritis Tentang Hermeneutika dalam Penafsiran Al-Qurʾān* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2013).

In this regard, the Three ‘*Ulamā*’ assert that in Sūrah al-Baqarah/ 2: 43, God is calling upon the Banī Isrā’īl to establish prayer, after they have first been instructed to cleanse themselves from corrupt beliefs.<sup>69</sup> The command to perform prayer is accompanied by a command for charity (zakat).<sup>70</sup> Moreover, they are specifically instructed at the end of the verse to bow (*ruku*), a practice that is emphasized to ensure the Jews align with the prayer rituals of Muslims, as the Jewish tradition does not include *ruku*‘ in their prayers.<sup>71</sup>

From these citations, the Three ‘*Ulamā*’ consistently use correlation (*munāsabah*) in their interpretations. This method is essential for preserving the original meaning of the verses, even though some theories suggest that the general message of a verse, rather than the specific reason for its revelation, should be the focus. Nevertheless, maintaining consistency in analysing contextual relationships between the verses is vital to safeguard the authenticity of the Qur’anic message. This approach is employed in the Three ‘*Ulamā*’ to ensure that the meanings of the verses are not distorted and do not deviate from their original context.

The author observes that such cases are common among tafsir scholars. A relevant example of this is al-Qurṭubi’s interpretation of Sūrah al-Baqarah/2: 134. The context of the verse concerns the Banī Isrā’īl’s defiance against God’s commands, but al-Qurṭubi interprets the terms *kasabat* and *kasabtum* to legitimize and challenge various intellectual schools of thought within Islam. In essence, al-Qurṭubi shifts the focus of the verse from its narrative context to a discussion on the different theological debates within Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā’ah, Jabariyyah, Qadariyyah, and Mu’tazilah, regarding human capacity or inability to choose actions.<sup>72</sup>

Regarding the consistency of the Three ‘*Ulamā*’ in applying contextualization in their interpretations, the following verbatim quote illustrates their approach:

From verse 40 to verse 43, and continuing through verse 45, God still speaks about the Banī Isrā’īl. These verses are interconnected

<sup>69</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, vol. 1, 146.

<sup>70</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 147.

<sup>71</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 147.

<sup>72</sup> Muḥammad bin Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi’ Li Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 2021), 94.

within a single purpose. After first reminding the Banī Isrāʾīl about the blessings bestowed upon them, and commanding them to fulfill their covenant, God instructs them to perform the prayer in its true sense and to pay their zakat.<sup>73</sup>

Similarly, when interpreting Sūrah al-Mā'idah/5: 11-12, which recounts God's covenant with the Banī Isrāʾīl, the Three 'Ulamā' connect the two verses that initially appear unrelated. While the eleventh verse addresses the believers and polytheists, and the twelfth verse is directed to the Banī Isrāʾīl, the Three 'Ulamā' establish a clear link between the two verses. They use the phrase *this verse relates to the verses that preceded it*,<sup>74</sup> which further demonstrates their consistency in applying correlation (*munāsabah*).

Another example is their interpretation of Sūrah al-Baqarah/2: 246-247, which at first glance seems disconnected from the preceding verses. The Three 'Ulamā', however, connect it with a verse much later, Sūrah al-Baqarah/2: 243. The language used to relate these verses is: *this verse is indeed closely connected to the verses that preceded it*.<sup>75</sup>

It is important to note that the method employed by the Three 'Ulamā' in connecting the verses of the Qur'an is a remarkable and praiseworthy approach. Without adhering to the correlation of each verse in the Qur'an, an interpreter may misunderstand verses commanding Muslims to fight the polytheists, potentially misinterpreting them.<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, without consistency in applying correlation, an interpreter may mistakenly interpret verses as metaphorical when their meaning is in fact literal.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, vol. 1, 149-150.

<sup>74</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, vol. 6, 355 and 340.

<sup>75</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, vol. 2, 477.

<sup>76</sup> See: Q.S. al-Baqarah/2: 191 and 193, Q.S. al-Taubah/9: 29, 36, and 123.

<sup>77</sup> Typically, such interpretations are carried out by Sufi interpreters with an Ishari or Fa'idhi style. As an example, one can refer to 'Abd al-Karīm bin Hawāzin, *Tafsir al-Qusyāirī al-Musamma Lathā'if al-Isyārat* (Beirut: Dārul Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2014). See also: 'Abd al-Raḥmān bin al-Ḥusain, *Tafsir al-Silmi Wahuwa Haqāiq al-Tafsir* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2016).

### e. The *Muqārin* Method

In the *Tafsir al-Quranul Karim* by Three ‘Ulamā’ or *Ulama Tiga Serangkai*, differing opinions between *mufasssirs* (Qur’anic interpreters) and their counterparts can be found. This mode of interpretation leads to the emergence of the *muqārin* (comparative) method of exegesis. The *muqārin* method does not merely involve comparing verses of the Qur’an with other Qur’anic verses, or comparing Qur’anic verses with the Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad, but also includes comparing the interpretations of one *mufasssir*, or multiple *mufasssirs*, with those of other *mufasssirs*.<sup>78</sup>

This method of interpretation is evident in the *Tafsir al-Quranul Karim* by *Three ‘Ulamā’*. For example, in the interpretation of Q.S. al-Mā’idah/5: 13, which addresses the status of Prophet Muhammad’s forgiveness of the Jews, the books of *Three ‘Ulamā’* presents a view that differs from other *mufasssirs* concerning whether this verse was abrogated by Q.S. al-Taubah/9: 29.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, when interpreting Q.S. al-Baqarah/2: 48, which contains the term *shafa’at* (intercession) in relation to the Banī Isrā’īl, the book of *Three ‘Ulamā’* presents a wide array of varying opinions.<sup>80</sup>

The *Three ‘Ulamā’* also compares the opinions of the *mufasssir* al-Suyūṭi with other *mufasssirs*, although the names of the latter are not specified. One such case involves the stone struck by Prophet Musa, from which twelve springs gushed forth. Al-Suyūṭi’s interpretation suggests that the stone was the one that carried Prophet Musa’s cloth. However, other *mufasssirs* reject this view, as the story of Prophet Musa’s cloth is not mentioned in the Qur’an.<sup>81</sup>

In a similar vein, regarding the raising of a mountain over the heads of the Banī Isrā’īl,<sup>82</sup> *Three ‘Ulamā’* compares the views of *mufasssirs* such as al-Suyūṭi, Abū Sū‘ud, al-Baiḍāwī, and Ṭanṭāwī with that of Muḥammad ‘Abduh. The first four *mufasssirs* argue that the mountain was physically lifted and placed over the heads of the Banī Isrā’īl.

<sup>78</sup> Shihab, *Sejarah*,

<sup>79</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, vol. 6, 347-348.

<sup>80</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, vol. 1, 157-178.

<sup>81</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Quranul Karim*, 195.

<sup>82</sup> See: Q.S. al-Baqarah/2: 63, and 93, Q.S. al-Nisā’/4: 154, and Q.S. al-A’rāf/7: 171.

However, *Three ‘Ulamā’* presents a different interpretation, aligning with Muḥammad ‘Abduh, who disagrees with all four of these *mufasssirs*. According to ‘Abduh, the mountain was not raised above the heads of the Banī Isrā’īl. He argues that the term *rafa‘nā* in the verse<sup>83</sup> could be interpreted as “making something high,” akin to the term *marfū‘ah* found in Q.S. al-Gāshiyah/88: 13, which means “high.”<sup>84</sup>

Muḥammad ‘Abduh suggests that the Banī Isrā’īl may have seen the mountain shaking due to a powerful earthquake, leading them to believe it might fall upon their heads. In this situation, they perceived the mountain as if it were hanging above them. While the term *nataqa* in Q.S. al-A‘rāf/7: 171 is used to describe the raising of the mountain, ‘Abduh interprets *nataqa* in this context to mean “earthquake” or “shaking,” as the term was commonly used in this way in the Arabic language.<sup>85</sup>

After presenting these differing opinions, *Three ‘Ulamā’* refrains from choosing one view over another or attempting to weaken or strengthen any particular argument. They leave it to the readers to decide between the different opinions. The author argues that *Three ‘Ulamā’* deliberately avoids adopting a particular interpretative approach, as they do not wish to become entangled in unproductive debates. Their goal is to motivate, enlighten, and intellectually empower the Muslim community, especially during the period in which this exegesis was written.

#### f. The *Mauḍu‘ī* Method: Three ‘Ulamā’ on Banī Isrā’īl

The exegesis of the Three ‘Ulamā’ certainly does not omit discussions on verses related to Banī Isrā’īl. In fact, at the beginning of their exegesis, particularly when interpreting Sūrah al-Baqarah/2: 40, the Three ‘Ulamā’ provided a comprehensive analysis of Banī Isrā’īl. This extensive discussion is elaborated by referencing various classical tafsir works such as *Tafsīr al-Baiḍāwī*,<sup>86</sup> *Tafsīr Faḥ al-Qādir*,<sup>87</sup> *Tafsīr al-Manār*,<sup>88</sup> *Tafsīr al-Jawāhir*,<sup>89</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Q.S. al-Baqarah/2: 63.

<sup>84</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsīr Al-Quranul Karim*, vol. 1, 207.

<sup>85</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsīr Al-Quranul Karim*, 207.

<sup>86</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsīr Al-Quranul Karim*, 133.

<sup>87</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsīr Al-Quranul Karim*, 133.

<sup>88</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsīr Al-Quranul Karim*, 134.

<sup>89</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsīr Al-Quranul Karim*, 134.

*Tafsīr Mafātih al-Gayb*,<sup>90</sup> The Gospel of Barnabas,<sup>91</sup> and *Tafsīr al-Futūḥāt al-Ilāhiyyah*.<sup>92</sup>

The term “Banī Isrāʿīl” is mentioned forty times in the Quran, “Banu Isrāʿīl once, and “Isrāʿīl” twice.<sup>93</sup> Banī Isrāʿīl refers to the children of Isrāʿīl, who is Yaʿqūb, the son of Ishāq, the son of Ibrāhīm.<sup>94</sup> According to the Three ‘*Ulamāʿ*’, the meaning of “Isrāʿīl” is interpreted as “Chosen of God” or “Servant of God.” This interpretation is based on the Hebrew meaning of “Isra” as servant and “il” as God.<sup>95</sup> The Banī Isrāʿīl comprises twelve individuals, often referred to in the Quran with the phrase *ithnata ashrata*<sup>96</sup> or *ithnaʿayi ashrata*.<sup>97</sup> The names of these individuals are specifically mentioned in various tafsir texts.<sup>98</sup> While the Quran mentions the wrongdoings of some among them, it also acknowledges that not all of them were wicked.<sup>99</sup>

Certainly, not every reference to Banī Isrāʿīl, Banū Isrāʿīl, or Isrāʿīl in the Quran falls within the scope of the exegesis of the Three ‘*Ulamāʿ*’, as their tafsir only covers the Quran from Sūrah al-Fātiḥah/1: 1 to Sūrah al-Aʿrāf/7: 87, or up to the eighth juz of the thirty juz of the Quran.<sup>100</sup> However, this does not diminish the substance of the information about Banī Isrāʿīl in their tafsir. Despite the Sūrah Banī Isrāʿīl being located in Sūrah 17, the most detailed Quranic information about Banī Isrāʿīl is found in the early chapters, especially in Sūrah al-

<sup>90</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsīr Al-Quranul Karim*, 138.

<sup>91</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsīr Al-Quranul Karim*, 148.

<sup>92</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsīr Al-Quranul Karim*, 134.

<sup>93</sup> Muḥammad Fuʿād ‘Abd al-Bāqī’, *Al-Muʿjam al-Mufahras li Alfāz al-Qurʿān al-Karīm* (Kairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2007), 40-41.

<sup>94</sup> M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsīr al-Mishbāh: Pesan, Kesan dan Keserasian al-Qurʿān*, vol. 1 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2017), 208.

<sup>95</sup> Hasan, Abbas, and Haitami, *Tafsīr Al-Quranul Karim*, vol. 1, 133. They express this opinion by quoting the views of al-Shaukānī and al-Baidāwī. In the original text, they state that it is Hebrew or Jewish language.

<sup>96</sup> Q.S. al-Baqarah/2: 60.

<sup>97</sup> Q.S. al-Aʿrāf/7: 160.

<sup>98</sup> Muḥammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Taʿwīl al-Qurʿān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2023).

<sup>99</sup> Q.S. Āli ‘Imrān/3: 113.

<sup>100</sup> Hasan, *Tafsīr*, vol. 8, 1062.

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Baqarah, particularly in the first juz of the Quran. Moreover, the central theme of Sūrah al-Baqarah concerns the story of Banī Isrāʿīl.<sup>101</sup>

Additionally, the term *al-magḍūb*, found in the early verses of the Quran, has been interpreted by exegesis scholars as referring to Banī Isrāʿīl (the Jews).<sup>102</sup> Indirectly, by beginning with the first pages of their tafsir, the discussion about Banī Isrāʿīl is already encountered.

In the context of Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, the interpretation of Quranic verses related to the Banī Isrāʿīl by the Three 'Ulamā' can be understood as an effort to reclaim the interpretive space controlled by dominant authorities in society. Gramsci discusses hegemony as the process by which a dominant group imposes its worldview as the accepted norm, often through control over discourse and knowledge. In this regard, the Three 'Ulamā' used tafsir (Quranic exegesis) to challenge mainstream narratives that portray the Banī Isrāʿīl as a people always granted special privileges. They interpreted these privileges as being applicable only during specific historical segments, rather than as a universal depiction of the people. In this way, the tafsir of the Three 'Ulamā' not only explained the meaning of the verses but also revealed and challenged the hegemonic construction that had long been accepted, which created the understanding of the Banī Isrāʿīl as a nation perpetually blessed.

Furthermore, Gramsci also emphasized the importance of organic intellectuals in uncovering and creating alternative knowledge to destabilize established hegemony. The Three 'Ulamā' can be viewed as organic intellectuals in this context, as they employed tafsir methods that integrated historical and contemporary knowledge to transform the way society viewed the verses related to the Banī Isrāʿīl. They did not rely solely on a textual interpretation of the verses but also incorporated historical and socio-political dimensions into their tafsir, making it relevant to the context of their time. This reflects their efforts to challenge and dismantle existing hegemony, while creating space for a more critical

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<sup>101</sup> See further details in Shihab, *Tafsir*, vol. 1, 99-100.

<sup>102</sup> Muḥammad bin Ya'qūb al-Fairūz Abādī, *Tanwīr al-Miqbās Min Tafsīr Ibnī 'Abbās* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2022), 3; Abū al-Fidā 'Imād al-Dīn Ismā'īl bin 'Umar, *Tafsīr Ibnī Kathīr al-Musammā Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Adhīm*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2021), 32.

and contextual understanding of religious texts, in line with Gramsci's perspective on the role of intellectuals in shaking dominant hegemony.

## Conclusion

The Three '*Ulamā*' or *Ulama Tiga Serangkai* discussed, Sheikh Abdul Halim Hasan, Sheikh Zainal Arifin Abbas, and Sheikh Abdurrahim Haitami, were highly influential figures in the intellectual history of Islam in Indonesia, particularly in North Sumatra. They hailed from the Mandailing ethnic group and possessed diverse educational backgrounds, yet all were known as scholars who persistently fought against colonialism through both written works and physical actions. In addition to their contributions as thinkers in the field of tafsir (Quranic exegesis), they played crucial roles in defending the Muslim community amid the pressures of Western colonialism. These '*ulamā*' demonstrated charismatic authority through their intellectual abilities, spirituality, and struggle, as well as rational-legal authority through their systematic tafsir methodologies. The tafsir works they authored became vital tools in resisting Western hegemony, reflecting a blend of intellectual authority and traditional values in the struggle for independence and the liberation of Muslims from oppression.

The tafsir of the Three '*Ulamā*' incorporates various methodological approaches in interpreting Quranic verses, particularly those related to the Banī Isrā'īl (Children of Israel). They employed the *tahfīfī* method, with an *ma'thūr* approach that links Quranic verses to one another, as well as an '*ilmī*' approach that enriches the tafsir with historical knowledge to strengthen understanding of the context and historical development of the Banī Isrā'īl. Additionally, this tafsir also adopts an *adabī ijtīmā'ī* approach, emphasizing the importance of social movements and Islamic thought as efforts for revival and transformation. Through their consistent use of '*ilm al-munāsabah*' (the science of correlations Quranic verses), the tafsir of the Three '*Ulamā*' maintained the interconnection between Quranic verses and highlighted the significance of lessons derived from history as well as the socio-political context of the time.

Their tafsir not only focused on the literal and linguistic aspects but also encouraged a broader understanding of the relevance of the Quran for the Muslim movement and society in general. Moreover, the tafsir of the Three '*Ulamā*' on the verses related to the Banī Isrā'īl can be understood

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as an attempt to challenge the hegemonic narratives accepted by society, limiting the view of the Banī Isrāʾīl's privilege to specific historical segments. In doing so, they functioned as organic intellectuals who created alternative knowledge by incorporating historical and socio-political dimensions into their tafsir, playing a key role in destabilizing dominant hegemony and offering a more critical understanding of religious texts.

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