

**CONTEXTUAL QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION IN
INDONESIA: A HERMENEUTICAL STUDY OF DAWAM
RAHARDJO'S *ENSIKLOPEDI AL-QUR'AN***

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Abstract: This study explores the contextualization of Dawam Rahardjo's *Ensiklopedi Al-Qur'an*, aiming to examine his paradigm of contextual interpretation and analyze how it is reflected in one of the entries within his work. Employing a qualitative method based on literature review, this research adopts Abdullah Saeed's theory of contextual interpretation as the hermeneutical framework for engaging with the Qur'an. The study presents two main findings. *First*, Dawam Rahardjo's interpretive paradigm is demonstrably contextual. This is evident in his emphasis on the importance of understanding the Qur'an within the context of its revelation. He further argues that the values of the Qur'an must not remain confined to their historical context but should be internalized within contemporary Indonesian society as a foundation for both social and intellectual engagement. *Second*, Dawam's contextual approach is reflected in his interpretation of the prohibition of *riba* (usury). In its revelatory context, the addition of value in lending was condemned because it typically involved oppressive consumer debt, particularly burdening low-income individuals. By contrast, Dawam argues that modern bank interest does not fall under the category of *riba*, since it involves productive loans and serves as a payment for the services rendered by financial institutions, which are legally regulated. Another example of Dawam's contextual methodology is his interpretation of the term *ummah* in QS. Ali Imrān (3): 104. He understands *ummah* as referring to the concept of a state, linking it to both the historical development of the Madinah Charter and to modern notions of the social contract.

Keywords: Dawam Rahardjo; Contextual Interpretation; Ensiklopedi Al-Qur'an

Introduction

The history of Islamic civilization is deeply intertwined with the tradition of Qur'anic interpretation. From the time of revelation until the present, interpretations of the Qur'an have continuously evolved. During the period of revelation, interpretation was not yet systematically documented; it consisted of the Companion's understanding of the Qur'an, which was guided by the Prophet Muhammad, whose authority stemmed from divine revelation (Basid & Jazila, 2023; Saeed, 1999). These early understandings were only compiled by the third generation of Muslims, such as Mujāhid and Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. Their interpretative tradition which relies on transmitted reports became known as *tafsir bi al-ma'thūr*. Up until the Umayyad period, this type of tafsir remained the primary mode of interpretation. A significant shift occurred during the Abbasid era, when scholars began to incorporate personal reasoning alongside transmitted knowledge from the Salaf generation. This marked the rise of *tafsir bi al-ra'y*, which laid an epistemological foundation

for rational engagement with the Qur'an. As rationality gained influence in exegetical discourse, interpretation began to engage with language, philosophy, jurisprudence, and mysticism. However, interpretations from the medieval period were often shaped by ideological biases (Al-Žahabī, 1986).

In the modern era, Qur'anic interpretation has been characterized by a spirit of reform, seeking to render the Qur'an relevant to contemporary challenges and to societal transformation (Albayrak, 2022; Hidayatullah, 2024). Three major trends emerged in modern tafsir. *First*, interpretations that connect scientific discoveries to Qur'anic verses in order to highlight the Qur'an's miraculous nature. *Second*, interpretations that accommodate Western civilizational values, attempting to bridge the gap between Islamic and Western worldviews. This approach is exemplified by works such as *Tafsir al-Manār* by Rashid Riḍā. *Third*, interpretations that emphasize the supremacy of Qur'anic values while rejecting all non-revelatory systems, often branding them as manifestations of *ṭāghūt* or human subjugation. This perspective is exemplified in Sayyid Quṭb's *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* (Al-Fansiyan, 1997).

In light of these trends, this study focuses on interpretive approaches that engage constructively with contemporary realities. Rather than rejecting the complexities of modern society, this approach seeks to allow Qur'anic values to shape social life. The underlying principle is that divine revelation is not in conflict with lived reality. In other words, the Qur'an remains relevant across time and space, not confined to the era of the Prophet Muhammad or to the Arab world (Syahrūr, 2016). This framework of interpretation is commonly referred to as contextual interpretation or contextualization of the Qur'an.

Studies on Qur'anic contextualization have gained significant scholarly attention. Generally, such studies revolve around either specific Qur'anic terms or the methodology of contextual interpretation. In the global context, this interpretive movement is often rooted in modern and contextual approaches. Abdul Mustaqim refers to this development as reformative interpretation, grounded in critical reasoning. This movement stems from critiques of conventional tafsir, which is perceived as increasingly irrelevant to current realities. Forcing classical interpretations onto modern contexts may undermine the Qur'an's function as *hudā li al-nās* (guidance for humanity). Notable proponents of this contextual approach include Fazlur Rahman, with his theory of double-movement hermeneutics, and Muḥammad Shaḥrūr, with his *ḥudūd* hermeneutics (Mustaqim, 2007). In the Indonesian context, contextual studies have explored both terminological analysis and methodological frameworks. For example, Sri Mulyati's research titled *The Meaning of Jihād: Textual and Contextual Interpretation* examines several Qur'anic verses, such as QS. al-Ma'idah: 35, al-Hajj: 78, al-Anfal: 72, and al-Fath: 17. Her study concludes that the Qur'anic concept of *jihād* should not be narrowly confined to armed struggle but rather encompasses inner struggle, the pursuit of justice, and the upholding of God's name in the face of oppression and immorality (Mulyati, 2019).

In terms of methodology, studies in this area often examine modern Muslim scholars's approaches to Qur'anic interpretation, commonly referred to as *Qur'anic Hermeneutics*. One example is Aan Najib's work *Contextual Qur'an Interpretation: The Study on the Concept of "Hierarchy of Values"* Abdullah Saeed. Najib argues that Saeed's hermeneutical

theory extends Fazlur Rahman's double movement, particularly through the development of a value-based hierarchy that plays a central role in formulating legal and ethical interpretations of the Qur'an (Najib, 2016).

Despite growing interest in contextual approaches, few studies have addressed contextualization through tafsir texts as the material object. To fill this gap, this research examines the contextual interpretation of the Qur'an as presented in an Indonesian exegetical work titled *Ensiklopedi Al-Qur'an: Tafsir Sosial Berdasarkan Konsep-Konsep Kunci* by Dawam Rahardjo. This research is significant not only because studies on contextualization through exegetical texts are rare, but also because little attention has been given to Indonesian scholar's thematic tafsir approaches. Most research remains focused on *tafsir tahlili* by major figures such as Hamka and Quraish Shihab.

A study closely related to this topic is Faris Maulana Akbar's work titled *Tafsir Tematik Sosial: Studi atas Ensiklopedi al-Qur'an dan Paradigma al-Qur'an Karya M. Dawam Rahardjo*. Akbar's study finds that the *Ensiklopedi Al-Qur'an* (henceforth EQ) uses social reality as the starting point for interpretation, employing a thematic approach based on key social concepts. As such, the EQ can be categorized as a work of contextual interpretation. Akbar employs Teun A. van Dijk's discourse analysis and Wilhelm Dilthey's hermeneutic framework to examine the text (Akbar, 2021). In contrast, the present study applies Abdullah Saeed's hermeneutical theory of contextual interpretation. Furthermore, while Akbar focuses primarily on classifying Dawam Rahardjo's interpretations as contextual, his study does not present specific examples or detailed analysis. This research, on the other hand, focuses on the process of contextualization in Dawam Rahardjo's interpretation and provides concrete examples as evidence. The research aims to (1) explore how Dawam Rahardjo engages Qur'anic verses in dialogue with contemporary Indonesian social realities, and (2) analyze specific examples from the EQ using Abdullah Saeed's contextual interpretation framework. The research adopts a qualitative method with a library-based content analysis of the EQ text.

The Intellectual Biography of Dawam Rahardjo

Muhammad Dawam Rahardjo was born into a devout Muslim family in the village of Buluwarti, Surakarta, on April 20, 1942. His parents, Muhammad Zuhdi Rahardjo and Mutmainnah, came from a religious background. His father hailed from the Tempur Sari Klaten area, the site of the founding of the Jamseseren Islamic Boarding School by KH. Zamakhsyari (Syafirin, 2024). Immersed in a religious environment from an early age, Dawam received his initial Islamic education at home and memorized parts of *Juz 'Amma* under the guidance of his aunt (Janah & Haerudin, 2021). According to his own account, Dawam was nurtured with a deep love for the Qur'an. His father, Zuhdi Rahardjo, was known for his profound understanding of the Qur'anic message. Dawam once recalled a moment near his father's death when guests came to visit. His father asked them to recite particular verses and surahs. One cleric, at Zuhdi's request, recited QS. Al-Nisā', and upon reaching verse 9, Zuhdi began to cry. The cleric then consoled him, saying, "Do not cry. You have fulfilled your responsibilities well. May your children live prosperously under your guidance." The verse in question emphasizes the responsibility of those who fear leaving behind vulnerable offspring, commanding them to speak the truth and act with

piety. After the recitation, the cleric addressed Dawam directly, saying, “Keng Roko pancen piantun ingkang alim,” meaning, “Your father is truly a pious man” (Rahardjo, 2002).

Dawam began his formal education at Bustanul Athfal Muhammadiyah Kindergarten in Kauman, near the Great Mosque of Solo. He continued to Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah Muhammadiyah but later transferred to Loji Wetan Elementary School. In the afternoons, Dawam attended Madrasah Diniyah Al-Islamiyah, where he studied Arabic, *fiqh*, *tafsir*, and *hadith*, and learned to recite the Qur’an under KH. Ali Darokah, who later became a member of the Surakarta Ulama Council. Due to his academic performance, Dawam was admitted to Junior High School in Solo. Before beginning secondary school, however, his father sent him to the Krapyak Islamic Boarding School to study the Qur’an for one month, where he briefly studied alongside Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur). He then continued his studies at SMA CV DIN Manahan (now SMA Negeri 5 Surakarta). Because high school started at noon, he was forced to leave the Diniyah program (Ali-Fauzi et al., 2012).

Before entering university, Dawam participated in the American Field Service program, completing part of his high school education in Boise, Idaho, USA. He then enrolled in the Faculty of Economics at Gadjah Mada University (UGM) in Yogyakarta (Dafit, 2017). During his university years, Dawam joined the Islamic Students Association (Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam, HMI), where he became acquainted with political discourse, although he never held an official position. Instead, he and colleagues such as Djohan Effendi and Ahmad Wahib became known as ideologues, contributing significantly to cadre training sessions in rural areas. Dawam also began writing regularly for newspapers and magazines, including *Mercu Suar* Yogyakarta. Though self-taught in many respects, Dawam acknowledged the intellectual influence of figures such as Sudjoko Prasdjo, Sularso, and Bintoro Thokroamidjojo (Ali-Fauzi et al., 2012).

Together with Ahmad Wahib and Djohan Effendi, Dawam joined a core discussion group in Yogyakarta known as the Limited Group Discussion Circle, led by Mukti Ali. From 1967 to 1971, this group held weekly discussions on Islamic reform and national issues in the courtyard of IAIN Yogyakarta. Notable participants included Syu’bah Asa, Syamsuddin Mahyuddin, Djauhari Muhsin, and Kuntowijoyo. The group also engaged with prominent intellectuals such as Deliar Noer, Nono Anwar Makarim, Rendra, Prof. Sutrisno Hadi, Prof. Lafran Pane, Niels Mulder, and James Peacock (Ali, 2012). These interactions drew Dawam into the orbit of progressive Islamic thought. Greg Barton classified several members of this intellectual circle, such as Ahmad Wahib, Djohan Effendi, Nurcholish Madjid, and Abdurrahman Wahid, as early proponents of Indonesia’s Liberal Islam movement rooted in the Neo-Modernist paradigm inspired by Fazlur Rahman (Hakim & Omar, 2012).

After graduating from UGM in 1969, Dawam briefly worked at the Bank of America (BoA), but the high salary did not compensate for the lack of intellectual freedom he experienced there. He soon transitioned to a research career, joining the Institute for Economic and Social Research, Education and Information (Lembaga Penelitian, Pendidikan, Penerangan Ekonomi dan Sosial, LP3ES), where he eventually became director (Ali-Fauzi et al., 2012). Dawam played a key role in founding several non-governmental organizations, including LSIS (Lembaga Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial), LKIS (Lembaga

Kebijakan Islam “Samanhudi”), LSP (Lembaga Studi Pembangunan), PPA (Pusat Pembangunan Agribisnis), and the Paramadina Waqf Foundation (Yayasan Wakaf Paramadina).

In the academic sphere, Dawam served as Director of the Graduate Program at the University of Muhammadiyah Malang, Rector of the Islamic University 45 Bekasi, editor-in-chief of *Ulumul Qur'an* journal, and chair of the Board of Directors at the Institute for the Study of Religion and Philosophy. One of his most notable positions was his service as Deputy Chair II of the Expert Council of the Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals Association (ICMI) from 1991 to 1995, and as ICMI chairman in 1995 (Mukhlis & Mahmudah, 2021). Dawam's editorial work at *Jurnal Ulumul Qur'an* (JUQ) left a lasting impression on his intellectual journey. The journal became a platform for Islamic thought during the New Order era, introducing the Indonesian readership to reformist Qur'anic thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and Mohammed Arkoun (MH, 2024). Dawam's background in economics and activism in social institutions gave him unique insight into the socio-economic dimensions of Qur'anic discourse.

Dawam Rahardjo passed away on Thursday, May 30, 2018, in Jakarta at the age of 76. He was buried the following day at the Kalibata Heroes Cemetery (Akbar, 2021). His passing was mourned by many, including Yudi Latief, Head of the Agency for Pancasila Ideology Education, who described Dawam as “a person who played a significant role in building bridges between Islam and Indonesian nationalism, and in promoting the inclusive values of Pancasila” (Jurnaliston, 2018).

Theory of Contextual Interpretation

Contextual interpretation combines two interrelated concepts. The first is *tafsir*, understood as an epistemological framework through which human beings, despite their limitations, attempt to understand the Qur'an in accordance with the divine intent of Allah as the ultimate source of revelation (Al-Ṣābūnī, 2003). The second is *context*, which refers to the surrounding elements including textual, historical, social, cultural, and biographical that clarify and give meaning to a passage. Context includes not only the internal structure of the text but also the socio-historical circumstances of its revelation, as well as the intended audience (Baldick, 2008). When combined, contextual interpretation refers to an exegetical effort that goes beyond literal readings by considering the historical reality surrounding a given verse. This interpretive approach encourages active engagement with the text, requiring the interpreter to draw on their socio-cultural consciousness and engage the Qur'an meaningfully within contemporary realities. As Abdul Mustaqim asserts, contextual interpretation stems from the belief that although the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic and within the socio-cultural framework of 7th-century Arabia, its message is universal and transcends spatial and temporal boundaries, commonly expressed in the phrase *ṣāliḥ li-kulli ẓamān wa-makān* (Mustaqim, 2010).

At the operational level, this approach was first systematically articulated by Fazlur Rahman through his concept of the “double movement” hermeneutic. This framework involves two key interpretive movements. The first is a backward movement to the context of revelation, wherein the interpreter reconstructs the socio-cultural, economic, and political background of the Qur'anic discourse, especially in Meccan and Medinan settings,

to identify the Qur'an's response to specific issues. Through this, general moral and ethical principles of the Qur'an's moral vision can be extracted. The second movement is forward-facing: it grounds those extracted values within the context of contemporary society. This phase requires an equally rigorous analysis of current social realities in order to implement Qur'anic guidance in a relevant and transformative manner (Rahman, 1982).

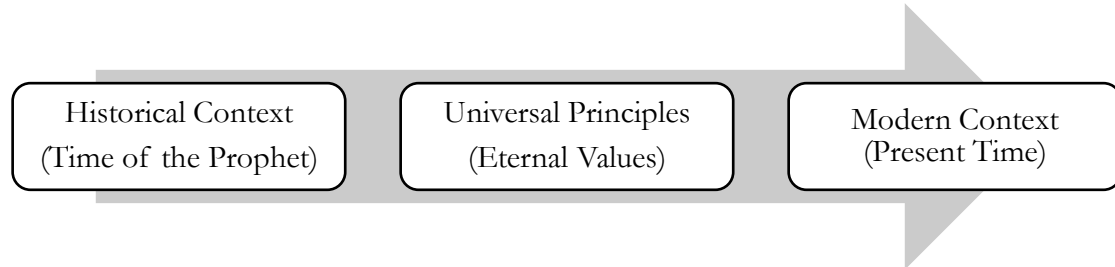


Figure 1: Operational framework of Fazlur Rahman's double movement method

Abdullah Saeed further developed Rahman's hermeneutics into a more detailed and structured methodology in his book *Interpreting the Qur'an*. Saeed outlines four stages in the process of textual interpretation (Saeed, 2006):

1. Engaging with the text and its world. This initial stage involves approaching the Qur'anic text within the broader historical and socio-political environment of its revelation, including the cultural and institutional frameworks of Arabia.
2. Textual analysis. At this stage, the interpreter focuses on the internal structure of the text. This includes linguistic analysis, grammar, syntactic features, lexical meanings, and intertextual relationships within the verse and across the Qur'an. The interpreter also classifies the nature of the text (legal, theological, historical, or ethical) and examines parallel or synonymous passages.
3. Reconstructing the historical context. This phase entails identifying the socio-cultural knowledge, norms, legal traditions, and beliefs of the Qur'an's first recipients. The goal is to determine the nature and scope of the message, whether it is universal or particular to its historical context. It also involves examining how early Muslims interpreted and applied the verse during the Prophet's time.
4. Connecting with the contemporary context. Finally, the interpreter identifies present-day issues, such as political, economic, social, and ethical that resonate with the Qur'anic message. This involves comparing the contemporary situation with the historical context and extracting values or principles from early Islamic teachings that remain relevant. The interpreter then evaluates whether the verse's message retains universality or was context-specific.

In a subsequent work, *Al-Quran Abad 21*, Saeed introduces a pivotal refinement to his hermeneutical model: the concept of the connecting context. This refers to the interpreter's own context including personal, academic, and socio-cultural as well as the legacy of interpretation that spans from the formative period to the present. Saeed emphasizes that proper interpretation requires dialogue not only between the text and its context but also between the interpreter and the interpretive tradition (Saeed, 2016). This is where Saeed diverges from Rahman: he places greater emphasis on the interpreter's position within a broader intellectual and historical continuum. Furthermore, Saeed categorizes Qur'anic values into five hierarchies, those are obligatory, fundamental,

protective, implementational, and instructional. Among these, only the last two (implementational and instructional) are considered open to contextual reinterpretation (Barsihannor et al., 2023).

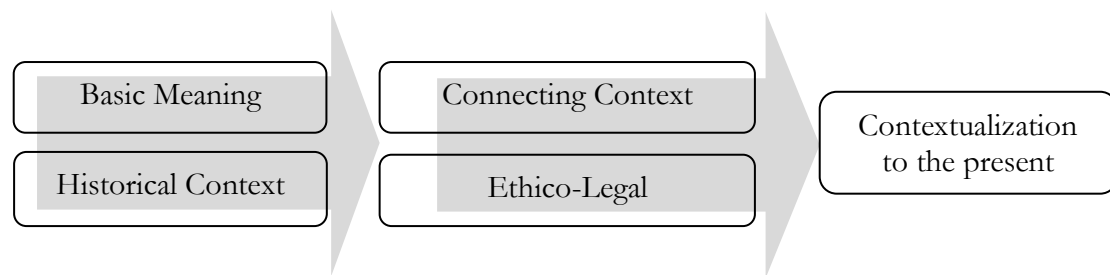


Figure 2: operational framework of Abdullah Saeed's contextual interpretation method

Overview of the *Ensiklopedi Al-Qur'an*

As mentioned at the beginning of his work, Dawam Rahardjo's *Ensiklopedi Al-Qur'an* (EQ) reflects strong nuances of Islamic studies. Although Dawam's formal academic background was in economics, his competence in Islamic scholarship, especially Qur'anic studies, is well-regarded. This is rooted in his religious upbringing and deep personal interest in the Qur'an. His commitment to the Qur'an is evident in many of his writings which are richly infused with Qur'anic thought. One example is his article *Menuju Masyarakat Utama*, where he argues that the ideal society is one that upholds good (*amr ma'ruf*) and prevents wrong (*nahy munkar*), oriented toward the value of *khayr* (virtue). Such a society operates not by coercion but through institutional structures that support ethical governance. This concept is grounded in Qur'anic verses such as QS. Ali 'Imrān (3): 104 and QS. Al-Ra'd: 11 (M. D. Rahardjo, 1992). Dawam's devotion to the Qur'an ultimately culminated in the EQ project. This section reviews the EQ in terms of its background, interpretive method, and thematic orientation.

The EQ was not written as a single unified volume from the beginning but developed gradually through a series of articles published in the *Ulumul Qur'an* journal between 1990 and 1995. The complete encyclopedia was later published in 1996, with Budhy Munawar-Rachman serving as the editor (D. Rahardjo, 2002). In the preface to the EQ, Dawam explains that his motivation for interpreting the Qur'an stems from his belief that the sacred text can be understood by people across varying levels of intellectual capacity. Deeper meanings, however, are accessed only by those with intellectual and reflective depth. This view is based on QS. al-Baqarah: 185 which describes the Qur'an as a guide for humanity, a source of clarification, and a criterion for distinguishing right from wrong.

Although the formal title of *mufasssir* is traditionally reserved for those with advanced expertise in Qur'anic sciences, Dawam argues that every human being has the potential to access guidance from the Qur'an, provided that they meet certain prerequisites, especially a command of Qur'anic Arabic. He also emphasizes the need for insight into classical Arabic rhetoric and literary devices which are essential to grasping the symbols and narratives embedded in the Qur'anic text. In compiling the EQ, Dawam studied Arabic independently, including disciplines such as *nahw*, *ṣarf*, and *balāghah*, and also pursued Qur'anic studies through formal institutions. In addition to linguistic training, Dawam attributes his interpretive capacity to prayer and spiritual receptivity. He believed that

sincere supplication for divine guidance was integral to understanding the Qur'an. He frequently consulted Ahmad Rifai Hasan, whom he regarded as a master of Qur'anic language and interpretation, for support in linguistic and exegetical matters. Aware that some might hesitate to classify the EQ as a work of tafsir, Dawam sought the opinion of Quraish Shihab. With Shihab's input, the EQ was framed as "an understanding of the Qur'an from a social science scholar" (D. Rahardjo, 2002). The conceptual seed of the EQ dates back to Dawam's tenure as director of LP3ES in the 1980s. During that time, he wrote an article titled *Refleksi Sosiologi al-Qur'an: Landasan Revolusi Sosial* (A Qur'anic Sociological Reflection: The Basis for Social Revolution), which became one of the earliest works in Indonesia to apply a multidisciplinary approach to the Qur'an (Akbar & Rahman, 2023).

Thematic and Social Approach

The thematic interpretation method applied by Dawam Rahardjo in compiling the EQ, is a model of Qur'anic exegesis that centers on specific themes. These themes may appear using different diction and are collected from various locations throughout the *mushaf*. A commentator engages with this method by examining a selected topic and drawing on a range of relevant sources in order to construct a comprehensive understanding (Al-Kummy & Al-Qāsim, 1982). Dawam adopts this approach based on the hypothesis that the Qur'an elucidates itself, since the Qur'an not only offers guidance (*budā*) but also provides clarification of that guidance (*bayān*), as mentioned in QS. al-Baqarah: 185. This hypothesis, according to Dawam, gives rise to a method of interpreting the Qur'an by the Qur'an itself, which is commonly known today as the thematic approach (D. Rahardjo, 2002).

The themes explored in EQ are generally drawn from three main sources. The first consists of concepts originating from social sciences, cultural theory, and philosophy, such as the idea that modern democracy aligns with the Qur'anic principle of *shūrā*. The second group is comprised of terms explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an, such as *taqwā* and *islām*. The third derives from concepts established in classical Islamic scholarship, for example *tawḥīd* (Amal, 2012). In total, EQ discusses 27 major themes. These are heavily dominated by social issues, which aligns with the general object of study in contextual Qur'anic interpretation. The table below outlines the progression of themes and sub-themes as structured in EQ, showing how one concept leads organically to the next.

Table 1: Themes in *Ensiklopedi al-Qur'an*

Theme	Sub-Themes
<i>Nabi</i>	- Prophethood in History
	- Prophets in the Qur'an
	- Muhammad, the Final Prophet
	- Prophet Abraham
	- From Prophet to Madinah
<i>Madinah</i>	- Madinah in the Qur'an
	- Religion and Civilization
	- The Formation of Madinah City
	- From Madinah to <i>Khalifah</i>

<i>Khalīfah</i> (Caliphate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Khalīfah</i> in the Qur'an - Humans as Vicegerents on Earth - <i>Khilāfah</i> and <i>Khalīfah</i> - Islamic Political Theory - From <i>Khalīfah</i> to 'Adl
'Adl (Justice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Adl in the Qur'an - Divine Justice - Dimensions of Justice - From 'Adl to <i>Zālim</i>
<i>Zālim</i> (Oppression)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Between Justice and Oppression - <i>Zālim</i> in the Qur'an - The Command to Uphold Justice - From <i>Zālim</i> to <i>Fāsiq</i>
<i>Fāsiq</i> (Transgression)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ethical Terms in the Qur'an - <i>Fāsiq</i> in the Qur'an - Between <i>Kāfir</i> (Disbelief), <i>Zālim</i> (Oppression), and <i>Fāsiq</i> (Transgression) - From <i>Fāsiq</i> to <i>Shūrā</i>
<i>Shūrā</i> (Consultation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Shūrā</i> in the Qur'an - <i>Mushāwarah</i> or Democracy? - Interpretation of <i>Shūrā</i>: A Case Study of <i>Khālīfah al-Rāshidīn</i> - From <i>Shūrā</i> to <i>Ūlu al-Amr</i>
<i>Ūlu al-Amr</i> (Those in Authority)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ūlu al-Amr</i> in Indonesian Politics - <i>Ūlu al-Amr</i> in the Qur'an - Islamic Theory of State and Society - From <i>Ūlu al-Amr</i> to <i>Ummah</i>
<i>Ummah</i> (Community)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ummah</i> in the Qur'an - Social Contract Theory - Model of an Independent Society - Universalism and Cosmopolitanism of <i>Ummah</i> - From <i>Ummah</i> to <i>Jihād</i>
<i>Jihād</i> (Struggle)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Jihād</i>, a Holy War? - Orientalist Views on <i>Jihād</i> - <i>Jihād</i> in the Qur'an - <i>Jihād</i> and <i>Ijtihād</i> - From <i>Jihād</i> to 'Ilm
'Ilm (Knowledge)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Ethos of Knowledge in the Qur'an - 'Ilm in the Qur'an - Religion and Science - Theory of Knowledge in Islam - From 'Ilm to <i>Ūlu al-Albāb</i>
<i>Ūlu al-Albāb</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ūlu al-Albāb</i> in the Qur'an - On Muslim Intellectuals

(People of Intellect)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Characteristics of <i>Ulu al-Albab</i> - From <i>Ulu al-Albab</i> to <i>Rizq</i>
<i>Rizq</i> (Sustenance)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ibn Khaldun's Theory of Labor - <i>Rizq</i> in the Qur'an - <i>Tawhid</i> and Economic Democracy - The Economic Ethics of the Qur'an - From <i>Rizq</i> to <i>Riba</i>
<i>Riba</i> (Usury)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Controversy of <i>Riba</i> - The History of <i>Riba</i> - <i>Riba</i> in the Qur'an - <i>Riba</i>, Interest and Banking - From <i>Riba</i> to <i>Amr Ma'ruf Naby Munkar</i>
<i>Amr Ma'ruf Naby Munkar</i> (Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Amr Ma'ruf Naby Munkar</i> in Theology - <i>Amr Ma'ruf Naby Munkar</i> in the Qur'an - Interpretation about <i>Amr Ma'ruf</i> - Interpretation about <i>Naby Munkar</i> - The Ideal Society

The style of interpretation in EQ is best described as social exegesis (*tafsir al-ijtima'i*). This approach emphasizes social and humanities concerns by interpreting the Qur'an in light of contemporary social issues, while grounding its solutions in religious values. The aim is to formulate shared ethical visions that contribute to a more humane society. In practice, *tafsir al-ijtima'i* attempts to synthesize divine revelation with the realities of the modern world. It seeks to contextualize the Qur'an in the lived experience of its interpreters and establish dialogues between modern social theories and Qur'anic paradigms (Iyāzī, 1967).

However, this perspective differs from the one advanced by Islah Gusmian, who argues that Dawam Rahardjo primarily employed a textual approach. As support, Gusmian points to Dawam's interpretation of the term '*abd*', noting that Dawam explains its semantic transformation into Indonesian phrases like *abdi negara* (servant of the state). According to Gusmian, this kind of analysis lacks a hermeneutical axis, since Dawam does not sufficiently engage with Indonesia's socio-cultural structures in drawing his conclusions (Gusmian, 2013). This thesis, however, is problematic for two main reasons. First, Dawam's interpretation of the term '*abd*' does not stop at semantic analysis. He explicitly responds to the theological concern raised at the time regarding whether the police force's slogan "abdi negara" contradicts the principle of *tawhid*, given that servitude in Islam is directed solely to God. Dawam cites Quraish Shihab, who clarifies that serving the state and nation is not objectionable if it is intended as part of one's devotion to God, since all human effort should ultimately aim to serve the Divine (D. Rahardjo, 2002). From this explanation, it becomes clear that Dawam moved from praxis (context) to reflection (text), which is a hallmark of the contextual approach (Gusmian, 2013).

The second counterpoint concerns Dawam's intellectual background. His training in economics and active role in HMI (Islamic Student Association) shaped his sensitivity to social realities in Indonesia. It is therefore unlikely, if not impossible, that his

interpretations are divorced from social engagement. This is further confirmed by the subtitle of the EQ, which explicitly labels the work as “Social Interpretation Based on Key Concepts” (Tafsir Sosial Berdasarkan Konsep-konsep Kunci).

Contextualization Dimension in *Ensiklopedi Al-Qur'an*

The contextual elements in EQ have been briefly touched on earlier, particularly in the author's rebuttal to Islah Gusmian's claim that Dawam Rahardjo employed a purely textual approach. This section will delve more deeply into the contextualization dimension of Dawam Rahardjo's interpretation of the Qur'an in *Ensiklopedi Al-Qur'an*. The author divides this discussion into two parts: *first*, an analysis of Dawam Rahardjo's interpretive paradigm as presented in the introduction and conclusion of EQ; *second*, an examination of the contextual application of Dawam's interpretation, particularly on the verses concerning *ribā* (usury).

Interpretive Framework of Dawam Rahardjo

Dawam Rahardjo outlines his interpretive paradigm in both the introduction and the conclusion of EQ, which deeply influences his hermeneutical framework. According to Dawam, the Qur'an was not revealed in a vacuum. To understand its message, one must consider the socio-historical circumstances in which it was revealed. For instance, to grasp the full meaning of Surah al-Ma'un, one must first understand the context of Mecca at that time: an international trading hub that enjoyed independence from the two dominant imperial powers of the age, the Roman and Persian Empires. Power resided in the hands of wealthy merchants and tribal leaders who formed a senate-like council called *al-mala'*. This oligarchic structure resulted in prosperity for the elite and poverty for the masses as typical of affluent commercial societies manifested in the form of economic inequality, slavery, arbitrary imprisonment, and deep social disparities. This sociological backdrop provides a powerful lens through which the Makkiyah surahs can be read not merely as spiritual exhortations, but as precursors to sharp social critique and even revolutionary change. Surah al-Ma'un, for example, can be seen not just as a call to social responsibility, but as a pointed critique of Meccan elites (D. Rahardjo, 2002)

Thirteen years of Prophet Muhammad's mission in Mecca were met with resistance, especially from the elite, eventually prompting him and his companions to migrate to Yathrib (later Medina). Unlike Mecca, Yathrib was a more settled society, reliant on oasis agriculture and collective date groves, making it somewhat more egalitarian and refined. In Medina, Islam was embraced more readily, allowing the Prophet to build a structured community. During this phase, formal legal verses began to be revealed.

It's important to note that Medina was more religiously and socially diverse than Mecca. Several Jewish tribes, such as Banū Naḍīr, Banū Qurayẓah, and Banū Qaynuqā' had long settled in the northern Hijaz region after fleeing persecution from Babylonian, Greek, and Roman authorities. These groups were eventually pushed toward Medina, where they coexisted with local Arab tribes like Awṣ and Khazraj. In addition to Jews, Christians and Arab pagans also inhabited the city. Although some of these groups converted to Islam, tribal rivalries persisted. The Qur'an responded by calling for unity based on faith. For instance, the revelation of QS. al-Hujurat: 9 was motivated by conflict between the Awṣ and Khazraj tribes: “*And if two groups among the believers fight, make peace between them. But if one*

of them oppresses the other, then fight against the one that oppresses until it returns to the ordinance of Allah. And if it returns, then make reconciliation between them with justice and act justly. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly." (QS. al-Hujurat: 9)

In this Medinan phase, the Qur'an also engaged in polemics with segments of the Jewish community who theologically opposed the Prophet. The Qur'anic responses to them were not merely theological but also historical-sociological, recounting the moral failures of their ancestors, Banī Isrā'īl. For example, in QS. Al-Baqarah (2): 83, Allah says:

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَ بَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ لَا تَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَقُولُوا لِلنَّاسِ حُسْنًا وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ ثُمَّ تَوَلَّيْتُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّنْكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ مُّعْرِضُونَ

"And [recall] when We took a covenant from the Children of Israel: Do not worship except Allah; and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, and the needy. And speak to people good [words] and establish prayer and give zakāh. Then you turned away, except a few of you, and you were refusing".

Dawam's concern is not limited to the socio-historical context of revelation. He emphasizes that the values of the Qur'an must also be internalized within the Indonesian context. This, according to him, is not a difficult task considering that nearly 80% of Indonesia's population is Muslim, and many of whom were raised in religious families and received basic religious education through *pesantren*. The purpose of EQ, he notes, is to help Muslims channel their religiosity into motivation for daily life and a force for intellectual and social engagement. He hopes EQ can cultivate Qur'anic appreciation that goes beyond personal devotion to critical engagement with social realities (D. Rahardjo, 2002).

Taufik Adnan Amal adds that in addition to employing a literary approach through thematic interpretation, Dawam also incorporates a chronological component that is an attention to the sequence of revelation of specific themes. This chronological perspective is significant, as it shows how ideas and concepts evolved over the 23-year period of the Prophet's mission in tandem with the development of the early Muslim community (Amal, 2012). From these perspectives, it is evident that Dawam's interpretive framework aligns closely with the principles of contextual interpretation on two levels: *first*, by emphasizing the necessity of understanding a verse within the socio-historical context of its revelation, whether at the micro or macro level to uncover the Qur'an's moral vision; and *second*, by advocating the internalization of Qur'anic values into the lives of Indonesian Muslims, not merely as devotional sentiments but as frameworks for concrete social action and as evolving interpretive discourses responsive to contemporary realities.

Contextualizing Social Ethics: Ribā and Ummah in EQ

Analyzing the contextual dimension across all 27 entries in *Ensiklopedi Al-Qur'an* would require extensive discussion. Therefore, this section highlights only two themes, namely *ribā* and *ummah* as representative examples of Dawam Rahardjo's contextual interpretive method. Dawam explains that the first verse revealed regarding *ribā* is QS. Al-Rūm (30): 39, which defines the term:

وَمَا أَتَيْتُمْ مِنْ رَبٍّ لَيْرَبُوا فِي أَمْوَالِ النَّاسِ فَلَا يَزِيدُوا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَتَيْتُمْ مِنْ زَكَاةٍ تُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُضْعِفُونَ

“Whatever *ribā* you give to increase your wealth at the expense of others will not increase in the sight of Allah. But whatever you give in *zakāh*, seeking the pleasure of Allah, these are the ones who will receive a multiplied reward” (QS. Al-Rum (30): 39).

Linguistically, *ribā* refers to “growth” or “increase”. In this verse, it denotes added value on lent property or money. However, the verse does not yet explicitly prohibit *ribā*. What is noteworthy is how Allah juxtaposes *ribā* with *zakāh* that conceptually opposing values. While *ribā* may seem profitable in human terms, it brings no value before Allah. Conversely, *zakāh*, though materially unrewarding, brings divine merit. The Qur'an later makes this moral contrast more explicit in QS. al-Baqarah: 275:

الَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ الرِّبَا لَا يَقُومُونَ إِلَّا كَمَا يَقُومُ الَّذِي يَتَخَبَّطُهُ الشَّيْطَانُ مِنَ الْمَسِّ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا إِنَّمَا الْبَيْعُ مِثْلُ الرِّبَا وَأَحَلَّ اللَّهُ الْبَيْعَ وَحَرَّمَ الرِّبَا

“Those who consume *ribā* will not stand [on the Day of Judgment] except like the one who is driven to madness by Satan. That is because they say, ‘Trade is just like *ribā*,’ but Allah has permitted trade and forbidden *ribā*” (QS. Al-Baqarah (2): 275).

This is followed by verses (2:277–278) which emphasize *zakāh* and call believers to abandon any outstanding *ribā*, underlining that usury was exploitative in the context of the time by targeting the poor who borrowed for basic survival. Thus, those with surplus wealth are instructed to give alms instead of charging interest, or at the very least, to reclaim only the principal without oppression (D. Rahardjo, 2002). As stated in QS. Al-Baqarah (2): 279-280:

فَإِنْ لَمْ تَفْعَلُوا فَأْذَنُوا بِحَرْبٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَإِنْ تُبْتُمْ فَلَكُمْ رُءُوسُ أَمْوَالِكُمْ لَا تَظْلِمُونَ وَلَا تُظْلَمُونَ وَإِنْ كَانَ ذُو عُسْرَةٍ فَنَظِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ مَيْسَرَةٍ وَأَنْ تَصَدَّقُوا خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

“If you do not give it up, then be informed of war from Allah and His Messenger. But if you repent, you may retain your principal, do not oppress and you shall not be oppressed. And if (the debtor) is in distress, give him respite until he can. And to give in charity (some or all of the debt) is better for you if you know”.

Dawam interprets this prohibition by returning to its historical context. In a simple, pre-modern society, only the poor borrowed money typically for consumption. Hence, interest-based loans burdened the vulnerable and violated Islam's principle of social welfare. At this stage, Dawam identifies the moral ideal behind the law: protection of the poor from exploitation. He argues that in today's financial system, not all interest constitutes *ribā*. Loans now involve institutional intermediaries and typically support productive activities, not subsistence. Moreover, banks have operational costs (e.g., administration, inflation risks) and offer security and profit to depositors. Therefore,

interest here functions more like a trade in capital services (*bay'*), which the Qur'an permits (D. Rahardjo, 2002). Through this reasoning, Dawam reconstructs the meaning of *ribā* to fit the modern economic context. Interest on exploitative, consumption-based loans still qualifies as *ribā*. But fair interest on productive, regulated credit does not. Dawam's view aligns with Abdullah Saeed, who also asserts that modern bank interest is not equivalent to Qur'anic *ribā*, since its function is to promote prosperity, not oppression (Misnawati & Zainab, 2023)

Table 2: Operational phases in contextualizing the term *ribā*

Steps	Analysis
Basic meaning	Growth and addition
Historical Context	Interest on loans for consumptive needs is synonymous with oppression
Eticho-Legal	A social system that promotes justice and opposes exploitation
Contextualization	Interest charged on productive loans with socio-economic safeguards is not <i>ribā</i> but a capital transaction

The second example of the application of the contextual approach in EQ is Dawam's interpretation of the concept of *ummah*. In the Qur'an, the meaning of *ummah* is mentioned 64 times. Citing Ali Syari'ati, Dawam argues that the meaning of *ummah* extends beyond a general group of people. It transcends categories such as nation, ethnicity, class, or race. The term is derived from the root '*amma*, which means "to intend" or "to move toward," and is related to *amām*, meaning "in front." Based on its linguistic root, *ummah* implies direction, intention, and awareness. In this sense, *ummah* denotes a collective of individuals who share a common objective and cooperate in realizing that objective under unified leadership or institutional structure.

Accordingly, Islam does not emphasize the formation of groups based on primordial identities such as geography, class, or race. During the Meccan period, the Qur'an refers to *ummah* in a reflective and historical context, often recounting past civilizations. For example, QS. al-A'raf: 34 states:

وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ أَجَلٌ فَإِذَا جَاءَ أَجْلُهُمْ لَا يَسْتَأْخِرُونَ سَاعَةً وَلَا يَسْتَقْدِمُونَ

"And for every nation is a [specified] term. So when their time has come, they will not remain behind an hour, nor will they precede [it]" (QS. Al-A'rāf (7): 34).

This verse illustrates that each human civilization has a defined period of prominence. Great civilizations such as those of Egypt and Babylon, and in the Indonesian context, the Majapahit and Sriwijaya kingdoms, all rose and fell. They now remain only as historical memories (D. Rahardjo, 2002).

As the Muslim community transitioned to the Medinan period, the meaning of *ummah* evolved with more ideological and political nuance, aimed at shaping the Muslim society. In QS. Ali Imran: 104, Allah commands:

وَلَتَكُنَّ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

“And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful” (QS. Ali Imrān (3): 104)

In this verse, *ummah* does not refer to the entire society but to a specific segment tasked with particular responsibilities. This group engages in promoting virtue, calling for goodness, and forbidding wrongdoing. The organizational structure of this group is outlined later in the same surah, QS. Ali Imrān (3): 159, which encourages consultation in collective affairs and trust in divine guidance after decisions are made. From this, *ummah* can be interpreted as a representative group within the community, akin to a committee responsible for public welfare. Applying social contract theory, this representative group becomes institutionalized as the state. This interpretation is supported by the Medina Charter, a constitutional framework established by the Prophet Muhammad, which refers to the collective as “indeed they are one *ummah*, separate from the rest of mankind” (*inna hum ummah wāḥidah min dūn al-nās*). Therefore, QS. Ali Imrān (3): 104 is seen as the foundation for a political authority tasked with managing public interests, grounded in the ethical framework of *amr ma’rūf nahy munkar* (D. Rahardjo, 2002). Interpreting the term *ummah* in QS. Ali Imrān (3): 104 as a state is a contextual interpretation with reference to the life of the Prophet Muhammad, a language approach and reading it with the post-World War II reality through a social contract theory approach.

Table 3: Operationalization of the contextual interpretation of the term *ummah*

Steps	Analysis
Basic meaning	A group united by a common goal
Historical Context	Formation of the Medina Charter that employed the term <i>ummah</i>
Eticho-Legal	A collective responsibility to realize shared public interests
Contextualization	The term <i>ummah</i> is interpreted as a particular group that serves the public good and is institutionalized in the form of the state

Table 3 above outlines the operational stages of contextual interpretation applied to the Qur’anic term *ummah*, as conceptualized through Abdullah Saeed’s hermeneutical framework and exemplified in Dawam Rahardjo’s *Ensiklopedi Al-Qur’an*. The first stage identifies the basic semantic meaning of *ummah* as a collective bound by a shared purpose and collective awareness, reflecting intentionality and unified direction. The second stage considers the historical context, particularly the formative role of the Medina Charter in transforming the notion of *ummah* from a religious group into a structured political and social community. This context underscores how the concept evolved in tandem with the early development of the Muslim polity.

The third stage, the ethico-legal dimension, highlights the collective responsibility of the *ummah* in fulfilling public welfare obligations. Here, *ummah* functions not merely as a theological abstraction but as a normative actor tasked with upholding justice and moral governance. Finally, in the contextualization phase, *ummah* is reinterpreted as a representative group institutionalized in the form of the state. This reinterpretation

positions *ummah* as a functional body engaged in ethical governance and the realization of the common good, in line with the Qur'anic principles of *amr ma'ruf* (enjoining good) and *nahy munkar* (forbidding evil). The table thus reflects a dynamic movement from textual meaning to contemporary application, reinforcing the enduring relevance of Qur'anic values in modern socio-political frameworks.

Conclusion

Dawam Rahardjo's *Ensiklopedi Al-Qur'an* represents a pioneering effort to contextualize Qur'anic interpretation through a socio-historical lens. Grounded in the realities of Meccan and Medinan society, Dawam's interpretive paradigm emphasizes that understanding the Qur'an requires attentiveness to the conditions surrounding its revelation. Crucially, he extends this approach to the Indonesian context, aiming to internalize Qur'anic values as a moral and intellectual foundation for contemporary societal engagement. This contextual method is evident in his reading of *riba*, where Dawam distinguishes between exploitative, consumption-based lending which he regards as prohibited, and productive, institutional lending which he frames as a legitimate capital transaction. Similarly, in interpreting *ummah* (QS. Ali Imrān (3): 104), he moves beyond traditional notions of community, proposing that *ummah* refers to an institutionalized elite tasked with managing public welfare that akin to modern political authority rooted in ethical governance.

Dawam's contribution through his work is significant not only for its thematic and contextual depth but also for its interdisciplinary openness. Despite the absence of an explicit methodological framework for theme selection, *Ensiklopedi Al-Qur'an* marks a departure from classical and textualist readings by incorporating socio-economic, political, and philosophical perspectives. As such, this study contributes to the broader discourse on contextual tafsir in Indonesia and offers a model for integrating local realities with evolving hermeneutical approaches. It opens further avenues for scholarly engagement beyond dominant voices like Hamka and Quraish Shihab, and signals the potential of encyclopedic formats for advancing contextual Qur'anic interpretation.

CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement

Ahmad Zainuddin: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Resources, Software, Validation, Writing – original draft, and Writing. **Abd. Muin:** Conceptualization, Supervision, Visualization, Validation, and Writing. **Ahmad Iqbal Mohd Fadzli:** Transliteration and Proofreading. **Iffah:** Proofreading and review-editing.

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