Hamka's Thought in Tafsir Al-Azhar: Between Acculturation and Rejection of Local Culture

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Abstract

Indonesia is committed to the principle of religious moderation, essential in light of the nation's vast religious, cultural, and traditional diversity. To support this commitment, Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs has issued guidelines with four key indicators of religious moderation, one of which is cultural accommodation. This study examines religious moderation with a particular focus on the cultural accommodation indicator in Hamka's Qur'anic exegesis. Using a library research method and a descriptive-analytical approach, the study finds that Hamka rejects cultural accommodation within religious moderation. Employing the *al-Ijtimāʿī* method, Hamka critiques Indonesian traditions and cultural practices that he views as incompatible with Islamic principles, labeling them as remnants of *Jahiliyyah*, acts of *bidʿah*, superstition, myth, or even *shirk*. This perspective underscores Hamka's belief that Muslims should adhere strictly to the Qur'an and reasoned judgment, rather than uncritically preserving ancestral customs.

Keywords

Introduction

Indonesia is distinguished by its rich diversity, encompassing religious and cultural dimensions. The Indonesian Constitution formally recognizes six religions and one indigenous belief system, underscoring the nation's pluralistic framework (BRIN n.d.). Moreover, Indonesia's cultural diversity is extraordinary. According to data released by the Ministry of Education and Culture in November 2022, there are 11,622 documented cultural heritage elements, with 1,728 officially designated (Kebudayaan, 2022; Muhammad, Nurul Yaqin, et al., 2024). This cultural richness is a unique hallmark of Indonesia. However, this diversity often presents challenges, particularly when cultural practices, such as offerings and rituals, intersect with religious doctrines, particularly those of Islam.

The cultural diversity in Indonesia frequently conflicts with religious doctrines, leading some groups to label these cultural practices as heretical or deviant (*takfīr* and *bid'ah*). Such perspectives can engender division and conflict. To address the potential for fragmentation and discord, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has implemented a religious moderation program mandated by the President's medium-term development plan (Muhammad, 2022). This program extends beyond the promotion of interfaith tolerance to encompass a broad spectrum of issues that could serve as sources of conflict (Arif, 2021; Junaedi, 2019). The Ministry's publication, *Moderation of Religion*, identifies four key indicators to assess the degree of religious moderation practiced by individuals in Indonesia and their vulnerability to extremism (Basri & Muhammad, 2023; Hamdan, Mahmudi, and Muhammad, 2023). One indicator discussed in this article is the capacity to accommodate cultural practices (Ditjen Bimas Islam Kementerian Agama, 2022; K. A. RI, 2019). This indicator evaluates the level of religious moderation manifested in interpreting Islamic texts, notably in Hamka's *Tafsir al-Azhar*.

Indonesia frequently faces intercultural conflicts between the Moni and Dani tribes in Papua, disputes in North and South Lampung, and tensions between Aceh and Java, including the Sampit tragedy (Coppel, 2006). Moreover, some groups have labeled longstanding religious rituals practiced by communities as "deviant culture" or "cultural deviation." In contrast, certain Indonesian Muslim intellectuals have attempted to integrate local culture with religion; however, this process of acculturation is often rejected by groups adhering to exclusive religious doctrines.

Most Indonesians tend to follow the guidance of elders, religious leaders (kiai), and community figures. Among the most influential figures shaping the perspectives of Indonesians is Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, widely known as Hamka (1908-1981), mainly through his work *Tafsir al-Azhar*. This exegetical

work is not only studied by scholars but is also widely accessible to the general public and extensively studied across Asia (Basri and Muhammad, 2023). Given the widespread influence of this text and Indonesia's commitment to promoting religious moderation—where cultural accommodation is a key indicator (Rasyid et al., 2022; K. A. RI, 2019) —examining the aspect of cultural accommodation within Hamka's exegesis is crucial. This investigation seeks to assess the extent to which Hamka's approach to religious moderation is reflected in his work. If it is found that Hamka's exegesis does not accommodate cultural practices, then his concept of religious moderation may need to be reconsidered.

Literature Review

Extensive scholarly discussions have examined religious moderation from Hamka's perspective, with numerous studies conducted by academics and researchers. Most existing research on this topic primarily focuses on the indicators of interreligious and intra-religious tolerance, as explored by Sulaiman Wibowo (W, 2022), Nurnila and Busro (Nurlina and Busro, 2021), and Moh Mufid Muwaffaq (Muwaffaq, 2020). However, their analyses of Hamka's interpretation of religious moderation require further scrutiny, as there are indications of selective interpretations and forced conclusions regarding his inclusivity in the context of interreligious tolerance (Basri and Muhammad, 2023; Muhammad, Mahmudi, et al., 2024).

In addition, several studies have investigated the influence of Islamic reformist thinkers—such as Muhammad Abduh, Rasyid Rida, and Sayyid Qutb—on Indonesian exegetes, including Hamka. Research by Abdul Manan Syafi'i (Syafi'i, 2014), Kevin W. Fogg (W. Fogg, 2015), and Sayed Khatab (Khatab, 2002). Demonstrates that reformist thought significantly shaped Hamka's exegetical methodology and interpretive framework. This finding suggests that Hamka's intellectual trajectory was deeply embedded within the broader paradigm of Islamic reformism of his time.

Another major focus of research on *Tafsir al-Azhar* concerns Hamka's engagement with local cultural traditions. Faizin et al. examined cultural accommodation in *Tafsir al-Azhar*, highlighting specific instances, such as oral hygiene practices, which align with Islamic teachings on the Sunnah of *siwak* (tooth brushing) (Faizin, Syafruddin, and Sri Chalida, 2022). However, their study does not address Hamka's response to more complex cultural practices, such as religious rituals rooted in Indonesia's Hindu-Buddhist heritage, including *puja laut* (sea offerings).

Similarly, Anwar Mujahidin and Hyung-Jun Kim (Mujahidin and Kim, 2021) underscore incorporating local wisdom into Qur'anic interpretation to promote respect for cultural diversity. Their perspective aligns with the Ministry of Religious Affairs' conceptualization of cultural accommodation within the framework of religious moderation. However, their study does not explicitly examine Hamka's rejection of certain cultural practices that he deemed incompatible with Islamic teachings.

A more comprehensive examination of Hamka's stance on local culture is provided by Husnel Anwar et al. (Anwar, Nasution, and Zamzami Siregar, 2020). Their study identifies two key patterns in Hamka's response to local traditions: acceptance of cultural elements that conform to Islamic principles and rejection of those that contradict Islamic values. This classification reveals that Hamka was more inclined to reject than accommodate Indonesia's indigenous cultural heritage.

These studies reveal a fundamental misalignment between Hamka's interpretation of *Tafsir al-Azhar* and the Ministry of Religious Affairs' framework of religious moderation, particularly regarding cultural accommodation. This article, therefore, aims to challenge prevailing assumptions by demonstrating that *Tafsir al-Azhar* does not fully endorse cultural accommodation and remains inconsistent with Indonesia's official religious moderation policy in this respect.

Method

This study employs a library research methodology with a descriptive-analytical approach to examine religious moderation in *Tafsir Al-Azhar* by Hamka, focusing specifically on his perspective regarding the accommodation of local cultural practices. This method is deemed appropriate given the study's reliance on textual sources (Hamzah, 2020).

The research utilizes both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include *Tafsir Al-Azhar* by Hamka and the *Moderasi Beragama* (Religious Moderation) publications issued by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2019 and 2021. These texts serve as foundational references for analyzing Hamka's views on religious moderation, particularly in relation to cultural accommodation. Secondary sources comprise scholarly articles and other relevant literature on religious moderation and Qur'anic exegesis. These sources enhance the depth of analysis and provide a comparative framework for evaluating Hamka's interpretive approach.

The study employs a descriptive-analytical framework (Hamzah, 2020), beginning with the identification and classification of Hamka's views on local

cultural practices in *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, particularly those he characterizes as remnants of *Jāhiliyyah*, *bid'ah*, superstition, myth, or polytheism. A comparative analysis follows, juxtaposing Hamka's exegesis with the Ministry of Religious Affairs' conceptualization of religious moderation, which emphasizes cultural accommodation as a key indicator. Additionally, the study adopts the *al-Ijtimāʿī* method to contextualize Hamka's rejection of cultural accommodation within the broader framework of Islamic thought (Basri et al., 2024; Muhammad, 2023).

Despite its methodological strengths, this study has several limitations. First, the interpretation of *Tafsir Al-Azhar* is inherently subjective, as it is influenced by the researcher's perspective, potentially leading to interpretive bias. Furthermore, the library research method does not allow for empirical verification of the societal impact of Hamka's exegesis. Additionally, the study is confined to Hamka's interpretations within the specific context of religious moderation and cultural accommodation, leaving other aspects of his intellectual contributions—such as modernism and reformism—outside the scope of analysis.

The study maintains academic rigor to address these limitations by engaging with relevant secondary literature and cross-referencing its findings with previous scholarship on Hamka and religious moderation. By adopting this approach, the research aims to provide a nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of religious moderation in Hamka's exegesis, particularly concerning his perspective on the accommodation of local cultural traditions outlined in the *Moderasi Beragama* publication by the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Results and Discussion

Incorporation of Local Cultural Practices as a Criterion for Religious Moderation

Religious moderation in Indonesia is deeply rooted in the nation's Constitution, which recognizes diversity and is committed to preserving its rich cultural heritage. This concept of moderation extends beyond mere tolerance, addressing various factors that could lead to societal conflict. To systematically assess religious moderation in Indonesia, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has identified four core indicators: 1) national commitment, 2) tolerance, 3) anti-violence, and 4) accommodation of local culture (Ditjen Bimas Islam Kementerian Agama, 2022; K. A. RI, 2019; T. K. K. M. B. K. A. RI, 2020).

Scholarly research on religious moderation in Islamic studies has concentrated mainly on the two indicators of tolerance and anti-violence (Rahmadi, Syahbudin, and Barni, 2023; Salim and Riyadi, 2022). As a result, existing literature often focuses on interpreting tolerance in the Qur'an, the perspectives

of prominent exegetical scholars, and reinterpreting verses related to *jihad* and *qital*(Prasojo and Pabbajah, 2020; Sirry, 2009). This emphasis is also reflected in international scholarship, such as the work of Imtiyaz Yusuf (Yusuf, 2010), Sajad Ahmad Padday (Padday, 2019), and Abdulaziz Sachedina (Sachedina, 2010). This trend may stem from the absence of explicit guidelines for measuring religious moderation in contexts outside Indonesia, where formal frameworks, such as the *Moderation in Religion* book—first published in 2019 under the guidance of Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, then Minister of Religious Affairs—provide clear benchmarks.

A crucial aspect of religious moderation in Indonesia, and the primary focus of this article, is the accommodation of local culture. The *Moderation in Religion* book by the Ministry of Religious Affairs outlines this accommodation as a measure of how well an individual can embrace religious practices incorporating local cultural elements and traditions. A moderate individual typically displays openness toward local culture, avoids rigidity, and does not adhere strictly to normative truths. Conversely, those who reject local culture, perceiving it as threatening religious purity, are considered less moderate (K. A. RI, 2019). This accommodation is essential in evaluating religious moderation in Indonesia, as it aligns with the principles of diversity and local wisdom. Additionally, such an accommodative approach allows individuals to integrate local traditions without viewing them as barriers to religious practice (Ditjen Bimas Islam Kementerian Agama, 2022).

Islam, as a major world religion, is characterized by its inherent flexibility, which allows it to adapt to various spatial and temporal contexts (Hasan, 2019). Classical Muslim scholars have argued that *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) should be contextually responsive to the time and place. This adaptability is further supported by legal maxims such as *al-'Adah Muhakkamah* and *al-Maqasid al-Shari'ah*. It is therefore unsurprising that Yusuf al-Qaradawi identifies seven fundamental characteristics of Islam's universality: 1) *Rabbaniyah* (divine orientation), 2) *Insaniyah* (humanitarian focus), 3) *Shumuliyah* (comprehensiveness), 4) *Wasatiyah* (moderation), 5) *Waqi'iyah* (realism), 6) *al-Wudhuh* (clarity), and 7) *al-Jam' bayn al-Tatawwur wa al-Thibat* (harmonization of progress and constancy) (Al-Qarḍāwī, 1983). Muhammad Alqadri Burga suggests that this universality fosters an Islamic cultural cosmopolitanism, which was eventually embraced in the Nusantara by a society with a deeply entrenched cultural foundation as its guiding philosophy (Muhammad Alqadri Burga, 2019). Scholars describe this phenomenon as cultural acculturation.

It is well-established that Islam accommodates cultural practices, and the development of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) is often influenced by the cultural contexts in which it is situated. However, not all cultural practices across differ-

ent regions can be justified. This is why the legal maxim addressing tradition includes the caveat *'mā lam tukhālif al-Shar'',* which delineates the boundaries of cultural practices that can and cannot be preserved. The *Moderasi Beragama* (Religious Moderation) handbook, published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, emphasizes that not all cultural practices and traditions should be accommodated or integrated; rather, they must be evaluated against the principle that they do not contradict fundamental religious teachings (Abdul Azis dan Khoirul Anam, 2021; K. A. RI, 2019).

Unfortunately, the phrase 'as long as traditions and cultural practices do not contradict fundamental religious teachings' lacks precise clarification on which traditions and cultural practices might be deemed contradictory to religious doctrine. This absence of specificity can result in arbitrary judgments against existing cultural practices and traditions. Consequently, it is unsurprising that some Muslim groups in Indonesia may denounce certain traditions as deviant while others may view these same traditions as permissible. This raises the question: Do the cultural boundaries endorsed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs align with the legal maxims of fiqh? If so, Albasher Mohamed Shammam identifies three cultural elements that are incompatible with Islamic core teachings: 1) *La Ibrah bi al-'Urf al-Shadh wa la al-Nadir* (no consideration is given to unusual or rare customs), 2) *La Ibrah bi 'Urf Yu'arid Tashrih wa Shart* (no consideration is given to customs that contradict legal texts and conditions), and 3) *La Ibrah bi 'Urf la Yakun Qa'im Waqt Insha' al-Tasarruf* (no consideration is given to customs that were not in effect at the time of the action's initiation) (Albasher Mohamed Shammam, 2020). These limitations are not fully articulated in the *Moderasi Beragama* handbook, which instead states:

> In the Indonesian context, religion and culture coexist harmoniously. There is relatively little conflict between religion and culture in Indonesia. Indonesians have long been accustomed to integrating culture into their religious life. Cultural development in Indonesia must respect fundamental religious values. Conversely, religious development, particularly Islamic proselytization (dakwah), should not undermine the diversity of longstanding cultural practices, traditions, and customs in Indonesia.
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> DITJEN BIMAS ISLAM KEMENTERIAN AGAMA, 2022

In discussing the indicator of cultural accommodation, the Ministry of Religious Affairs tends to focus on the intellectual arguments of Muslim scholars regarding the importance of cultural acceptance in forming Islamic legal products. The perspectives of scholars such as Abdul Wahhab al-Khalaf, Wahbah al-Zuhayli, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzi, al-Qarafi, Jasser Auda, and Ibn Taymiyah are

highlighted to reinforce the notion that Islam is inherently receptive to culture. However, simply advocating for cultural acceptance without addressing which specific cultural practices and traditions are impermissible in Islam can confuse understanding the concept of cultural accommodation. This article argues that this concept is ambiguous, especially since Hamka, in his tafsir, issues a cautionary note:

> In the colonial era, when someone still identified as Muslim and expressed an opinion that was essentially poisoned by collaboration with Christians and Zionists, they could be easily identified and refuted. However, after independence, people could take refuge under the pretext of nationalism, identity, and other rationales. Those who hold the reins behind the scenes are the People of the Book, armed with Orientalists, professors, and scholars. Although Islam means seeking peace, the response it received was gunfire from all sides, driven by a single agenda: to eradicate Islam from the face of the earth.
>
> AMRULLAH, 1982

The Ministry of Religious Affairs needs to clarify the boundaries of cultural accommodation beyond general statements like 'as long as it does not contradict fundamental religious teachings.' Such clarity is essential to provide a more accurate response to the warnings issued by Hamka in his tafsir. Furthermore, there are concerns among some Muslims about the potential infiltration of specific ideologies into Islamic teachings by external actors. Conversely, some Muslim groups in Indonesia believe that the integration of cultural practices into religious observance is essential. This view is rooted in the approach historically taken by Islamic missionaries, who successfully made Islam widely accepted by the people of the Nusantara. The management of culture and incorporating cultural practices into the religious framework was a strategy employed in the propagation of Islam in Indonesia (Wasitaatmadja, 2017).

Although the Ministry of Religious Affairs has established the accommodation of local culture as one of the indicators for measuring religious moderation and regards it as a significant aspect, its explanation remains ambiguous. As stated: 'Nevertheless, this religious practice cannot immediately reflect the moderation of its practitioners. This can only be used to observe general tendencies. Therefore, the notion that someone more accommodative of local traditions is more moderate in religion still needs to be proven. A moderate religious attitude and the accommodation of local traditions in religious practice may not be a positive correlation (K. A. RI, 2019).

Tafsir al-Azhar at the Intersection of Tradition and Reform: A Study of the al-Ijtima'ī Method

Scholars and researchers specializing in Qur'anic exegesis argue that interpretations developed in Indonesia, particularly Tafsir al-Azhar by Hamka and Tafsir al-Mishbah by Quraish Shihab, possess unique characteristics not found in Arab-world exegeses. This distinctiveness is primarily rooted in socio-cultural methods (Nur Muhammad and Purwaningrum, 2022; Zulfikri and Badawi, 2021). In this article, the term *al-Ijtimā'ī* is adopted instead of *al-Adabī al-Ijtimā'ī*, even though the latter is more frequently used by Indonesian exegetical scholars. The terminology used to describe this exegetical approach varies: Al-Dhabī and Muhammad Hādī Ma'rifah employ *al-Adabī al-Ijtimā'ī*, Muhammad Ibrāhīm Sharīf uses *al-Hadāī*, while al-Sharqāwī and Ali Ayāzī favor *al-Ijtimā'ī*. Hammad b. Ṣādiq al-Jammāl refers to it as *Iṣlāḥ al-Dīnī* (Ḥammad b. Ṣādiq 1994) and Fahd al-Rumī names it *al-'Aqlī* (Fahd b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān, 1983), among other terms that describe this socio-cultural method.

Regarding the *al-Ijtimā'ī* method, Muḥammad Ali al-Ayāzī offers two definitions (Ayāzī, 2007):

1. An exegete who seeks to elucidate the meaning of the Qur'an following an extensive analysis of human social life, considering needs, changes, and the causes of social differences, encompassing strengths and weaknesses, good and evil, knowledge and ignorance, and faith and disbelief. The exegete then presents Qur'anic verses as guidance for humanity to improve life or establish moral regulations. This approach emphasizes sociology and history.
2. An interpretation that responds to the demands of social life and the exigencies of the time, focusing on integrating the religious objectives found in the Qur'an with social goals.

Ali Daigham Taher defines this method as "an exegesis that specifically provides explanations and insights into Qur'anic verses after considering social conditions, intending to find solutions and educational lessons for contemporary social issues (Daigham Taher, 2019)." The purpose of this method is to harmonize the religious teachings of the Qur'an with societal needs while preserving Islamic teachings and the Qur'an within the dynamic context of human life (Daigham Taher, 2019). This definition by Ali Daigham is particularly relevant when analyzing the interpretive approach used by Hamka in his exegesis.

Specific criteria are used to classify an exegetical work as employing the *al-Ijtimā'ī* method if it fulfills at least one of the following ten characteristics: 1) An interpretation that positions the Qur'an as the central foundation for social life. 2) Seeking correlations between contemporary phenomena and historical events based on *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, followed by deriving solutions from the

Qur'an. 3) Focusing on the pursuit of guidance from the Qur'an and the correction of interpretations. 4) Promoting rationalist thought by eliminating blind imitation and superstitions. 5) Employing contemporary/modern language to ensure clarity and accessibility. 6) Demonstrating a balance between religious principles and modernity. 7) Being closely associated with discussions of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān*. 8) Responding to doubts within Islam and the Qur'an. 9) Avoiding adherence to specific schools of thought. 10) Seeking to understand the laws governing the world, humanity, and social life (Daigham Taher, 2019).

With an understanding of the definitions and standards of the *al-Ijtimā'ī* method, the subsequent discussion focuses on its application by Hamka in his Qur'anic exegesis. Syaripah Aini explores the *al-Ijtimā'ī* method in *Tafsir al-Azhar*, identifying two key characteristics: (1) Interpreting the Qur'an in modern language to enhance accessibility and (2) Hamka's consistent engagement with social phenomena in Indonesia, such as the Family Planning program (Aini 2020).

Research by Hafid Nur Muhammad further emphasizes that Hamka's exegesis frequently references societal conditions and situations (Nur Muhammad and Purwaningrum, 2022). Anwar Mujahidin reveals that *Tafsir al-Azhar* employs the *al-Ijtimā'ī* method, which encompasses the beliefs of local communities, wisdom in addressing challenges, and traditional child-rearing practices. Hamka's interpretation reflects a deep respect for the noble values of local communities. These values are transmitted through dialogue rather than coercion, preserving harmony and peace (Mujahidin and Kim, 2021). However, Anwar's findings may lack objectivity, as they appear somewhat forced in their conclusions.

A more prudent approach is to refer to Husnel Anwar's findings, which offer an objective analysis of the *al-Ijtimā'ī* method in Hamka's exegesis. Anwar identifies two key aspects of Hamka's engagement with local culture: first, his effort to preserve Nusantara culture through proverbs, poetry, metaphors, and other literary forms; second, his strong opposition to traditions that contradict Islamic law (Anwar, Nasution, and Zamzami Siregar, 2020).

Anwar's second finding aligns with the al-Ijtimā'ī method's defining characteristic—promoting rationalist ideas, such as eliminating taqlid and superstition. Consequently, Hamka frequently criticizes aspects of local Nusantara culture that he views as bid'ah, superstition, or remnants of Jahiliyyah. Hamka's guiding principle in Qur'anic interpretation is that Indonesia should align with the Qur'an, not vice versa. This principle is grounded in his assertion that "the Qur'an is what has shaped the culture and life of its adherents, establishing morality, refining emotions, enriching memory, and softening speech (Amrullah, 1982, 1/10)."

In studying Hamka's exegesis, many researchers have predominantly focused on the literary aspects. This focus arises from the use of the term *al-Adabī al-Ijtimāʿī* by scholars to describe this style of exegesis, leading analyses to concentrate primarily on al-Adabī as literature or language (Alfiyah 2016). Ironically, this description is based on Ḥusaīn al-Dhahabī's work, even though al-Dhahabī himself asserts that *al-Adabī al-Ijtimāʿī* does not primarily pertain to literary aspects. He defines it as "a mufassir who begins by meticulously analyzing the explicit meanings within Qur'anic verses, elucidates them in accessible language, and then applies the Qur'anic text to contemporary social phenomena (Al-Dhahabī, 2005, 2/401)."

The discussion above suggests that Hamka's exegesis represents a significant intellectual contribution from Muslim scholars in the Nusantara, using the *al-Ijtimāʿī* method, a view widely recognized by researchers. However, it is important to note that the *al-Ijtimāʿī* method, or the term *al-Adabī al-Ijtimāʿī* in Qur'anic interpretation, does not necessarily facilitate religious moderation; rather, it may challenge it. The *al-Ijtimāʿī* method focuses on correcting erroneous cultural phenomena from the mufassir's Islamic perspective. It does not seek to align Qur'anic verses with pre-existing cultures and traditions (Muhammad, 2023).

This argument is further supported by al-Dhahabī's analysis of the exegeses of Muḥammad ʿAbduh, Rashīd Riḍā, and al-Marāghī. He categorizes the works of these scholars as representing the *al-Adabī al-Ijtimāʿī* style, characterized by a strong rejection of longstanding cultural and traditional practices, often labeling them as bidʿah or superstition (Al-Dhahabī, 2005, 2/401-458). Similar findings are observed in studies of Sayyid Quṭb's Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān (Andriansyah 2014; Khatab 2002; Muhammad, Mahmudi, et al. 2024) and Hamka's Tafsir al-Azhar. Consequently, the *al-Ijtimāʿī* method may not be the most appropriate approach for Qur'anic exegesis in multicultural contexts. A method more conducive to promoting religious moderation—particularly one accommodative of local cultures—is required. Further research on a method better suited to fostering religious moderation is necessary and could serve as a recommendation for future scholars, given that this article primarily focuses on Hamka's exegesis.

Rejection of Local Cultural Practices in Hamka's Tafsir al-Azhar

Indonesia's cultural and traditional dynamics between 1908 and 1981 played a pivotal role in shaping Hamka's exegetical works. During this era, Indonesian culture was heavily influenced by mythological beliefs. Indigenous religious practices declined with the spread of major world religions, which sought to integrate these mythological elements into their doctrinal frameworks (Sirait and Malau, 2022). It is further argued that before the arrival of Islam, the theo-

logical landscape of the Nusantara was profoundly shaped by Hindu-Buddhist traditions, which continued to influence Islamic practices in the region (Ricklefs, 2006).

The historical debate over the introduction of Islam to the Nusantara is complex and marked by scholarly disagreement. Some scholars contend that Islam arrived in the 7th century CE (1st century AH), while others argue for a later introduction in the 12th century CE (5th century AH). Nyong Eka Teguh provides a synthesis, suggesting that Islam was first introduced in the 1st century AH, with significant cultural and civilizational developments becoming evident from the 5th century AH onward (Santosa, 2005). During this period, the Muslim population was broadly divided into *abangan* and the *putihan* (Ricklefs, 2006). The *abangan* constituted the majority of Javanese Muslims, who formally adhered to Islam but whose beliefs and practices were syncretic, blending elements of ancient Javanese animism, Hindu-Buddhist traditions, and Islamic teachings. In contrast, the *putihan* fully embraced Islam in outward practice and inward belief (Burhani, 2017).

Hamka's tafsir distinctly differentiates between the *putihan* and *abangan* groups, with a strong advocacy for the *putihan* perspective, aiming to eradicate the syncretic practices of the *abangan*. His application of the *al-Ijtimāʿī* method is particularly evident in his critique of the *abangan* practices of his time. Consequently, it is unsurprising that Hamka frequently employs terms such as superstition, heresy, and bid'ah in his Qur'anic interpretations, seeking to cleanse Islamic practices of their syncretic associations with ancient Javanese animism. This approach illustrates that Hamka's exegesis does not accommodate local cultural practices. As a result, the Ministry of Religious Affairs' publication "Moderasi Beragama" considers Hamka's approach to religious moderation somewhat limited. This evaluation is based on the understanding that genuine religious moderation typically involves openness to local cultural expressions, flexibility, and a balanced approach that does not overly prioritize normative correctness (K. A. RI, 2019).

Hamka's intellectual stance is characterized by a staunch rejection of ancestral traditions that lack a foundation in knowledge, have unclear origins, or contradict divine guidance, revelation, and enlightenment. His opposition to inherited customs stems from a profound concern about the potential amalgamation of religious practices with elements of uncertain origin. This concern is particularly evident in his commentary on the concluding verse of Surah al-Māʾidah 5:104:

> *Sekarang datanglah celaan kepada orang yang memegang suatu peraturan yang mereka namai agama itu, padahal tidak ada sumbernya yang jelas. Mereka katakan, begitulah pusaka nenek moyang, kami tidak dapat*

mengubahnya. Bagaimana kalau peraturan nenek moyang itu hanya suatu peraturan yang tidak timbul dari ilmu? Tidak jelas sebab-sebabnya? Apakah akan diikuti juga? Bagaimana kalau peraturan nenek moyang itu sekali-kali tidak datang dari petunjuk Allah, tidak dari hidayat dan wahyu yang diterima dari salah seorang Rasul seumpama Ibrahim dan Ismail? Hanya dari khayal nenek moyang itu saja, lalu dimasukkan ke dalam rangka keagamaan, apakah akan diikuti juga? Kalau demikian jadinya, tentu mudah saja bagi seorang tua membuat satu peraturan, walaupun tidak masuk akal, tak tentu akan gunanya, sehingga segala macam perbuatan yang karut-marut bercampur-aduk dalam agama dan dilaksanakan saja oleh yang datang kemudian dan dikatakan agama. Kemana anak mereka letakkan? Inilah ayat yang berguna untuk segala zaman, bukan untuk orang Jahiliyah itu saja, untuk memperingatkan bahwa di dalam memegang suatu peraturan agama, sekali-kali tidak boleh turut-turutan saja kepada apa yang diterima daripada guru atau nenek moyang. Sumber agama, sebagaimana yang diserukan pada ayat ini sudah tegas sekali, yaitu peraturan dari Allah dan Rasul. Di luar daripada itu, bid'ah Namanya.

Criticism here is directed at those who adhere to practices they call religion, despite these practices having no clear origin. They claim these traditions as ancestral legacies that cannot be altered. However, what if these ancestral rules are merely customs without any basis in knowledge? What if their origins are unclear? Should they still be followed? What if these traditions did not originate from divine guidance or the revelation received by prophets like Ibrahim and Ismail? If these traditions are merely the imaginings of ancestors, later incorporated into religious practices, should they still be adhered to? If so, it would be easy for any elder to create a rule, even if it is irrational and lacks a clear purpose, leading to all sorts of irrational practices being integrated into religion and followed by future generations under the guise of religious obligation. What kind of legacy does that leave? This verse is relevant for all times, not just for the people of Jahiliyyah, as a reminder that in adhering to religious principles, one must not unthinkingly follow what is inherited from teachers or ancestors. The source of religion, as emphasized in this verse, is the commands of Allah and His Messenger. Anything outside of that is *bid'ah*.

AMRULLAH, 1982, 3/1900

Hamka's rejection of ancestral traditions draws heavily from the early prophetic mission of Muhammad, which sought to eliminate the practices of Jahiliyyah. To Hamka, opposition and criticism posed little challenge, as he be-

lieved the key to paradise lay in adherence to the Qur'an and the teachings of Muhammad, not in clinging to outdated customs, blind imitation (*taqlid*), or rigid preservation of ancestral heritage (Amrullah, 1982, 1/135-136). He viewed ancestral traditions in Indonesia as particularly rife with superstitions, myths, and irrational beliefs that defy common sense, categorizing these as forms of *jibt*, as explained in Surah al-Nisā' 4:51 (Amrullah, 1982, 2/1254).

Hamka often expressed bewilderment at the persistence of animistic practices in Indonesian society during his time despite the widespread adoption of Islam. He pointed to practices such as *tawassul* (seeking intercession) with the deceased, visiting graves, performing rituals with *keris* (traditional daggers), and beliefs in omens associated with children as examples (Amrullah, 1982, 2/1211). Moreover, Hamka vehemently opposed the idea of accommodating Islam to other cultural or religious traditions, viewing such efforts as strategies by Dutch colonizers and Orientalists to weaken Islam. Hamka says accommodation might be permissible for other religions, but it is strictly impermissible in Islam. He stated: "Their aim is not to promote a vibrant Islam, but rather to revive mystical, esoteric knowledge, *primbon* (Javanese traditional divination), and syncretism, blending Islam with Hinduism, Buddhism, and animism— anything but the living Islam (Amrullah, 1982, 3/1990-1991)."

Hamka posits that the enduring elements of ancient Javanese culture are remnants of the Jahiliyah era, analogous to the pre-Islamic period of ignorance during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. He cites practices such as the use of amulets, rituals for newborns, and the burial of the placenta in Indonesia as relics of Jahiliyah and forms of spirit worship. Hamka categorizes these traditions as manifestations of polytheism and argues that their elimination requires a deepened understanding of Islamic teachings, which would naturally lead to the abandonment of such un-Islamic customs. He articulates this perspective in his commentary on Surah al-A'rāf 7:190:

> *Cocoklah ujung ayat ini terhadap perbuatan orang zaman jahiliyah dan juga cocok terhadap perbuatan jahiliyah di negeri kita sendiri, seperti yang penulis tafsir lihat ketika masih kecil. Padahal dalam Islam sendiri, Nabi kita Muhammad telah menunjukkan beberapa upacara yang tidak kurang indahnya untuk menyambut kelahiran anak, dan semuanya itu tidak lepas dari rangka Tauhid.*

> This verse aptly criticizes the people's behavior during the Jahiliyah period and is equally relevant to the Jahiliyah practices still observed in our country, as noted by the author during his childhood. However, Islam, through the guidance of the Prophet Muhammad, offers alternative ritu-

als for welcoming a child's birth, all of which are firmly grounded in the
concept of Tawhid.

AMRULLAH, 1982, 4/2648

Hamka also classifies the coastal traditions of Indonesian and Malay com-
munities as forms of shirk (polytheism) and Jahiliyah. These coastal rituals,
known by names such as Petik Laut, Jamu Laut, Puja Pantai, and Puja Roh Laut,
are collectively called Puja Laut in his tafsir. Relin D.E., a scholar at the State
Hindu Dharma Institute in Denpasar, researched these practices in Muncar,
Banyuwangi, and found they are deeply intertwined with Hindu religious val-
ues (Relin 2014). While such traditions are often regarded as valuable cultural
heritage in Indonesia, Hamka argues that they should be purified and eradi-
cated, particularly among Muslims. He calls upon Islamic scholars to address
these rituals, referencing Surah al-Anʿām 6:121:

> *Jika para ulama dan muballigh Islam tidak berusaha menanamkan pen-
> gertian Tauhid kepada penduduk di tempat itu, maka 'puja' ini akan terus
> mereka laksanakan dan perasaan turun-temurun dari nenek moyang itu,
> bahwa ada kekuatan selain dari Allah yang menguasai lautan, tidak akan
> hilang dari jiwa mereka. Maka mereka tetap dalam kemusyrikan.*

> If Islamic scholars and preachers do not strive to instill the understand-
> ing of Tawhid in these communities, they will continue to perform these
> 'puja' rituals, perpetuating the ancestral belief that there is a power other
> than Allah controlling the seas. As a result, they will remain entrenched
> in polytheism.

AMRULLAH, 1982

Furthermore, Hamka discusses the causes of religious fragmentation within
Islam in the modern era, attributing much of it to the influence of philosoph-
ical ideologies such as socialism, communism, liberalism, pragmatism, and
democracy. He argues that Muslims, often without a deep understanding of
Islamic teachings, have studied and adopted these ideologies, incorporating
their theories into state governance. Some Muslims even believe that certain
aspects of these ideologies align with Islam, leading them to integrate these
teachings into their practices, often without realizing that they have strayed
from core Islamic principles (Amrullah, 1982).

From Hamka's perspective, the concept of accommodating cultural prac-
tices within Islamic teachings, primarily through cultural assimilation, is fun-
damentally unacceptable. He strongly opposes the adoption of nationalist

and socialist systems by Muslims, particularly in Indonesia. Hamka insists that Muslims must adhere strictly to authentic Islamic teachings, rejecting all forms of superstition, irrational beliefs, and religious innovations (bid'ah), which he views as detrimental to the Muslim community. He firmly believes that Indonesia's progress can only be achieved by upholding Islamic principles rather than adopting new state systems devised by humans. Hamka contends that Western nations advanced due to their adherence to Christianity (Amrullah, 1982). Consequently, he argues that if Indonesia or other Muslim countries aspire to progress, they must remain steadfast in their commitment to Islamic teachings rather than relying on ancestral traditions.

Conclusion

The *al-Ijtimāʿī* method in Qur'anic interpretation holds significant potential for responding to and reflecting on social phenomena as exegetes engage with sacred texts. However, it does not necessarily promote the accommodation of local cultures. Instead, it is often employed to challenge and reject traditions perceived as deviating from the core principles of Islam, as evident in Hamka's critique of Indonesian cultural and traditional practices. Hamka firmly opposes ancestral traditions that lack a clear theological foundation. He characterizes these traditions as remnants of *Jāhiliyyah*, filled with superstition, myths, *bid'ah*, and elements of polytheism. From the perspective of religious moderation, as advocated by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, *Tafsir Al-Azhar* warrants reassessment regarding its alignment with moderation principles. Hamka's interpretation appears rigid, providing limited space for cultural integration within the Islamic framework. Consequently, Hamka's exegesis opposes preserving Indonesian cultural heritage, positioning it in direct contrast to the Ministry's approach to religious moderation, particularly regarding cultural accommodation. His rejection of cultural traditions calls for scrutiny by scholars and policymakers dedicated to fostering religious moderation while preserving local cultural diversity.

Addressing this issue requires several strategic measures. First, *Tafsir Al-Azhar* should be critically reexamined through the lens of religious moderation as conceptualized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. A thorough analysis is necessary to determine whether the socio-political context of his era influenced Hamka's rigid stance on local traditions or was strictly rooted in his theological convictions. Second, the Ministry of Religious Affairs should reassess Hamka's interpretive framework within the broader discourse on religious

moderation. Suppose his exegesis is found to be incompatible with cultural accommodation. In that case, efforts should be made to develop alternative interpretations that uphold Islamic orthodoxy while recognizing the significance of local cultural values. Finally, fostering dialogue among religious scholars, academics, and policymakers is essential to critically engage with Hamka's interpretations concerning the Ministry's conceptualization of religious moderation. Such discourse is crucial to ensuring that Qur'anic interpretation in Indonesia does not exclusively emphasize doctrinal purity but also acknowledges and accommodates the nation's rich cultural diversity.

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