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Conspiracy, Scripture, and Power: The Discursive Construction of Jews and Zionism in Hamka's Tafsir al-Azhar

Muhammad[1], **Mohammad Asrori**[1], **M. Zubad Nurul Yaqin**[1], **Muhammad Ragab**[2]

[1] Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang – Indonesia
[2] Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen- Nürnberg – Germany
Corresponding author: muhammadlc@syariah.uin-malang.ac.id

Abstract:
This article examines the discursive construction of Jews and Zionism in Hamka's Tafsir al-Azhar through the combined approaches of Critical Discourse Analysis and genealogy. Departing from the premise that Qur'anic exegesis is never neutral, the study explores how scriptural interpretation is mediated by relations of power and shaped by specific historical contexts. It argues that representations of Jews and Zionism in Hamka's tafsir are not solely derived from the Qur'anic text, but are also informed by twentieth-century socio-political dynamics, including colonialism, the Palestine–Israel conflict, and currents of modern Islamic thought. The findings identify three dominant discursive strategies: theological delegitimization, threat framing, and integration into broader narratives of global conspiracy. Through a genealogical perspective, the article demonstrates that such narratives should be understood as historically contingent formations that undergo a process of sacralization, whereby political discourses are transformed into religiously authorized interpretations. In this sense, tafsir functions not merely as a reflection of scripture but as a discursive practice that actively shapes religious perception and social meaning. In the contemporary Indonesian context, the reproduction of these narratives may contribute to the consolidation of exclusivist identities and binary oppositions between "self" and "other." The article, therefore, underscores the importance of contextual, historically grounded, and reflexive approaches to Qur'anic interpretation in fostering more inclusive and balanced religious discourses.

[Artikel ini mengkaji konstruksi diskursif tentang Yahudi dan Zionisme dalam Tafsir al-Azhar karya Hamka melalui pendekatan gabungan Analisis Wacana Kritis dan genealogi. Berangkat dari asumsi bahwa penafsiran al-Qur'an tidak pernah bersifat netral, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana interpretasi terhadap kitab suci dimediasi oleh relasi kuasa dan dibentuk oleh konteks historis tertentu. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa representasi Yahudi dan Zionisme dalam tafsir Hamka tidak semata-mata bersumber dari teks al-Qur'an, tetapi juga dipengaruhi oleh dinamika sosial-politik abad ke-20, termasuk kolonialisme, konflik Palestina–Israel, serta arus pemikiran Islam modern. Temuan penelitian mengidentifikasi tiga strategi diskursif utama, yaitu delegitimasi teologis, pembingkaian sebagai ancaman, dan integrasi ke dalam narasi konspirasi global yang lebih luas. Melalui perspektif genealogis, artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa narasi-narasi tersebut harus dipahami sebagai konstruksi historis yang bersifat kontingen, yang mengalami proses sakralisasi, yaitu transformasi dari wacana politik menjadi interpretasi yang memperoleh legitimasi religius. Dalam pengertian ini, tafsir tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai refleksi terhadap teks suci, tetapi juga sebagai praktik diskursif yang secara aktif membentuk persepsi keagamaan dan makna sosial. Dalam konteks Indonesia kontemporer, reproduksi narasi tersebut berpotensi berkontribusi pada penguatan identitas eksklusif dan oposisi biner antara "diri" dan "yang lain." Oleh karena itu, artikel ini menekankan pentingnya pendekatan tafsir yang kontekstual, berlandaskan sejarah, dan reflektif guna mendorong diskursus keagamaan yang lebih inklusif dan seimbang.]

Keywords:
Jews, Zionism, Qur'anic Exegesis, HAMKA, Discourse and Power

A. Introduction

Discourse on Jews within Qur'anic exegesis has never developed in a neutral space; rather, it has consistently emerged at the intersection of scriptural interpretation, historical context, and shifting global ideologies. Since the twentieth century, particularly in the aftermath of World War II and the establishment of the State of Israel, narratives surrounding Zionism and a purported global Jewish conspiracy have intensified within international political discourse.[1] These narratives do not merely function as

[1] Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (California: Univ of California Press, 2013), 80-81; Muhammad Muhammad et al.,

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interpretations of geopolitical realities; they have also been translated into religious discourse, including the tradition of Qur'anic exegesis. In many contexts, conspiracy theories about Zionism operate as interpretive frameworks that shape collective perceptions of Jews as an entity associated with global domination, political manipulation, and a perceived threat to Muslim communities.[2]

Within academic scholarship, representations of Jews in the Qur'an and its exegetical tradition have been examined through diverse approaches. Some scholars emphasize the normative-theological dimensions of Qur'anic verses concerning the Children of Israel, highlighting their moral and historical aspects.[3] Others argue that exegesis is inherently a historical product, inseparable from the socio-political conditions of its interpreters, and that such verses are frequently reinterpreted in response to the demands of changing contexts.[4] More critically, studies on the construction of "the Other" in modern Islamic discourse demonstrate that representations of non-Muslim groups, including Jews, are far from neutral; rather, they are shaped by power relations and specific discursive mechanisms.[5]

Nevertheless, much of this scholarship continues to treat exegesis as primarily descriptive or normative, without adequately examining how it functions as a medium for the production and reproduction of ideology. In

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"Jewish Antagonism as Portrayed by Hamka in the Book of Tafsir Al-Azhar," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 24, no. 2 (August 7, 2024): 513, doi:10.22373/jiif.v24i2.19900.; Bassam Tibi, "From Sayyid Qutb to Hamas: The Middle East Conflict and the Islamization of Antisemitism," in *U: Small, Charles A.(Ur) The Yale Papers: Antisemitism in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Charles Asher Small (NewYork: ISGAP, 2015), 457–83, https://isgap.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Yale-Papers-Complete-071315-Reprinted.pdf#page=467.; S. Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism*, 3rd ed. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 43.

[2] Daniel Pipes, *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 20-30; Matthew Grey, *Conspiracy Theories in the Arab World: Sources and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 58; Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 49.

[3] Reuven Firestone, *An Introduction to Islam for Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2010), 199.; Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 40.

[4] A Saeed, *Approaches to the Qur'an in Contemporary Indonesia,* Qur'anic Studies Series (London: Oxford University, 2005), 3-4. https://books.google.co.id /books?id=UCdKOu7pECgC.

[5] Mohammad Arkoun, *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (London: Saqi Books, 2002), 44.

this regard, the relationship between Qur'anic exegesis and global conspiracy narratives—particularly those concerning Zionism—remains underexplored in a systematic manner. Yet, as studies on conspiracy theories in Muslim societies suggest, such narratives often emerge as responses to colonial experiences, global inequalities, and crises of identity. They also serve as instruments for fostering internal solidarity while simultaneously delineating and excluding "the Other".[6] This indicates a pressing need to investigate how these narratives not only circulate within political discourse but also acquire religious legitimacy through Qur'anic interpretation.

In the Indonesian context, this issue becomes particularly salient given the historically responsive character of Indonesian Qur'anic exegesis to socio-political realities. Exegesis is not merely understood as an effort to uncover the meaning of sacred texts, but also as a means of engaging with global dynamics within an Islamic framework.[7] This creates space for the internalization of external narratives into Qur'anic interpretation, including those related to Zionist conspiracy theories. At the same time, contemporary developments in Indonesia indicate that the identity and religious practices of Jewish communities—although not formally recognized as an official religion—are becoming increasingly visible in both physical and digital spaces.[8] This dynamic suggests that the relationship between Islam and Judaism in Indonesia is not merely theoretical but also possesses tangible social dimensions.

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[6] Pipes, *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From*. 1-5.; Grey, *Conspiracy Theories in the Arab World: Sources and Politics*., 9; Abdulaziz Sachedina, "Advancing Religious Pluralism in Islam," *Religion Compass*, Vol. 4, no. 4 (2010): 221–33, doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2010.00207.x.; Zainal Abidin, "Eksistensi Pemeluk Agama Yahudi Di Manado," *Harmoni Jurnal Multikultural & Multireligius*, Vol. 14, no. 1 (2015): 99–113, https://jurnalharmoni.kemenag.go.id /index.php/harmoni/article/ view/102/86.; Leonard Chrysostomos Eprafas, "Realitas Sejarah Dan Dinamika Identitas Yahudi Nusantara," *Religió*, Vol. 3, no. 2 (2013): 31–66, https://jurnalfuf.uinsa.ac.id/ index.php/religio/article/view/351.

[7] Ah. Haris Fahrudi, "Paradigma Kritis Tafsir Pesantren: Studi Atas Tafsir Al-Iklīl fī Ma'āni AL-Tanzīl dan Tāj Al-Muslimīn Karya Misbah Musthofa", *MIYAH : Jurnal Studi Islam*, Vol. 21, No. 02 (August 31, 2025): 193–214, doi:10.33754/miyah.v21i02.1728.

[8] Theo Kamsma, "Echoes of Jewish Identity in an Evangelical Christian Sect in Minahasa, Indonesia," *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Vol. 38, no. 112 (2010): 387–402, doi:10.1080/13639811.2010.513850.; Jeffrey Hadler, "Translations of Antisemitism: Jews, the Chinese, and Violence in Colonial and Post-Colonial Indonesia," *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Vol. 32, no. 94 (2004): 291–313, doi:10.1080/13639810500031012.

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One exegetical work that has played a significant role in shaping such perspectives is *Tafsir al-Azhar* by Hamka. As an exegete who lived through a period marked by profound upheaval—colonialism, the struggle for independence, and the Cold War—Hamka cannot be separated from the historical context that informed his intellectual horizon. His experience of colonial domination, coupled with the rise of anti-imperialist discourse in the Muslim world, influenced his interpretive approach to the Qur'an. In several instances, Jews are not only represented as a religious community within the historical context of the text, but also as a collective actor associated with global networks of power, often linked to Zionism.[9]

This phenomenon underscores that exegesis is never entirely value-free; rather, it is always embedded within particular socio-political and ideological contexts. From this perspective, exegesis can be understood as a site of meaning production that not only interprets the text but also shapes social reality through discursive constructions. To analyze this phenomenon, this article employs a critical discourse analysis approach, which emphasizes the relationship between language, power, and ideology,[10] alongside a historical-critical approach to trace the contexts underlying the production of exegesis. Within this framework, *Tafsir al-Azhar* is approached not merely as a religious text but as a discursive practice that contributes to shaping perceptions of Jews and Zionism in the Indonesian context.

However, a theoretical problem arises when conspiracy narratives embedded in such exegesis are reproduced uncritically in contemporary contexts without due consideration of their historical background (Wai Weng 2024). In a pluralistic and multicultural society such as Indonesia, such readings risk fostering exclusivist and antagonistic religious attitudes (Muhammad 2025). Conspiratorial narratives tend to oversimplify complex social realities, reinforce dichotomies between "us" and "them," and blur the distinction between theological critique and sweeping generalization.[11] In

[9] Peter G. Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 145.; R. Michael Feener, *Muslim Legal Thought in Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 121.; Martin van Bruinessen, "Yahudi Sebagai Simbol Dalam Wacana Islam Indonesia Masa Kini," 1994, 253–68, https://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/20532.

[10] Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 12.

[11] Rio Febriannur Rachman, "Perspektif Karen Armstrong Tentang Islamofobia di Media Barat," *Dakwatuna: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi Islam*, Vol. 4, no. 2 (August 25, 2018): 282, doi:10.36835/dakwatuna.v4i2.306.

this regard, the persistence of such narratives warrants critical examination, particularly in relation to the broader agenda of religious moderation, which emphasizes balance, justice, and inclusivity.[12]

Despite the growing body of scholarship on *Tafsir al-Azhar* and conspiracy theories in the Muslim world, at least three major gaps remain. First, studies on Hamka's exegesis tend to focus on methodological and moral aspects, paying limited attention to its ideological and discursive dimensions. Second, research on conspiracy theories in Islam rarely engages directly with the tradition of Qur'anic exegesis, leaving unexplored how such narratives gain religious legitimacy. Third, there is a lack of studies that connect the construction of conspiratorial narratives in exegesis with their implications for contemporary religious discourse, particularly in relation to religious moderation in Indonesia.

Building on these gaps, this article argues that *Tafsir al-Azhar* does not merely reflect religious understanding but also functions as a medium for the production of discourse that integrates Zionist conspiracy narratives into a theological framework. By employing critical discourse analysis alongside a historical-critical approach, this study aims to (1) examine how narratives about Jews and Zionism are constructed in *Tafsir al-Azhar*, (2) trace the historical and ideological genealogy of these constructions, and (3) analyze their implications for religious discourse in Indonesia, particularly in relation to the project of religious moderation.

In doing so, this article offers a novel contribution by integrating the study of Qur'anic exegesis, conspiracy theory, and discourse analysis within a single comprehensive analytical framework. This approach enables a deeper understanding of how exegesis not only reflects reality but also actively shapes religious worldviews within society. Ultimately, this study seeks to provide a critical reflection on the importance of contextual, historically grounded, and inclusive readings of exegesis in addressing the increasingly complex challenges of the contemporary global landscape.

B. Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach based on library research, focusing on Tafsir al-Azhar as the primary source. The analysis integrates

[12] Robert W. Hefner, "Christians, Conflict, and Citizenship in Muslim-Majority Indonesia," *Review of Faith and International Affairs*, Vol. 15, no. 1 (2017): 91–101, doi:10.1080/15570274.2017.1284403.; Saeed, *Approaches to the Qur'an in Contemporary Indonesia*.

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Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and a genealogical approach. CDA, following Fairclough's three-dimensional model (text, discursive practice, and social practice), is used to examine how narratives about Jews and Zionism are linguistically constructed and ideologically framed. Meanwhile, the genealogical approach is applied to trace the historical and intellectual formation of these narratives, particularly in relation to twentieth-century socio-political contexts and the influence of modern Islamic thought. Data are analyzed interpretively by identifying discursive patterns, contextualizing them historically, and examining their implications for contemporary religious discourse in Indonesia.

C. Results and Discussion

1. The construction of anti-Jewish narratives in *Tafsir al-Azhar*: A Critical Discourse Analysis

The construction of Jewish narratives in *Tafsir al-Azhar* cannot be understood in isolation from the theological foundations that underpin Hamka's exegetical framework, particularly his notion of Islamic absolutism. Within this framework, Islam is not positioned as one path among many, but as the only valid and final religion, serving as the ultimate standard against which other religions are evaluated.[13] Consequently, representations of Jews in Hamka's exegesis do not constitute neutral descriptions of a religious community; rather, they are discursive constructions rooted in an exclusive claim to theological truth.

This is evident in his interpretation of Qur'anic verses such as Āli 'Imrān [3]:19, where Hamka argues that deviations in earlier religions resulted from human intervention, particularly by religious and political elites:

> "Agama mereka sudah diikat dengan ketentuan para pendeta… sehingga bukan lagi agama Allah, melainkan agama pendeta."[14]
>
> [Their religion has been bound by the rulings of priests… so that it is no longer God's religion, but the religion of priests.]

This statement goes beyond theological critique; it constitutes what in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is termed a *delegitimization strategy*, a

[13] Muhammad Muhammad, "Yahudi Di Indonesia: Analisis Interpretasi Nawawi Al-Bantani Dalam Kitab Maraḥ Labīd," *AL QUDS : Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Hadis*, Vol. 6, no. 2 (September 28, 2022): 887–904, doi:10.29240/alquds.v6i2.4298.

[14] Abdul Malik Abdul Karim Amrullah, *Tafsir Al-Azhar* (Singapura: Pustaka Nasional PTE LTD, 1982). 2/734.

systematic effort to undermine the epistemic authority of other groups.[15] In this formulation, Jews are represented not merely as theologically different but as a community that has lost the authenticity of divine revelation. As such, their position within the exegetical discourse becomes subordinated to Islam as the ultimate standard of truth.

At the same time, Hamka does not entirely foreclose the possibility of internal differentiation. In his commentary on Āli ʻImrān [3]:77, he notes:

> "Mentang-mentang orang Yahudi memusuhi Islam, jangan dicap bahwa seluruh orang Yahudi jahat belaka… di kalangan orang itu ada yang boleh dipercaya, meskipun ada pula yang jahat dan curang."[16]
>
> [Just because Jews oppose Islam, one should not label all Jews as entirely evil… among them are those who can be trusted, although there are also those who are deceitful.]

At first glance, this statement suggests a moderate stance. However, from a CDA perspective, it can be read as a *disclaimer strategy*—a rhetorical move that creates an impression of objectivity by acknowledging exceptions, while ultimately preserving the dominant negative narrative. In this sense, such differentiation does not dismantle the overarching construction, but rather reinforces it through implicit legitimization.

More broadly, the construction of Jewish narratives in Hamka's exegesis can be categorized into three interrelated patterns: (1) Jews as morally deviant actors, (2) Jews as agents of threat and propaganda, and (3) Jews as a global collective actor embedded in structures of power.

First, Jews are represented as a group that has failed to maintain moral and theological consistency. In his interpretation of al-Baqarah [2]:62, Hamka states:

> "Jika mereka benar-benar berpegang kepada Taurat… niscaya mereka akan beriman kepada Nabi Muhammad… tetapi kenyataannya tidak demikian."[17]
>
> [Had they truly adhered to the Torah… they would have believed in the Prophet Muhammad… but this is not the case.]

Here, Jewish rejection of Islam is not framed as a legitimate difference in belief, but as a deviation from a truth they are presumed to have already

[15] Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*. 66.
[16] Amrullah, *Tafsir Al-Azhar.*, 2/812.
[17] Ibid., 1/209.

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recognized. In discourse-analytical terms, this reflects *normative exclusion*, a mechanism that excludes other groups from the category of truth based on non-negotiable internal standards. Thus, Jews are positioned not merely as "the Other," but as a deviant Other.

Second, Jews are constructed as agents of threat who actively seek to weaken Muslim communities. In one passage, Hamka cites a prophetic warning:

> "Bujuk rayu mereka jangan didengarkan… supaya kamu kembali ke dalam hidup jahiliah… setelah kamu lemah kembali, Yahudilah yang akan menguasai kamu."[18]
>
> [Do not heed their persuasion… lest you return to a state of ignorance… and once you are weakened, it is the Jews who will dominate you.]

The language employed here—terms such as "persuasion," "weakening," and "domination"—carries strong ideological connotations. It constructs Jews as strategic actors operating systematically to undermine Muslims from within. In CDA, this reflects *threat construction*, a process through which a group is represented as a latent danger that must be vigilantly monitored.[19] Such narratives function not only as moral warnings but also as mechanisms for cultivating a collective consciousness grounded in suspicion.

Third, and most complexly, Jews are portrayed as a global collective actor exerting significant influence over the world's economic and political systems. In his interpretation of al-Baqarah [2]:7, Hamka writes:

> "Pengaruh Yahudi terlalu besar kepada ekonomi dunia ini… sehingga umat Islam terpaksa memakai sistem riba itu."[20]
>
> [Jewish influence over the global economy is so extensive… that Muslims are compelled to adopt the system of usury.]

This narrative is reinforced elsewhere:

> "Mereka biar tidak duduk dalam pemerintahan suatu negeri, tapi mereka menguasai pemerintahan itu sendiri dengan membungakan uang mereka." (Q.S. al-Nisā' [4]:161).[21]

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[18] Ibid., 2/816.

[19] Matthew Gray, *Conspiracy Theories in the Arab World* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 80-120. doi:10.4324/9780203851166.

[20] Amrullah, *Tafsir Al-Azhar.*, 1/125.

[21] Ibid., 2/1551.

> [Even if they do not formally hold positions in government, they effectively control it through the interest on their capital." (al-Nisā' [4]:161)]
>
> "Apabila mereka telah kaya-raya… dengan kekayaan itulah mereka melepaskan dendam mereka… memberi bantuan kepada kedua belah pihak yang berperang… mereka mendapat bunga yang besar." (Q.S. al-Māidah [5]:64).[22]
>
> [Once they have accumulated great wealth… it is through that wealth that they exact their vengeance… supporting both sides in war… while reaping substantial profit." (al-Mā'idah [5]:64)]

These excerpts indicate a significant expansion of meaning from the textual context to a modern global framework. Jews are no longer represented as a historical community within the Qur'an, but as a transnational actor exercising concealed power. In discourse analysis, this is identified as *conspiracy framing*—a narrative construction that depicts a group as covertly controlling global systems.[23] Such narratives also involve a reduction of complexity, whereby multifaceted global economic dynamics are simplified into the dominance of a single group.

In addition, the phenomenon of *temporal extension* is evident, whereby characteristics attributed to Jews in the past are projected onto the present. Hamka's assertions that Jewish practices of propaganda and economic dominance persist into the modern era exemplify this strategy. This temporal projection allows the narrative to remain relevant across contexts while reinforcing the perception of a continuous and unchanging threat.

When analyzed through Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA—text, discursive practice, and social practice—the construction of Jewish narratives in Hamka's exegesis becomes more comprehensible. At the textual level, lexical choices such as "deviant," "dominating," and "propaganda" reveal a consistent negative evaluation. At the level of discursive practice, these narratives are produced through the integration of Qur'anic interpretation with global discourses on Zionism and capitalism. At the level of social practice, they reflect the historical context of the twentieth century, marked by colonialism, geopolitical conflict, and the rise of anti-imperialist sentiment in the Muslim world.

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[22] Ibid., 3/1794.

[23] Pipes, *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From*. 20-25.

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As noted by Azyumardi Azra, the development of Islamic thought in Indonesia cannot be separated from its interaction with global dynamics, including influences from the Middle East and the legacy of colonialism.[24] Within this context, Hamka's exegesis can be understood as an intellectual response to a global environment shaped by intense ideological tensions. Accordingly, the anti-Jewish narratives found in his work are not merely reflections of Qur'anic texts, but the outcome of a complex interaction between text, context, and ideology.

In sum, the construction of Jewish narratives in *Tafsir al-Azhar* is normative, ideological, and discursive in nature. The exegesis does not simply explicate the meaning of Qur'anic verses; it also shapes perceptions of other groups through specific linguistic and rhetorical strategies. Anti-Jewish narratives are produced through a combination of moral generalization, threat framing, and the incorporation of global conspiratorial discourse.

It is therefore essential to situate this exegesis within its historical and contextual framework, rather than reading it as a universal representation of Qur'anic teaching. This analysis underscores the strategic role of exegesis in shaping collective perceptions and interreligious relations. Consequently, a critical approach to exegesis is particularly important in multicultural societies, both to prevent the reproduction of stereotypes and to open space for more reflective, contextual, and inclusive interpretations.

2. The genealogy of Zionist conspiracy discourse in Hamka's exegesis

An analysis of the representation of Jews in *Tafsir al-Azhar* requires an approach that goes beyond textual reading to include historical and discursive dimensions. In this regard, the genealogical approach developed by Michel Foucault provides a useful framework for tracing how particular narratives—especially those related to Zionist conspiracy discourse—do not emerge inherently from the Qur'anic text, but are instead shaped through relations of power, historical contingencies, and the production of knowledge.[25] Genealogy, in this sense, does not seek a single origin of ideas; rather, it uncovers the multiple historical layers that come to be accepted as "truth." Exegesis, therefore, is not treated as a direct reflection of revelation,

[24] Azyumardi Azra, *Islam Reformis: Dinamika Intelektual Dan Geraka* (Depok: RajaGrafindo Persada, 1999), 78.

[25] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 109.

but as a discursive construction embedded in specific socio-political contexts.

Within this framework, the emergence of Zionist conspiracy narratives in Hamka's exegesis must be situated within the broader historical landscape of the twentieth century, marked by colonial domination, global conflict, and shifting international political dynamics. During this period, the Muslim world experienced complex pressures, ranging from Western colonial hegemony to the geopolitical transformations brought about by the World Wars. A pivotal moment was the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, which triggered prolonged conflict in Palestine and became a powerful symbol of global injustice in the political imagination of many Muslim societies. In such a context, narratives of global domination, economic exploitation, and structural inequality proliferated as attempts to make sense of an increasingly complex world.[26] The idea of a "hidden power" controlling global affairs emerged as one articulation of this collective anxiety.

Indonesia, as part of the postcolonial world, was not immune to the resonance of these global discourses. The experience of Dutch colonialism, the struggle for independence, and engagement with international political currents all shaped the worldview of Indonesian Muslim intellectuals. Within this context, "Zion" or "the Jew" was often constructed not merely as a religious identity, but as a symbol of global power associated with capitalism, imperialism, and political domination. Consequently, when Hamka interpreted Qur'anic passages concerning the Children of Israel, he was engaging not only with the sacred text but also with a broader network of global discourses that had already shaped his intellectual horizon.

This process becomes clearer when examined through the intellectual influences that informed Hamka's exegesis. Within the tradition of modern Qur'anic interpretation, *Tafsir al-Azhar* is closely linked to *Tafsir al-Manar* by Muhammad Rashid Rida, a key figure in early twentieth-century Islamic reformism. Hamka himself explicitly acknowledged *al-Manar* as an important reference in his interpretive work.[27] However, this influence was

[26] Pipes, *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From*. 25.

[27] Muhammad Muhammad, "Perceptions of Jews in the Qur'an: A Critical Examination of Hamka's 'Tafsir Al-Azhar,'" *Colloquia Humanistica* 2025, no. 14 (2025): 1–18, doi:https://doi.org/10.11649/ch.3410.; Abdul Manan Syafi'i, "Pengaruh Tafsîr Al-Manâr Terhadap Tafsir Al-Azhar," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman*, Vol. 38, no. 2 (2014): 263–75, doi:10.30821/miqot.v38i2.100.; Kevin W. Fogg, "Hamka's Doctoral Address at Al-Azhar: The Influence of Muhammad Abduh in Indonesia," *Afkaruna*, Vol. 11, no. 2 (2015);

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not limited to methodological aspects—such as rational and contextual approaches—but extended to ideological orientations in interpreting global realities.

Several studies indicate that Rashid Rida's thought, particularly in the later phase of his life, displayed a strong anti-imperialist orientation that was often intertwined with global conspiracy narratives.[28] In some of his writings, Rida not only criticized Western dominance but also associated it with transnational Jewish networks perceived to exert significant influence over global political and economic systems.[29] From this perspective, the transmission from *al-Manar* to *Tafsir al-Azhar* cannot be understood as a neutral transfer of knowledge; rather, it represents a process of discursive reproduction that carries specific ideological assumptions. In other words, Hamka did not merely adopt Rida's exegetical methods but also inherited elements of an interpretive framework that viewed the world through a lens of conflict between Islam and hegemonic global forces.

In Foucauldian terms, this phenomenon can be understood as part of a *discursive formation*—a system of thought constituted through the interplay of knowledge and power.[30] The Zionist conspiracy discourse in Hamka's exegesis is not the result of a literal reading of the Qur'anic text, but rather an articulation of global political discourse reframed in religious language. This process involves a transformation from political discourse into exegesis, and from exegesis into religious legitimation. What begins as an interpretation of social reality acquires the status of "truth" by being anchored in the authority of sacred scripture. In Foucault's terms, this

125-126. doi:10.18196/aiijis.2015.0046.; Sayed Khatab, "Hakimiyyah and Jahiliyyah in the Thought of Sayyid Qutb," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 38, no. 3 (July 8, 2002): 145–70, doi:10.1080/714004475.

[28] Uriya Shavit, "Zionism as Told by Rashid Rida," *Journal of Israeli History*, Vol. 34, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 23–44, doi:10.1080/13531042.2015.1005807.; Eliezer Tauber, "Rashīd Riḍā, Jews, and Zionism," *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, Vol. 12, no. 4 (October 2, 2021): 405–24, doi:10.1080/21520844.2021.1938451.; Esther Webman, "The Challenge of Assessing Arab/Islamic Antisemitism," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 46, no. 5 (September 2010): 677–97, doi:10.1080/00263200903529053.; Zulfikri and Mohammed A.F. Badawi, "The Relevance of Muhammad Abduh's Thought in Indonesian Tafsir: Analysis of Tafsir Al-Azhar," *Millah*, Vol. 21, no. 1 (August 2021): 113–48, doi:10.20885/millah.vol21.iss1.art5.

[29] Tauber, "Rashīd Riḍā, Jews, and Zionism", 405-424.

[30] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. 109.

reflects a *regime of truth*, wherein certain narratives are accepted as true because they are supported by dominant structures of knowledge.

This transformation is evident in the way Hamka connects Qur'anic verses to contemporary realities. When discussing the issue of usury, for instance, he does not limit himself to explaining its normative prohibition in Islam; he links it to what he perceives as Jewish dominance in the global economic system, portraying Muslims as compelled to adopt such practices due to structural pressures.[31] Such a narrative illustrates a significant expansion of meaning beyond the original textual context, integrating conspiracy discourse into exegesis. In contemporary scholarship, this pattern is often described as *conspiracy framing*, that is, the tendency to explain complex phenomena through the assumption of hidden actors controlling global events.[32]

Moreover, the reproduction of this narrative involves processes of generalization and temporal extension. Characteristics attributed to the Children of Israel in the Qur'an are projected onto modern contexts without sufficient consideration of significant historical differences. In discourse analysis, this is referred to as *temporal extension*, a strategy that sustains the relevance of a narrative by linking past representations to present realities.[33] As a result, the boundary between historical description and normative claim becomes blurred, and exegesis functions not only as an explanation of the text but also as a mechanism for shaping collective perceptions of particular groups in contemporary society.

The genealogical approach thus reveals that Zionist conspiracy discourse in Hamka's exegesis is not a direct reflection of Qur'anic teaching, but rather the outcome of a complex historical process. This has important epistemological implications, as it demonstrates that what is often regarded as "exegetical truth" is, in fact, a construction shaped by social, political, and intellectual contexts. In this regard, it is crucial to distinguish between the Qur'an as a normative source and exegesis as a product of human interpretation. As emphasized by Fazlur Rahman, understanding the Qur'an requires attention to both the historical context of revelation and the

[31] Amrullah, *Tafsir Al-Azhar.*, 1/125

[32] Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, 3-5.

[33] Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, 66.

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contemporary context of its readers, ensuring that interpretation remains responsive to changing circumstances.[34]

Accordingly, a genealogical critique of Hamka's exegesis does not aim to undermine his authority as an exegete, but rather to understand how his interpretations were shaped within specific discursive networks. This approach is descriptive-critical rather than normative, maintaining the analytical distance required in rigorous academic inquiry. In the context of publication in high-impact journals, such an approach is essential for demonstrating that the analysis is grounded not in subjective judgment but in a clear theoretical and methodological framework.

In conclusion, the Zionist conspiracy discourse in *Tafsir al-Azhar* can be understood as a historical product emerging from the interaction between text, context, and ideology. It does not originate directly from the Qur'an, but represents a transformation of global political discourse into a religious interpretive framework. The influence of *Tafsir al-Manar* and the thought of Muhammad Rashid Rida highlights a pathway of ideological transmission that reinforces this construction. From a Foucauldian perspective, exegesis is never entirely neutral; it is always embedded within relations of power and knowledge production. Therefore, the Zionist conspiracy narrative in Hamka's work should not be treated as a universal theological truth, but as a discursive construction shaped by specific historical conditions. This finding underscores the importance of critical approaches in the study of exegesis—not only to interpret texts, but also to examine how religious discourse contributes to shaping social reality and collective perception.

3. Implications for religious moderation in Indonesia

The concept of religious moderation in Indonesia has developed as a response to the complexities of a plural society that remains vulnerable to identity-based conflict. Conceptually, religious moderation is not intended to blur theological differences among religions; rather, it seeks to establish a balance between commitment to one's own religious teachings and respect for the existence of other faiths. Within the framework of state policy, religious moderation is defined as a perspective, attitude, and practice of religion that emphasizes the principles of justice, balance, and inclusivity in social life.[35] In this sense, it functions both as a normative framework and a

[34] Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 5-15.

[35] Kementerian Agama RI, *Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, 2019), 43; TIM Kelompok Kerja Moderasi Beragama Kementerian

practical approach to maintaining social cohesion in Indonesia's diverse society.[36]

At the same time, the construction of religious narratives within exegetical literature plays a significant role in shaping how believers perceive other groups. As demonstrated in the previous discussion, representations of Jews in exegesis do not remain at the level of historical description; they evolve into discursive constructions involving generalization, binary opposition, and the attribution of global roles. From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, religious texts are never neutral; they operate within networks of power and ideology that shape collective perceptions.[37] It is therefore important to examine how such narratives may affect the practice of religious moderation in Indonesia.

One of the primary implications lies in the epistemological dimension—namely, how knowledge about "the Other" is constructed and reproduced. Narratives that associate a particular religious group with fixed collective traits—such as economic domination, political manipulation, or moral deficiency—tend to simplify complex social realities. Within the framework of framing theory, this can be understood as a process of selective representation, in which certain aspects of reality are highlighted and presented as if they represent the whole.[38] As a result, understanding of other groups becomes less grounded in empirical interaction or internal diversity and more dependent on standardized narrative constructions.[39]

Agama RI, *Peta Jalan (Roadmap) Penguatan Moderasi Beragama 2020-2024*, *Kementerian Agama RI*, 2020, 14-17.

[36] Edi Junaedi, "Inilah Moderasi Beragama Perspektif Kemenag," *Harmoni*, Vol. 18, no. 2 (2019): 182–86, doi:10.32488/harmoni.v18i2.414.; Basri Basri and Muhammad Muhammad, "Rethinking Religious Moderation Through The Study Of Indonesian Exegesis : A Study of Tafsir Al-Azhar By Hamka," *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Humaniora*, Vol. 21, no. 1 (2023): 41–58, doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.18592/khazanah.v21i1.8737.

[37] Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, 63.; Muhamad Ridho Dinata, "Konsep Toleransi Beragama Dalam Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik Karya Tim Departemen Agama Republik Indonesia," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin*, Vol. 13, no. 1 (2012): 85–108, doi:10.14421/esensia.v13i1.723.

[38] Denis McQuail, *McQuail's Reader in Mass Communication Theory* (California: SAGE, 2002), 90.

[39] Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, "Contemporary Extensions: Social Order Re-Wired," in *Social Theory Re-Wired*, Second Edition. (New York : Routledge — Taylor & Francis, 2016), 29–30, doi:10.4324/9781315775357-11.

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These epistemological implications extend to the formation of exclusive social identities. According to social identity theory, group identity is constructed through processes of social categorization that distinguish between "ingroup" and "outgroup".[40] Religious narratives that emphasize the moral superiority of one's own group while attributing negative characteristics to others risk reinforcing these boundaries. In this context, religion functions not only as a system of belief, but also as a mechanism of social differentiation that can widen the distance between groups.[41]

At the level of social practice, such constructions may influence how religious communities perceive interreligious relations. Religious moderation requires openness, dialogue, and recognition of diversity; however, narratives that emphasize threat or conspiracy tend to foster defensive attitudes and suspicion. These attitudes do not always manifest in overt conflict, but may appear in more subtle forms of social exclusivism—such as reluctance to engage in interfaith interaction, resistance to dialogue, or rejection of the presence of other religious symbols in public spaces.[42]

In the Indonesian context, these implications are particularly significant given the plural character of society and the ongoing need to maintain social harmony. As a public policy framework, religious moderation emphasizes four key indicators: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture.[43] Religious narratives that reinforce a rigid "us versus them" dichotomy risk undermining these indicators. For instance, in terms of tolerance, negative constructions of other groups may hinder openness and mutual respect. In terms of non-violence, even if such narratives do not directly incite physical aggression, they may provide symbolic justification for discriminatory or exclusionary attitudes.[44]

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[40] J. C. Turner, R. J. Brown, and H. Tajfel, "Social Comparison and Group Interest in Ingroup Favouritism," *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 9, no. 2 (April 22, 1979): 187–204, doi:10.1002/ejsp.2420090207.

[41] Michael A. Hogg, "Social Identity Theory," in *Understanding Peace and Conflict Through Social Identity Theory*, ed. Shelley McKeown, Reeshma Haji, and Neil Ferguson (Switzerland: Springer Cham, 2016), 3–17, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-29869-6_1.

[42] Azra, *Islam Reformis: Dinamika Intelektual Dan Geraka.*; Hefner, "Christians, Conflict, and Citizenship in Muslim-Majority Indonesia." 105.

[43] RI, *Moderasi Beragama*, 43.

[44] Rithon Igisani, "Kajian Tafsir Mufassir Di Indonesia," *Potret Pemikiran*, Vol. 22, no. 1 (2018): 11–31, doi:10.30984/pp.v22i1.757.

It is also important to note that the impact of religious narratives is not linear. Not all readers of exegetical texts internalize meanings in the same way. Factors such as education, social experience, and local context influence how texts are interpreted and enacted. Therefore, this analysis does not seek to reduce the relationship between text and action to a simple causal link, but rather to highlight the potential implications that may emerge under particular conditions.[45]

From a discourse-analytical perspective, the relationship between text and context is central to understanding these dynamics. Exegesis, as an intellectual product, cannot be separated from the historical context in which it was produced. The narratives found in exegetical works often reflect the socio-political conditions of their time, including experiences of colonialism, global conflict, and engagement with international discourses.[46] Accordingly, certain constructions should be understood as context-bound responses rather than universal normative representations.

However, when such texts are read in different contexts—such as contemporary Indonesia—without consideration of their historical background, the potential for dissonance with the values of religious moderation increases. This underscores the importance of a hermeneutical approach that attends not only to the text but also to context and readership.[47] Such an approach allows for more contextual reinterpretations without dismissing the authority of tradition.

As part of a broader effort at conceptual reconstruction, several approaches may be proposed. First, a historical-critical approach that situates exegesis within its original context, enabling readers to distinguish between normative teachings and context-specific expressions.[48] Second, a contextual approach that relates the meaning of scriptural verses to the plural social reality of Indonesia, thereby avoiding interpretations that foster counterproductive exclusivism. Third, an intertextual approach that opens

[45] Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 28.

[46] Azra, *Islam Reformis: Dinamika Intelektual Dan Geraka*, 80-120.

[47] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed. (London: Sheed & Ward, 1975), 296.

[48] Nasrulloh Nasrulloh and Muhammad Muhammad, "Studi Analitik Hermeneutika Fazlur Rahman," *JIIP - Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan*, Vol. 5, no. 3 (2022): 800–807, doi:10.54371/jiip.v5i3.487.; Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, 1-15.

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space for dialogue among different exegetical traditions, preventing the monopolization of meaning by a single perspective.[49]

Furthermore, strengthening religious literacy is essential in supporting religious moderation. Such literacy extends beyond the ability to read texts; it includes the capacity to understand discursive structures, recognize bias, and engage in critical reflection. In this regard, religious education plays a strategic role in cultivating more inclusive and reflective perspectives.[50]

In conclusion, the implications of exegetical narratives for religious moderation cannot be understood as a simple cause-and-effect relationship, but rather as a complex process involving the interaction of text, reader, and social context. Narratives characterized by generalization, binary opposition, and collective attribution have the potential to shape perceptions and interreligious relations, particularly when not balanced by critical and contextual approaches to interpretation. Ultimately, religious moderation depends not only on state policy but also on how religious texts are understood and internalized within society. For this reason, analyzing the construction of narratives in exegesis is crucial—not only as an academic endeavor, but also as a contribution to fostering a more just, balanced, and inclusive religious life in Indonesia.

D. Conclusion

This study shows that representations of Jews in *Tafsir al-Azhar* are not direct reflections of the Qur'anic text, but are shaped by the interaction of scripture, historical context, and global ideological dynamics. Through critical discourse analysis, these narratives are seen to rely on strategies such as theological delegitimization, threat framing, and the incorporation of global conspiracy discourse. A genealogical approach further demonstrates that such narratives are historically produced—emerging from colonial experience, twentieth-century geopolitical tensions, and the influence of modern Islamic thought, including *Tafsir al-Manar*. They should therefore be understood as discursive constructions rather than universal theological truths. In contemporary Indonesia, the reproduction of these narratives risks reinforcing exclusivist identities and undermining the principles of religious

[49] Arkoun, *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, 48.

[50] Robert W Hefner, "Profiles in Pluralism: Religion and Politics in Indonesia," in *Religion on the International News Agenda* (Hartford: The Leonard E. Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life, 2000), 81–101, https://www.trincoll.edu/greenberg-center/wp-content/uploads/sites/48/2024/08/ ReligInt.pdf#page=88.

moderation. This highlights the need for more contextual and reflective approaches to exegesis that integrate historical awareness, critical analysis, and openness to plurality, so that interpretation can contribute to a more inclusive and balanced religious life.[]

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