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Emotion, Sound, and Piety: Interpreting the Living Qur'an through Anna M. Gade's Thought in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study explores the concept of the Living Qur'an in Indonesian society through the lens of Anna M. Gade's thought, focusing on the ways in which Muslims read, interpret, and practice the Qur'an within social and cultural contexts. Employing a descriptive qualitative method based on literature analysis, the research investigates how the Qur'an

functions not only as a source of doctrinal knowledge but also as a performative and emotional force in everyday religious life. Findings highlight the unique Indonesian engagement with the Qur'an, where non-Arabic speaking communities demonstrate profound aesthetic and spiritual connections through recitation and ritual. Gade's analysis emphasizes the role of affect, sound, and embodiment in Qur'anic practices, offering an alternative perspective on piety as a deeply personal and experiential phenomenon. While her work is subject to critique—particularly regarding generalizations and lack of empirical specificity—it provides valuable insights into the religious dynamics of Indonesian Muslims, including community participation, media usage, lifelong learning, and women's empowerment. The study concludes that the Qur'an operates both informatively and performatively, shaping a psycho-emotional relationship that influences the believer's psychological and spiritual state. Gade's contributions pave the way for future inquiries into the affective and performative dimensions of Islamic religiosity in diverse cultural settings.

Keywords: Anna Gade; Living Qur'an; MTQ.

Abstrak

Studi ini mengkaji konsep Al-Qur'an yang Hidup dalam masyarakat Indonesia melalui pemikiran Anna M. Gade, dengan fokus pada cara umat Islam membaca, menafsirkan, dan mengamalkan Al-Qur'an dalam konteks sosial dan budaya. Menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif berbasis analisis kepustakaan, penelitian ini menelusuri bagaimana Al-Qur'an berfungsi tidak hanya sebagai sumber pengetahuan doktrinal, tetapi juga sebagai kekuatan performatif dan emosional dalam kehidupan keagamaan sehari-hari. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa keterlibatan masyarakat Indonesia dengan Al-Qur'an bersifat unik, di mana komunitas yang tidak berbahasa Arab tetap menunjukkan keterhubungan estetis dan spiritual yang mendalam melalui tilawah dan ritual. Analisis Gade menekankan peran afeksi, bunyi, dan tubuh dalam praktik-praktik Qur'ani, serta menawarkan perspektif alternatif tentang kesalehan sebagai fenomena yang sangat personal dan pengalaman. Meskipun pemikirannya mendapat kritik—terutama terkait generalisasi dan kurangnya data empiris yang spesifik—karyanya memberikan wawasan berharga mengenai dinamika keberagamaan Muslim Indonesia, termasuk partisipasi komunitas, pemanfaatan media, pembelajaran sepanjang hayat, dan pemberdayaan perempuan. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa Al-Qur'an memiliki fungsi informatif dan performatif sekaligus, membentuk hubungan psiko-emosional yang memengaruhi kondisi psikologis dan spiritual seorang Muslim. Kontribusi Gade membuka ruang bagi penelitian lanjutan terkait dimensi afektif dan performatif dalam keberagamaan Islam di berbagai konteks budaya.

Kata kunci: Anna Gade; Living Qur'an; MTQ

Introduction

According to Clifford Geertz, religion is inherently intertwined with society. This relationship is evident in the presence of religious symbols embedded within social life. Religion is not merely a component of theological rituals, but permeates everyday social experiences. In other words, religion is a living force that becomes an integral part of individual lives. Geertz portrays religion not only as an expression of faith but as a **"system of symbols" that shapes human worldviews, provides meaning to life's realities,** and guides daily behavior. In his study of Javanese society, he emphasizes that religion encompasses three interrelated dimensions: ritual, belief, and social ethics. Together, these elements construct a framework through which individuals understand their relationship with the divine, with others, and with their social environment (Geertz, 1960).

A key component of religion—the sacred scripture—is also a crucial element to which society responds. Beyond serving as the primary source of religious teachings, scripture is internalized in multiple ways, assuming diverse meanings and functions in accordance with cultural context, tradition, and both individual and collective understanding. This occurs because sacred texts generate norms and practices that guide human life, both spiritually and socially. For instance, the normative dimensions of communal and societal life often encompass moral values, ethical principles, and interpersonal relationships inspired by scriptural teachings. Similarly, religious practices—especially those involving the reading, interpretation, and contemplation of sacred texts—are shaped by these interactions. As Abdullah (2006) asserts, sacred scripture also functions as a means of social integration, fostering solidarity among adherents and serving as a foundation for the formation of collective identity within a community. Thus, scripture should not be viewed solely as a theological document but also as a dynamic social guide.

With regard to the final issue—societal interaction with sacred texts—empirical observations reveal a lack of in-depth research addressing this dynamic. Most studies tend to focus primarily on extracting normative teachings directly from the text itself. However, scholarship that explores the relationship between society and scripture is equally essential to understanding how sacred texts are interpreted, internalized, and implemented in daily life. In this context, scripture functions not only as a source of doctrine but also as a cultural product, continually reinterpreted and responded to

within specific socio-political and cultural frameworks. As Assmann (2006) notes, sacred texts possess a dimension of "cultural memory," enabling religious writings to remain alive through ongoing interpretative processes within society. This underscores that societal engagement with scripture is a dynamic phenomenon that warrants greater attention in academic inquiry.

At this point, the research conducted by Anna Gade becomes highly significant. Her work offers a nuanced and insightful exploration of how the Qur'an is read, interpreted, and practiced in the life of a Muslim (Gade, 2008). In her book *Perfection Makes Practice: Learning, Emotion, and the Recited Qur'an in Indonesia*, Gade illustrates that the act of reciting the Qur'an involves not only technical proficiency but is also deeply intertwined with the emotional experiences of the reciter. Although not explicitly stated in her work, Gade implicitly raises two fundamental research questions: how is the Qur'an interpreted and practiced in everyday life, and how do readers' emotional engagements influence their interaction with the sacred text?

Gade further emphasizes that reciting the Qur'an is not merely a religious obligation, but also a spiritual medium that strengthens the individual's connection with God. The process of reading and understanding the Qur'an often bears significant implications for social life, including the construction of religious identity, the reinforcement of Muslim communal solidarity, and its influence on moral attitudes and behavior.

Building on these findings, this study aims to revisit and elaborate upon Gade's valuable contributions by re-examining the phenomenon of Muslim individuals' interaction with the Qur'an across diverse social and cultural contexts. In doing so, the research offers a fresh perspective on the notion of the "*Living Qur'an*" as articulated by Anna M. Gade, thereby enriching the discourse within contemporary Qur'anic and tafsir studies. Furthermore, the study holds practical relevance for educators and academics by providing insights that can inform the development of Islamic education curricula that are more contextually grounded—taking into account local cultural dynamics as integral to the process of engaging with the Qur'anic text.

Theoretical Framework

1. Contemporary Thought on the Qur'an and Society

In theoretical explorations of the Qur'an, it is essential to consider how the sacred text is understood within contemporary societal contexts. Anna M. Gade offers a fresh perspective that seeks to reexamine the relevance of Qur'anic teachings in the lives of modern Muslim communities. Gade does not approach the Qur'an as a static or fixed text but rather as a dynamic source of guidance and inspiration that continues to shape and respond to the challenges of changing times. She underscores the importance of engaging the Qur'an within evolving social and cultural frameworks, allowing it to "live" through the everyday practices and experiences of Muslim societies. Her view aligns with hermeneutical theories that emphasize the interpretation of texts based on historical and social contexts (Lutfianto & Nafsiyah, 2022). Thus, Gade's scholarship may be understood through the lens of Qur'anic hermeneutics, which holds that every reader and community brings their own perspectives and contexts to bear on the interpretation of the text.

2. The Hermeneutics of the Qur'an

Qur'anic hermeneutics refers to the deep interpretive study of the Qur'anic text, taking into account linguistic, historical, and social dimensions. This theoretical approach posits that interpretations of the Qur'an are not static but evolve in accordance with societal developments and the shifting needs of the time (Sidik & Sulistyana, 2021). Hermeneutical theory suggests that understanding a text requires more than linguistic or grammatical expertise—it demands a reader's awareness of, and sensitivity to, social and cultural transformations (Rahmah, 2013). This approach is particularly relevant to Gade's work, which illustrates that the Qur'an should be applied in ways that are responsive to the conditions of contemporary life. In this sense, Gade invites Muslims to renew their engagement with the Qur'an through interpretive efforts that resonate with their lived realities.

3. Islamic Social Exegesis and Community Empowerment

Gade's intellectual framework also resonates with Islamic social theory, which emphasizes the Qur'an as a foundational source for community empowerment. In many

of her writings, she advocates for interpretations of the Qur'an that aim to empower individuals and communities in the pursuit of a just and prosperous society. For Gade, the Qur'an is not merely a sacred text to be revered but a transformative guide that can inspire social change. Islamic social theory often highlights key Qur'anic values such as justice, equality, and freedom as principles to be enacted in societal life (Ningsih & Zalisman, 2024). Within this framework, Gade encourages Muslims to explore Qur'anic values that can revitalize communities, provide solutions to social problems, and respond to contemporary changes with the wisdom embedded in the text.

Social exegesis (*tafsir ijtimā'i*) represents a methodological approach within Qur'anic studies that seeks to understand how the Qur'an can contribute to social transformation and societal reform. Gade's thought emphasizes that exegesis should not be confined to ritualistic or dogmatic concerns but should also focus on the Qur'an's social and practical dimensions. Social exegesis regards the Qur'an as a tool for addressing real-world injustices such as poverty, inequality, and discrimination. Gade's emphasis on a contextual and progressive reading of the Qur'an aligns with this vision, calling on interpreters to be attuned to the social conditions in which they work and live.

4. *The Implementation of the Qur'an in Modern Societal Life*

Anna M. Gade argues that the understanding of the Qur'an must not be rigid or disconnected from the realities of daily life. In this theoretical reflection, one may also refer to the ideas of other contemporary scholars who regard the Qur'an as a source of guidance that must remain relevant across diverse social contexts. This perspective acknowledges that each generation faces distinct challenges, and that the Qur'an must serve as a living source of ethical and existential guidance for each era.

Moreover, the concept of *ijtihad*, or creative interpretation, becomes central in enabling scholars and practitioners to discover solutions that respond to contemporary societal needs. *Ijtihad* allows for greater flexibility in the application of Qur'anic teachings, enabling Muslims to animate those values within both social and political domains.

Gade's contributions are best understood through a multidisciplinary lens that integrates religious studies, sociology, history, and cultural studies. Through this integrative approach, her scholarship portrays the Qur'an as a living text that operates within the spiritual, moral, and social spheres of community life. This theoretical framework invites critical analysis of how the Qur'an can be concretely translated into everyday practices, and how it can act as a catalyst for positive social transformation (Nurhaidah et al., 2024).

Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a library research approach. This approach involves the collection of data through a comprehensive process of reading, identifying relevant sources, noting significant information, and organizing data to support analytical interpretation. Descriptive analysis techniques are utilized to depict, interpret, and explain the phenomenon of societal reception toward sacred texts within various social and cultural contexts.

The primary sources of data in this research consist of literature, including books, scholarly journals, articles, documents, and other relevant publications. These sources not only support the theoretical framework of the study but also provide a broader understanding of how sacred texts are internalized, interpreted, and applied in different cultural settings.

As noted by Creswell (2013), qualitative research rooted in library-based inquiry relies heavily on authentic and academically credible sources. In this context, a hermeneutic approach is adopted as the principal analytical framework, with a particular focus on the thought of Anna M. Gade. The hermeneutic method facilitates an in-depth understanding of religious texts and discourses by considering contextual, historical, and interpretive dimensions. Therefore, this approach is deemed appropriate for examining the interaction between society and sacred texts as part of a complex socio-cultural phenomenon.

Results and Discussions

*Emosi, Pendidikan, dan Kesalehan dalam Tradisi Pembacaan Al-Qur'an:
Perspektif Anna M. Gade dalam Konteks Indonesia*

Although only a few claim Arabic as their mother tongue, Indonesian Muslims have long been renowned for their proficiency and beauty in reciting the Qur'an. The tradition of reciting the Qur'an in a deliberate, melodious manner has become an integral part of the religious life of Muslim communities in Indonesia. In the 1990s, during a wave of Islamic revitalization in Indonesia, this phenomenon became increasingly prominent. This revitalization was rooted in the expansion of study groups, or *pengajian*, across various layers of society. Study circles proliferated in diverse spaces, from kindergartens, banks, to government vehicle bureaus (Fealy & White, 2008).

This movement not only expanded access to religious education but also became a platform for strengthening Islamic identity amidst the forces of modernization and globalization. The study groups often served as venues for learning, sharing spiritual experiences, and fostering social solidarity among their members. As Howell (2008) expressed, study groups in Indonesia play a crucial role in building an active and dynamic Muslim community, which continuously seeks to integrate Islamic values into modern life.

In this passionate interdisciplinary work (*Perfection Makes Practice: Learning, Emotion, and the Recited Qur'an in Indonesia*), Gade (2005) examines Qur'anic recitation as both an instrument and an ultimate goal of Islamic piety. As a fluent Arabic and Indonesian-speaking student of Islamic studies, Gade conducted field research for her dissertation in 1996–1997, focusing on Makassar, South Sulawesi. Makassar is known in Indonesia as a stronghold of conservative Islamic revival with a complex political history, including armed rebellions.

However, rather than highlighting the political dimensions and social contestations that are often central to studies of Islamic revival in Indonesia, Gade adopts a unique approach. She explores the social context of Qur'anic recitation through individual experiences, focusing on the educational, spiritual, and psychological dimensions of the practice. She explains how Qur'anic recitation is not only a means to achieve personal piety but also a tool for creating a sense of community connection.

Gade emphasizes the importance of Qur'anic recitation in the "community-building" project, where the practice strengthens social solidarity, deepens religious understanding, and fosters collective identity.

Through her research, Gade demonstrates that the practice of Qur'anic recitation is an integral part of Indonesian Muslim life, not only as a religious expression but also as an emotional and social experience. This perspective contributes significantly to the study of Islam in Indonesia, especially in understanding how religious traditions adapt and evolve amidst the challenges of modernity and globalization.

Social theory students will quickly recognize the similarities between Gade's methodology, which focuses on the individual actor, and recent efforts in anthropology and religious studies that highlight social agency and human-centered experiences. Yet, Gade is more intent than most analysts on exploring the affective dimensions of religious experience. In *Perfection Makes Practice* (2005), Gade ambitiously guides readers through recent thoughts in psychological learning studies, anthropology, and emotion theory. Gade does not only investigate the cognitive processes involved in Qur'anic recitation but also focuses on how emotions are linked to individuals' religious experiences. She highlights that religious experience often cannot be reduced to intellectual or symbolic interpretation alone but also involves profound emotional dimensions, which impact one's relationship with the sacred text and fellow believers.

Focusing on the development of individual engagement with ritual forms, **Gade's *Perfection Makes Practice* (2005) does not delve deeply into how state-mandated religious education has contributed to public interest in Qur'anic recitation.** However, formal religious education provided in public schools, from primary to secondary levels, plays a key role in shaping Muslim engagement with religious texts, including the Qur'an. Nevertheless, Gade places more emphasis on personal experience and the psychological dynamics of individuals' relationships with the Qur'an, which are often far more complex and substantial than formal teachings. The book also does not provide an in-depth explanation of the broader impact of ritual participation on "community building" and public ethics formation.

However, when examining the ongoing debate among devout Indonesian Muslims today, it seems that the cultural obligation to engage in Qur'anic recitation is

more non-specific and less consensual than its impact on personal attitudes and vocal techniques in Qur'anic reading. In this context, Qur'anic recitation is more often viewed as a personal activity that has emotional and spiritual impacts on the individual, rather than a social obligation demanded by the community or the state. This is where one of the great paradoxes of Qur'an-inspired piety lies: although the ritual of Qur'anic recitation is seen as key to piety, its contribution to public ethics or community development is not always direct or easily measurable. This paradox suggests that Qur'an-inspired piety is not confined to ritual practices alone, but is also closely tied to the diverse subjective experiences of each individual.

Gade acknowledges that to understand this piety more holistically, it is not enough to study the rituals or the external act of reciting the Qur'an. A deeper understanding of the subjective dynamics of the recitation is needed, which involves the emotional power and strong personal experience associated with it. This book offers an original and theoretically significant explanation of these dynamics, revealing how Qur'anic recitation can be a means of experiencing deep emotional transformation and shaping a more inclusive and transformative personal understanding of religion. In the Indonesian context, this also touches on more personal and social religious aspects that cannot be separated from political and identity issues.

Studies of Islam in Southeast Asia aim to better understand the diverse and complex dimensions of Islam. Nevertheless, it is still possible to make general categorizations about Muslim beliefs and practices based on fundamental differences in ideology and strategy, such as the difference between cultural Islam and political Islam. On one hand, cultural Islam emphasizes ritual, aesthetics, and social life in religious traditions, while political Islam focuses more on the role of religion in political and state affairs. Anna M. Gade's book *Perfection Makes Practice* (2005) highlights the cultural aspects of Indonesian Muslim practices by delving deeply into how Muslims interact with the Qur'an through reciting and memorizing the sacred text.

One important contribution raised by Gade is the significant role of *Musabaqah Tilawatul Qur'an* (MTQ), an annual competition that not only tests the ability to recite the Qur'an but also serves as an arena for individuals to showcase their vocal and technical skills in pronouncing sacred verses. MTQ, often seen as the pinnacle of

achievement in Qur'anic recitation, also functions as a means to express love for the sacred text, which is highly valued in Indonesian Muslim society (Al-Ayyubi, 2020). Gade views MTQ as a significant example of how religion and culture intersect in the everyday practices of Indonesian Muslims, while also portraying the competition as a symbol of publicly displayed piety.

Furthermore, the book emphasizes the importance of competitions such as MTQ in shaping individual and collective religious identity. The practice of reciting and memorizing the Qur'an not only becomes a way to draw closer to God but also serves as an arena for individuals to gain social and cultural recognition. In this context, the Qur'an is not just a sacred text but also an instrument used in social dynamics to demonstrate piety and religious quality, where knowledge of the Qur'an is valued as an achievement that can bring recognition within society. Gade also illustrates that this phenomenon encompasses not only the technical aspects of recitation but also emotional dimensions that connect individuals to the broader religious tradition. Through this analysis, Gade offers a deeper understanding of the relationship between cultural practices, religious education, and social identity in Indonesia.

Perfection in reading and memorizing the Qur'an, according to Gade, serves as a means to enhance personal engagement with the text. This creates a reinforcing cycle between personal piety and social dynamics within the Muslim community. In this context, a positive mood and strong motivation are crucial for maintaining the practice of Qur'anic recitation and revitalizing the life of the Muslim community. Emotionally charged and sincere recitation creates a bond between the individual and the text, which not only shapes their religious identity but also strengthens the sense of solidarity within the community. Gade rightly emphasizes that, while the Qur'an can be understood cognitively, the feelings and motivations involved in its recitation have a significant impact on both individual and collective religious life.

In the first chapter of her book *Perfection Makes Practice* (2005), Anna Gade begins with a deep theoretical consideration for her case study, focusing on the importance of feelings and emotions in ritual and religious experience. Gade develops this conceptualization of emotional engagement by inviting readers to understand how emotions are not only a response to the text or religious teachings but also an integral

part of the ritual process itself. She adapts a perspective that acknowledges religious experience involves complex emotional dimensions, which influence how individuals interact with sacred texts and how they live out religious practices in daily life.

In the second chapter, Gade introduces the concept of memorization in the context of self and social relationships, highlighting the importance of memorizing the Qur'an as a practice that is not only personal but also has strong social dimensions. She argues that Qur'an memorizers have a close relationship with the style and structure of their recitation as well as with their social environment. Although memorizing the Qur'an is a common practice for many Muslims, Gade shows that practitioners do not merely memorize but also learn how to memorize and recite the verses beautifully, a skill highly valued in Muslim society. This process involves not only technical skills but also emotional management and adherence to social and ethnic norms, such as politeness in pronunciation.

Chapter three of *Perfection Makes Practice* (2005) delves into how the Qur'an is recited, both with and without understanding, within the educational and social context in Indonesia. Gade identifies two main pedagogical approaches to Qur'anic learning: first, the traditional method known as the Baghdadi method, which is slower but more profound, and second, the modern method known as the Iqra method, which is faster but often lacks deep understanding. While both methods differ in teaching style and learning speed, Gade emphasizes that what is more significant is the affective associations formed during the learning process. In this regard, the ambivalence and emotional texture surrounding the Qur'anic learning experience become Gade's main focus, explaining that Qur'anic recitation is an emotional journey that transcends the pure intellectualization of religious knowledge.

Chapter four of *Perfection Makes Practice* (2005) by Anna Gade thoroughly examines how Muslims in Indonesia are confronted with the demand to adhere to orthopraxy, specifically the proper way of reciting the Qur'an, and how they strive to meet these expectations. Gade explains that aesthetic and melodic pronunciation, accompanied by vocalization techniques originating from Egypt, have become the standard to be achieved by advanced practitioners in Qur'anic recitation. This vocal technique, which has increasingly developed in Indonesia, is viewed not only as a

technical skill in Qur'anic reading but also as an expression of art and spirituality that must meet certain societal expectations. This leads to the attainment of an ideal standard in Qur'anic recitation, which encompasses not only technical correctness but also the emotional and aesthetic beauty of pronouncing the sacred texts.

In the final chapter of her book *Perfection Makes Practice* (2005), Anna Gade shifts her attention to the annual *Musabaqah Tilawatul Qur'an* (MTQ) competition, a highly popular event in Indonesia that combines religious education and vocal skill performances in Qur'anic recitation. Gade argues that this competition motivates participants to engage in activities that are not only for entertainment but also to glorify Islam, participate in socio-religious activities, achieve victory, and contribute to national development. However, Gade contends that the most profound motivation behind this competition is not found in the seemingly dominant discourse but in the effects of subtle yet influential social forces, which can be understood as a kind of "invisible sociological hand." This suggests that behind the overt motivations, there exists a social structure that influences how individuals participate in and respond to the competition, creating a space for individuals to display their piety within a broader context.

For instance, in the 1997 national MTQ competition, the event was expected to raise public awareness of the importance of Islam as a source of national development in line with the New Order ideology. In this context, the government used MTQ as a tool to promote piety and enhance awareness of Islam as an integral part of national development. Despite receiving some criticism, particularly from Muslim groups who viewed it as more ceremonial and distracting from more important tasks, such as applying the teachings of the Qur'an in daily life, or from those who considered women's public performances inappropriate, these objections gradually diminished by the mid-1990s. Gade reveals that these critiques waned as stronger justifications, such as resistance to the perceived dominance of Westernization at the time, and an emphasis on the glorification of Islam, became more prominent in sermons and religious dialogues.

Furthermore, Gade illustrates that the MTQ competition serves not only as a venue to showcase Qur'anic recitation skills but also as a means of strengthening social and religious identity in the face of the challenges of modernity, particularly those

associated with globalization and Westernization (Mukholik, 2017; M. E. Saputro, 2011). In this regard, MTO becomes a medium to reaffirm Islamic values amid the rapid social changes. Therefore, while the competition has recreational and social dimensions, it also functions as a form of "culturalization of religion," where piety can be expressed in the public sphere in a more visible and structured manner (Rahtikawati & Abdullah Afifi, 2021; Rurin, 2019).

Reconceptualizing Qur'anic Reading Traditions: A Historical and Interdisciplinary Approach

The author might consider placing the tradition of Qur'anic recitation within a broader historical perspective, examining how the practices of memorizing and reciting the Qur'an may have evolved over time. With the development of educational and social systems, it is possible that the pedagogical techniques used in memorizing and reading the Qur'an have undergone significant transformations compared to past practices. For instance, the development of more structured teaching methods, including the use of modern technology, may offer a different experience in the memorization process compared to traditional methods that rely more heavily on oral memorization and direct interaction with teachers. By placing these practices within a historical context, we can better understand how the tradition of memorizing and publicly reading the Qur'an is not only a form of religious expression but also part of a broader development in social, cultural, and pedagogical fields. For example, changes in the way the Qur'an is recited in public, involving vocal aesthetics and techniques, can be understood as a response to the demands of the times, including efforts to preserve the sanctity of the Qur'anic text in the more dynamic modern context (Hefner, 2000).

Perfection Makes Practice is suggestive in its interdisciplinary approach, constructing a strong argument about the role of emotions and social contexts in religious practices. This book provides new insights by exploring the deep relationship between Qur'anic recitation and the emotional experiences of its readers. Through an approach that integrates various disciplines, such as Islamic studies, anthropology, psychology, and education, Gade successfully highlights how religious practices, particularly the recitation and memorization of the Qur'an, are not merely intellectual

or ritualistic activities but also involve profound emotional dimensions (Ali, 2015; Lukita & Rohmaniyah, 2024). In this context, emotions act as a driving force that strengthens individual engagement with the sacred text and shapes social relationships within the Muslim community. Therefore, this book is highly relevant for scholars interested in religious studies, particularly Islam, as well as those studying cultural anthropology, religious psychology, and Islamic pedagogy.

Anna Gade's research offers valuable insights into the dynamics of Qur'anic learning and application in Indonesia. The key points raised by Gade can be summarized into five main contributions that significantly enhance our understanding of religious practices in Indonesia.

First, Gade emphasizes the context of Indonesia and the diversity of Muslims as an important aspect of her research. Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, has highly diverse religious characteristics. Gade's work provides a deep understanding of how this diversity is reflected in Qur'anic learning, with particular attention to efforts to develop correct Qur'anic reading skills. This illustrates the importance of the Qur'an not only as a religious text but also as an integral part of Indonesian Muslim identity and education (Gade, 2008).

Second, Gade highlights the active participation of Indonesian Muslims in the process of Qur'anic learning. She shows that Indonesian society plays an active role not only as readers but also as teachers and students, creating a collective movement in the development of understanding the sacred text. This active participation extends beyond formal learning settings and involves various aspects of social life, reflecting the community's awareness of the importance of learning and applying the Qur'anic teachings in daily life (Noorhidayati et al., 2021).

Third, the use of media as an educational tool is another fascinating point discussed by Gade. She explores how mass media, such as radio and television, play a crucial role in spreading Qur'anic education to the broader public. Mass media function not only as a source of entertainment but also as an effective educational medium, expanding the reach of public understanding of the Qur'anic content. This demonstrates the utilization of technology to support the enhancement of religious education in society.

Fourth, Gade emphasizes that learning is a continuous process involving various age groups and levels of expertise. This underscores the idea that Qur'anic education in Indonesia is not limited to a single phase of life or level of expertise but rather a lifelong process. Gade shows that this continuity is not only academic but also involves ongoing spiritual and social development throughout the lives of Muslims.

Fifth, one notable aspect is the empowerment of women in the practice of Qur'anic learning. Gade highlights the example of Dra. Hj. Maria Ulfah, a renowned Qur'anic reciter in Indonesia, illustrating the increasing role of women in this movement. She underscores how women, who were once limited in their religious roles, are now increasingly empowered to participate in teaching and learning the Qur'an, marking a significant development in gender equality in the religious sphere in Indonesia (Gade, 2008).

In her research, Anna M. Gade has made significant contributions. However, some criticisms can be raised against her arguments. One of the main criticisms is Gade's claim that Qur'anic studies in Arabic are the foundation of religious education across the Islamic world, including Southeast Asia. This argument is based on the fact that the Muslim population in Indonesia, nearly equivalent to that of the Arab-speaking Muslim world, constitutes about a quarter of the total Muslim population globally who do not speak Arabic (Gade, 2008).

For example, in Indonesian Islamic traditions, although the Qur'an is regarded as the primary source of religious teachings, many Islamic schools and pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) teach Islam in Indonesian and focus on the application of Islamic values in daily life, including social ethics and community life, which are not always directly linked to the Arabic language (Azra, 2004). Therefore, criticism of this generalization is important for enriching our understanding of how Islam is practiced and studied in various parts of the world, including in Indonesia.

3. Revitalizing Qur'anic Recitation in Indonesia: A Critique of Vocal Aesthetic Movements, the Diversity of Practices, and Gender Roles in Religious Education

The discourse on the intensification of Islamic revitalization programs in Indonesia during the mid-1990s—with a specific focus on Qur’anic recitation—garnered considerable scholarly attention, particularly regarding its emphasis on the perfection of various modes of recitation. During this period, numerous educational institutions and religious communities sought to enhance Qur’anic recitation skills through accurate tajwīd, introducing more systematic and structured methods to ensure correctness. This movement was not limited to vocal techniques alone but also aimed to embody piety through high-quality recitation that fulfilled aesthetic standards embedded in Islamic tradition (Gade, 2008).

However, this narrative warrants critique, especially concerning the lack of clarity surrounding the empirical basis for such claims. The sources of data—whether statistical, survey-based, or interview-derived—are not thoroughly explained, raising questions about the representativeness of the assertions made regarding Qur’anic recitation practices across Indonesia. Moreover, while Qur’anic recitation is positioned as central to the revitalization process, this overlooks the broader diversity of religious practices among Indonesian Muslims. Many Muslim communities, particularly in more remote areas, may prioritize the application of Qur’anic teachings in daily life—through religious instruction, charitable acts, and devotional practices—over achieving technical excellence in vocal performance (Azra, 2004). Thus, while the vocal-centered revitalization movement is undoubtedly significant, claims that it constitutes the core of Islamic revitalization in Indonesia should be approached with caution, especially considering the multiplicity of religious expressions among Indonesian Muslims (Hefner, 2000).

The recognition of Dra. Hj. Maria Ulfah—a renowned Qur’anic reciter from Jakarta—at the international level offers a compelling illustration of Islamic resurgence in Indonesia at the close of the twentieth century. Celebrated for her beautiful and precise Qur’anic recitation, Maria Ulfah gained international acclaim through her participation in major Qur’anic recitation competitions such as the Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur’an (MTQ). Her success is emblematic of a broader effort to elevate the quality of Qur’anic recitation, emphasizing vocal perfection increasingly valued among Indonesian Muslims, particularly within Qur’an-focused educational programs. Ulfah has come to symbolize the integration of religious tradition with international

achievement, and her exceptional skill in recitation can be viewed as a marker of the revitalization movement's success (Gade, 2008).

Nevertheless, while Maria Ulfah's global recognition is significant, it is essential to critique the assumption that her prominence can be seen as representative of the broader Indonesian Muslim community. Her success in Qur'anic recitation competitions should not be interpreted as a universal reflection of Islamic practice across Indonesia. The country's religious landscape is deeply heterogeneous, with diverse traditions and practices varying significantly across regions. Local and social contexts often shape community-level Qur'anic practices. Therefore, while Ulfah may exemplify a segment of the Islamic revitalization movement centered on aesthetic vocal recitation, not all Indonesian Muslims engage with Qur'anic practice in this manner. Many groups, especially in rural or more conservative areas, may prioritize comprehension and practical application of Qur'anic teachings in daily life over vocal beauty in recitation (Azra, 2004).

Moreover, despite Maria Ulfah's status as a successful female Qur'anic reciter, women's participation in religious domains in Indonesia remains fraught with challenges. Some conservative groups continue to regard female involvement in public religious performances, such as Qur'anic competitions, as controversial. Thus, while Ulfah's achievements reflect women's potential within the field of Qur'anic recitation, broader experiences of Muslim women in Indonesia's religious sphere are complex and shaped by diverse sociocultural dynamics that must be understood holistically (Hefner, 2000). In some regions, for instance, adult religious study groups (*pengajian*) serve to strengthen social bonds while fostering religious understanding (Anwar, 2018). Elsewhere, adults may pursue Qur'anic learning as a form of personal achievement or spiritual quest. In such cases, factors such as educational background, social class, and environmental influences can significantly affect how individuals engage with Qur'anic education (Azra, 2004; Azwar, 2018).

Additionally, the role of gender must be critically considered in analyzing this phenomenon. While efforts to promote Qur'anic learning among all age groups are commendable, women may face greater barriers to accessing religious education due to both traditional norms and structural inequalities. In some communities, despite

initiatives aimed at empowering women through Qur'anic education, resistance to their active participation in public religious life persists. Such resistance may limit women's involvement in Qur'anic learning and religious expression more broadly (Hefner, 2000; Rokhman et al., 2024).

Conclusion

This study concludes that the recitation and practice of the Qur'an reflect two primary functions: the informative and the performative. The informative function emphasizes the search for meaning and religious teachings within the sacred text, while the performative function highlights the aesthetic and religious identity aspects expressed in social contexts, such as Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an (MTQ). Anna Gade further underscores the role of emotion and psychology through auditory experiences (soundscapes), demonstrating how the sound of the Qur'an evokes memories and emotional attachment. These findings affirm that engagement with the Qur'an encompasses cognitive, social, and affective dimensions, offering fertile ground for further research into Muslim religious experience.

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