

Social Education in the Perspective of QS Al-Mā'ūn and QS Al-Baqarah Verse 271 through Roland Barthes' Semiotic Approach

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Abstract

This study aims to analyse verses from the Qur'an through Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, specifically QS. al-Mā'ūn dan QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 271. Surah al-Mā'ūn was chosen because it highlights social issues such as caring for orphans and the poor, while QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 271 emphasising the value of sincerity in almsgiving. This research method is qualitative in nature with a literature review approach, using primary sources in the form of the Qur'an and classical interpretations, as well as secondary sources in the form of recent academic literature. Data analysis was conducted using Barthes' semiotic framework, which encompasses three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and mythology. The results of the study indicate that al-Mā'ūn semiotically presents a critique of formalistic religiosity that is not oriented towards social concern, while QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 271 presenting almsgiving as an ideological symbol of social justice distribution. This study contributes to the development of contemporary interpretation methodology by presenting semiotics as an interdisciplinary approach, as well as affirming the relevance of the Qur'an in building public ethics in the modern era.

Keywords: Social Education; QS al-Mā'ūn; QS al-Baqarah [2]: 271; Roland Barthes' Semiotic

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1. Introduction

The Qur'an is a holy book that has always been the centre of attention for Muslims throughout history. From the beginning, this text has been understood not only as a normative guide, but also as a collection of verses (signs) that are open to interpretation (Pranoto et al., 2025). The classical tradition of interpretation, both tafsir bi al-ma'tsur and tafsir bi al-ra'yi, has made a significant contribution to the development of religious understanding (Putri & Nurhuda, 2023b).

However, social, political, and cultural changes in the modern era demand more contextual and interdisciplinary methods of interpretation (Amrona et al., 2024). It is in this context that the semiotic approach gains urgency, as the science of signs opens up the possibility of a more profound and critical reading of the text (Chandler, 2021).

Although various contemporary methods of interpretation have developed (Zaatariyah & et al, 2023), such as hermeneutics, discourse analysis, and historical approaches, limitations remain. Classical interpretations tend to focus on legal and literal aspects, leaving little room for the symbolic and ideological dimensions of the Qur'an (Rahman, 2017). This raises an academic question: how should we read the Qur'an as a text that not only regulates rituals, but also offers moral and social perspectives that are relevant to modern life?.

Semiotic studies of the Qur'an are still relatively rare (Nurhuda & Azizah, 2022). Some previous studies have highlighted the relevance of sign theory in Qur'anic studies, but have not yet reached the point of systematic application to specific verses. (2018) emphasising the importance of semiotics as an alternative approach, while (2008) emphasises the need to read the Qur'an through symbolic analysis. However, most of these studies are still conceptual and descriptive in nature. Even contemporary research on Qur'anic semiotics, for example by (2023) and (2025), still limited in applying Roland Barthes' framework, especially in relation to the three levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and mythology. Thus, there is a gap that can be filled with applied research (Pranoto, Raharjo, Lutfiyah, et al., 2025a).

This article aims to address this gap. By applying Barthes' semiotic framework, this study focuses on QS. al-Mā'ūn dan QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 271. Both verses were chosen because they contain rich moral and social messages: QS. al-Mā'ūn emphasises concern for orphans and the poor as well as the dangers of hypocrisy, while QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 271 teaching the ethics of charity and sincerity. Through semiotics, these messages can be read not only on a literal level, but also on a symbolic and ideological level, making them more contextual to contemporary social realities (Pranoto, Raharjo, Lutfiyah, et al., 2025b).

The main motivation for this research is to present an interpretive model that is alive and relevant to modern humanitarian issues. Phenomena such as increasing social inequality, the crisis of solidarity, and the formalisation of religion make semiotics a significant approach in reviving the social dimension of the Qur'an (Nurhuda, 2024). This approach is not intended to replace classical interpretation, but rather to complement it, so that the sacred text remains capable of addressing the challenges of the times. (Suhardi & Satria, 2023) (Millah, 2022).

Specifically, this study aims to: (1) explain Roland Barthes' semiotic theoretical framework in the study of the Qur'an; (2) to analyse QS. al-Mā'ūn and QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 271 through Barthes' three levels of meaning; and (3) to compare the results of semiotic analysis with classical interpretation to see its methodological added value. With these objectives, this study contributes to the development of a more critical and interdisciplinary interpretation methodology.

The contribution of this research can be seen in two areas. First, theoretically, this article enriches the methodology of interpretation by presenting semiotics as an interdisciplinary reading tool (Nurhuda et al., 2024). Second, practically, this research affirms the relevance of the Qur'an in addressing contemporary issues such as social justice, solidarity, and public ethics. Thus, this article is expected to demonstrate how the Qur'an as a sacred text is always alive, dynamic, and transformative in every context of the times (Pranoto, Raharjo, Savana, et al., 2025).

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach to examine the semiotic dimensions of verses in the Qur'an. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because it allows researchers to explore complex phenomena laden with values, symbols, and meanings, thereby enabling them to delve deeper into theoretical constructs and their relevance in the contemporary social context (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The type of research used is library research, which involves systematically examining primary and secondary sources. The primary sources for this research are the Qur'an, particularly QS. al-Mā'ūn and QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 271, as well as classical tafsir books such as the works of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Qurṭubī (Muna & et al., 2024). Meanwhile, secondary sources include academic books, journal articles, and contemporary research discussing semiotics (e.g. Saussure, Peirce, Barthes) and modern Qur'anic hermeneutics (Pranoto et al., 2025).

Data collection techniques were carried out through document analysis, namely the process of identifying, coding, and synthesising information from relevant texts (Bowen, 1997). This technique is particularly suitable for theoretical and conceptual research, as it helps researchers discover the symbolic structures and interpretative patterns contained within a text. For data analysis, this study uses Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, which views meaning on three levels: (1) Denotation: the literal meaning of words or expressions in a verse. (2) Connotation: additional meaning influenced by the socio-cultural context. (3) Mythology: ideological or universal meaning formed through recurring symbols (Habibie & Hairul, 2023).

In addition, a comparative analysis was conducted by comparing the results of semiotic studies with classical interpretations. This approach aims to demonstrate the added value of semiotics as a complementary methodology, rather than a substitute for traditional methods of interpretation (Yuwono & Nurhuda, 2024). To maintain academic credibility, this study uses triangulation techniques by verifying meanings through various primary and secondary sources, as well as ensuring consistency of interpretation with established academic discourse (Yvonna S. Lincoln, 1985). Validity is also reinforced through thick description, namely detailed contextual explanations of Qur'anic concepts (Geertz, 1973).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Semiotic Analysis QS. al-Ma'ūn

Surah al-Mā'ūn is one of the Makkiyah surahs that highlights the social dimension of religion. Its verses describe the signs of religious hypocrisy: rebuking orphans, refusing to feed the poor, neglecting prayer, and performing deeds for the sake of showing off. At the denotative level, the literal meaning of this surah emphasises that religious hypocrisy is manifested not only in theological rejection, but also in social behaviour that disregards concern for the weak (Putri & Nurhuda, 2023a). Orphans and the poor in this Qur'anic text represent the most vulnerable marginalised groups in pre-Islamic Arab society (Nurhuda, 2023).

At the connotative level, Surah al-Mā'ūn reveals the symbolic meaning that true faith is demonstrated through social empathy. *Riya'*, for example, is not merely personal behaviour, but a symbol of religious practice that is only oriented towards social image without authentic concern (Shihab, 2013). This surah thus criticises a formalistic model of religiosity that is disconnected from human values.

At the mythological level, al-Mā'ūn gives rise to the ideological awareness that religion is a social project. By making concern for the oppressed an indicator of faith, this surah rejects the individualistic paradigm of religiosity (Habibie & Hairul, 2023). emphasising that mythology is a mechanism for shaping collective consciousness, and in this context, al-Mā'ūn reinforces the mythology of social justice as an integral part of faith.

When compared to classical interpretations, (Kathir, 2017) and (Ath-Thabari, n.d.) It highlights more legal aspects, such as the obligation to pray and the dangers of *riya'*. Classical interpretations still focus heavily on worship norms. However, the semiotic approach opens up a new dimension: this surah can be read as a discourse of resistance against social domination that marginalises the poor. In a contemporary context, the message of al-Mā'ūn is relevant to issues of Islamic philanthropy, social justice movements, and criticism of purely symbolic religious practices. (Junaidi et al., 2024).

2. Semiotic Analysis QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 271

QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 271 Speaking of the practice of charity: charity that is visible is good, but charity that is done in secret is more important. At the denotative level, this verse emphasises the ethics of *fiqh* charity: transparency in charity has exemplary value, but secrecy in charity affirms sincerity (Huda et al., 2023). This literal meaning shows the flexibility of Islamic law in accommodating different social conditions.

At the connotative level, charity is understood as a social symbol. Displaying charity has an educational meaning: setting an example for society, inspiring solidarity. Meanwhile, concealing charity is a symbol of pure spirituality, emphasising one's personal relationship with Allah. Thus, this verse reveals the dialectic between social and spiritual interest (Meliasani & Nugroho, 2025)

At the mythological level, almsgiving becomes an ideological symbol of resistance against structural injustice. Through almsgiving, Islam establishes a moral redistribution mechanism to counter the accumulation of wealth. In the modern context, this verse is highly relevant to Islamic philanthropic practices, the management of *zakat* and *infaq*, and the discourse on social fund transparency in the digital age ((Masorong, 2025). (Habibie & Hairul, 2023) refers to mythology as a way for texts to construct ideological systems; in this case, the Qur'an teaches the ideology of equality and social justice.

Classical interpretations such as (2002) It places greater emphasis on the importance of *fiqh* in secret charity. The semiotic approach, on the other hand, broadens the meaning: charity is not only a religious practice, but also an ideological narrative that builds collective awareness of the importance of social justice. In the contemporary era, semiotic interpretation opens up new horizons: charity can be understood as a moral instrument for a more just Islamic economic system (Mahera & Jamal, 2025)

Discussion: The Contribution of Semiotics to the Study of Interpretation

Analysis of QS. al-Mā'ūn and QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 271 demonstrates the important contribution of semiotics to the study of interpretation. First, semiotics allows for multi-level readings: literal (denotation), symbolic (connotation), and ideological (mythology). This complements classical interpretation, which tends to stop at the normative-legal aspect.

Secondly, semiotics connects Qur'anic texts with contemporary reality. Al-Mā'ūn relates to issues of philanthropy, social solidarity, and criticism of symbolic religiosity; while al-Baqarah [2]: 271 is relevant to

discourses on social fund transparency, digital donations, and modern philanthropic ethics. (Maning et al., 2025) (Masorong, 2025).

Third, semiotics shows that the Qur'an functions not only as a book of law, but also as an ideological text that shapes collective consciousness. In other words, semiotics reveals the role of the Qur'an in constructing a 'social mythology' about justice, equality, and solidarity (Habibie & Hairul, 2023).

Fourth, semiotics serves as a complementary methodology, not a replacement. A comparison with classical interpretation shows continuity, but also differences in focus. Classical interpretation emphasises norms, while semiotics emphasises symbols and ideology. The synergy between the two produces a more complete and relevant interpretation. Thus, semiotics not only broadens the horizons of interpretive studies, but also makes the Qur'an a source of public ethics capable of responding to the challenges of the times.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that applying Roland Barthes' semiotics to verses of the Qur'an can open new horizons in tafsir studies. Analysis of QS. al-Mā'ūn confirms that true faith is manifested in social solidarity, whereas QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 271 teaches that almsgiving is not only spiritually valuable, but also ideologically valuable as an effort to build social justice. Semiotic reading shows that Qur'anic texts work on three levels of meaning: literal, symbolic, and ideological. This research contributes to expanding contemporary interpretation methodology through an interdisciplinary approach, while also affirming the relevance of the Qur'an as a source of public ethics in the modern era. Further studies can integrate semiotics with hermeneutics or maqāṣid al-sharī'ah approaches, as well as expand the object to other surahs that are rich in social messages.

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