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6			

Negotiating Pure Ideas and Religious Thought in Qur'anic Exegesis: An Analysis of Muḥammad Sa'īd al-'Ashmāwī's Concept of Homosexuality Verses

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Keywords : Al-'Ashmāwī, Pure ideas and Religious Thought, Contextual Qur'anic Exegesis, Homosexuality in the Qur'ān, Contemporary Islamic Hermeneutics.	Abstract This study examines Muḥammad Sa'īd al-'Ashmāwī's conceptual approach to interpreting Qur'anic verses concerning homosexuality, emphasizing the distinction between <i>al-fikr al-ṣāfī</i> (pure ideas) and <i>al-fikr al-dīnī</i> (religious thought). Al-'Ashmāwī asserts that pure ideas are transcendent and objective, whereas religious thought constitutes human interpretation influenced by social, historical, and cultural contexts. The study aims to explore how this framework enables exegesis that preserves normative principles while remaining responsive to contemporary social, ethical, and legal dynamics. Employing a qualitative methodology through literature review, the analysis is both thematic-categorical and epistemological, examining relevant Qur'anic verses and al-'Ashmāwī's works. Findings indicate that his approach foregrounds the moral, ethical, and social essence of revelation, treating legal prescriptions as contextually constructed by humans. By integrating classical and modern hermeneutics with local and global perspectives, this method ensures interpretations remain relevant to issues of justice, human dignity, and contemporary social dynamics. The study contributes to the development of a transformative exegetical framework that bridges transcendent principles and human interpretive needs in a humanistic, critical, and practical manner, offering a methodological foundation for contemporary Qur'anic studies.
Kata Kunci : Al-Ashmawī, Ide Murni dan Pemikiran Agama, Tafsir Kontekstual, Homoseksualit as dalam Al- Qur'an, Hermeneutika Islam Kontemporer.	Abstrak Penelitian ini menganalisis gagasan Muḥammad Sa'īd al-'Ashmāwī dalam menafsirkan ayat-ayat al-Qur'an terkait homoseksualitas, dengan menekankan distingsi antara <i>al-fikr al-ṣāfī</i> (ide murni) dan <i>al-fikr al-dīnī</i> (pemikiran agama). Al-'Ashmāwī menegaskan bahwa ide murni bersifat transenden dan obyektif, sementara pemikiran agama merupakan interpretasi manusia yang dipengaruhi konteks sosial, sejarah, dan budaya. Penelitian ini bertujuan menelusuri bagaimana gagasan tersebut memungkinkan penafsiran wahyu yang tetap mempertahankan prinsip normatif, namun responsif terhadap dinamika sosial, etis, dan hukum di era modern. Metodologi yang digunakan bersifat kualitatif melalui studi pustaka, dengan analisis tematik-kategoris dan epistemologis terhadap ayat-ayat terkait dan karya-karya al-'Ashmāwī. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa gagasan al-'Ashmāwī menekankan inti moral, etis, dan sosial dari wahyu, sementara aspek hukum dipahami sebagai konstruksi manusia yang kontekstual. Pendekatan ini mengintegrasikan hermeneutika klasik dan modern, perspektif lokal dan global, sehingga interpretasi tetap relevan dengan isu keadilan, martabat manusia, dan dinamika sosial kontemporer. Kontribusi penelitian ini terletak pada pengembangan kerangka tafsir transformatif yang menjembatani prinsip transenden dan kebutuhan interpretasi manusia secara humanis, kritis, dan aplikatif, sekaligus menawarkan landasan metodologis bagi studi tafsir kontemporer.
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Introduction

The interpretation of the Qur'an is a complex epistemological process that involves a dynamic interplay between the revealed text, the interpretive tradition, and the socio-cultural context of its readers. In the history of exegesis, classical scholars emphasized understanding the text through normative principles that were regarded as fixed and universal. However, modern social developments, including sensitive issues such as sexual orientation, have created tensions between the ideality of the text and the realities of contemporary society.¹ This situation highlights the importance of adopting a more contextual and critical hermeneutical approach, one that remains anchored in the fundamental principles of religion while also responding to social, ethical, and cultural dynamics in a relevant way. Through this approach, Qur'anic interpretation can serve both as a medium of critical reflection and as a guide for adaptive and humanistic religious practice.

The tension between religious ideas and social practices is especially pronounced in the Qur'anic discourse on homosexuality. Classical interpretations tend to adopt a literal, normative perspective that stresses obedience to principles deemed immutable and binding for all time. In contrast, contemporary realities, shaped by communal dynamics and the progression of ethical thought, demand interpretive frameworks that are more flexible, rational, and sensitive to context.² The persistence of rigid exegetical approaches risks producing interpretations that are socially disconnected and analytically reductive. Accordingly, a key scholarly challenge lies in developing interpretive frameworks capable of mediating between the enduring normative authority of revelation and the contingent realities of contemporary human experience.

Within this broader debate, the thought of Muḥammad Sa'īd al-ʿAshmāwī offers a significant hermeneutical contribution. He articulates a fundamental distinction between *al-fikr al-ṣāfi* (pure ideas), understood as transcendent and objective principles embedded in revelation, and *al-fikr al-dīnī* (religious thought), defined as contextual, creative, and historically situated human interpretation. Al-ʿAshmāwī underscores a crucial distinction between pure ideas, defined as the essential, objective, and transcendent principles embedded in revelation, and religious thought, understood as contextual, creative, and responsive to social change.³ Such a distinction provides a conceptual framework that

¹ Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Theological Approaches to Qur'anic Exegesis, Theological Approaches to Qur'anic Exegesis: A Practical Comparative-Contrastive Analysis* (Faculty of Arts, University of Taibah, Saudi Arabia: Routledge, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203127018>; Nor Syamimi Mohd, Haziyah Hussin, and Wan Nasyrudin Wan Abdullah, "Scientific Exegesis in Malay Qur'anic Commentary," *Asian Social Science* 10, no. 10 (April 29, 2014): 236–42, <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v10n10p236>.

² Mustaffa Abdullah et al., "Quranic Exegesis Studies in Malaysia: Realities, Challenges and Future Direction," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 26, no. 1 (March 2, 2025): 1–30, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v26i1.5779>; M Salama, *The Qur'an and Modern Arabic Literary Criticism: From Taha to Nasr, The Qur'an and Modern Arabic Literary Criticism: From Taha to Nasr* (Department of Modern and Classical Languages, George Mason University, United States: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2018).

³ Lukman Afandi and Monika @ Munirah Abd Razzak, "The Progress of the Quranic Scientific Exegesis in South-East Asia," *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 19, no. 2 (October 19, 2021): 228–56, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-12340104>; Abdullah et al., "Quranic Exegesis Studies in Malaysia: Realities, Challenges and Future Direction."

enables Qur'anic exegesis to preserve the integrity of normative principles while engaging critically with the complexities of modern social realities, including controversial issues such as homosexuality. This study aims to investigate systematically how al-ʿAshmāwī negotiates the relationship between these two domains, thereby demonstrating how his hermeneutics functions both as an instrument of critical reflection and as a guide for religious practice that is adaptive, humanistic, and responsive to the ethical and cultural needs of contemporary society. This study examines explicitly how al-ʿAshmāwī negotiates the relationship between these two domains in interpreting Qur'anic verses on homosexuality.

Previous studies on the Qur'anic exegesis of homosexuality reveal a gradual shift from literalist readings toward more historical and contextual approaches. Jamal (2001), for example, examined the story of Prophet Lūṭ in the Qur'an through semantic and historical analysis, concluding that the narrative emphasizes social morality rather than a categorical prohibition of sexual orientation.⁴ Kugle (2010), through *Homosexuality in Islam*, argued for the urgent need to reread the exegetical and juristic traditions by differentiating between violent sexual practices and consensual relationships. His work highlights the possibility of constructing an inclusive theology that resonates with modern ethical concerns.⁵ Furthermore, El-Rouayheb (2005), in *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800*, demonstrated that classical discourse was shaped primarily by socio-legal roles and regulatory frameworks rather than by modern notions of sexual identity, thereby exposing the historical gap between premodern discourses and contemporary categories.⁶ These studies primarily focus on historical, ethical, or semantic dimensions of the text rather than on the epistemological structure of interpretation itself.

In contrast, studies on al-ʿAshmāwī have concentrated mainly on his conception of *sharīʿah* and contextual legal interpretation. Huda (2017) observed that al-ʿAshmāwī emphasized the importance of considering *asbāb al-nuzūl* and *asbāb al-wurūd* to ensure that Islamic law remains responsive to changing social realities.⁷ Mutawallī (2009) argued that for al-ʿAshmāwī, *sharīʿah* represents divine and universal principles with inherent flexibility, while *fiqh* is a human intellectual product of *ijtihād* that is inevitably bound by time and space.⁸ Likewise, Salādīn (2021) demonstrated that al-ʿAshmāwī approached *āyāt al-aḥkām* through a contextual lens, treating them not as immutable prescriptions but as texts open to reinterpretation in light of the demands of the age.⁹ Meanwhile, Shepard (1987) critically examined al-ʿAshmāwī's objections to the legal application of *sharīʿah* in Egypt and

⁴ Amreen Jamal, "The Story of Lot and the Qur'ān's Perception of the Morality of Same-Sex Sexuality," *Journal of Homosexuality* 41, no. 1 (June 27, 2001): 1–88, https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v41n01_01.

⁵ Scott Alan Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2010), 52–97.

⁶ Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 21–48.

⁷ Moh Shofiyul Huda MF, "Prinsip-Prinsip Umum Syari'ah Dalam Perspektif Muhammad Sa'īd Al-ʿAsymāwī Dan Implementasinya Dalam Instinbāth Hukum," *Istinbath* 16, no. 2 (December 25, 2017): 441–68, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ijhi.v16i2.14>.

⁸ Mutawallī Mutawallī, "Perspektif Muhammad Sa'īd Al-Asymāwī Tentang Historisitas Syari'Ah," *Ulumuna* 13, no. 1 (2009): 23–58.

⁹ Bustami Saladin, "POTRET IDEOLOGI PEMIKIRAN M SAID ASHMAWI TENTANG AYAT AHKAM DENGAN METODE KONTEKSTUAL," *Sophist: Jurnal Sosial Politik, Kajian Islam Dan Tafsir* 1, no. 2 (2018): 109–126.

emphasized his insistence on distinguishing between *sharīʿah* as a transcendent principle and *fiqh* as a body of positive law shaped by historical and political circumstances.¹⁰ However, these works do not systematically explore how al-ʿAshmāwī's epistemological distinction between pure ideas and religious thought operates in the interpretation of Qurʾanic verses on homosexuality.

Compared with existing scholarship, this study makes a distinct contribution by shifting the analytical focus from the morality or legality of homosexuality to the epistemological negotiation underlying Qurʾanic interpretation. Rather than treating homosexuality merely as a historical, social, or ethical problem, this research examines how Muḥammad Saʿīd al-ʿAshmāwī systematically negotiates *al-fikr al-ṣāfī* (pure ideas) and *al-fikr al-dīnī* (religious thought) in interpreting related Qurʾanic verses. This negotiation functions as a concrete hermeneutical mechanism through which transcendent normative principles are preserved while interpretive authority is opened to contextual reasoning. By foregrounding this epistemological process, the study demonstrates how Qurʾanic exegesis can transcend rigid literalism without collapsing into relativism. The novelty of this research lies in articulating negotiation not as a rhetorical stance, but as an operational framework that redefines the relationship between revelation, interpretation, and contemporary ethical reality.

The urgency of this research becomes increasingly evident in light of the growing prominence of thematic and categorical approaches to Qurʾanic exegesis in the modern Islamic world, particularly when addressing issues related to human rights, ethical pluralism, and the complexities of contemporary social life.¹¹ By situating al-ʿAshmāwī's thought within this methodological trajectory, the study contributes to contemporary tafsīr discourse by clarifying how normative principles can be preserved through epistemological differentiation rather than juridical rigidity.

Methodologically, this study employs a qualitative library-based approach using thematic and categorical analysis.¹² The primary unit of analysis consists of Qurʾanic verses related to homosexuality, examined through al-ʿAshmāwī's epistemological framework. The analytical steps include: (1) identifying thematic clusters of relevant verses, (2) examining their dominant moral and normative orientations, and (3) analyzing how al-ʿAshmāwī's distinction between pure ideas and religious thought reconfigures their interpretive implications. By integrating textual, contextual, and epistemological analysis, this approach

¹⁰ William E. Shepard, "Muhammad Saʿīd Al-ʿAshmawī and the Application of the Shariʿa in Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28, no. 1 (February 23, 1996): 39–58, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800062772>.

¹¹ Hurnawijaya et al., "Dialectical Engagement with Biblical Narratives in Ibn ʿAshur's Tafsīr Al-Tahrīr Wa Al-Tanwīr: Study of Aaron, Jesus, and Noah's Wife Narratives," *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities* 6, no. 3 (August 2, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.58256/84c1wd64>; Syamimi Mohd, Hussin, and Nasyrudin Wan Abdullah, "Scientific Exegesis in Malay Qurʾanic Commentary."

¹² Haradhan Kumar MOHAJAN, "QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN SOCIAL SCIENCES AND RELATED SUBJECTS," *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People* 7, no. 1 (March 30, 2018): 23, <https://doi.org/10.26458/jedep.v7i1.571>; Muhammad Rijal Fadli, "Memahami Desain Metode Penelitian Kualitatif," *HUMANIKA* 21, no. 1 (April 30, 2021): 33–54, <https://doi.org/10.21831/hum.v21i1.38075>.

enables a systematic evaluation of al-‘Ashmāwī’s hermeneutics as a model for contemporary Qur’anic interpretation that is both critical and contextually responsive.

Pure Ideas and Religious Thought in the Perspective of al-‘Ashmāwī

Muḥammad Sa‘īd al-‘Ashmāwī was born in Egypt in 1932 and received formal legal training at Cairo University, followed by advanced studies in the United States.¹³ His professional career as a senior judge and legal expert within the Egyptian judicial system positioned him at the intersection of positive law and religious normativity. This location decisively shaped his epistemological concerns.¹⁴ Before he engaged with Islamic legal thought, al-‘Ashmāwī was influenced by existential philosophy, an intellectual background that sharpened his sensitivity to questions of human agency, meaning, and historical contingency. This combination of legal praxis and philosophical reflection provided the intellectual foundation for his later hermeneutical insistence on distinguishing between transcendent revelation and historically conditioned interpretation.

Al-‘Ashmāwī authored an extensive corpus engaging Islamic law, religious authority, and interpretive theory. This study focuses particularly on his writings on sharī‘ah and hermeneutics, notably *Usūl al-Sharī‘ah*, *Jawhar al-Islām*, and *Ḥaqīqat al-Ḥijāb wa Ḥujjiyyat al-Ḥadīth*, as these works clearly formulate his epistemological separation between divine normativity and human interpretive reasoning. Within this framework, al-‘Ashmāwī emerges as a critical intellectual stance that resists both rigid textual literalism and unbounded interpretive relativism. His intellectual project does not seek to desacralize revelation or undermine its authority. Instead, it aims to challenge the sacralization of historically conditioned legal formulations that have been elevated to the status of immutable doctrine, thereby reopening space for critical reasoning, ethical evaluation, and responsible reinterpretation within the Islamic legal and theological tradition.¹⁵

Building upon this background, al-‘Ashmāwī conceptualizes Qur’anic exegesis as a negotiated process between pure ideas and religious thought. Pure ideas (*al-fikr al-ṣāfi*) refer to the transcendent, objective principles conveyed through revelation, whose essential substance remains inviolable. Religious thought (*al-fikr al-dīnī*), by contrast, denotes the interpretive activity of human agents operating within specific social, historical, and cultural contexts.¹⁶ This distinction functions as an epistemological control mechanism: it safeguards the authority of revelation while simultaneously legitimizing contextual reasoning as an integral component of interpretation rather than a deviation from it. Exegesis, therefore, is neither a mechanical reproduction of textual meaning nor a subjective projection of contemporary values, but a disciplined negotiation between normativity and context.

¹³ Yusuf Hanafi, “Al-Ashmawī Dan Nalar Kritis Shari’ah: Menemukan Kembali Dimensi Yang Hilang Dari Wacana Shari’at Islam, *Islamica*,” *Islamica* 2, no. 2 (2008): 128.

¹⁴ Wael B. Hallaq, *Sejarah Teori Hukum Islam: Pengantar Untuk Uṣūl Al-Fiqh Mazhab Sunni*, ed. E. Kusnadiningrat dan Abdul Haris bin Wahid (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo, 2000), 345.

¹⁵ Hanafi, “Al-Ashmawī Dan Nalar Kritis Shari’ah: Menemukan Kembali Dimensi Yang Hilang Dari Wacana Shari’at Islam, *Islamica*.”

¹⁶ Hallaq, *Sejarah Teori Hukum Islam: Pengantar Untuk Uṣūl Al-Fiqh Mazhab Sunni*; Farhat J. Ziadeh, “Uṣūl Al-Fiqh,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 299.

The practical implications of this framework are evident in al-‘Ashmāwī’s treatment of legal verses. While classic examples such as the gradual prohibition of intoxicants illustrate the adaptive nature of legal formulation, the same logic is methodologically applicable to morally charged issues such as homosexuality, where ethical objectives cannot be reduced to fixed legal sanctions alone. In this regard, al-‘Ashmāwī argues that *sharī‘ah* should be understood as the embodiment of universal moral purposes, whereas legal rulings reflect historical attempts to realize those purposes. This analytical move redirects interpretation from the rigidity of legal form to the ethical substance of revelation, a shift central to understanding his approach to contested Qur’anic passages.

Through this principle of negotiation, al-‘Ashmāwī frames Qur’anic interpretation as a dialectical and methodologically structured enterprise. He emphasizes chronological awareness, contextual analysis, and the integration of Qur’an, ḥadith, and historical circumstance as essential interpretive tools. This approach aligns with the principle of intertextuality, which emphasizes the inherent connectivity between Qur’anic verses and the broader corpus of ḥadith.¹⁷ More importantly, his epistemology translates the distinction between pure ideas and religious thought into concrete methodological steps that guide interpretation toward moral coherence, social responsibility, and contextual relevance. In doing so, al-‘Ashmāwī contributes a significant epistemological intervention to contemporary *tafsīr* studies, one that enables the preservation of transcendent normativity while equipping interpretation to engage critically with complex modern ethical realities.

The Discourse of Homosexuality in the Qur’an

The Qur’an addresses homosexuality primarily through the narrative of Prophet Lūṭ and his people, which appears in several chapters, including QS Hūd [11]: 78–81, al-Naml [27]: 54, al-‘Ankabūt [29]: 28–29, 33, Saba’ [34]: 13, al-Syu‘arā’ [26]: 155–156, al-Naḥl [16]: 72, and al-Rūm [30]: 21. From a *tafsīr* perspective, the Lūṭ narrative exhibits a consistent *siyāq* that links moral transgression with social corruption, hospitality violations, and the rejection of prophetic authority, rather than isolating sexual acts as purely private behavior. Classical exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, and Ibn Kathīr emphasize the phrase *ata’ūna al-fāḥishah* as denoting an unprecedented moral deviation that disrupts communal order. Accordingly, the condemnation articulated in these verses is embedded within a broader moral and social critique, which explains why divine punishment is presented as a consequence of collective ethical collapse rather than individual inclination alone.¹⁸

The majority of traditional Sunni scholars interpret the story of Lūṭ through a literal-legal lens, concluding that same-sex relations constitute a prohibited act subject to severe moral sanction.¹⁹ This position is grounded in classical *tafsīr* traditions that prioritize the

¹⁷ Ibnu Hajar Ansori and Salma, “Intertextuality of Hadith Regarding the Prohibition of Seeking Position,” *Ihyaussunnah: Journal of Ulumul Hadith and Living Sunnah* 3, no. 1 (2023): 1–17.

¹⁸ Maha Sourani et al., “The Gendered Semiotic Spectrum: A Linguistic and Symbolic Analysis of the Qur’anic Narrative on Sexual Deviation,” *Forum for Linguistic Studies* 7, no. 7 (July 11, 2025): 247–56, <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i7.9902>; Sara Omar, “In Search of Authenticity,” in *Routledge Handbook on Early Islam* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018.: Routledge, 2017), 339–58, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315743462-21>.

¹⁹ Donja Hodaie, “A Muslim Perspective of Sexual Orientation,” in *The Routledge International Handbook of Sex Therapy and Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2025), 273–86, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003268017-25>; M

apparent meaning of the text and its legal implications, often reinforced by juristic analogy and prophetic reports. Contemporary debates, however, introduce a contextual reading that distinguishes between violent or coercive acts and consensual relationships, drawing on historical analysis and ethical reasoning.²⁰ Rather than negating the normative authority of the Qur'an, these approaches reinterpret its moral objectives in light of changing social realities, thereby illustrating a concrete negotiation between revelation as a pure ideal and human reasoning as contextual interpretation.

Recent revisionist scholarship advances a markedly different theological stance by framing homosexuality as an innate aspect of human diversity rather than a moral deviation. From this premise, arguments for religious recognition and social inclusion are constructed as consistent with broader Qur'anic ethical commitments. LGBT communities, especially in Western intellectual settings, actively reinterpret Qur'anic and ḥadīth narratives to legitimate this position, despite persistent resistance from conservative authorities who maintain classical juridical readings.²¹ Academic studies grounded in semiotic and linguistic analysis challenge the assumption that the texts unequivocally mandate prohibition, showing instead that classical interpretations prioritize punitive readings shaped by specific historical and rhetorical contexts. Alternative interpretations foreground justice, human dignity, and moral intentionality as central Qur'anic values.²² This divergence underscores that disagreement lies not in the text itself, but in the epistemological assumptions guiding interpretation.

The Qur'anic verses related to homosexuality thus display a coherent narrative structure centered on the Lūṭ account, emphasizing moral transgression, social resistance to prophetic guidance, and ethical consequence. Verses such as QS al-Nahl [16]: 72 and al-Rūm [30]: 21, while not explicitly addressing homosexuality, are methodologically relevant within a munāsabah framework because they articulate the Qur'anic vision of marital harmony, social stability, and emotional balance as normative ideals. When read relationally, these passages function as ethical counterpoints that clarify the moral horizon within which the Lūṭ narrative operates. This integrative reading enables tafsīr to move beyond punitive legalism toward a value-oriented interpretation that aligns moral normativity with social well-being, thereby reinforcing the epistemological framework of this study.

Alipour, "Essentialism and Islamic Theology of Homosexuality: A Critical Reflection on an Essentialist Epistemology toward Same-Sex Desires and Acts in Islam," *Journal of Homosexuality* 64, no. 14 (December 6, 2017): 1930–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2017.1289001>.

²⁰ M. Izwan M. Yusof et al., "Malaysian Muslim Gay and Lesbian Community's Perspective of the Concept of Domestic Partnership and Marriage in the Qur'an," in *Past and Present: Perspectives on Gender and Love* (National University of Malaysia (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia), Department of al-Quran and al-Sunnah, Malaysia: BRILL, 2015), 13–24, https://doi.org/10.1163/9781848883918_003; Dervla Sara Shannahan, "Sexual Ethics, Marriage, and Sexual Autonomy: The Landscapes for Muslimat and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Muslims," *Contemporary Islam* 3, no. 1 (April 2009): 59–78, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-008-0077-4>.

²¹ Asifa Siraj, "Alternative Realities: Queer Muslims and the Qur'an," *Theology & Sexuality* 22, no. 1–2 (May 16, 2016): 89–101, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13558358.2017.1296690>; Sara Omar, "In Search of Authenticity," in *Routledge Handbook on Early Islam* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018: Routledge, 2017), 339–58, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315743462-21>.

²² Sourani et al., "The Gendered Semiotic Spectrum: A Linguistic and Symbolic Analysis of the Qur'anic Narrative on Sexual Deviation."

Table 1. Qur'anic Verses on Homosexuality and Their Moral-Social Implications

Surah & Verse	Summary	Moral-Social Implications
Hūd [11:78–81]	Prophet Lūṭ admonishes his people for engaging in homosexual behavior	Reinforces moral prohibition and calls for repentance
An-Naml [27:54]	Lūṭ's community rejects his call to repentance	Demonstrates social resistance to ethical and divine values
Al-'Ankabūt [29:28–29, 33]	Lūṭ's people are destroyed due to same-sex sexual behavior	Illustrates social and moral consequences of transgressing transcendent norms
Saba' [34:13]	Destruction of Lūṭ's people related to same-sex acts	Strengthens the function of moral and social warning in the Qur'anic narrative
Al-Syu'arā' [26:155–156]	Rejection of Lūṭ's call to abandon homosexual behavior	Emphasizes adherence to moral principles despite opposition
Al-Nahl [16:72]	Importance of heterosexual marriage as obedience to God	Highlights the moral and social role of family structure
Al-Rūm [30:21]	Heterosexual marriage brings love, tranquility, and emotional stability	Demonstrates psychological and social harmonization in obedience

Negotiation between Pure Ideas and Religious Thought in the Interpretation of Qur'anic Verses on Homosexuality: The Perspective of al-'Ashmāwī

Rigid literal and *fiqhiyyah* readings often constrain the understanding of the Qur'an on homosexuality. Al-'Ashmāwī responds to this limitation by introducing an epistemological distinction between al-fikr al-ṣāfī (pure religious ideas) and al-fikr al-dīnī (religious thought), which functions as a methodological tool rather than a purely conceptual dichotomy. Pure religious ideas represent absolute, objective, and universal values derived directly from revelation, including obedience to God, the prohibition of moral transgression, and the preservation of human dignity. These values remain constant throughout prophetic history. In the narrative of Prophet Lūṭ, as articulated in QS Hūd [11]: 78–81 and QS Al-Syu'arā' [26]: 155–156, the Qur'anic language emphasizes terms such as *al-fāḥishah* and *al-isrāf*, which classical exegetes identify as markers of unprecedented moral deviation and social disorder rather than mere personal inclination. Within this framework, al-'Ashmāwī argues that the absoluteness of revelation lies in its moral warning and ethical orientation, not in fixed legal formulations.²³

At the level of religious thought, al-'Ashmāwī demonstrates that legal interpretations are shaped by socio-historical reasoning rather than by revelation itself. The Prophetic report stating, "Whoever you find committing the act of the people of Lūṭ, execute the doer and the one acted upon," was interpreted divergently by jurists. Imam al-Shāfi'ī prescribed capital punishment, Abū Ḥanīfah emphasized discretionary *ta'zīr*, while Abū Yūsuf and al-Awzā'ī analogized it to adultery. This plurality indicates that legal determinations reflect juristic logic and contextual assumptions rather than pure ideas themselves. In *Ḥaqīqah al-Hijāb wa Ḥujjiyyat al-Ḥadīth*, al-'Ashmāwī argues that ḥadīth must be evaluated within its epistemic function, emphasizing moral guidance over rigid legal literalism. Such a position

²³ Muḥammad Sa'īd Al-'Ashmawī, *Jauhar Al-Islām* (Kairo: Maktabah Madbuli al-Ṣaghīr, 1996), 45-47.

problematizes claims of singular legal absolutism in matters where the Qur'an itself prioritizes ethical warning and social reform.²⁴

Al-ʿAshmāwī then proposed six principles of *Shari'ah* that function as a methodological framework for text interpretation: (1) viewing *Shari'ah* as a dynamic way of life, (2) contextualized interpretation, (3) orientation toward general welfare (*maṣlaḥah ʿāmmah*), (4) sensitivity to social variations, (5) an organic connection between the Qur'an and *Shari'ah*, and (6) adaptation to changing societal conditions. When applied to Qur'anic verses on homosexuality, these principles require moving beyond criminal classification toward an analysis of the *maqāṣid* underlying moral prohibition, such as safeguarding dignity, family coherence, and communal stability. This demonstrates that *Shari'ah*, in al-ʿAshmāwī's framework, functions as an ethical horizon rather than a closed penal system.

Within this framework, the narrative of Prophet Lūṭ is interpreted not merely as a historical episode confined to a particular community but as a paradigmatic moral warning that articulates enduring ethical principles. QS Al-ʿAnkabūt [29]: 28–29 demonstrates a coherent *siyāq* in which sexual transgression is explicitly associated with a broader pattern of social disorder, including public immorality, hostility toward prophetic guidance, and the erosion of communal ethics. Al-ʿAshmāwī interprets this narrative as expressing the objectivity of pure ideas, whereby divine punishment functions not as an arbitrary sanction but as a moral consequence of sustained ethical collapse. By framing punishment as the inevitable outcome of rejecting moral order rather than as a prescriptive legal response, this approach redirects exegetical focus from juridical enforcement to ethical causality. Such a reading aligns Qur'anic discourse with universal moral reasoning. It reinforces the Qur'an's role as a source of ethical orientation that transcends temporal and cultural boundaries, while remaining normatively authoritative.²⁵

Furthermore, this approach broadens the interpretive horizon beyond legal debate alone. Verses such as QS Saba' [34]: 13 are invoked by al-ʿAshmāwī not as direct parallels to the Lūṭ narrative, but as illustrative of a recurring Qur'anic pattern in which obedience and gratitude sustain civilization, while moral arrogance precipitates decline. The methodological relevance of such verses lies in thematic coherence (*munāsabah ma'nawīyyah*), not historical identity. This justifies their inclusion as ethical analogies rather than legal precedents, reinforcing the moral-symbolic dimension of Qur'anic discourse.²⁶ The hermeneutical framework advanced by al-ʿAshmāwī ultimately contests the monopolization of pure ideas by rigid legalism. By situating punitive prescriptions within the realm of religious thought, he exposes their contingent nature and warns against transforming law into an instrument that neglects justice and welfare. Nevertheless, this approach also invites critical scrutiny, particularly regarding the risk of marginalizing ḥadīth authority or overextending contemporary ethical agendas. Such tensions mark the epistemological limits of al-ʿAshmāwī's method and highlight the need for disciplined textual engagement rather than unrestricted moral reinterpretation.

²⁴ Muhammad Sa'id al-ʿAshmāwī, *Uṣūl Al-Sharī'Ah* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1992), 18–22.

²⁵ Al-ʿAshmāwī, *Jauhar al-Islām*, 80–85.

²⁶ al-ʿAshmāwī, *Uṣūl Al-Sharī'Ah*, 20–23.

In this context, al-‘Ashmāwī proposes a fundamental repositioning of Qur’anic interpretation on homosexuality by relocating the axis of normativity from rigid legal formulations to the epistemological distinction between pure ideas and religious thought. Qur’anic verses are understood as articulations of pure ideas that embody transcendent values such as obedience to God, moral order, and the preservation of human dignity, which remain constant across time and context. In contrast, *fiqhiyyah* rulings that prescribe specific legal sanctions are treated as historically contingent products of religious reasoning shaped by social, political, and cultural circumstances. This negotiated framework does not relativize revelation, but instead protects its transcendence by preventing it from being reduced to fixed juridical outcomes. By acknowledging interpretive plurality while maintaining ethical orientation, al-‘Ashmāwī’s approach enables contemporary *tafsīr* to function as a reflective, methodologically accountable, and socially responsive discourse that engages modern realities without dissolving the normative authority of the Qur’an.

Transformative Implications of al-‘Ashmāwī’s Thought in Qur’anic Exegesis Studies

The thought of Muhammad Sa‘īd al-‘Ashmāwī presents a radical, transformative perspective in Qur’anic exegesis, shifting the classical paradigm that often remains confined to literal readings and formalistic legal interpretations. He emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between pure religious ideas (*al-fikr al-ṣāfī*), which are universal and transcendent, and religious thought (*al-fikr al-dīnī*), which is a product of human reasoning and is contextual. Within this framework, exegesis does not merely focus on legal formulations but highlights moral and ethical messages that retain relevance across time and cultures. This approach aligns with contemporary trends in Indonesia, where Muslim scholars advance transformative and contextual exegesis to liberate Qur’anic understanding from traditional rigidity and ensure its applicability to modern social, political, and ethical challenges.²⁷

Methodologically, al-‘Ashmāwī integrates classical and modern hermeneutics, demonstrating analytical precision that is rarely found in the classical exegesis tradition. He underscores the importance of understanding Arab conventions at the time of revelation (*ma’hūd al-‘Arab fī ‘aṣr an-nuzūl*) to uncover both the literal and historical meanings, while simultaneously emphasizing the recovery of divine intent to ensure that exegesis remains relevant within contemporary social contexts. This approach guides interpreters to move beyond mere textual literalism and focus on the moral and ethical substance at the core of revelation. Consequently, Qur’anic exegesis functions not only as a record of law but also as an instrument for moral and social emancipation, aligning with modern hermeneutical trends that highlight interpretative dynamism and practical relevance.²⁸

²⁷ I Rohman, “The Pursuit of New Interpretive Approaches to the Qur’ān in Contemporary Indonesia,” in *The Qur’ān in the Malay-Indonesian World: Context and Interpretation* (Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka (UHAMKA), Jakarta, Indonesia: Taylor and Francis, 2016), 83–136, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315646350-15>.

²⁸ A Helli, “THE ‘CONVENTIONS OF THE ARABS’ (MA’HŪD AL-‘ARAB) AS A FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF TAFSIR,” *Quranica* 14, no. 1 (2022): 26–57, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85218235880&partnerID=40&md5=dbaeb61b797495d7edf697e7a5638d9d>; Ulrika Mårtensson, “Through

One of al-ʿAshmāwī's significant innovations is his emphasis on thematic and structural analysis to capture the unity and continuity of the Qur'anic message. He asserts that a partial understanding of specific verses or surahs risks obscuring the universal message of revelation. This thematic approach allows exegesis to highlight enduring principles such as *tawhīd*, *rahmah*, and *ʿadl*, which serve as moral, social, and political foundations guiding human conduct. The structural analysis he develops also functions as a tool to counter ideological distortions, including extremism, by emphasizing the alignment of ethics and law within broader social contexts. For al-ʿAshmāwī, Qur'anic exegesis thus serves not only as an academic endeavor but also as a concrete means for moral and social transformation.²⁹

The impact of al-ʿAshmāwī's thought on contemporary Islamic thought is multidimensional, encompassing modernism, liberation theology, and feminist exegesis. By opening space for historically and morally relevant interpretations, he encourages the emergence of exegesis that emphasizes social justice, gender equality, and the protection of human dignity as universal values of the Qur'ān. This perspective enriches Islamic intellectual discourse by providing a methodological foundation for contemporary interpreters to connect classical texts with modern socio-political challenges. Al-ʿAshmāwī not only liberates exegesis from dogmatism but also establishes a conceptual framework that enables Qur'anic interpretation to function as a medium for social transformation and progressive moral reflection.³⁰

Furthermore, al-ʿAshmāwī emphasizes the necessity of integrating both local and global perspectives within Qur'anic interpretation as an essential requirement for maintaining the relevance of revelation in a plural and interconnected world. He argues that although the Qur'ān was revealed within the socio-historical context of seventh-century Arabia, its ethical and moral messages possess a transcendent character that enables them to speak meaningfully across diverse cultural and civilizational settings. This epistemological stance has inspired interpretive developments, such as Sufi-oriented exegesis in Southeast Asia, in which classical hermeneutical principles are creatively engaged with local cosmologies, spiritual practices, and communal values. Such contextual integration allows tafsīr to function not merely as an abstract textual exercise, but as a living ethical discourse capable of guiding social behavior, nurturing spiritual awareness, and addressing contemporary moral challenges. In this way, Qur'anic exegesis becomes a practical

the Lens of Modern Hermeneutics: Authorial Intention in Al-Ṭabarī's and Al-Ghazālī's Interpretations of Q. 24:35," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 11, no. 2 (October 2009): 20–48, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2009.0003>.

²⁹ M.E.-T. El-Mesawi, "From Al-Shatibi's Legal Hermeneutics to Thematic Exegesis of the Quran," *Intellectual Discourse* 20, no. 2 (2012): 189–214; H Kuseri et al., "A Qur'anic Framework for Tawhid-Based Peacebuilding: Contextualizing Southeast Asia's Response to Violent Extremism," *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities* 6, no. 3 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.58256/jnwzcf68>.

³⁰ Ali Akbar, "Fazlur Rahman's Influence on Contemporary Islamic Thought," *The Muslim World* 110, no. 2 (June 25, 2020): 129–53, <https://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.12334>; E E M Ibrahim and I M Zein, "Hasan Al-Turabi's Approach to Qur'anic Exegesis," *Intellectual Discourse* 22, no. 1 (2014): 53–71, <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84903753736&partnerID=40&md5=4fd59073fbb8edc4a6d4e8f585e882a9>.

instrument for shaping ethical, social, and spiritual consciousness among Muslims in the era of globalization.³¹

In his works *Al-Islām al-Siyāsī* and *Usūl al-Sharī'ah* (1979), al-'Ashmāwī emphasizes that the formal application of Shari'ah often becomes trapped in procedural compliance without substantive understanding of the moral and ethical principles underlying revelation. He critiques Islamic legal practices that prioritize rigid rules, rendering them less responsive to socio-political dynamics and contemporary challenges. From this perspective, al-'Ashmāwī advocates a critical, contextual approach that integrates revelation, rationality, and social and political realities. This approach stresses that legal interpretation should consider moral objectives (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*), justice, public welfare, and social balance, thereby ensuring that Shari'ah remains a relevant normative and ethical framework that guides society in moral, social, and practical terms.³²

Overall, al-'Ashmāwī's thought constitutes a transformative paradigm in Qur'anic exegesis by redefining the nexus between revelation, interpretation, and social reality. By synthesizing classical exegetical traditions with modern hermeneutical approaches, and by prioritizing thematic unity, structural coherence, and sensitivity to *siyāq* and socio-historical context, the Qur'an is positioned as a dynamic ethical discourse rather than a fixed legal corpus. Moreover, attention to local and global cultural conditions renders interpretation historically aware while remaining normatively anchored. This paradigm safeguards the transcendent character of revelation while offering a rigorous methodological framework through which interpretation functions as moral guidance, intellectual clarification, and social responsibility. Consequently, it enables contemporary engagement with Qur'anic ethics that is both critical and faithful, responsive to modern challenges without eroding commitment to the divine message.

Table 2. Transformative Implications of al-'Ashmāwī's Thought in Qur'anic Exegesis Studies

Aspect	Description	Transformative Implications
Contextual and Emancipatory Exegesis	Al-'Ashmāwī emphasizes the relevance of the Qur'an to modern social, cultural, and political contexts, liberating interpretation from rigidity and dogmatism.	Enables the Qur'an to serve as a source of moral, ethical, and social guidance that responds to contemporary issues.
Integration of Classical and Modern Hermeneutics	Combines classical principles such as Arab conventions during revelation with modern hermeneutics that stress authorial intention.	Exegesis becomes dynamic, contextual, and capable of addressing contemporary social, ethical, and moral challenges.
Thematic and Structural Analysis	Emphasizes thematic unity of surahs and verses, as well as	Prevents partial interpretation, counters extremist ideologies, and

³¹ Moh. Mauluddin et al., "Sufi Hermeneutics and Symbolic Tafsir in the Javanese Manuscript Hakikate Bismillah," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 26, no. 2 (July 31, 2025): 413–43, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v26i2.6315>; Vanessa De Gifis, *Shaping a Qur'anic Worldview, Shaping a Qur'anic Worldview: Scriptural Hermeneutics and the Rhetoric of Moral Reform in the Caliphate of Al-Ma'un* (University of Chicago, Wayne State University, Germany: Routledge, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315818689>.

³² Muḥammad Sa'īd Al-'Ashmawī, *Al-Islām Al-Siyāsī* (Kairo: Maktabah al-Qāhira, 1979), 45–52; Muḥammad Sa'īd Al-'Ashmawī, *Usūl Al-Sharī'Ah* (Kairo: Maktabah al-Qāhira, 1979), 33–41.

	universal principles such as tawhīd, rahmah, and 'adl.	guides society toward humanistic social and political ethics.
Impact on Contemporary Islamic Thought	Introduces modernist exegesis, liberation theology, and feminist interpretations relevant to social justice and gender equality.	Provides a methodological framework for contemporary mufassir to connect classical texts with modern socio-political issues.
Integration of Local and Global Perspectives	Connects the Qur'ānic message with both local contexts (e.g., Southeast Asian Sufism) and global frameworks without losing its transcendent essence.	Exegesis becomes applicable, relevant, and responsive to modern social and cultural complexity, supporting ethical and spiritual awareness.

The table's description can be synthesized into a comprehensive overview that shows Muhammad Sa'īd al-'Ashmāwī's approach to Qur'ānic exegesis emphasizes a balance between the normative principles of the Qur'an and contemporary social contexts. By integrating classical and modern hermeneutics, thematic and structural analysis, and local and global perspectives, his exegesis becomes dynamic, contextual, and humanistic. This approach allows the Qur'an to be understood not merely as a sacred text but also as a source of moral, ethical, and social guidance that responds to contemporary issues, including social justice, gender equality, and cultural complexity. Consequently, al-'Ashmāwī's tafsīr provides a practical and transformative methodological framework for contemporary mufassir to bridge classical texts with modern realities.

Conclusion

Based on the findings presented, Muḥammad Sa'īd al-'Ashmāwī's interpretation of Qur'ānic verses concerning homosexuality constitutes a significant epistemological intervention within contemporary *tafsīr*. His systematic distinction between *al-fikr al-ṣāfī* (pure ideas) and *al-fikr al-dīnī* (religious thought) operates not merely at a theoretical level but as an effective hermeneutical strategy that redirects interpretation away from rigid legalism toward ethical intentionality. Within this framework, prohibitions associated with the Lūṭ narrative are understood as articulations of transcendent moral values, such as social order, obedience to divine guidance, and the safeguarding of human dignity. Conversely, juridical sanctions formulated in classical *fiqh* are treated as products of historically conditioned interpretive reasoning rather than immutable divine mandates. By employing linguistic precision, thematic coherence, and a *maqāṣid*-oriented analytical lens, this research addresses a lacuna in earlier scholarship that reduced homosexuality to either a juridical issue or a sociological category. Methodologically, it advances thematic and categorical *tafsīr* by demonstrating how the negotiation between pure normative principles and contextual reasoning can be systematically operationalized within Qur'ānic exegesis.

The findings of this study also delineate clear directions for future research. Further studies may operationalize al-'Ashmāwī's framework through close textual analyses of selected Qur'ānic passages employing linguistic, *munāsabah*, and *maqāṣid*-based approaches to assess the scope of epistemological negotiation. Comparative research is needed to critically situate his methodology alongside other reformist exegetes, evaluating both its analytical strengths and its potential limitations, including the risk of diminishing ḥadīth authority or overextending contemporary moral reasoning. Moreover, empirically grounded

research in specific Muslim societies could examine how such hermeneutical models shape lived ethical practice and legal reasoning. These trajectories would enable al-‘Ashmāwī’s approach to be refined and tested, ensuring Qur’ānic interpretation remains normatively anchored, methodologically sound, and responsive to evolving ethical concerns.

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We have reached a decision regarding your submission to QOF, "Negotiating Pure Ideals and Religious Thought in Qur'ānic Exegesis: An Analysis of Muhammad Sa'īd al-'Ashmāwī's Concept on Homosexuality Verses".

Our decision is to: Accept Submission

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Abstract

B *I* $\times^2$ $\times_2$ 

This study examines Muḥammad Saïd al-Ashmāwī's conceptual approach to interpreting Qur'anic verses concerning homosexuality, emphasizing the distinction between *al-fikr al-ṣāfi* (pure ideas) and *al-fikr al-dīnī* (religious thought). Al-Ashmāwī asserts that pure ideas are transcendent and objective, whereas religious thought constitutes human interpretation influenced by social, historical, and cultural contexts. The study aims to explore how this framework enables exegesis that preserves normative principles while remaining responsive to contemporary social, ethical, and legal dynamics. Employing a qualitative methodology through literature review, the analysis is both thematic-

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Homosexuality in the Qur'an ✕

Contemporary Islamic Hermeneutics ✕

Subjects ?

Muhammad Saïd al-Ashmāwī ✕

Homosexuality in Islamic Texts ✕

Pure Ideals and Religious Thought ✕

Contextual and Thematic Tafsir ✕

Contemporary Islamic Hermeneutics ✕

Ethics and Morality in the Qur'an ✕

Qur'anic Exegesis (Tafsir) ✕

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Negotiating Pure Ideas and Religious Thought in Qur'anic Exegesis: An Analysis of Muḥammad Sa'īd al-Ashmāwī's Concept of Homosexuality Verses

Udin Safala

Universitas Islam Negeri Kisi Ageng Muhammad Besari Ponorogo, Indonesia

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30767/qof.v9i2.3300>

Keywords: Al-'Ashmāwī, Pure Ideas and Religious Thought, Contextual Qur'anic Exegesis, Homosexuality in the Qur'an, Contemporary Islamic Hermeneutics

Abstract

This study examines Muḥammad Sa'īd al-'Ashmāwī's conceptual approach to interpreting Qur'anic verses concerning homosexuality, emphasizing the distinction between *al-fikr al-safī* (pure ideas) and *al-fikr al-dīnī* (religious thought). Al-'Ashmāwī asserts that pure ideas are transcendent and objective, whereas religious thought constitutes human interpretation influenced by social, historical, and cultural contexts. The study aims to explore how this framework enables exegesis that preserves normative principles while remaining responsive to contemporary social, ethical, and legal dynamics. Employing a qualitative methodology through literature review, the analysis is both thematic-categorical and epistemological, examining relevant Qur'anic verses and al-'Ashmāwī's works. Findings indicate that his approach foregrounds the moral, ethical, and social essence of revelation, treating legal prescriptions as contextually constructed by humans. By integrating classical and modern hermeneutics with local and global perspectives, this method ensures interpretations remain relevant to issues of justice, human dignity, and contemporary social dynamics. The study contributes to the development of a transformative exegetical framework that bridges transcendent principles and human interpretive needs in a humanistic, critical, and practical manner, offering a methodological foundation for contemporary Qur'anic studies.

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