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### Research Article

# The Living Qur'an: Ethnographic Study and Understanding of Al-Isra': 9 in Urban Communities

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**Abstract.** This research presents the understanding and application of the values of the Qur'an, specifically Al-Isra': 9, and its influence on the lifestyles of individuals who migrate to big cities for work or education. The ethnographic study was conducted in urban communities in the cities of Jakarta and Yogyakarta, involving 20 workers and 20 students. The research was conducted using qualitative methods, including participatory observation, questionnaires and in-depth interviews to understand the adaptation strategies of individuals in urban life, while maintaining their religious beliefs. The research results show that despite are many challenges, such as hectic schedules, unsupportive work or academic environments, and social pressure to adapt to an urban lifestyle, individuals still try to carry out religious practices. Facilities and technology play a crucial role in supporting these practices, and the active support of religious communities proves highly beneficial in maintaining Qur'anic values. This research identifies affective adaptation strategies and provides

practical recommendation to help individuals maintain the values of the Qur'anic in a dynamic environment, such as good time management and participation in community activities.

**Keywords:** Living Qur'an, Ethnographic Studies, Lifestyle, Urbanization

## INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an is the holy book of Muslims, containing the word of Allah which were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ through the angel Jibril, as the main guide that regulates the lives of individuals and society. Practicing the Qur'an is not just about reading and memorizing it, but also incorporating religious principles into every aspect of life, starting from hard work and responsibility at work, social interaction and lifestyle. One of the factors that most influences world society (Zhenhua Zhang, Mingcheng Zhao, Yunpeng Zhang, 2023), especially Indonesia in the case mentioned above is urbanization, namely the movement of people from rural to urban areas to seek better opportunities, especially in big cities (Hidayati, 2021, p. 212). The urbanization process is taking place very quickly, usually this movement occurs in order to work, continue education or stay. Apparently this has changed the social structure, mindset, economy and culture of society. Behind this dynamic, there are significant challenges faced by individual Muslims to maintain and implement religious values, especially those derived from the Qur'an in urban environment, which often differ drastically from their places of origin.

In this context, living Qur'an, al-Qur'an as the object and humans as the subject (Rafiq, 2021, pp. 469-484) can be interpreted as all behavior that appears in society or the community's response as a form of interpretation of the values of the Qur'an, which refers to the principles and teachings of the Qur'an in daily lives (Mansur, 2007, p. 5). Through approach living Qur'an which is more inclusive and dynamic, will produce understanding and practices that are relevant to the realities of today's society (Murtadlo et al., 2023, pp. 112-118). Covers spiritual aspects such as worship, ethics and morality in a more complex environment. City life, with its dynamics and density, has forced humans to adapt and look for new ways to continue living according to faith, without violating God's rules.

Allah says in Al-Isra': 9

إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ يَهْدِي لِلَّتِي هِيَ أَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ الَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا كَبِيرًا

Meaning: Verily, this Qur'an guides to the straightest (path) and gives good news to believers who do good deeds that for them there is a very great reward (*Quran Kemenag*, 2019)

In the Al-Misbah, Quraish Shihab mentions Sayyid Qutb's opinion regarding this verse, emphasizing that the Qur'an is the most straight and perfect guidance in the field, in the field of conscience and feeling, in the field of faith which is very clear and easy to understand, in connecting the outer and inner man, his feeling and action,

as well as his beliefs and activities. In term of worship that links obligations and abilities, it does not become burdensome to the point of being boring and does not make things easier or easier to give birth to an attitude of indifference. In terms of relationships between people, individuals, couples, governments, communities, countries and human species. A relationship that is based on solid foundations, which is not influenced by lust, nor does it use the yardstick of pleasure, love and hate. All must be respected and maintain their purity, which leads all humans with their various religious to live in harmony and peace. (Shihab, 2002, p. 421)

In the Indonesian Ministry of Religion's interpretation, it is explained that the "straight path" in this verse is "Islamic religion", which stems from monotheism, namely the belief that no power can be created and control the universe except Allah, His power cannot be compared with anyone else. He is the true Ruler of Nature and is The Most Great. Allah gives good news to those who believe in Him and His Messenger, do good deeds, do whatever is commanded and stay away from what He has forbidden. With abundant rewards that will be received in the afterlife as a reward for pious deeds carried out in the world (Kementarian Agama RI, 2011, pp. 443-444).

Meanwhile in Tafsir An-Nuur's, it is stated that the Qur'an is a guide for humans on the best path, calling for goodness in this world and the hereafter. The "straightest path" is the true religion, one of the most important aspects of which is solemn submission to Allah and confessing that Allah is One, who own the universe. And it makes those who believe in Allah and His Messenger happy, they will get a great reward on the Day of Resurrection as a reward for their deeds in this world (Ash-Shiddieqy, 2000, p. 2306).

So, this verse should be used as a basis for the importance of following the instruction of the Qur'an in dealing with various situations and conditions in life. It firmly shows that the Qur'an is the straightest source of guidance, and provides good news to those who believe and do righteous deeds. The Qur'an is not only a text that must be read, but also must be followed in every aspect of life. This verse provides motivation for humans to continue doing righteous deeds, with the promise of great rewards in return. In such a busy urban life, maintaining consistency is the biggest challenge. Individuals must try their best to be able to follow the instructions of the Qur'an in the midst of a life full of distractions and pressure. Then, is this understood by individuals?

This research focuses on an ethnographic study of how Muslim individuals living in big cities maintain and apply the principles of the Qur'an in their daily lives. Especially workers and students, as two groups who often face great challenges in balancing the demands of urban life, as well as their spiritual needs. The study was conducted in two large cities in Indonesia, The Jakarta and Yogyakarta. These two cities have different urban characteristics, but both are economic, educational and cultural centers that have attracted many individuals from various regions. This research fills the gap in the existing literature by highlighting the real experiences of urban Muslim communities in large Indonesian cities, especially Jakarta and Yogyakarta, which are still rarely explored through an ethnographic approach. This

research aims to understand the experiences, challenges, difficulties and adaptation strategies they use to maintain religious habits.

The results of previous research have shown that urbanization can significantly influence individual religious life. For example, research conducted by the Pew Research Center found that life in big cities often causes more pressure to adapt to a more varied social environment. This causes a lack of time spent in religious activities. Additionally research by Smith shows that urban conditions impact religious practices in complex ways, including changes in pattern of worship and social interaction in Muslim communities. (Smith, 2018, pp. 145-160)

In Indonesian context, modernization also influences the dynamics that occur in the movement of people from villages to cities. Research conducted by Joseph Tamney on the relationship between religion and modernization. ("Modernization and Religious Purification : Islam in Indonesia Author ( s ): Joseph Tamney Published by: Religious Research Association, Inc . Stable URL : [Http://Www.Jstor.Org/Stable/3510661](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3510661) Modernization And Religious Purification : Islam In Indonesia," 2008, pp. 207-218). Meanwhile, this research aims to add to the literature on how the religion life of Muslims can also be affected by urbanization. This research aims to find the values of that Qur'an that support or hinder its implementation. This was done using participant observation, questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Apart from that, researchers also explore the methods used by individuals to overcome the various difficulties they face. It is hoped that this research will improve academic understanding of religion and urbanization, as well as provide practical advice for Muslim communities and policy makers to support individuals who migrate to big cities. Thus, this research not only increases understanding, but has implications that can help Muslim communities to live in accordance with religious values and the Qur'an.

## METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with the method of filling out questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Collecting 40 respondents, consisting of 10 workers and 10 students each in the cities of Jakarta and Yogyakarta. This method was chosen because it is effective and efficient, allowing the collection of systematic and measurable data about the experiences, challenges and adaptations used by individuals in the aforementioned large cities. The two cities were chosen because they have different urban characteristics, but both are centers of economics, educational and cultural activity that attract many migrants from various regions. The analysis was carried out descriptively-analytically to answer the research problems. The first step was carried out by conducting a literature study of studies with similar themes, then linking them with the result of field observation carried out by distributing questionnaires. Literature review and field observation results can mutually strengthen existing findings.

## DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The movement of people from villages to big cities certainly brings changes to lifestyles, thought pattern and individual understanding of religion and the Qur'an,

as a holy book that Muslims must understand and practice. Like it or not, adjustments to the new environment must continue to be made, because habits in the village or place of origin are certainly different from those of overseas places. In the village everything is limited, but in the city someone can discover various new things easily. Because there are more people, it is easier to access the latest information because the facilities and technology provided are also more sophisticated and up to date. It depends on the individual whether they choose to be silent (passive) or actively explore the unlimited knowledge and experience around them. Don't forget, individuals also have to be good at filtering everything, not swallowing information or anything new they get.

## Challenges in Implementing Qur'an Values

### 1. Work and Study Pressure

Pressure caused by work or study demands is one of the main problems faced by respondents. Especially in big cities like Jakarta and Yogyakarta which are known for their rhythm of life which demands to be fast-paced and competitive. For workers, busy schedules with long working hours are required. Meanwhile for students, high academic demands can cause a heavy study load and extra activities that take up time, which is often a reason that makes it 'difficult' for individuals to perform religious services regularly and on time.

Many respondents said that, because of the inflexible demands of work and study, they often had to be strict in dividing their time, with a small number even sacrificing their time for worship. For example, the mandatory worship, namely 'salah' the five daily prayers, can be difficult to carry out.

*"Several times I missed praying, because I was too busy meeting work deadlines or tired from coming home from the office"*

*"Lately I'm quite often not pray Isha' because I fell asleep, not pray dawn because I woke up late. Sometimes I'm very tired all day in college and then continue homework, the alarm sounds until I do not hear at all"*

*"Since moving away and living alone, I have been postponing my prayers more often. Finally pray at the end of time"*

Statement "several times", "quite often", "since moving away" shows that individuals previously prayed consistently and on time, then began to change because of the new activities they were doing. Heavy workloads and pressure generated by the work or academic environment can cause worship to become worse. Individuals who experience physical and mental fatigue often have difficulty concentrating and *khushu* in praying. This is in line with previous research which shows that work or study pressure (burnout) in urban areas can cause people to be less involved in religious activities. (Yu Ding, Weidong Huo, 2022)

### 2. Heterogeneous Social Environment

Cities are places where individuals with various social, culture and religious backgrounds meet and interact with each other. The impact of this interaction can sometimes cause them to feel isolated or not supported in carrying out religious

activities. 67,9% of respondents felt that the biggest challenge faced in implementing the values of the Qur'an was the social environment.

*"I once didn't pray, because I was reluctant to ask for permission among friends who were used to not praying, when we were doing assignments together"*

*"At home, I have family and friends who remind each other to pray and attend recitations. Here, I have to rely on myself, and that sometimes makes me feel lazy"*

*"The culture in the office is very relaxed regarding religion, then there are usually events held during prayer times. If I leave the event to pray, I worry that I will be seen as not mingling/disrespecting my co-workers"*

*"I used to always prioritize prayer at the beginning of time, even qabliyah ba'diyah. Pray every day, now let alone, can pray already thank God. Read the Qur'an only when really free, for example during long weekends like that"*

*"When I first moved here, I tried to study even if it was only 1-2 verses a day, even if today, for example, it was not fulfilled. It means to eat the next day, because I'm not sure how busy I am. Now I rarely study"*

From the respondents' statements, it proves that values conflict between different social norms in urban areas can occur. In the workplace or campus, dominant social norms may not provide space or time for religious activities such as prayer or reading the Qur'an. As a result, Muslim individuals may be compelled to conform to these norms, which sometimes leads to reducing or even abandoning their religious practice.

### 3. Space and Time Limitations

Another significant challenge is the limited space and time for religious practice. A quiet, private space suitable for worship is often hard to find. Individuals find it difficult to find the right time and place to pray, due to busy workplaces, campuses full of activity and crowded public transportation. A respondent who works in Jakarta said, *"It is difficult to find a clean and quiet place to pray in the office, I have to look for an empty space which is not always available."*

This limited space shows the need for more easy-to-access worship facilities in workplaces, campuses and other public places. Then limited time due to busy schedules often causes worship to be carried out in a hurry. Even though calm (*tuma'ninah*) is part of the perfection of prayer itself. (Meidiana, 2023)

*"I usually pray between lunch times and on my way home from work, which ultimately makes me unable to fully focus on worship, and often don't even leave after praying"*

*"The class schedule starts at Asr time and ends close to the Maghrib call to prayer, it's really hard to manage the time"*

*"Since becoming a student with various internal and external campus activities, it has become difficult for me to pray on time, often procrastinating or praying at the end of the day"*

Based on the statement, time management is essential to ensure that obligatory acts of worship, such as prayer, can still be performed, even in the midst of a very busy schedule.

#### 4. Distraction from Urban Life

Distraction and desires distract individuals from their time of worship. Common distractions include entertainment centers, shopping, technology and social media. Apart from that, the desire to live a materialistic and hedonistic lifestyle can disturb someone from the principles of the Qur'an that they have previously implemented. Although technology and social media can be useful tools to support religious life, they can also be the biggest distractions if used inappropriately. This can cause the time that should be used for worship or activities that support religious understanding to be reduced.

*"When I have a cell phone on me, I often lost track of time and scroll through social media more than reading Qur'an or listening to studies. The intention of healing was lost"*

*"When I get paid, I often go crazy because there are lots of promotions at the mall. Even more willing to endure pain and sleepiness to shop than to pray and recite the Qur'an"*

Individuals can ignore spiritual principle because of the desire to live a materialistic and hedonistic lifestyle, especially as urban life offers many luxuries and pleasures that can make people careless, so that in the end they prefer worldly pleasures to worship. This causes internal conflict and feelings of guilt for those who try to apply the values of the Qur'an in their lives.

#### Adaptation Strategy

Despite facing various challenges and pressures, many Muslim individuals are able to find adaptive ways to apply the principles of the Qur'an in their daily lives. Joining a study group or community is a common adaptation strategy. Social and spiritual support is crucial for migrants, and they often receive this support through the groups or communities they join. This approach has proven effective in helping individuals maintain their religious habits, and even increases understanding. 75% of respondents felt that the values of the Qur'an were very helpful in overcoming the stress and pressure experienced when living in a big city.

*"Joining a recitation community really helps me to stay connected with Islamic values. We support each other, remind each other, and even share new experience. It makes life less monotonous."*

*"Being obedient alone is hard, that's why I need a community to support me through the ups and downs of facing this world, so I can balance too."*

*"Every weekend I go to big mosques that host famous ustad or lecturers, where I meet new people with the same learning goals and broaden my insight and views. We often discuss and share information if there are studies on the Qur'an at other times."*

The respondents' statements highlight the importance of strong social networks in supporting religious life in the city. Additionally, technology and digital media play a significant role in supporting respondents' religious lives. Qur'an application and various other Islamic resources are easily accessible by social media platforms, helping them understand and apply the values of the Qur'an. This technology enables the easy and flexible access to religious knowledge, fitting into their busy schedules.

*"I listen to lectures on YouTube during class breaks, so that I can use my downtime productively."*

*"Because I don't have time to study the lessons that come right away, so I listen the studies on YouTube. I also use an application that has the Qur'an and its interpretation, searching for topics that i need. So far, it works!"*

*"Once a week I have private Tahsin Qur'an lessons, sometimes offline and sometimes online, the tutor is my senior on campus. So if you want to level up, there will be a test."*

The easy access to facilities, as mentioned by respondents, is very helpful for individuals in strengthening their faith and religious practices. Even though they have to find time in their busy schedule and push themselves to remain committed to the principles of the Qur'an. This dedication is a valuable asset for individuals living in dynamic environments.

## **The Impact of Urbanization on Lifestyle and Religious Views**

### **1. Evolution of Religious Views**

In urban communities, of course there is more access to information and education that can help them understand and deepen religion. Individuals have the opportunity to learn from various sources, such as books in libraries (city libraries, campuses, mosques, coffee shop) and large bookstores (such as Gramedia or Togamas), talks and studies of the Qur'an held in various mosques and their speakers, as well as study groups and religious communities that are very varied. This is means of learning and discussing with other, so that they can change the perspective of their religious understanding to be broader, critical, even deeper.

*"Since I migrated, I have experienced many changes, such as an Islamic mindset. How to overcome and respond to a problem with Islamic solution and the Qur'an, calmer and no longer arguing."*

*"Since here, I regularly attend lecturer at Masjid Istiqlal, honestly it's great influence to recharge faith and self-capacity."*

Changes in religious views can occur due to social shifts and isolation, such as the loss of social support experienced in rural areas. This can lead to increased feeling of loneliness and anxiety (Weeks et al., 2023), as people are accustomed to close-knit interactions, mutual assistance and regular greetings. In contrast, urban life often fosters a more individualistic mindset, where people tend to focus more on productivity and their personal work. However, statements like *"since moving here"*, *"since here"* shows that many positive impact or improvements individuals experience after relocating to a big city. A person's outlook is inevitably shaped by their surroundings (Shutaleva, 2023) and the people they interact with. A new, positive environment can help individuals grow and develop in better ways.

### **2. Tolerance and Pluralism**

Big cities are a melting pot of various cultures, religions and ethnicities, so that individuals inevitably come into contact and interact with other people who come from different backgrounds. This certainly increases understanding and acceptance



of religious differences. Not only are differences outside the Islamic religion, but group differences within Islam are also more pronounced.

*"On campus, I joined a student organization that held social activities such as social service and disaster relief. Through this activity, I learned that the human values and universal goodness in the Qur'an are also taught in other religions."*

*"I have become a person who is more open to all groups."*

*"Not only religious differences, religious organizations here are very visible (Muhammadiyah, NU, Salafy, etc). In my village the mass organizations are not really shown by individuals, it's just that we are Muslim, that's all."*

*"Interacting with friends from various religious made me appreciate differences more, understand the importance of tolerance in Islam and learn a lot about how to live in harmony in diversity."*

Living in a multicultural city allows makes many individuals to better understand and respect other religious and cultural beliefs.(Hutabarat, 2023) They feel that interaction foster tolerance and enriches understanding of Islam in the context of pluralism.

### 3. Religious Community

Urbanization also creates opportunities for the formation of more inclusive and diverse religious communities. Often provides religious education programs such as *tahsin* or *tahfidz* classes, interpretation of the Qur'an, regular lectures and discussions. These programs help individuals deepen their understanding of Islamic teachings and how to implement them in daily lives. Respondents in this study indicated that joining a community or study group had provided strong moral and spiritual support.

*"It's a lot of fun gathering with many service-oriented and semi-professional people. I'm more motivated and able to better understand the work I'm actually doing."*

*"Every weeknight, we have recitation session with different speakers. After that, we eat together and discuss. This togetherness fills my time more meaningful and useful way, and it really helps me since I'm far from family."*

*"In the past, we struggled alone to avoid things prohibited by religion, but now we have friends who support and strengthen each other to remain steadfast."*

Many communities organize social and religious activities, providing opportunities for individuals to learn, discuss and strengthen their faith with others.

### Understanding of Al-Isra':9

Almost all respondents understand that *Al-Isra':9* states that the Qur'an is the most straightforward guidance that must be followed to achieve happiness and success. This verse is believed to be a guide for life, emphasizing the importance of faith and good deeds. The author noted several key points from the respondents' understanding:

**First, as a moral and ethical guide.** Respondents view this verse as a guide to living a life of integrity and good ethics by striving to maintain honesty and responsibility in their work or the educational process as a form of practicing good

deeds. They also make an effort to manage their time so they can still perform prayers and other acts of worship.

*"My principle is to work honestly and reject all (negative) offers, even though the risks are big."*

*"It means that the Qur'an is the most accurate guide, that's how I understand it."*

**Second, as motivation to do good.** This verse has motivated them to always strive to help other and maintain good relationships, in the hope of receiving great rewards and fulfilling pious deeds.

*"From this verse, I try to do good in whatever form and to whoever it is. Because Allah Himself said that He would give great rewards to those who are willing to do it."*

*"This verse definitely makes me even more enthusiastic about doing good and spreading kindness."*

**Third, as a source of calm and strength.** Many respondents admitted that through this verse, Allah gives people inner peace and strength to face the various challenges of life in big cities.

*"After moving to a new place, I faced serious challenges, especially related to finances. This verse became my guide, calming me every time I remembered it and make me confident that by adhering to the Qur'an and trying my best. I would find a way out of this problem. And sure enough, slowly, I began to see opportunities and solutions that I had never thought of before."*

*"Belief in the Qur'an gives me incredible inner peace and helps me focus on efforts and prayers, not an anxiety."*

Through the experiences of these respondents, it shows that the Qur'an can be strong spiritual source, helping individuals live life more calmly and confidently, as well as providing guidance to wisely and full of hope.

## Practical Recommendations

Based on several challenges and impact of urbanization on urban communities, the author tries to provide several practical recommendations that can help individuals, communities and religious institution in supporting the implementation of the values of the Qur'an:

### 1. Provision of Religious Facilities

Supporting facilities such as clean and comfortable ablution and prayer areas in workplaces and campuses not only help workers and students to fulfill their religious obligations, but also demonstrate the institution's commitment to religion and inclusiveness.

### 2. Participate in a Religious Education Program

There are various Qur'an classes held regularly in mosques, campuses and community centers. These classes can help individuals understand the context and practical application of the verses of the Qur'an. Then also by taking part in online religious programs which are easy to access. These classes are usually held

at flexible times to accommodate people with busy schedules, such as on weekends or after work hours.

### 3. Utilizing Technology

Application development mobile in religious content, prayer reminds and educational materials about the Qur'an should be a means of accessing religious-related understanding. Then, such as content contained in podcasts, YouTube, Instagram, E-books and articles about the application of Qur'an values in modern life. This content can be accessed by busy people who need an easy-to-access source of inspiration.

### 4. Time Management

Make daily and weekly plans that include time for worship and religious study. This helps individuals ensure that they do not miss prayer times and have dedicated time to deepen their religious knowledge.

*"Take the time to read Qur'an, even if only one page a day. Don't wait for time, but take the time to read."*

*"Spend time with Qur'an, not just in our spare time."*

*"It's true that there's no end to following a lifestyle, the main thing is that you have to try to live according to what Allah wants, by reading and reciting the messages in the Qur'an and gathering in a supportive environment."*

*"I created a daily schedule that included prayer times and reading the Qur'an. This really help me to be more disciplined and consistent in worship."*

Therefore, worship should be a priority scale for every individual. A life that is different from the previous residence definitely has positive and negative impact. Wherever they are, humans will not be separated from challenges and tests. So, with good time management, they can live a balanced life and in line with Allah's commands in the Qur'an.

## CONCLUSION

This research provides insights for Muslims and policymakers to support individuals experiencing the process of urbanization. Either they move from the village to the city with the aim of working or studying. Support from the community and better access to religious resources can certainly help individual Muslim to continue living according to the values of the Qur'an, even in an environment very different from their origin. *Al-Isra':9* functions as a moral guide, motivation to do good and a source of calm for urban communities. Thus, this research not only contributes to the understanding of the impact of urbanization on religious life and understanding of the Qur'an, but also provides practical recommendation for individuals and communities facing similar challenges.

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