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From Epistemology to Methodology: Berger–Luckmann’s Social Construction as a Basis for the Study of the Living Qur’an

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Abstract

This paper aims to formulate the epistemology of social construction by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann as a methodological basis for the study of the Living Qur’an. The study of the Living Qur’an having developed in the form of empirical-descriptive studies of community religious practices still faces limitations in its epistemological foundation and systematic methodological framework. On the other hand, Berger–Luckmann’s social construction theory offers a conceptual tool explaining that social reality, including religious reality, is formed through a dialectical process of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Using a philosophical-sociological approach and conceptual analysis, this paper examines the structure of the epistemology of social construction and its relevance to the study of the Living Qur’an. The study’s findings indicate that the practice of the Living Qur’an can be understood as a form of social construction of the sacred text of the Qur’an not only interpreted textually, but also presented in social reality through a process of religious cosmization that provides sacred legitimacy to these practices. These findings confirm that the epistemology of social construction is not only theoretically relevant but can also serve as a methodological basis for explaining the relationship between text, meaning, and practice in the study of the Living Qur’an. This paper contributes to strengthening the epistemological foundation of the study of the Living Qur’an by offering an integrative methodological framework between the sociology of knowledge and Qur’anic studies, thus opening up opportunities for the development of more analytical and reflective studies of the reality of Muslim religiosity.

Keywords: *epistemology, social construction, sociology of knowledge, living Qur’an, methodology.*

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INTRODUCTION

The study of the living Qur'an in recent decades has shown significant developments in contemporary Qur'anic studies, particularly in highlighting the application of the sacred text in Muslim social practices. This approach shifts the focus of studies from the textual-normative to the practical dimension, namely how the Qur'an functions in rituals, traditions, and the daily lives of society (Aji et al., 2021; Amin & Nurhayat, 2020). Various studies have revealed the diversity of living Qur'anic practices in Indonesia, such as *yasinan* tradition, *tablilan*, and the use of Qur'anic verses in healing practices. However, most studies still tend to be descriptive-empirical, stopping at an inventory of phenomena without an adequate epistemological framework to explain how these practices are formed and gain social legitimacy (Wahidah et al., 2024). As a result, living Qur'anic studies often fail to systematically explain the dialectical relationship between text, meaning, and social reality. The relationship between the three is often not analyzed in depth, only described as an "existing" phenomenon.

Subsequent developments indicate a paradigm shift in the study of the Qur'an, from a textual orientation to a contextual study of how the Qur'an is received, interpreted, and practiced in social life. In this context, Heddy Shri Ahimsa-Putra (2012) is one of the important figures having provided an anthropological foundation for the development of the living Qur'an in Indonesia. He explains that the living Qur'an is a socio-cultural phenomenon related to the meaning the society gives to the Qur'an and how that meaning is realized in everyday life. Therefore, the phenomenon of the living Qur'an can be analyzed through various anthropological perspectives, including acculturation, diffusion, functional, structural, phenomenological, and hermeneutic or interpretive perspectives. These views show that the Qur'an in people's lives is not only present as a text to be read, but also as a source of meaning interacting with cultural systems, social structures, and community experiences (Ahimsa-Putra, 2012).

This development is reinforced by research that places the living Qur'an within a socio-cultural perspective and societal reception. Junaedi (2015) views the living Qur'an as an approach capturing various social events related to the presence of the Qur'an in Muslim communities, particularly how the text is applied in everyday life to form institutionalized traditions. Furthermore, Amin and Nurhayat (2020) emphasize that societal reception of the Qur'an can take the form of aesthetic, cultural, and academic receptions, so that the study of

the living Qur'an requires historical-normative as well as socio-cultural analysis of the communities that practice it. Thus, both studies show that the object of the living Qur'an cannot be separated from the social context shaping the meaning of the Qur'an. At this point, the study of the living Qur'an has an epistemological closeness to the social sciences because its primary focus is not only directed at "what the text says," but also on how the text acquires meaning and function in social life.

This interdisciplinary trend is increasingly evident in recent studies. Saifuddin and Nirwana (2024), for example, showed that the development of Qur'anic studies and interpretation in Indonesia is increasingly open to contributions from the social sciences and humanities, including sociology and anthropology. From this perspective, the Qur'anic phenomenon is not only understood through a normative approach, but also through analytical tools allowing researchers to read the relationship between text, people, culture, and social structure. In line with this, Wahidah et al. (2024) show that the study of the living Qur'an faces methodological challenges when empirical phenomena are only described without adequate theoretical tools. This finding is important because it shows that the development of the living Qur'an is not sufficient simply by expanding the research object to various social practices, but also requires strengthening the epistemological and methodological aspects so that the relationship between text, actors, meaning, and social context can be explained more systematically.

A number of studies have also begun to reconcile the living Qur'an with certain social theories. Applications of sociological theory can be found in research that uses Pierre Bourdieu's structure-genesis theory to examine the understanding and internalization of religious concepts in the Ahmadiyya community (Aini & Suhendra, 2018). Max Weber's social action approach is also used to understand the motives and goals of Qur'anic recitation practices in certain communities. Meanwhile, Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge approach is used to explore the relationship between meaning, knowledge, and social position in the practice of living Qur'an. These developments demonstrate that social theory is not merely a complement to research on the living Qur'an, but has become an instrument for explaining how religious practices acquire meaning within the structures of social life. However, the diversity of these theories also indicates that there is not yet a single methodological formulation systematically explaining the process of production, institutionalization, and internalization of Qur'anic meaning in social life.

A more explicit development is seen in the study of Syauqi and Prasetiawan (2026), bringing together the theory of symbolic interactionism with the theory of the reception of the living Qur'an. The study shows that symbolic interactionism is closely related to the reception of the Qur'an because both pay attention to the relationship between symbols, meaning, interaction, and religious practices. The theory of reception in the living Qur'an is even seen as a development of the perspective of symbolic interactionism in the study of the Qur'an. This finding shows the increasingly strong tendency to use sociological and anthropological theories as analytical tools in understanding society's relationship with the Qur'an. However, the orientation is still primarily on the relationship between symbols, interaction, and reception, not specifically directed at the question of how a meaning of the Qur'an is produced, experienced objectivation through institutions and social legitimacy, and then internalized into religious consciousness and practice.

Furqan and Anbayuda's (2026) study provides a broader perspective on the genealogy of living Qur'an scholarship. They demonstrate that living Qur'an is the result of the evolution of the paradigm of Qur'anic studies, moving from the tradition of 'ulūm al-Qur'an, interpretation, and contextual approaches to reception theory and research into social practices. This shift has methodological consequences in the form of the need for sociological, anthropological, and ethnographic approaches. These findings further strengthen the argument that epistemologically, living Qur'an indeed has a close relationship with the social sciences. However, while Furqan and Anbayuda emphasize genealogy and paradigm transformation toward an empirical-sociological approach, this study takes a further step by questioning how the theory of the sociology of knowledge can be operationalized into a concrete methodological framework for living Qur'an research.

In this context, the social construction theory of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann offers a different development possibility. While the anthropological approach of Ahimsa-Putra helps explain the meaning of the Qur'an in a cultural context, reception theory explains society's relationship with the text, and symbolic interactionism explains the formation of meaning through interaction, Berger-Luckmann's social construction allows researchers to trace the dialectical process connecting the three through externalization, objectivation, and internalization. With this framework, the practice of living the Qur'an can be read as a social process beginning with the production or expression of meaning by individuals and groups, then undergoing institutionalization and legitimization to become an objective reality, and

subsequently internalized by individuals as knowledge, beliefs, identities, and orientations for action. Therefore, the position of this research is not to replace the approaches of anthropology, sociology, or reception theory having been developed, but rather to offer an epistemological formulation that can connect the text, the production of meaning, institutionalization, and internalization as a single process of social construction. Herein lies the novelty of this research, namely, positioning Berger–Luckmann’s social constructionism not merely as a theory applied to the case of the living Qur’an, but also as a methodological basis for determining what is observed, how social processes are traced, and how the reality of the living Qur’an is analyzed. Thus, the social construction of reality offers a conceptual framework having potential to fill this gap.

Social construction is one of the pillars in the sociology of knowledge emphasizing that knowledge is not born neutrally or independently of context, but is always related to the social conditions in which it is produced (Berger & Luckmann, 1991:16). In this perspective, human thought is the result of a dialectical interaction between individuals and social structures, so that what is considered “knowledge” or “reality” is actually a historical and cultural product formed through certain social processes. Berger and Luckmann (1991:13-15) explain that the relationship between thought and social reality occurs through mechanisms of externalization, objectivation, and internalization, allowing human ideas to become social realities that appear objective, and then re-shape individual consciousness. Thus, social construction as a theory in the sociology of knowledge serves to explain how knowledge is formed, legitimized, and reproduced in certain social contexts, while also showing that human thought cannot be separated from the social world giving birth to it.

In the context of religion, Berger also emphasizes the function of cosmization, namely the process of giving sacred meaning to social reality so that it obtains religious legitimacy (Berger, 2011). A number of studies have begun to utilize this theory to read religious phenomena, including in the context of the living Qur’an, particularly in explaining the construction of meaning in religious practices (Ansori et al., 2023). However, as noted by Dressler (2019), the use of social construction theory in religious studies is still often applicative and has not been developed as an explicit and systematic methodological framework. In other words, Berger–Luckmann’s theory has not been fully operationalized as an epistemological basis in Qur’anic studies. Departing from this condition, this work attempts to fill the gap in the literature by formulating Berger–Luckmann’s social construction epistemology as a

methodological basis in the study of the living Qur'an. Specifically, the study focuses on how Berger–Luckmann's social construction theory can be formulated as a methodological foundation in understanding the phenomenon of the living Qur'an.

The approach used in this paper is a philosophical-sociological one with a qualitative method based on *library research*. Primary data sources are the main works of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, especially *The Social Construction of Reality*, as well as literature related to the sociology of knowledge and the study of the living Qur'an. While secondary data are from journals, books, and research results relevant to the study theme. Data collection techniques used are literature search and documentation, while data analysis was carried out using an interpretative method with an emphasis on critical reading of key concepts, such as externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Through this approach, this paper aims to formulate a social construction theory framework as a methodological basis that can be used in analyzing the phenomenon of the living Qur'an systematically. In addition, it also examines the epistemological structure of social construction theory and integrates it into an analytical framework that is able to explain the relationship between the text of the Qur'an, its meaning, and socio-religious practices. Thus, the contribution of this paper is to strengthen the theoretical and methodological dimensions of the study of the living Qur'an to be more analytical and contextual.

DISCUSSIONS

A. Historical Setting of Social Construction Epistemology in the Sociology of Knowledge

The sociology of knowledge is a branch of sociology examining the relationship between human thought and the social context where the knowledge arises (Berger & Luckmann, 1991:16). This study not only analyzes the cognitive domain, but also practically pays attention to all intellectual products such as philosophy, ideology, politics, and theological thought, by connecting ideas and the historical settings where these ideas are produced and accepted by society. The sociology of knowledge examines societal knowledge, regardless of its validity based on any criteria, as long as it is developed, transmitted, and managed in various social situations. The sociology of knowledge understands the process until a reality, which is a social construction, is formed (Berger & Luckmann, 1991:15). Thus, the task of the sociology of knowledge is at the empirical level and examines the diversity of

the empirical nature of societal knowledge, as well as the ongoing process of the body of knowledge that is ultimately determined as the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1991:15).

Historically, the seeds of the sociology of knowledge are found in the thoughts of Ibn Khaldun (732-808/1332-1406) in the 14th century, writing a number of works in which the sociology of knowledge is found in Chapter VI of the Book of Muqaddimah (1425) (Khaldun, 1958, vol. 3). However, most sociologists view Ibn Khaldun's contribution to the field of sociology of knowledge as very small. Sociologists increasingly recognize that the emergence of the sociology of knowledge is the fruit of the intellectual history of the 19th century, especially the radical differentiation between social sciences and natural sciences. Conceptually, its emergence is a reaction to the application of the positivistic paradigm in social sciences having distorted the human side of humans. The study of the sociology of knowledge first developed in Germany after World War I with the terms *Wissenssoziologie* or *Erkenntnissoziologie*, *Soziologie des Erkennens*, *Sociologie des Wissens*, and *Sociologie des Geistes*. The emergence of the sociology of knowledge provides new opportunities for social sciences to dynamically understand societal phenomena with humanistic elements based on social facts.

One of the main initiators was a German philosopher, Max Scheler, in his main work *Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft* in the 1920s (Becker & Dahlke, 1942; Berger & Luckmann, 1991:16; Berger, 1985:155; Baum, 1999:12-13). This work is a philosophical anthropology explaining the position of humans in the universe that have self-awareness, is reflective and actively constructs themselves and their surroundings, and assumes humans in constructing reality later developed in the sociology of knowledge (Riyanto, 2009: 56-65). Scheler's thoughts are rooted in three previous German thinkers: Karl Marx, Nietzsche, and Wilhelm Dilthey. The character of Marxism strongly colors the sociology of knowledge because German intellectual history was born after the euphoria of Karl Marx's thinking. Meanwhile, Max Scheler criticized Marx's thinking about the concept of human consciousness being determined by its social existence (Gardiner, 1959:127; Becker & Dahlke, 1942). Other concepts are ideology, false consciousness (alienation), substructure and superstructure, and work in the broadest sense as a human activity also originating from Marx's thinking (Marx & Bottomore, 1964:20-25).

The sociology of knowledge can also be seen as an application of Nietzsche's anti-idealism, known as the "art of suspicion" (Berger, 1991:10). Given that knowledge and

existence are inseparable, the ideological content of knowledge must always be considered suspect. The sociology of knowledge is also closely related to the thinking of Wilhelm Dilthey (Berger, 1991:19; Baum, 1999:28-29) emphasizing the social situation of thought. In Dilthey's view, situational determination and position in life refer to the social location of thought. Every society and culture is a historically produced totality, and social scientists must be able to understand the life of society. Among these thoughts, Scheler's sociology of knowledge still has a philosophical nuance, namely as a tool (*ancilla philosophiae*) to penetrate philosophical relativism (Berger, 1991:20), analyzing human knowledge formed by society a priori to examine the epistemological dimension of knowledge (Becker & Dahlke, 1942). Then Scheler put forward the idea of the powerlessness of the mind, without any underlying trigger, namely the surrounding socio-cultural conditions) (Zuhri, 2008:71).

Scheler's contribution to the sociology of knowledge avoids the understanding of the objectivity of knowledge. However, Scheler was only a pioneer followed by Karl Mannheim (1954) as a pioneer for a more concrete theoretical framework of the sociology of knowledge in sociological analysis no longer philosophical in nature. Mannheim saw society as a subject determining the forms of thought, starting from the idea of ideology that no human thought is immune to the ideologization of its social context (Berger, 1991:21). Mannheim's thoughts on the sociology of knowledge are found in the book *Ideology and Utopia* (published in German in 1929 and English in 1936) stating that knowledge is determined by social existence. In this case, the sociology of knowledge includes the systematic study of knowledge, ideas, or intellectual phenomena in general (Ritzer, 2012:316), and the task of the sociology of knowledge is to ensure the empirical relationship between intellectual and structural perspectives on the one hand and historical positions on the other hand (Fanani, 2010:36). If Scheler's thinking is ontological, Mannheim's thinking is epistemological with the term relationism (Baum, 1999:35; Zuhri, 2008:76-77). Mannheim was influenced by Dilthey's thinking (Berger & Luckmann, 1991:22), so that the task of the sociology of knowledge is to be an aid to gain a correct understanding of human events departing not only from the social dimension, but also from the substantive dimension rooted in humans, both epistemology and methodology.

The development of the sociology of knowledge after Scheler and Mannheim only criticized and modified thinking, as carried out by Robert K. Merton and Talcott Parsons (Berger & Luckmann, 1991:23). Merton reformulated the sociology of knowledge and

integrated it with structural-functional theory. Meanwhile, Parsons only commented on Mannheim's thoughts on the role of ideas without integrating them with his theory. Similarly, C. Wright Mills only provided criticism without contributing to the development of the sociology of knowledge. The efforts to integrate the sociology of knowledge with neo-positivistic approach were carried out by Theodor Geiger, then continued by Ernst Topitsch through emphasizing the ideological roots of various philosophical perspectives. Meanwhile, a more comprehensive understanding of ideas in their social context was carried out by Werner Stark, whose ideas were closer to Scheler's than to Mannheim's.

The historical development of the sociology of knowledge is a fact that the empirical concern of the sociology of knowledge is epistemological issues at the theoretical level. The presence of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann to remove the sociology of knowledge from the problems of epistemology and methodology by placing it as an empirical sociological discipline with an emphasis on theoretical aspects referring to concrete problems, not philosophical problems. Therefore, the sociology of knowledge is busy with what is "known" by society as pre-theoretical "reality" in everyday life. The focus of attention is on common sense knowledge, not on intellectual ideas. The redefinition carried out by Berger and Luckmann regarding the nature and scope of the sociology of knowledge has shifted the sociology of knowledge from the periphery to the center of sociological theory itself. It was from here that Berger and Luckmann gained an international reputation as leading experts in the field of the sociology of knowledge.

B. Theoretical Framework: The Social Construction of Reality

The social construction of reality is a theory developed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, based on an analysis of the sociology of knowledge. This theory views humans as agents actively constructing reality. Humans are instruments to create objective reality through the process of externalization, just as they influence it through the process of internalization (reflecting subjective reality) (Poloma, 2004:302). In this context, Berger and Luckmann describe the process of human action and interaction in continuously creating a shared reality, experienced objectively and factually as well as subjectively and meaningfully. Society and its various institutions are created, maintained, and changed through actions and interactions between people. Social construction theory lies between structural-functional theory on the one hand and symbolic interactionism theory on the other hand. In Ritzer's

view, as cited by Riyanto (2009: 49,157), Berger and Luckmann's thinking is based on methodological relationism. This is because The epistemological construction of the sociology of knowledge in the book 'The Social Construction of Reality', synthesizes two poles far apart: the pattern of tendencies emphasizing that social reality is subjective from Max Weber's view and Durkheim's view emphasizing that social reality is objective.

Social construction theory is basically a continuation of phenomenology in contrast to theories in the social fact paradigm as developed by Durkheim. Phenomenology originated from Hegel's philosophy, developed by Husserl and used as a social theory by Schütz to analyze social phenomena (Giddens, 2010: 4-5; Moustakas, 1994: 27-28; Ritzer & Smart, 2011: 464; Creswell, 2014: 106; Syam, 2005: 34-35). Schütz juxtaposes Husserl's phenomenology with Weber's concept of *Verstehen* oriented toward 'in order to motive' in acting (Jones, 2010: 114), and not explaining the motive 'in order to' (Giddens, 2010: 11). Because the social world for Schütz is something intersubjective and meaningful, Schütz adds 'because motive', the ones underlying individual actions and distinguished from 'in order to motive'. Furthermore, Schütz developed the study of natural behavior with the term *Lebenswelt* (life-world) or everyday life world (Giddens, 2010: 10), which is the social reality of ordinary people (lay people), and within it there are symptoms that must be described. Schütz's thinking provides a new touch to the sociology of knowledge. Berger and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge follows the thought process in Schütz's phenomenology starting from the reality of everyday life as the main reality of social symptoms in the book "The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge". According to McCarthy as quoted by Riyanto (2009: 37), the sociology of knowledge experienced a change in direction with the publication of the book.

1. The Social Construction of Reality

Berger and Luckmann restore the role of the sociology of knowledge within the framework of developing social theory (1991:20-25). The first role is to redefine the task of the sociology of knowledge at the empirical level as a theory adapted to the discipline of empirical sociology, in order to explain the ongoing social construction. "Reality" and "knowledge" are reinterpreted in a social context. Social reality is something implicit in social interactions, expressed socially through linguistic communication and manifested in actions, and cooperation in the form of social organization. Social reality is intersubjective, while knowledge of social reality is related to the experience of social life in all its aspects (cognitive,

psychomotor, emotional, and intuitive). The concept of intersubjectivity refers to the dimension of the structure of general consciousness toward individual consciousness in a specific group that is interacting.

The second is to determine the appropriate methodology for researching intersubjectivity in order to discover the essence of society implied in social phenomena. Berger uses Durkheim's thinking on social reality, displaying an objective dimension, and Weber's thinking on a subjective dimension. For Berger, the two are not contradictory because society possesses objective facticity while expressing subjective meaning, both of which shape reality. Sociological interpretations emphasize aspects of development, change, and the process of social action. In this way, we can understand social order built by society and maintained in everyday interactions, so that the sociological relevance of everyday life can be found.

The third role is to choose the right logic to apply in understanding social reality, which is pluralistic, dynamic, and continuously evolving. Berger and Luckmann attempted to change the perception that the orientation of the sociology of knowledge has tended to only examine the history of the emergence of an idea or intellectual concepts. However, the issue of ideas or ideology is not the main issue in sociology. The main problem lies in all dimensions of knowledge in society, with the subject of analysis being the structure of the common-sense world, namely everyday knowledge. The logic used is based on the contradictory and dialectical way of thinking to synthesize social phenomena into a systematic interpretation. This dialectical thinking ability is evident in Berger's thinking, as is Karl Marx and several existential philosophers recognizing humans as paradoxical creatures. Therefore, it is not surprising that the reality of everyday life is dual, as it possesses both objective and subjective dimensions (Berger & Luckmann, 1991:30).

The main task of the sociology of knowledge, according to Berger and Luckmann (1991:83), is among others to explain the dialectic between the self and the socio-cultural world. Conceptually, the social dimension of knowledge that develops in society begins with the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. All three processes proceed through a dialectical pattern, where externalization and objectivation are moments of a dialectical continuity process ending in the moment of internalization (the objectivated social world is reinserted into consciousness during socialization). The fundamental relationship between these three dialectical moments exists in reality and is related to the

characterization of the essence of the social world. Thus, it can be understood that the construction of societal knowledge is ongoing human production. Society is a product of individuals, thus becoming an objective reality through a process of externalization, and individuals are also products of society through a process of internalization. Therefore, the social construction of reality is not part of nature and cannot be explained by natural law (Berger and Luckmann, 1991:71). Social construction theory emphasizes that humans have the freedom to express themselves without being bound by the structures in which they exist. Humans have their own subjectivity because they are agents of themselves.

2. Society as objective reality

In line with Durkheim and structural-functional theory (Poloma, 2000:302), Berger and Luckmann acknowledge the existence of objective social reality, seen in its relationship to social institutions. Agreeing with Durkheim, Berger and Luckmann (1991:69-70) also see objective social structures as having their own characteristics, but there is a relationship between human interaction and existing structures, a process of human externalization as an anthropological necessity. The process of human self-manifestation—always and inevitably—implies a social activity reflecting the self as *Homo sapiens* and *Homo socius*. The basic laws governing objective social reality are order, regularity, and stability. However, existentially, human biological tendencies differ from those of animals, so that humans live in a world shrouded in uncertainty (chaos) and do not have a natural system. To protect themselves from this uncertainty, humans build social institutions constituting human products and existing in a moment of externalization, taking place continuously through habituation, patterned, and continuously reproduced as understood actions. From this habitualization, sedimentation and tradition occur, where the entire human experience is stored and deposited in consciousness, which can ultimately understand oneself and one's actions in a social context (Berger & Luckmann, 1991: 69, 71, 85).

The process of habitualization of externalized actions acquires an objective nature (objectivation). In a dialectical moment, the objective reality formed through externalization reshapes humans in society. Practically, it can be described that in human life there are rules or laws serving as guidelines for social institutions (Syam, 2005:39). These rules are human products to maintain social order. Although restrictive, they do not rule out the possibility of violations by individuals. These violations represent a changing process of externalization by individuals, due to the inability to adapt to the rules used to maintain social order, so that

the problem of change lies within this externalization process. Berger acknowledges that social order is something difficult, but from a functionalist perspective, he sees social institutions tending toward equilibrium.

This dialectical process is a continuous process, and the third element is the process of internalizing individuals into the objective social world. One important instrument within it is transformation through language (Berger & Luckmann, 1991:87). Language is used to objectify one's experiences to others. This is where the role of social institutions lies, including those related to the traditionalization of experience and the transformation of experience. The conceptualization of roles (Berger & Luckmann, 1991:89-96), as a link between the human organism and social structure, is also similar to the structural-functional formulation. Social structure consists of patterned or symbolic behavioral roles—symbolizing reciprocity. Although individuals are not identical to their roles, they still carry out activities in accordance with the dimensions of their role implementation. The typology of these roles is “the necessary relationship for the institutionalization of behavior.” Thus, roles can be said to be the basic unit of objectively institutionalized rules.

Institutional orders or social institutions also require legitimacy, a manifestation of the objective reality of society. The function of legitimacy is to make institutionalized objectifications subjectively plausible (Berger & Luckmann, 1991:79). For example, mythology, besides having a legitimizing function for behavior and actions, also becomes plausible when the mythology is understood and carried out. To maintain it, social organization is necessary. This is because, as a historical product of human activity, all things socially constructed will experience change due to human actions, so social organization is needed to maintain them. In contrast to the structural-functional model (Poloma, 2000:303), Berger and Luckmann emphasize processes parallel to structure. Society has never been a finished product, but remains a process in progress. Objectivity designs a process in which the social world will become a reality capable of constraining and also shaping its participants. Thus, it can be said that the legitimacy factor originates from interactions between individuals, making the description of legitimacy objective. Therefore, legitimacy is evidence for the objective social world.

3. Society as Subjective Reality

Social construction theory views society as an objective and subjective reality through a continuous dialectical process that occurs in three moments: externalization, objectivation,

and internalization. These three moments do not occur in a chronological order; rather, every societal phenomenon is characterized by all three moments simultaneously. This also applies to individual members of society who collectively externalize their existence into the social world as an objective reality. This means that being in society means participating in this dialectic. Essentially, individuals are not born as members of society, but through a process of internalization, individuals become members of society. Berger and Luckmann (1991:150) refer to the social psychology tradition regarding the process of individuals becoming members of society through primary socialization (the first socialization experienced by an individual in childhood) and secondary socialization (being introduced to the objective social world, dealing with other influential people (parents) and being responsible for the child's socialization). The boundaries of reality coming from other influential people are considered by the child as objective reality.

Because it is impossible to fully absorb all existing realities, the child will internalize their interpretation of them. Each person has a version of reality that they perceive as a reflection of the objective world. Socialization ceases when concepts about others have been formed and embedded in the individual's consciousness. At this point, a child has become a member of society and subjectively possesses a self-concept within a world. However, internalization in this socialization process is never complete. Therefore, a process is necessary to maintain the internalized reality in consciousness as a subjective reality. This is the function of the internalization process: maintaining and transforming this subjective reality. Socialization always takes place within a specific social structure, not only in terms of its content but also in terms of its level of success. Therefore, micro-sociological or social-psychological analysis of internalization phenomena must always be informed by a macro-sociological understanding of its structural aspects (Berger & Luckmann, 1991:183).

The structure of individual subjective consciousness in the sociology of knowledge occupies an equal position in providing explanations of social reality. Each individual absorbs a limited form of interpretation of social reality reflecting the objective world. Not every individual can maintain a balance in absorbing the objective dimension and the dimensions of social reality. The reality that individuals receive from social institutions, according to Berger, requires a way of explaining and justifying the power being held and practiced. Identity itself is a key element of subjective reality, as all subjective reality is dialectically related to society. Identity is formed by social processes through social relations. The social

processes involved in forming and maintaining identity are determined by social structure. Thus, the relationship between individuals and their institutions is a dialectic expressed in three moments: 1). Society is a human product; 2). Society is an objective reality; and 3). Man is a social product. This dialectic is connected by knowledge based on experiential memory on the one hand and by the roles representing individuals in the institutional order (Berger & Luckmann, 1991:79; Syam, 2005:40-41).

Humans have been “ordered” to inhabit and shape a world together with other humans. The world for humans is a dominant, limited reality. These limitations are determined by nature, but after this world is constructed by humans, the world in turn influences nature. In this dialectic between nature and the socially constructed world, the human organism itself is transformed. In the same dialectic, humans create reality and thereby create themselves. Externalization is the process by which all humans experiencing socialization together form a new reality. This process is exemplified by Berger in modernity, namely “the transformation of the world caused by technological innovation” in various dimensions of life such as economics, social, and politics (Poloma, 2000:306). Modernity also brings revolutionary changes to the level of human consciousness, particularly values, beliefs, and even the emotional network of life. The process of internalizing the social world that forms a new reality is interconnected with the changes in modern technology that humans are beginning to internalize. Meanwhile, Berger and Luckmann’s concern with the legitimacy of the modern world is secularization, which implicitly poses a threat to religion (Poloma, 2000:308). Religion is the strongest bulwark against a meaningless existence, and it has become the most effective source of justification for the social world. Secularization, on the other hand, means a decline in trust in efforts to legitimize existence. In analyzing changes in religious institutions, Berger and Luckmann apply social construction theory through sociohistorical analysis.

C. From Social Construction to Religious Cosmization

Berger and Luckmann’s intellectual struggle in the sociology of knowledge stems from their thinking on religious issues, particularly the function and critical position of the sociology of religion (a subfield of the sociology of knowledge) in relation to theological issues among Western Christians. Their attention is focused on the occurrence of secularization as one of the characteristics of modern civilization, reflected in the process of

privatization of religious life. Through a dialectical-theoretical scheme encompassing externalization, objectivation, and internalization, Berger and Luckmann explain that humans create social institutions—one of which is religion. Like other institutions, institutionalized religion also undergoes a continuous process of formation, becoming the objective and subjective reality of individuals and society. The involvement of religion in the historical dialectic of human life is a nomizing activity (Poloma, 2000:308-309).

Nomos is order and normative provisions as the opposite of *anomie*, namely the collapse of social rules (a state without norms). Berger states that subjectively and objectively, the social world creates a *nomos* where the objective *nomos* is born from the process of objectivation. Besides *nomos*, there is also *cosmos* transcending everyday reality moving toward a world beyond objective verification, and is established by humans as sacred (Poloma, 2000:308-310). In this context, religion is something sacred, not merely a human product. Therefore, religion is not merely a protective “canopy,” but also a “sacred canopy” (Noor, n.d.). However, in the modern world, religious cosmization exists alongside secular cosmization, where science develops through secular efforts at cosmization.

In relation to the social construction of reality, religion is the most effective source of legitimacy in understanding the world. Historically, religion’s crucial role in the legitimation process is evident in its unique ability to place human phenomena within a cosmic framework. Meanwhile, in the social construction of reality, there are two important purposes of religion: providing *nomos* or meaning to reality and validating or “receiving” that reality. Historically, Berger and Luckmann explore the emergence of secularization and show its effects on religion—emphasizing not only that religion has helped shape reality—but also the power in the form of human ability to externalize and change the reality of life and modify religion. The objective reality that humans accept includes sacred aspects—as expressed by religion—and secular aspects revealed by science (Poloma, 2000:310). As a social institution, the legitimacy of religion has begun to be questioned. One case in point is that while the function of religion can be studied cross-culturally, the specific institutional place of religion in the church or its equivalent is relatively rare (Berger & Luckmann, 1995:70). The increasing rise of secularization in Western societies demonstrates that sociological legitimacy is found outside of institutional religion. Church-oriented religion has become a marginal phenomenon, pushed to the fringes of modern life. Secularization has completely changed

the location of religion, the church, and the meaning of its contents (Luckmann, 1995:178-181).

In Berger and Luckmann's view (1995:72-73), secularization is a dialectical process occurring in humans both individually and socially. Secularization occurs at the level of human consciousness as the logic of the human world and the spiritual world increasingly separates. Meanwhile, at the societal level, secularization is the process of removing religious influence from legal-formal matters that must be handled by the state. This is the meeting point for understanding the sociology of religion in modern society with the sociology of knowledge in the interconnectedness of social structure and social consciousness. The task of the sociology of religion in this case is to analyze the normative and cognitive elements through which socially expressed knowledge is validated. From a sociological perspective, religion is perceived as a central phenomenon of social reality, thus also central to sociological understanding in general. Meanwhile, in contemporary Western society, the institutional legitimacy of religion is diminishing due to the "emigration" and even the "privatization" of religion (Berger & Luckmann, 1995:71). Furthermore, there is also a transformation of traditional religious meanings within religion. This is the central point of understanding the sociology of religion in modern society.

In the modern world, pluralism is inevitable, where various legitimacy systems compete for the patronage of potential consumers of *the Weltanschauung* (Berger & Luckmann, 1995:71). At the subjective level, pluralism makes a person feel doubtful about religion, because there are many choices in the social environment for giving meaning to life. Secularization causes religion to lose its logical consistency (*plausibility*) and credibility as the only human guide to comprehensively interpreting an uncertain life. The social structure of modern society does not allow religious beliefs to monopolize truth by limiting religious activities and elements from the public sphere and relegating them to the private sphere (Riyanto, 2009:190). Changes in the modern world accompanied by changes and subjective acceptance of religious reality will give rise to objective changes in religious institutions. Humans externalize and realize changes in the objectification of religious reality. Although religion is objectified as a seemingly complete truth at one time, it allows for stagnation due to its inability to accommodate doctrine with reality, so that subjective individual understanding of truth is no longer relevant to responding to social problems. Ultimately, truth returns to being outside

of humans, as something achieved through symbolic order even though the final point of understanding will never be reached.

Historically, humans have always been confined by the symbolic order they created to address problems. However, this legitimized symbolic order tends to be reified and alienate humans. Humans perceive the truth conceptualized by this symbolic order as absolute truth, thus forgetting that social reality is their own creation with relative value (Riyanto, 2009:201). Therefore, religion must open itself to new facts, must change its exclusive orientation to an inclusive one, and universalize its teachings, so that they can be contextually accepted (Riyanto, 2009:199). Religious explanations must be explanations accommodating scientific explanations and those of other religions. Furthermore, according to Berger, there is another option, by completely closing the door of belief to other objections, as if nothing has changed. This is what proves the wisdom of religious communities, so that the form of religion internalized by modern humans is no longer the same as before.

D. Social Construction and Methodological Implications for the Study of the Living Qur'an

The social construction theory developed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann is based on the assumption that social reality is not a given, but rather is formed through a dialectical process between individuals and society, as shown in Figure 1. Within this framework, religious reality is not understood as an objectively independent entity, but rather as the result of the ongoing construction of meaning through social interaction. This process occurs through three main moments: externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Externalization refers to the process by which individuals or groups express their subjective understanding into the social world. In the context of religion, this is evident in various religious practices that arise from the interpretation of sacred texts. Furthermore, objectivation occurs when these practices are institutionalized and viewed as realities that “exist” outside the individual, even gaining legitimacy as normative truths. At this stage, religion functions as a legitimation mechanism through *cosmization*, namely the process of giving sacred meaning to social reality (Berger, 2011). Internalization is the process by which individuals reabsorb the objectified reality into their subjective consciousness, thereby forming beliefs and orientations for action. Thus, social construction epistemology positions religious reality as the result of a dialectic between text, interpretation, and social practice.

This approach opens up space for understanding religion not only as a doctrinal system but also as a dynamic and historical social phenomenon.

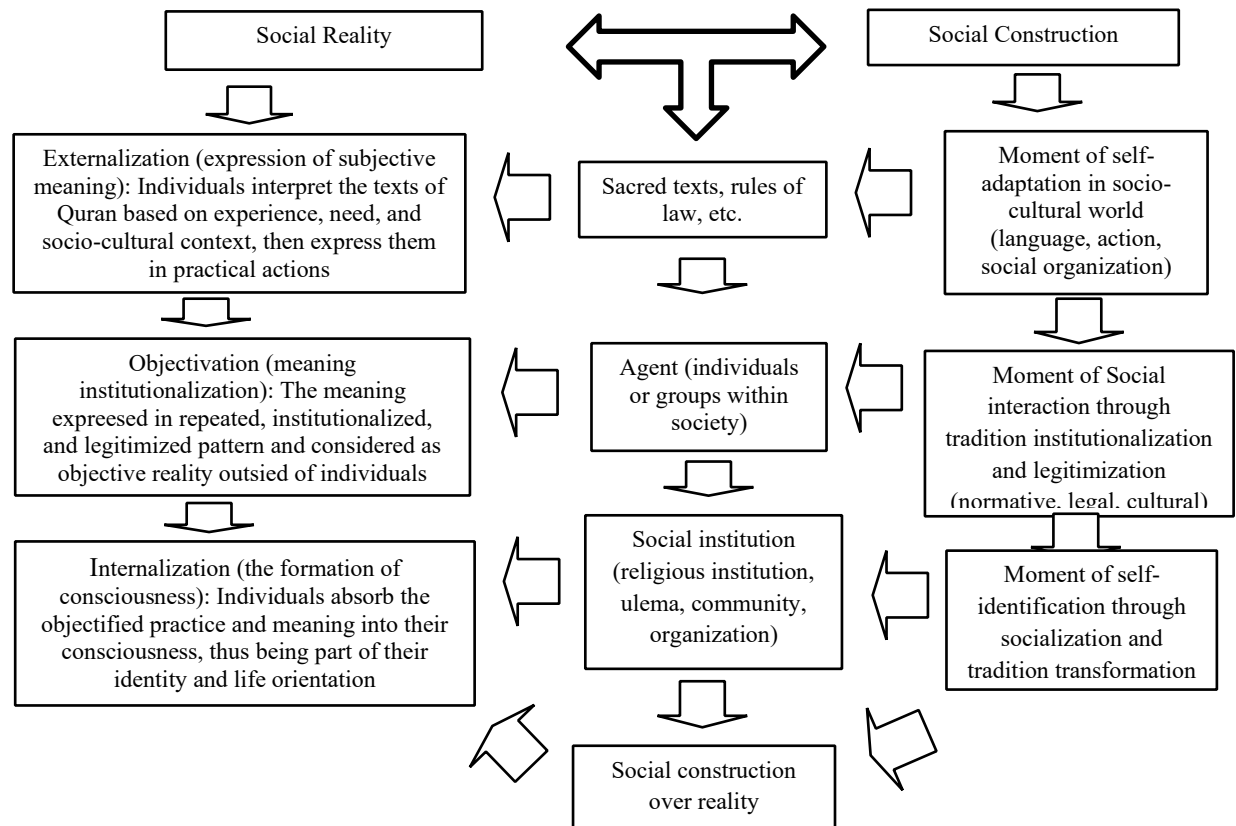


Figure 1. The social construction of reality

In contemporary studies, the living Qur'an is understood as a study highlighting how the Qur'an is lived out in the social practices of Muslims. The primary focus is not on the text as an object of normative interpretation, but rather on how the text functions in everyday life, whether in the form of rituals, traditions, or cultural practices (Aji et al., 2021; Amin & Nurhayat, 2020). One example is the widespread tradition of reciting Surah Yasin on Friday nights (*yasinan*), which is widespread in Indonesian Muslim communities. Several studies have shown that this tradition functions not only as a religious ritual but also as a medium for social solidarity and the transmission of religious values within the community (Laili, 2021; Juariah, 2026). In fact, a study conducted by Riyaldi et al. (2025) emphasized that *yasinan* has various meanings, ranging from worship and collective prayer to a mechanism for strengthening the religious identity of rural communities. From a social construction perspective, the practice of *yasinan* can be understood as the result of externalization, namely

when religious understanding of the virtues of certain verses or surahs is expressed in collective action. This practice then undergoes objectification through repetition, reinforcement by religious figures, and social legitimacy, thus becoming considered an inherent part of Islamic teachings. Research by Khaizarony (2025) shows that in certain contexts, the recitation of Yasin even acquires an additional sacred dimension, such as in the rituals of the night of Nisfu Sya'ban, strengthening its status as a religious practice that is "taken for granted." This process continues to the stage of internalization, where individuals growing up in such environments accept the practice of Yasin as an unquestionable part of Islamic teachings. Thus, the practice acquires the status of an objective religious reality, even though it is essentially the result of the social construction of the sacred text.

The dialectical model of social construction can be explained more concretely through the practice of ruqyah as a form of living the Qur'an. Various studies show that the use of Qur'anic verses in healing practices has developed widely in Indonesia and become part of a religion-based alternative medicine system (Wahid et al., 2023; Ardianto, 2021). In the externalization stage, individuals or religious practitioners interpret certain verses as possessing therapeutic power and then implement them in ruqyah practices. Jatmiko's (2024) study shows that this practice often stems from a combination of religious texts, empirical experience, and pre-existing local traditions. The objectivation stage occurs when ruqyah practices are institutionalized through Islamic healing institutions, ruqyah communities, and da'wah media. A research conducted by Habibi et al. (2025) shows that ruqyah is no longer merely an individual practice but has become part of a structured Islamic education and da'wah system. In this context, ruqyah practices gain social legitimacy as an "Islamic" and legitimate healing method. Furthermore, in the internalization stage, individuals experiencing or witnessing ruqyah practices will internalize the belief that Quranic verses possess certain healing powers. A study conducted by Nurmansyah and Oktaviana (2022) shows that this belief is not only individual but also reinforced by media representations and religious narratives circulating in society. Thus, the externalization–objectivation–internalization model demonstrates that ruqyah practices as part of the living Quran are the result of a complex social construction process, in which the sacred text is interpreted, practiced, and legitimized within a specific social context.

Based on the explanation above, the application of social construction epistemology in the study of the living Qur'an has significant methodological implications. First, this

approach shifts the research focus from merely describing religious practices to analyzing the processes through which these practices are formed. This aligns with the finding that many studies of the living Qur'an are still inventory-based and have not yet addressed the analytical dimension (Wahidah et al., 2024). Second, through empirical examples such as the Yasinan (recitation of the Yasin) and ruqyah (recitation of the Ruqyah), it is clear that the practice of the living Qur'an can be systematically analyzed using a framework of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. This approach allows researchers to identify the roles of social actors, religious authorities, and legitimacy mechanisms in shaping religious reality (Susanto et al., 2025). Third, this approach emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between the sacred text as revelation and religious practices as social constructions. This distinction is crucial to ensure that the analysis remains within an academic framework without diminishing the sacredness of the text, but rather explains how that sacredness is mediated through social and cultural processes. Thus, the epistemology of social construction is not only theoretically relevant, but also provides a concrete methodological contribution in reading the phenomenon of the living Qur'an in a more analytical, contextual, and systematic way.

CONCLUSION

Berger and Luckmann's social construction theory has strong epistemological relevance as a methodological basis for the study of the living Qur'an. Through the framework of externalization, objectivation, and internalization, religious reality—including the practice of the living Qur'an—can be understood as the result of a dialectic between the Qur'anic text, the process of interpretation, and the surrounding social context. Therefore, religious practices such as the Yasinan and Ruqyah are not merely direct manifestations of the sacred text, but are the result of social construction formed through the process of interpretation, institutionalization, and internalization in community life. These findings indicate that the social construction approach allows for a paradigm shift in the study of the living Qur'an, from the original descriptive-empirical nature to a more interpretative and systematic analysis. Berger–Luckmann's theory not only functions as an analytical tool but can also be formulated as a methodological framework capable of comprehensively tracing the process of the formation of religious practices, from the production of meaning to its legitimacy and reproduction in social life. This also emphasizes the importance of integration between the sociology of knowledge

and Qur'anic studies in understanding the dynamics of contemporary religiosity.

Practically, these findings have implications for the development of research and practice in Islamic studies, particularly in the study of the living Qur'an. First, for researchers, this approach can serve as an analytical guide to not only describe religious practices but also explore the social processes underlying them more systematically. Second, for academics and teachers, the social construction framework can be utilized as a pedagogical tool to explain the relationship between sacred texts and social reality to students in a more contextual and reflective manner. Third, for religious practitioners, such as preachers or community leaders, this understanding can help them view religious practices more critically without eliminating their sacred dimension, thus enabling a more open dialogue between tradition, text, and social change. Thus, the contribution of this paper is not only theoretical but also provides a practical foundation for reading and developing the study of the living Qur'an in a more adaptive and contextual manner.

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