

Living Qur'an: Its Texts and Practices in the Functions of the Scripture

Living Quran: Teks Dan Praktik Dalam Fungsi Kitab Suci

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Abstract¹

Since firstly appeared in an informal conversation among the faculty members at the Qur'anic and hadith studies program at the Faculty of Ushuluddin, Religious Studies, and Islamic Thought of IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta in 2005, scholars have ventured to develop the concept of Living Qur'an, pursuing to determine its proper or best formats, scopes, methods, and approaches. It is my contention that Living Qur'an is yet to find its epistemological and methodological infrastructures. It is in this context this paper aims to contribute. It firstly offers my construction of the term along with its conceptual consequence. Then, I propose the mapping of the relationship between scripture and its community, built on the relational concept of scripture. Finally, this article elaborates on the transmission and transformation patterns through which knowledge, practices, and discourse forming the Qur'anic reception between its community. It is hoped that with these three subjects, this paper would emulate further discussion about Living Qur'an at the epistemological and methodological level.

Keywords: Living Qur'an; Informative Function; Performative Function; Transmission-Transformation

Abstrak

Sejak muncul pertama kali dalam percakapan informal di antara para dosen di jurusan Tafsir Hadis, Fakultas Ushuluddin, Studi Agama, dan Pemikiran Islam, IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta pada tahun 2005, para sarjana terus mengembangkan konsep Living Qur'an, dalam rangka menemukan format, ruang lingkup, metodologi, dan pendekatan yang terbaik untuk sub-disiplin ini. Hemat saya, Living Qur'an masih belum menemukan infrastruktur epistemologis dan metodologisnya. Dalam konteks ini lah artikel ini ingin berkontribusi. Pertama sekali, artikel ini menampilkan tawaran saya atas terminology Living Qur'an dan konsekuensi konseptualnya. Kemudian, saya menawarkan pemetaan hubungan antara kitab suci dan khalayaknya, yang terbangun atas konsepsi relational atas kitab suci. Akhirnya, artikel ini akan menjelaskan pola-pola transmisi dan transformasi yang melaluinya ilmu, praktik, dan diskursus yang membentuk resepsi Al-Qur'an di tengah khalayaknya. Diharapkan artikel ini bisa memantik diskusi lebih panjang mengenai Living Qur'an pada level epistemologis dan metodologis.

Kata Kunci: Living Qur'an; Fungsi Informatif; Fungsi Performatif; Transmisi-Transformasi



Introduction

Issues around the reception of the Qur'an and the interactions between humans and the Qur'an had relatively been an understudied field, especially in Indonesia up until the 2000s. Accordingly, there was yet to be a grounding and thought-provoking abstraction about the connection between the phenomena of texts and the phenomena of readers in the reception of the Qur'an. Through various discussions among Indonesian scholars in the field of Qur'anic studies appears the terminology "Living Qur'an," pointing to a new sub-field within Qur'anic studies that focuses on the Qur'anic reception in society. Among the first attempts to discuss Living Qur'an are a newspaper article by Hamam Faizin, "Living Qur'an: Sebuah Tawaran" (2005) and an edited volume by Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Metodologi Penelitian Living Qur'an dan Hadis* (2007).¹ Even though neither the article nor the edited volume explores the research format of Living Qur'an, both accounts display the discursive construction of the history of interpreting the relationship between humans on the one hand and Qur'an-based knowledge and practices on the other.

Against this backdrop, the present article elaborates on three primary issues. The first is concerned with the conceptual signification of the term "Living Qur'an" and its practical use. The second issue deals with mapping the functions and the relationships between humans and scriptures from the perspective of their data and interpretations. At this point, in addition to seeing scripture as a textual form and structure carrying meanings, this article posits that studies on the function of a text as sacred scripture among its interlocutors can help understand the reception process of the Qur'an as a socio-cultural phenomenon. As for the final issue, this article explores the patterns of transmissions and transformations of various modes of interpretations that are resulted from the variations of the audiences, contexts, and the times of the reception of the text. These variations of interpretations and receptions are, for example, widely available in Islamic literatures, such as *tafsīr*, *ḥādīth*, *sīrah/tārikh*, the merits (*faḍā'il*) of the Qur'an, and Islamic medicine. With these three issues, this article is expected to ground the epistemological framework of the term Living Qur'an whose use has accelerated for at least a decade.

In general, this article attempts to provide a narrative encompassing the development of Living Qur'an studies. It argues that Living Qur'an as a growing sub-field within Qur'anic studies requires epistemological and methodological

1 Hamam Faizin, "Living Qur'an: Sebuah Tawaran [The Living Qur'an: A Proposal]", Jawa Post, 2005; Sahiron Syamsuddin ed. *Metodologi Penelitian Living Qur'an dan Hadis* [Research Methodology on the Living Qur'an and Hadith], Yogyakarta: Teras, 2007. Among the latest account, see Muhammad Ali, "Kajian Naskah dan Kajian Living Qur'an dan Hadith [Manuscript Studies, and Living Qur'an and Hadith Studies]", *Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2015). Ali Mabrouk titles his book *Nuṣūṣ awl al-Qur'ān: fi al-Sa'y warā' al-Qur'ān al-Hayy*, (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Saqafi al-'Arabi, 2015).

infrastructures. The study of the Qur'an as scripture—which has a relational characteristic with its audiences, either as the recipient or the forming element of practices—should be placed in a grounded discursive tradition, that is, through the analysis upon the 'living' Qur'an, which establishes a reciprocal system of knowledge, practices, and ideality between itself and its audiences.

On the Terminology of Living Qur'an

After firstly appeared in an informal conversation among the faculty members at the Qur'anic and hadith studies program at the Faculty of Ushuluddin, Religious Studies, and Islamic Thought of IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta in 2005, the terminology Living Qur'an has widely been used in the Indonesian academia. Since its impetus, scholars have ventured to determine its proper or best formats, scopes, methods, and approaches. In fact, the very concept of Living Qur'an itself is still under discussion, and here I aim to offer my construction of the term. The word "living" in Living Qur'an is intended to clarify the "Qur'an." The primary idea of the term is that the Qur'an is living or is enlivened by its community, either through its exegesis/interpretation or through particular practices. In Indonesian, living Qur'an simply means the Qur'an that lives, which in Arabic, relatively corresponds to *al-qur'ān al-ḥayy*.

From the English structure point of view, the idea of 'something that lives' can be expressed through three possible terms, whose meanings are closely related and intersecting. It can be "living the Qur'an"—living as gerund, "the lived Qur'an"—lived as past participle, or "the living Qur'an"—living as present participle. The first construction, living as gerund, refers to an act of a subject who makes the Qur'an alive or who enlivens the Qur'an. In this context, there is a subject, namely humans, who actively makes the Qur'an, the object, alive through their understanding or through their practices. The Qur'an assumes the position as the object of an act, from which it becomes a living text, or a text made alive through the action of the subjects.² The second formula, the lived Qur'an, using past participle as an adjective, has a related meaning to the first one. However, it gives more emphasis on the Qur'an as an object, which receives an act that makes it alive, instead of the Qur'an as a subject. In this context, the living character of the Qur'an comes from a subject external to the Qur'an, not from the Qur'an itself. As for the third expression, it puts the Qur'an as a noun explained with an active adjective, living. Unlike in the second expression,

2 For example, see Imam Muhammad Aslim Shaw, "Living the Quran in Our Daily Lives" on <https://aaail.org/text/articles/others/livingqurandailyives.shtml>, accessed on Feb. 2, 2020. This article refers to the concept of "living Qur'an" as a way to make the Qur'an alive based on what one deems as the correct interpretation of its text.

here, the Qur'an is not only regarded as a passive object that is made alive through its communities' understanding or practices, but also as an active subject, which partakes in defining meanings and shaping practices.

Previous literature on Living Qur'an has touched upon different dimensions of each three possible terms above. "Living the Qur'an" could have a theological connotation, speaking about Muslims' attempt to enliven the Qur'an through observing its teaching. The methodological concern of this approach starts with an exploration of Qur'anic meanings, better known as *tafsir*. Followingly, its *tafsir* becomes the basis for particular practices. From the theological perspective, these practices are to be determined whether they are right or wrong in light of what one deems to be the correct interpretation. Forms and variations of practices are defined through the extent to which *tafsir*—with all its epistemological instruments—allows them. Further explanation on this issue is widely available in the rich literature of *tafsir* and *'ulūm al-Qur'an*. Rather contrary to "living the Qur'an," the other two expressions, "the lived Qur'an" and the "the living Qur'an," concern with humanistic aspects of the scripture, namely the Qur'an, rather than theological. So, it is not of what Muslims believe in the Qur'an, but how Muslims believe in the Qur'an. From this point of view, *tafsir* is not considered as the sole defining element that makes the Qur'an alive. Rather, *tafsir* is situated as one among the overall human actions, either as an individual or in a community. It is the totality of these actions or practices that make the Qur'an alive.

Based on this humanistic assumption, William Graham contends that the very nature of scriptures, including the Qur'an, is "relational." This nature underlines that a text becomes a scripture not in and through itself. A text becomes a scripture when people relate themselves to a text they consider sacred in various ways: accepting, reciting, reading, interpreting, treating, or using it for various purposes. It should be noted, however, that the said relational character of scriptures cannot be formed by individuals unconnected to one another. In other words, these individuals need to be socially connected, in which they produce collective actions or practices, a feature called by Graham as "the community of faith." This community loves, celebrates, as well as lives with, for, and inside the scripture.³

Without meaning to undermine the theological stance of a community of faith towards their scripture, including Muslims' faith in the sacredness of the Qur'an, in the humanistic discourse, the relational character of scriptures marks the transition of the text's sacredness from passive to active. It is passive for it openly receives its believers' various forms of interaction that make it a sacred text. Once being a

3 See William Graham, "Scripture as a Spoken Word", in Miriam Levering ed. *Rethinking Scripture: Essays*

scripture, the text becomes independent and offers new meanings in the context of its being sacred. Take the Qur'an as an example. Believed as a revelation from God, the Qur'an was delivered by the Prophet Muhammad in various contexts, interacting with the Prophet's companions or other people addressed by its verses. These verses were memorized by the companions as the revelation from God, containing messages that addressed specific issues, questions, or conditions that they were facing. Later on, however, the Qur'an was memorized not merely to preserve its messages—in fact, these messages might not be preserved in a detailed manner—but to preserve the divine revelation. Eventually, this revelation has historically been transformed into scripture, to be recited, chanted, written, and printed, without necessarily being connected every time to its historical messages at the time of its revelation. The construction of beliefs—that it is a divine revelation—that accompanies its messages makes the Qur'an also take part in how humans relate themselves with it. In other words, the Qur'an is also an active agent through its oral or written preserved structure of the text in this relation.

Dus, the Qur'an is a sacred text whose very character is relational: it receives and forms practices at once. It is both passive and active at the same time. This dual position can be described with the concept of “implied reader” introduced by Wolfgang Iser. He suggests that readers carry out dual function towards texts. First, readers catch the meaning, impression, and imagination from the structure of the text. This textual structure—either the sound of the Qur'an when recited, its word composition, and its verse order—determines the construction of meaning that is understood by its community, both semantically and pragmatically. This first function gives more emphasis on the textual structure that defines meaning, even though in the process of such construction, humans play their part.⁴ Second, the text receives readers' acts, whose acts are shaped and structured by the readers' knowledge and experience. This concept is called implied reader, so Iser suggests, because, on the one hand, the structure of the text partly contributes to shaping the way readers

from a *Comparative Perspective* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989); Graham firstly explained the relational concept of scripture in 1987 when writing the first edition of *Beyond the Written Word*. See William Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: The History of the Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 1993). Graham's concept is parallel to that of Wilfred C. Smith, which was first published in 1993. See Wilfred C. Smith, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Perspective* (Massachusetts: Fortress Press, 1994).

4 In the case of the Qur'an, the form of humans' involvement that almost everyone agrees on is the use of Arabic, which is the daily language of the Prophet and his Companions as the first recipients of the scripture. This paper will not delve into a classical debate in the discipline of *kalam* (scholastic theology) about the limits of human involvement in the process of the formation of the Qur'an—the debate that leads to the discourse on the Qur'an's createdness. Ali Mabrouk discusses this issue, yet not in the context of *Kalam*, but rather in the historical context of the various ways Muslims encounter the Qur'an through which the Qur'an is alive. See Ali Mabrouk, *Nuṣūṣ awl al-Qur'ān: fi al-Sa'y warā' al-Qur'ān al-Ḥayy*, (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Saqafi al-'Arabi, 2015).

should accept the text.⁵ On the other hand, at the same time, the reading process also involves readers' horizons—to use Gadamer's terminology—of knowledge and experience outside of the text structure that they consciously and unconsciously bring in when reading the text.

I have concluded that the Qur'an is not only a passive text that receives a set of practices, but also an active text offering meaning. Thus, among the three expressions mentioned previously, I suggest that it is the term "Living Qur'an" that is able to contain the above character of the Qur'an as a subject and an object at the same time.⁶ Keeping in mind the Qur'an's active and passive nature, Living Qur'an refers to the social and cultural phenomena where humans accept and interact with the Qur'an. In other words, Living Qur'an connects the phenomena of texts and the phenomena of readers in the reception process of the Qur'an. These phenomena can be approached in various ways, of course with the limit each approach may have. To understand the Qur'an as a phenomenon in the discourse of the study of scriptures, Living Qur'an is not concerned merely with the Qur'an's textual forms and structures that carry meanings, but also with its function as a scripture in its community.⁷

Informative and Performative Functions of the Qur'an as Scripture

In this section, I propose two functions of the Qur'an that I develop from Sam D. Gill's thesis on the basic functions of scriptures.⁸ Gill divides scriptures' functions into two dimensions: data and interpretation. The data is the scriptural data that include texts and practices. The notion of text here covers both oral and written texts. These texts are perceived as scripture from generation to generation. The texts can be with an explicit association to a central figure that is considered as the messenger or founder of a religion. For example, texts in the world's major religions are associated with these central figures deemed as such: Moses and the Torah for the Jews, Jesus and the Bible for the Christians, and Muhammad and the Qur'an for

5 Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 27-34. See also Ahmad Rafiq, "The Reception of the Qur'an in Indonesia: The Place of the Qur'an in a Non-Arabic Speaking Community", Ph.D. Dissertation, Temple University, 2014, 145-146.

6 Even though 'lived' and 'living' emphasize the relationship between the subject and object in different ways, they can be used interchangeably in the study of scripture because both refer to the same phenomenon in the socio-anthropological discourse. In this paper, the phrase Living Qur'an is used instead of the Living Qur'an, as the former is the normalized expression used among Indonesian scholars of Qur'an studies. This phrase still uses the definition from the original language of the term, which is English.

7 Frederick Denny divides areas of the study of scriptures into three: origin, form, and function. See more on this in Frederick M. Denny, "Introduction" in Frederick Denny and Rodney Taylor, *The Holy Book in the Comparative Perspective* (Columbia: South Carolina Press, 1993).

8 Sam D. Gill, "Non-Literate Tradition and Holy Books", in Frederick M. Denny and Rodney Taylor, *The Holy Book*.

Muslims. Such text can be composed of linguistic structures, such as sound, words, sentences until they form meanings, or of formulaic sound based on the memories of its believers, who believe this text as scripture.⁹

The data aspect of scripture also includes practices of a community towards a text or an abstract form they believe as scripture. These practices can be personal or communal rituals, or temporary practices that involve scripture. These practices are more often than not performed for pragmatic purposes. Such purposes include, for example, self-protection, negotiation towards a certain condition, or an abstract expression of hope manifested in concrete practices. For the followers of religions having canonized written scripture, these practices may and may not connect to the linguistic structure of the text. Moreover, for non-literate people the scripture is in their practices.

The second dimension is the interpretation which is the interpretation of the data—either in the form of texts or practices as mentioned earlier. In this dimension, subjects' comprehension of the scripture may be informative or performative, two categories that lead to the dual function of scripture, i.e. informative and performative. From the informative function point of view, scripture is read as a source of information either as statements or understandings. Both data in the forms of texts and practices can be interpreted as carrying informative functions. When data take form as texts, their informative function can be observed in the meanings of the texts. In the discourse of written scripture, this function manifests in exegesis tradition. Whereas, when data take form as practices, their informative function assumes these practices as texts that deliver messages. This perspective is equivalent to that in the hermeneutics of social sciences, which places social practices as equal to written tradition. In this context, actors or performers of practices are compatible to authors in the written tradition. Therefore, similar to the context in the written tradition, each practice is perceived as composing a set of messages to be interpreted by "readers."¹⁰

In the context of the performative function, the interpretation of texts does not manifest itself as statements or messages but rather as a source of practices. Statements mentioned in the scripture are not merely perceived as a medium carrying messages, but rather as commands, guidance, or a stimulus to act. Here, the meanings of text do not manifest as statements but rather as actions and practices. At this point,

⁹ Walter J. Ong discusses examples of scriptures that are preserved through the formulaic sounds. See Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982).

¹⁰ See Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutika Ilmu Sosial* [Hermeneutics of the Social Sciences], trans. into Bahasa by Muhammad Syukri (Yogyakarta: Kreasi Wacana, 2006). The book is an Indonesian translation of John B. Thomson's *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essay on Language, Essays and Interpretation*, which contains a collection of Ricoeur's essays. It was first published in 1981 by Cambridge University Press.

we can see the overlap between the performative function and the data dimension of scripture in the form of practices, not texts. Performative interpretation, in this context, can also mean the transmission of old practices as data into new practices as interpretation.

To put it simply, the relationship between the scriptural data as texts or practices and its interpretation leads to four models of human-scripture relationships. The first model is the informative reception of texts. In the context of the Qur'an, this model of relationship is represented by the *tafsir* tradition. In this tradition, the Prophet Muhammad is considered the first *mufassir* (interpreter). The next generations continue this informative reception through developing a *tafsir* tradition with its ever-evolving theories, methods, and approaches.¹¹

The second model is the informative reception of practices. For example, there is a hadith about the prominence of al-Fātiḥah, the first chapter of the Qur'an, as a medium for healing physical illness. This hadith, narrated by Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī, reports that one of the companions recited al-Fātiḥah towards an ill person with the hope that the recitation of the *sūrah* would facilitate healing. Al-Bukhārī locates this hadith in the chapter of "the permission to receive payment from the Qur'an." This means that al-Bukhārī saw an informative message from this practice, not the performative one. To him, this hadith carries *information* about the lawfulness of receiving payments from Qur'anic related activities.¹² As I will explain later, al-Bukhārī's approach to this hadith is dissimilar to that of Abū 'Ubaid al-Qāsim bin Sallām in his *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, or al-Imām al-Nawāwī in his *Kitāb al-Tibyan fī Adāb Ḥamalāt al-Qur'ān*, who cites the hadith to invoke its performative function, meaning this hadith is taken as a stimulus of a certain action, that is reciting al-Fātiḥah in the case of illness.

The third model is the performative reception of texts. Reciting *al-mu'awwidhatayn* (the *sūrahs* of al-Falaq and al-Nās) with an intention of self-protection from supernatural disturbance represents an example of this model. The context and content of the *sūrahs* refer to self protection from the evil of *jinn* and other humans.¹³ Nevertheless, in some contexts, they are recited for a practical motivation

11 Encyclopedic descriptions of this tradition can be found in the accounts that compile and sometimes conduct an indepth analysis of the commentaries of the Qur'an and their methods, such as Husain Muḥammad Al-Zahabi in *al-Tafsir wa al-Mufasssirūn* and Muḥammad Hādī Ma'rifah, *al-Tafsir wa al-Mufasssirūn fī al-Ṣaubih al-Qashib*.

12 See Muḥammad bin Ismā'il al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, (n.p.: Dār Iḥyā al-Turāṣ al-Islāmi, n.d), chapters VI, 23; see also Ahmad Rafiq, "Pengantar (Introduction)" in Muhammad Barir, *Tradisi Al-Qur'an di Pesisir: Jaringan Kiai dalam Tradisi Al-Qur'an di Gerbang Islam Tanah Jawa* [Qur'anic Tradition on the Coast: Network of Kiai in the Qur'anic Tradition at the Gate of Islam in Java] (Yogyakarta: Nurhamera, 2017).

13 See Abū 'Ubaid al-Qāsim bin Sallām, *Kitāb Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, (Dimasyq: Dār Ibn Kasir, n.d., 270-273; As-Sayyid Muhammad Haqqī al-Nazilī, *Khazīnatul-Asrār Jalīlatul Azkār*, (Semarang: Karya Thoha

of self-protection without the reciter necessarily referring to or being aware of their interpretation or content. This is what I call the performative reception of the *surahs*. We should be aware, however, that there might be an overlapping area between the informative and performative reception. *Al-Mu'awwidhatayn* case shows just that, because, again, the historical context of their revelation and the meanings contained in the *surahs* are indeed related to self-protection.

While *al-mu'awwidhatayn* may indicate the existence of a semantical connection between the informative and performative receptions, performative receptions of the Qur'an, especially in non-Arabic communities, may take a different form in which such a semantical connection is absent. For example, in Banjar, South Borneo, *surah* al-Takāthūr is recited for women in labor, with the hope for their smooth delivery. In Banjar, smooth delivery is described with the expression “*mendusur*,”¹⁴ which is phonetically close to *takāthur*. In other words, the Banjarese recites this *surah* during a process of delivery on the basis of phonetical, not semantical, connection between the *surah* and what the recitation is aimed for.¹⁵

Finally, the fourth model is the performative reception of practices. Let see the case of reciting al-Fātiḥah in the context of physical illness again. Unlike al-Bukhārī who underlines the informative message from this particular practice, al-Nawāwī in his *Al-Tibyān fī Adāb Ḥamalat al-Qur'ān* places this hadith in a chapter entitled “prayers for visiting sick people” without giving a textual explanation of the *sūrah*.¹⁶ Thus, not only does al-Nawāwī perceive the hadith as a specific historical practice performed during the life of the Prophet Muhammad, he extends the relevance of the practice to any other sick people in another time. This is what I mean by the performative reception of scripture. Al-Nazili even, for example, develops more the merit dan performative function of al-Fātiḥah from the abovementioned data of the practices by detailing “how to do it” in comprehending, perceiving, reciting, writing, and using the chapter fully or in parts of its verses for varying specific purposes.¹⁷

Transmission and Transformation

The reception models in the previous section emphasize the various forms of relational relationship between scripture and its community, whose variation is

Putra, n.d.) 177; Al-Syaikh Ahmad al-Dairābī, *Mujarrabat al-Dairābī al-Kubra*, (Singapore-Jeddah: Al-Haramain, n.d.), 44-45.

14 A banjarese local word meaning passing easily and smoothly.

15 More on this, see Ahmad Rafiq, “The Reception of the Qur'an in Indonesia”, 82.

16 in Arabic, *fī mā yuḡra'u 'ind al-marīḍ*. See Abū Zakariya Muḥyiddīn Yahya bin Syaraf al-Nawāwī, *al-Tibyān fī Adāb hamalat al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad al-Hajjār (Beirut: Dār Ibn azm, 1994) 4th edition, 163.

17 See As-Sayyid Muhammad Haqqī al-Nazilī, *Khazīnatul-Asrār Jalīlatul Azkār*, 95-123.

determined by the variety of receivers, and the context and time of its reception. In this section, I will discuss other aspects that these models demonstrate: transmission and transformation of knowledge and practices.

The different models of receptions by al-Bukhārī (informative) and al-Nawāwī (performative) above, for example, demonstrate this dual aspect. It all started with a report narrating a companion reciting al-Fātiḥah when he was asked to cure an ill person. After some time, during the canonization of hadith, al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) received and interpreted this narration as carrying a legal information. Some centuries later, al-Nawāwī (d. 676/1277) referred to the similar hadith and used it as a basis for new religious practices around the Qur'an. Al-Nazili (d. 1300/1884) who came later develops some unprecedented reception and practices of the chapter by referring to al-Bukhari and al-Nawawi and some other sources. The different ways of perceiving and interpreting the identical report reflected by al-Bukhārī, al-Nawāwī, and Al-Nazili are typical and are widely available in the various genres of Islamic literature, from *tafsīr*, hadith, to *history*, or in other specific genres like *faḍā'il al-Qur'ān* (the merits of the Qur'an) and Islamic medicine.¹⁸

The above interrelated pieces of information around one specific practice points to the transmission of knowledge and practice from the early Islamic period to the later generations. An example above is just one of the significantly rich and varied practices from which one may trace the transmission pattern. There are at least three transmission patterns that can be deduced from the Islamic texts and tradition. First, the transmission pattern in the form of citation or reference to an earlier literature. For example, al-Bukhārī includes the hadith narrated by Abū Sa'īd Al Khudrī in his *Sahīh*, but al-Nawāwī cites the same hadith without specifically mentioning his source. Despite his silence about his source, it is highly possible that he cites the hadith from al-Bukhārī's *Sahīh* or other sources contemporary to al-Bukhārī. Later on, al-Nazili recalls the hadith by stating the source of transmission in the companion level, but not al-Bukhari or his contemporaries.

Second, the transmission pattern created through teacher-disciple relationship and is materialized in a chain of transmission called *sanad*. This pattern is best reflected by the case of hadith *musalsal*.¹⁹ In the case of the Qur'an, Ingrid Mattson calls this transmission as sacred pedigree. She illustrates this with a story of a student who memorizes the Qur'an in the process of obtaining a *sanad* or an authorization of her

18 Elsewhere, I wrote a preliminary account on the development of these texts. See Ahmad Rafiq, "Sejarah Al-Qur'an: Dari Pewahyuan ke Resepsi" [History of the Qur'an: From Revelation to Reception], in Sahiron Syamsuddin ed., *Islam, Tradisi, dan Peradaban* (Islam, Tradition, and Civilization) (Yogyakarta: Bina Mulia Press, 2012).

19 In the context of oral transmission of hadith, Garret A. Davidson highlights the role of *musalsal* as he

recitation and memorization. In order to do that, she had to fly all the way from the United States to Syria and recite the Qur'an by heart and in person before a teacher. This way, the teacher could determine whether her recitation and memorization are sound. This teacher should be the one who has an authority over a particular reading (*qirā'ah*), whose authority he obtained from his/her teacher, who previously obtained his/her authority from his/her teacher, and so on up to the Prophet Muhammad, the angel Gabriel, and God. After the teacher had listened to the student's reading and approved it, he gave her his authorization, from which the genealogy of the transmission of such reading extends to the student. During the authorization process, the teacher usually performs certain practices or read certain authorization formulas believed to have been transmitted along generations as well.²⁰

The third pattern of transmission is in the form of discursive tradition,²¹ in the case that certain practices are observed from one generation to another in a society. It is to be noted, however, that in this case, the process of transmission is not necessarily through a direct replication of certain previous practices. The process of transmission is also constructed by the living discourse in the society, involving various elements such as texts, religious narrative, authoritative subjects, or the already established practices in the society. Because later generation does not receive only the form of a practice, but also its discourse—a rather abstract conception—that makes it legitimate, a certain later practice would not necessarily be identical with its originator.

Let see the widely performed practices in our society: *khataman al-Qur'an* and Qur'anic recitation during particular moments, such as pregnancy, birth, or death. These practices are observed and preserved in a society not through the first and second transmission patterns, but through discursive tradition. In this case, religious texts as reference or *sanad* as a basis for legitimation have transformed in the society into the discourse of the merits of the Qur'an, the recitation or the act of reciting the Qur'an, paying tribute to ancestors, respecting teachers, or social ties, each of which contributes to establishing the norm of the practice and how to perform it.²²

calls it *musalsalāt* in the plural form, as a main vehicle of constructing ritual practices in Islamic tradition through imitating the teacher. See Garret A. Davidson, *Carrying on the Tradition: A Social and Intellectual History of Hadith Transmission across a Thousand Years*, (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020), 91-95.

20 See Ingrid Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an: Its History and Place in Muslim Life*, ed. (West Sussex: Wiley-Balckwell, 2013), 79-85.

21 Talal Asad further discusses the concept of discourse and discursive tradition, which mark the distinctive features of an anthropology of Islam. See Talal Asad, *The Idea of Anthropology of Islam*, (Washington DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986) and Talal Asad, "Thinking about Tradition, Religion, and Politics in Egypt Today", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Autumn 2015), 166-214.

22 See for example some rituals of the Qur'an among Indonesian Muslim life cycle in Ahmad Rafiq, "The Reception of the Qur'an in Indonesia".

All mentioned transmission patterns necessitate some forms of transformation. Certain knowledge and practices around the Qur'an are not just transmitted from one generation to another, but along this process of transmission, transformation happens. In the case of al-Fātiḥah recitation above, an event in the past is transmitted as a memory. In other words, a particular event around the Qur'an in the past is not only taken as history, but also as a memory, with which the later generations construct a variety of new knowledge and practices through the above three transmission patterns: reference, *sanad*, or discursive tradition. Every time this memory is narrated, it in reality is naturally and perpetually being reconstructed by different agents carrying different interests. It is this process of retelling memory that gives birth to transformation.

On the one hand, the genealogy or network of memory preserves religion and religious traditions, so that they continue to exist.²³ On the other hand, memory is the reason why history is never a stationary affair; it develops and grows following the growth of a community of faith.²⁴ In other words, history, which stands as the source of legitimation or the basis of knowledge and practices, is not only narrative, but also interpretative.²⁵

Conclusion

The discussion of Living Qur'an starts from an assumption that the Qur'an is a text that is not only a passive recipient of practices but also an active agent producing meanings, a set of knowledge, and practices. Along this line, I have argued for the plausibility of the term Living Qur'an precisely because this term best carries an idea of the Qur'an as subject and object at once. Keeping in mind the notion of the Qur'an being passive and active at the same time, Living Qur'an refers to socio-cultural phenomena in which society perceives and interacts with the Qur'an. In other words, Living Qur'an brings together the phenomena of text and the phe-

23 Hervieu-Leger proposes a thesis on the function of the chains of traditions in maintaining the continuity of a community. The stronger the network of the chains of tradition, the stronger a socio-religious group or a religious institution will be. On the other hand, the looser the chains of tradition, or if there is a missing chain, the more vulnerable the socio-religious group or religious institution becomes, which may lead to disunity or even disappearance. See Daniele Hervieu-Leger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, (Rutgers University Press, 2000).

24 Asma Afsaruddin describes how the early generation of Muslims are reconstructed in the history and recollection of the contemporary generation, resulting in various contemporary Islamic movements. See Asma Afsaruddin, *The First Muslim: History and Memory*, (London: Oneworld Publications, 2007).

25 On the historical account of the contemporary narrative or interpretation, see, for example, Allan Megill, who reconstructs the classical debates of Herodotus and Thucydides that gave birth to two schools of narrative and interpretive history. See Allan Megill, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error: A Contemporary Guide to Practice*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

nomena of the reader in the process of reception. Living Qur'an is not limited to studying the form and structure of the text, but more importantly, it elaborates on the function of the text as scripture in its community.

Finally, the phenomena of Living Qur'an, one way or another, deal with the Qur'anic text. Nevertheless, the notion of text from this perspective is not limited to the written linguistic composition that is subject to philological and linguistic comprehension. More than that, the text is perceived as an entity that contain information about its construction as a scripture, which gives birth to a system of knowledge and practices. This knowledge system and practices develop over time and transforms into an ever-increasing variety of forms as recorded in Islamic literature or as present in Islamic society today.

Supplementary Materials

The data presented in this study are available in [insert article or supplementary material here] (Usually the datasets were analyzed from library research can be found in the whole data references).

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Authors' contributions

Ahmad Rafiq is the sole author of this research article

Data availability statement

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Conflict of interests

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