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### Research Article

## A Study of Al-Manṭūq wa Al-Mafhūm in QS. An-Nisā' [4]:3 on Polygamy: An Analysis Based on the Principles of Tafsīr

Muhammad Diaz Supandi, Mahmud Rifaannudin

University of Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia

E-mail; [muhammaddiazsupandi38@student.iqt.unida.gontor.ac.id](mailto:muhammaddiazsupandi38@student.iqt.unida.gontor.ac.id)

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**Abstract.** This abstract presents a comprehensive analysis of QS. An-Nisā' [4]:3 regarding polygamy through the framework of al-manṭūq and al-mafhūm, aiming to understand both the explicit and implicit meanings of the verse and to synthesize them into a holistic understanding that is socially and ethically relevant. The study employs a qualitative approach using library research, examining classical and contemporary tafsīr, uṣūl al-fiqh literature, and scholarly articles on polygamy and justice, through thematic analysis that situates the verse within its socio-historical context and the objectives of shari'ah (maqāṣid al-shari'ah). The findings indicate that al-manṭūq provides limited permission for polygamy of up to four wives under the condition of justice, while al-mafhūm emphasizes material, emotional, and social dimensions of justice, making monogamy often the more appropriate choice, with polygamy serving as a conditional allowance in specific social circumstances, such as protection of orphans and widows. The application of the principle of al-manṭūq wa al-mafhūm demonstrates that Islamic law integrates legal certainty with ethical responsibility, emphasizing justice, welfare, and harm prevention. This study contributes to tafsīr scholarship by highlighting the importance of a

holistic analysis of the verse, reducing narrow interpretations and misuse, and providing a balanced, ethical, and contextually relevant perspective on Islamic law for modern society.

**Keywords:** Al-Manthūq wa Al-Mafhum, Polygamy, Islamic Law

**Abstrak.** Abstrak ini menyajikan analisis komprehensif QS. An-Nisā' [4]:3 terkait poligami melalui kerangka al-manṭūq dan al-mafhūm, dengan tujuan memahami makna tersurat dan tersirat ayat serta menyintesis keduanya untuk menghasilkan pemahaman holistik yang relevan secara sosial dan etis. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan studi pustaka, mengkaji tafsīr klasik dan kontemporer, literatur uṣūl al-fiqh, serta artikel ilmiah terkait poligami dan keadilan, melalui analisis tematik yang menempatkan ayat dalam konteks sosial-historis dan maqāṣid al-sharī'ah. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa al-manṭūq memberikan izin poligami terbatas hingga empat istri dengan syarat keadilan, sementara al-mafhūm menekankan dimensi material, emosional, dan sosial keadilan, sehingga monogami sering lebih sesuai dan poligami hanya dispensasi bersyarat untuk situasi sosial tertentu, seperti perlindungan anak yatim dan janda. Penerapan prinsip al-manṭūq wa al-mafhūm menegaskan bahwa hukum Islam menggabungkan kepastian hukum dengan tanggung jawab etis, menekankan keadilan, kesejahteraan, dan pencegahan kemudharatan. Penelitian ini memperkaya khazanah tafsīr dengan menekankan pentingnya analisis holistik ayat, membantu mengurangi interpretasi sempit dan penyalahgunaan, serta menawarkan perspektif hukum Islam yang seimbang, etis, dan relevan bagi masyarakat modern.

**Kata kunci:** Al-Manthūq wa Al-Mafhum, Poligami, Hukum Islam

## INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an, as the sacred scripture and ultimate guidance (hudan li-n-nās) for Muslims, encompasses not only spiritual and moral teachings but also a set of rules and principles regulating human social interactions (mu'āmalah) in various aspects of life.<sup>1</sup> Among the social institutions that receive significant attention in the Qur'an is marriage, which serves as the primary foundation for building a dignified and healthy society.<sup>2</sup> Of the many verses addressing marriage, QS. An-Nisā' [4]:3 frequently emerges as a focal point of ongoing intellectual, legal, and social debate. Although this verse outwardly addresses polygamy, it cannot be reduced merely to a dry legal ruling (ḥukm taklīfī). Rather, it is a text rich with wisdom, socio-historical context, and profound moral messages that demand a multidimensional approach.<sup>3</sup> Partial interpretations detached from their interwoven layers of meaning often result in biased, simplistic, and incomplete readings, potentially leading to distortion and misapplication. Therefore, a rigorous engagement with the discipline of tafsīr,

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<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Diaz Supandi and Ihwan Agustono, "Trends in Islamic Revisionist Discourse on Qur'anic Studies (A Critical Analysis of John Wansbrough's Thought)," *Jurnal Kawakib* 5, no. 02 (2024): 78–85, <https://doi.org/10.24036/kwakib.v5i02.238>.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmad Fadly Rahman Akbar et al., "Nafs Wahidah Dalam Al-Qur'an Al-Karim Menurut Zaghul Raghīb Muhammad An-Najjar," *ZAD Al-Mufasssirin* 5, no. 1 (2023): 60–77, <https://doi.org/10.55759/zam.v5i1.70>.

<sup>3</sup> Mursyid Al Haq, "Poligami Dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an," *Jurnal Garasi Buku Dan Obrolan Keilmuan* 1, no. 2 (2024): 104–20, <https://doi.org/10.62475/cfkhfg79>.

grounded in scientific principles and objectivity, is indispensable to uncover the multilayered meanings of this highly interpretive verse.<sup>4</sup>

Polygamy, as a social practice long predating the advent of Islam, was in fact regulated and reframed by Islamic law with strict and deliberate conditions. This divine regulation was not intended as absolute endorsement but rather as limitation, humanization, and ethical refinement of a preexisting practice. Nevertheless, in contemporary understandings and practices, QS. An-Nisā' [4]:3 has often been subject to significant reduction in meaning. Public perception frequently fixates exclusively on its al-manṭūq, namely the permissibility (jawāz) of marrying more than one woman, while neglecting the moral imperatives, spirit (rūḥ), and justice that constitute the core of the verse.<sup>5</sup> Such a literalist and isolated reading has led to serious social consequences, ranging from perpetuating injustice against women, domestic disharmony, to the misuse of religious authority under the guise of divine sanction to serve self-interest or desire. Thus, a comprehensive scholarly analysis of both the explicit (al-manṭūq) and implicit (al-mafhūm) dimensions of the verse is not merely an academic exercise but an urgent necessity (ḍarūriyy) to address contemporary problems and restore interpretive balance.

Within the intellectual tradition of Islam, particularly in Uṣūl al-Fiqh (principles of Islamic law) and 'Ulūm al-Tafsīr (Qur'anic sciences), scholars developed sophisticated analytical tools to interpret scriptural texts. Among these are the concepts of al-manṭūq and al-mafhūm. Al-manṭūq refers to the meaning explicitly conveyed by the wording itself, directly understood from its clear linguistic structure.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, al-mafhūm denotes meaning not explicitly stated but inferred implicitly and logically from context, sentence structure, or from what is deliberately omitted, such as in the case of mafhūm al-mukhālafah. Applying both of these analytical tools to QS. An-Nisā' [4]:3 broadens the interpretive horizon. While al-manṭūq provides direct understanding of the legal stipulations, al-mafhūm uncovers implicit messages, restrictions, cautions, and ethical values that underlie the provision, thereby preventing narrow or purely literal interpretations.

Upon closer examination, QS. An-Nisā' [4]:3 does not simply open the door to polygamy as an isolated directive. The verse begins with a highly sensitive concern for the care of orphans and the fear of failing to administer justice in managing their wealth. The permission for polygamy is then framed within this context of caution, introduced by a conditional clause ("if you fear that you will not be just") linked to guardianship of orphans and further extended to marital relations under the same condition of justice. This linguistic (tarkīb) and contextual structure is critical, as it

<sup>4</sup> Moh. Akib Muslim and Anisa Alya Rahma, "Kaidah 'Am Dalam Al-Qur'an: Kajian Terhadap Surat Al-Ahzab Ayat 59 Serta Implikasinya Terhadap Ketentuan Berhijab Bagi Perempuan Muslim," *Studia Quranika* 9, no. 1 (August 19, 2024): 133–54, <https://doi.org/10.21111/studiquran.v9i1.12310>.

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Solikhudin et al., "Legal Certainty, Justice, and Maqasid Al-Shari'ah in Polygamy Permits: A Case Study of Kediri Religious Court," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Law* 7, no. 2 (2024): 1–29, <https://doi.org/10.35719/ixcbasch7>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibnu Elmi A.S. Pelu et al., "Polygamy Law Reform Through the Development of the Aceh Qanun: A New Approach to Protecting the Rights of Women and Children in Indonesia," *El-Mashlahah* 14, no. 1 (2024): 149–68, <https://doi.org/10.23971/el-mashlahah.v14i1.7864>.

indicates that the verse's central message is not an imperative to practice polygamy but a highly cautious (*tatabbuq al-ḥazr*) and conditional solution to specific social challenges—namely, the protection of orphans and widows of that era. Through *al-manṭūq*, the verse presents a numerical allowance (two, three, or four wives).<sup>7</sup> Yet, through *al-mafhūm*—particularly *mafhūm al-sharṭ* (understanding through conditions)—it implies that the permissibility is effectively nullified if justice cannot be upheld, suggesting that monogamy may indeed represent the preferable state.

The significance of this kind of study lies in its effort to move beyond literalist readings and to explore the spirit (*rūḥ*) and higher objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*) underlying the verse—namely justice (*'adl*), welfare (*maṣlaḥah*), and the prevention of harm (*mafsadah*). To achieve a holistic and comprehensive understanding, this research integrates the application of *al-manṭūq* and *al-mafhūm* with foundational principles of *tafsīr* established by authoritative scholarship. These principles include examining the reasons for revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) to provide definitive historical context, studying the coherence of verses (*munāsabah al-āyāt*) to connect the verse with its surrounding passages, and analyzing interpretations from both classical and contemporary exegetes to map a complete understanding. With this robust methodology, the study seeks to yield an interpretation that is not only theoretically sound but also contextual, relevant, and applicable in addressing modern challenges while promoting a balanced and just perspective.

In light of the complex background outlined above, this study specifically aims to conduct an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of QS. An-Nisā' [4]:3 through the analytical framework of *al-manṭūq* and *al-mafhūm*, supported by authentic and authoritative principles of Qur'anic exegesis. Concretely, the research seeks to identify the explicit meanings conveyed by the text, uncover implicit meanings inferred from context and structure, and synthesize both levels to produce a holistic understanding. The expected outcome of this study is to contribute significantly to the body of *tafsīr* scholarship, particularly in the application of *al-manṭūq* and *al-mafhūm*, while simultaneously reducing misinterpretation and misuse of the verse. Ultimately, it aspires to offer an interpretation that is balanced, just, and enlightening in addressing one of the most complex and multi-interpretive verses in Islamic family law.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design using the library research (desk study) approach, aiming to analyze the application of the principle of *al-manṭūq wa al-mafhūm* in QS. An-Nisā' [4]:3 regarding polygamy.<sup>8</sup> Library research enables comprehensive exploration of primary and secondary sources, including classical and contemporary *tafsīr* literature, *uṣūl al-fiqh* texts, and scholarly articles, to understand the explicit (*manṭūq*) and implicit (*mafhūm*) dimensions of the verse. By examining

<sup>7</sup> Jihanu Rofifah Mahmud, "Polygamy and Socioeconomic Factors in Islamic Family Law: Legal Interpretations and Social Outcomes," *Journal of Islamic Family Law* 1, no. 1 (2025): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.59784/jifl.vii.1>.

<sup>8</sup> Prof Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif Kualitatif Dan R&D*, Bandung: Alfabeta (Bandung: ALFABETA, 2019).

written materials, the study prioritizes depth, historical accuracy, and hermeneutical rigor, allowing for an integrated understanding of the socio-ethical, legal, and spiritual messages embedded in the Qur'anic text. This methodological approach ensures that interpretations are grounded in authoritative scholarship and historical context, providing a solid foundation for analysis.

The research procedure consists of three main stages. First, data collection involves gathering relevant sources, including Qur'anic exegeses (tafsīr), uṣūl al-fiqh references, and contemporary scholarly discussions on polygamy and justice in Islamic law. Classical tafsīr works such as those by al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, and al-Rāzī are reviewed to identify the foundational interpretations and reasoning employed by traditional scholars. Contemporary analyses, including works by Muhammad 'Abduh, Rashīd Riḍā, and Wahbah al-Zuhaylī, are also consulted to capture modern applications and ethical considerations. Second, data analysis is conducted through thematic and hermeneutical reading, distinguishing between *manṭūq* (explicit meaning) and *mafhūm* (implicit or inferred meaning) while situating the verse within its socio-historical and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* framework. This stage emphasizes careful comparison, synthesis, and critical evaluation of scholarly arguments to produce a coherent interpretation.

Finally, the interpretation and synthesis stage integrates findings from the literature to construct a holistic understanding of QS. An-Nisā' [4]:3. The study examines how the explicit wording provides legal permission for polygamy while the implicit meanings, derived from contextual clues, ethical reasoning, and linguistic structure, impose stringent conditions of justice, protection, and welfare. By applying the principle of *al-manṭūq wa al-mafhūm*, the study elucidates the layered nature of Qur'anic legislation, demonstrating that divine guidance operates both through clear commands and moral-ethical implications. The result is a comprehensive, contextually grounded, and socially relevant interpretation, contributing to the scholarly discourse on Islamic family law, tafsīr methodology, and the practical application of justice in contemporary Muslim societies.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Definition of Al-Manṭūq wa Al-Mafhūm

In the discipline of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, there exists a set of methodological instruments formulated by scholars to understand the intent and meaning of the Qur'anic and Sunnah expressions. Among these instruments, the concepts of *al-manṭūq* and *al-mafhūm* are the most fundamental because they directly relate to how the sacred text speaks to humanity.<sup>9</sup> These terms are not merely technical jargon within Islamic jurisprudence, but rather epistemological foundations that determine the direction and scope of legal derivation (*istinbāṭ al-ḥukm*).<sup>10</sup> Through *al-manṭūq*, a jurist (*faqīh*) is able to capture the explicit meaning of a text as it is clearly stated, whereas through

<sup>9</sup> Achmad Khusnul Khitam, "Engagement of Qur'anic Sciences," *Studia Quranika* 9, no. 1 (August 2, 2024): 73–93, <https://doi.org/10.21111/studiquran.v9i1.11677>.

<sup>10</sup> Rokhmat Subagiyo, "IMPLEMENTASI AL-DALALAH MAFHUM AL-MUKHALAFAH AL-SYAFI'YAH DALAM ILMU EKONOMI ISLAM," *NIZHAM* 06, no. 02 (2018): 83–91.

*al-mafhūm* he can uncover the implicit meaning derived from the structure of the sentence, the arrangement of words, or the logical consequences embedded in language. Imām al-Ghazālī, in *al-Mustasfā*, emphasized that the expressions of the Qur'an cannot be understood only at the literal layer, but must also be read for their underlying, hidden meanings. This demonstrates that mastery of *al-manṭūq* and *al-mafhūm* is a prerequisite for anyone aspiring to reach the level of sound *ijtihād*. Without proficiency in both, legal derivation risks losing its linguistic foundation.

Etymologically, the term *al-manṭūq* is derived from *naṭaqa*, which means "to utter" or "to pronounce verbally." This basic linguistic meaning was enriched terminologically by *uṣūl* scholars. For instance, al-Āmidī in *al-Iḥkām fī Uṣūl al-Aḥkām* defines *al-manṭūq* as the meaning indicated by the wording directly through its utterance, whether in the form of an apparent (*ẓāhir*) meaning or one understood through the *dalālah* contained in the expression. In other words, *al-manṭūq* refers to the meaning grasped directly from the text as it is articulated, without requiring extensive analysis.<sup>11</sup> It can be likened to the voice of the text speaking directly to its reader. An example is Allah's command in QS. al-Baqarah [2]:43, "Establish prayer...", which represents an explicit (*manṭūq ṣarīḥ*) indication of the obligation of prayer without the need for further reasoning. The command is clear and unequivocal, easily understood by every Muslim without prolonged debate.

However, within the epistemology of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *al-manṭūq* is not understood as a single-layered concept. Scholars classify it into two levels: *al-manṭūq aṣ-ṣarīḥ* (explicit) and *al-manṭūq ḡhayr aṣ-ṣarīḥ* (implicit). The former refers to a meaning that leaves no possibility for any interpretation other than what is intended, such as the command of prayer mentioned earlier. The latter refers to a meaning not explicitly stated but still understood from the text with simple reasoning. For example, the Qur'anic command to marry entails the obligation of providing financial support to one's wife and children, even though such an obligation is not explicitly mentioned in the wording. Ibn Qudāmah, in *Rawḍat al-Nāẓir*, explains that this distinction holds significant epistemological value, as it affects the strength of a legal proof: a ruling derived from *al-manṭūq aṣ-ṣarīḥ* is stronger than that derived from *al-manṭūq ḡhayr aṣ-ṣarīḥ*.<sup>12</sup>

The term *al-mafhūm*, however, carries a different character. Linguistically, it derives from *fahima*, meaning "to understand" or "to comprehend." In the terminology of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *al-mafhūm* refers to a meaning not explicitly stated in the text, but rather understood from the logical implications of the wording or from the sentence structure employed.<sup>13</sup> Al-Shawkānī, in *Irshād al-Fuḥūl*, defines *al-mafhūm* as an additional meaning beyond what is spoken, yet still closely connected to the text. In other words, *al-mafhūm* arises not from what is uttered, but from what is unspoken yet implied within the language. This highlights that the Qur'an, as divine revelation, communicates not only at the literal level but also conveys messages through implicit

<sup>11</sup> Zulhidah Ati Adzki Fikria, "Konsep Mafhum Dan Manthuq Dalam Kajian Al-Qur'an," *Jurnal Kajian Agama Dan Dakwah* 1, no. 2 (2023).

<sup>12</sup> Wahbah Az-Zuhaili, *Tafsir Al-Munir*, Juz 1 ((Damaskus: Dar al-Fikr, 1991).

<sup>13</sup> Fikri Mahmud, *QAWA'ID TAFSIR: Kaidah-Kaidah Menafsirkan Al-Qur'an* (Riau: Azka Pustaka, 2021), <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=GpIzEAAAQBAJ>.

meaning. Thus, a *mujtahid* seeking to derive rulings from the Qur'an must not stop at *al-manṭūq* alone, but must also consider the *mafhūm* embedded within the text.

Within this framework, scholars divide *al-mafhūm* into several categories, each with distinct legal implications. The two most renowned are *mafhūm al-muwāfaqah* and *mafhūm al-mukhālafah*. The former refers to a meaning consistent with, and even stronger than, what is explicitly mentioned in the text. A classic example is found in QS. al-Isrā' [17]:23, where the prohibition of saying even “uff” to one’s parents implies, by even stronger reasoning, that harsher words or physical harm against them are even more forbidden. Conversely, *mafhūm al-mukhālafah* refers to the opposite meaning of the text. For instance, Allah’s statement in QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]:6, “If a sinner brings you news, verify it...” implies, by contrast, that if the news is brought by a trustworthy person, verification is unnecessary. Both types of *mafhūm* serve as vital tools in *istinbāt al-ḥukm* and have been widely employed by jurists throughout Islamic history.

From this comparison, it is evident that *al-manṭūq* and *al-mafhūm* operate in distinct yet complementary domains. *Al-manṭūq* pertains to explicit, direct meanings conveyed through wording, while *al-mafhūm* pertains to implicit meanings understood through linguistic implications and logical consequences. Al-Juwaynī, in *al-Burhān*, emphasizes that both can serve as valid *dalīl shar'ī*, yet *al-manṭūq* enjoys a stronger position because it is supported by explicit wording. By contrast, *al-mafhūm* has often been a point of contention among jurists due to its greater openness to interpretation. This divergence does not undermine the role of *mafhūm*, but rather reflects the dynamic nature of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, which accommodates diverse reasoning.

The significance of these concepts becomes even clearer when applied to Qur'anic exegesis. For example, in QS. al-Nisā' [4]:3 regarding polygamy, the *manṭūq* of the verse allows a man to marry up to four women, provided he can uphold justice. Yet the *mafhūm* of the same verse strongly warns that if justice cannot be maintained, then only one wife is permissible. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, stresses that the *mafhūm* of this verse implies a strong tendency toward limiting polygamy, rather than granting unrestricted license. This demonstrates the crucial role of *mafhūm* in enriching legal understanding and preventing reductive readings of divine revelation.<sup>14</sup>

While the majority of scholars agree that *al-manṭūq* constitutes incontrovertible proof (*ḥujjah*), they differ on the validity of *al-mafhūm*. Scholars of the Shāfi'ī and Ḥanbalī schools accept *mafhūm al-mukhālafah* as a valid proof and a legitimate basis for legal rulings. Conversely, the Ḥanafī school tends to reject it, considering it uncertain and potentially in conflict with the literal meaning of the text. Ibn Taymiyyah, in *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, adopts a moderate stance, maintaining that *mafhūm* may be used as evidence as long as it aligns with Arabic linguistic principles and does not contradict stronger textual evidence. This diversity of opinions demonstrates the flexibility of *uṣūl al-fiqh* methodology and underscores the epistemological dynamism of Islamic law.

<sup>14</sup> Fakhruddin Razi, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb* (Beirut, Lebanon: Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1862).

In the contemporary era, discourse on *al-manṭūq* and *al-mafhūm* has regained relevance, particularly within thematic exegesis (*tafsīr mawḍū'ī*) and Qur'anic hermeneutics. Modern scholars such as Wahbah al-Zuhaylī, in *Uṣūl al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*, highlight the vital role of *mafḥūm* in uncovering the Qur'an's social dimensions. Issues such as gender justice, human rights, and ethical values often draw upon *mafḥūm* to enable more contextual interpretations without departing from the text. Through *mafḥūm*, revelation extends beyond rigid legalism and engages dynamically with changing realities, demonstrating the enduring relevance of classical *uṣūl* concepts.

From the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that *al-manṭūq* and *al-mafḥūm* are two complementary epistemological tools for understanding divine revelation. *Al-manṭūq* provides strong legal certainty through explicit wording, while *al-mafḥūm* opens space for interpretation through the implicit meanings embedded in language. Scholarly differences over the evidentiary value of *mafḥūm* have, in fact, enriched the methodological heritage of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and granted elasticity to Islamic law. This dynamism demonstrates that Islamic law possesses methodological flexibility, allowing it to adapt to the needs of the age without losing its textual foundation. Hence, mastery of *al-manṭūq* and *al-mafḥūm* remains not only relevant in classical contexts but also essential in addressing contemporary challenges of Islamic law.

### Al-Manṭūq wa Al-Mafhūm Applied to the Polygamy Verse, QS. An-Nisā' [4]:3

The science of tafsīr is not merely about understanding the Qur'anic text in a literal sense, but also about uncovering the deeper messages implied within it. Scholars affirm that behind every word lies both an explicit meaning that is clearly apparent and an implicit meaning that remains concealed. One of the fundamental principles in *uṣūl al-fiqh* and tafsīr used to bridge these two layers of meaning is the concept of *al-manṭūq wa al-mafḥūm*—that which is explicitly spoken and that which is implicitly understood. *Al-manṭūq* refers to the literal meaning directly indicated by the wording of the verse, while *al-mafḥūm* refers to the additional meaning understood from context, sentence structure, or matters not directly stated.<sup>15</sup> This principle plays a crucial role in comprehensively understanding Islamic law, as it allows an exegete not only to remain at the surface of the text but also to dive into the deeper objectives of the Shari'ah. In the case of the verse on polygamy, for instance, the application of *al-manṭūq wa al-mafḥūm* helps reveal the true intent of the Shari'ah, which is far broader than a mere formal license to marry more than one woman.

Before embarking on an analysis of the meaning of this verse through the principle of *al-manṭūq wa al-mafḥūm*, it is indispensable first to situate the verse within its historical and social context of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*). According to numerous exegetical reports, the verse on polygamy was revealed in the aftermath of the Battle of Uhud, a critical moment in early Islamic history during which a large

<sup>15</sup> Abī al-Qāsim Maḥmūd bin 'Umar Az-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf* (Arab Saudi: Al-'Ubaykān li al-Nashr, 1998), <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=doK6DwAAQBAJ>.

number of Muslims fell as martyrs, leaving behind widows and orphans deprived of both guardianship and financial support.<sup>16</sup> This tragic circumstance created a profound social crisis in Madinah, where women and children, who represented some of the most vulnerable segments of society, faced the risk of poverty, exploitation, and marginalization. Within this context, polygamy was not introduced as an unrestricted license to indulge personal or carnal desires but rather as a regulated mechanism to provide social protection, stability, and dignity for those who were left without means of support. Classical exegetes such as al-Qurṭubī highlight that the verse should be read as a divine response to a pressing emergency, a practical solution to safeguard orphans and widows from destitution, rather than as a normative encouragement to pursue multiple marriages for their own sake. This historical backdrop underscores that the *mafhūm* of the verse must be approached through a framework of social justice, compassion, and responsibility, emphasizing that the higher intent of the Sharī'ah was to preserve welfare, prevent harm, and uphold equity.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, any interpretation that isolates the verse from its contextual purpose risks reducing it to a mere legal allowance, while in reality the Qur'anic discourse embeds within it a moral vision that prioritizes protection of the weak and the realization of communal solidarity. In this light, polygamy appears not as a privilege or entitlement, but as a conditional concession tied to extraordinary circumstances, framed by the greater objectives of the law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*) which aim at ensuring justice, protecting family structures, and maintaining the dignity of women and children.

Explicitly (*manṭūq*), QS al-Nisā' [4]:3 states: "Marry women of your choice, two, three, or four; but if you fear that you will not be able to deal justly, then [marry] only one." The wording of this verse provides a clear and definitive legal ruling, establishing the permissibility of polygamy while simultaneously imposing the non-negotiable condition of justice (*al-'adl*) as a prerequisite. The phrase *fa-in khiftum allā ta'dilū fa wāḥidatan* emphasizes that if there is any fear of failing to maintain justice among multiple wives, the most prudent and legally safe course is to marry only one.<sup>18</sup> Classical scholars, such as Imam al-Ṭabarī in *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, interpret "justice" as encompassing not only equitable distribution of material resources but also fairness in affection, attention, and emotional support, reflecting a comprehensive understanding of justice that integrates both external and internal dimensions. Similarly, Ibn Kathīr in his *Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān al-Aẓīm* underscores that the explicit permissibility of multiple marriages is intrinsically conditional and should not be divorced from the requirement of justice, framing polygamy as a regulated exception rather than a general entitlement. Furthermore, contemporary scholars such as Wahbah al-Zuhaylī reiterate that the explicit wording provides legal clarity (*manṭūq ṣarīḥ*), yet its proper application cannot ignore the moral and social obligations embedded in the text. This duality between permissibility and strict condition reflects

<sup>16</sup> Razi, *Maḥāṭib Al-Ghayb*.

<sup>17</sup> Abdarrahmān al-Ḥalīl ibn Aḥmad Al-Farāhīdī, *Kitāb Al-'Ayn* (Beirut, Lebanon: Mu'assasat al-'A'lamī li-l-maṭbū'āt, 1988), <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=NNGbvwEACAAJ>.

<sup>18</sup> Aḥmad ibn Fāris al-Qazwīnī Ibn Fāris, *Mu'jam Maqāyīs Al-Lughah*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Ḥārūn (mesir: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Cairo, 2011), <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=x8dwDwAAQBAJ>.

the Qur'anic methodology of combining legal instruction with ethical imperative, ensuring that polygamy functions within a framework of justice, responsibility, and protection of rights, rather than as an unbounded privilege or personal desire. Therefore, *mantūq* here serves not merely as a statement of law but as a vehicle for safeguarding equity and social welfare, embodying the Qur'an's overarching concern for justice as an inseparable element of legal rulings.

However, the meaning of the verse does not end with its explicit wording, for the Qur'an also communicates through subtle, implicit guidance that scholars capture under the concept of *mafhūm*. Within this framework, jurists differentiate between *mafhūm muwāfaqah* and *mafhūm mukhālafah*, which reveal the ethical and legal dimensions beyond the literal text. *Mafhūm muwāfaqah* denotes an implicit understanding that is equal to or even stronger than what is explicitly stated; for example, if the ability to act justly (*al-'adl*) is the explicit prerequisite for polygamy, then the obligation to ensure the welfare, dignity, emotional well-being, and protection of all wives emerges as an even more compelling requirement. This is affirmed by Imam al-Ghazālī in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, who emphasizes that justice encompasses both material fairness and equitable treatment of feelings and affections, making perfect adherence exceedingly difficult in practice. Conversely, *mafhūm mukhālafah* refers to the opposite implication: if one is confident in their ability to maintain justice, polygamy becomes permissible.<sup>19</sup> Yet, classical scholars such as Ibn Kathīr and al-Ṭabarī caution that human capacity for absolute justice is rarely achievable, suggesting that the implicit meaning (*mafhūm*) often functions as a restraining mechanism rather than a blanket endorsement. This dual layer of meaning demonstrates that the Qur'an communicates not only through explicit legal commands (*mantūq ṣariḥ*) but also through nuanced implications embedded in its linguistic and moral architecture. Consequently, understanding polygamy in Islam requires attentiveness to both the text and its ethical-mafhūm dimensions, ensuring that the law is interpreted within a framework of justice, responsibility, and protection, rather than mere formal permissibility or personal desire.

Building on the previous discussion of *mantūq* and *mafhūm*, the phrase *wa-in khiftum allā tuqsiṭū* ("if you fear you will not act justly") generates a compelling *mafhūm muwāfaqah* that deepens the ethical and legal implications of polygamy. Scholars, particularly Imam al-Ghazālī in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, emphasize that justice in this context transcends mere material provision; it encompasses fairness in affection, attention, and emotional engagement with each wife, a standard that is extraordinarily difficult, if not practically impossible, to fulfill perfectly. Consequently, the implicit message of the verse leans more toward restricting polygamy rather than expanding its permissibility, signaling that the primary concern of the Qur'an is to prevent injustice and protect the integrity of family life.<sup>20</sup> While the explicit wording permits multiple wives, *mafhūm mukhālafah*—the converse

<sup>19</sup> Afriadi Putra, Safira Malia Hayati, and Muhammad Yasir, "Reinterpretation Of Polygamy Verses," *Qof* 5, no. 2 (2021): 173–86, <https://doi.org/10.30762/qof.v5i2.8>.

<sup>20</sup> Fajar Ledianito, Khalilullah, and Muhsin Muis, "Women's Rights in Rejecting Polygamy: Islamic Law Perspective and Compilation of Islamic Law in Indonesia," *Jurnal Al-Qadau: Peradilan Dan Hukum Keluarga Islam* 11, no. 2 (2024): 134–51, <https://doi.org/10.24252/al-qadau.v11i2.53218>.

implication that polygamy is allowed if one is confident of perfect justice—introduces interpretative complexity. Jurists from the Shāfi'ī and Ḥanbalī schools accept this reasoning as authoritative, whereas the Ḥanafis tend to reject it due to the practical impossibility of complete fairness. Reinforcing this cautionary stance, a hadith reported by Abū Dāwūd states: “Whoever has two wives and inclines toward one of them will come on the Day of Judgment with half of his body leaning,” highlighting the almost inevitable risk of emotional injustice. Taken together, these insights demonstrate that the mafhūm of the polygamy verse prioritizes ethical responsibility, prudence, and the safeguarding of familial harmony, framing polygamy not as an unqualified entitlement but as a highly conditional and morally regulated practice. Classical exegetes also highlighted this understanding. Imam al-Ṭabarī, in *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, interprets justice as the obligation to distribute time, provision, and residence fairly. Ibn Kathīr, in his tafsīr, cites opinions that this verse essentially represents a prohibition expressed in the form of permission (*al-man'u fī ma'nā al-ibāḥah*), given how difficult it is to fulfill the condition of justice. Sa'īd ibn Jubayr even affirmed that the deeper meaning of this verse is the prohibition of polygamy, except for those who are truly certain of their ability to uphold justice—a group considered extremely rare.

Building on the preceding analysis of manṭūq, mafhūm, and the strong *mafḥūm muwāfaqah* derived from *wa-in khiftum allā tuqsitū*, examining the surrounding context of the polygamy verse further reinforces its cautionary and ethical implications. The verse is framed by instructions not to wrong orphans and to provide women with their rightful dowry, indicating that the Qur'an situates polygamy within a broader social and moral framework aimed at protecting the vulnerable rather than satisfying personal desire.<sup>21</sup> This contextual reading generates a mafhūm that polygamy is permissible only for those capable of establishing comprehensive justice and protection—covering economic, emotional, and social dimensions. Modern scholars such as Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā emphasize this point, arguing that the default ruling for those who fear injustice is prohibition, permitting polygamy only in cases of acute social necessity. They further contend that QS al-Nisā' [4]:3 should be interpreted alongside QS al-Nisā' [4]:129, which stresses the inherent difficulty of achieving justice among wives. Together, these insights confirm that the implicit message of the Qur'anic text is not an encouragement of polygamy but a strict limitation, highlighting moral responsibility, the protection of the weak, and the prioritization of social justice as the guiding principles of the shari'ah.

Thus, the mafhūm of the polygamy verse conveys a profound ethical and legal message that extends beyond mere textual permission, emphasizing the paramount responsibility of justice and protection in marital conduct. Polygamy is not an unqualified right; it is a concession within Shari'ah, contingent upon a condition of

<sup>21</sup> Mukhammad Nur Hadi, Latifatul Islamiyah, and Cecep Soleh Kurniawan, “Conservatism on Islamic Legal Maxims: Judicial Interpretation of Polygamous Marriage at the Religious Courts of Mojokerto, Indonesia,” *Journal of Islamic Law* 4, no. 2 (2023): 172–96, <https://doi.org/10.24260/jil.v4i2.1637>.

justice that is exceedingly difficult, if not nearly impossible, to fulfill completely.<sup>22</sup> Al-Māwardī, in *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyyah*, reinforces this principle by asserting that a judge possesses the authority to prohibit polygamy if it is likely to result in harm or injustice within the family, demonstrating the application of maqāṣid al-sharī'ah in safeguarding lineage, protecting women, and ensuring equitable treatment among family members.<sup>23</sup> The relevance of the principle of *al-manṭūq wa al-mafhūm* is particularly apparent in contemporary contexts, as many Muslim-majority countries implement stringent regulations requiring judicial approval, evidence of financial capacity, and guarantees of fairness to all wives. These measures are not arbitrary but derive directly from the mafhūm of the Qur'anic text, which underscores that Sharī'ah legislation is guided by moral, social, and ethical objectives, rather than mere formalistic compliance.<sup>24</sup> While the manṭūq provides the formal legal allowance to marry multiple wives, the mafhūm imposes a rigorous ethical framework that prioritizes justice, protection, and the prevention of harm, ensuring that polygamy remains an exceptional measure applied with caution and full accountability. This dual approach illustrates how classical jurisprudential tools remain highly relevant in interpreting and implementing Qur'anic law in ways that are socially responsible and ethically grounded.

Building upon the previous discussion, the application of *al-manṭūq wa al-mafhūm* to QS al-Nisā' [4]:3 underscores the intricate and layered nature of Islamic legal reasoning, demonstrating how the Qur'anic text operates on both explicit and implicit levels to guide ethical and social behavior. The *manṭūq* of the verse clearly establishes the formal permissibility of marrying up to four wives, yet the *mafhūm*, derived from linguistic cues, contextual circumstances, and the broader objectives of Sharī'ah, significantly restricts this allowance, imposing rigorous conditions of justice that encompass financial, emotional, and social dimensions. This interpretation aligns with the maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, emphasizing the protection of women, the welfare of children, and the prevention of familial injustice. Scholars such as al-Māwardī and al-Ghazālī highlight that failing to meet these conditions effectively transforms what appears as a legal permission into a moral and social prohibition, demonstrating the interplay between text and context. Consequently, polygamy under this hermeneutical framework is not a personal or cultural preference but a conditional, exceptional measure applicable only in circumstances where all ethical and legal criteria of fairness, protection, and well-being are verifiably met. This dual consideration of *manṭūq* and *mafhūm* thus illustrates the sophistication of Islamic jurisprudence, where legal rulings are deeply intertwined with moral imperatives, social responsibility, and the overarching goals of the Sharī'ah, ensuring that divine law serves justice rather than mere formal legality.

<sup>22</sup> Safna Permata Dewi, "The Practice of Polygamy in Islamic Family Law in Indonesia : Between Ideality and Reality" 01, no. 01 (2024): 30–41.

<sup>23</sup> Dahlia Haliah Ma'u, "The Harmonization of Polygamy Between Islamic Law and Legal Law in Indonesia," *Samarah* 7, no. 2 (2023): 669–86, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjkh.v7i2.8519>.

<sup>24</sup> Fauzi Rahmat Pamula and Naf Torihoran, "Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Polygamy in Islamic Law : A Meta-Analysis And Systematic Review Jurnal Hukum Keluarga" 02, no. 01 (2025): 11–22.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the application of the principle of *al-manṭūq wa al-mafhūm* to QS. An-Nisā' [4]:3 affirms that polygamy is not an absolute license, but rather a conditional dispensation grounded primarily in the principle of justice. The *al-manṭūq* of the verse provides legal clarity in permitting marriage to up to four wives, yet the *al-mafhūm* emphasizes that the requirement of justice encompasses material, emotional, and social dimensions, which in practice are exceedingly difficult to fulfill perfectly. This places monogamy as the more ideal option, in line with the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*—namely justice, protection, and the prevention of harm. Thus, polygamy becomes relevant only in specific social circumstances, such as providing protection for widows and orphans, and not merely as a means of satisfying personal desire.

This research demonstrates that an exegetical approach combining *al-manṭūq* and *al-mafhūm* can produce a balanced, comprehensive, and contextual understanding. Such an interpretation not only provides legal certainty but also integrates the moral and ethical responsibilities that form the spirit of Islamic law. Within this framework, QS. An-Nisā' [4]:3 can be read as both a legal and moral text, aimed at safeguarding women's dignity, protecting vulnerable groups, and ensuring family integrity and well-being. Therefore, this study underscores the importance of a holistic reading in interpreting legal verses, in order to minimize the misuse of religious texts and to offer a more just, balanced, and socially relevant perspective of Islamic law in addressing the challenges of modern society.

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