

Qur'anic *Ta'āruf* as a Normative Proposal for Social Cohesion: A Five-Dimensional Reconstruction

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Abstract

This article examines verse 13 of Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt and reconstructs a five-dimensional logic of Qur'anic *ta'āruf* as a normative proposal for addressing othering and social rupture. Employing an exegetical-conceptual method based on eight systematically coded commentaries (al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Qurtubī, al-Rāzī, Ibn Kathīr, Rashīd Riḍā, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, and Makārim Shīrāzī), supplemented by three hermeneutical sources (al-Ālūsī, 1994; Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984, and Faḍl al-Raḥmān, 1982), the study demonstrates that *ta'āruf* (in the *tafā'ul* pattern) denotes mutual reciprocal knowing. The logic of *ta'āruf* is reconstructed as a five-dimensional model—ontological, sociological, teleological, axiological, and theological—in which human plurality is presented as a creational given and mutual recognition as an ethically directed relational orientation. The article compares this logic with contemporary theories of tolerance and recognition, explicitly acknowledging significant overlaps and not claiming superiority. Drawing on intergroup contact theory, the article proposes a revised two-stage heuristic—recognition and cooperation—in which the first stage is more directly grounded in Quran (49:13), while the second is a normatively inferred and socially adapted extension. The framework presented in this article offers a distinctive normative proposal. However, acknowledging the empirical validation remains the task of future research, and the relationship between *ta'āruf* and distributive justice requires further theoretical integration.

Keywords: Qur'anic *ta'āruf*, othering, social cohesion, tolerance, mutual recognition, intergroup contact theory

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

The contemporary world is witnessing an intensification of social fissures and identity-based polarization. Despite its promise of a global village, globalization has in many contexts reproduced

and deepened ethnic, religious, and cultural divisions (Huntington, 1996; Sen, 2006). The phenomenon of "othering"—a psycho-social mechanism for defining the "self" in opposition to the "other"—has been extensively documented across various socio-political contexts (Fanon, 2008; Said, 1978). This process has weakened the foundations of social solidarity and, in extreme cases, contributed to polarization and violence.

In response to this challenge, the liberal tolerance paradigm has been influential. However, this approach has faced serious critiques: first, certain conceptions of tolerance may imply passive endurance or indifference toward difference (MacIntyre, 1981; Marcuse, 1965); second, in the face of deep ruptures caused by histories of oppression and discrimination, tolerance alone may prove insufficient for fostering genuine reconciliation (Eisenstadt, 1999). These limitations suggest the need to explore alternative or complementary normative frameworks, including those derived from religious ethical traditions—provided that they are subjected to critical scrutiny and not presented as self-evident solutions.

A crucial caveat at the outset maintains that any framework focused on recognition and relationship-building, including the one proposed here, risks what Fraser (2003, pp. 7–10) terms "false reconciliation" if not integrated with mechanisms of distributive and restorative justice. Deep social ruptures often stem from unjust structures of power and wealth distribution. The present study focuses on the recognition-oriented dimension of social cohesion; it does not claim that *ta'āruf* alone suffices. The relationship between *ta'āruf* and justice is revisited in Sections 4 and 6.

1.2 Positioning and Contribution of the Present Study

This study does not claim absolute novelty. Rather, it builds upon and synthesizes existing strands of research on Quran (49:13). A systematic review of exegetical and interdisciplinary literature reveals that previous works have generally: (1) focused on linguistic analysis and the occasion of revelation; (2) used this verse to derive ethical doctrines about human equality; (3) analyzed the verse within frameworks such as religious pluralism, often limited to one or two dimensions.

At the same time, broader scholarship on pluralism, recognition, and intergroup relations suggests that the ethical significance of difference cannot be adequately captured by linguistic or doctrinal analysis alone. Studies of multiculturalism, recognition, and democratic inclusion have shown that relations across difference involve questions of symbolic status, moral standing, and social participation, not merely coexistence (Taylor, 1994; Jenson, 1998; Young, 1990). Likewise, scholarship on Islamic pluralism and peacebuilding has highlighted the need to place scriptural ethics in conversation with contemporary social realities rather than treating religious texts as self-sufficient answers (Abu-Nimer, 2003; Esack, 1997; Sachedina, 2001). This broader context reinforces the need for a reconstructive approach that is both textually grounded and theoretically dialogical.

What is distinctive about the present study is not any single claim but the combination of three elements: (a) a systematic, transparently documented exegetical reconstruction of the verse's internal argumentative structure across five dimensions; (b) a comparative-critical engagement with contemporary theories of tolerance and recognition that avoids caricature; and (c) an explicit, qualified connection to social-psychological literature on intergroup contact, with clear differentiation between Qur'anically derived and empirically adapted components.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the main components and logical structure of the "Qur'anic logic of *ta'aruf*" in Quran (49:13)?
2. How does this logic relate to, and differ from, concepts such as tolerance and recognition?
3. What heuristic model can be derived from this logic for addressing othering?

1.4 Research Method: Exegetical-Conceptual Analysis

This qualitative study employs "exegetical-conceptual analysis," situated within the broader tradition of social interpretation of the Qur'an (Abu Zayd, 2004; Raḥmān, 1982).

1.4.1 Textual Corpus: A Two-Layer Structure

To address criticisms regarding corpus consistency, the study adopts a two-layer structure:

Although the primary corpus is limited to eight systematically coded commentaries for reasons of analytical manageability, the selection was designed to ensure diachronic breadth, methodological diversity, and the representation of major currents within mainstream *tafsīr*. The supplementary consultation of al-Ālūsī, Ibn ʿĀshūr, and Faḍl al-Raḥmān further broadens the interpretive horizon of the study by introducing additional hermeneutical depth and modern thematic reflection.

Table 1. Two-Layer *Tafsir* Corpus and Analytical Role

Layer	Description	Sources	Role
Layer A (Primary)	Systematically coded commentaries	al-Tabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Qurṭubī, al-Rāzī, Ibn Kathīr, Rashīd Ridā, al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, Makārim Shīrāzī (8 sources)	Direct coding and dimensional extraction
Layer B (Supplementary)	Hermeneutical sources consulted for depth	al-Ālūsī, Ibn ʿĀshūr, Faḍl al-Raḥmān	Contextual enrichment, not systematic coding

Note on Faḍl al-Raḥmān: Unlike the primary eight, Raḥmān's work is a thematic-hermeneutical study rather than a verse-by-verse commentary. It is included in Layer B to enrich the interpretive framework, but it was not subjected to the same systematic coding procedure.

1.4.2 Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis followed a systematic coding procedure (see Appendix A for complete coding tree):

Stage 1 – Familiarization and unitization: The verse and relevant sections of all eight primary commentaries were read repeatedly. The unit of analysis was defined as "any proposition in the commentary that directly explicates a word, phrase, or implication of Quran (49:13)."

Stage 2 – Open coding: Each unit was assigned an initial code. A total of 147 initial codes were generated. Examples include "unity of origin," "rejection of lineage boasting," "purpose of knowing," "divine knowledge of deeds," and "plurality as divine design." Inter-coder reliability was assessed by having a second coder (a PhD candidate in Qur'anic studies) code a 20% sample ($\kappa = 0.81$), indicating substantial agreement.

Stage 3 – Axial coding: The 147 initial codes were organized into 23 axial categories. For example, "unity of origin," "shared human essence," and "rejection of inherent superiority" were grouped under "ontological foundations."

Stage 4 – Thematic formation: The 23 axial categories were refined into five main themes (dimensions). Appendix A documents which axial categories collapsed into which themes, including categories that were initially considered but later merged or discarded. Appendix A also provides the full coding tree, a list of the initial codes, the axial grouping process, and examples of categories that were revised, merged, or excluded during analysis, so that readers may evaluate the reconstructive pathway from textual units to thematic dimensions.

Methodological clarification: These five dimensions are best understood as second-order analytic labels assigned by the present study to recurrent exegetical motifs. They are not claimed to be native conceptual categories explicitly used by the commentaries themselves. Their purpose is heuristic and reconstructive: to organize dispersed exegetical insights into a coherent analytical framework for contemporary discussion.

Stage 5 – Interpretive validation: Drafts of the five-dimensional model were discussed with two experts (one in Qur'anic exegesis, one in social theory) in two structured sessions.

Table 2. Analytical Procedure and Coding Outputs

Stage	Analytical Procedure	Output
Stage 1	Familiarization and unitization	Defined unit of analysis across the eight primary commentaries
Stage 2	Open coding	147 initial codes

Stage	Analytical Procedure	Output
Stage 3	Axial coding	23 axial categories
Stage 4	Thematic formation	Five major dimensions
Stage 5	Interpretive validation	Two structured expert-review sessions

Table 3. Sample Coding from Commentaries

Quotation from Commentary	Initial Code	Axial Category	Theme/Dimension	Citation (Vol., p.)
al- Ṭabāṭabā'ī, <i>al-Mīzān</i> : "The origin of all of you is one man and one woman... no place for boasting about lineage"	Unity of origin; rejection of lineage boasting	Ontological equality	Ontological	Vol. 18, p. 340
al- Zamakhsharī, <i>al-Kashshāf</i> : "The meaning of 'peoples and tribes' is that you may know one another, not that you may boast"	Diversity as means, not end	Purposefulness of difference	Teleological	Vol. 4, p. 314
al- Rāzī, <i>Mafāṭih</i>	Acquired vs.	Criterion of value	Axiological	Vol. 28, p. 91

Quotation from Commentary	Initial Code	Axial Category	Theme/Dimension	Citation (Vol., p.)
<i>al-ghayb</i> : "Nobility is only by piety, not by lineage"	ascribed nobility			
<i>al-Qurṭubī, al-Jāmi'</i> : "God's knowledge encompasses your lineages and your deeds"	Divine guarantee of judgment	Transcendent backing	Theological	Vol. 16, p. 93

Note: Appendix A provides the full coding architecture used in this study, including representative coded units, the movement from initial codes to axial categories, and illustrative examples of category consolidation into the five final analytical themes. All direct quotations in Appendix A have also been supplemented with volume and page numbers following the same citation format.

2. Theoretical Framework: Othering, Social Rupture, and Intergroup Contact

2.1 Conceptualizing Othering

Othering is a process through which an individual or group defines another as intrinsically different, alien, and often inferior (Fanon, 2008; Krumer-Nevo & Sagi, 2020; Said, 1978).

The concept has also been elaborated in broader philosophical and cultural theory. De Beauvoir's account of the self/other relation, Hall's work on representation and difference, and Young's analysis of domination and exclusion all indicate that othering is not merely an interpersonal attitude but a socially embedded process shaped by discourse, institutions, and asymmetrical power relations (de Beauvoir, 2011; Hall, 1997; Young, 1990). This wider perspective is important for the present study because it prevents the reduction of social rupture to individual prejudice alone.

Mechanisms include stereotyping, dehumanization, and spatial segregation (Link & Phelan, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

In this sense, othering should be understood not only as a psychological act of categorization, but also as a social process of symbolic boundary-making and hierarchical differentiation (Hall, 1997; Young, 1990).

2.2 Social Rupture and the Justice-Recognition Dialectic

Social rupture refers to the weakening of bonds, trust, and solidarity among members of a society (Durkheim, 1984; Putnam, 2000).

Social cohesion, moreover, is best understood as a multidimensional concept rather than merely the absence of conflict. It has been variously described in terms of belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition, trust, and commitment to shared institutions (Chan et al., 2006; Jenson, 1998; Kearns & Forrest, 2000). This broader understanding is methodologically useful here, as it allows *ta'āruf* to be interpreted not only as an interpersonal ethic but also as a normative orientation potentially relevant to wider patterns of integration and solidarity.

Critically for this study, rupture can arise from two distinct but interrelated sources: (a) misrecognition (cultural domination, disrespect) and (b) maldistribution (economic inequality, exploitation). Fraser (2003) argues that neither recognition nor redistribution alone suffices; any normative framework addressing social cohesion must theorize their integration. The present study focuses primarily on the recognition dimension, but Section 6 returns to the question of how *ta'āruf* might relate to justice-oriented frameworks.

This limitation is especially important in light of broader social cohesion research, indicating that trust and belonging are difficult to sustain where structural exclusion and unequal participation remain unaddressed (Chan et al., 2006; Jenson, 1998).

2.3 Intergroup Contact Theory

Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, subsequently refined by Pettigrew (1998), proposes that intergroup contact reduces prejudice under optimal conditions: equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and institutional support. Pettigrew's longitudinal model identifies a three-stage process—decategorization (personalized interaction), salient categorization (acknowledging group differences), and recategorization (shared identity).

Subsequent research has generally supported the prejudice-reducing effects of intergroup contact, while also showing that such effects are shaped by contextual and institutional variables. In particular, meta-analytic and review studies suggest that contact tends to be more effective when supported by norms of equality, sustained interaction, and conditions that reduce threat and hierarchy (Paluck et al., 2019; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). These findings are important for the present article because they support the claim that *ta'āruf* should be treated as a normative

orientation requiring social conditions for effective realization, rather than as an automatic mechanism of reconciliation.

This article draws on contact theory as a complementary social-scientific framework. However, a distinction that must be made clear throughout is that where contact theory provides empirically tested mechanisms for prejudice reduction, the Qur'anic logic of *ta'āraf* provides a normative orientation. The heuristic model proposed in Section 5 is neither a direct derivation from the verse nor a mere relabeling of Pettigrew's stages.

A further clarification is important. In the model proposed below, Stage 1 (recognition) is the more directly textually grounded component, since it follows closely from *li-ta'ārafū* as reciprocal knowing. Stage 2 (cooperation), by contrast, is less directly stated in the verse; it is a normatively inferred and empirically informed extension of the teleological logic reconstructed from the text, strengthened by insights from intergroup contact theory. Section 5.1 specifies which elements derive from the Qur'anic text and which are adapted from contact theory.

2.4 Common Approaches to Rupture and Their Critiques

- Liberal tolerance: Forst (2013) distinguishes four conceptions: (1) permission conception (power tolerates what it could prohibit); (2) coexistence conception (pragmatic acceptance for peace); (3) respect conception (mutual respect for moral autonomy); and (4) esteem conception (valuing differences as enriching). The present study engages primarily with the coexistence and respect conceptions. Critiques of thinner conceptions (MacIntyre, 1981; Marcuse, 1965) are well-established, but Forst's richer conceptions share significant common ground with recognition-based frameworks.

- Recognition theory: Honneth (1995) identifies three spheres—love, rights, solidarity—as necessary for individual self-realization. *Ta'āraf* overlaps most significantly with the solidarity sphere. The differences (foundation in transcendent unity vs. immanent social struggle; emphasis on relational goods vs. individual self-realization) should not be overstated; Honneth (2014) himself has emphasized the intersubjective and relational dimensions of recognition.

3. Analysis of Quran (49:13): Extracting the Logic of *Ta'āraf*

3.1 Text, Translation, and Context of Revelation

Text: *Yā ayyuhā al-nāsu innā khalaqnākum min dhakarīn wa-unthā wa-ja'alnākum shu'ūban wa-qabā'ila li-ta'ārafū inna akramakum 'inda Llāhi atqākum inna Llāha 'alīmun khabīr.*

Translation: "O humankind, indeed We have created you from a male and a female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of God is the most pious of you. Indeed, God is All-Knowing, All-Aware." (Note: "humankind" replaces "mankind" to reflect contemporary inclusive language standards.)

The verse was revealed in Medina. According to prominent narrations (al-Rāzī, 2000, Vol. 28; al-Ṭabarī, 1992, Vol. 22), the verse responded to an incident in which some Quraysh nobles expressed superiority over Bilāl al-Ḥabashī.

3.2 The Five-Dimensional Logical Structure

The term "logic" here denotes the internal argumentative and normative structure of the text as reconstructed through exegetical analysis. The five dimensions emerged from the coding process. Readers interested in methodological traceability may consult Appendix A for the full movement from coded exegetical propositions to axial categories and final thematic consolidation. The labels used are analytic categories for contemporary readers; the text itself does not use this terminology. More precisely, these labels are not presented here as Qur'anic terms of art, but as second-order analytical labels derived from recurrent interpretive patterns in the coded material.

Table 4. The Five Dimensions of Qur'anic *Ta'āruf*

Dimension	Analytical Definition	Main Textual Anchor	Normative Function
Ontological	Shared creational origin of humanity	khalāqnākum min dhakarīn wa-unthā	Undermines inherent hierarchy
Sociological	Human plurality as a real social condition	shu'ūban wa-qabā'ila	Normalizes diversity as social fact
Teleological	Diversity is purposively directed toward mutual recognition	li-ta'ārafū	Orients interaction toward reciprocal knowing
Axiological	Human worth is not tied to ascriptive identity	akramakum ... atqākum	Displaces inherited superiority claims
Theological	Divine knowledge guarantees the moral horizon of the verse	inna Llāha 'alīmun khabīr	Anchors the normative order in transcendence

3.2.1 Ontological Dimension (Shared Creational Origin)

The proposition *innā khalaqnākum min dhakarīn wa-unthā* refers to a shared human origin. Across all eight primary commentaries, this phrase is interpreted as nullifying any inherent hierarchy among humans. Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1970, Vol. 18, p. 340) states: "The origin of all of you is one man and one woman... so there remains no place for boasting about lineage." Interpretive caution: Calling this an "ontological foundation" (as this study does) is a reconstructive choice. An alternative reading would see it simply as a historical claim about common ancestry. The study defends the ontological reading as more coherent with the verse's normative force, but acknowledges this as an interpretive leap (see Section 1.2).

3.2.2 Sociological Dimension (Reality of Plurality)

The phrase *wa-ja 'alnākum shu 'ūban wa-qabā'ila* presents ethnic and social diversity not as a deviation but as a creational reality. Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1970, Vol. 18, p. 341) notes: "Differences among human communities are something that nature necessitates... this is a creational reality."

3.2.3 Teleological Dimension (Purposefulness of Diversity)

The core purpose is expressed in *li-ta 'ārafū*. The *tafā 'ul* pattern in Arabic indicates mutual and reciprocal action. Al-Zamakhsharī (1987, Vol. 4, p. 314) states: "The meaning of 'peoples and tribes' is that you may know one another, not that you may boast."

3.2.4 Axiological Dimension (Criterion of Nobility)

The proposition *inna akramakum 'inda Llāhi atqākum* invalidates ascriptive criteria (lineage, race, wealth) and ties worth to an acquired quality (piety). Al-Rāzī (2000, Vol. 28, p. 91) writes: "Nobility is only by piety, not by lineage."

Critical tension: As noted in Section 6, if *taqwā* is known fully only to God, its social operationalization remains problematic. This study does not resolve this tension but flags it as a central limitation. One provisional clarification may nevertheless be offered. If *taqwā* is known fully only to God, then the verse may be read not as authorizing a new humanly administered hierarchy, but rather as displacing final judgment away from socially ascribed markers such as lineage, race, or status. On this reading, the social function of the verse is less to rank persons publicly than to undermine the legitimacy of inherited claims to superiority and to relocate ultimate moral distinction to the divine perspective.

3.2.5 Theological Dimension (Transcendent Backing)

The concluding phrase *inna Llāha 'alīmun khabīr* provides a theological guarantee for this value system. Al-Qurṭubī (2006, Vol. 16, p. 93) states: "God knows your lineages and your deeds." The interpretation of this phrase as "ontological backing" rather than simple emphasis is the author's reconstructive claim, not a direct exegetical finding.

3.3 Key Components of the Logic of *Ta 'āruf*

- Unity in plurality: Simultaneous affirmation of shared origin and social difference
- Positive purposefulness of diversity: Differences as context for achieving *ta 'āruf*
- Active mutual interaction: Two-way, dynamic process of knowing
- Redefinition of identity and nobility: Shift from ascriptive to acquired criteria
- Transcendent guarantee: Divine backing for the value system

4. Distinguishing *Ta'āruf* from Kindred Concepts

Acknowledgment before proceeding: This section identifies distinctions, not superiority. *Ta'āruf* overlaps significantly with the "respect conception" of tolerance (Forst, 2013) and the "solidarity sphere" of recognition (Honneth, 1995). The purpose here is conceptual clarification, not competitive evaluation.

4.1 Tolerance: A Nuanced Engagement

Forst (2013) distinguishes four conceptions of tolerance. *Ta'āruf* shares with the respect conception an emphasis on mutual recognition. Differences include: (1) foundation: shared creation and purposive plurality vs. rights-based justificatory frameworks; (2) moral emphasis: ethically directed mutual regard vs. respect for autonomy and reciprocity; and (3) orientation: more explicitly relational vs. more explicitly justificatory. These are descriptive differences rather than claims of superiority. The contrast with Forst's (2013) respect conception should therefore be formulated carefully. Both frameworks reject mere passive endurance and move toward a thicker account of intersubjective regard. The difference lies less in whether the other is respected and more in how the grounds of such respect are construed.

In Forst (2013), respect is anchored primarily in moral autonomy and justificatory reciprocity; in the present reconstruction of *ta'āruf*, it is anchored in shared creation, purposive plurality, and a morally charged orientation toward mutual knowing. The practical implications may overlap considerably even where the justificatory grammars differ.

4.2 Recognition Theory

Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition identifies three spheres love, rights, and solidarity.

Recognition theory has also developed beyond Honneth's (1995) original formulation. Ricoeur (2005) distinguishes recognition as identification, self-recognition, and mutual recognition, thereby highlighting the layered character of acknowledging the other. This distinction is especially useful for the present study, as *ta'āruf* is not a reducible to cognitive identification alone but implies an ethically guided orientation toward reciprocal acknowledgment. In this respect, the Qur'anic term can be read as engaging not only epistemic awareness but also normative relation.

The logic of *ta'āruf* overlaps with the solidarity sphere. Differences include (1) Foundation: transcendent unity vs. immanent social struggles; and (2) Ultimate good: relational goods as intrinsic vs. individual self-realization. However, Honneth (2014) has emphasized the intersubjective dimensions of recognition, narrowing the gap. A brief comparison with Taylor (1994) is also helpful. Taylor's "politics of recognition" highlights the moral damage produced by misrecognition and the importance of acknowledging identity-forming difference. *Ta'āruf* overlaps with this concern, but places greater emphasis on reciprocal orientation and interpersonal knowing than on the public affirmation of authenticity as such. In this sense, *ta'āruf* is less a

politics of identity affirmation than an ethic of relational engagement across difference. If Honneth (1995) helps clarify the relational and developmental dimensions of recognition, Taylor (1994) is useful for a different reason: he draws attention to the moral significance of acknowledging identities and ways of life that seek not merely coexistence but also the correction of public misrecognition. *Ta 'āruf* does not map neatly onto Taylor's (1994) politics of recognition, yet the comparison helps specify that the Qur'anic model proposed here is less concerned with identity affirmation as such than with ethically regulated mutual acknowledgement under conditions of plural human difference.

This suggests that the difference between *ta 'āruf* and recognition theory should not be overstated as one between "relational" and "individualistic" paradigms. Honneth's (1995) account is itself deeply relational. A more precise distinction is that Honneth (1995) theorizes recognition largely through the grammar of social struggle, institutional mediation, and conditions for self-realization, whereas *ta 'āruf*, as reconstructed here, begins from a normatively charged anthropology of shared origin and divinely intended plurality. The divergence, then, is not of absolute opposition but rather a difference in starting point, justificatory structure, and ultimate horizon.

Taken together, these comparisons suggest that *ta 'āruf* is best understood not as a replacement for contemporary recognition theory, but as a distinct normative grammar that overlaps with such theories at selected points while remaining anchored in a theologically structured account of human plurality, moral responsibility, and social encounter.

4.3 The Justice Question

Unlike the frameworks above, *ta 'āruf* does not inherently address maldistribution. Fraser's (2003) critique of recognition theory—that can lead to "false reconciliation" if decoupled from redistribution—applies equally to *ta 'āruf*. This study does not claim that *ta 'āruf* resolves this problem. Rather, it acknowledges that any recognition-oriented framework must be integrated with justice-oriented mechanisms. Section 6 returns to this as a central limitation and avenue for future research.

Table 5. Comparative Distinction of *Ta 'āruf* from Kindred Concepts

Concept	Basis/Motivation	Relation to the "Other"	Justice Component
Tolerance (coexistence)	Pragmatic acceptance	Other as co-inhabitant	Not inherent
Tolerance (respect)	Respect for moral autonomy	Other as rights-holder	Not inherent
Recognition (Honneth)	Identity formation through intersubjectivity	Other as condition of self	Weak critique (Fraser)

Concept	Basis/Motivation	Relation to the “Other”	Justice Component
<i>Ta ‘āruf</i> reconstruction)	(this Ontological unity/divine purpose	Other as kin and opportunity	Absent (limitation)

5. A Heuristic Model for Addressing Othering

5.1 Theoretical Basis: Distinguishing Qur'anic Derivation from Contact Theory Adaptation

Transparency statement: The model proposed below is neither a direct derivation from Quran (49:13) nor a mere relabeling of Pettigrew's (1998) stages; rather, it is a synthetic heuristic.

Table 6. Source Distinction in the Heuristic Model

Component	Source	Status in the Argument
Normative orientation toward mutual recognition	Qur’anic <i>ta ‘āruf</i>	More directly textually grounded
Recognition as first stage	Quran (49: 13) and exegetical reconstruction	Textually grounded heuristic component
Cooperation as second stage	Authorial normative inference in dialogue with contact theory	Inferential and socially adapted component
Conditions for effectiveness	Contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998)	Empirical social-scientific supplement
Two-stage reduction	Author’s synthesis	Analytical simplification for heuristic use

This distinction is consistent with later work in contact theory, emphasizing that the success of intergroup engagement depends not only on contact itself but on the normative and institutional structure within which such contact occurs (Paluck et al., 2019; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Why a two-stage rather than three-stage model? Pettigrew's (1998) decategorization → salient categorization → recategorization sequence is empirically grounded. However, from a Qur'anic perspective, the distinction between decategorization and salient categorization is less relevant than the distinction between minimal recognition (moving from stereotype to individual knowledge) and sustained cooperation (institutionalized joint action). It should therefore be read asymmetrically: the first stage is more directly grounded in the Qur’anic wording, whereas the second stage is a practical and normative extrapolation proposed by the author in dialogue with social-psychological literature.

5.2 The Two-Stage Model

Table 7. The Revised Two-Stage Heuristic Model

Stage	Goal	Key Actions	Qur'anic Basis	Contact Theory Parallel
1. Recognition	Moving from stereotype to mutual knowing	Face-to-face encounter; storytelling; cultural exchange	<i>li-ta'ārafū</i> as reciprocal knowing	Decategorization
2. Cooperation	Building sustained solidarity	Joint projects; shared institutions; coexistence agreements	Normatively inferred from the teleological dimension of diversity	Recategorization

Important Caveats:

- This model is heuristic, not empirically validated.
- Transition from Stage 1 to Stage 2 requires conditions specified in contact theory (equal status, institutional support, common goals).
- The model assumes minimal reciprocity; it does not address non-reciprocal others (e.g., violent extremists, see Section 6). A further unresolved question concerns how *ta'āraf* should operate when reciprocity is absent or strategically refused. In such cases, the framework cannot assume mutual moral openness as a standing social fact, and must therefore be supplemented by a more explicit account of asymmetrical obligation, institutional restraint, and protective justice.

5.3 Historical Illustration: The Medinan Community (Qualified)

The occasion of revelation provides an illustrative case rather than empirical proof. According to al-Ṭabarī (1992, Vol. 22) and al-Rāzī (2000, Vol. 28), the verse was revealed when some Quraysh nobles expressed superiority over Bilāl al-Ḥabashī. One can read this episode as illustrative of an ethic consistent with the logic of *ta'āraf*: (1) rejecting ascriptive superiority (ontological dimension); (2) redirecting ultimate worth away from lineage and toward piety (axiological dimension); and (3) supporting forms of inclusion within a shared community (teleological dimension). This formulation should be taken as an interpretive illustration rather than a strong causal claim about the historical formation of the Medinan polity. The point of the example is therefore heuristic rather than evidentiary: it illustrates an ethical trajectory compatible with *ta'āraf*, without claiming to establish a direct exegetical derivation from the verse itself.

6. Limitations, Challenges, and Avenues for Future Research

6.1 The Justice-Recognition Dialectic (Central Limitation)

As explained in Sections 1.1 and 4.3, *ta'āruf* focuses on recognition and relationship-building. Deep social ruptures often stem from unjust structures of power and wealth distribution. In such cases, *ta'āruf* alone, without mechanisms of restorative and distributive justice (Fraser, 2003, pp. 7–10), could lead to "false reconciliation." This study does not resolve this tension. Future research must theorize the integration of recognition-oriented frameworks (like *ta'āruf*) with justice-oriented frameworks.

6.2 The Challenge of Non-Reciprocal Others

The logic of *ta'āruf* assumes a minimal level of reciprocity. How should it respond to groups that refuse recognition altogether (e.g., violent extremists)? The commentaries do not address this question, and the present study does not resolve it—a significant limitation.

6.3 The Operationalization of Piety (*Taqwā*)

If the ultimate criterion of nobility is *taqwā*, and only God fully knows it, how can this criterion function socially without leading to problematic moral judgments? This remains an unresolved tension. A useful distinction may be drawn here between eschatological nobility and worldly dignity. The former belongs to divine judgment and is therefore not fully accessible to human institutions; the latter belongs to the social order and supports the equal dignity of persons irrespective of lineage, ethnicity, or inherited status. On such a reading, Quran (49:13) does not provide a socially operational ranking system so much as it blocks unjust claims to ascriptive superiority while reserving ultimate moral evaluation to God. This tension does not invalidate the framework, but it does indicate that any contemporary application of *ta'āruf* requires a more explicit account of how universal social dignity is normatively secured without collapsing the Qur'anic moral horizon into a flat egalitarianism. This distinction does not eliminate the tension entirely, but it helps explain how the verse can be socially egalitarian without collapsing moral evaluation into relativism.

Relatedly, if *taqwā* functions as an orienting moral criterion within the reconstructed model, future work must clarify how it can be publicly interpreted in ethical and institutional terms without reducing it either to private piety or to a thin procedural norm.

6.4 Methodological Limitations

- The exegetical corpus, though systematically coded, is limited to eight primary commentaries. Commentaries from Ibādī or contemporary feminist traditions were not included.
- The coding process, while systematic ($\kappa = 0.81$), involved interpretive judgments. A different researcher might produce a different dimensional structure.
- The "interpretive validation" with two experts does not constitute external validation in a strict sense.

6.5 Empirical Validation as a Task for Future Research

The present study does not claim empirical efficacy. What is offered is a theoretically grounded normative proposal and a heuristic model that can be empirically tested. Specific directions include:

1. Experimental testing of the two-stage model in controlled intergroup settings
2. Comparative case studies of communities implementing *ta'āruf*-inspired initiatives
3. Longitudinal studies examining relationships between mutual recognition and social cohesion outcomes

7. Conclusion

This study has reconstructed a five-dimensional logic of *ta'āruf* from Quran (49:13) and eight systematically coded commentaries (supplemented by three hermeneutical sources): ontological (shared creational origin), sociological (reality of plurality), teleological (purposefulness of diversity for mutual recognition), axiological (shift from ascriptive to acquired criteria), and theological (transcendent backing). The comparative analysis indicated that *ta'āruf* shares features with, but is distinct from, conceptions of tolerance and recognition. These distinctions, however, should be understood as differences in justificatory grammar and normative emphasis rather than as evidence of categorical superiority or incommensurability. The study explicitly acknowledges significant overlaps and does not claim superiority.

By placing the exegetical reconstruction of Quran (49:13) in dialogue not only with classical and modern *tafsīr* but also with broader literatures on othering, recognition, social cohesion, and intergroup contact, the article aims to provide a more robustly grounded account of *ta'āruf* as a normative proposal. This expanded engagement with the literature helps situate the argument more clearly within current interdisciplinary debates.

The study's most significant contribution is not a single claim but the combination of: (a) a transparently documented, systematic exegetical reconstruction with a two-layer corpus and complete coding tree (Appendix A); (b) a nuanced comparative engagement with contemporary theories that avoids caricature; (c) a qualified integration with intergroup contact theory, clearly distinguishing Qur'anically derived from empirically adapted components; and (d) an explicit acknowledgment of central limitations, particularly the unresolved relationship between *ta'āruf* and distributive justice.

Limitations

The study is theoretical, not empirical. The relationship between *ta'āruf* and justice remains undertheorized. The challenge of non-reciprocal others remains unresolved. The operationalization of *taqwā* in social contexts remains problematic.

Future research directions: (1) empirical testing of the two-stage heuristic; (2) deeper comparative analysis of *ta'āruf* with theories of transitional justice and reconciliation; (3) examination of the

model's applicability across different socio-political contexts (e.g., post-conflict societies, multicultural democracies); and (4) theoretical integration of *ta'aruf* with Fraser's redistribution-recognition framework.

The contribution of this study, therefore, lies less in displacing existing theories of tolerance or recognition than in reconstructing a Qur'anically grounded normative vocabulary that may enter into critical conversation with them.

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