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The Meaning of Al-Karamah in the Qur'an: Toshihiko Izutsu's Semantic Analysis and Its Integration with Islamic Humanitarian Values

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the meaning of al-karamah in the Qur'an through Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic approach and integrates the findings with humanitarian values in Islam. It responds to a persistent gap: the Qur'an grounds human nobility in divine endowment measured by piety, whereas social practice grades people by wealth, office, and lineage. This is a qualitative library research employing content analysis operated through Izutsu's semantic stages, namely determining the focus word, tracing the basic meaning, syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis, synchronic and diachronic reading, constructing the semantic field, and formulating the worldview. The corpus comprises forty-seven occurrences of the root k-r-m in forty-six verses across twenty-nine chapters, from which ten verses on human nobility are analysed. Three findings emerge. First, the basic meaning of the root is nobility inhering in substance and character, opposed to blameworthiness and humiliation. Second, its relational meaning unfolds in three patterns, namely nobility as divine endowment, as ethical obligation, and as contested claim; within the Qur'an the concept undergoes five shifts that form a worldview in which every person is ennobled at creation yet summoned to verify that nobility through piety. Third, this reading converges reciprocally with the notions of dignity, equality, and justice advanced by Kamali, Madjid, and Essack, indicating that Islamic humanitarian values are rooted in the Qur'an's own lexical system rather than imported into it.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Honor is one of the most frequently used categories for judging others, and it is also one of the most easily misunderstood. In everyday life, a person is commonly viewed as honorable by their wealth, position, popularity, or lineage. Such measures have now gained a new platform through social media, making the display of possessions a marker of status. The Quran, on the other hand, constructs a different concept. Honor in it stems from God's gift to all the children of Adam and is measured by piety, not by external attributes that can be bought and sold. The gap between these two perspectives deserves linguistic examination, because what is at stake is not simply a difference of opinion, but a difference in the meaning of the same word. The word *karamah* has even experienced a narrowing in the consciousness of Indonesian Muslims, tending to be understood as the extraordinary privileges of saints, so that its original meaning, the dignity of every human being, rarely appears in religious discourse.

The concept of nobility is one of the most constant categories of social assessment used by humans to measure others, and it is also one of the most vulnerable to bias and misconception. In everyday life, a person is often conventionally considered noble based on the accumulation of material wealth, hierarchy of positions, level of popularity, or claims of noble lineage (*nasab*). These physical indicators now find a new stage of articulation through social media algorithms, which transform the display of possessions (flexing) into the primary marker of social status. In contrast, the Qur'an constructs a radically opposite paradigm: nobility stems from God's primordial gift to all the children of Adam (*karramnā banī Ādam*) and is measured exclusively through the axis of piety, not determined by external, marketable variables.

In the dynamics of religious awareness in Indonesian Muslim communities, the term karāmah has undergone a significant narrowing of meaning, tending to be relegated to a mere phenomenon of supernatural specialness (*khāriq al-'ādah*) inherent in the personalities of saints. Consequently, its most fundamental meaning, as the existential dignity inherent in every human being, has become increasingly dim and rarely comes to the fore in religious discourse.

Several studies have addressed this issue from various angles. Semantic studies of the word karīm and all its derivations have been conducted and have yielded a fairly broad mapping of meanings, although not focused on the issue of human dignity ('Ulya, 2020). The application of the Izutsu method to other key terms, such as ūlū al-albāb, shows that these semantic stages are productive in uncovering the Qur'anic worldview (Zulfikar, 2018). Meanwhile, human dignity has also been discussed through the maqasidi tafsir approach (Fatimah, 2023) and through the tahlili method of a single key verse (Mudzakir., 2023), and linked to contemporary issues such as human rights and gender equality (Qurtubi, A. N., Ilmi AS, M. A., & Panggabean, 2025). These studies generally start from the objectives of sharia or from a single main verse, rather than from the network of vocabulary meanings.

The map reveals an unexplored gap: semantic analysis that specifically limits its corpus to verses that directly address human dignity and then reconciles the results with the formulation of humanitarian values in Islamic thought. This gap is what this article aims to fill. Its objectives are threefold: to formulate the basic meaning of the root word k-r-m, to elaborate its relational meaning and the worldview it forms, and to integrate these findings with the values of dignity, equality, and justice. The novelty of this article lies in three aspects. First, the corpus is deliberately narrowed to verses on human dignity, unlike previous studies that explored all root derivations without any thematic limitations. Second, the analysis results do not stop at a list of meanings but are structured into a semantic field architecture that reveals the origin, size, form, and opposite of dignity. Third, these linguistic findings are combined in a two-way manner with the formulation of humanitarian values, so that the semantic study does not stop at linguistic description but instead leads to actual ethical issues.

Based on the comparative map, an academic gap (research gap) has emerged that has not been optimally addressed, namely the lack of semantic analysis that specifically limits the corpus of its study to verses that directly portray aspects of human dignity, to then reconcile the results dialectically with the construction of humanitarian values in contemporary Islamic thought. This scientific gap is filled substantively by this article through three main objectives: formulating the basic meaning of the root word k-r-m, analyzing its relational meaning along with the construction of a worldview (weltanschauung) formed from it, and integrating these linguistic findings with the pillars of dignity, equality, and social justice. The novelty of this research rests on three strategic contributions, namely the strict focus of the corpus on the theme of human nobility without including generic derivations, the arrangement of semantic field architecture that maps the origins, benchmarks, articulations of forms, to the oppositional entities of nobility, as well as a two-way dialectical encounter between linguistic findings and the formulation of human values, so that semantic studies do not stagnate as sterile linguistic descriptions, but rather transform into analytical tools for actual ethical issues.

This study is a qualitative literature study using content analysis techniques. The analytical framework follows the semantic stages developed by Izutsu, which distinguishes basic meaning as the inherent meaning of a word wherever it is used, and relational meaning as a new meaning that arises from the position of the word within the network of the Qur'anic vocabulary (Izutsu, 2003). Methodologically, this study is classified as a qualitative study based on library research that applies content analysis techniques. The analytical framework consistently adopts the semantic procedures developed by Toshihiko Izutsu, an approach that maps meaning through two main axes: the reading of basic meaning as the inherent conceptual core attached to a word in various contexts of its use, and the exploration of relational meaning as a new connotation articulated when the word interacts and occupies a strategic position within the syntagmatic and paradigmatic networks of the Qur'anic vocabulary.

The primary sources of the research were the Qur'anic manuscripts and the index dictionary *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras* ('Abd al-Bāqī, 1364) to inventory all occurrences of the root k-r-m. The search yielded forty-seven occurrences in forty-six verses spread across twenty-nine chapters. From the total data, ten verses were selected

that directly address human dignity. The basic meaning was traced through three classical dictionaries, namely Maqāyīs al-Lughah (ibn Fāris ibn Zakariyā, 1979), *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān* (Al-Aṣfahānī, 1992), and *Lisān al-'Arab* (Manẓūr., 1997), while the interpretation of the verse is referred to the books of interpretation, especially Tafsir Al-Azhar (Hamka., 2015) and Tafsir Al-Misbah (Shihab, 2002).

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1. Semantic Al-Qur'an Toshihiko Izutsu

Izutsu understands semantics not simply as the analysis of word forms or the exploration of their origins, but as the analytical study of key terms in a language, ultimately leading to a conceptual understanding of the worldview of the language's speakers (Izutsu, 2003). Toshihiko Izutsu places semantics at a much deeper level than simply dissecting rigid linguistic structures. For Izutsu, the study of words should not stop at grammatical formalism, the analysis of external forms (morphology), or simply the exploration of their historical origins (etymology). He views language as a reflection of the collective consciousness of its users. Therefore, his semantic approach focuses on unpacking and mapping interconnected terms within a text system. Through this exploration of core vocabulary, semantics serves as an analytical tool for reconstructing a complete conceptual understanding. At the highest level of meaning, this process will lead researchers to read the weltanschauung, namely the perspective, philosophy of life, and construction of reality experienced by the language's speakers.

Within this framework, the vocabulary of the Qur'an is not viewed as a collection of stand-alone words, but rather as an interconnected system that forms a unified perspective on God, humanity, and nature. According to Izutsu, each word has two layers of meaning. Basic meaning is the content of meaning that is always attached to the word wherever it is carried, while relational meaning is the new meaning that arises when the word occupies a certain position in the vocabulary system and relates to the words around it. Relational meaning is explored in two directions: syntagmatic analysis, which examines the words that appear together in a verse, and paradigmatic analysis, which compares a word with other words that are equivalent or opposite. Furthermore, the vocabulary is read from two time perspectives: synchronic, which looks at the system of meaning at a particular time, and diachronic, which looks at changes in meaning over time. All these findings are then compiled into a semantic field and formulated into a worldview (Izutsu, 2003).

Based on this framework, the Qur'an is not perceived as a collection of fragmented vocabulary, but rather as a complete and systematic conceptual fabric in reconstructing perspectives on the relationship between divinity, humanity, and the universe. Toshihiko Izutsu dissects this structure by separating two levels of meaning in each word entity. First, there is the dimension of basic meaning, namely the most essential substance of meaning and remains constantly attached even though the word is transferred to various cultural contexts. Second, relational meaning appears, namely the expansion or shift of meaning that is newly formed when the word is integrated into the network of Qur'anic vocabulary and interacts specifically with the terms around it.

Referring to this theoretical basis, the text of the Qur'an is no longer approached merely as a compilation of fragmented vocabulary, but rather is positioned as a coherent and systematic conceptual constellation in order to re-weave the paradigm (weltanschauung) regarding the triadic relations of theological (divinity), anthropological (humanity), and cosmological (universe). To dissect this structural anatomy, Toshihiko Izutsu classifies the operationalization of meaning in each lexical entity into two hierarchical orders. In the first dimension, there exists what is called basic meaning, namely the primary semantic essence that is inherent and always persistently attached to a word, regardless of shifts in space or cultural context. In the second dimension, relational meaning is constructed, namely a form of signification or new derivation of meaning that crystallizes when the word is inserted into the linguistic ecosystem of the Qur'an, so that it interacts with each other, intertwines, and redefines its position syntagmatically with the specific diction around it.

2.2. The Basic Meaning of the Root Word k-r-m

The three dictionaries referenced show a unity of direction with varying emphases. Ibn Fāris places this root word in one dimension of meaning, namely nobility that can be inherent in the substance of something or in its character (ibn Fāris ibn Zakariyā, 1979). These three main lexicographic sources actually lead to the same conceptual thread, although each offers a specific perspective and emphasis. In this context, Ibn Fāris focuses his analysis of the root word on one very fundamental axis of meaning, namely the principle of nobility or glory. This dimension of nobility is understood as holistic, where its manifestation is not only rooted in the substance (żāt) or internal nature of something, but also radiates in the form of character, moral greatness, and inherent temperament.

Al-Aṣfahānī gives a more operational formulation by distinguishing the direction of its meaning according to the subject (Raghib al-Ashfahani. A, 1992). When applied to Allah, this word indicates His goodness and grace that appear real; when applied to humans, it becomes the name for praiseworthy morals that are truly manifested in actions. As for Ibn Manẓūr emphasizes the equivalence of karuma with syarufa and places nobility as the opposite of blameworthiness (Manẓūr., 1997). Al-Aṣfahānī presents an operationally integrated formulation by mapping the orientation of the meaning based on the subject of its owner. When attributed to a divine entity, this term represents the abundance of goodness and the virtue of God's grace manifested substantively. Conversely, when connected to the realm of humanity, this meaning transforms into a representation of noble moral character and is evaluated realistically through concrete actions. Meanwhile, Ibn Manẓūr completes this lexical basis by emphasizing the conceptual alignment between the words karuma and syarufa, while constructing the position of nobility as a meaningful entity that is directly opposite (contradictory) to all forms of humiliation or disgrace.

Two important points can be drawn from this comparison. First, at the dictionary level, nobility in Arabic has been two-dimensional: an inherent quality and a sought-after quality. Second, in humans, nobility demands manifestation, so claims of nobility that are not visible in actions are invalid even linguistically. A search for usage in pre-Islamic Arabia completes this picture. At that time, nobility was understood as social honor centered on demonstrated generosity, noble lineage, and tribal might. Thus, the basic meaning of the root k-r-m can be formulated as nobility inherent in both substance and character, encompassing nuances of high value, honor, and generosity, and the opposite of blameworthiness and humiliation.

From this comparison, two fundamental interpretations are worth underscoring. First, at the lexicographic level, the meaning of nobility in the Arabic language tradition is rooted in multidimensionality, namely combining inherent potential inherent by nature (built-in quality) with moral capacity formed through conscious effort. Second, when placed in a humanitarian context, the concept of nobility requires empirical evidence. This implicitly emphasizes that claims of nobility that are not internalized in concrete actions are considered invalid, even not meeting the criteria of grammatical validity. The construction of this meaning is further accelerated when traced back to the pre-Islamic Arab era (*Jahiliyyah*). In this historical phase, the degree of nobility was sociologically constructed as a form of public honor measured by demonstrations of generosity, pride in ancestral lineage, and the dominance of tribal power. Through the linking of these contexts, the basic meaning structure of the root word k-r-m can be drawn into one complete conceptualization: a quality of greatness that is united in the essence of both substance and character, which integrates high instrumental value, dignity, and ease of giving, while simultaneously standing face to face with all forms of humiliation and reprehensible traits.

2.3. Relational Meaning: Syntagmatic Analysis

An analysis of the sentence context of the ten focus verses reveals three consistent patterns. The first pattern emerges when God becomes the agent of glorification. In QS. al-Isrā' [17]: 70, the word karramnā serves as the first predicate among four Divine acts, with the children of Adam as recipients, without qualification by faith, tribe, or status. This grammatical structure makes the universal nature of glorification not merely an interpretation but an inherent part of the verses' structure. Hamka added that the form of glorification encompasses reason, linguistic ability, and spiritual capacity, and thus cannot be reduced to material dimensions. The second pattern emerges when humans become the agents (Hamka., 2015).

The results of the examination of the linguistic ecosystem in the ten focus verses confirm the presence of three consistent structural typologies. The first conceptual pattern emerges when Allah acts as the main actor (*fā'il*) of glorification. In QS. al-Isrā' [17]: 70, the diction *karramnā* is positioned as the primary predicate of the four articulations of Divine action, by placing the phrase banī Ādam as the recipient object (*maf'ūl bih*) without being accompanied by prescriptions of faith qualifications, ethnic entities, or social strata hierarchies.

The exploration of the syntagmatic construction in the ten selected verses reflects three typologies of patterns that are consistently built. The first typology emerges when the Divine entity acts as the sole actor giving glorification. As expressed in QS. al-Isrā' [17]: 70, the verb form *karramnā* occupies a central position as an articulation of Divine action that precedes a series of other privileges, where the phrase banī Ādam is positioned as the recipient object without discrimination of background, ethnicity, or social strata. This open grammatical structure locks the universal nature of human glory as an innate entity of the textual structure itself, not merely a construction of external interpretation. In line with that, Buya Hamka emphasizes that the manifestation of primordial glorification includes completeness of thought power (*'aql*), linguistic articulation, and spiritual potential, so that its meaning cannot be narrowed down to merely materialistic indicators.

Shihab differentiates *takrīm* at the beginning of a verse from *tafḍīl* in the end. The first concerns the inherent blessings of humans, while the second concerns comparative superiority over other creatures (Shihab, 2002). The

command to speak noblely to parents in QS. al-Isrā' [17]: 23 is placed in a series with the provisions of monotheism, so that the ethics of honoring others appears as a direct continuation of the creed, not an addition to it. In QS. Yūsuf [12]: 21 the command to honor is directed to a foreign slave, which shows that the ikrām between humans in the Qur'an transcends social status barriers. Meanwhile, QS. al-Furqān [25]: 72 uses the word kirāman to describe the way to pass from futility, so that nobility also means maintaining one's dignity.

M. Quraish Shihab draws a clear line of argument by distinguishing between the conceptualization of takrīm at the beginning of the verse and tafḍīl at the end. The dimension of takrīm contains the essence of primordial virtue that has been existentially installed in every human individual, while tafḍīl refers to the articulation of relational superiority that distinguishes the position of humans compared to other created entities. This pattern of nobility is increasingly strengthened in the realm of social ethics; the instruction to speak noble words (qaulan karīman) to both parents in QS. al-Isrā' [17]: 23 is symmetrically woven in one breath with the commitment to monotheism. This construction theologically emphasizes that respect for humanity is not merely an ethical complement, but a logical consequence directly rooted in the structure of faith.

The inclusiveness of this value is further emphasized in QS. Yūsuf [12]: 21, where the call to give respect (akrimī maswāhu) is addressed to a migrant slave. This proves that the articulation of interpersonal ikrām in the Qur'an radically transcends the barriers of hierarchy and social strata. As for QS. al-Furqān [25]: 72, the diction kirāman is used to portray the ideal personality when traversing the phenomenon of futility, where nobility is transformed into a moral defense mechanism to maintain integrity and self-dignity.

Among the ten focus verses, QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13 occupies a special position because only there is the superlative form of the root k-r-m directly juxtaposed with the superlative form of the root takwa. The structure of the verse moves in three stages, namely the affirmation of the common origin of the creation of all humans, the explanation that the diversity of tribes and nations is intended for humans to know each other, and the establishment of piety as the sole measure of nobility. The most decisive marker lies in the phrase 'inda Allāh which moves the panel of judges from the community to the presence of Allah. This verse does not deny the existence of social respect, but revokes its authority as a measure of human worth. The third pattern appears when humans claim nobility for themselves. The sequence of QS. al-Fajr [89]: 15–17 records a way of thinking that equates abundance with honor and hardship with humiliation, then dismantles it through the word ibtalā which frames both conditions as tests. The next verse reverses the entire framework with a refutation of the kallā and a condemnation of not honoring orphans, so that the place of honor shifts from what one receives to what one gives to the weakest. A similar reversal occurs in QS. ad-Dukhān [44]: 49 when the term al-'azīz al-karīm is used ironically for the inhabitants of hell.

The most fundamental epistemological shift is marked by the presence of the phrase 'inda Allah. This clause radically shifts the throne of demarcation of judgment from the realm of public consensus to the domain of Divine sovereignty. This verse does not immediately eliminate the legitimacy of social respect in everyday reality, but rather revokes the absolute authority of society in claiming to be the measure of human dignity and worth. Meanwhile, a third pattern emerges when claims of glory are unilaterally constructed by humans for their own benefit. The series of QS. al-Fajr [89]: 15–17 peels away the materialistic perspective that identifies abundant sustenance as a manifestation of Divine love/glorification, and interprets economic narrowness as a form of dwarfism. This logical error is immediately destroyed by the insertion of the diction ibtalā, which redefines both extreme conditions solely as instruments of existential testing.

The next verse carries out a complete deconstruction of this framework of thought through a strong refutation of the kallā, followed by a moral correction of the negligence in honoring orphans. The implication is that the indicator of nobility is shifted dramatically: it is no longer measured by the accumulation of facilities received by a person, but by the extent of the care he contributes to the most vulnerable groups. An equally sharp reversal of meaning is expressed in QS. ad-Dukhān [44]: 49, where the predicate al-'azīz al-karīm is used ironically (sarcastically) to the inhabitants of hell in order to expose the falsity of the false claims of nobility that they once proudly carried in this world.

In addition to the ten focus verses, there is a group of supporting verses that show striking syntagmatic regularity. The expressions *rizq karīm, ajr karīm*, and *mudkhal karīm* in QS. al-Anfāl [8]: 4 and 74, QS. al-Ḥajj [22]: 50, QS. Saba' [34]: 4, and QS. an-Nūr [24]: 26 almost always appear after the mention of two qualities, namely faith and good deeds, and are often combined with forgiveness. This regularity is not accidental, as it shows that in the Qur'an's vocabulary, eschatological glory is bound to these two moral conditions. For the focus of this study, this pattern proves at the linguistic level that noble rewards are never promised on the basis of lineage, wealth, or position.

2.4. Relational Meaning: A Paradigmatic Analysis

In the word equivalence, *al-karamah* is next to *'izzah*, faḍl, elevation of rank, and the expression aḥsani taqwīm, but not identical with all of them. The word 'izzah emphasizes power and, like al-karamah, transfers the Qur'an entirely into the hands of Allah. The word faḍl work comparatively by comparing one party with another. The elevation of status in QS. az-Zukhruf [43]: 32 and QS. al-An'ām [6]: 165 is marked with a clear purpose, namely for humans to benefit each other and as a test, so that differences in socio-economic status should not be read as a map of dignity. In the word conflict, the most explicit opposites are ihanah and hūn. The Qur'an itself brings the two together with ikrām in one verse in QS. al-Ḥajj [22]: 18 which states that whoever is humiliated by Allah will not find a giver of glory.

In the conceptual mapping of the network of meaning equivalences, the term al-karāmah is closely aligned with several key concepts such as 'izzah, faḍl, elevation of rank (raf'u al-darajāt), as well as the formulation of aḥand taqwīm. However, al-karāmah cannot be absolutely equated with these terms because each contains a unique semantic focus. Meanwhile, in the context of the network of semantic oppositions, the most contrasting antonyms for al-karāmah are ihānah (insult) and hūn (humiliation). The Qur'an brings together the dictions of ihānah and ikrām directly in one nodal point in QS. al-Ḥajj [22]: 18. This verse underlines a fundamental theological principle: whoever is placed in a state of humiliation by Allah, there is no power in the universe that is able to restore him or bestow glory upon him.

Consequently, determining true humiliation is not within human authority. The use of the same root word in QS. an-Naḥl [16]: 58–59 reinforces this implication, because the perspective that places the birth of a girl as a humiliation is actually judged as a bad decision. żillah and khizy, on the other hand, denote humiliation and disgrace that are always associated with moral qualities, never with birth identity, while istikbār stands as a false imitation of glory whose first figure is Iblis when he refused to honor Adam. Another finding is negative but significant. The most established aristocratic vocabulary of honor in the Arabic tradition, namely the root word sy-r-f which gave rise to the term asyrāf for tribal leaders, is not used in the Qur'an. In Izutsu's framework, the elimination of such vocabulary is one of the most subtle ways in which a new worldview takes shape, because the old structure of honor is not refuted one by one but is denied a place from the start.

As a logical implication, the authority to determine true humiliation is absolutely beyond the realm of human authority. This implication is emphasized by the use of equivalent root words in QS. an-Naḥl [16]: 58–59, where the social construction of the Arab Jahiliyah which identified the birth of a girl as a burden of humiliation was sharply hit and judged as a very bad assessment (sā'a mā yaḥkumūn). On the other hand, the diction żillah and khizy represent forms of existential humiliation and humiliation that in the Qur'an are always tied to the weight of a person's moral qualities, not linked to the destiny of primordial identity at birth. Meanwhile, the trait of istikbar (arrogance) stands as a manifestation of destructive, false glory. This protocol of arrogance was first demonstrated by Iblis when he rebelled and refused to give honor (glorification) to Adam.

Beyond this network of words, a crucial negative finding emerged in the linguistic structure of the Qur'an. The aristocratic honorific vocabulary that was so dominant and deeply rooted in pre-Islamic Arab civilization, namely the root word sy-r-f that gave birth to the title asyrāf for tribal nobility, was deliberately never used in the Qur'an. Within Izutsu's methodological framework, the deconstruction and neglect of such vocabulary became the most sublime strategy for a new worldview (weltanschauung) to establish itself. The Qur'an did not need to debate the feudal honorific hierarchy one by one, but simply did not provide any space for articulation from the outset for such vocabulary in the cognitive system of its users.

Within Izutsu's methodological framework, the deconstruction and abandonment of such vocabulary becomes the most sublime strategy for a new worldview (weltanschauung) to establish itself. The Qur'an does not need to debate the feudal hierarchy of honor one by one, but simply by initially denying such vocabulary space for articulation in its users' cognitive systems. Through this elimination, the Qur'an successfully revolutionizes the essence of nobility from the basis of tribal feudalism to spiritual obedience and individual moral quality before God.

2.5. Synchronic and Diachronic Analysis

In the pre-Quranic era, nobility was a form of social honor centered on ostentatious generosity, noble lineage, and tribal might. This culture found expression in a tradition of boasting and mutual one-upmanship—a phenomenon the Quran records in Surah At-Takāthur [102]: 1–2 as a form of nobility that was quantified and treated as a contest. Such honor was guarded by a volatile temperament, as illustrated by the contrasting concepts of ḥilm (forbearance) and jahl (impulsive ignorance) within the ethical framework of early Arab society (Izutsu, 1993). In the sociocultural reality of the pre-Qur'anic era, the manifestation of nobility was articulated as a form of

public honor anchored in three primary pillars: the ostentatious display of generosity, claims of ancestral grandeur (nasab), and the geopolitical might of the tribe. This cultural construct found its principal arena in the tradition of at-takāṡur—a culture of mutual boasting regarding quantity and the exaltation of group greatness—which is critically immortalized in Surah at-Takāṡur [102]: 1–2 as a phenomenon of nobility that was quantified, tallied, and competed over with ostentation. This externally oriented nature of honor was underpinned by a highly sensitive and reactive psychological temperament, as reflected in the ethical dichotomy of classical Arab society between ḥilm (self-restraint) and jahl (an easily ignited emotional impulse).

When this root word entered the Quranic vocabulary, its meaning underwent five shifts. First, a shift toward God-centeredness, wherein the source and standard of honor moved from human beings to Allah. Second, an expansion of the recipients, extending honor from tribes and the nobility to all the descendants of Adam. Third, an ethical reinterpretation, shifting the criterion from lineage and wealth to piety, thereby transforming honor from an inheritance into an attainable achievement. Fourth, a social reinterpretation, directing the expression of honor toward the treatment of others, especially the vulnerable. Fifth, an eschatological reinterpretation, shifting the pinnacle of honor from worldly renown to the reward of the Hereafter.

In the sociocultural reality of the pre-Qur'anic era, the manifestation of nobility was articulated as a form of public honor grounded in three primary pillars: the ostentatious display of generosity, pride in lineage (nasab), and the geopolitical might of the tribe. This culture of pride found expression in the tradition of at-takāṡur—a practice of vying to surpass others in group size and grandeur—which is critically depicted in Surah At-Takāthur (102:1–2) as a phenomenon of nobility quantified and competed for ostentatiously, all while being sustained by a sensitive psychological temperament, as reflected in the dichotomy between ḥilm and jahl in classical Arab ethics. However, when the root k-r-m was integrated into the Qur'anic lexicon, its semantic structure underwent five fundamental and interconnected shifts.

It should be noted that this shift did not represent a complete rupture, but rather a realignment of its axis. The element of generosity was not eliminated; instead, it was redirected from the pursuit of tribal renown toward giving for the sake of Allah. This shift also extended to the nature of how honor was upheld. While pre-Islamic honor was maintained through a readiness to retaliate, the Qur'an commends self-restraint; the use of the word kirāman in Surah al-Furqān [25]: 72 serves as linguistic evidence that nobility is demonstrated not through retaliation, but through restraint. In the post-Qur'anic era, the meaning of the word karāmah shifted once more. Within the Sufi tradition, it evolved into a technical term denoting the extraordinary attributes of saints (awliyā'), thereby narrowing its scope from the inherent nobility of all human beings to the special qualities possessed by a select few. A reversal occurred in the modern period with the resurgence of the phrase karāmah insāniyyah (human dignity) to designate the dignity inherent in every human being, a concept grounded primarily in Surah al-Isrā' [17]: 70 (Kamali, 2002).

This conceptual shift did not represent a radical historical rupture, but rather a fundamental reorientation and restructuring of the axis of meaning. The element of generosity, for instance, was not simply eliminated from the value system; instead, its purpose was redirected—transforming from a pursuit of reputation and tribal renown into an expression of care grounded in intentions for the sake of Allah. This reorientation also influenced the psychological temperament of the guardians of honor; whereas dignity in the Jahiliyyah era was upheld through reactive and impulsive mechanisms of retaliation, the Qur'an positioned the capacity for self-restraint as the pinnacle of virtue. The use of the term kirāman in Surah al-Furqān [25]: 72 serves as clear linguistic evidence that nobility was no longer measured by the courage to retaliate, but by the steadfastness of self-restraint.

As history moved into the post-Qur'anic era, the manifestations of the word karāmah underwent further semantic evolution. Within the Sufi tradition, the term crystallized into a technical concept referring to the extraordinary or supernatural phenomena associated with saints (awliyā'); consequently, its scope of meaning narrowed from a universal existential right shared by all humanity to an exclusive privilege reserved for a select few. However, the modern period witnessed an epistemological reversal, as the concept of karāmah insāniyyah (human dignity) was revived to define the innate dignity inherent in every human being, with Surah al-Isrā' [17]: 70 serving as its primary theological foundation (Kamali, 2002).

2.6. The Semantic Field and Worldview of the Qur'an

All of the above findings can be compiled into a single semantic field with al-karamah as the focus word. This field is composed of seven interconnected sub-fields, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Sub-Fields and Semantic Field Keywords of *al-karamah*

Sub-Field	Keywords for Formation	Representative Sentence

Source	*Al-Akram*, *al-Karīm, 'inda Allāh*	al-'Alaq: 3; al-Ḥ13
Channel	*Qur'ān karīm, rasūl karīm, kirām bararah*	al-Wāqi'ah: 77; 'Abasa: 16
Recipient	*Karramnā banī Ādam, aḥsani taqwīm*	al-Isra': 70; at-Thin: 4
Size	*Taqwā, īmān, 'amal ṣāliḥ*	al-ḤUjurat: 13; al-Anfal: 4
Ethical form	*Qawlan karīmā, ikrām al-yatīm, marrū kirāman*	al-Isra': 23; al-Fajr: 17
Reply	*Rizq karīm, ajr karīm, maqām karīm*	al-Anfāl: 74; ad-Dukhān: 26
Opponent's field	*Ihānah, hūn, żillah, khizy, istikbār*	al-Ḥajj: 18; an-Naḥl: 59

The field is driven by three dimensions. The dimension of grace connects the source, channel, and recipient, and is descriptive in nature because it states what has happened to each human being unconditionally. The dimension of proof connects the measure, ethical form, and reward, and is imperative in nature because it states what humans must do with this grace. The dimension of opposition brings the entire structure into contact with its opposing field, and is polemical in nature because every affirmation of glory is simultaneously a rejection of the humiliation imposed by humans. From these three dimensions, the Qur'anic worldview on human glory can be formulated in five statements. Human glory is a universal gift, not an achievement. This glory has the status of a trust that demands a response. Its vertical dimension is piety, while its horizontal manifestation is the glorification of others. True glory is clearly distinguished from its imitation, which is istikbar. And glory moves in a circular motion, originating from God, practiced among humans, and then returning to Him to be weighed.

This semantic construction is accelerated and driven by three interconnected conceptual dimensions, namely the dimension of grace which is descriptive in nature because it affirms the universal existential primacy of every human being without conditions, the dimension of proof which is imperative in nature because it demands a real ethical response and responsibility for this grace, and the dimension of conflict which is polemical in nature because every articulation of Divine glorification automatically destroys the claim of humiliation imposed by fellow human beings.

From the interconnection of these three holistic dimensions, the weltanschauung or worldview of the Qur'an regarding the nature of human nobility can be formulated into five conceptual pillars: nobility is essentially a primordial universal gift and not merely an individual achievement, this existential virtue is carried out as a moral mandate that demands real proof, the benchmark of nobility is vertical in the form of piety with the articulation of horizontal forms in the form of glorification of others, true nobility is clearly separated from its false imitation in the form of istikbār (arrogance), and nobility has a circular movement, namely originating from God, actualized in social praxis in the midst of society, and then returning to Him to be weighed eschatologically.

This construction also shows the difference between this study and previous research. The semantic field compiled by ('Ulya, 2020) focuses on the word karīm in general and identifies the words that accompany it. The semantic field in this study is structured specifically around the issue of human nobility, so that its structure is not simply a list of juxtaposed words, but rather a relational map that shows where nobility comes from, to whom it is given, with what measure, how it is realized, and what its opposite is. This formulation has a methodological implication. No single verse about nobility can be read alone. QS. al-Isrā' [17]: 70 without QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13 gives rise to the concept of glory without responsibility, while QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13 without QS. al-Isrā' [17]: 70 can be misled into the assumption that humans outside the pious group do not have dignity.

This construction also emphasizes the methodological demarcation that distinguishes this study from previous research. In previous studies, semantic field mapping was generally constructed generically around the word karīm to record the entities of terms that are side by side with it. In contrast, the semantic field in this study is designed specifically and focused on the axis of existence of human glory, so that the resulting structure does not merely compile a list of adjacent vocabulary, but presents a comprehensive relational matrix, a systematic map that elaborates the muasabah of glory, the subject of its recipient, the benchmark for its assessment, the articulation of its embodiment, and its oppositional entity.

This concept gives rise to a fundamental methodological implication, namely that not a single verse of the Qur'an regarding glory can be interpreted partially or in isolation. Reading QS. al-Isrā' [17]: 70 without involving it with QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13 risks triggering an understanding of glory that is free from ethical responsibility. On the contrary, isolating QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13 without being based on the primordial foundation of QS. al-Isrā' [17]: 70 has the potential to slip into exclusive assumptions that ignore the existential dignity of humans outside the group of those who are pious ('Ulya, 2020).

2.7. Integration with Humanitarian Values in Islam

The semantic findings above meet three humanitarian values formulated by modern Muslim figures. Regarding the value of dignity, Kamali asserts that human dignity is a divine gift inherent in humans as humans and does not depend on individual achievements, so it cannot be revoked by any ruler or institution. Linguistic analysis strengthens this formulation through three pieces of evidence: the verb pattern *karramnā* which emphasizes God as the sole agent, the placement of *ihānah* as the sole authority of God, and the absence of the passive form *mukram* for dignity derived from social status (Kamali, 2002).

The results of the semantic mapping are symmetrically intertwined with the three principles of humanity formulated by contemporary Muslim thinkers. In the context of the value of human dignity, Mohammad Hashim Kamali emphasized that human nobility is a divine gift inherent in human existence itself, independent of individual qualifications or achievements, and that the essence of this dignity cannot be annulled or revoked by any institution of power. Linguistic proof of this construction is strengthened by three solid linguistic findings, namely the use of the verb *karramnā* in intensive form which places God as the sole actor who gives glory, the affirmation that the authority to determine humiliation (*ihānah*) lies exclusively in God's sovereignty alone, and the absence of the use of the passive participle (*ism maf'ūl*) *mukram* to describe glory that is rooted merely in the accumulation of social status.

On the value of equality, Madjid read QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 11–13 as the basic teaching of brotherhood that is passed on to the wider brotherhood of humanity, and juxtaposes it with the hadith that there is no superiority of Arabs over non-Arabs except through piety (Madjid, 1999). This reading aligns with the function of the phrase 'inda Allāh (in the sight of Allah), which shifts the locus of judgment regarding nobility to the Divine presence, thereby stripping any human being or institution of the authority to appoint themselves as the arbiter of human dignity. Equality in Islam, therefore, is not the product of negating God, but rather stems from affirming His absolute sovereignty.

Regarding the value of equality, Nurcholish Madjid analyzes Surah al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 11–13 as a primordial doctrine of religious brotherhood (*ukhuwwah islāmiyyah*) that extends its reach to the landscape of universal human brotherhood (*ukhuwwah insāniyyah*). He places this alongside Prophetic traditions affirming that there is no racial superiority between Arabs and non-Arabs, save on the basis of spiritual devotion.

This critical reading converges perfectly with the syntagmatic function of the phrase 'inda Allāh, which radically shifts the exclusive forum for determining nobility to the Divine presence, thereby stripping any individual or institution of the authority to position themselves as the sole measure of human dignity. Thus, the principle of equality in Islam does not arise from secularization or the elimination of the Divine; rather, it is the fruit of affirming the absolute sovereignty of the One God.

Regarding the value of justice, Essack asserts that Qur'anic interpretation never emerges from a vacuum; consequently, interpretations that ignore the suffering of the oppressed risk perpetuating oppression. He proposes several hermeneutic keys derived from the Qur'an's own vocabulary—including taqwā, tauḥīd, al-nās, al-mustaḍ'afūn fī al-arḍ, and 'adl wa qisṭ (Esack, 1997).

In the context of justice, Farid Essack emphasizes that any interpretation of the Qur'an never exists in a vacuum isolated from social reality; consequently, a hermeneutic approach that turns a blind eye to the suffering of the oppressed risks becoming an instrument that legitimizes the very structures of oppression. To counter such power-based bias, Essack proposes a set of hermeneutic pillars derived transformatively from the Qur'anic lexicon itself—specifically by integrating the concepts of *taqwā* (God-consciousness), *tauḥīd* (divine oneness), *al-nās* (humanity), and *al-mustaḍ'afūn fī al-arḍ* (the marginalized or oppressed), alongside the principles of *'adl* and *qisṭ* (justice and substantive equity).

Crucial to this study is his understanding of taqwā—defined as an awareness of living in the presence of God that demands tangible engagement in defending the downtrodden. This aligns precisely with the study's findings regarding taqwā as the criterion for nobility. Surah al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13 asserts that the noblest among people are those who possess the greatest taqwā; this assertion simultaneously invalidates all other metrics of worth, such as race, ethnicity, gender, or social status. If, according to Essack, *taqwā* manifests as solidarity with the weak, then social justice is not merely an add-on to the concept of nobility but a concrete expression of that very criterion. Those who uphold justice demonstrate their taqwā—and thereby their nobility—in the sight of God. The converse holds true as well: individuals who act arrogantly and demean others based on wealth or position are employing a standard that the Qur'an invalidates, revealing a lack of taqwā within themselves.

The most fundamental element of this study lies in Essack's reconceptualization of taqwa (God-consciousness or piety)—an existential awareness before God that imperatively demands tangible proof through

the defense of the marginalized (*al-mustaḍ'afūn*). This semantic analysis converges most specifically on the position of taqwa as the singular axis of human nobility. Through Surah al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13, the Qur'an underscores that the highest degree of nobility is held absolutely by the most pious—an assertion that automatically invalidates all other artificial criteria based on race, ethnicity, gender, or social stratification. Following Essack's line of thought—wherein taqwa crystallizes into a concrete stance in favor of the oppressed—the praxis of social justice is not merely an ethical ornament appended to the concept of *karāmah* (human dignity/nobility), but rather a tangible embodiment of that very measure of nobility. An individual who upholds justice is, in essence, articulating their taqwa while simultaneously affirming their status of nobility in the Divine presence. Conversely, one who harbors arrogance (istikbār) while belittling others based on material possessions or hierarchical rank is adopting a false standard—one already deconstructed by the Qur'an—thereby revealing a lack of taqwa within themselves.

The most fundamental element of this study lies in Essack's reconceptualization of *taqwa* (God-consciousness or piety)—an existential awareness before God that imperatively demands tangible proof through the defense of the marginalized (al-mustaḍ'afūn). This semantic analysis converges most specifically on the position of taqwa as the singular axis of human nobility. Through Surah al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13, the Qur'an underscores that the highest degree of nobility is held absolutely by the most pious—an assertion that automatically invalidates all other artificial criteria based on race, ethnicity, gender, or social stratification. Following Essack's line of thought—wherein taqwa crystallizes into a concrete stance in favor of the oppressed—the praxis of social justice is not merely an ethical ornament appended to the concept of karāmah (human dignity/nobility), but rather a tangible embodiment of that very measure of nobility. An individual who upholds justice is, in essence, articulating their taqwa while simultaneously affirming their status of nobility in the Divine presence. Conversely, one who harbors arrogance (istikbār) while belittling others based on material possessions or hierarchical rank is adopting a false standard—one already deconstructed by the Qur'an—thereby manifesting a behavior that exposes the absence of taqwa within themselves.

This paradigm shift is reaffirmed by the Qur'an through far more direct and stern language in Surah al-Mā'ūn [107]: 1–3, which explicitly identifies individuals who harshly repulse orphans and fail to champion the feeding of the destitute as deniers of the faith (mukażżib bi al-dīn). The argumentative structure of this Surah mirrors that of Surah al-Fajr [89]: 15–18, as both passages highlight the same pair of marginalized groups. However, Surah al-Mā'ūn significantly raises the ethical bar: reprehensible conduct toward vulnerable groups is no longer viewed merely as an indicator of a lack of noble character, but is condemned as proof of a false faith and a denial of the very tenets of religion. The convergence of these two Surahs confirms that advocacy for the marginalized is not merely a peripheral narrative found in isolated verses, but a recurring doctrinal pattern that serves as a litmus test for the authenticity of one's religious commitment.

Furthermore, these semantic findings offer a fundamental correction to the general orientation of discourse on justice. The key terminology employed in Surah al-Fajr [89]: 17 extends beyond the distributive act of feeding; it is rooted in the imperative to honor the orphan. Consequently, the social justice mandated by the Qur'an is not limited to calculations of charity or the mere distribution of material aid, but encompasses the restoration of the recipients' human dignity. Providing assistance while simultaneously engaging in acts that diminish or degrade the recipient's worth stands in direct contradiction to the essence of the verse. It is at this juncture that linguistic analysis makes its epistemological contribution to the discourse on social justice, demonstrating that the Qur'an—starting with its choice of key verbs—demands an ethical enlightenment that transcends mere redistribution of material assets.

A comparison of the three thoughts and their points of intersection with semantic findings is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Meeting Points of Thought of Three Figures with Semantic Findings

Figure	Main Idea	Bridged Semantic Findings	Mark
Maybe	Dignity comes from God, is inherent in every human being, and cannot be revoked.	The form karramnā (We have honored) applies to the Children of Adam unconditionally; ihānah (humiliation) is the prerogative of Allah.	Human dignity
Madjid	Piety fosters an egalitarian attitude; no human being has the right to determine the value of another.	The function of the phrase 'inda Allāh; the antonym of hūn in An-Naḥl 59	Equality

Figure	Main Idea	Bridged Semantic Findings	Mark
Essack	Piety is an awareness of Allah that manifests itself in siding with the weak.	Piety as the measure of nobility; arrogance as false nobility.	Justice

The resulting relationship is two-way. Semantic findings provide textual roots for human values, preventing them from floating around as jargon, while value formulations provide operational form for semantic findings, preventing them from becoming mere word analysis. This distinguishes this study from previous research, as equality and justice are not treated as modern notions seeking justification from verses, but rather are explored as consequences of the workings of the Quran's vocabulary itself. This framework also provides a precise reading of contemporary phenomena.

The relationship between the two is circular and mutually reinforcing. The findings of semantic analysis provide a solid textual foundation for humanitarian principles, preventing them from evaporating into mere rhetorical discourse, while the formulation of these values provides an operational articulation of the results of the linguistic analysis, preventing them from being isolated as a sterile vocabulary search. This interactive character demarcates this study from previous studies; the principles of equality and justice are not treated as constructs of modern thought that are artificially justified, but rather are traced as logical implications that arise organically from the working mechanisms of the Qur'an's vocabulary itself. This conceptual framework also provides a precise analytical tool for dissecting and responding to the various dynamics of contemporary phenomena.

The culture of flaunting possessions on social media is essentially nothing new, but rather a modern form of the culture of boasting that has been documented and condemned in the Quran. What has changed is only the stage, from tribal assemblies to timelines, while the mechanism remains the same: glory is calculated, compared, and contested. The real problem is not the disappearance of the word "glory" from society's vocabulary, but rather the reintroduction of the word with its old content while maintaining its Islamic form. It is at this point that semantic studies discover its social function: restoring the Quranic content to a word already owned by society.

The phenomenon of flaunting possessions—or "flexing"—on social media platforms is not, in essence, a new discourse; rather, it is a contemporary articulation of the culture of boastful rivalry (at-takāṡur) that the Qur'an has long documented and incisively deconstructed. The shift lies solely in the stage upon which this plays out—moving from the tribal gathering to the timeline algorithm—while the underlying mechanism remains constant: a conception of honor that is quantified, compared, and ostentatiously competed over. The fundamental issue arising today is not the disappearance of the concept of "honor" from the public lexicon, but rather the re-infusion of that term with pre-Qur'anic values, even as its outward Islamic veneer is maintained. It is at this critical juncture that semantic analysis finds its balancing social function: restoring and re-internalizing the essence of the Qur'anic meaning into the vocabulary that shapes the reality of social life.

3. CONCLUSION

The basic meaning of the root word k-r-m is the nobility inherent in both substance and character, encompassing nuances of high value, honor, and generosity, and in contrast to blameworthiness and humiliation. Its relational meaning is spread out in three patterns, namely nobility as a gift from God, as an ethical demand for others, and as a claim that is contested when based on wealth and power; in the Qur'an, this concept undergoes five shifts that form a semantic field with seven sub-fields and three dimensions, thus formulating a worldview that every human being is honored since their creation and is called to prove that nobility through piety. This finding aligns with the values of dignity, equality, and justice, demonstrating that the value of humanity in Islam is rooted in the Qur'an's vocabulary. Practically, this finding can be used as a basis for instilling morals that are based on faith, especially in education and preaching, because demeaning humans based on their identity not only violates social ethics, but also usurps the authority to determine humiliation, which, according to the Qur'an, belongs only to God. This study has limitations because it is limited to a single root word with ten focal verses and three figures as dialogue partners. Further research is recommended to explore the words *taqwā* and *'izzah* using the same method and empirically test the extent to which the narrowing of the meaning of *karamah* has occurred in the understanding of Muslim communities.

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