

## Counter Discourse on the Idea of Islamic State and Formalization of Religion in the Qur'anic Exegesis of KH. Abdurrahman Wahid

*Kontra Wacana terhadap Gagasan Negara Islam dan Formalisasi Agama dalam Tafsir KH Abdurrahman Wahid*

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### Abstract

This research discusses KH Abdurrahman Wahid's Qur'anic interpretation written in his articles around the 2002–2003 period. Initial studies of the text show that Gus Dur was only active in elaborating the Qur'anic verses in his articles after he stepped down from the president and Chairman of the PBNU. This initial observation then raised questions regarding his lack of interpretation during Orde Baru (New Order), primarily when he served as Chairman of PBNU. Thus, what context finally made Gus Dur want to include the interpretation of the Qur'an in his article? This paper answers these questions using a descriptive-interpretive method. The theory used is the critical discourse analysis by Teun A. Van Dijk, which contains three steps, namely text analysis, personal and social cognition, and context. Furthermore, the results reveal that: (1) there is a discourse contest in the democratic transition period between those who are pro with an Islamic state and those against it; (2) Gus Dur positioned himself as a party against the idea of an Islamic state. It happened when Gus Dur used the verses of the Qur'an to strengthen his argument; (3) Gus Dur's interpretation which prioritizes the principle of humanity and can reach a wider audience, has implications indirectly for the development of the interpretation of the Qur'an in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Gus Dur; tafsir; article; discourse analysis; Islamic state

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas penafsiran KH. Abdurrahman Wahid yang tertuang di dalam artikel-artikel yang ia tulis dalam rentang waktu 2002-2003. Studi awal atas teks menunjukkan bahwa Gus Dur baru aktif mengelaborasi ayat al-Qur'an setelah ia tak lagi menjabat sebagai presiden dan Ketua Umum PBNU. Pengamatan awal tersebut kemudian memunculkan pertanyaan terkait ketiadaan penafsirannya semasa Orde Baru, khususnya ketika ia menjabat sebagai Ketua Umum PBNU. Dengan demikian, konteks apa yang akhirnya membuat Gus Dur ingin memasukkan penafsiran al-Qur'an di dalam artikelnya? Tulisan ini menjawab pertanyaan tersebut menggunakan metode deskriptif-interpretatif. Teori yang dipakai adalah analisis wacana kritis Teun A. Van Dijk, yang terdiri dari tiga langkah, yakni analisis teks, kognisi personal dan sosial serta konteks. Hasil penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa: (1) terdapat pertarungan wacana di masa transisi demokrasi, antara yang pro dengan negara Islam dengan yang kontra terhadapnya; (2) Gus Dur memosisikan diri sebagai pihak yang kontra terhadap gagasan negara Islam. Di sinilah Gus Dur menggunakan ayat al-Qur'an sebagai penguat argumennya; (3) penafsiran Gus Dur yang lebih mengedepankan prinsip kemanusiaan serta mampu menggapai pembaca yang lebih luas, secara tidak langsung memberi implikasi bagi perkembangan tafsir al-Qur'an di Indonesia.

**Kata kunci:** Gus Dur; tafsir; artikel; analisis wacana; negara islam



## Introduction

Abdurrahman Wahid, commonly called Gus Dur (this paper will use this designation), is a religious, humanist, thinker, and pro-democracy figure who has carried out religious experiments to realize the fundamental values of religion in the social sphere.<sup>1</sup> To date, Gus Dur's writings and speeches have been studied seriously by young people along with the works of other progressive thinkers, such as Nurcholish Madjid and Djohan Effendi.<sup>2</sup> The productivity of Gus Dur in expressing his ideas and thoughts is why this paper chooses Gus Dur as the object of research. The second reason is the lack of interest of researchers, particularly in the field of Qur'anic studies, in examining Gus Dur's thoughts on the Qur'an and his commentary.

There are several reasons why this aspect is 'invisible.' Firstly, Gus Dur is commonly known as a thinker, political and democracy activist, and humanist. Consequently, Gus Dur's thoughts and commentary on the Qur'an were drowned out by conventional researches. Meanwhile, other figures such as Nurcholish Madjid, who does not have an academic background in Qur'anic studies, have been examined his main ideas on the Qur'an by several scholars. Among these, the most comprehensive are those written by AH. Johns and Abdullah Saeed. They demonstrated how the contextualization of the Qur'an by Cak Nur was heavily influenced by his teacher, Fazlur Rahman.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, Gus Dur never wrote a complete book of commentary. Nevertheless, Gus Dur employs many verses of the Qur'an that he interprets to support the arguments in his article. Therefore, what Gus Dur did is an interesting phenomenon to be researched further. In addition, because the material object in this study is a collection of articles containing the commentary of the Qur'an, this paper will return the concept of interpretation to its base meaning in Arabic. Namely, *al-idah wa al-tabyin*. Linguistically, it is rooted in the word *al-fasr* (*fa sa ra*), which explains and reveals.<sup>4</sup> In *Lisan al-'Arab*, the word *al-fasru* means revealing something closed, while the word *al-tafsir* means revealing the meaning of an abstruse expression.<sup>5</sup> This perspective assumes that any attempt to explain or interpret the Qur'an can be

1 Ahmad Salehudin, *Abdurrahman Wahid* (Yogyakarta: Basabasi, 2019), p. 33.

2 G Barton, *Biografi Gus Dur: The Authorized Biography of Abdurrahman Wahid*, trans. Lie Hua (LKIS Pelangi Aksara, 2002), p. 183.

3 AH. Johns and Abdullah Saeed, 'Nurcholish Majid and the Interpretation of the Qur'an: Religious Pluralism and Tolerance', in *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an*, ed. by Suha Taji-Farouki (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 79.

4 Muhammad Husain al- Zahabi, *Al-Tafsir Wa Al-Mufasssirun*, vol. 1 (Kairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 2000), p. 12.

5 Imam ibn Manzur, *Lisān Al-'Arab*, vol.6 (Kerajaan Arab Saudi: Kementerian Urusan Islam, Wakaf, Dakwah dan Penyuluhan, n.d), p. 361.

called an interpretation.<sup>6</sup>

According to Andreas Görke (2014), this perspective is an alternative tool for studying tafsir, which is still dominated by commentaries formally printed, written by Arab Muslim intellectuals, so that it only shows part of the various exegetical activity of Muslims.<sup>7</sup> Görke presented several typologies, namely: (1) oral tafsir; (2) partial tafsir; (3) lay exegesis; and (4) regional tafsir written in various regional languages. Islah Gusmian has studied these four typologies. Unfortunately, when constructing a new direction of the methodology for studying the interpretation of the Qur'an, Islah Gusmian was still framed by the traditional concept of formal interpretation,<sup>8</sup> thereby limiting the scope of the observed exegetical activity, something that Görke still questions.

Furthermore, Johanna Pink (2010) said that studying the periodization of tafsir from classical to modern could not help analyze the phenomena of interpretation in contemporary times.<sup>9</sup> Pink then made three types of interpretation of the Qur'an, taking into account the authorship, origin, target group, and style of commentaries, namely: (1) scholar's commentaries; (2) institutional commentaries; and (3) popularizing commentaries that use mass media such as newspapers, magazines, and television as the medium.<sup>10</sup> This analysis from Pink was then used by Fadhli Lukman when he observed exegetical activity on social media. Fadhli Lukman (2018) concluded that the existence of social media had brought tafsir from an exclusive affair into a personal and private sphere, in which the interpretation of the Qur'an is not only a matter for the elite but also all social media users.<sup>11</sup> Lukman's research provided a new perspective on the study of interpretation and the possibility to examine every attempt at exegesis in various media, not just those formally printed.

One commentary resulting from its relationship with the mass media is commentary included in Gus Dur's articles. Interestingly, Gus Dur's articles

6 and Johanna Pink Görke, Andreas, 'Introduction', in *Tafsir and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre*, ed. by Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 3.

7 Andreas Görke, 'Redefining the Borders of Tafsir: Oral Exegesis, Lay Exegesis and Regional Particularities', in *Tafsir and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre*, ed. by Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 373.

8 Islah Gusmian, *Khazanah Tafsir Indonesia: Dari Hermeneutika Hingga Ideologi* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2013), p. 120.

9 Johanna Pink, 'Tradition, Authority and Innovation in Contemporary Sunni Tafsir: Towards a Typology of Qur'an Commentaries from the Arab World, Indonesia and Turkey.', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 1 (2010), p. 56, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3366/E1465359110000963>.

10 Pink, p. 61-62.

11 Fadhli Lukman, 'Digital Hermeneutics and a New Face of the Qur'an Commentary: The Qur'an in Indonesian's Facebook', *Al-Jami'ah*, 56.1 (2018), p. 115, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2018.561.95-120>.

containing his commentary of the Qur'an were not found when he was active in the religious-based community organization, Nahdhatul 'Ulama. Moreover, the policies of the New Order regime, which frequently conflicted with the interests and mission of Muslims,<sup>12</sup> did not make Gus Dur explore the verses of the Qur'an, as was done by most intellectuals at that time.<sup>13</sup> Gus Dur's interest in elaborating the verses of the Qur'an appeared when he stepped down as chairman of the PBNU.

This paper analyzes Gus Dur's commentary in the articles he wrote in the 2002-2003 period from the description above. The existence of Gus Dur's commentary in the mass media after his descent as chairman of the PBNU and president raises academic questions regarding the hidden agenda behind the use of the verses of the Qur'an. Hence, to answer this question, this paper uses a descriptive-interpretative method with the Critical Discourse Analysis theory offered by Teun A. Van Dijk. According to Islah Gusmian, this analysis emphasizes the constellation of forces that occur while producing and reproducing meaning. The central character in Critical Discourse Analysis, as pointed out by Teun A. Van Dijk, is that discourse represents: (1) action; (2) specific context or situation; (3) history, namely the social context that accompanies the discourse; (4) power—every text does not arise naturally, but as a result of a power struggle; and (5) ideology—text is a reflection of a certain ideology.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, a discourse has three dimensions, namely text, social cognition, and context. These three dimensions are in one unit of analysis. The text focuses on the structure and discourse strategies used to emphasize a specific theme. Social cognition examines the process of text induction which involves the author's cognitions. The social context aspect explains the discourse that develops in society.<sup>15</sup> By looking at the political situation that occurred at that time, the dialectic between the interpretation of the Qur'an and the life of the KH. Abdurahman Wahid will be seen. The primary research resources are Gus Dur's articles summarized in *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita* (My Islam, Your Islam, and Our Islam). Additionally, the secondary sources are all the articles written by Gus Dur, books that discuss his thoughts, and related journals.

12 Syamsul Wathani, 'Tafsir Alquran Dan Kekuasaan Politik Di Indonesia (Perspektif Analisis Wacana Dan Dialektika)', *Nun*, 2.1 (2016), p. 185 <https://doi.org/10.32459/nun.v2i1.6>.

13 Islah Gusmian, 'Tafsir al-Qur'an dan Kekuasaan (Menelusuri Jejak Dialektika Tafsir Al-Qur'an Dan Praktik Politik Rezim Orde Baru)', *Annur: Journal Study of The Science of Al-Quran and It's Interpretation*, 1.1 (Desember 2017), p. 38.

14 Islah Gusmian, 'Paradigma Penelitian Tafsir Al-Qur'an Di Indonesia', *Empirisma*, 24.1 (2016), p. 5, <https://doi.org/10.30762/empirisma.v24i1.1>.

15 Umar. Fauzan, 'Analisis Wacana Kritis Dari Model Fairclough Hingga Mills', *Pendidik*, 6.1 (2014), p. 11.

## Macro Context of Religious Movements in Post-New Order Indonesia

The Islamism movement, silenced by the *Orde Baru* (New Order) regime for a long time, reappeared after the reform era. KAMMI as a representative of contemporary Tarbiyah, even participated in initiating Suharto's fall from the presidency.<sup>16</sup> According to Azyumardi Azra, after the fall of the New Order regime, there was a phenomenon of the rise of Islamic mass organizations with radical, militant, and even fundamentalist orientations. Because while leading, the New Order regime depoliticized Islamic ideology that caused disappointment for Indonesian Muslims. That disappointment emerged and was expressed through movements generally called 'fundamentalist,' 'militant,' 'radical,' or 'split' that appeared in various regions throughout the 1970s to 1980s.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, along with the freedom of the Habibie era, Islamic organizations increasingly found their momentum to fight for Islamic aspirations with radical movements. *Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah* Communication Forum (FKASW), *Ikhwanul Muslimin*, HAMAS, *Hizbut Tahrir*, and *Majelis Mujahidin* followed other Islamic organizations that appeared in the New Order period, such as Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), Indonesian Committee for Islamic World Solidarity (KISDI) and Indonesian Muslim Workers Association (PPMI). These Islamic organizations showed their exclusive, symbolic, literalist, and radical religious attitudes, which would carry out any activity without compromising their spirit of jihad.<sup>18</sup>

These activists considered their community authentic Muslims who have a noble duty to apply Islamic law and establish Islamic political authority. Generally, in the social sphere, these groups carried out four types of actions: explosion in the churches or buildings often visited by Europeans; campaign for war against prostitution, pornography, narcotics, alcohol, and gambling; doing a mass march and street protest.<sup>19</sup> These actions will never be allowed by the New Order regime if they happened in their period. The post-New Order government did not take any action in facing the phenomenon of reappeared radical movements in Indonesia. Therefore, the rise of Islamic politics after the Reformation was marked by a rise of

16 Rendy Adiwilaga, 'Gerakan Islam Politik Dan Proyek Historis Penegakan Islamisme Di Indonesia', *Jurnal Wacana Politik*, 2.1 (2017), p. 5, <https://doi.org/10.24198/jwp.v2i1.11373>.

17 Abdurrahman Wahid, *Tuhan Tidak Perlu Dibela* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1999), p. xxix.

18 Khamami Zada, *Islam Radikal: Pergulatan Ormas-Ormas Islam Garis Keras Di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Teraju, 2002), p. 77.

19 Eric Hiariej, 'Aksi Dan Identitas Kolektif Gerakan Islam Radikal Di Indonesia', *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik*, 14.2 (2010), p. 160, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jsp.10934>.

Islamic organizations with radical and militant orientations.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, HTI was more daring to voice *Islam kaffah* as a formal system. Furthermore, the entire elite of the FPI agreed at a large meeting in 2002 that FPI had an attitude to demand that Islamic law should be included in Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution by adding “the obligation to carry out Islamic Law for its adherents.”<sup>21</sup>

The emergence of demands for applying Islamic law formally is based on the view that Islam is a perfect religion, which encompasses all ways of life in total. Accordingly, Islam must be applied as the only reference in solving various problems of the nation. Furthermore, there is a strong desire to show the specific Islamic identity amid mixed identities in globalization. In addition, corruption factor, no guarantee of legal certainty, the judiciary that is not independent and even frequently used as a tool of power also gives these groups the reason in offering legal alternatives.<sup>22</sup> Suparman Syukur notes that attempts to change the state’s basis or ideology with the concept of Islam formal, in the democratic transition period, is a hijacking activity of democracy. The momentum of freedom provides convenience to fundamentalist groups to go out to the public to voice their ideological-political aspirations.<sup>23</sup> From the explanation above, it is clear that the democratic transition period harms religious life in Indonesia. The formalization of religion is the outcome of the literal reading of religious texts and is very dangerous, both for the religion itself, its adherents, and adherents of others. Scriptural messages are reduced to the ideological interest level; monolithic meanings will lead to the uniformity of religious adherents so that other religions’ adherents will be marginalized. Since these groups take religious texts literally and ignore verses and hadith that do not support their interests,<sup>24</sup> Gus Dur criticized them. Gus Dur emphasized that the transformation of religion into the reality of life, both through actions and interpretations of scripture texts, must be based on the interests of humans and humanity instead of defending God.<sup>25</sup>

The formalization of religion, including the desire to establish an Islamic state, is called by Syafi’i Anwar, rooted in the legal-exclusive paradigm. This paradigm shows attention to an orientation that supports imagined forms of Islamic political society, such as realizing an ‘Islamic political system,’ the emergence of

20 Zada, p. 77.

21 Adiwilaga, p. 5.

22 *Ilusi Negara Islam: Ekspansi Gerakan Islam Transnasional Di Indonesia*, ed. by Abdurrahman Wahid (Jakarta: Wahid Institute, 2009), p. 130-31.

23 Suparman Syukur, ‘Islam Radikal Vs Islam Rahmah Kasus Indonesia’, *Jurnal Theologia*, 23.1 (2017), p. 90, <https://doi.org/10.21580/teo.2012.23.1.1761>.

24 Wahid, *Ilusi Negara Islam: Ekspansi Gerakan Islam Transnasional Di Indonesia*, p. 103-4.

25 Wahid, *Tuhan Tidak Perlu Dibela*, p. xxxv.

Islamic parties, symbolic expressions, and idioms of politics, society, Islamic culture, and experimentation with the Islamic state administration. In the Indonesian context, advocates of the legal-exclusive paradigm accentuate ideological nation and politicization of religion, leading to religious symbolism.<sup>26</sup> This phenomenon demonstrates the significant differences among Muslims regarding the relationship between Islam and state ideology. From the explanation above, it is clear where Gus Dur's position is in terms of the relationship between Islam and state ideology. Further explanation will be explained in the following sections.

### Gus Dur and His Thoughts on the Qur'an

Gus Dur was born in Denanyar, Jombang in his maternal grandfather's boarding school, Kiai Bisri Syansuri. Gus Dur has two versions of his birth date. First, Gus Dur was born on the 4th of August, 1940, which is always celebrated, and the second is the actual date of his birth, which is the fourth day of the eighth month or 4 *Sya'ban* 1940, which coincides with the 7th of September. Gus Dur began his formal education at the KRIS Primary School, Central Jakarta. Then, he moved to Matraman Putra Perwari Primary School that is closer to his family home.<sup>27</sup> He graduated from primary school in 1953. Then, he continued his education at the Yogyakarta Junior High School of Economics (SMEP) and graduated in 1956. At that school, Gus Dur had mastered English and began readings *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx and the romances of Jean-Paul Sartre, in between his busy reading of the Religious books.<sup>28</sup>

To complete his education, Gus Dur used the time to learn Arabic with KH. Ali Ma'shum at the al-Munawwir Boarding School. When he graduated from SMEP in 1957, Gus Dur attended lessons at the Tegalrejo Boarding School full with Kiai Khudori until mid-1959. In 1959 he moved to Jombang to continue his education at Tambakberas Boarding School under the enlightenment of Kiai Wahab Chasbullah until 1963.<sup>29</sup> In the following year, Gus Dur left for Al-Azhar Kairo and then moved to Baghdad. In the middle of 1970, Gus Dur completed four years of study at the University of Baghdad and then moved to Europe until he returned to Indonesia in mid-1971.<sup>30</sup> Gus Dur's diverse educational background shapes his specific views

26 M. Syafi'i Anwar, 'Membingkai Potret Pemikiran Politik KH Abdurrahman Wahid', in *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi* (Jakarta: Wahid Institute, 2006), xxii.

27 Barton, p. 25-40.

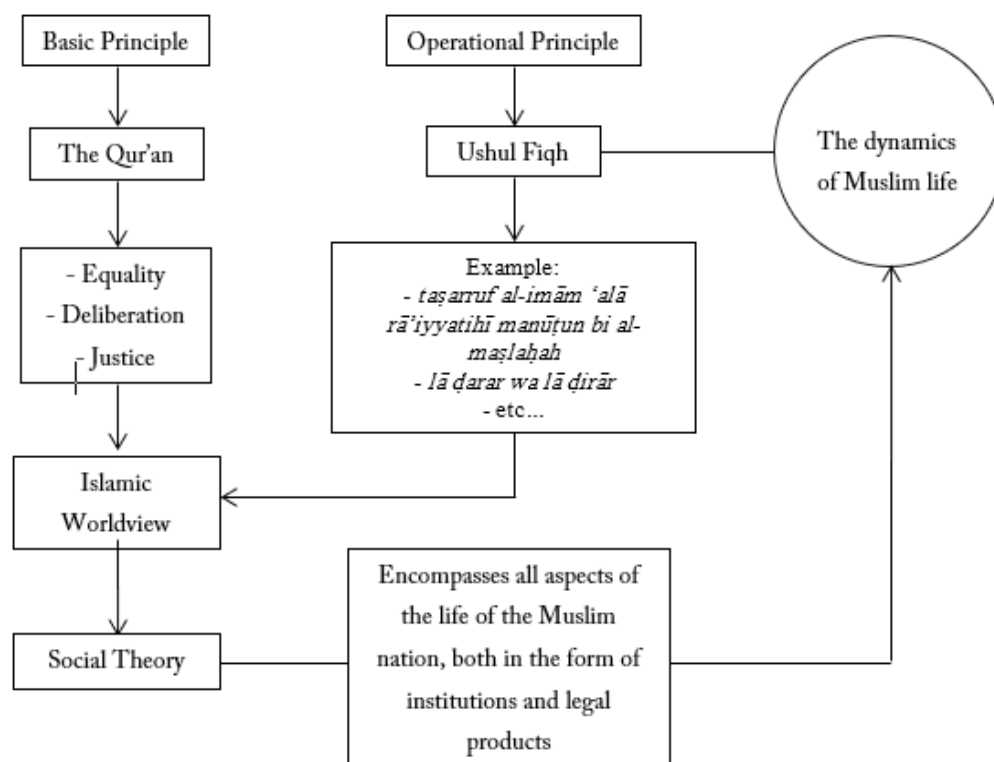
28 RMI, *Kiai Menggugat, Gus Dur Menjawab* (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2020), p. 16-17.

29 Barton, p. 49-50.

30 Barton, p. 83-107.

on the Qur'an, although he does not have an academic background in the field of Quranic studies.

Gus Dur's thoughts on the Qur'an are contained in his speech when he was "judged" by approximately 200s Kiai at the Dar al-Tauhid Boarding School, West Java. At that moment, Gus Dur explained his controversial statement about the neighborhood Association and emphasized the importance of developing the social theory resting on the Qur'an for Muslims. Gus Dur believed that the development could be reached if Muslims gave top priority to the principle of the Qur'an, namely: equality (*al-musawah*), deliberation (*al-syura*), and justice (*al-'adalah*). According to Gus Dur, the Islamic social theory has never been designed because what has been used so far is only Islamic insight. Insight is a view (*ra'yu*), while theory results from a unanimous and complete thought. Gus Dur gave an example that Muslims have never formulated the relationship between citizens and the state in detail.<sup>31</sup>



**Figure I. The relationship between the basic principles of the Qur'an and Usul Fiqh that form the Islamic worldview**

<sup>31</sup> RMI, p. 44.



Gus Dur insists that Islam has several teachings, values, and regulations required to increase the standard of human life. In addition, Gus Dur argues that Islam places humans in high status of creation and gives them natural abilities, intelligence, and spiritual perception to keep the individual's rights in balance with the people's interests in collective life.<sup>32</sup> In other words, Gus Dur seeks a social change to a better level based on the Qur'an. Gus Dur's thoughts commence from the context, then goes to the text to find answers. This approach is also similar to the principles in the hermeneutics of acceptance.

In contemporary hermeneutics, it is synonymous with text functionalism which emphasizes that the existence of a sacred text lies in its functional and pragmatic dimensions.<sup>33</sup> In addition, Gus Dur seems to be much inspired by Hasan Hanafi, although he did not explicitly mention it. In his monumental essay, *madha ya'ni al-yasar al-Islami*,<sup>34</sup> Hassan Hanafi offered a form of perspective interpretation (*al-syu'uri*) so that the Qur'an be able to describe humans, their relationships with other humans, their duties in the world, their position in history, building social and political systems. Accepting the valid Qur'an and Sunnah, according to him, means accepting the principles of benefit.<sup>35</sup> The principles and values initiated by Hassan Hanafi in the *Islamic Left* have similarities with the universalistic spirit built by Gus Dur.

### Gus Dur's Interpretation of the Qur'an: General Review

As mentioned above, this paper discusses Gus Dur's commentary in his articles compiled into a book entitled *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita*. This book is a collection of Gus Dur's articles that have been published in several newspapers, such as: *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, *Duta Masyarakat*, *Kompas*, *Suara Pembaruan*, *Memorandum*, *Sinar Harapan*, *Media Indonesia*, *Majalah Tempo* and *The Jakarta Post*. Gus Dur wrote these articles after he stepped down from the president, namely between 2002-2003. The book was published on the initiative of Gus Dur himself, as seen when he asked M. Syafi'i Anwar to edit and give an introduction to his book.<sup>36</sup> It looks as though this book is the only one that collects Gus Dur's articles containing his commentary

32 Abdurrahman Wahid, 'Al-Qur'an Dalam Pengembangan Pemahaman Melalui Konteks Kehidupan Sosial Baru', in *Islam Kosmopolitan: Nilai-Nilai Indonesia & Transformasi Kebudayaan* (Jakarta: Wahid Institute, 2007), p. 29.

33 Farid Esack, *Membebaskan Yang Tertindas: Al-Qur'an, Liberalisme Dan Pluralisme*, ed. by Watung A. Budiman (Bandung: Mizan, 2000), p. 84.

34 This essay was published in the journal *Kiri Islam* which was published only once in Cairo, in January 1981.

35 Kazuo Shimogaki, *Kiri Islam: Antara Modernisme Dan Posmodernisme*, trans. by M. Imam Aziz and M. Jadul Maula (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2007), p. 132.

36 Anwar, p. xi.

on the Qur'an.

There are three patterns of presenting the commentary of the Qur'an in Gus Dur's article. Firstly, there are times when he puts it at the beginning of the article. For example, in the article entitled "*Adakah Sistem Islami?* (Is there an Islamic system?)" Gus Dur began quoting Q. 2:208.<sup>37</sup> Secondly, sometimes the verse is placed in the middle of the article, such as in the article entitled "*Kemiskinan, Kaum Muslimin dan Partai Politik*. (Poverty, Muslims and Political Parties)" In this article, Gus Dur began with a personal experience story. Then, from the story's narrative at the beginning, Gus Dur continued by analyzing the American people of the 19th century AD who chose Andrew Jackson as president because he wanted to empower people to take care of themselves so that they were free from poverty. After that, Gus Dur included a verse from the Qur'an:

"For the Muslims, that objective is really an absolute obligation. The Holy Qur'an states: "Made for the Muslims humiliation and poverty (*wa duribat a'lahim al-dhillatu wa al-maskanah*)" (Q. 2:61), meaning Islam rejects poverty as something permanent, Islam considers both things changeable according to the structure of society. Thus, it is up to humans to eliminate or perpetuate poverty. God or destiny has nothing to do with it, completely left to humans. This includes the structure of society that eliminates or perpetuates poverty itself."<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, there is a third pattern, in which Gus Dur places a verse from the Qur'an at the end of the article, such as in the title "*Arabisasi, Samakah dengan Islamisasi?* (Arabization, is equal to Islamization?)" In this article, Gus Dur began by narrating a personal experience in which the Prime Minister of Pakistan asked him to order all NU residents to read al-Fatihah for the safety of the Pakistani Nation because the country has been led by Benazir Bhutto, who was a female. After finishing his story, Gus Dur analyzed this phenomenon as an example of Arabization, which has developed into Islamization that raised an attitude of puritanism and can lead to the formalization of religion due to a sense of defeat against the secular Western civilization. At the end of the article, Gus Dur then relates it to the verse of the Qur'an:

"This is the implementation of the adage "difference of opinion from the leaders is a blessing for the people (*ikhhtilaf al-a'immah rahmat al-ummah*)." The adage is rooted in the provisions of the Holy Qur'an: "I have made you into nations and tribes so that you may know each other

37 Abdurrahman Wahid, 'Adakah Sistem Islami?', in *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi* (Jakarta: Wahid Institute, 2006), p. 3.

38 Abdurrahman Wahid, 'Kemiskinan, Kaum Muslimin Dan Partai Politik', in *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi* (Jakarta: Wahid Institute, 2006), p. 213-16.

(*wa ja'alnakum syu'uban wa qaba'ila li ta'arafu*)" (Q.49:13). Therefore, the best way for both parties, both traditionalists and reformers in Islam, is to acknowledge the plurality brought by Islam."<sup>39</sup>

It is clear from the three patterns above that Gus Dur put the verses of the Qur'an based on his logical analysis when he wrote the articles. He did not demonstrate the literal meaning or pay attention to the historical circumstances of the quoted verses. In other words, there is no internal study of the text (*ma fi al-nas*) and external study of the text (*ma > h}aula al-nas*). Nevertheless, that does not mean that Gus Dur did not know those analyses as important knowledge to understand the meaning of the Qur'an. In the article entitled "*Bersumber dari Pendangkalan*", Gus Dur states that he had been criticized by Yusril Ihza Mahendra because he has been close to Jewish and Christians. Yusril argued that the true Muslim is someone who "use force on unbelievers and become soft with fellow Muslims (*asyidda'u 'ala alkuffar ruhama'u baynabum*)" (Q. 48:29). Gus Dur responded to his argument by stating "that the meaning of the word unbeliever or unbelievers in the Qur'an is polytheist which appeared in Mecca at that time."<sup>40</sup> This article demonstrates that Gus Dur indirectly applies a contextual analysis.

In addition, there are times when Gus Dur puts one verse for several articles that discuss the different themes. For example is Q. 4:135 placed in three different articles, namely: "*Islam, Negara dan Rasa Keadilan*", "*Pentingnya Sebuah Arti*" and "*Kita dan Perdamaian*". In the first article, the context is about people-oriented interests that the state must hold.<sup>41</sup> In the second article, Gus Dur redefined the concept of globalization. The objective of his idea is to keep the developing states in balance with the developed states.<sup>42</sup> The third article was his writings on good government when UNESCO invited him in 2003. Gus Dur emphasized two essential things in international relations, namely the rule of law and justice.<sup>43</sup>

This paper will only examine articles related to the theme of Islamic ideology to retain the focus of the study. As Syafi'i Anwar pointed out, this theme is the

39 Abdurrahman Wahid, 'Arabisasi, Samakah Dengan Islamisasi', in *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi* (Jakarta: Wahid Institute, 2006), p. 243-47.

40 Abdurrahman Wahid, 'Bersumber Dari Pendangkalan', in *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi* (Jakarta: Wahid Institute, 2006), p. 299.

41 Abdurrahman Wahid, 'Islam, Negara Dan Keadilan', in *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi* (Jakarta: Wahid Institute, 2006), p. 92.

42 Abdurrahman Wahid, 'Pentingnya Sebuah Arti', in *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi* (Jakarta: Wahid Institute, 2006), p. 253.

43 Abdurrahman Wahid, 'Kita Dan Perdamaian', in *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi* (Jakarta: Wahid Institute, 2006), p. 357.

essence of Gus Dur's thoughts in the book. Syafi'i Anwar concluded that Gus Dur rejected the idea of formalization, an ideological nation, and shariatization of Islam because the glory of Islam lies in its ability to develop culturally. In other words, the formalization of Islam is not a requirement for someone to be predicated as a pious Muslim. Gus Dur asserted that a true Muslim is "someone who recognizes the principles of faith, practices the pillars of Islam, helps those who need help, uphold professionalism and be patient when facing trials and tests."<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, through the articles in this book, Gus Dur seeks to ground Islamic values culturally.

At least, there are seven verses of the Qur'an quoted by Gus Dur in 16 articles that discuss the theme of the ideologicalization of Islam. The seven verses are: 1.) Q. 2:208 in "Adakah Sistem Islam?", "Islam: Pokok dan Rincian", "Islam dan Orientasi Bangsa", "NU dan Negara Islam (1)"; 2.) Q. 2:256 in "Islam: Pokok dan Rincian"; 3.) Q. 5:3 in "Islam: Pokok dan Rincian", "Islam dan Orientasi Bangsa", "NU dan Negara Islam (1)", "NU dan Terorisme Berkedok Islam"; 4.) Q. 5:44 in "NU dan Negara Islam (1)", "NU dan Negara Islam (2)"; 5.) Q. 21:107 in "Islam dan Orientasi Bangsa", "Islam: Perjuangan Etis ataukah Ideologis?"; 6.) Q. 33:21 in "Islam dan Formalisme Ajarannya"; 7.) Q. 59:7 in "Islam: Sebuah Ajaran Kemasyarakatan", "Islam: Perjuangan Etis ataukah Ideologis?".

### **Text, Context, and Ideology in Gus Dur's Commentary**

As explained above, genealogically, Gus Dur's commentary was rooted in Muhammad 'Abduh's *Tafsir al-Manar*, both in terms of the style of interpretation and the interpretation itself. For example, when interpreting Q. 2:208, 'Abduh demonstrated the phenomena among Muslims, such as Sunni who killed Syi'ah, Syi'ah who ruined 'Ibadiyya, Syafi'i scholars who called the Hanafi scholars as Tar-Tar and Hanafi scholars who called the Syafi'i scholars as *kafir zimmi*. They are groups obedient to their respective schools so that Muslims are divided, hostile to each other, and contradicting each other.<sup>45</sup> The style of interpretation explaining the phenomena is followed by Gus Dur commentary, although the phenomena changed based on the context that emerged during writing.

In the article entitled "Islam: Pokok dan Rincian", Gus Dur directly criticized the proponents of an Islamic state who always used Q. 2:208 as the basis of argument. He did not talk about the conflict of Schools but about an Islamic state conflict. Gus Dur prohibited the exclusive attitudes carried out by the proponents of an Islamic state by stating: "Islam also rejects the attitude of separating a group of people from

<sup>44</sup> Anwar, p. xvii.

<sup>45</sup> Rida, p. 207.

other groups.”What is demonstrated by Gus Dur’s commentary is the refreshment of past interpretation by facing it with the phenomena which happen nowadays. Gus Dur’s endeavor in combining text, context, and spirit of humanity adapted to the popular language typical of mass media contributes to the Quranic studies. Gus Dur seems to be paving the way so that the product of interpretation can reach a wider audience. Accordingly, tafsir can have a direct role in responding to social phenomena happening in his community. Gus Dur’s thought on the Qur’an, as mentioned above, can be the significant basis for the exegetical activity in Indonesia.

### **Gus Dur’s Commentary in the Theme of Ideologicalization of Islam**

Commenting on Q. 2:208, Gus Dur writes that the meaning of *al-silmi* is peace. Gus Dur rejects the interpretation that the word *al-silmi* means Islam because it implies that there must be a formal Islamic entity and thus urges to create an Islamic system. Gus Dur gives no other meaning for this term, which he explains as peaceful, referring to a universal entity that does not need to be described by a particular system, including the Islamic system.<sup>46</sup> Gus Dur furthermore identifies that this verse is frequently used as a basis of thought for those who encourage the establishment of an Islamic state. Gus Dur views that this idea is incompatible with the values of the Qur’an. Gus Dur says that:

”Islam also rejects the attitude of separating a group of people from other groups. In this case, they can be said to be “affected” by God’s words in the Holy Book: “Each group is very proud of what it has (*kullu hizbin bima ladaihim farihun*)” (Q. 23:53). By focusing on ‘their own,’ they forget God’s other words: “And I have not sent you, O Muhammad, except as a bearer of brotherhood for mankind (*wa ma arsalnaka illa rahmatan li al-‘alamin*)” (Q. 21:107). This is a noble principle, but the Muslims pay very little attention to it.”

Furthermore, Gus Dur also identifies that Q. 5:3<sup>47</sup> is frequently used as the basis for the idea of an Islamic state. This verse is imagined that Islam has a perfect living system that can only be realized in a religious state system. In other words, without the state, Islam cannot be realized perfectly.<sup>48</sup> This verse is interpreted in reverse by Gus Dur. According to him, this verse demonstrates that Islam is not

46 Wahid, ‘Adakah Sistem Islami?’, p. 3.

47 *Al-yauma akmalu lakum dinakum wa atmamtu ‘alaikum ni‘mati wa raditu lakum al-Islama dinan.*

48 Abdurrahman Wahid, ‘Islam: Pokok Dan Rincian’, in *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi* (Jakarta: Wahid Institute, 2006), p. 12.

merely establishing a religious state. Islam teaches humanity in general, which is not at all coercive. Muslims' obligatory is to uphold the teachings of life, while those that are perfected are Islamic principles. Gus Dur's view implies that Islam can be adapted to any place and time as long as it does not violate Islamic principles.<sup>49</sup> Not surprisingly then, in another article, Gus Dur emphasizes that Islam does not need to be defended by any action, except by implementing the Islamic way of life itself.<sup>50</sup>

Q. 5:44<sup>51</sup> is also frequently used as a reference by proponents of the idea of an Islamic state. Gus Dur states that the politicization of this verse can be refuted with logical arguments. Regarding this verse, Gus Dur emphasizes that Islamic law does not depend on the state's existence. Muslims can enforce religious laws without being incorporated into state law. Muslims who morally hold on to Islam and establish Islamic law no longer need the presence of a religious state.<sup>52</sup> Gus Dur uses Q. 59:7<sup>53</sup> to emphasize that Islam does not recommend establishing a religious state. Gus Dur's commentary regarding this verse demonstrates that Islam is more concerned with helping the poor and discriminated people and does not pay special attention to the form of the religious state.<sup>54</sup> This verse also demonstrates that the Qur'an recognizes the economic system of the state but not the form of the state. Thus, as Gus Dur mentioned, "this textual evidence [without applying contextual analysis] shows that Islam does not have an attention to the form of the state."<sup>55</sup>

Gus Dur's commentary above has similarities with Muhammad 'Abduh interpretation, particularly on. 2:208. 'Abduh explained that the meanings of *al-silmi* are peace, obedience, reconciliation, and also Islam. Furthermore, 'Abduh argued that the term has other meanings, namely harmony and mutual peace among the believers. This verse ordered Muslims to avoid dissension, enmity, and strife by strengthening unity and brotherhood. This is in accordance with word of God: *wa' tasimu bi habli Allah jami'an wala tafarraqu* (Q. 3:103) and *wa la tanaza'u fatafsyalu* (Q. 8:46).<sup>56</sup>

49 Abdurrahman Wahid, 'NU Dan Negara Islam (1)', in *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi* (Jakarta: Wahid Institute, 2006), p. 102-103.

50 Abdurrahman Wahid, 'NU Dan Terorisme Berkedok Islam', in *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi* (Jakarta: Wahid Institute, 2006), p. 309.

51 *Wa man lam yah}kum bima> anzala Alla>h fa 'ula>'ika hum al-ka>firu>n.*

52 Wahid, 'NU Dan Negara Islam (1)', p. 103.

53 *Ma afa'a Allahu 'ala rasulih min ahli al-Qura fa lillabi wa li al-rasuli wa lizi al-qurba wa al-yatama wa al-masakini wa ibni al-sabil, kai la yakuna dulatan baina al-agniya'i minkum.*

54 Abdurrahman Wahid, 'Islam: Sebuah Ajaran Kemasyarakatan', in *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi* (Jakarta: Wahid Institute, 2006), p. 32.

55 Abdurrahman Wahid, 'Islam: Perjuangan Etis Ataukah Ideologis?', in *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi* (Jakarta: Wahid Institute, 2006), p. 112.

56 Muhammad Rasyid Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar* (Mesir: Al-Hai'ah al-Misriyyah al-'Ammah lil Kitab, 1990), p.

'Abduh pointed out that this verse prohibits Muslims from becoming divided, which is clarified by Q. 3:103 and Q. 8:46. Gus Dur in several articles strengthen his arguments in disputing the ideologicalization of Islam. As in the article "*NU dan Negara Islam*", Gus Dur explains that the verse shows the differences among Muslims but prohibits dissension.<sup>57</sup>

### **Counter-Discourse against the Idea of an Islamic State in the KH. Abdurrahman Wahid's Commentary**

The discourse to establish an Islamic state that re-emerged during the democratic transition period became the historical context that caused Gus Dur to interpret *al-silmi* as peace. The formalization, syari'atization and ideologicalization movement is why Gus Dur's commentary emerged in his articles. From the descriptions explained above, it can be seen that Gus Dur's commentary has two agendas, that is generally and particularly. Firstly, the general agenda is related to the context of Indonesia. This part has two points: Gus Dur's commentary wants to establish the Islamic worldview he campaigned for and a cosmopolite civilization.

Gus Dur believes that the cosmopolite of Islamic civilization has several elements, such as the strength of cultural plurality, loss of ethnic boundaries, and heterogeneity of politics. These characters will be in the best stage, when there is a balance between Muslims normative tendencies and the freedom of speech for all people, including non-muslim.<sup>58</sup> It is related to his commentary on the Q. 49:13 about the brotherhood of all humankind. Gus Dur stated that this verse demonstrates the difference between man and woman and between nations and cultures which will always exist. Therefore, the differences are something recognized by Islam, while something prohibited by Islam is dissension and separation (*tafarruq*). Those several beliefs do not have to be generalized in total because everyone has their own beliefs considered correct.<sup>59</sup> Gus Dur's thought and commentary of this verse are relevant to the Indonesian context, which has ethnic, religious, and cultural differences.

The particular agenda is related to the historical context that accompanied the published articles throughout 2002-2003. The emergence of the religious formalization movement, which offered an Islamic state is one of the external factors that led Gus Dur to the exegetical activity in his articles. Through his commentary,

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205-206.

57 Wahid, 'NU Dan Negara Islam (1)', p. 102.

58 Abdurrahman Wahid, 'Universalisme Islam Dan Kosmopolitanisme Peradaban Islam', in *Islam Kosmopolitan: Nilai-Nilai Indonesia & Transformasi Kebudayaan* (Jakarta: Wahid Institute, 2007), p. 11.

59 Abdurrahman Wahid, 'Islam Dan Dialog Antar Agama', in *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi* (Yogyakarta: Wahid Institute, 2006), p. 134.

Gus Dur placed himself as a party against the idea of an Islamic state. Several arguments from the textual analysis can strengthen this conclusion, namely that his Qur'anic commentary is more focused on the theme related to the idea of the ideologicalization of Islam. Furthermore, Gus Dur even wrote his disagreement with the concept of the Islamic state and religious formalization. He used several phrases, such as “for those who become accustomed to formalization...”; “the proponents of an Islamic state always use two verses of the Holy Qur'an”; and “a large number of leaders of Islamic political parties...”.

This conclusion also answers the absence of Gus Dur's commentary during the New Order regime. As mentioned above, Soeharto's regime implemented depoliticalization and de-ideologicalization, which weaken of the potential of Islamic politics. This project was based on the assumption that the political power of Islam will inhibit the modernization process. Slowly but surely, the New Order succeeded in “subduing” Islam politically, ideologically, and intellectually.<sup>60</sup> At that time, Gus Dur did not do counter-discourse against the ideological nation of Islam because it was hard to develop. Nevertheless, Gus Dur continued to criticize fundamentalist groups in terms of their attitude, not ideology.

Some of them can be found in articles entitled “*Umat Islam Seyogyanya Hindari Eksklusifisme*”<sup>61</sup>, “*Perihal Gerakan Sempalan Islam*”<sup>62</sup>, “*Mengapa Mereka Marah*”<sup>63</sup>; “*Intelektual di Tengah Eksklusifisme*”<sup>64</sup>; and “*Massa Islam dalam Kehidupan Bernegara dan Berbangsa*”.<sup>65</sup> Gus Dur's criticism of the exclusive groups during the New Order was only at the level of attitudes and activities, not the ideological realm. Gus Dur's criticism of the ideology of exclusive groups only emerged when the New Order regime fell, and the discourse of an Islamic state resurfaced. At that time, Gus Dur interpreted many verses of the Qur'an in his articles as reinforcement of the arguments he built.

<sup>60</sup> Zada, p. 31.

<sup>61</sup> Abdurrahman Wahid, 'Umat Islam Hendaknya Hindari Eksklusifisme', in *Ergulatan Negara, Agama, Dan Kebudayaan* (Depok: Desantara, 2001), p. 89. This article was published in 1983.

<sup>62</sup> Abdurrahman Wahid, 'Perihal Gerakan Sempalan Islam', in *Tuban Tidak Perlu Dibela* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1999), p. 47. This article was published in 1981.

<sup>63</sup> Abdurrahman Wahid, 'Mengapa Mereka Marah', in *Tuban Tidak Perlu Dibela* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1999), p. 113. This article was published in 1981.

<sup>64</sup> Abdurrahman Wahid, 'Intelektual Di Tengah Eksklusifisme', in *Prisma Pemikiran Gus Dur* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1999), p. 195. This article was published in 1982.

<sup>65</sup> Abdurrahman Wahid, 'Massa Islam Dalam Kehidupan Bernegara Dan Berbangsa', in *Prisma Pemikiran Gus Dur* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1999), p. 203. This article was published in 1984.



## Conclusion

From the discussion above, it could be concluded that Gus Dur emphasizes the form of interpretation of the Qur'an, which should pay attention to the interests of humans and humanity itself. In addition, Gus Dur also emphasizes the importance of the Qur'an as a principle for establishing a social theory that is in line with the Islamic worldview. Gus Dur frequently carried out the exegetical activity to strengthen the arguments he built in a book entitled *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita*. During the democratic transition period, the formalization and ideologicalization movement of religion grew stronger. Furthermore, the discourse to establish an Islamic state voiced by the exclusive groups has also found its momentum again. In that bitter fight, Gus Dur positioned himself as a figure against the idea of an Islamic state. This aspect can be seen from the phrases in the article referring to other entities.

In addition, Gus Dur also carried out more interpretations of verses that were often used as references by groups supporting the Islamic state. In conclusion, Gus Dur's commentary cannot be separated from the discourse contestation about the Islamic state, which developed during the democratic transition period. It can also be seen that during the New Order, Gus Dur only criticized the exclusive groups from an ethical point of view, without including his ideological criticism. There are still many gaps to examine Gus Dur's commentary. The hope is that there will be more studies on Gus Dur's commentary to fill the gaps that have not been filled. Criticisms and suggestions from this research are highly appreciated.

## Supplementary Materials

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

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## Authors' contributions

Ahmad Ahnaf Rafif is the sole author of this research article

## Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

### Conflict of interests

None of the authors of this study has a financial or personal relationship with other people that could inappropriately influence or bias the content of the study.

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