

Politics and Pluralism: Analyzing State Official Tafsir and Interfaith Discourse in Indonesia

Politik dan Pluralisme: Analisis Tafsir Resmi Negara dan Diskursus Hubungan Antar Agama di Indonesia

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the Tafsir produced by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, specifically focusing on the potential politicization of the Qur'an, particularly in the narrative of inter-religious relationships in Indonesia. The study underscores the crucial role of Tafsir in shaping societal perceptions of religious pluralism in the country. In this context, a significant question arises concerning the extent to which the interpretations generated through the state's political mechanisms contribute to the discourse on religious pluralism. To address this inquiry, the critical discourse analysis approach by Norman Fairclough is employed, encompassing three dimensions: text analysis, discursive practices, and social practices. The analysis focuses on the Tafsir produced in 1980 by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs titled "*Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*." The research reveals that the narrative regarding inter-religious relationships in Indonesia within the official Tafsir is not solely connected to the state's role through the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia. It is also influenced by various factors such as the socio-religious context and the role of *Mufassir (mufassir)*. This situation is reflected through three patterns of state affirmation: Affirmative-Accommodative, Affirmative-Permissive, and Affirmative-Disruptive. The substantial contribution of this research lies in enhancing the understanding of the intricate relationship between religious exegesis, state politics, and religious pluralism in Indonesia. This opens avenues for further reflection and debate in scholarly literature, particularly regarding the impact of state involvement in the Qur'an interpretation process on the narrative of inter-religious relationships in Indonesia.

Keywords: Tafsir, Institutional Tafsir, Politization of Religious, Interraligious Relation

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi Tafsir yang diproduksi oleh Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, dengan fokus khusus pada potensi politisasi Al-Qur'an, terutama dalam narasi hubungan antar-agama di Indonesia. Studi ini menekankan peran penting Tafsir dalam membentuk persepsi masyarakat tentang pluralisme agama di negara ini. Dalam konteks ini, muncul pertanyaan penting tentang sejauh mana interpretasi yang dihasilkan melalui mekanisme politik negara berkontribusi pada wacana tentang pluralisme agama. Untuk menjawab pertanyaan ini, pendekatan analisis wacana kritis oleh Norman Fairclough digunakan, yang mencakup tiga dimensi: analisis teks, praktik diskursif, dan praktik sosial. Analisis difokuskan pada Tafsir yang diproduksi pada tahun 1980 oleh Kementerian Agama Indonesia berjudul "*Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*." Penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa narasi tentang hubungan antar-agama di Indonesia dalam Tafsir resmi tidak semata-mata terkait dengan peran negara melalui Kementerian Agama Indonesia. Hal ini juga



dipengaruhi oleh berbagai faktor seperti konteks sosial-agama dan peran Mufassir (mufasir). Situasi ini tercermin melalui tiga pola afirmasi negara: Afirmatif-Akomodatif, Afirmatif-Permisif, dan Afirmatif-Disruptif. Kontribusi substansial dari penelitian ini terletak dalam meningkatkan pemahaman tentang hubungan yang rumit antara penafsiran Al-Qur'an, politik negara, dan pluralisme agama di Indonesia. Hal ini membuka jalur untuk refleksi lebih lanjut dan perdebatan dalam literatur ilmiah, khususnya mengenai dampak keterlibatan negara dalam proses interpretasi Al-Qur'an terhadap narasi hubungan antar-agama di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Tafsir, Institusional Tafsir, Politisasi Agama, Hubungan Antaragama

Introduction

The complex discourse on the relationship between the Qur'an and violence within national contexts has triggered discussions, considering the diverse interpretations and contextual elements involved. This complexity stems from nuanced issues and various contextual factors in play. Some individuals attribute violence to Islam as a religion, connecting this perception to specific Tafsir.¹ Notably, extremist and terrorist factions selectively construe verses, such as the "*ayatul qital*," to justify their violent activities.² However, it is imperative to recognize that Islamic law explicitly prohibits terrorism and violence in the name of religion.³ Differences in perspectives emerge due to the contextual backgrounds of the *Mufassir*. Thus, comprehending the inclinations of these interpretations necessitates considering not only the content but also the context provided by the *Mufassir*.

The dispute concerning the contextual background of *Mufassir* has become a topic of contention among scholars of exegesis. In classical literature, political intervention is considered to compromise the objectivity of interpretation and is regarded as impure. Ibn Kathir intricately elucidates how the politicization of exegesis is evident in the verses related to *Lailatul Qadr*. Drawing on the perspective of At-Tabari, Ibn Kathir concludes that such interpretations are viewed as reprehensible.⁴ Moreover, interpretations aligning with political interests can adversely impact political minority groups.⁵ On the contrary, there is a perspective that regards politics

1 John L. Esposito, "Islam and Political Violence," *Religions* 6, no. 3 (2015), Najib Ghabbian, "Political Islam and Violence," *New Political Science* 22, no. 1 (2000).

2 Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi, "Fundamentalisme Dan Upaya Deradikalisasi Pemahaman Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis," *RELIGIA* 13, no. 1 (October 3, 2017),

3 Ahmad Baidowi et al., "Promoting Qur'anic Verses That Reject Violence," *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 10, no. 6 (November 5, 2021): 23,

4 Ibnu Katsir, *Tafsir Al Qur'an Al Adhim Al Musamma Tafsir Ibnu Katsir* (Libanon: Maktabah Al Rusydi, 2011).

5 Zia Ul Haq, "Maududi's Political Theology: A Critical Review of the Names and Attributes of God in Tafsir Al Qur'an," *University of Chitral Journal of Linguistics and Literature* 5, no. II (July 10, 2019): 184-194.

and religion as inseparable. Al-Ghazali, for instance, posits a theory in which, in the caliphate, three elements must coexist: the caliph, the sultan, and the ulama. Similar sentiments are echoed by Ibn Taymiyyah, who underscores that the separation of religion and state can lead to chaos. The influence of these views is evident in the writings of Sayyid Qutb's exegesis. Qutb's political interpretation emphasizes the imperative of restoring a genuine Islamic political system and society, challenging secularism, and advocating a return to the early Islamic polity.⁶

In the era of modern states, regulating the interpretation of the Qur'an, particularly narratives involving religious violence, poses an increasingly intricate challenge due to diverse interpretative approaches. Instances of Tafsir containing elements of violence are visible in both individual works and those produced by institutions, with states as political entities actively participating in exegesis production.⁷ Classical Islamic Scholars observed a compelling phenomenon as they scrutinized attempts to infuse political elements into the Qur'an. This critique gained heightened significance due to the active involvement of the state, a political institution, in the interpretative process. Within this landscape of exegesis production and considerations of moderation and interfaith dialogue, pivotal questions emerge, including the extent to which a state constructs narrative related to religious moderation and interfaith relations to counter religious radicalism through official exegesis products. Additionally, the potential politicization of religion in relation to interfaith narratives within these interpretations requires examination, given the influential role of exegesis in shaping public perceptions, particularly when it becomes a state product.

Tafsir *"Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya"* from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia holds a significant position as an example of exegesis produced by a state institution. Initiated by the Indonesian government in 1980, this exegesis has undergone several revisions and refinements.⁸ Being a state-produced interpretation, it potentially exhibits characteristics that are controlling and reflective of the political interests of the country, particularly in interpreting verses related to religious moderation and interfaith dialogue. A parallel approach is evident in the phenomenon of the politicization of exegesis in Turkey, as elucidated by Bilal Gokkir.

"The Turkish secular political power seemed to be very concerned with

6 Joseph A. Kechichian, "The Role of the Ulama in the Politics of an Islamic State: The Case of Saudi Arabia," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 18, no. 1 (1986): 53–71.

7 Johanna Pink, "Tradition and Ideology in Contemporary Sunnite Qur'anic Exegesis: Qur'anic Commentaries from the Arab World, Turkey and Indonesia and Their Interpretation of Q 5:51," *Welt Des Islams*, April 1, 2010.

8 *Mukadimah Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsirnya*. ([Jakarta]: Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2010).

the religious affairs with its hidden agenda in its very early time of the republic. The book was initially planned to be published for the sake of political and secular agenda by secular and westernized politics. The aim of politics was to cut off the relations between the public and original Islamic culture and heritage which is in Arabic by promoting secular policy of Turkification of religion.”⁹

Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that not only the state is involved in the production of this exegesis, but also the team of *Mufasssir* as individuals. Therefore, the individual interests of the authors should also be considered, as this reflects a negotiation between state interests and individual perspectives.

The study of Tafsir, the state, and religious radicalism often tends to be described in popular terms, overlooking the political dimension and intellectual history associated with the discourse of the state, scripture, and religious radicalism. Consequently, research in this field can be categorized into three patterns. First, there is research that aims to categorize various types of tafsir, including state interpretations.¹⁰ Second, there is research that focuses on exploring the discourse of the state as an integral part of the history of religious politics.¹¹ Lastly, there is research that examines the interpretation of verses pertaining to interfaith relations.¹² However, there is a notable absence of research that views state interpretation as both an actor and a tool employed by the state to shape the public perception particularly in religious moderation and role of interfaith relation in countering religious radicalism. State interpretations can serve as a representation of the dynamics between religion and the state in regions where religion plays a significant role in the context of statehood, such as Islamic countries like Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and Turkiye.

This research aims to critically analyze the narrative of religious moderation and role of interfaith relation in countering religious radicalism and the socio-political

9 Bilal Gokkir, “The Role of State Policies in Modern Qur’anic Exegesis in Turkey: Case of Elmahh Muhammed Hamdi Yazır (1878-1942) and His Exegesis,” *Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia* 25 (2012).

10 Islah Gusmian, Tafsir Al-Qur’an Di Indonesia: Sejarah Dan Dinamika, Nun : Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Tafsir Di Nusantara, vol. 1, December 29, 2015; Howard M Federspiel, Popular Indonesian Literature of the Qur’an, Publication ; (Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1994); Hidayet Aydar, “Türklerde Kur’an Çalışmaları,” İstanbul Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi, no. 1 (April 16, 2012).

11 Mohamad Latief and Mifedwil Jandra, “Islam, State and Secularism; Analysis on The Substantive Political Paradigm in Indonesia,” UMRAN - International Journal of Islamic and Civilizational Studies (EISSN: 2289-8204) (2016); John R. Bowen, “ The Question of Islamic Pluralism Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia . By RobertW. Hefner. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000. 286 Pp.,” *Current Anthropology* (2003).

12 Amiur Nuruddin et al., “Relationship of Interfaith in Tunisia (Critical Study of Ibn ‘Ashur Tafsir W.1973),” Budapest International Research and Critics Institute (BIRCI-Journal) : Humanities and Social Sciences, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.33258/birci.v2i1.208>; Gordon Nickel, “‘We Will Make Peace With You’: The Christians of Najran in Muqatil’s ‘Tafsir,’” *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* (CCO), 2006; Ahmad Zainul Arifin, Khairuddin, and Moh Rifa’i, “Ayat Toleransi Dalam Al-Qur’an Perspektif Tafsir Al-Kabir (Mafaatihul Ghaib),” *An-Nuha : Jurnal Kajian Islam, Pendidikan, Budaya Dan Sosial*, 2019,

context present in *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, which serves as a reflection of state interests. *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, being a discourse produced by the state, can be examined through three distinct stages, namely the textual content, the instruments involved in shaping the discourse, and the socio-political context surrounding it. Upon analyzing the textual content of the interpretation pertaining to verses related to other religions, *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* exhibits a critical approach towards these religions, encompassing aspects of doctrine, social relations, and the context of warfare. Notable examples of this critical approach can be found in the interpretation of verses such as QS. al-Maidah verses 72-73, QS. Al-Maidah 51, and QS. At-Taubah verse 5-36. This critical style signifies an endeavor to construct a discourse that is jointly formed by the state and the interpretation's author, intended to resonate within the broader societal fabric. However, during the discourse formation process, there may be instances where attempts are made to distort alternative discourses. Therefore, it is crucial to explore these potential distortion efforts in order to shed light on the underlying dynamics contributing to the formation of the discourse documented within the state interpretation.

In the conducted research, a qualitative approach utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) served as the theoretical framework, exploring how state formal interpretations, particularly those linked to the Tafsir of the Qur'an, have shaped public perceptions, specifically in the realms of religious moderation and interfaith dialogue as a countermeasure to religious radicalism. Drawing insights from diverse sources, primary data included official documents such as *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* from the Ministry of Religious affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, alongside policy statements and publications. The primary focus was on examining policy statements and specific publications that endorsed government interpretations of the Qur'an, encompassing guidelines for interpreting the Qur'an and other official documents outlining the Ministry's stance on religious discourse. Beyond document analysis, scrutiny extended to media representations, encompassing news articles, press releases, and other coverage forms to uncover how these formal interpretations influenced broader public discourse. Complementing these methods, qualitative interviews with religious scholars and focus groups such as Jaringan Gusdurian and Interfide, both recognized groups engaged in interfaith dialogue. These engagements aimed to capture the perspectives of members of religious groups affected by the interpretations, offering depth and validation to the findings.

The applied methodology adhered to CDA principles, systematically delving into language use, discourse structures, and socio-political contexts to reveal hidden power dynamics, ideologies, and the role of specific interpretations in the

marginalization of certain religious groups. Thematic analysis identified recurring themes and discourse strategies within the data. Triangulation of data from various sources, including speeches, documents, and media representations, bolstered the credibility and validity of the study, establishing a robust foundation for drawing meaningful conclusions. This comprehensive approach aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between formal interpretation, public perception, and religious marginalization.

Formalized Qur'an Interpretations and Religious Plurality

The intersection of religion and politics is a dynamic interplay influenced by societal changes, globalization, and religious diversity. Eriksson (2019) explores how politicization intertwines with religious values in the context of identity negotiations and evolving state-religion dynamics.¹³ This integration of political discourse with religious values is further solidified by formalized interpretations, providing a structured framework for political actors. Lindberg (2014) extends this by highlighting how liberated religion in industrialized societies facilitates its integration into political arenas.¹⁴ The consequences of religious politicization are profound, impacting societal mobility and transforming religion into a political concern. Mourão Permoser (2014) sheds light on the privatization of religion in European contexts, particularly when Islam is a minority religion.¹⁵ Abdillah (2013) emphasizes group orientations over nationalistic ones in pluralistic societies, revealing the inseparability of religion's politicization from the pursuit of societal ideals.¹⁶

Global perspectives on the politicization of religion and formalization of interpretation provide valuable insights. Eriksson (2019), Lindberg (2014), and Thapa Karki, Xheneti, and Madden (2020) contribute to a global understanding, emphasizing the impact of globalization, migration, and religious diversity on the interconnectedness of these themes.¹⁷ Krasteva (2015) and Aziz (2018) show how formalized interpretations contribute to political mobilization and identity formation

13 Lise Eriksson, "Intersections between Biopolitics and Religion: Cases of Politicisation of Religion in Finland and Norway," *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* (2019).

14 Jonas Lindberg, "Politicisation of Religion in Scandinavian Parliamentary Debates 1988–2009," *Politics, Religion and Ideology* (2014).

15 Julia Mourão Permoser, "Austrian MEPs: Between Privatisation and Politicisation of Religion," *Religion, State and Society* (2014).

16 Masykuri Abdillah, "Hubungan Agama Dan Negara Dalam Konteks Modernisasi Politik Di Era Reformasi," *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* (2013).

17 Shova Thapa Karki, Mirela Xheneti, and Adrian Madden, "To Formalize or Not to Formalize: Women Entrepreneurs' Sensemaking of Business Registration in the Context of Nepal," *Journal of Business Ethics* (2020).

on a national scale.¹⁸ The Jakarta gubernatorial election, examined by Zainuddin (2015), illustrates the global relevance of religious plurality in shaping political outcomes.¹⁹ The challenge lies in navigating the balance between leveraging religious identities for political mobilization and fostering harmony amid diverse beliefs. The formalization of interpretation plays a critical role, exemplified by institutional responses like the Indonesian government's establishment of a Tafsir institution Kurniawan (2019), which influences legal frameworks and the broader relationship between religion and politics.²⁰

Religious plurality, a significant aspect of the discourse, affects both the politicization of religion and the formalization of interpretation. Zainuddin's (2015) exploration of the Jakarta gubernatorial election demonstrates how formalized interpretations can either foster harmony or generate conflict. Lufaei (2017) and Mahmuddin²¹ (2015) exemplify how formalized interpretations impact the relationship between political interpretation and state involvement.²² The delicate balance between Islam and the state, as highlighted by Iqbal (2014), underscores the need for a clear separation, avoiding the imposition of religious transformation into official policies.²³ Dinata (2012) addresses challenges associated with the politicization of religion and proposes proactive measures, such as the establishment of official versions of thematic Qur'anic exegesis, to maintain a balanced interpretation.²⁴

However, a significant research gap emerges in the absence of a comprehensive analysis regarding how formalized interpretations, endorsed by the state, may shape public perceptions and contribute to the marginalization of specific religious groups. While existing studies delve into the intricacies of formalization in legal frameworks and political discourse, there is a dearth of research examining the downstream effects on public opinion. This gap is crucial as state-endorsed interpretations

18 Anna Krasteva, "Religion, Politics, and Nationalism in Postcommunist Bulgaria: Elastic (Post)Secularism," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* (2015).

19 M. Zainuddin, "Plurality of Religion: Future Challenges of Religion and Democracy in Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* (2015).

20 Arif Kurniawan, "Tinjauan Strategi Wacana Kuasa Pemerintah Dalam Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik Kementerian Agama RI," *HERMENEUTIK* (2019).

21 Mahmuddin, "Formalisme Agama Dalam Perspektif Gerakan Sosial: Prospek Dan Tantangan Di Masa Depan," *Jurnal Diskursus Islam* (2015).

22 Lufaei Lufaei, "Rekonstruksi Jargon Formalisasi Syariat: Upaya Menjaga Persatuan Dalam Bingkai Keberagaman," *Al-A'raf: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam dan Filsafat* (2017).

23 Mahathir Muhammad Iqbal, "Dinamika Wacana Formalisasi Syariat Dalam Politik: Ikhtiar Menemukan Relevansi Relasi Agama Dan Negara Perspektif Indonesia," *Walisongo: Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* (2014).

24 Muhamad Ridho Dinata, "Konsep Toleransi Beragama Dalam Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik Karya Tim Departemen Agama Republik Indonesia," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* (2012).

hold the potential to shape societal attitudes and beliefs, potentially reinforcing existing inequalities and contributing to the marginalization of certain religious communities. The impact on public sentiment remains an underexplored aspect, hindering a comprehensive understanding of the broader socio-political implications of formalized interpretations. Bridging this research gap is imperative not only for a more holistic understanding of the interplay between formalized interpretation and public sentiment but also for the development of informed policies that address potential marginalization and foster inclusive societies.

Textual Analysis of Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya in the Context of Interreligious Dialogue.

The first dimension in CDA is textual analysis. During this stage, an examination is undertaken to scrutinize the official state narrative of the Quran within the context of interreligious dialogue. Consequently, textual analysis is executed on three distinct categories of verses. These encompass verses delving into the doctrines of other religions, verses addressing social interactions with adherents of other faiths, and verses advocating conflict against followers of other religions.²⁵ In the subsequent section, we will expound on the diverse interpretative approaches applied to these three categories of verses, as illustrated in the analysis presented in *“Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya.”*

The first category of verses within *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* that addresses other religions focuses on QS Al-Maidah verses 72 and 73. These verses provide an interpretation of the doctrines held by other religions, specifically highlighting the Christian belief in the Trinity. The analysis within *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* affirms that the Christian notion of the Trinity is considered heretical, categorizing Christians as infidels. QS Al-Maidah verse 72 in *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* emphasizes that Jesus himself emphasized the unity of God, and the Christian belief in the Trinity significantly deviates from this fundamental truth. Consequently, QS Al-Maidah verses 72 and 73 in *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* present a perspective that aligns with Islamic teachings on the oneness of God, firmly rejecting the concept of the Trinity.

“The Christians hold that God is composed of elements which they call three persons, namely the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Rohulkudus).... Their position is far from the truth, for Jesus himself told the Children of Israel to worship Allah, the God of Jesus and the God of the Children of Israel...”²⁶

25 Mun'im Sirry, “Memahami Kritik Al-Qur'an Terhadap Agama Lain,” *Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 3, no. 1 (2014): 2,

26 Kementerian Agama RI, *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*. Juz 2 P. 445

Building upon the preceding verse, QS Al-Maidah verse 73 in *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* further solidifies the notion that Christians are considered disbelievers and misguided. This perception stems from the Christian belief that Allah is one among three persons within the Trinity.

“This verse explains that Allah confirms the disbelief of the Christians who say that the God who created the heavens and the earth is one of the three persons, namely the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit...their stance has no solid foundation because the true God is the incomprehensible substance.”²⁷

These two verses from *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* underscore the stance that certain Qur'anic verses affirm the disbelief of Christians, primarily attributed to their theological beliefs and acceptance of a false religious dogma. *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* asserts that Christian disbelief originates from their adherence to the concept of the Trinity, deemed heretical within the Islamic framework. Importantly, *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* draws a distinction between Christians as a whole and specifically targets followers of the Trinity, asserting that not all Christians are categorized as disbelievers. Emphasizing that the teachings of Prophet Isa (Jesus) are inherently monotheistic and align with the Islamic principle of the oneness of God, *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya's* interpretation highlights the theological disagreement with the concept of the Trinity while acknowledging the diversity and nuances within the Christian faith.

The second category revolves around verses found in QS Al-Baqarah verse 120 and Al-Maidah verse 51 within *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, providing interpretations regarding the social interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims, specifically Jews and Christians. The analysis within *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* accentuates that QS Al-Baqarah verse 120 clarifies the reluctance of Jews and Christians to accept someone embracing Islam, actively striving to influence Muslims to adopt their own beliefs. Furthermore, *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* asserts that even if Jews and Christians possess knowledge of the truth of Islam, they are unlikely to acknowledge its veracity or contribute to its propagation. As delineated in *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, QS Al-Baqarah verse 120 and Al-Maidah verse 51 present a nuanced perspective, indicating that the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is intricate and requires diligent efforts to establish meaningful dialogue and understanding. It is through such endeavors that fruitful interfaith interactions can be fostered.

“The Jews and Christians do not want anyone to embrace Islam. They are always trying to get you to follow them. Allah will not help the one who knows the truth, but does not want to follow it or practice it.”²⁸

QS Al-Mai'dah verse 51, as interpreted in *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, sheds

²⁷ Kementerian Agama RI, *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*. Juz 2 P. 447

²⁸ Kementerian Agama RI, *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*. Juz 1 P. 189

light on the social dynamics concerning the prohibition of appointing non-Muslims as leaders. *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* aims to demonstrate that seeking protection from non-Muslims is forbidden, as underscored by the explicit prohibition against making them leaders. This verse, within the context of *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*'s interpretation, emphasizes the importance of preserving the Islamic identity and ensuring that leadership positions are entrusted to individuals who adhere to the faith.

“This verse forbids believers from taking Jews and Christians as close friends who will provide help and protection, let alone to be trusted as leaders. ... The repeated repetition of this prohibition in several verses in the Qur'an, shows that the issue is very important and if violated will cause great harm.”²⁹

QS Al-Baqarah verse 120 and Al-Maidah verse 51 are utilized to assert the absolute prohibition of appointing non-Muslims as leaders. *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*'s analysis explicitly does not impose any limitations or exceptions on this prohibition, thereby extending its scope to encompass both religious and state leadership roles. Furthermore, the prohibition extends to social interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims, as *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* emphasizes the forbiddance of forming friendships with individuals outside the Islamic faith.

The third category of verses, found in QS At-Taubah verses 5 and 36, addresses the interpretation of commands related to combatting non-Muslims, including the People of the Book (Jews and Christians), the Hypocrites, and the *Bugat*. According to *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, QS At-Taubah verse 5 is classified as one of the “*ayatul qital*” or “verses of war” due to its explicit instructions regarding armed conflict. *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* explains that this verse directs Muslims to engage in combat with non-Muslims after the conclusion of the *Haram* (sacred) months, particularly in the context of war between Muslims and polytheists. Nevertheless, QS At-Taubah verse 5 also allows for the potential of extending considerable freedom to those who repent and refrain from engaging in capture or combat. The perspective presented in *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* demonstrates that Islamic teachings acknowledge the possibility of armed conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims, with Muslims being commanded to defend themselves in such circumstances. However, Islamic teachings also highlight the possibility for non-Muslims to embrace the right path and be granted extensive freedom.

“This verse is one of the four verses called “*ayatul qital*”, meaning “verses of war”, because these four verses were revealed to kill or fight with the use of force.... In a situation of war between the Muslims

29 Kementerian Agama RI, *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*. Juz 6 P. 416

and the polytheists, the Muslims are ordered to fight them after the completion of the Haram months.”³⁰

QS At-Taubah verse 36, in accordance with the interpretation presented in *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, conveys the obligation for all Muslims to unite in a collective effort to combat non-Muslims until the establishment of Islam and the eradication of their presence. Furthermore, *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* highlights that if Muslims are subjected to betrayal or aggression during the sacred months, it becomes incumbent upon them to defend themselves and respond in kind. This interpretation extends beyond non-Muslims and encompasses hypocrites and instigators of unrest as well, as indicated in QS At-Taubah verse 5. Thus, *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* emphasizes that acts of war or killing are not solely directed at non-Muslims but also encompass individuals who exhibit hypocritical behavior or engage in activities that incite turmoil.

“So it is obligatory for every Muslim to rise up and fight them until the religion of Islam is established and they are destroyed. Let the spirit of jihad be instilled in the hearts of every Muslim, as well as the determination and belief that they will be victorious, for Allah always helps those who fear Him.”³¹

“This verse is one of the four verses called “ayatul qital”, meaning “verses of war”, because these four verses were revealed to kill or fight by force of arms. First: this verse is for killing or fighting the polytheists. The second is to fight the People of the Book, the third is to fight the hypocrites, and the fourth is to fight the rioters.”³²

Based on the interpretation presented in *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, it becomes apparent that the Qur'an includes verses advocating for combatting non-Muslims. However, it is essential to emphasize that these instructions are contextualized within the framework of warfare and self-defense. Although *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* acknowledges the limited scope of these instructions, the critical narrative surrounding these verses tends to accentuate the element of violence and bloodshed within religious teachings. As a result, this narrative fosters varying interpretations and understandings among Muslims. The divergent interpretations underscore the complexity and sensitivity associated with the depiction of violence in religious texts and the potential for differing perspectives on the appropriate application of these verses.

Internal Interpretive Challenges: Systematics, Sources, and Tafsir Authorship

30 Kementerian Agama RI, *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*. Juz 4 P. 63

31 Kementerian Agama RI, *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*. Juz 4 P. 113

32 Kementerian Agama RI, *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*. Juz 4 P. 63

The critical nuances present in the interpretation of verses about other religions in *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* are influenced by methodological aspects. The methodological aspects that shape this critical style of interpretation can be observed in three key areas: the methodology of interpretation, sources of interpretation, and Tafsir Authorship. *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* adopts an *ijmali* (global) interpretation methodology, which is evident in its adherence to the Mushafi rules³³ and the application of the principle of *munasabah* in establishing connections between letters and verses. *Asbabun nuzul*, although inconsistently utilized, also finds its place in this interpretation. Core vocabulary is presented separately when discussing verses, but the Tafsir lacks consistent explanations of vocabulary selection. Conclusions are provided at the end of each discussion of a group of verses.³⁴ While the *ijmali* (global) tafsir category offers the advantage of being accessible to readers of various levels, it tends to yield partial interpretations³⁵, particularly when confronted with polemical and complex issues.³⁶

Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya employs an inspirational approach in interpreting sources, wherein direct quotes from the referenced sources are rarely included. To provide further elucidation on the subject matter, additional verses and Hadith are often incorporated without explicit citations. The sources utilized in *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*'s interpretation refer to a range of classical tafsir books, such as *al-Tafsir al-kabir* by al-Fakh al-Razi, *Anwar al-tanzil Wa Asrar al-Ta'wil* by Abdullah ibn Umar al-Baidawi, *Abkam al-Quran* by Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Abdillah ibn Arabi, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-azim* by Imaduddin Abu Al-Fida' Islamail ibn Kasir, among others. Moreover, other sources like books of *Ulumul Qur'an*, *Mu'jam Mufradat*, *Hadith*, *Asbabun Nuzul*, *Historical Books*, and various translations of other interpretation texts are also referenced.³⁷ These sources are typically listed at the conclusion of each chapter. Consequently, this inspirational writing model engenders ideas and notions in the interpretation that lack clear links to authoritative sources, thereby making it challenging to ascertain the specific style of interpretation employed.

The production of the *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* involves a collaborative effort among multiple individuals who work together in a synchronized manner. The *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* exhibits a consistent structure and style throughout its writing,

33 Muh. Istikromul Umamik, *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya (Edisi yang Disempurnakan) Karya Tim Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia : Tinjauan Epistemologi*. Tesis: UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, 2019, P. 87-100.

34 *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*. ([Jakarta]: Kementerian Agama RI, 2010).

35 Nashruddin Baidan, *Perkembangan Tafsir Al-Qur'an Di Indonesia* (Solo: Tiga Serangkai Mandiri, 2003).

36 Mun'im Sirry, *Scriptural Polemics: The Qur'an and Other Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

37 *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, 82-86.

rendering the identification of individual authors an unattainable task. Unlike works such as edited volumes or co-authored publications, where the contributions of individual authors can be discerned, the *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* embodies a distinct notion of collectivity. In this context, the collective authorship remains wholly unattributable, despite the inclusion of contributor names, thus posing challenges in determining the interpretation of verses or expressions. These challenges arise due to the diverse range of religious expertise, varying educational backgrounds, and divergent sectarian perspectives among the contributors.

The Socio-Political Background of Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya

The emergence of the *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* in Indonesia can be attributed to various socio-religious factors. Firstly, the communal Muslim identity prevalent in Indonesia plays a significant role. This identity shapes the approach to Tafsir, reflecting the collective experiences and values of Indonesian Muslims. Additionally, conflicts arising between Muslims and non-Muslims also contribute to the development of the *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, as interpretations often address the contextual challenges faced by Indonesian Muslims in a multi-religious society. Furthermore, the historical influence of the Syafi'i madhab in Indonesia's Tafsir is noteworthy. The dominance of the Syafi'i madhab is a result of Islam's dissemination in the country through the teachings of the *walisongo* scholars³⁸, who predominantly followed this madhab. Indonesian scholars have contributed to the field of tafsir, and the 19th-century discovery of Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani's tafsir work, particularly his renowned *Marah Labid*, played a pivotal role in strengthening the tafsir tradition in Indonesia. This tafsir, adhering primarily to the views of the Syafi'i madhab³⁹, greatly influenced subsequent interpretations in the country throughout the following century.⁴⁰

The tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims in Indonesia, stemming from the official banning of atheism in 1966, have had a profound impact on religious dynamics in the country. As religious instruction became compulsory and adherence to one of the five officially recognized religions became mandatory, the focus primarily targeted followers of mysticism and animism. This shift in religious landscape led to significant growth in Christianity and Hinduism, while simultaneously intensifying Islamic proselytizing efforts. Consequently, tensions between Muslims and Christians

38 Leonie Schmidt, "Aesthetics of Authority: 'Islam Nusantara' and Islamic 'Radicalism' in Indonesian Film and Social Media," *Religion* 51, no. 2 (April 3, 2021): 237–258.

39 Abdurrohman Kasdi, "The Role of Walisongo in Developing the Islam Nusantara Civilization," *Addin* 11, no. 1 (2017): 1–26.

40 Anny Nailatur Rohmah and Ashif Az Zafi, "Jejak Eksistensi Mazhab Syafi'i Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Tamaddun : Jurnal Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Islam* 8, no. 1 (May 12, 2020): 175.

escalated, resulting in the emergence of writings that sought to justify and defend their respective viewpoints. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia (ABRI) adopted divergent stances on the issue. While the Ministry of Religious Affairs aimed to maintain neutrality, ABRI took decisive measures to suppress acts of violence. However, attempts at fostering interfaith dialogue during an interfaith meeting in 1967 proved futile, further exacerbated by the refusal of NU, one of Indonesia's largest Islamic organizations, to register new converts since 1966. President Soeharto called for equal treatment of all religions and emphasized his neutrality, but these efforts inadvertently heightened interfaith tensions as religious leaders harbored distrust towards the honesty of preaching in other religions.⁴¹

Religious Interpretation and State Interests in Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya

Upon scrutinizing the interpretations of verses related to other religions in the Qur'an as presented in *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, three discernible patterns of interpretive inconsistency emerge, offering insight into the intricate relationship between religious interpretation and state interests. One of these patterns, the Accommodative-Affirmative Pattern, manifests when the state affirms interpretations in *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, aligning them with state interests. For example, in the interpretation of Qur'an Surah Al-Maidah, Verses 72-73, addressing the dogma of the Christian religion, the *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* incorporates elements that emphasize the true teaching within the Christian tradition as the worship of the One God. This additional information aims to accommodate Christian teachings within the framework of religious principles in Indonesia, particularly the first principle of Pancasila, which emphasizes "belief in the one and only God." However, this accommodation falls short in adequately explaining the diverse opinions within the Christian tradition, ultimately reinforcing the narrative that Christianity is a heretical religion.

Conversely, the Permissive-Affirmative Pattern is evident when the state upholds existing interpretations without providing supplementary information. In the interpretation of Surah Al-Maidah verse 51, which addresses the prohibition for believers to establish close friendships with Jews and Christians and to refrain from accepting them as leaders, the state affirms the interpretation found in *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* without elaborating further. The emergence of non-Muslim leadership was not considered a significant issue when this tafsir was written in 1980, aligning with state interests at the time. However, this affirmation, without supplementary

⁴¹ Robert W Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press., 2000).

details, may contribute to the potential strengthening of the narrative of identity politics. In the Disruptive-Affirmative Pattern, the state affirms interpretations found in *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, even when they run contrary to state interests. For instance, the interpretation of Surah At-Taubah, Verse 36, endorsing the notion of obligatory fighting against non-Muslims, contradicts the principles of peace and non-violence promoted by the state through its anti-radicalism programs. Despite this contradiction, the state affirms the interpretation, highlighting the intricate interplay between religious interpretation and state interests.

These patterns reveal that the state's influence on interpretations in *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* is complex and multifaceted. While some interpretations align with state interests, others may do so inadvertently or even in opposition to state objectives. The intricate relationship between religion and the state in Indonesia, as reflected in these diverse affirmations, underscores the need for a nuanced understanding that goes beyond a singular perspective. The collaborative effort involving 15 authors, each with diverse social and intellectual backgrounds, adds another layer of complexity, as the interests of minority groups may be less visible within the interpretation. Additionally, the influence of the Sunni-Shafi'i tradition on the narrative sometimes overshadows the local context of Indonesia, showcasing the varied dynamics at play in the interpretation process.

Conclusion

This study examines the analysis of critical narratives concerning other religions in the *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. The findings reveal inconsistencies and ambiguities in the interpretation of these narratives. The presence of a state institution producing the Tafsir introduces ambiguity regarding the Qur'an's stance towards other religions, which can be attributed to the diverse interests underlying the production of *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*. The inconsistencies observed in *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* are closely connected to the state's affirmative endeavors in addressing interfaith relations within Indonesia. Notably, three patterns of state affirmation emerge in the interpretation of these verses: affirmative-accommodative, affirmative-permissive, and affirmative-disruptive. These patterns shed light on the nature of the relationship between religion and the state in Indonesia, encompassing various aspects of social, political, and intellectual history that are intertwined with the production of *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*.

The interpretive inconsistencies observed within the context of state affirmation efforts have significant implications for the construction of narratives

surrounding inter-religious relations in Indonesia. These impacts manifest themselves in both positive and negative ways. On the positive side, the inconsistencies illustrate a harmonious relationship between the state and religion, without negating one another. However, on the negative side, these inconsistencies inadvertently provide legitimacy for radicalism, enabling extremists to justify their actions by invoking the authority of the state. As a result, the presence of interpretive inconsistencies within the state's affirmations can have profound consequences on the dynamics of inter-religious relations within the Indonesian context.

This research delves into the intricate nature of interpreting other religions within the *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, highlighting the multifaceted influence of political, social, and intellectual factors on these interpretations. By unraveling these complexities, it offers a deeper comprehension of the intricate relationship between religion and the state in Indonesia, as well as the repercussions of interpretive inconsistencies in shaping narratives concerning inter-religious relations. Given the significance of this issue, further studies and increased attention are crucial to foster the development of a more inclusive and harmonious discourse within the realm of religious life in Indonesia. Such endeavors will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of religious dynamics and promote greater interfaith understanding within the Indonesian context.

Supplementary Materials

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Authors' contributions

All listed authors contributed to this article. A.Y.M. wrote the original draft, reviewed and edited it, and wrote the formal analysis, M.B. compiled the resources, conceptualised the study, and managed the project administration. A.R.M. was responsible for the methodology and validation and supervised the project.

Data availability statement

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

Conflicts of Interest

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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