

MORE THAN A TAFSĪR Convergence, Contestation, and Deradicalization of Quranic Interpretations on Website

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Abstract:

Social media has opened space for practically anyone to interpret the Qur'an, thus the contestation of *tafsīr* cannot be avoided. The term *e-tafsīr* in this article refers to the Quranic interpretations that appear in the digital space through new media (both website and social media). This study employs a digital ethnography method by investigating and observing various websites related to the Quranic interpretations. It focuses on popular Islamic websites such as tafsiralquran.id, ibtimes.id, and buletinkaffah.com, which regularly uploaded Islamic articles between 2020 and 2023. The research argues that social media has resulted in the proliferation of *e-tafsīr*, including conservative (textualist) interpretations of the Qur'an. Furthermore, the author contends that to reduce radicalism in Indonesia, it is not enough to block conservative websites; it should be countered by spreading moderate Quranic interpretations. This article unveils the contestation of *e-tafsīr* in Indonesia, which may also occur in other digitalizing Muslim worlds.

Keywords: *E-Tafsīr*, Contestation of *Tafsīr*, and Deradicalization of *Tafsīr*

Lebih dari Sekedar Sebuah Tafsir: Konvergensi, Kontestasi, dan Deradikalisasi Penafsiran al-Qur'an dalam Situs Web

Abstrak:

Media sosial telah membuka ruang bagi siapa saja untuk menafsirkan al-Qur'an sehingga kontestasi penafsiran tidak bisa dihindarkan. Istilah e-tafsir dalam artikel ini merujuk pada penafsiran-penafsiran yang menjamur di ruang digital melalui media baru (baik situs web maupun media sosioal). Penelitian ini menerapkan metode digital etnografi dengan menyelidiki dan mengamati berbagai situs web yang berkaitan dengan tafsir al-Qur'an. Penelitian ini berfokus pada situs-situs Islam populer seperti tafsiralquran.id, ibtimes.id, dan buletinkaffah.com yang secara teratur mengunggah artikel-artikel keislaman pada tahun 2020-2023. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa media sosial telah menghasilkan proliferasi tafsir elektronik termasuk didalamnya tafsir al-Qur'an yang konservatif (textualis). Penulis juga berpendapat bahwa untuk mengurangi radikalisme di Indonesia, tidak cukup hanya memblokir situ-situs konservatif tetapi juga harus diimbangi dengan menyebarkan penafsiran-penafsiran al-Qur'an yang moderat. Artikel ini mengungkap kontestasi tafsir elektronik (e-tafsir) di Indonesia yang mungkin juga terjadi di belahan dunia Muslim lainnya yang sedang mengalami digitalisasi.

Kata Kunci: *Tafsir Elektronik (Tafsir-El), Kontestasi Tafsir, dan Deradikalisasi Tafsir.*

أكثر من مجرد تفسير:

التقارب والتنافس ونزع التطرف في تفسير القرآن الكريم على المواقع الإلكترونية

ملخص

لقد فتحت وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي المجال أمام أي شخص لتفسير القرآن، بحيث لا يمكن تجنب التنافس في التفسير. ويشير مصطلح «التفسير الإلكتروني» في هذه الدراسة إلى التفسيرات التي تنتشر في الفضاء الرقمي عبر الإنترنت، وخاصة المواقع الإلكترونية ووسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. يطبق هذا البحث الأسلوب الإثنوغرافي الرقمي من خلال التحقيق ومراقبة المواقع المختلفة التي تعرض أو تبث تفسيرات للقرآن الكريم. وكنماذج يركز هذا البحث على المواقع الإسلامية الشهيرة مثل tafsiralquran.id، و ibtimes.id، و buletinkaffah.com التي تقوم بنشر المقالات الإسلامية بانتظام في 2020-2023. وقد توصل هذا البحث إلى أن وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي أدت إلى انتشار التفسيرات الإلكترونية، بما في ذلك التفسيرات المحافظة النصية للقرآن. ويعتقد المؤلف أيضًا أنه للحد من التطرف في إندونيسيا، لا يكفي حجب المواقع المحافظة فحسب، بل يجب أيضًا تحقيق التوازن من خلال نشر تفسيرات معتدلة للقرآن. يكشف هذا البحث عن التنافس على التفسير الإلكتروني (e-tafsir) في إندونيسيا والذي قد يحدث أيضًا في أرجاء أخرى من العالم الإسلامي التي تشهد التحول الرقمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التفسير الإلكتروني، منافسة التفسير، ونزع التطرف عن التفسير.

Introduction

Recently, sympathizers of extreme ideology have been appearing more frequently in the Indonesian public sphere. For instance, in 2022, a Muslim woman carrying a gun tried to break into the State Palace. After the case was investigated by the police, she admitted that she took action following a dream about the afterlife to practice genuine Islamic teachings in the caliphate system. She also often consumed and shared caliphate discourses through her social media accounts (TvOne Team 2022). The propaganda for the implementation of Islamic law (*Sharia*) by some Islamist groups is inspired by a textual, superficial, and partial (literalism) interpretation of a certain verse. For instance, al-Mā'idah: 49 discusses the rules for deciding a particular problem through the Islamic path. Kaffah, a website managed by former HTI (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia) members, interpreted this verse as an argument for rejecting the democratic system that is legally applied in Indonesia. According to Kaffah, the system of government must be based on *Sharia*, and legal issues in a country must be regulated by Islamic law, not by the people or leaders (government). At the same time, laws originating from Allah's revelations (Al-Qur'an and Sunnah) will make people prosperous and wealthy (Kaffah 2022a: 4).

Tafsīr is an Arabic term that means to unveil, uncover, and explain (As-Suyūṭī 1996: 758). In other words, *tafsīr* is an explanation of the meaning of a Quranic verse that reveals what is meant by the text. In early Muslim society, the Prophet Muhammad orally interpreted the verses of the Qur'an to his companions. Later, as time progressed, these interpretations were conveyed by scholars or ulama through writing in various *kitābs*. In the twentieth century, the interpretations and Islamic knowledge spread through new media such as radio, television, etc. Towards the end of the same century, the proliferation of new communication technologies began to be used as a medium for preaching and conveying Islamic teachings, including the Quranic interpretation (Nisa 2018a: 73). The concept of *e-tafsīr* emerged from this context, and this paper defines it as the Quranic interpretation within cyberspace, encompassing social media and websites.

This research employs a qualitative approach through critical discourse analysis to collect data by investigating and observing various Islamic websites that propagate interpretations of the Qur'an, such as *tafsiralquran.id*, *ibtimes.id*, and *buletinkaffah.com*. The selection of the three websites represents prominent Indonesian Muslim mass organizations: Nahdlatul Ulama (traditionalist), Muhammadiyah (progressive), and ex-HTI (Islamist) groups, respectively. These websites regularly uploaded Islamic articles between within 2020 and 2023. We

focus on verses that have the potential to result in debates among Muslims, such as *khilāfah* (Al-Baqarah [2]: 30), *ummatan wasaṭan* (Al-Baqarah [2]: 143), and *khayr ummah* (Āli ‘Imrān [3]: 110). These words contain political elements, prompting the following questions: Why do websites have different interpretations of the same verses? To what extent is the contestation of interpretation present on these websites? How do Muslims respond to these diverse interpretations?

This study argues that the internet has created a new social environment that facilitates public interaction, thereby encouraging the democratization of online interpretation and establishing new authorities (Campbell and Teusner 2011: 59). Subsequent developments have led to information being completely open, aligning with Lim’s (2005: 28) perspective on the conviviality of the internet, where content can be spread widely without clear identification of the authority behind the information.

In relation to the emergence of *e-tafsīr* in Indonesia, we have identified a typology in *e-tafsīr* in Indonesia, namely tafsiralquran as a direct interpretation, ibtimes as an additional or specific rubric interpretation, and bulletinkaffah as an indirect interpretation. Initially, mainstream moderate Muslim groups did not consistently promote their Islamic interpretations, which differed from conservative groups (Halimatusa’diyah 2020: iii). However, more recently, the former has started creating websites to counter conservative *e-tafsīr* in Indonesia. We further argue that this development has contributed to challenging the proliferation of conservative *e-tafsīr* in Indonesia, which remains prevalent despite the government’s efforts to block such websites.

This article proceeds as follows: First, we explore the transformation of conventional media into new media, which is utilized for the development of interpretation, including the pursuit of true *tafsīr* on social media. Furthermore, we provide a brief explanation of the Islamic organization and websites developed by each group. Then, we highlight the contestation of interpretations on the websites, heavily influenced by behind-the-scenes actors, leading to polarization and politicization of the Quranic verses. Finally, we explain the relevance of deradicalizing *tafsīr* as an initial effort to prevent conservative understandings.

The Quest for ‘True’ *Tafsīr* on the Internet in Digitalizing Indonesia

The emergence of the internet as a new media platform has provided vast opportunities for disseminating information, especially religious messages. Social media has become a tool for expressing and consuming the thoughts of Muslims, including their understanding of the interpretation of the

Qur'an (Nisa 2018b: 24-25). Moreover, statistics reveal that the reading literacy of Indonesians is inadequate, while simultaneously, internet usage rates have been rapidly increasing (Jurriëns and Tapsell 2019: 5-8). This finding underscores that new media, particularly social media like Facebook and Instagram, are accessed more frequently by the Indonesian population compared to traditional literature, let alone scholarly works. In 2019, according to the National Counter Terrorism Agency (BNPT) social media index, nearly half of Indonesians used social media to explore and voice religious content (Sianturi, Pardede, and Riadi 2021: 124). In other words, *e-tafsīr* has gained popularity among Indonesian Muslims as a means to access religious knowledge and guide their everyday life (Lukman 2016: 119).

The way a *tafsīr* is disseminated currently differs significantly from the era before the internet gained popularity. In the pre-digital technology era, religious messages, encompassing both moderate and conservative understandings, were conveyed orally through congregations or dialogues with their followers (*jamā'ah*). Subsequently, with the advent of early technological advancements, religious messages were disseminated through various print media forms such as writings. Both conservative and moderate groups vied to indoctrinate religious messages through books, magazines, bulletins, or newspapers. With the rapid growth of technology, including the rise of social media, conservative and even radical groups were among the first to leverage this momentum. They engaged in indoctrination via various social media platforms (Lim 2003: 247, 2005: 185-187). Data compiled from several surveys indicate that the number of supporters of the ideology of jihadism is quite significant (Syarif 2019: 21).

The popularity of *e-tafsīr* in Indonesia, thus, has posed challenges due to the spread of conservative and radical Islamic teachings through the internet and social media. Moreover, the spread of radical *e-tafsīrs* has manifested in various terrorist acts. Indeed, radical efforts have influenced the dynamic of Islam in Indonesia throughout its history. Indonesia is acknowledged as not being a religious state, but it also doesn't segregate religion from the daily lives of its citizens. Religious values are intertwined with local wisdom and customs, shaping the identity of Indonesians as an Islamic nation that embraces local culture with a polite, tolerant, harmonious character while adeptly engaging in dialogue amidst diversity (Tim Penyusun Kementerian Agama RI 2019: 43). Robert Hefner (2009) highlights the tolerant characteristic of Indonesian Islam with the concept of 'civil Islam'.

With the development of the internet, the interpreters of the Qur'an who utilize websites and social media to spread their interpretation have become more diverse. For example, Salman Harun, a senior professor in the field of Qur'anic interpretation, employs Facebook as a means to disseminate his interpretive insights. In contrast to other interpreters who use print media, Harun prefers new media as a platform to convey his thoughts through the Qur'anic interpretation. This approach allows him to address contemporary discourses in the realm of *tafsīr* for this century (Muhammad 2017: 69). Similarly, Nadirsyah Hosen leverages Facebook as a new channel for conveying his interpretations. Hosen, a professor in Islamic law, frequently elucidates verses of the Qur'an that carry political and legal implications. For example, he interprets al-Māidah (5): 51 as a response to the political struggles occurring in Indonesia regarding the interpretation of *awliyā'* (Hosen 2019). Furthermore, Hosen's interpretation serves as a form of resistance against the diverse array of interpretations that arise on social media (Juwantara, Aini, and Zahra 2020: 329). His observations on the proliferation of Qur'anic interpretations on social media are encapsulated in a book that urges readers/users to approach verses with caution and remain open to interpretations beyond their own group.

Utilizing social media, the interpretation of the Qur'an has also been undertaken by Ali Nouman Khan. He presents his interpretation of the Qur'an through a linguistic approach, harmoniously blending with the nuance of *adābi ijtimā'i*. Khan's distinctive style has successfully captured the attention of YouTube users, amassing tens of millions of viewers (Hairul, 2020: 212). Instagram is also a significant platform for the contestation of Quranic interpretations on social media. Despite its limitation in offering texts, images, and videos, the extensive user base in Indonesia, which is almost 100 million people, renders Instagram a potent medium for conveying the messages of the Qur'an. An illustrative example is the account @quranreview, recognized for innovatively presenting the Qur'anic message in the language of the youth (slang and soft), alongside a concise thematic presentation that gets to the heart of the issues. In other words, the @quranreview account endeavors to offer Qur'anic solutions as practical guidance for the contemporary problems faced by its followers (Izzuthoriqulhaq and Syauqi 2021: 56-7).

While there is an increasing diversity of actors and agencies involved in e-*tafsīr*, prior studies have predominantly focused on examining e-*tafsīr* on social media. For instance, Fadhlī Lukman categorizes the diversity of interpretive forms and topics on social media. According to his classification, Quranic interpretation on social media in Indonesia can be grouped into

three tendencies (Lukman 2016: 119): textual tendencies (digital interpreters carry out interpretive activities by moving from text to context); contextual tendencies (digital interpreters carry out their interpretive activities moving from empirical data to the texts of the Qur'an); and *tafsīr 'ilmi* tendencies (digital interpreters aim to validate scientific findings using verses from the Qur'an).

This paper aims to bridge the gap in existing *e-tafsīr* studies by directing its focus towards websites.¹ A website essentially serves as a 'home' for social media accounts. Almost all accounts on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and others are linked to web pages that belong to specific domains. Websites hold several crucial advantages over social media accounts. Firstly, they offer search engine functionality. When individuals seek the interpretation of a particular verse, they simply type their query into a search engine column (World Wide Web), and then a URL (Uniform Resource Locator) displays various interpretations through webpages or websites. In this sense, websites serve as the initial step for individuals seeking to understand the meaning of a specific verse. Secondly, websites are not confined by character limits, in contrast to social media platforms (IG, FB, or TikTok) which impose restrictions on characters or time duration. This characteristic of the website provides greater flexibility for delivering interpretations. Undoubtedly, in terms of dissemination, social media holds a considerable advantage over websites. However, service providers (agencies) regularly employ both websites and social media to ensure broad, rapid, and effective outreach to users. The discussion below delves into the strategies and mechanisms involved.

Muslim Organizations in Indonesia and Their Online Propagation

Indonesia, with a population of approximately 270 million people, hosts the world's largest Muslim community, accounting for around 88% of its populace. Moreover, It serves as the home to the world's most-followed Islamic organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. Both have tens of millions of followers and frequently work together against radical groups, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. These organizations, each boasting tens of millions of followers, frequently collaborate against radical groups. It is no wonder that both have thrived for over a century in the Hijri calendar, evolving into mainstream Islamic institutions championing moderate ideologies (Kuru 2021; Massola 2019). It is important to note that

¹ The author simply found one research that discussed interpretation focused on websites, Rifai (2020) examines interpretations on the tafsirweb.com site, but he merely focuses on the digitization model on the website and not discussed more depth of the interpretive content on the website.

not all Indonesian Muslims exclusively align with these two organizations. A vocal minority tends to opt for and endorse radical or conservative sympathies (Hefner 2003). Among the transnational Islamic movements advocating for the establishment of an Islamic state in Indonesia is Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). Despite its government ban in 2017, the organization, which once attracted tens of thousands of followers, continues to remain active underground and online (Zaim 2019: 14-5).

The aforementioned organizations have been active in propagating their Islamic teaching through websites, forming the core focus of this study. These include the Tafsiralquran, IbTimes, and Kaffah websites, each representing different Islamic organization groups like NU, Muhammadiyah, and HTI. These organizations exhibit distinct tendencies toward specific Islamic political agendas, with traditional, progressive, and Islamist ideologies respectively. Additionally, the research focuses on politically motivated verses such as sura Al-Baqarah (2): 30, Al-Baqarah (2): 143, and Āli 'Imrān (3): 110 which magnifies the contestation of Islamic interpretations between the three groups. The contestation of narratives or interpretations reaches its zenith as they deconstruct their arguments and vie for the attention of users. In this background, their interpretations are strongly influenced by the actors behind the platform, frequently aligning with and promoting their respective organizational visions.

Initially launched in 2020, tafsiralquran is a platform that centralizes content related to Quranic interpretation and scientific discourses related to the Qur'an. With a vision of constructing an Islamic civilization rooted in the interpretation of the Qur'an, the platform aims to provide tangible benefits to the community. The website predominantly features moderate interpretations, employing the *tahlili* and thematic methods of interpretation. The thematic interpretations on the website are categorized into several rubrics, such as interpretations of *Aḥkam* (laws), Ecology (environment), *Ishari* (Sufism), Nationality (relationship between state and religion), *Tarbawi* (morality), as well as thematic interpretations of *sūrah*s (verses and suras) in the Qur'an.

The website was initiated by the Center for Research and Islamic Studies (CRIS) Foundation in collaboration with the el-Bukhari Institute which seeks to explore the meaning of the Qur'an deeply and broadly, thereby ensuring that the study of interpretation remains dynamic and aligned with societal developments (Editor 2020b). The platform is guided by the motto 'deliver even only one verse,' and adheres to scientific principles in the field of *ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Qur'anic studies), while also drawing from the insights of scholars (*ulama*) and authoritative exegetical literature within an Indonesian context.

To broaden its outreach, tafsiralquran utilizes various social media accounts, for instance, Instagram (11.5k followers), Facebook (1.7k followers), Twitter (1.5k followers), and YouTube (1.1k subscribers and 15.4 views). According to similarweb.com, the tafsiralquran.id website has recorded a total of 112.6k visitors and has achieved a ranking of 67 in the category of website community and society in Indonesia.

IbTimes, launched in 2019, arose in response to the surge of hoaxes, hate speeches, intolerance, conservatism, radicalism, and terrorism pervasive in social media. Recognizing the need for a counter-narrative, the website positions itself as the Voice of Progressive Islam (*Islam Berkemajuan*). Its mission centers around challenging the radical narratives and discourses that have flourished across various social media platforms. IbTimes adopts an approach to Islamic interpretation that integrates texts (al-Qur'an and Hadith), *ilm* (science and technology), and intellectual Islamic narratives (Ibtimes 2019). They are committed to spreading moderate and contextual Islamic messages by accommodating Islamic values and modernity. The website is managed by young Muhammadiyah activists who are dedicated to disseminating messages about Islam. Their focus extends beyond the realm of Islamic interpretation. The website houses a dedicated section on Islamic interpretations within a category named Afkaruna (which literally means thoughts). To expand the reach of their *e-tafsīr*, IbTimes uploaded their Islamic interpretation through various social media accounts, such as Instagram (18.3k followers), Facebook (9.9 followers), Twitter (7.2k followers), and YouTube (704 subscribers and 24.4 views). Based on similarweb.com, the number of visitors to the website reached 176.4k, and it ranks 103 in the category of community and social website in Indonesia.

Thirdly, Kaffah initially originated as a bulletin disseminated to various mosques every Friday under the auspices Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (Ghazali 2021). HTI is an Islamic organization (*ormas*) that has been officially banned by the government due to its categorization as an extremist and radical movement. that aims to establish a caliphate state, which is contrary to the ideology of Pancasila in Indonesia. Consequently, Kaffah's central doctrine revolves around advocating the Islamic caliphate as the solution to the multifaceted challenges faced by Muslims on a global scale (Burhani 2017: 1). In the aftermath of the government's prohibition of HTI, former members of the organization adjusted their *da'wa* strategy, employing new media as a conduit for disseminating their ideas, which is more challenging to regulate. While Kaffah's ownership does not overtly disclose its affiliation, data collection and thorough examination of their writings substantiate a close alignment with the former HTI ideology. In regard to their development on

social media, Kaffah utilizes various platforms, such as Instagram (32.4k followers), Facebook (31k followers), Telegram (12.5k subscribers), and the website which has reached 32.2k visitors.

Contestation of Moderate and Conservative E-*Tafsīr*

The emergence of e-*tafsīr*, indeed provides a vast opportunity for the wider community to engage with various interpretations and further fragment religious authorities (Iqbal 2014: 283-284). Internet users can select and choose any information -in this case Islamic interpretation- from a wide-ranging option of Islamic interpretations in cyberspace. The aforementioned cases vividly illustrate the diversity of Islamic websites. Their interpretations of some topics show highly significant differences, as follows:

1. *Khalīfah*, (*Caliph, al-Baqarah* [2]:30)

a. Tafsirquran

This verse serves as evidence concerning the obligation of Muslims to elect and appoint a supreme leader who can serve as a unifying figure among communities (tafsiralquran editor, 2020). The term '*khalīfah*' in this verse conveys the idea of an individual who impartially adjudicates cases among all people, irrespective of differences in religion, ethnicity, and race (Suharsono 2021). It aims to foster a civilization in any form of government, as Islamic doctrines never dictate a specific governmental system within a country (Naim 2021). Thus, the interpretation asserting that this verse mandates the establishment of an Islamic state is an ancillary and ambiguous viewpoint rooted in the political agendas of specific factions (Kurdi 2020).

b. IbTimes

The caliphate system entails a country that isn't necessarily obligated to implement Islamic law as long as certain prerequisites are met within the nation. First and foremost, it should be capable of providing security and prosperity for all its citizens; second, it should be adept at ensuring justice, peace, and crime control; third, it should excel in upholding trust (promises) and safeguarding the rights of its citizens (Ilyas 2022). The caliphate concept remains subject to considerable criticism. Firstly, there is a lack of a definitive method for selecting a caliph; secondly, there is no limit on the term of leadership; and finally, there are no constraints on the authority of a caliph. Consequently, this system has faced widespread rejection in the Middle East and other regions, primarily due to its incongruity with the nation-state model (Hidayatullah 2020; Mahendra 2023; Yanuri 2022).

c. Kaffah

The verse serves as a basis for arguing the obligation to establish and uphold the caliphate. According to this perspective, Muslims are obliged to appoint an *imām* or caliph who must be obeyed. There is no dispute among scholars (*ulama*) regarding this obligation except the Muktaẓilah group (Kaffah 2021b: 2). The verse also confirms that the concept of the caliphate has indeed been commanded in the Qur'an. Drawing from all the proofs (*dalīl*) of *Sharia*, both the Qur'an as-Sunnah and the consensus of the Companions, as well as the explanation of the famous *ulama*, it is clear that there is no other government system in Islam except the caliphate. Thus, systems such as So, Monarchies, Republics, Democracies, and so on are clearly not derived from Islam and are even contrary to Islam. Therefore, there is no *Sharia* evidence that validates the existence of these systems within Islam (Kaffah 2020: 4; 2021c: 2-4, 2022b: 4).

2. *Ummatan wasaṭan* (*just community, al-Baqarah* [2]:143)

a. Tafsiralquran

Ummatan wasaṭan is defined by the meaning of fairness in various ways, avoiding any inclination towards a particular school (*mazhab*) and refraining from excess (*israf*). *Wasaṭan* is defined as moderate which is manifested through the engagement of Muslims with the community, inclusively contributing to the establishment of world peace and civilization (Prasetia 2020) There are at least two main reasons why Muslims are referred to as *ummatan wasaṭan*. Firstly, it encompasses the notion of balance within religion, extending its focus beyond matters of spirituality (like Jews) or materialism (like Christians) but on both. Secondly, it underscores the integration of knowledge and action. Muslims are encouraged to view social reality by considering both textual teachings and context, ensuring that their actions align with religious principles and contribute positively to humanity (Faidurrohman 2021; Ulumiyah 2021). This is not an ideology, but rather a way of looking at the process of practicing and understanding Islamic values in accordance with the purpose for which the religion was revealed, namely mercy for humans (An Nakhrowi 2021).

b. IbTimes

Ummatan wasaṭan represents a community dedicated to positioning Islamic teachings between two extreme poles, guided by an emphasis on justice, virtue, and moderation in both thought and action. Wasaṭiyah

Islam is an essential teaching of Islam that aligns with the texts of the Holy Book (Al-Qur'an), by balancing the synthesis of text and context, aql and naql, as well as normativity and historicity, allowing for the evolution of Islam (Ibrahim 2022). This idea extends beyond merely advocating for a moderate presentation of Islam, encompassing a modern outlook that welcomes Western culture, and looking towards the future while harnessing the power of science and technology (Khanafi 2020).

c. Kaffah

The concept of *ummatan wasaṭan* is defined as a just and equitable community, signifying a commitment to aligning all aspects in accordance with Islamic law (*sharia*). Consequently, Muslims as *ummatan wasaṭan* distinguish themselves from Christians who formulate their own regulations or laws (democracy), and also from Jews who may not apply their *sharia*. To embody *ummatan wasaṭan*, one must incorporate Islamic law (*Shariah*) into the state system (Kaffah 2021a: 3-4). The term *ummatan wasaṭan* is also interpreted as representing religious moderation, a term that has a certain political purpose. Moderate Islam (*Islam Moderat*) entails an adaptation of Islamic principles to Western thought, understanding, and civilization. In short, a moderate Muslim is a Muslim who accepts, adopts, propagates, and practices an understanding of Islam in accordance with Western methods (Kaffah 2021b: 1-2; 2021a: 1-3).

3. *Khayr ummah* (the best community, *Āli 'Imrān: 110*)

a. Tafsiralquran

Khayr ummah signifies a transformation towards an inclusive ideal society. This implies that in contemporary times, Muslims can aspire to become a *khayr ummah* through their efforts towards societal transformation, which encompass humanization, liberation (from an inappropriate system), and faith in Allah (Ali 2021). While the *khayr ummah* verse textually refers to Muslims, it should not be misconstrued as endorsing the superiority of Muslims over other religions (Fikriyati 2020).

b. IbTimes

Khayr ummah represents a community that can extend help to others (organizations) that advocate *amr ma'rūf nahy munkar*. The term *ma'rūf* (virtues) actions encompass practices such as praying, almsgiving, and obeying Allah. The command to establish prayer remains relevant in the Indonesian Muslim community, as there are many who identify as Muslims

yet do not engage in prayer or fulfill Islamic almsgiving obligations (Rahardjo 2020).

c. Kaffah

Kaffah argues that the credibility of the *khayr ummah* (the best community) cannot be ascribed to Muslims in the present day, primarily because they do not apply Islamic law in the caliphate institution. This is based on the consensus reached among the four *imams* of the schools or mazhab (Hanafi, Maliki, Syafii, and Hanbali) regarding the establishment of the caliphate (Kaffah 2021d: 3-4).

Interpretations presented on social media (*e-tafṣīr*), especially on websites, cannot be separated from the tendency of behind-the-scenes actors (both website creators and article writers). The Tafsiralquran website interprets the meaning of *ummataṅ wasaṭan* to support the project of religious moderation, which is being massively promoted by the Indonesian government to counter the threats of radicalism and extremism. They also interpret the meaning of *khalīfah fī al-arḍ* as an obligation in choosing the president as the highest leader of a country, and the meaning of *khayr ummah* is interpreted as closely tied to the context of Indonesian-ness. The term *ummah* is a bond of equality in any sense such as nation, tribe, religion, ideology, and so on. That relationship has given birth to one *ummah*, thus all its members are relatives (Muhammad 2021).

While the IbTimes website which calls itself the Voices of Islam with Progress, it interprets the meaning of *khalīfah fī al-arḍ* not necessarily in the form of a caliphate system, as long as peace, prosperity, and security are fulfilled in the country. Similar to the previous website, IbTimes also interprets *wasataṅ* in the sense of being in the middle between extremism and liberalism, emphasizing moderation based on (*moderat yang berpedoman*) -the Qur'an and Sunnah-. There are at least seven points that affirm the meaning of *wasataṅ* such as *tawassuṭ* (a straight middle path), *i'tidāl* (proportionally and fair action), *tasamuḥ* (tolerant), *syūrā* (consultation in resolving any issues through deliberation to reach consensus), *iṣlah* (getting engaged to reformative and constructive action), *qudwah* (generating a noble initiative), and *muwaṭanah* (acknowledging the nation-state) (Khoirudin 2020). IbTimes intends to interpret the meaning of *khayr ummah* to support the project of establishing a Muhammadiyah organization that carries out *da'wah* by promoting good and preventing immorality, aligning with the slogan of Muhammadiyah (*amr ma'rūf nahy munkar*).

Kaffah itself interprets the meaning of the *khalifah fi al-ard* as a proposition to support their propaganda in the project to apply the caliphate in the world. In many of their writings, they adeptly weave religious messages by referencing various everyday life problems and then use the Quranic verses as a legitimation of their argument. They employ the same approach in interpreting the meaning of *ummatan wasaʿatan*, and *khayr ummah* as arguments supporting the establishment of the caliphate. Despite, to some extent, the content of Kaffah suggesting a conservative interpretation of the Qur'an, the website has remained active in propagating this *e-tafsir* despite the government's determined efforts to ban the organization and block such websites. We state that the persistence of Kaffah can be attributed to its indirect propagation strategy, which poses a challenge to deradicalization efforts in the digital age.

The indirect website is one of our classifications for the methods through which Islamic websites in Indonesia propagate their *e-tafsir*. We argue that Indonesian Islamic websites can be classified into direct interpretation, added interpretation, and indirect interpretation websites. Direct interpretation websites are where the website is specifically created to disseminate content about Islamic interpretation only, with *tafsiralquran.id* being an example of this category. In the second category, additional websites, the focus extends beyond Islamic interpretations to include thematic content. In Indonesia, this kind of website is commonly spread on social media to provide flexible responses to the daily concerns of Indonesian Muslims. Some websites that fall into this typology include *ibtimes*, *islam.nu*, *bincangsyariah*, *islamkaffah*, *rumaysho*, *bangsaonline* and others. Finally, indirect websites do not interpret the verse of the Qur'an directly, but rather in the form of narratives or articles. If the users read the content carefully and meticulously, they will find various interpretations tucked into the contents, as the interpretations contained in this website are more implicit. Conservative or radical groups generally use this way considering that the ideas they propagate are often blocked by the Ministry of Communication and Information (*Kemkominfo*) because they often contain elements of negative stigma against the legal government and hate speech against other Muslim or non-Muslim groups, so they feel the need to change their strategy by discreetly spreading their conservative Islamic interpretations.

Way Forward: Efforts in Reducing Extremism in Digitalizing Indonesia

The development of *e-tafsir* in Indonesia underscores the necessity for a novel approach to counter the burgeoning rise of conservatism and

radicalism within the country. Various endeavours, both governmental and non-governmental, have indeed been undertaken to fortify religious moderation in Indonesia. These actions are spurred by the imperative to address the upsurge in violent extremism, radicalism, and intolerance that has afflicted Indonesian society over the past few decades. The emergence of hard-line Islamic groups or radical groups, spanning both violent and non-violent, is primarily a consequence of a superficial, partial, and narrow understanding of religion. Therefore, it is necessary to have a broad, open, and tolerant understanding of other practices, understandings, and teachings, so the deradicalization of *tafsīr* becomes very important to maintain the harmony of the Indonesian Muslim community. Eventually, the ideology of religious moderation must be disseminated among Muslims, especially in interpreting the main sources of Islam (the Qur'an and hadith), to avoid radical understanding (*gulūw*) in the name of religion.

Initially, the term 'deradicalization of *tafsīr*' was introduced by Mustaqim (2013), and later expanded upon by Nasaruddin Umar in his book *Deradikalisasi Pemahaman Al-Qur'an dan Hadis*. The book was borne out of an Indonesian interpreter's concern over the outlook held by certain Muslim communities, where violence is perceived as being endorsed by Islamic scriptures. Such an understanding has created a negative stigma from the West, portraying Islam as an intolerant religion that justifies violence. To stem these stereotypes, it is necessary to counterbalance such narratives with an open, moderate, and soft understanding (Umar 2014).

In the current digital age, the moderate interpretation should be actively propagated through the internet given the limitation of blocking conservative and radical websites. Among the efforts to mainstream moderate Islamic teaching is the digitalization of *tafsir* books. This entails transforming traditional hardcopy texts into digital formats to enhance access to Qur'anic interpretations within the digital realm. Furthermore, responding swiftly to interpretations of popular verses or significant events by providing Quranic-based solutions is crucial as a counter-narrative against conservative or radical groups. Given the immensity of social media users, the phenomenon of pop-*tafsīr* has become a defining characteristic of this century (Pink 2010). For instance, the alleged blasphemy case committed by Ahok catapulted sura Al-Māidah (5): 51 into virality in 2016. The verse has become popular and a subject of debate not only among scholars and academics but also among laypeople lacking interpretational authority. In this regard, popular interpretations have become part of public consumption, necessitating the propagation of moderate interpretations to safeguard against distortions.

In fact, mainstream Islamic organizations in Indonesia represented by NU and Muhammadiyah frequently spread moderate ideas, but somehow, they still tend to be left behind in responding to radical content. At the same time, radicalism, conservatives, or fundamentalists repeatedly articulate the narratives that contain radical thought, so they have been challenged by moderate thought in the contestation of *tafsīr* on social media. The difference in narrative delivery patterns is a significant factor. Some mainstream Islamic organizations only interpret the Qur'an according to their abilities or simply use *ijmāli* (global) or *tahlīli* (analytical) method (for instance <https://www.nu.or.id/> and <https://tafsirweb.com/>), although there are several websites that interpret the thematic method (for instance <https://tanwir.id/> and <https://tafsiralquran.id/>). While radicals use thematic methods, they spread narratives or religious messages according to what is presently being discussed by the Indonesian people. In this sense, the radical or conservative group - represented by Kaffah - managed to wrap the narrative skilfully and nicely by looking at the context of the public conversation. While initially, the moderate Muslim groups such as Nahdhatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah in Indonesia were lagging behind in propagating their tolerant Islamic teaching through the internet, however, some Islamic websites recently have emerged from the younger generation of these organizations such as tafsiralquran and ibtimes discussed in this paper.

Conclusion

As a religious reference, the understanding of the Qur'an must be accurate and sound, so that it can serve as a source of mercy for the entire universe. When the Holy Book is interpreted through the lens of various interests and desires of the interpreter (*mufasssir*), it's undeniable that the interpretations that surface, especially on websites or social media accounts, can foster rigid, radical, extreme understandings, leading to one-sided justifications. The emergence of *e-tafsīr* has ushered in a shift in the phenomena of religious authority, especially in the field of interpretation. The content of Qur'anic verses, once deemed sacred and revered, has indirectly eroded due to the politicization of numerous verses aimed at bolstering each group's doctrines. Moderate interpretations accessible through websites tend to outnumber radical interpretations in terms of access. However, in terms of consistency and the updating of narratives, the former lags behind. Conservative interpretations, while often shared in an indirect (hidden/implicit) manner, exhibit significant activity in disseminating content via cyberspace. Moreover, their content is diversified

into various forms (text, audio, and visual), and disseminated through numerous social media accounts, facilitating the accumulation of substantial support. Therefore, efforts towards deradicalizing interpretations must emphasize the restoration of the identity of the Qur'an as a sacred scripture, free from any political interference. Deradicalization of *tafs̄ir* entails contextualizing of interpretation with certain conditions, ensuring that the Qur'an remains pertinent and compatible in this digital era.

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