

Hermeneutical Reconstruction of Qur'anic War Verses: Exclusive Exegesis, Power Relations, and the Challenge of Religious Radicalism in Contemporary Indonesia

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords:</p> <p>Qur'anic war verses; Contextual hermeneutics; Religious radicalism.</p> <p>Article history:</p> <p>Received 2025-07-13 Revised 2025-08-06 Accepted 2025-10-05</p>	<p>This study aims to analyze how exclusive and literalist interpretations of Qur'anic verses on warfare, such as QS. <i>At-Taubah</i>:5 and QS. <i>Al-Anfāl</i>:12, have become one of the roots of religious radicalism and to offer a framework for reconstructing interpretation that is more ethical and contextual. The research employs a qualitative-critical approach through library research, using Fazlur Rahman's double-movement hermeneutics, Michel Foucault's analysis of power relations, and the framework of <i>maqāṣid al-sharī'ah</i> as analytical tools. Data were collected from classical tafsirs (al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī), modern tafsirs (<i>Tafsir al-Azhar</i>, <i>Tafsir al-Mishbāh</i>), and contemporary academic literature. The findings reveal that literalist exegesis, when detached from its historical context and ethical purposes, legitimizes violence and fuels exclusivism, while contextual exegesis offers an inclusive framework that fosters dialogue, reconciliation, and social justice. This study also shows that exegesis is not ideologically neutral but often functions as an arena of power contestation, where interpretation can either reinforce domination or become a discourse of liberation against fundamentalism. The implications highlight the urgent need to integrate contextual hermeneutics into religious education curricula, strengthen exegetical literacy in public discourse, and promote interreligious dialogue as a means to counter radicalism. The originality of this research lies in its interdisciplinary integration of hermeneutics, power analysis, and socio-political context, which provides a comprehensive framework for reinterpreting Qur'anic war verses in a way that is faithful to the text yet responsive to contemporary plural realities.</p>
	<p>ABSTRAK</p> <p>Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis bagaimana tafsir eksklusif dan literalistik terhadap ayat-ayat perang dalam Al-Qur'an, seperti QS. <i>At-Taubah</i>:5 dan QS. <i>Al-Anfāl</i>:12, menjadi salah satu akar radikalisme agama serta menawarkan kerangka rekonstruksi tafsir yang lebih etis dan kontekstual. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif-kritis melalui studi pustaka, dengan memadukan hermeneutika ganda Fazlur Rahman, analisis relasi kuasa Michel Foucault, dan kerangka <i>maqāṣid al-sharī'ah</i> sebagai</p>

alat analisis. Data diperoleh dari tafsir klasik (al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī), tafsir modern (*Tafsir al-Azhar*, *Tafsir al-Mishbāh*), serta literatur akademik kontemporer. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tafsir literalistik, ketika dilepaskan dari konteks historis dan tujuan etiknya, cenderung melahirkan legitimasi kekerasan dan eksklusivisme. Sebaliknya, tafsir kontekstual mampu menghadirkan kerangka inklusif yang menumbuhkan dialog, rekonsiliasi, dan keadilan sosial. Penelitian ini juga menegaskan bahwa tafsir tidak pernah netral secara ideologis, melainkan menjadi arena perebutan makna: ia dapat menjadi alat legitimasi kekuasaan, sekaligus dapat direkonstruksi sebagai wacana pembebasan yang menolak fundamentalisme. Implikasi penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya integrasi hermeneutika kontekstual dalam kurikulum pendidikan agama, penguatan literasi tafsir di ruang publik, serta pengembangan dialog lintas agama sebagai strategi untuk menangkal radikalisme. Keaslian penelitian ini terletak pada integrasi interdisipliner antara hermeneutika, analisis kuasa, dan konteks sosial-politik, yang menghasilkan kerangka komprehensif dalam menafsirkan ulang ayat-ayat perang Al-Qur'an secara tetap setia pada teks sekaligus relevan dengan realitas plural kontemporer.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Religious radicalism is a complex phenomenon triggered not only by the ideologization of religious texts but also by the socio-political contexts that surround them (Fahidin, 2021). In Indonesia, a country marked by high levels of religious and ethnic plurality, radicalism poses a serious threat to social stability and national unity. Verses such as *QS. At-Taubah:5* and *QS. Al-Baqarah:191* are often cited literally by radical groups as justification for acts of violence. Such interpretations neglect the context of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), the objectives of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, and the values of pluralism that form an essential foundation for life in a diverse society. This phenomenon illustrates how exclusive interpretations can serve as ideological bases for intolerance and identity-based conflict.

This concern becomes even more pressing when examined through recent empirical data. The Indonesian National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT) estimates that approximately 33 million Indonesians have been exposed to radical ideologies. In the digital sphere, in 2023 BNPT detected 2,670 items of content containing intolerance, radicalism, and terrorism on social media, particularly on Facebook and Instagram (Setiawan, 2023). Throughout 2024, this number rose with the identification of 2,264 accounts and 10,519 pieces of content spreading terrorist narratives. In terms of violent actions, there were 97 recorded terrorism cases between 2017 and 2022, although in 2023 no incidents were reported due to stronger law enforcement. These data indicate that while the number of physical attacks can be reduced, the penetration of radical ideologies and content continues to spread through digital channels (BNPT RI, 2024).

Religious radicalism also thrives amid economic and political inequality, inadequate Qur'anic literacy, and patterns of religious education that remain exclusive (Qadri et al., 2024). The narrowing of public narrative spaces exacerbates the acceptance of literal interpretations, leading to identity polarization and religiously based conflict (Østebø, 2023). This has broad implications, both academically, which demands critical study of texts and interpretations, and practically, which requires governments, educational institutions, and civil society to formulate more constructive and inclusive strategies to counter radicalism.

Previous research on religious radicalism can be grouped into three main tendencies. First, normative-textual studies emphasize the analysis of Qur'anic verses related to war and social relations. Such works show that literal and partial interpretations often ignore the historical context (*asbāb al-*

nuzūl) and the higher purposes of the *sharī'ah*, thereby producing distorted understandings (Mergaliyev et al., 2021). Second, *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*-based studies emphasize the primary goals of Islamic law, such as the protection of life (*ḥifẓ al-naḥs*), intellect (*ḥifẓ al-'aql*), and human dignity (*ḥifẓ al-'ird*) ('Asyur, 1984). While these studies contribute to theoretical frameworks for combating extremism, they remain limited in addressing the practical dimensions of applying *maqāṣid* in plural societies. Third, sociological and political studies link radicalism to social, cultural, and power structures. For example, Khamami (2022) highlights the transformation of Javanese *abangan* identity into radical ideology through cultural transmission. Meanwhile, Foucault's theory of power relations has been used to show how interpretation is produced and utilized as an instrument of domination (Shah, 2023). These approaches help explain the dynamics of power in the production of exegesis, yet they often remain disconnected from *maqāṣid* frameworks or Qur'anic hermeneutics.

The research gap lies in the separation of these three approaches. Normative studies tend to stop at textual analysis, *maqāṣid* studies remain at a theoretical level, and sociological studies focus on structural and political dimensions. Few studies have attempted to integrate critical hermeneutics (such as Fazlur Rahman's double movement), *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, and the analysis of power relations within Indonesia's multicultural socio-cultural context. This gap constitutes the central rationale for this study.

This research seeks to fill that gap by offering an interdisciplinary framework for rereading religious texts. Specifically, the study aims to: (1) deconstruct exclusive interpretations that underlie radical ideologies; (2) reconstruct exegesis based on *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, emphasizing the protection of life, intellect, and human dignity; and (3) integrate critical hermeneutics and theories of power relations to explain how exegesis functions within Indonesia's socio-political context.

This study argues that religious radicalism in Indonesia thrives because of the dominance of literalist exegesis detached from historical contexts, the higher purposes of the *sharī'ah*, and social realities. By integrating critical hermeneutics, *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, and power-relations analysis, the study hypothesizes that Qur'anic exegesis can be reconstructed as an instrument for strengthening values of tolerance, dialogue, and social welfare. In this way, exegesis no longer legitimizes violence but instead becomes a source of constructive public ethics for plural societies.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The unit of analysis in this study consists of religious texts, particularly Qur'anic verses that are often used by radical groups as a basis for legitimizing violence, such as QS. *At-Taubah*:5, QS. *Al-Baqarah*:191, and QS. *Al-Anfāl*:12. In addition, the study examines classical exegetical works (for example, the tafsirs of al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī) as well as contemporary exegeses (for instance, *Tafsir al-Mishbāh* by Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Azhar* by Buya Hamka, and *Tafsir At-Tanwir* published by Muhammadiyah). The analysis focuses on how these texts and interpretations are produced, understood, and employed within socio-religious discourses that contribute to the emergence of radical ideologies.

This study employs a qualitative-critical design with a hermeneutical approach (Maxwell, 2009). This design was chosen because it allows for a deep exploration of the meaning of religious texts, not only at the linguistic level but also within their historical, social, and ideological contexts. Fazlur Rahman's (2009) critical hermeneutics, specifically the double-movement method, is used to trace the dynamics of meaning from the context of revelation to contemporary social contexts. At the same time, Michel Foucault's (2023) critical discourse analysis is employed to uncover the power relations at work in the production of exegesis, thereby clarifying how literalist interpretations may transform into instruments of domination and symbolic violence.

The primary data sources of this research are the Qur'an and both classical and contemporary tafsirs as mentioned above. In addition, secondary data are utilized, including academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, research reports, and official documents addressing issues of religious radicalism, Qur'anic interpretation, hermeneutics, and the sociology of religion. These secondary data provide theoretical grounding and enable a comparison between this study's findings and previous scholarship.

Data collection was conducted through library research. This process involved the examination of both digital and printed literature, documentation of verses and tafsir, and the collection of academic references relevant to the research topic. The main instrument used was a categorization guide for identifying verses and interpretations associated with radicalism. Data collection followed a systematic process to ensure the comprehensiveness of information from both classical and contemporary sources, while also linking the findings to Indonesia's socio-religious realities.

The data were analyzed through the integration of three approaches: (1) Fazlur Rahman's critical hermeneutics using the double movement to interpret the text contextually; (2) Foucault's critical discourse analysis to expose the dimensions of power in the production of exegesis; and (3) the sociology of religion to examine how interpretation interacts with social, cultural, and political structures. The analysis proceeded step by step, beginning with the identification of texts, the historical contextualization of revelation, the unpacking of power relations in interpretation, and finally the social-practical interpretation (Rahman, 2009). The integration of these three approaches is expected to produce a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between text, exegesis, and the phenomenon of religious radicalism in Indonesia.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Construction of Exclusive Exegesis and the Reproduction of Religious Power

In the long history of Qur'anic exegesis, the sacred text has never been separated from interpretive processes influenced by specific social, political, and ideological contexts (Faris, 2023). One phenomenon that deserves close attention is how interpretations of certain verses have been employed as justification for violence by extremist groups. Verses such as QS. *At-Taubah*:5, QS. *Al-Baqarah*:191, and QS. *Al-Anfal*:12 are often cited in isolation from their contexts and used as a foundation for destructive actions against those regarded as the "enemies" of Islam. In this sense, violence does not merely emerge as an option for action but as the result of an exclusive exegetical construction that renders violence seemingly legitimate and divinely sanctioned (Saumantri & Muslim, 2024).

Literal interpretations of these verses have a long genealogy within the classical exegetical tradition. Works such as *Jāmi' al-Bayān* by al-Ṭabarī and *al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* by al-Qurṭubī generally situate verses on warfare within the framework of *fiqh al-jihād*. However, it is important to note that these classical exegetes were fully aware that such verses emerged within concrete military conflicts (Edinger, 2022). Their interpretations did not automatically command universal violence against all non-Muslims but were primarily tied to the specific historical contexts of the Prophet Muhammad's battles, such as Badr, Uhud, or expeditions against the Quraysh. This indicates that the meanings of these verses were always bound to their sociopolitical circumstances.

Problems arise when these classical interpretations are reproduced in entirely different social contexts. In modern, plural, and complex societies, literal readings of warfare verses become dangerous ideological tools (Zhao & Roberts, 2025). Exegesis is no longer a means of enlightening understanding but turns into an instrument of domination. From Michel Foucault's perspective, religious texts are never free from power relations. Knowledge, including religious interpretation, is always the outcome of discursive struggles in which power operates to regulate what can be known, thought, and believed (Foucault, 2023). In other words, exegesis is never neutral. It can be used to normalize authority, legitimize orthodoxy, and silence alternative interpretations that are more inclusive and humane.

Exclusive exegesis becomes fertile ground for the reproduction of religious power, especially when legitimized by formal authorities such as clerical institutions or states aligned with particular religious groups (Halevy & Buštíková, 2025). The religious knowledge produced by these authorities is disseminated through sermons, media, and religious education until it becomes the only truth recognized as legitimate. In this hegemonic process, alternative interpretations that align more closely with the ethical spirit of Islam and universal human values are marginalized or even branded as heretical (Raquib et al., 2022). This hegemonic dynamic creates a situation in which society no longer has access to the plurality of Qur'anic meanings but only to a singular interpretation filtered and politicized by discursive authorities.

Religious radicalism, in this regard, does not emerge from a vacuum but from the success of certain groups in constructing interpretations that justify violence and absolutize a single version of truth (Koca, 2023). Violence is not merely seen as a response to threats but becomes a constituent part of faith itself. When literalistic interpretations dominate discursive space, difference, dialogue, and diversity are endangered. For instance, QS. *At-Taubah*:5, which states “slay the polytheists wherever you find them,” is often cited without reference to the preceding and subsequent verses that explicitly regulate exceptions for those who do not engage in hostilities or violate treaties. This verse was revealed in the context of broken peace treaties by specific polytheist groups, not as a universal command for indiscriminate violence (Andrian, 2022).

A similar case is QS. *Al-Anfal*:12, which mentions, “I will instill terror into the hearts of the disbelievers.” This verse was revealed in the context of the Battle of Badr and indicates a psychological strategy in wartime, not a command to attack civilians (Anis & Aminuddin, 2020). However, when these verses are separated from their *asbāb al-nuzūl* (historical context of revelation) and *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* (the moral and ethical objectives of Islamic law), their meanings become radically distorted (An-Naʿim, 2021). The consequence is a false legitimization of violence and the erosion of Islam’s fundamental principles such as *ḥifẓ al-nafs* (protection of life), *ḥifẓ al-ʿird* (protection of dignity), and *ḥifẓ al-māl* (protection of property).

In critical discourse analysis, domination over meaning also signifies domination over social practices (Fairclough, 2013). Literalistic interpretations generate thought structures that legitimize exclusivism, even against fellow Muslims. An exegetical project that does not accommodate multivocal interpretations risks negating the principle of *ikhtilāf*, which is deeply rooted in the classical Islamic tradition. By absolutizing a single meaning, such exegesis fosters *takfīr* (excommunication) of those with differing views. In many cases, *takfīr* becomes the justification for acts of terror perpetrated in the name of religion. These acts often target not only non-Muslims but also Muslims who are deemed deviant from their version of “truth” (Fairclough, 2023).

The problem becomes more complex when literalistic interpretations receive institutional backing. States or political groups, in pursuit of power consolidation or ideological stability, often support conservative religious narratives (Snegovaya & McGlynn, 2025). In some cases, collaboration between governments and religious organizations can be observed in regulating which meanings are allowed to circulate in the public sphere. Interpretations that promote tolerance, pluralism, or gender justice are frequently suspected as liberalizing projects that threaten doctrinal purity (Van Der Tol, 2021). In such contexts, exegesis becomes a political battlefield rather than a mere exercise of textual reading.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the Qurʾan itself cannot be blamed for acts of violence committed in its name (Al-Tarawneh, 2021). What requires critique is the way certain individuals or groups understand and employ the text. The Qurʾan is replete with values of compassion, justice, and humanity. Verses on *jihad* and warfare never stand alone but are always accompanied by messages of peace, protection of the vulnerable, and calls to dialogue. For instance, QS. *Al-Mumtahanah*:8 clearly states that Allah does not forbid believers from acting justly and kindly toward non-Muslims who do not wage war against them. This verse underscores that Islam’s paradigm of social relations is built upon respect and justice, not hatred and hostility (Maulida et al., 2025).

This underscores the urgency of cultivating a culture of interpretation that is contextual, reflective, and responsive to social complexities. Exegesis should not be limited to philological or textual approaches but should also involve historical, sociological, and even psychological perspectives (Schaffar & Wolff, 2024). Reading the Qurʾan in the 21st century cannot be done with a 7th-century lens, as the political, social, and epistemological realities of contemporary Muslim societies are far more diverse and complex (Fouz Mohamed Zacky & Moniruzzaman, 2024). Therefore, interpretation must be capable of responding wisely to these evolving realities.

In this regard, the concept of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* becomes profoundly relevant. *Maqāṣid* are not merely a set of moral principles but a framework that requires interpretive adaptation to the ethical purposes of Islam rather than to the literal text alone. Through the *maqāṣid* approach, the Qurʾan can be reclaimed as a source of ethical inspiration rather than a tool for justifying violence (Mergaliyev et al., 2021).

The greatest challenge for Muslims today is not only to resist physical radicalism but also to dismantle the epistemological infrastructure that sustains it. This requires building critical interpretive literacy, deconstructing the myth of a singular truth, and opening spaces for dialogue among interpretations. Religious knowledge must be liberated from the grip of powers that monopolize meaning (Pratiwi & Liliani, 2021). By doing so, the Qur'an can once again serve as a text that enlightens civilization rather than one that instills fear in humanity.

Critique of the Freezing of Meaning

Exegesis that is ahistorical and antithetical often produces literalist readings that detach the text from its revelatory context (Sinclair, 2021). Such an approach neglects two crucial aspects: first, the emergency situations that underlay the revelation, such as war or the betrayal of peace treaties; and second, the universal moral objectives of the Qur'an, such as the principle of *rahmatan lil-'ālamīn*, justice (*al-'adl*), and the protection of life (*hifz al-nafs*). Therefore, to avoid the dislocation of meaning and the freezing of the Qur'an's ethical message, an interpretive approach that simultaneously integrates historical context and universal moral values is required (Yunitasari et al., 2025).

To address the dislocation of meaning that frequently arises from literal and ahistorical readings of the Qur'an, Fazlur Rahman proposed a hermeneutical approach that methodologically bridges the gap between the revealed text and the ever-changing social reality of humanity. This approach, known as the double movement hermeneutic, seeks not only to understand the text but also to enliven it contextually and ethically in modern life (Rahman, 2009). Rahman outlined two major steps in this process. The first step requires the interpreter to return to the historical context of revelation by tracing the social, political, and cultural settings in which the verses were revealed. This is not merely an academic exercise but an essential part of reconstructing meaning so that it does not become trapped in textual formalism (Muttaqin, 2021). At this stage, understanding the *asbāb al-nuzūl*, the structure of Arab society, and the prophetic mission is crucial so that the meaning truly reflects the urgency and relevance of the verse in its time.

The second step involves transforming the moral and ethical values contained in the verse into contemporary social contexts. Fazlur Rahman emphasized that the universal values of revelation do not end with their historical moment but must be creatively rearticulated to address today's social problems, ranging from justice and violence to human rights. This distinguishes his approach from literalist methods that stop at the text without uncovering the transcendent moral message behind it (Arman, 2024). Thus, interpretation is no longer static and scriptural but becomes dynamic, responsive, and continuously engaged with the ethical needs of humanity. Saeed (2005) affirmed that the double movement approach is highly relevant in responding to contemporary challenges, especially amid exclusive interpretations often exploited by radical groups. By rereading the text through historical and ethical lenses, interpreters not only preserve the originality of the Qur'an's meaning but also ensure that its universal message remains alive and capable of addressing modern problems. This is the strength of Rahman's method: it does not pit text against context but unites them in a dialectical movement that strengthens both. Therefore, the double movement is not merely a method but also an intellectual and spiritual stance in reading revelation more justly, openly, and meaningfully.

Verses of the Qur'an that contain commands to fight should not be understood literally as calls for aggression but must be interpreted historically within the framework of Muslim defensive strategies against real hostilities during the time of revelation (Afriyanto & Anandari, 2024). Such commands were situational rather than universal. Consequently, a historical-contextual approach is necessary to prevent generalization of meaning and to curb the misuse of the text by extremist groups. In this sense, contextual interpretation restores the Qur'an as a source of peace, justice, and tolerance (Saeed & Akbar, 2021).

When the historical context of revelation is taken into account, the ethical values contained in conflict-related verses do not aim to legitimize violence. On the contrary, such verses promote respect for life (*hifz al-nafs*) and the preservation of social stability during critical conditions. The Qur'an does not advocate aggression but emphasizes proportional self-defense and the cessation of conflict when

peaceful resolution is possible (Fareeda & Ahmed, 2024). This aligns with the principle of religious freedom expressed in QS. *Al-Baqarah*:256 (*lā ikrāha fī al-dīn*) and the divine justice values that constitute Islam's universal moral framework (Ansari & Alzamzami, 2022).

This approach offers novelty by explicitly distinguishing between the historical context of verses revealed during military conflicts and the universal ethical principles that transcend time (Mitchell et al., 2022). Such contextual reading critically rejects the literal generalization of textual meanings often used to legitimize violence in the name of religion. Instead, it directs exegesis toward a more ethical orientation, positioning the Qur'an as a reference for peace, reconciliation, and human dignity (Wahid et al., 2025). This approach also promotes the actualization of the Qur'an's meaning within the framework of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, particularly the protection of life and social justice.

Beyond a merely historical approach, reconstructing the exegesis of conflict-related verses must be reoriented toward the framework of prophetic ethics. This entails a mode of reading revelation that not only traces the *asbāb al-nuzūl* but also asserts that the entire Qur'anic message is bound to the noble prophetic mission: to liberate, protect, and dignify human life. Within this framework, the Qur'an's commands to fight cannot be read as normative instructions valid for all times but as contextual responses to emergency situations, morally bound to universal principles such as justice, compassion, and the protection of life (*ḥifẓ al-naḥs*). Such interpretation rejects literalist approaches that sever verses from their ethical spirit and resists the exploitation of sacred texts for political or exclusivist ideological ends (Jaffer, 2021).

In today's world, which is grounded in principles of international law, respect for human rights, and commitments to interreligious coexistence, Qur'anic interpretation must undergo an epistemological reorientation (Hessler, 2005). Verses that contain commands to fight, such as QS. *Al-Anfāl*:12 or QS. *At-Taubah*:5, should be reread through the lens of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, particularly the principles of *ḥifẓ al-naḥs* and *dar' al-mafāṣid*, to prevent their misuse as legitimization for violence that contradicts the Qur'an's foundational values. As Ahmad (2022) stress, Qur'anic commands to fight are always accompanied by moral and contextual restrictions: they are intended for self-defense, prevention of corruption, and the restoration of justice in situations where legal institutions are unavailable. This aligns with the views of Bouchier (2019) and Auda Jasser (2018), who highlight the necessity of making exegesis an instrument to advance peace and social justice rather than a tool for justifying conflict (Snauwaert, 2011).

Therefore, contemporary interpretation of verses concerning *jihad* or warfare cannot be divorced from prophetic ethics and public morality. The reconstruction of exegesis is not merely an academic endeavor but also a moral imperative to make the Qur'an a source of light rather than a weapon of violence. Exegesis grounded in *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* and universal human values will safeguard Muslims from the traps of misleading fundamentalism and guide them back to Islam's original spirit: the building of a just, peaceful, and humane civilization (Ibrahim & Thameem, 2024).

Hermeneutic Critique and a Proposal for Reconstructing Exegesis

One of the fundamental problems in contemporary Qur'anic exegesis lies in the tension between textual meaning and social reality. When conflict-inflected Qur'anic verses are read literally without considering the historical context of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) or the social framework in which the text first appeared, a semantic dislocation occurs: the normative meaning carried by revelation becomes detached from its contextual roots and ethical values, and then shifts into a manipulative narrative of power. This severance opens space for ideological readings that distance the text from its prophetic spirit. In such cases, the Qur'an is no longer read as a lofty moral guide but instead becomes an instrument to justify violence, both symbolic and physical (Rahmat et al., 2025).

This phenomenon appears clearly in the practices of radical groups that use verses such as QS. *Al-Anfāl*:12 or QS. *At-Taubah*:5 as proof-texts for violence against others. The literalist exegesis they adopt does not arise from a vacuum; it emerges from meaning-making processes uprooted from Qur'anic ethics and inattentive to the principles of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. Core principles such as *'adl* (justice), *rahmah* (compassion), and *ḥifẓ al-naḥs* (protection of life)—which constitute the soul of the Islamic *sharī'ah*—are

sidelined. What remains are textual fragments reduced to pretexts for power and the imposition of a singular truth. Yet from its inception, Islam has upheld the sanctity of life, the protection of the vulnerable, and respect for human diversity (Akrim, 2023).

To address this disorientation in interpretation, the double-movement hermeneutic formulated by Rahman (2009) offers a contextual, critical, and morally responsible epistemology of exegesis. Rahman proposes two interpretive movements. The first movement returns to the sociohistorical context of the verses by tracing the concrete needs of the community at the time of revelation. This movement enables us to see why a verse was revealed, under what circumstances, and in response to which social problems. The second movement elevates the universal ethical values of the text and articulates them within contemporary realities. This approach not only honors the historicity of the text but also safeguards its moral relevance for modern life.

Through this double-movement approach, one can transform the meanings of verses that initially appear severe into ethical messages rooted in the higher aims of the *sharī'ah*. For example, QS. *Al-Anfāl*:12, often read as a command to aggression against non-Muslims, reveals—when read contextually—that it was revealed in a highly specific wartime situation: the Battle of Badr. This first defensive battle in Islamic history confronted Muslims with an existential threat from the Meccan Quraysh (Anjum, 2024). In that situation, military strategy—including psychological elements such as instilling fear in the enemy—functioned as a survival tactic rather than a universal doctrinal mandate for violence (Kowalczevska, 2025). Reading this verse apart from the Badr context leads to serious misinterpretations that diverge from the Qur'an's overarching spirit.

This proposal for critical exegesis is not merely an academic attempt to curb radicalism; it constitutes an ethical responsibility to protect the purity of revelation from the manipulations of power. Within the frame of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, interpretation must orient itself toward the protection of life (*hifz al-nafs*), the prevention of harm (*dar' al-mafāsīd*), and the establishment of social justice. Exegesis must not stop at the linguistic or grammatical level; it must also address the needs of the present, respond to human challenges, and offer peaceful solutions in plural and complex societies. In other words, exegesis should serve as a bridge between text and life, not a fortress that constricts meaning and silences diversity (Sielke, 2022).

Beyond Rahman's approach, contemporary scholars such as Sambo (Sambo, 2023) also emphasize the importance of contextual readings of the Qur'an. Sambo underscores that interpretation oriented toward ethical values and public welfare better prevents the politicization of religion and helps build inclusive societies. Within this approach, the Qur'an is not treated as a rigid legal code but as a transcendent text that offers moral inspiration for peace, reconciliation, and social harmony (Ali & Isnaini, 2024). Such an approach is crucial for multicultural and multireligious societies like Indonesia, where bridging the authenticity of religious teachings with plural social realities remains an enduring challenge.

This hermeneutical approach does not nullify the text or subject it to moral relativism. On the contrary, it seeks to restore the Qur'an to its original spirit: guidance that liberates humans from oppression, fear, and structural injustice. Contextual exegesis does not weaken the text; it honors revelation's presence as a response to the perennial problems of humanity (Mundzir et al., 2025). It also avoids the trap of formalism that merely repeats literal meanings without grasping the complex social conditions that underlie them.

In today's Islamic academia, exegetical discourse continues to move toward openness and interdisciplinarity. New approaches have emerged—from feminist hermeneutics and postcolonial readings to critical social theory—that seek to expose structures of domination within exegetical traditions (Davison, 2023). These developments demonstrate an awareness that exegesis is a human construction upon a sacred text and is therefore always open to critique, revision, and enrichment. Exegesis does not end in the past; it evolves with historical dynamics and the ethical needs of society (Manioudis & Meramveliotakis, 2022).

In the Indonesian context, this hermeneutic is highly relevant for strengthening a narrative of Islam that is peaceful, tolerant, and just (Muhtador et al., 2025). A nation of diverse ethnicities and religions requires a non-exclusive yet unifying religious understanding. The project of reconstructing exegesis

forms part of a broader effort to develop Islam Nusantara as a face of Islam hospitable to plurality without sacrificing the authenticity of Islamic values (Marheni Muhammad, 2024). Hence, the double-movement hermeneutic is not only theoretically significant but also practically urgent for the future of the community and the nation.

We must stress that Qur'anic exegesis is never a finished project. It remains open to renewal, reflection, and critique. Literalist interpretations that have produced violence and religious exclusivism serve as a stark warning of the danger when texts are read without conscience (Marheni Muhammad, 2024). The contextual hermeneutics proposed by Fazlur Rahman and developed by contemporary scholars provide room for an interpretation that is wiser, more ethical, and more responsible. Through this approach, we not only protect the text from misuse but also revive the prophetic spirit at the core of the Qur'an's mission: to spread compassion, justice, and peace among humankind.

Table 1. Proposal for Reconstructing Qur'anic Exegesis

Aspect	Literalist Exegesis (Problematic)	Double-Movement Hermeneutic (Rahman)	Contextual Reconstruction (Contemporary Scholars)
Approach to Text	Detached from <i>asbāb al-nuzūl</i> and socio-historical context; emphasizes rigid textual formalism	Step 1: Return to historical context of revelation (<i>asbāb al-nuzūl</i>)	Integration of history, ethics, and public welfare
Ethical Orientation	Ignores <i>maqāṣid al-sharī'ah</i> such as 'adl, rahmah, and ḥifz al-nafs	Step 2: Extract universal moral values and reapply them in modern contexts	Emphasizes justice, compassion, pluralism, and inclusivity
Function of Exegesis	Becomes an instrument of ideological manipulation and justification of violence	Serves as a bridge between text and contemporary life	Becomes a source of peace, reconciliation, and social harmony
Impact on Society	Fuels radicalism, exclusivism, and legitimization of violence	Encourages ethical, contextual, and responsible interpretation	Strengthens tolerant, just, and plural Islamic narratives
Scholarly Contribution	Produces closed and hegemonic discourses	Provides methodological framework for contextual and ethical exegesis	Expands to interdisciplinary approaches (feminist, postcolonial, social critique)

The table above summarizes three major strands in the interpretation of conflict-inflected Qur'anic verses: literalist exegesis, the double-movement hermeneutic of Fazlur Rahman, and contemporary contextual reconstruction. Literalist exegesis reduces the text to rigid, ahistorical readings that neglect the moral objectives of Islam and instead serve as tools for ideological manipulation. In contrast, Rahman's double-movement hermeneutic offers a structured methodology that combines historical contextualization with the extraction of universal moral values, allowing the Qur'an to remain ethically relevant across time. Contemporary scholars further enrich this approach by situating exegesis within broader interdisciplinary frameworks, emphasizing inclusivity, public welfare, and pluralism.

This comparative visualization highlights the ethical responsibility of exegesis in shaping religious understanding and social reality. While literalist interpretations risk producing violence and exclusivism, hermeneutic and contextual approaches present pathways toward peace, justice, and coexistence. In the Indonesian context, these approaches are especially urgent as they align with the spirit of *Islam Nusantara*—a vision of Islam that harmonizes authenticity with pluralism. Thus,

reconstructing Qur'anic exegesis is not only a theoretical imperative but also a practical necessity for building a tolerant and humane civilization.

Reconstructing Exegesis as Prophetic Ethics and Resistance to Fundamentalism

The reconstruction of exegesis on Qur'anic verses with violent connotations is not merely an academic concern; it addresses a fundamental issue in the landscape of contemporary religiosity. In an era when violence is frequently cloaked in sacred garb, this study emphasizes that rereading the sacred text is both an epistemological and practical responsibility (Dube, 2024). Exegesis cannot be positioned as a dead legacy to be preserved and memorized; it must function as a living, contextual, and transformative arena of critical engagement. This effort stems from concern over how some interpretations have been used not to cultivate values of compassion and justice but instead to justify violence, domination, and oppression in the name of religion.

Within this framework, this article introduces an exegetical approach that integrates three dimensions simultaneously: critical hermeneutics, *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, and power-relations analysis. These three dimensions do not stand apart as separate theoretical tools; they complement one another in shaping a paradigm of liberation of meaning. Critical hermeneutics functions as an analytical instrument to interrogate the text and the ways in which it is socially and politically interpreted. The *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* approach provides ethical and moral orientation, ensuring that interpretation remains anchored in the higher purposes of the *sharī'ah*: the protection of life, dignity, wealth, and intellect. Meanwhile, an analysis of power relations, as emphasized by Foucault (2023), unveils the hidden layers behind exegetical discourse—specifically, who interprets, by what authority, and for whose interests.

The novelty of this approach lies in its refusal to accept static and ahistorical models of exegesis. In many religious traditions, including Islam, interpretation is often positioned as a final edifice—an authoritative legacy of classical scholars that must remain unquestioned. Yet social realities continue to evolve. The dynamics of time present new challenges that cannot always be addressed by past interpretations (Berger & Luckmann, 2023). Therefore, this article proposes repositioning exegesis as a dialectical practice between text, context, and the universal values of Islam. The double-movement approach developed by Rahman (2009) provides a robust methodological framework to carry out two interpretive movements: first, to understand verses within the historical context of their revelation, and second, to extract their ethical values and reapply them in contemporary social realities.

When this approach is combined with a Foucauldian reading of power relations, exegesis is no longer perceived as truth descending from heaven and frozen in the pens of classical scholars, but as a discursive field shaped by specific socio-political forces. What is regarded today as “authoritative” interpretation is often the result of a long process of codifying meaning, one not free from the intervention of power. In this light, reconstructing exegesis involves not only dismantling epistemic structures of domination but also challenging monopolistic truth claims that threaten the plurality of meaning in Islam (Zacky & Moniruzzaman, 2024). Recognizing that every interpretation is a construction subject to critique and adaptation opens space for a more dialogical, open, and humanistic Islam.

This article also responds to a methodological vacuum in Qur'anic studies in Indonesia. Many exegetical studies are trapped between two extremes: on one side, rigid scriptural literalism, and on the other, liberal relativism that loses theological orientation. In the midst of these two poles, this study offers a middle path that is normatively solid yet epistemologically open (Burelli & Camboni, 2023). Through the principles of *hifz al-nafs* (protection of life) and *dar' al-mafāṣid* (prevention of harm), exegesis is framed as an ethical practice that rejects violence, nurtures interfaith dialogue, and cultivates awareness of diversity as a blessing rather than a threat.

In Indonesia's plural context, exegesis can no longer be understood merely as an abstract theological product. It must function as a social and cultural instrument capable of responding to the challenges of identity polarization, religious fundamentalism, and the narrowing of public religious space (Pedersen, 2016). Exegesis cannot remain confined to academic circles or religious pulpits; it must

find expression in education, media, public policy, and everyday life. In other words, exegesis must descend into lived realities if it is to illuminate rather than inflame society.

With the approach proposed here, this article contributes to an exegetical framework that portrays Islam as a religion of liberation rather than oppression; of embrace rather than exclusion; of celebration of difference rather than uniformity. Islam in practice is no longer merely normative and formalistic; it becomes prophetic Islam: Islam that lives in ethics, in just social relations, in siding with the oppressed, and in solidarity with humanity regardless of identity (Zainuddin et al., 2022). This is the prophetic ethic that this study seeks to advance: exegesis as a space of liberation and resistance to fundamentalism.

Religious fundamentalism, in this regard, is understood not merely as radical action but as a way of thinking that freezes meaning, closes off dialogue, and rejects change. It is a phenomenon rooted in fear, loss of control, and the need to monopolize truth. Exclusive and literalist interpretations serve as the epistemological vehicles of this fundamentalism. Thus, resistance to fundamentalism cannot be limited to counter-violence narratives alone; it must strike at the epistemic roots—how texts are understood, interpreted, and deployed (Nagata, 2001).

This article argues that resistance to religious fundamentalism must begin with the development of an exegesis that is ethical and liberative. Such interpretation does not arise from a normative void but stands firmly on the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* and prophetic ethical values. By adhering to these values, exegesis becomes a field of articulating healthy religiosity: open to critique, respectful of diverse perspectives, and committed to upholding human dignity (Suryani & Muslim, 2024).

Ultimately, the main contribution of this article lies not only in enriching exegetical discourse theoretically but also in paving the way for practical transformation of Muslim religiosity in Indonesia. In a society facing the threats of radicalism, religious disinformation, and the erosion of social cohesion due to the politicization of identity, exegesis must be revived as a space of dialogue rather than a fortress of exclusion (Arifin et al., 2025). Living exegesis is that which addresses humanity with gentleness, empathy, and justice. This is exegesis as prophetic ethics: it speaks not only of truth but also of solidarity with life itself.

Discussion

This study finds that exclusive and literalist interpretations of Qur'anic verses with conflictual themes, such as QS. *At-Taubah*:5 or QS. *Al-Anfāl*:12, constitute one of the roots of religious radicalism. Such interpretations detach the verses from their historical context of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) and from the ethical objectives of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, thus producing a false legitimization of violence. By contrast, Fazlur Rahman's double-movement hermeneutic, when combined with Foucault's analysis of power relations and the framework of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, can reconstruct exegesis into one that is ethical, contextual, and relevant to the needs of plural societies.

This finding arises because literalist interpretations tend to close off space for dialogue and absolutize a single truth, thereby fostering exclusivism. Such interpretations are easily exploited by radical groups as ideological instruments. On the other hand, when interpretation takes into account the historical context and the moral purposes of Islam, the meaning of the verses becomes more inclusive and aligned with the principles of protecting life (*hifz al-nafs*), justice (*al-'adl*), and compassion (*rahmah*). In other words, the link between exclusivist exegesis and radicalism emerges from the absence of hermeneutical awareness and prophetic ethics in the interpretive process.

This study expands upon three main trends in previous research. First, unlike normative-textual studies that focus solely on analyzing verses of war (Mergaliyev et al., 2021), this study emphasizes the importance of incorporating historical context and ethical purposes. Second, unlike classical *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* studies ('Asyur, 1984) that remain abstract, this study demonstrates the practical relevance of *maqāṣid* in countering radicalism. Third, unlike sociological-political studies (Khamami, 2022; Shah, 2023) that highlight power relations, this study integrates that perspective with critical hermeneutics, resulting in a more holistic analysis. Thus, the novelty of this research lies in its integration of three dimensions: text, context, and power relations.

Historically, this study underscores that Qur'anic war verses are always tied to concrete conditions (for instance, the Battle of Badr) and therefore cannot be generalized as universal calls to violence. For example, during the Almohad period of the 12th–13th centuries, Qur'anic verses were used to legitimize jihad within a specific historical context, demonstrating how sacred texts were reframed according to the needs of the time (Albárran, 2021). Similarly, QS. *At-Taubah*:5, commonly known as the Sword Verse, is frequently cited by extremists as a basis for militancy; yet a contextual reading shows that it neither endorses forced conversion nor militancy when understood within its historical and linguistic frameworks (Bakour, 2022).

Socially, this study reveals that contextual interpretation can serve as an instrument of reconciliation and dialogue, particularly in plural societies such as Indonesia that are vulnerable to identity polarization. The Qur'an's principles of the ethics of war—such as the prohibition against killing non-combatants, the protection of the environment, and respect for property—affirm its humanistic dimension, which seeks to mitigate the brutality of conflict (Rusdi et al., 2024). In contemporary terms, contextualist approaches enable the Qur'an's ethical values to remain relevant to modern values without losing their fundamental principles (Saeed & Akbar, 2021). Indonesian tafsirs also demonstrate this dynamic: for instance, *Tafsir al-Azhar* and *Tafsir al-Mishbāh* reinterpret the story of Moses to address the needs of modern society (Mujahidin et al., 2024). These findings strengthen the argument that contextual interpretation is not merely academic but also practical, as it sustains social cohesion, counters extremist narratives, and opens space for interfaith and intercultural dialogue.

Ideologically, this study shows that exegesis can become an arena of contestation over meaning: it can function as a tool of legitimizing power, but it can also be reconstructed as a discourse of liberation that resists fundamentalism. Historically, Qur'anic exegesis has never been neutral; it has always been intertwined with political and ideological interests. Abdul-Raof (2013) stresses that Qur'anic interpretation has historically developed under the shadow of political status quos, often reflecting dogmatic differences and political cleavages. The divergence between Sunni and Shi'i traditions, for instance, has generated distinct epistemological bases of exegesis, especially regarding issues of leadership and religious authority (Dakake, 2021; Sirry, 2021).

In the contemporary context, exegesis is also shaped by social and cultural dynamics. In Indonesia, the emergence of thematic exegesis demonstrates that interpretive authority has shifted from being monopolized solely by traditional '*ulamā*' to also being influenced by academics and political contexts (Kaltsum & Amin, 2024). Gender issues have likewise become a field of ideological contestation, where institutional exegesis is often laden with socio-political interests, producing subjective understandings of women's roles (Nugroho et al., 2024). Moreover, the influence of Sufism shows how Sufi-oriented interpretations of the Qur'an have promoted discourses of tolerance, social justice, and reconciliation in Muslim societies (Ichwan et al., 2024).

Methodologically, the contextual approach developed by Abdullah Saeed seeks to place ethical values as the main orientation, rather than strict textual literalism, so that exegesis can respond to contemporary social challenges without losing its fundamental principles (Rois et al., 2025). Such interpretation enables the Qur'an to serve as an inspiration for building a just society, as emphasized in literature highlighting the Qur'an's vision of social justice (Harvey, 2017; Junaidi et al., 2023). Thus, exegesis is not merely an arena of legitimizing power but can also be reconstructed as a discourse of liberation that articulates the Qur'an's vision of justice, equality, and peace.

The findings of this study carry a dual function. On the positive side, this research provides a methodological framework for rereading the Qur'an contextually, thereby strengthening the narrative of Islam as peaceful, inclusive, and humanistic. On the dysfunctional side, however, this approach may face resistance from conservative groups that absolutize classical interpretations or reject the relativization of meaning. Such resistance may exacerbate polarization in religious discourse if not carefully managed. The phenomenon of *resistance to hermeneutical reinterpretation* is not unique to Islamic exegesis; it has also been examined extensively in philosophy, politics, and psychotherapy. For instance, Edgoose (2024) highlights the notion of *hermeneutical sabotage*, in which dominant groups distort interpretive resources to undermine marginalized communities. Even when adequate concepts

exist, dominant ideologies may add excessive conceptual layers that obscure marginalized experiences—a phenomenon described as *hermeneutical excess* (Dular, 2023; Falbo, 2022).

Resistance may also emerge from stigma attached to certain identities, leading individuals to reject available interpretive resources (Edlich & Archer, 2025). As a form of counteraction, marginalized groups sometimes develop *hermeneutical dissent*—alternative interpretive tools designed to challenge mainstream dominance (Goetze, 2018). Yet this process is not immune to the risk of *hermeneutical bastardization*, when progressive hermeneutical resources are decontextualized into dominant discourses, thereby stripping them of their original meaning (Drury, 2024). In political contexts, local structures can even reinforce resistance to reinterpretation, despite the translation of global norms, as illustrated in the case of Northern Ireland (Thomson, 2017). This demonstrates that resistance to exegetical reconstruction is not merely an epistemic issue but is deeply tied to surrounding social, political, and ideological structures.

To address this dysfunction, this study recommends three strategic steps. First, integrate contextual hermeneutical approaches into religious education curricula so that younger generations become accustomed to critical and ethical exegesis. Second, strengthen exegetical literacy in the public sphere through media, preaching, and academic discourse that emphasize *maqāṣid* and prophetic ethics. Third, foster collaborative dialogue across religious authorities so that inclusive interpretations can gain social legitimacy and are not marginalized by exclusive ones. Through these measures, exegetical reconstruction can serve as a concrete solution for countering religious radicalism in Indonesia.

4. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that exclusive and literalist interpretations of Qur'anic verses with conflictual themes, such as QS. *At-Taubah*:5 and QS. *Al-Anfāl*:12, significantly contribute to the growth of religious radicalism. The main finding demonstrates that Fazlur Rahman's double-movement hermeneutic, when combined with Foucault's analysis of power relations and the framework of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, can reconstruct exegesis into one that is contextual, ethical, and relevant for plural societies. Thus, this research highlights the importance of contextual and prophetic readings that not only preserve the authenticity of the text but also embody the values of justice, peace, and humanity in contemporary life.

The scientific contribution of this research lies in the integration of three dimensions of analysis: text, context, and power relations. First, this study expands exegetical scholarship by combining critical hermeneutics, *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, and socio-political analysis, producing a more comprehensive interpretive framework. Second, this study offers a new perspective that exegesis is not only an instrument of legitimizing power but can also serve as a discourse of liberation that resists fundamentalism. Third, on a practical level, this research provides a conceptual basis for strengthening contextual exegetical literacy in Indonesia, which can support the development of a peaceful, inclusive, and tolerant society.

Nevertheless, this study has its limitations. First, the analysis is primarily based on literature review and does not yet engage with empirical dimensions through in-depth fieldwork. Second, the study is limited to selected case examples and does not explore more broadly the practice of contemporary exegesis in diverse Muslim communities. Therefore, future research should develop comparative studies across different social and geographical contexts, while integrating hermeneutical approaches with empirical research, so that the results become more comprehensive and applicable for strengthening religious moderation in the contemporary era.

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