

DE-RADICALIZATION IN QURANIC EXEGESIS (RE-INTERPRETATION OF “VIOLENCE VERSES” TOWARD PEACEFUL ISLAM)

Abdul Mustaqim
State Islamic University (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta
taqimlsq@gmail.com

Abstract

One of the most popular issues over the last decade is religious radicalization. This issue is often linked to religious texts, including Quranic verses which are literally understood as a legitimation of violence in the name of religion (Islam). It is an urged need to produce new Quranic exegeses, for several verses in the Qur'an are potentially understood as teaching violence. This research aims to re-interpret those Quranic verses. The questions arising are: what are the verses potentially serving as the basis of violence in the name of religion? How should these verses be interpreted in the context of a multi-cultural society to make a peaceful society? Using thematic method and hermeneutical approach, the paper constructs more humanist and tolerant understanding on Quranic verses in order to spread humanist and tolerant Islamic norms, *rahmatan lil 'alamin*.

Keywords: De-radicalization, Quranic exegesis, re-interpretation, violence verses

Introduction

The phenomenon of religious radicalization in the last decade is an irrefutable fact. There are several bombings in Bali, JW Marriot Hotel Jakarta, and Masjid Polres (Resort Police Mosque) in Cirebon. There is also a big number of religious violence, impacting Ahmadiyah Community in Cekuesik Pandegelang, church destroying in Temanggung, book bomb terror involving several persons, and combustion of Syiah Pesantren in Madura. Thus, there is strong evidence proving that violence and terrorism acts do exist amidst religious community (Nur Syam, 2009, n.p.). Instead of protecting human from doing that 'sin,' many often do that sin in the name of "religion." It seems like religion has even become the license to kill others, just because they hold different religion or ideology. On the other hand, the Qur'an declared itself as a holy book containing blessing to spread ideas and values of peace, rather than riot and violence (Q 21.107). Furthermore, Arabic words *silm* and *salām* (peace) with all its derivations are repeated 50 times throughout the Qur'an, and one of the derivations is used as one of the beautiful names of Allah (*asma al-husnā*), which is *al-salām* (The Source of Peace) (Abdul Baqi, 1981: 355-356). Such facts lead one to conclude that peace is the core, sacred goal in religious life, especially in the context of multicultural society.

Normatively the Qur'an affirms guarantee of freedom of religion, as Allah has said: *Let there be no compulsion in religion: truth stands out clear from error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand hold, never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things.* (Q 2.256) (Pickthall, 2006). Why does Qur'an assert this sort of statement? It is because the compulsion into Islam is a compulsion to convert from one's former religion. Meanwhile, religious authenticity must be based on consciousness not

compulsion in religion. (Ibn `Asyûr, 2000: 319)

Historically speaking, daily practices of the Prophet Muhammad had shown and also strengthened both Islam's vision and mission; humanist and tolerance. The account of *Fath Makka* proves it. The Prophet realized humanist attitude, with no revenge or even homicide, saying as he entered Makkah: "*hāza yaum al-marhama walaisa yaum al-malhama*", today is a day of love, not the day of revenge. And so did, when he arrived in Medina, he made so-called Medina Charter or the Constitution of Medina preserving tolerance norms towards non-Muslim, particularly Jews (al-Buthi, 1990: 207 and 374-377).

However, it is undeniable that there are several Quranic verses which are understood as a legitimation of the violent acts in the name of religion (Islam). For instance, *wa qātilu al-musyrikin kāffah...* (Q 9.36), and fight *musyrikin* (Pagans) altogether. By literal understanding, that Pagans must be opposed, someone might conduct violence towards others, when they meet *musyrikin* characters in his perspective. Similarly, *Inna al-Din 'inda Allāh al-Islam...* (Q 3.19) The true religion before Allah is Islam (Submission to His will). Certain Muslims understand this verse as a legitimation not to acknowledge other religions. Jews and Christianity are considered religions that must be replaced by Islam, as Prophet Muhammad taught. The verse is even considered abrogating several verses that relate freedom in religious (Q 2.256) (Ibn Katsir, 2000: 326-332). Imam al-Qurthubi for example has mentioned that the majority of exegetes have said that Q 2.256 is abrogated by the verse of sword (*ayat al -saif*), i.e., Q 9.5, which commands Muslims to fight against infidels (Al-Qurthubi, 2003: 280). In fact, according to Ibn `Athiyyah (d. 541 AH), the verse of sword abrogates one hundred and fourteen verses about patience, peace, and tolerance (Ibnu, Athiyyah, 2010: 221).

The case is so in Q 2.208 *yā ayyuhal ladzina āmanu udkhulū fi al-silmi kāffah*, O ye who believe! Enter into Islam whole heartedly. The verse often becomes the justification of so-called *Islam kāffah* and its fellow, Islamic State, as the formalization. Islam, formally, should be practiced in total in every aspect of Muslims life be it in the past, today, and in the future. We have many reasons to produce a concept of *al-Islam Din wa Dawla* (Islam is religion and state). By implication, either laws, as a human product, or systems of a state which are not in line with Islamic teaching are *thaghūt* (the enemy of Allah) (Qutb, 1999: 890-891). They support their argument with "*wa man lam yahkum bimā anzala Allah fa ulaika hum al-kafirūn* (Q 5.44), should anyone do fail to judge by (the light of) what Allah hath revealed, they are (no better than) unbelievers. Consequently, the radical camp of Muslims also criticizes the system of democracy, and regard it *modern jahiliyah* (modern ignorance/dark age), on the basis of Q 5.50.

Hence, it is important to *de-radicalize* the Quranic verses which are potentially understood as teaching violence. As Nasaruddin Umar, professor of Tafsir in State Islamic University (UIN) Syarif Hidayatullah, says, it is significant to produce new Quranic exegesis, since several verses in the Qur'an are potentially understood to be teaching "violence" (Umar, 2012).

According to the author, those violence acts in the name of religion are inseparably linked with hard, radical religious ideology of the actors rooting at the literal and partial understanding of some Quranic verses especially those containing "radical ideology" (interview with several actors, 11 May 2012). In brief, social and political attitudes of the actors are the reflection of their understanding of Qur'an (Maftuh, 2004). It is true that the product of Quranic exegeses is often influenced by the ideology of the exegete and

otherwise, and there is a significant relation between mode of thought and mode of conduct (Geertz, 1993). Hence, someone having a radical, hard, extreme, black-white and literal way of understanding religious texts tends to act intolerance and fully violent.

The research on *de*-radicalization, particularly on Quranic verses potentially understood as teaching violence is very significant. Such research would construct more humanist and tolerance understanding on Quranic verses, benefitting in spreading humanist and tolerance Islamic norms, *rahmatan lil alamin*. There are at least two questions that must be answered: what are Quranic verses potentially serving as the basis of acts of violence in the name of religion? How should these verses be understood in the context of the multi-cultural society to make a peaceful society?

Methods

To understand *de*-radicalization on Quranic interpretation, there are several theories to be employed in this research. *First*, radicalism theory. In English dictionary, the word *radical* means extreme and hard, while radicalism means a radical concept employed to drastic changes or fundamental reform (Hornby, 1995: 354). The core of radicalism is radical willing to change with a tendency to use violence (Barry, 1994: 333). This concept is used by Islam politic as strategy of extreme change, corresponding to the realization of their ideology. Such ideological framework is also based on the interpretation of Quranic verses, which literally allows violence. In this context, the author divides two kinds of radicalism; soft radicalism which is a concept of Islamic religious understanding that is radical, fundamental but only in cognitive level, and hard radicalism that is a radical concept of Islamic understanding that leads to violence actions.

Second, *de*-radicalization theory is an attempt to break a radical ideology by Quranic interpretation. The religious radicalism that implies an act of terrorism is linked to basic problems that usage of the religious symbol (citing verses which are potentially understood as violence motivating) is one. Hence, one of the important works is how to interpret the “violence verses” in comparison with those relating “peaceful and tolerance.” It is noteworthy that there are several factors of religious radicalism, not only about radical interpretation, but also non-conducive, about poverty and justice, external factors such as injustice attitudes towards communities by others or even government. Consequently, the “victim” community would feel threatened, unfairly treated and give some reactions. American domination of politic, economic, social and cultural agendas had wrecked social order of Islam. As for radical ideology followers, America is a symbol of Western hegemony that must be opposed because of domination implying riot in Islam world. (<http://lazardiburru.blogspot.com/2009/08/pengertian-fundamentalisme-radikalisme.html>. 20 May 2011)

Third, radical qura’nic exegesis theory which is indicated by literal interpreting on verses, sharia-minded orientation (orientation on maintenance of sharia formally), and tends to ignore context, to be anti-pluralism, to be authoritarian and last but not least to do close-truth claim and anti-hermeneutic (Mustaqim, 2010: 108; al-Qaradlawi, 1990: 6-7). Using thematic-contextual method, the author will describe the *de*-radicalization concept of Quranic exegesis. These are the steps: first, identification of verses that are potentially understood as radical and entice violence. Second, description and elaboration of interpretation on those “radical verses,” while identifying and grouping them to certain themes. Third, critique to an existing paradigm by doing re-thinking process (*i’adat al-nazr*) in viewing Indonesian

context, particularly in its multicultural aspects. It then could compress authoritarian and intolerance understanding. (Hanafi, n.y: 25) Fourth, re-conceptualization that replaces radical understanding with more moderate understanding. Fifth, analysis and conclusion answering research questions.

Evidence to be observed comprise with primary and secondary references. The primary one is Quranic verses themselves that potentially becomes angle of radical acts. The Quranic verses that textually appeal to be intolerance and angle of violence will be re-interpreted by considering aspects based on the theory of interpretation. In this research, these verses will be observed. For instance, Islam's truth-claim as the only religion and its implication on multicultural (including Muslim non-Muslim relation), and verses talking about jihad and war.

The author also will use hermeneutic approach, as Roger Trigg said: "the paradigm for hermeneutics is interpretation of the traditional text, where the problem must always be how we can come to understand in our own context something which was written in radically different situation" (Hidayat, 1996: 161). It means that hermeneutic paradigm is an interpretation towards traditional (classic), in which a problem should be directed to the ways in which we can understand them in today context and very different situation.

Briefly, a hermeneutic approach is used to explain and understand verses that are potentially radical by considering structural of the text, its context, both internal and external, and then contextualize them in order to find proper meaning in today context. In this exact point, Gadamer's hermeneutic theory is significant. According to Gadamer, interpretation of scripture is not only reproductive but also productive. Exegete should also try to find new meaning, not only repeat an old one. It is almost impossible to read a text without prejudice and, similarly, to understand it without improving the meaning. Therefore it needs two paradigms, and what so-called fusion of horizon will be realized in order to produce more inter-subjective meaning (Gadamer, 1975: 264). On the other hand, the author will also employ historical criticism so as to uncover concept of diversity, change and continuity (Tholfsen, 1967: 249) in relation to radical interpretation. In addition to that philosophical approach is engaged to reveal fundamental structure underlying methodological context of de-radicalization on Quranic exegesis, since finding the fundamental structure is main character of this latter approach (Abdullah, 1996: 285).

Research Findings

1. "Violence verses" in the Qur'an

There are several verses in Qur'an that could be an angle of radicalism. The author then categorizes them into two categories: *First*, soft radicalism which is a radical concept or ideology existing in ones paradigm, but just in cognitive level. It might be an idea reflecting radical, extreme, or even intolerance attitudes to "the others". Such attitudes are to be shown by radical Islamic communities, to both Muslims with different ideology and/or to non-Muslims. *Secondly*, hard radicalism which is a radical concept or religious ideology actualized in several acts in praxis such as terrorism, violence, devastation, bombardier towards other community considered to be enemies of Allah (*thaghut*). For more explanation the author will disclose as below:

a. Soft radicalism

The soft radicalism of Quranic verses tends to squashy do tabdi (bidah claim), or even takfir (kafir claim). Among those verses are "if any do fail to judge by (the light of)

what Allah hath revealed, they are (no better than) unbelievers. The verse is commonly used to judge every law and politic system considered not in line with religious teaching and thus thaghut or jahiliyah system that must be rejected and opposed. (Q 5.44)

The religion before Allah is Islam (submission to His will); nor did the People of the Book dissent therefrom except through envy of each other, after knowledge had come to them. But if any deny the Signs of Allah, Allah is swift in calling to account. (Q 3.19).

If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah), never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter, he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good). (Q 3.85)

O ye who believe! Enter into Islam whole heartedly, and follow not the footsteps of the evil one; for he is to you and avowed enemy. (Q 2.208)

Those verses are commonly understood by a radical community as the theological foundation to argue that Islam as Prophet Muhammad had taught is the only true religion before Allah, and consequently, all religion existing out of Islam must be abrogated (deleted). It is as if, the belief that Islam is “the only religion to be accepted by God” tends to inspire intolerance attitudes towards other religion followers and suspect them. (Al-Qurthubi, 2003: 280; Athiyyah, 2010, 456; Qutb, 1999: 890-891)

Furthermore, relating to Q 9.28, even though the majority of Islamic scholars (jumhur ulama) argue that it is their (Pagans) belief that convicted to be impure, for they were associating partners to Allah. However Zahirians regard Pagans’ bodies as impure too, so when someone is shaking hand with Pagan, he should do wudu (ablution). As Hasan al-Bashri said, “should any Muslim is to shake hand with Pagan, he/she should do wudu” (Al-Qurthubi, 2010: 238). In the extreme context, some of radical Muslims reject tolerance, for it will be destructive to their belief.

Islam, for those who hold radical ideology, should be a formal system in every line of Muslim’s life, whether in ritual, social relationship or even in a state system. Therefore, maintaining Islam state is an obligatory task and any form of government and state which is not based on Islam is thaghut, false, and even should be opposed (Kathir, 2000: 326-332). Hence, in order to do de-radicalization or “domesticate” those verses, they should be juxtaposed with multicultural verses. When we open al-Qur’an, we will find that multicultural phenomenon is sunnatullah (Gods certainty), God had designed it, so that people can learn, respect each other and compete in good things (fastabiqû al- khairat). There are several verses in Qur’an asserting it:

To each of you have we prescribed a law and an open way. If Allah had so willed. He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what he hath given you: so strive in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is he that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute. (Q 5.48)

The verse asserts positive opinion in relation to plural and multicultural reality. God has made people into nations and tribes that they may know each other (Q.S. al-Hujurat [49]: 13). Al-Qur’an also mentioned: Had Allah willed He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by which He hath given you (He hath made you as ye are). So vie one with another in good works (Q 5.48)

The words law sya’a, (if he wanted) in tafsir (interpretation) theory, expresses an impossible thing. It is different with idza syaa (certainty) and in sya’a (probability). Thus, if God were willing to make the human into monocultural, it would happen. Yet, in fact, we are

living in multicultural society. In the other words, cultural diversity should be one of God's blessings, a learning media for all people. Therefore, conflicts in the name of religion in a multicultural era today are irrelevant, because there are some humanity problems such as flood, earthquake, landslide, eviction, unemployment, poverty, global warming and several moral crises the world, particularly Indonesia, is facing (e.g. corruption, manipulation, case realtor (makelar kasus), which are untouched by certain religion followers. As the consequence, we need a good cooperation among the religious community to solve them. It is a counter-productive act that religious community prefers conflict than harmonious life. We would be busy to take care of conflict among religious community and let the crisis grow up and never stop.

b. Hard Radicalism

As it is mentioned above hard radicalism is a radical concept or religious ideology which is actualized in several acts in praxis such as terrorism, violence, devastation, and bombings towards other community held to be enemies of Allah. According to the author, hard radicalism is very dangerous because it threatens and endangers people's religious and social life. On the other hand, for Western scholars, terrorism, since it is the realization of hard radicalism, causes Islamophobia.

One of "angle" of hard radicalism is "war verses" such as:

Against the make ready you strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies, of Allah and your enemies, and others besides, whom ye may not know, but whom Allah dots know. Whatever ye shall spend in the cause of Allah, shall be repaid unto you, and ye shall not be treated unjustly. (Q 8.60)

The verse becomes a justification to say that al-Qur'an allows Muslims to do terrorism because the term *turhibûna* (you are allowed to do terror) is involved in the verse. This verse is addressed to Muslims and their leaders, perpetuating how to make preventive and defensive actions in a state and how to make the state have a strong security system (Asyûr, n.y: 114).

and fight the Pagans all together as they fight you all together. But know that Allah is with those who restrain themselves. (Q 9.36)

o ye who believe fight the Unbelievers who gird you about, and let them find dirmness in you: and know that Allah is with those who fear Him. (Q 9.123)

Both of the verses above (Q 9.36 and Q 9.123), as radical Muslims said, confirm that Muslims should carry out very strict, unkind attitude towards unbelievers when they are in a war (Ulama Kota Surakarta, n.y: 40-41). It should be noticed that Islam never started a war but in a threatening situation. The word *qatilû* in the verses shows the meaning of *al-musyarakah* (two involved persons doing certain things to each other), implying that Muslims just respond to the war by the unbeliever.

... and fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and Faith in Allah altogether and everywhere; but if they cease, verily Allah doth see all that they do. (Q 8.39)

According to Ibn Abbas, the word *fitnah* means associating partners to Allah, while in Urwah ibn Zubair's view it means interruption or disturbance towards Islam and Muslims (Kathir, 56-57). Thus, in the context of religious de-radicalization, a concept of jihad should be understood in dynamic. It might be developed as its context does. Every disturbance that interrupts Muslim needs to be jihad-ed. Jihad can be included in the retention of state

involving Islamic universal norms such as ittihad (unity), al-syûra (consultation), al-a`dalah (justice), al-hurriyyah ma' mas'uliyah (responsible freedom), law inevitability and human rights guarantees and so on.

Urwah's interpretation on Q 8.39 could be better understood with considering historical context he was living in. At the time, Muslims were commanded to fight al-kafirin (the Unbelievers) because they threatened Muslims. Consequently, every riot actions should be restricted with not only violence. An effort to maintain justice (fair political) and to increase prosperity (economy) and religious understanding (education) in tolerance and well-mannered framework is very important. Muslims then, in quite peace environment, should not create restless things, even more, terrorism in the name of religion.

Methodology of Quranic Exegeses to Domesticate Radical Quranic Verses

De-radicalization of tafsir is an attempt to break the paradigmatic chain that causes radical understanding of Quranic verses. Criticizing last methods of Tafsir that is considered no longer compatible, this sort of attempt will reconstruct tafsir methods and produce a new one to answer Muslims problems today. Not only does this theoretically serve as al-khithab al-mudladl (counterbalance discourse) towards radical interpretation, but in praxis, it is also a suggestion to educational institutions and/or Islamic one so-called pesantren in teaching tafsir to its students. The construction of tafsir therefore precisely reflects moderate, tolerance, non-violence understanding and instead supports peace in multicultural societies.

1. Considering al-Qur'an as the Book of Rahmah (Blessing)

An exegete should have a worldview as a basic value that his understandings will be based on. Therefore, in the context of de-radicalization of Quranic interpretation (tafsir), there are several principles one should not be overlooked, but instead, use as a part of the paradigmatic building to treat crisis and anomaly in Quranic interpretation.

Al-Qur'an, firstly, should be considered to be rahmah (blessing), a book teaching its believers to be charitable so that Muslims may live peacefully, in relation to both Muslims and non-Muslims. Al-Qur'an should be an inspiration to defend interest and beneficence of Muslims, in particular, and all people, in general. For al-Qur'an was revealed for human, not for God. Therefore, the human is not supposed to be a victim of misconception about al-Qur'an. Every interpretation which is not in line with its capacity as rahmah should be reviewed or even abrogated so that more humanist understanding that based on peace norms namely rahmatan lil alamin (Q 21.107) could replace it.

2. Understand Qur'an comprehensively (syumûl)

Al-Qur'an should be read in a holistic, rather than partial or atomistic way. Partial understanding to al-Qur'an would obliterate beauty and totality of Qur'an. Imam al-Hatimi in his work namely Tarikh al-Naqd al-Adabi as cited by Ahmad Ustman Rahmani described that like the human's body that of Qur'an's has; each part it has are connected one another. If someone separates a part of its body, it would never be beautiful as it was (Rahmani, 2004: 50). Technically, an exegete should consider many aspects and approaches, e.g. linguistic, internal and external context, and each significance and relevance to multicultural life.

3. Considering "war verses" as ambiguous (mutasyabihat) and "peace verses" as clear (muhkamat)

In the context of radicalization to Quranic interpretation, what so-called "peace verses" should be based and considered as muhkamat (clear), while "war verses" are to be mutasyabihat (ambiguous) and continuance of muhkamat. Hence, an understanding of

mutasyabihat should be based on muhkamat (Syamsuddin, n.y: n.p). Hence, Qur'an's core message is to establish peaceful life, baladan Amina (peaceful state), baldatun thayyibah wa rabb ghafur.

In reading verses that seemingly express violence towards non-Muslims or "Unbelievers", we should also consider justice and tolerance verses, so that we could understand Qur'an comprehensively and therefore moderate. Instead of preserving terrorism, Muslims are called to be ummatan wasathan (moderate people), fair and not-extreme. Only with being moderate, Muslims will succeed in facing today's problems (Thalibi, 1996: 11-28).

Conclusion

In this research, the author can conclude:

There are several verses in Qur'an that might be understood as an angle to do religious radicalism which could be categorized into two categories, namely; Firstly, soft radicalism verses, such as verses claiming Islam as the only truth to be followed (Q 3.19), obliging Muslims to consider Islam as the only ideology in living totally (Q 2.208), regarding non-Muslims as excrement (Q 9.28) and Jews and Christians as the rival that threatened Muslims (Q 2.120). Secondly, hard radicalism, which is to be understood literally as justification to act violence such as the command to fight unbelievers, to do violence towards kafir (Q 9: 123), to fight kafirs altogether (Q 8.39), to kill kafir whenever Muslims find them (Q 2.191) and so on. An important thing to remark in this context is that radicalism is to destroy Islam itself. Because Islam is the universal religion, it does not separate Muslims from others. Islam is willing to offer ummatan wahidah (unity nation). Briefly, multicultural aspects still should be considered in all its unique lines to establish civilized community, and on the other hand, wihdatul ummah (unified community) tends to be anti-pluralism and disclaims other religious followers outside Islam. It is a great disaster that nowadays religion has been distorted that much until it causes slaughter.

It is necessary to create a new method in Quranic exegeses in order to domesticate "radical" verses, such as; First, al-Qur'an should be considered to be rahmah (grace/ blessing) and peaceful book. So that every interpretation of Qur'an that is not in line with rahmah norms has to be reviewed and even more replaced. Second, "peace verses" should be considered as the basic paradigm, and on another hand, "war verses" should constitute its continuance. Third, an effort to interpret Quranic verses that seemingly suggest radical attitudes and acts should consider many aspects including asbab al-nuzul (historical context), munasabah (interrelation among verses), and also today's multicultural aspects. Briefly, contextual-interconnective interpretation is needed, so that such interpretation might solve social crisis contemporary society today are facing.

Wa Allahu a'lamu bi al-shawab

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