

Discourses of Religious Harmony in Q.S. Al-Kāfirūn [109]: An Analysis of Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi's Oral Tafsīr



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Abstract: Q.S. al-Kāfirūn [109] has frequently served as a Qur'ānic foundation for discussions of interreligious relations. Existing scholarship, however, has focused predominantly on written exegesis, while the production of meaning within oral tafsīr traditions has received comparatively little attention. This study examines the discourse of religious harmony in Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi's oral interpretation of Q.S. al-Kāfirūn [109], with particular attention to the relationship among Qur'ānic interpretation, the plural social context of Kudus, and the social authority of the kiai. This qualitative study is based on an audio-document analysis of transcripts from Sya'roni Ahmadi's tafsīr lecture at al-Aqsā Mosque, Menara Kudus. The data are analyzed through Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis, encompassing textual analysis, social cognition, and social context. The findings show that Sya'roni Ahmadi constructs a discourse of harmony by distinguishing between 'religious harmony' (kerukunan agama), understood as the mixing of doctrines and rituals and therefore rejected, and 'harmony among religious communities' (kerukunan umat beragama), understood as peaceful social relations without compromising religious identity and therefore encouraged. This discourse is established through textual legitimation based on Q.S. al-Kāfirūn, historical legitimation through the examples of the Prophet Muhammad and the Wali Songo, and cultural legitimation through Javanese language and locally grounded illustrations. The study demonstrates that oral tafsīr does not merely reproduce Qur'ānic meaning; it also functions as a discursive practice that mediates theological norms and the realities of a plural society through the social authority of a kiai.

Keywords: Oral Tafsīr; Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi; Q.S. al-Kāfirūn; Religious Harmony; Critical Discourse Analysis

Abstrak: QS. al-Kāfirūn [109] merupakan salah satu surah yang sering dijadikan landasan dalam diskursus hubungan antarumat beragama. Meskipun demikian, sebagian besar penelitian masih berfokus pada tafsīr tertulis, sementara kajian mengenai produksi makna dalam tradisi tafsīr lisan relatif terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis wacana kerukunan dalam penafsiran lisan Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi terhadap QS. al-Kāfirūn [109] dengan menyoroti hubungan antara penafsiran ayat, konteks pluralitas masyarakat Kudus, dan otoritas sosial kiai. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif berbasis analisis dokumen audio dengan sumber utama berupa transkrip rekaman pengajian tafsīr Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi di Masjid al-Aqsā Menara Kudus. Data dianalisis menggunakan Analisis Wacana Kritis Teun A. van Dijk melalui tiga dimensi, yaitu analisis teks, kognisi sosial, dan konteks sosial. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi mengonstruksi wacana kerukunan melalui pembedaan antara kerukunan agama yang dipahami sebagai pencampuran 'aqīdah dan ibadah sehingga ditolak, dengan kerukunan umat beragama yang dimaknai sebagai hubungan sosial yang harmonis tanpa mengaburkan identitas keagamaan sehingga dibolehkan. Wacana tersebut dibangun melalui legitimasi tekstual terhadap QS. al-Kāfirūn, legitimasi historis melalui teladan Nabi Muhammad saw. dan Wali Songo, serta legitimasi kultural melalui penggunaan bahasa Jawa dan ilustrasi lokal yang dekat dengan pengalaman jamaah. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa tafsīr lisan tidak hanya mereproduksi makna Qur'an, tetapi juga menjadi praktik produksi wacana yang menjembatani norma teologis dengan realitas masyarakat plural melalui otoritas sosial seorang kiai.

Kata Kunci: Tafsīr Lisan; Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi; QS. al-Kāfirūn; Kerukunan Umat Beragama; Analisis Wacana Kritis

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Introduction

To date, tafsīr studies in Indonesia in particular, and globally in general, have continued to concentrate on written or published works, while oral practices of Qur'ānic interpretation have tended to remain at the margins of academic attention. Yet during the period of the Prophet and his Companions, oral tafsīr was the dominant mode of interpretation.¹

The term “oral tafsīr” refers to interpretation conducted by communicating the meanings and contents of the Qur'ān directly to an audience.² Al-Bayūmī calls this *al-tafsīr al-idhā'ī*, encompassing any interpretation that is broadcast, whether deliberately prepared for transmission or originally delivered as a mosque lesson and subsequently broadcast, as exemplified by Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī.³

Within Indonesia's socio-religious life, oral Qur'ānic interpretation is especially prominent and enjoys a broad reach. Through religious study circles, *majālis al-ta'līm*, sermons, Friday sermons, and other forms of da'wah, Qur'ānic messages are communicated, reinterpreted, and directly experienced by audiences. Oral tafsīr serves not only as a medium for transmitting Islamic knowledge, but also as a means of legitimating scholarly authority, consolidating religious identity, and responding to continuously evolving social problems.⁴

The contextual, situational, and performative nature of oral tafsīr fundamentally distinguishes it from written exegesis. Richard Bauman emphasizes that performativity in oral traditions is constitutive of meaning-making rather than a neutral vehicle for transmitting messages.⁵ Meaning does not emerge as a final product; it is continuously negotiated through the relationship between speaker and listener.⁶ Accordingly, a kiai's interpretation in a religious lecture cannot be understood merely as a reproduction of classical exegetical opinions, but also as a new construction of meaning that relates the Qur'ānic text to the social realities of the congregation.

One Qur'ānic passage whose meaning is continually reproduced in social space is Q.S. al-Kāfirūn [109]. From the classical to the contemporary period, this sūrah has served as an important reference in discussions of relations between Muslims and followers of other religions. Exegetes, however, have not emphasized the same dimensions. Some read the sūrah as a declaration of doctrinal separation that rules out compromise in matters of faith. Others view it as an acknowledgment of religious freedom and a foundation for peaceful coexistence

¹ Hamdani Anwar, “Mengenal Tafsir Rasulullah,” *Ushuluna: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin* 1, no. 1 (2020): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.15408/ushuluna.v1i1.15146>.

² Muhammad Alwi HS, “Perbandingan Tafsir Tulis Dan Lisan M. Quraish Shihab Tentang QS. Al-Qalam Dalam Tafsir Al-Misbah (Analisis Ciri Kelisanan Aditif Alih-Alih Subordinatif),” *Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Ushuluddin* 18, no. 1 (2019): 34, <https://doi.org/10.18592/jiiu.v18i1.2866>.

³ ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Dāmīr, “al-Tafsīr al-Idhā'ī li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm,” *Majallah Ma'had al-Imām al-Shāḥibī li al-Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyyah* 1, no. Rabī' al-Awwal (1427), 136.

⁴ John R. Bowen, *A New Anthropology of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 37–41.

⁵ Richard Bauman, *Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3–9.

⁶ Walter J. Ong, *Kelisanan dan Keberaksaraan*, ed. oleh Bisri Effendi (Yogyakarta: Gading Publishing, 2013), 151.

without erasing the religious identity of either community.⁷ These different orientations demonstrate that the interpretation of Q.S. al-Kāfirūn is shaped by the historical and social contexts and the interpretive methodologies employed by particular exegetes.

Studies of Q.S. al-Kāfirūn have largely examined concepts of tolerance in written commentaries or compared the positions of different exegetes. Ghufrani and Muhajirin compare the concept of tolerance in Hamka's *Tafsir al-Azhar* and Hamdi's *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*,⁸ while Setio Budi and Muhammad Esa Prasastia Amnesti examine Quraish Shihab's concept of tolerance in *Tafsir al-Misbah*.⁹ Supardi, meanwhile, analyzes the limits of religious tolerance in Q.S. al-Kāfirūn through a linguistic-semiotic approach.¹⁰ Although these studies contribute to a normative understanding of the sūrah, they remain centered on written exegesis. Little attention has been given to how meanings of tolerance are produced in oral tafsīr and how this process is shaped by social context and the authority of the interpreter.

This question becomes particularly significant when situated in Kudus. The city provides a relevant setting for examining the production of meaning around Q.S. al-Kāfirūn because it has a long history of interreligious relations shaped by the missionary legacy of Sunan Kudus while also confronting the dynamics of contemporary plurality. Previous studies indicate that Sunan Kudus's legacy cultivated an ethos of tolerance and coexistence through cultural accommodation, while communal harmony continues to be negotiated in everyday life.¹¹ In such a context, a kiai's oral tafsīr does more than explain the textual meaning of a verse; it functions as a mechanism of discourse production that shapes how the boundaries of tolerance are understood and practiced.

Within this setting, Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi was a scholar with considerable social and religious authority in Kudus. Through his regular tafsīr lectures, he not only conveyed the contents of Qur'ānic verses but also constructed social norms governing interreligious relations. His pesantren authority, mastery of classical exegetical literature, use of Javanese as the language of communication, and emotional proximity to the congregation endowed his oral interpretation with considerable legitimating power.¹²

Scholarship on Sya'roni Ahmadi has developed along several lines. The first focuses on his thought and intellectual production in both written and oral forms. Arif Friyadi, for example, examines *al-Farā'id al-Saniyyah* as a hadith-based counter-narrative to Wahhabism, while Laili Noor Azizah and Muhammad Dilla Khoirona study the characteristics of Sya'roni

⁷ Azzam Ghufrani dan Muhajirin, "Toleransi dalam Surah Al-Kafirun: Komparasi Tafsir Al-Azhar dan Hak Dini Kur'an Dili," *Living Islam: Journal of Islamic Discourses* 7, no. 1 (2024): 305, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14421/ljid.v7i2.5497>.

⁸ Ghufrani dan Muhajirin, "Toleransi dalam Surah Al-Kafirun: Komparasi Tafsir Al-Azhar dan Hak Dini Kur'an Dili," 303-320.

⁹ Muhammad Esa Prasastia Amnesti dan Setio Budi, "Konsep Toleransi Menurut Quraish Shihab pada Surah al-Kafirun," *Minhaj: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 3, no. 2 (2022): 178-92, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.52431/minhaj.v3i2.1070>.

¹⁰ Supardi, "Religious Tolerance Limits: A Semiotic Linguistic Analysis of Al-Kāfirūn Chapter:," *Leksema: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra* 7, no. 2 (2022): 133-43, <https://doi.org/10.22515/ljbs.v7i2.5580>.

¹¹ Nur Said, "Revitalizing the Sunan Kudus' Multiculturalism in Responding Islamic Radicalism in Indonesia," *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2013): 37-57, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.21043/qjijis.v1i1.175>.

¹² Ulin Nuha Mahfudhon, *Kerukunan Umat Beragama dalam al-Qur'an: Telaah Penafsiran Kiai Sya'roni Ahmadi* (Tangerang Selatan: Yayasan Wakaf Darus-Sunnah, 2020), 89-106.

Ahmadi's oral interpretation disseminated through the *Official Menara Kudus* YouTube channel.¹³ A second line of research examines his interpretive method through different theoretical approaches. Muhammad Afnan Abdillah analyzes the hermeneutical discourse in his interpretation,¹⁴ whereas Miftahur Rohmah studies his oral interpretation of Q.S. al-Aḥzāb [33]:33 through a *maqāṣidī* approach.¹⁵ These studies show that scholarly attention has largely focused on Sya'roni Ahmadi's thought, interpretive methodology, characteristics of oral tafsīr, and media of dissemination.¹⁶

Despite their important contribution to oral tafsīr studies, these works have not specifically examined how Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi's interpretation of Q.S. al-Kāfirūn [109] produces a discourse of harmony within a plural society. Nor have they made the relationship among Qur'ānic interpretation, the socio-religious context of Kudus, and the social authority of the kiai a central object of inquiry. Addressing this gap, the present article analyzes the discourse of religious harmony in Sya'roni Ahmadi's oral tafsīr of Q.S. al-Kāfirūn [109] by positioning oral interpretation as a practice of meaning production. Its novelty lies in examining how interpretation, local plurality, and the kiai's social authority interact to construct the boundaries of interreligious tolerance.

Method

This research is a qualitative study based on audio-document analysis. It focuses on the discourse of Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi's oral interpretation of Q.S. al-Kāfirūn [109] in a tafsīr lecture at al-Aqṣā Mosque, Menara Kudus. The primary source is a single audio recording of his interpretation of Q.S. al-Kāfirūn [109] and al-Naṣr [110], published on the Musholla Rapi blog (<http://mushollarapi.blogspot.co.id>). The analysis concentrates on the seventeen-minute segment devoted to Q.S. al-Kāfirūn [109]. The lecture was delivered in 2015.

Data collection proceeded in four stages. First, the researchers identified archived lecture recordings related to Q.S. al-Kāfirūn. Second, they downloaded and documented the recording that met the research criteria. Third, they transcribed the complete oral presentation verbatim. Fourth, they verified the transcript by repeatedly listening to the recording in order to minimize errors in transcription and translation.¹⁷

The data were analyzed using Teun A. van Dijk's model of Critical Discourse Analysis, which integrates three dimensions: text, social cognition, and social context. At the textual level, the analysis examines macrostructure to identify the main theme, superstructure

¹³ Laili Noor Azizah dan Muhammad Dilla Khoirona, "Tafsir Era Millenial: Kajian Atas Penafsiran KH.Sya'roni Ahmadi di Channel Youtube Official Menara Kudus," *HERMENEUTIK* 14, no. 2 (2020): 199, <https://doi.org/10.21043/hermeneutik.v14i2.7796>.

¹⁴ Muhammad Afnan Abdillah, "Diskursus Hermeneutis Penafsiran KH. Sya'roni Ahmadi di Channel Youtube," *QOF* 7, no. 1 (2023): 53–66, <https://doi.org/10.30762/qof.v7i1.953>.

¹⁵ Miftahur Rohmah, "Oral Interpretation of QS. Al-Ahzab: 33 by KH. Sya'roni Ahmadi: Maqashidi Analysis," *Jurnal At-Tibyan: Jurnal Ilmu Alqur'an dan Tafsir* 7, no. 2 (2022): 309–25, <https://doi.org/10.32505/at-tibyan.v7i2.3863>.

¹⁶ Arif Friyadi, "Counter Narratives from Hadith Texts of KH. Sya'roni Ahmadi's Al-Faraid Al-Saniyya Against Wahhabism," *Riwayah: Jurnal Studi Hadis* 9 (2023): 27–48; Arif Friyadi, "Counter-Narrative of Shi'ism in The Hadith Text of Kitab 'Al-Faraid Al-Saniyyah' KH. Sya'roni Ahmadi Kudus," *International Journal Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* 25, no. 1 (2023): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ihya.25.1.14603>.

¹⁷ Blake D. Poland, "Transcription Quality as an Aspect of Rigor in Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 1, no. 3 (1995): 290–310, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049500100302>.

to trace the organization of the argument, and microstructure, including lexical choices, sentence forms, metaphors, emphasis, and omission in the explanation of Q.S. al-Kāfirūn. At the level of social cognition, the study considers how Sya'roni Ahmadi's scholarly formation, pesantren tradition, and position as a Nahdlatul Ulama scholar shaped his construction of the verse's meaning. At the level of social context, the analysis focuses on the relationship between his interpretation and the plurality of Kudus society, the history of interreligious relations, and the social authority of the kiai in constructing discourses of harmony and the boundaries of tolerance.¹⁸

Results and Discussion

Positioning the Study of Religious Harmony

Al-Tuwayjirī defines harmony, or *al-ta'āyush al-silmī*, as the desire of adherents of different religions to seek common ground in establishing security and peace on earth so that, as fellow human beings, they may live in fraternity and cooperate in goodness.¹⁹

In Indonesia, the commonly used term is “harmony among religious communities,” understood as relations among religious adherents grounded in tolerance, mutual understanding, mutual respect, recognition of equality in the practice of religion, and cooperation in social, national, and civic life within the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia on the basis of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution.²⁰

Abu-Nimer divides studies that ask how Islam supports principles and values of war and peace into three major categories: The first category, comprises studies of war and jihad. Their underlying hypothesis is that Islamic religion and tradition have been employed to support warfare and violence as means of resolving differences. Islam is consequently portrayed as intolerant of difference, especially religious difference, and war and violence are treated as integral components of Islamic religion and tradition.²¹

Pipes, Bernard Lewis, and Sivan belong to this category. Bernard Lewis, for example, argues that Muslims believe war will end only when God's word has been established throughout the world.²² Research of this kind generally focuses on fundamentalism and the recent rise of radical Islamic movements.²³

The second category, concerns just war and peace. Its hypothesis is that Islamic religion and tradition permit the use of violence under limited and clearly defined circumstances in order to establish peace and justice. The use of force in resolving internal or external conflict must therefore take particular conditions and situations into account.²⁴

¹⁸ Teun A. van Dijk, *Discourse and Context: A Sociocognitive Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 56-216.

¹⁹ Abd al-'Azīz ibn Uthmān Al-Tuwayjirī, *al-Islām wa al-Ta'āyush bayn al-Adyān fī Ufuq al-Qarn 21* (Rabat: Mathba'ah ISESCO, 1998), 12-13.

²⁰ Ihsan Ali-Fauzi dan dkk., *Menggapai Kerukunan Umat Beragama: Buku Saku FKUB* (Jakarta: Pusat Studi Agama dan Demokrasi (PUSAD), 2018), 5.

²¹ Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Nirkekerasan dan Bina-Damai dalam Islam: Teori dan Praktik* (Jakarta: Pustaka Alvabet, 2010), 27.

²² Abu-Nimer, *Nirkekerasan dan Bina-Damai dalam Islam: Teori dan Praktik*. 27.

²³ Michael Dunn, “Revitalist Islam and Democracy: Thinking about the Algerian Quandary,” *Middle East Policy* 1.2 (1992): 16–22.

²⁴ Abu-Nimer, *Nirkekerasan dan Bina-Damai dalam Islam: Teori dan Praktik*, 28.

Scholars such as Mahmoud Ayoub, Sohail Hashmi, and Abdulaziz Sachedina fall within this category, although in certain respects they may also be associated with the third. Hashmi, for instance, recognizes Islam's presumption of peace while arguing that Islam cannot be understood as an "absolutely nonviolent" religion because it authorizes warfare and the use of force under particular conditions.²⁵

The third category, comprises studies of nonviolence and peacebuilding. Its central hypothesis is that no theological reason prevents Muslim societies from pioneering the development of nonviolent approaches. It differs from the preceding category in its stronger emphasis on the primacy of nonviolence and peace, an emphasis shaped by the scholars' convictions or theoretical frameworks. Rather than foregrounding just-war theology or the legitimate use of force, this group calls for the formulation of distinctly Islamic approaches to nonviolence.²⁶

Studies of interreligious harmony are closely, and perhaps necessarily, connected with peace and peacebuilding studies because of their conceptual relationship. Harmony is an outcome of peacebuilding efforts. The study of religious harmony may therefore be situated within the broader field of nonviolence and peacebuilding.²⁷

A Brief Biography of Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi

Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi was born in Kudus on 17 August 1931 to Ahmadi and Hayati. He was a descendant of Pangeran Puspoyudo Singopadon, also known as Sayyid Utsman, who is buried in Singopadon, Singocandi, Kudus.²⁸

Orphaned at a young age, Muhammad Sya'roni was raised by his grandfather and lived west of the tomb of Sunan Kudus. He spent his childhood under the pressures of Japanese occupation. Although he was able to pursue religious learning, difficult economic circumstances prevented him from obtaining a formal education. His only recorded schooling was at the Ma'ahid and Mu'awanatul Muslimin madrasahs, both nonformal religious institutions.²⁹

Economic limitations also confined his pesantren education to the area around Menara Kudus, where he studied with Raden Asnawi, Muhammad Arwani, Turaichan Adjhuri, and several other scholars.³⁰ These constraints did not diminish his commitment to learning. He memorized the verses of the *Alfiyyah* at the age of eleven and completed his memorization of the Qur'ān at fourteen in only eight months.³¹

In addition to memorizing the Qur'ān and the seven canonical readings (*qirā'āt sa'*), Muhammad Sya'roni repeatedly completed the study of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* under Muhammad

²⁵ Sohail H. Hashmi, "Interpreting the Islamic Ethic of War and Peace," dalam *Islamic Political Ethic: Civil Society, Pluralism, and Conflict*, ed. oleh Sohail H. Hashmi (Princeton, 2002), 194–216.

²⁶ Abu-Nimer, *Nirkekerasan dan Bina-Damai dalam Islam: Teori dan Praktik*, 44.

²⁷ Ihsan Ali-Fauzi dan dkk., *Agama, Kerukunan, dan Binadamai di Indonesia: Modul Lokakarya Penyuluh Agama* (Jakarta: Pusat Studi Agama dan Demokrasi (PUSAD), 2018), 34.

²⁸ Mc. Mifrohul Hana dan dkk., *Jejak Ulama Nusantara*, 1a ed. (Kudus: Aqila Kuds, 2017), 162.

²⁹ Mahfudhon, *Kerukunan Umat Beragama dalam al-Qur'an: Telaah Penafsiran Kiai Sya'roni Ahmadi*, 90.

³⁰ Hana dan dkk., *Jejak Ulama Nusantara*, 163–164.

³¹ Mahfudhon, *Kerukunan Umat Beragama dalam al-Qur'an: Telaah Penafsiran Kiai Sya'roni Ahmadi*, 91.

Arwani. He also studied the same work with Raden Asnawi, Turaichan Adjhuri, and Sayyid Abdillah, as well as other texts with the scholars of Kudus.³²

After marrying Afifah, Muhammad Sya'roni began preaching in two forms: *da'wah bi-al-kalām* (oral preaching) and *da'wah bi-al-qalam* (preaching through writing). His oral preaching followed at least three patterns. First were study circles in mosques or private homes, including tafsīr lectures in several Kudus mosques. Second were public sermons or *tabligh akbar* delivered at the request of communities or institutions. Third was instruction for students in pesantren and madrasahs.³³

Muhammad Sya'roni was known for an approachable preaching style that attracted broad interest. He frequently conveyed messages of harmony both among Muslims and between Muslims and followers of other religions. This approach made him acceptable to audiences within and beyond Nahdlatul Ulama.³⁴ He was regarded as an influential figure in Kudus and the surrounding region and was consequently appointed to the Advisory Council (*Mustashār*) of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board until his death.

His written *da'wah* is represented by six works in different fields: *al-Farā'id al-Saniyyah wa-al-Durar al-Bahiyyah*, *al-Taṣrīḥ al-Yasīr fī 'Ilm al-Tafsīr*, *Fayḍ al-Asānī 'alā Ḥirz al-Amānī wa-Wajh al-Tahānī*, *al-Qirā'ah al-'Ashriyyah*, *Tarjamah al-Sullam al-Munawraq fī 'Ilm al-Manṭiq*, and *Tarjamah Tashīl al-Ṭuruqāt li-Naẓm al-Waraqāt fī 'Ilm Uṣūl al-Fiqh*. All were written in Arabic except the final two, which were composed in Javanese using the Pegon script.³⁵ Muhammad Sya'roni died on Tuesday, 27 April 2021, leaving a wife and eight children: two sons and six daughters.

The Methodology of Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi's Oral Tafsīr

Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi's oral tafsīr emerged from weekly Qur'ānic lectures held every Friday at dawn at al-Aqṣā Mosque, Menara Kudus. This tradition continued from 1983 until his death. He used *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* as his principal reference. The lectures were fundamentally intended to help the congregation understand the Qur'ānic message with ease. Rather than emphasizing complex theories of interpretation, he sought to communicate the Qur'ān in a simple form accessible to ordinary listeners. His method was therefore strongly characterized by *tanzīl*, the application of verses to concrete life contexts in order to make them relevant to the audience.³⁶

In practice, Muhammad Sya'roni combined transmitted and reasoned interpretation. When discussing Q.S. al-Mumtaḥanah [60]:8, for example, he illustrated the command to act justly and kindly toward non-Muslims through the Prophet Muhammad's relationship with Abū Ṭālib, his non-Muslim uncle who rendered him significant assistance and later became related to him by marriage. He also connected the verse with Sunan Ampel's kinship relations

³² Hana dan dkk., *Jejak Ulama Nusantara*, 164.

³³ Hana dan dkk., *Jejak Ulama Nusantara*, 164.

³⁴ A. Mujib dan dkk., *Intelektualisme Pesantren*, ed. oleh Mastuki HS dan M. Ishom El-Saha (Jakarta: Diva Pustaka, 2003), 336.

³⁵ Mahfudhon, *Kerukunan Umat Beragama dalam al-Qur'an: Telaah Penafsiran Kiai Sya'roni Ahmadi*, 96-98.

³⁶ Mahfudhon, *Kerukunan Umat Beragama dalam al-Qur'an: Telaah Penafsiran Kiai Sya'roni Ahmadi*, 102.

with the non-Muslim King Brawijaya.³⁷

Muhammad Sya'roni's oral tafsīr followed the order of the sūrahs in the muṣḥaf. He explained the Qur'ān verse by verse and did not proceed to the next verse before completing the preceding one, even when both addressed the same theme. His interpretation was social in orientation (*ijtimā'ī*): he sought to disclose Qur'ānic meanings in order to provide practical guidance and solutions to problems encountered in society.³⁸

His treatment of each verse was detailed. In explaining Q.S. al-Fātiḥah [1]:1, for example, he discussed multiple dimensions of meaning, including the distinction between *al-Raḥmān* and *al-Raḥīm* and the arguments underlying it. His presentation was monologic, without direct dialogue with the congregation. In pesantren tradition, this method is known as *bandongan*.³⁹ These oral interpretations originated in actual lectures at al-Aqṣā Mosque, Menara Kudus. They were recorded by the mosque or members of the congregation and circulated through radio, YouTube, websites, and compact discs.

Discourse Analysis in Qur'ānic Interpretation

This study examines Muhammad Sya'roni's interpretation of Q.S. al-Kāfirūn [109] through Critical Discourse Analysis in order to uncover its interests and ideological orientations. Critical discourse analysis is an analytical process that explains a text as a social reality produced and studied by individuals or groups for particular purposes. It presupposes that interests embedded within a context must be made explicit.⁴⁰

In Critical Discourse Analysis, discourse is not understood merely as language. The approach requires researchers to relate language in a text to its context, that is, to the purposes and practices for which language is employed. It emphasizes the constellation of forces operating in the production and reproduction of meaning. Individuals are not regarded as neutral subjects who interpret freely according to personal thought; they are shaped by social forces within society.⁴¹

According to Teun A. van Dijk, Critical Discourse Analysis does not possess a single unified theoretical framework or methodology; its application depends on analytical focus and the skills required to examine texts on the basis of knowledge and reasoning.⁴² In this study, it is used to analyze Muhammad Sya'roni's oral statements as preserved in his tafsīr lectures.

Although it has no single standardized methodology, Critical Discourse Analysis may be identified through several characteristics: (1) action, viewing speech and writing as forms of interaction; (2) context, according to which discourse is produced, understood, and analyzed within particular situations; (3) history, which situates discourse within a specific historical setting; (4) power, which approaches discourse as a site of struggle; and (5) ideology, which recognizes that texts and speech are affiliated with particular ideological

³⁷ Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi, "Rekaman Pengajian Tafsir QS. Mumtahanah [60]: 8-9," Kudus: <http://mushollarapi.blogspot.co.id>, 2013.

³⁸ M. Afifuddin Dimiyathi, *Ilm al-Tafsīr Uṣūluḥ wa Manāḥijuh* (Sidoarjo: Maktabah Lisan Arabi, 2016); Mahfudhon, *Kerukunan Umat Beragama dalam al-Qur'an: Telaah Penafsiran Kiai Sya'roni Ahmadi*, 124.

³⁹ Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi, "Rekaman Pengajian Tafsir QS. al-Fātiḥah: 1-7," Kudus: <http://mushollarapi.blogspot.co.id>, 2017.

⁴⁰ Yoce Aliah Darma, *Analisis Wacana Kritis* (Bandung: Yrama Widya, 2013), 49.

⁴¹ Eriyanto, *Analisis Wacana: Pengantar Analisis Teks Media* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2011), 7.

⁴² Darma, *Analisis Wacana Kritis*, 54.

positions.⁴³

In tafsīr studies, Islah Gusmian argues, researchers must remain attentive to ideological coloration. A work of interpretation cannot be separated from the social space in which it is produced or from the identity of its interpreter. Whether acknowledged or not, this social space shapes tafsīr and represents the interests and ideologies carried by the exegete.⁴⁴

For Jorge Larraín, ideology has two opposing meanings. Positively, it refers to a worldview that articulates the values of a particular social group in defense of its interests. Negatively, it denotes false consciousness: a perceived need to deceive by distorting people's understanding of social reality.⁴⁵

Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi's Interpretation of Q.S. al-Kāfirūn [109]

God states in Q.S. al-Kāfirūn [109]:1–6:

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ (1) لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ (2) وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عِبُدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ (3) وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدْتُمْ (4) وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عِبُدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ (5) لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ (6)

“(1) Say, ‘O disbelievers! (2) I do not worship what you worship, (3) nor are you worshippers of what I worship. (4) I will never be a worshipper of what you have worshipped, (5) nor will you ever be worshippers of what I worship. (6) For you is your religion, and for me is mine.’”

In his oral interpretation, Muhammad Sya'roni treats Q.S. al-Kāfirūn [109]:1–6 as a single thematic unit. Although the sixth verse appears most directly relevant to religious harmony, a complete understanding cannot be separated from the preceding verses. Before addressing the sūrah's central message, Muhammad Sya'roni discusses its place of revelation, noting the disagreement over whether its six verses are Makkan or Medinan.⁴⁶

He explains that Q.S. al-Kāfirūn [109] was revealed in connection with the resentment of the unbelievers toward the success of the Prophet's mission and his growing number of converts. In Muhammad Sya'roni's words, they became “agitated” as more unbelievers embraced Islam. They approached Abū Ṭālib and then the Prophet with a proposal that Sya'roni calls “religious harmony”:

“*Wis ngene wae Muhammad, apik-apikan aten, kito kerukunan agama. Kuwe nyembah pengeranku setahun. Aku ngko nyembah pengeranku setahun.*”⁴⁷

Translation:

“Let us settle this amicably, Muhammad, and establish religious harmony. You worship my god for one year, and I will worship your God for one year.”

⁴³ Teun A. Van Dijk, “Discourse as Interaction in Society,” dalam *Discourse as Social Interaction: Discourse Studies A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, Vol. 2, ed. oleh Teun A. Van Dijk (London: Sage Publication, 1997), 1-37.

⁴⁴ Islah Gusmian, “Paradigma Penelitian Tafsir di Indonesia,” *Empirisma* 24, no. No. 1 (2015): 1–10.

⁴⁵ Aleks Sobur, *Analisis Teks Media: Suatu Pengantar untuk Analisis Wacana, Analisis Semiotik, dan Analisis Framing* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2004), 61.

⁴⁶ Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi, “Rekaman Pengajian Tafsir QS. al-Kafirun [109]: 1-6,” Kudus: <http://mushollarapi.blogspot.co.id>, 2017.

⁴⁷ Ahmadi, “Rekaman Pengajian Tafsir QS. al-Kafirun [109]: 1-6.”

When the unbelievers offered this form of religious harmony, the Prophet remained silent for a moment. Gabriel then descended with Q.S. al-Kāfirūn [109]:1–6, which rejected the proposal.⁴⁸

At this point, Muhammad Sya'roni divides harmony into two forms. The first is “religious harmony,” and the second is “harmony among religious communities.” The first corresponds to the unbelievers’ offer to alternate acts of worship with the Prophet. In the context of Kudus, Sya'roni illustrates it as Muslims attending a Christian service in a church while Christians perform the Friday prayer at Menara Kudus Mosque. According to the guidance of Q.S. al-Kāfirūn, this form of harmony is prohibited (*ḥarām*).⁴⁹

The second form, harmony among religious communities, is permitted. The Prophet Muhammad himself practiced it by maintaining a harmonious relationship with his uncle Abū Ṭālib despite their different beliefs. Sya'roni therefore emphasizes that harmony with followers of other religions is permissible insofar as it concerns worldly affairs and does not enter the domains of ‘aqīdah or worship.⁵⁰

Harmony among religious communities receives particular emphasis in Muhammad Sya'roni's teaching. He repeatedly reminds his congregation that the Prophet himself practiced it and encourages them to embody it in everyday life.⁵¹

Muhammad Sya'roni then explains Q.S. al-Kāfirūn [109]:1–6 verse by verse, beginning with lexical meanings. In discussing the third verse, he notes that it does not prohibit non-Muslims from embracing Islam. The verse must be understood in its particular context: the unbelievers addressed were those whose unbelief had become deeply entrenched and who had gone to extremes in insulting the Prophet and Islam. Sya'roni describes their reasoning as follows:

*Nganti wong kafir duwe paham, “wong aku nyembah braholo 360 mben dino gantian wae kadang-kadang maksud tujuanku ora keturutan. Lha Muhammad kok nyembah pengeran siji. Ora kethok pisan.”*⁵²

Translation:

The unbelievers reasoned: “We worship 360 idols in rotation every day, yet our wishes are sometimes not fulfilled. Muhammad, however, worships only one God—and one who cannot even be seen.”

Because these unbelievers had gone to extremes in insulting God and the Prophet, the verse indicated that they should not propose an exchange of objects of worship. They had no need to worship God if their purpose was to induce the Prophet to worship their idols.

In relation to the fifth verse, Muhammad Sya'roni states that those who proposed the exchange of worship—such as Abū Jahl, al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah, and others—had been divinely destined to remain unbelievers and would therefore persist in unbelief.⁵³

Muhammad Sya'roni does not elaborate further on Q.S. al-Kāfirūn. He concludes only that the sūrah prohibits “religious harmony,” which he understands as the mixing of matters of ‘aqīdah and worship. He illustrates this with Muslims in Kudus exchanging worship with

⁴⁸ Ahmadi, “Rekaman Pengajian Tafsir QS. al-Kafirun [109]: 1-6.”

⁴⁹ Ahmadi, “Rekaman Pengajian Tafsir QS. al-Kafirun [109]: 1-6.”

⁵⁰ Ahmadi, “Rekaman Pengajian Tafsir QS. al-Kafirun [109]: 1-6.”

⁵¹ Ahmadi, “Rekaman Pengajian Tafsir QS. al-Kafirun [109]: 1-6.”

⁵² Ahmadi, “Rekaman Pengajian Tafsir QS. al-Kafirun [109]: 1-6.”

⁵³ Ahmadi, “Rekaman Pengajian Tafsir QS. al-Kafirun [109]: 1-6.”

Christians: Muslims perform the Friday prayer at Menara Kudus Mosque one week and attend a church service the following Sunday.⁵⁴

Sya'roni further states that participants in such practices cannot be described as "half-Muslim." Whether Muslims attend a Christian service or Christians perform the Friday prayer in a mosque, he considers both parties to have left their respective religious identities and, in his formulation, to be non-Muslim.⁵⁵

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi's Interpretation

As Muhammad Sya'roni explains it, Q.S. al-Kāfirūn [109] records the Prophet's rejection of the unbelievers' invitation to exchange objects of worship. From this sūrah, he derives the concept of harmony as a conclusion drawn from its central message. Although he presents the distinction clearly, he does not elaborate its derivative implications through detailed cases within this particular lecture. The authors infer that such cases were discussed in his lectures on other verses and therefore draw on those materials in the following discourse analysis.

In addition to harmony within the Muslim community, Muhammad Sya'roni maps harmony into two categories. The first, "religious harmony," refers to compromise or the mixing of matters of 'aqīdah and worship between Islam and other religions. The *sabab al-nuzūl* of Q.S. al-Kāfirūn provides his principal example: compromise in 'aqīdah and worship is prohibited.

This prohibition is reinforced through other verses. Among the passages Sya'roni cites is Q.S. al-Mumtaḥanah [60]:13, which he understands as prohibiting affection or mutual assistance with non-Muslims in matters of religion, specifically 'aqīdah and worship.⁵⁶

Sya'roni offers a simple Kudus-based illustration of "religious harmony": Muslims perform the Friday prayer at Menara Mosque on one Friday and attend a church service the following week; conversely, Christians worship in church on Sunday and perform the Friday prayer at Menara Kudus Mosque the next week.

The second, harmony among religious communities. Muhammad Sya'roni understands this as adherents of different religions living peacefully, cooperating, and treating one another well without mixing the domains of 'aqīdah and worship. He cites the Prophet's harmonious and benevolent relationship with his non-Muslim uncle Abū Ṭālib. Abū Ṭālib even became related to the Prophet by marriage when his son 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib married the Prophet's daughter Fāṭimah. Sya'roni regards this form of harmony as permissible and even recommended because the Prophet practiced it.

Among the permissible forms of interreligious harmony is cooperation with non-Muslims in worldly affairs. According to Sya'roni, God applies the same worldly principles to Muslims and non-Muslims: whoever works diligently will receive the reward of that effort, irrespective of religion. The same applies to employment relationships. Whether a Muslim

⁵⁴ Ahmadi, "Rekaman Pengajian Tafsir QS. al-Kafirun [109]: 1-6."

⁵⁵ Ahmadi, "Rekaman Pengajian Tafsir QS. al-Kafirun [109]: 1-6."

⁵⁶ Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi, "Rekaman Pengajian Tafsir QS. Mumtahanah [60]: 13," Kudus: <http://mushollarapi.blogspot.co.id>, 2017.

works for a non-Muslim or vice versa, lawful and conscientious work entitles the worker to lawful compensation. Sya'roni grounds this view in the general wording of Q.S. Hūd [11]:15.

Sya'roni offered this explanation in response to the reality that many Muslims in Kudus work for companies owned by non-Muslims. Kudus is widely known as a center of Indonesia's cigarette industry and is consequently called the "city of kretek." Djarum, founded in Kudus, is among Indonesia's largest cigarette companies. Its leader, Robert Budi Hartono, is an Indonesian of Chinese descent and a Catholic. The company employs thousands of residents of Kudus and the surrounding region, most of whom are Muslim; in other words, many Muslims work for a non-Muslim employer.⁵⁷ This reality generated public questions regarding the permissibility of working for non-Muslims. Muhammad Sya'roni addressed these questions in his tafsīr lectures.

On another occasion, he addressed the permissibility of accepting gifts from non-Muslims and ruled that it was allowed. In addition to being a worldly form of interreligious harmony, this ruling was based on a hadith stating that the Prophet accepted gifts from non-Muslims. Among the reports he cited is a narration from Abū Ḥumayd recorded by al-Bukhārī:

*"The ruler of Aylah presented the Prophet with a white mule and a garment, and the Prophet confirmed him as ruler over his people."*⁵⁸

Sya'roni presented this account in response to community questions and to his observation that non-Muslim-owned companies in Kudus regularly hosted Ramadan fast-breaking events for Muslims and orphans. He further stated that Muslims may accept non-Muslim donations for mosque construction.⁵⁹

Regarding prayers for non-Muslims, Muhammad Sya'roni offers a distinction. First, if the non-Muslim has died, praying that the person enter paradise is, in his view, prohibited and futile because it would imply that unbelief could lead to paradise, whereas the Qur'ān states that unbelievers enter hell. He therefore classifies praying for a deceased non-Muslim to enter paradise as a prohibited form of "religious harmony."

Second, if the non-Muslim is still alive, Sya'roni permits Muslims to pray that God grant the person guidance or forgiveness. He cites the Prophet's supplication, Allāhumma ighfir li-qawmī fa-innahum lā ya'lamūn ("O God, forgive my people, for they do not know").⁶⁰

Sya'roni formulated this explanation in response to the religious diversity of Kudus. A Muslim with non-Muslim neighbors should preserve harmonious relations through mutual greetings and social courtesy. When a non-Muslim neighbor dies, the Muslim should visit the bereaved family as part of maintaining good relations. Sya'roni nevertheless cautions Muslims not to pray that the deceased receive divine salvation or enter paradise.

These examples illustrate Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi's distinction between "religious harmony" and "harmony among religious communities." His explanations arise from the religious diversity of Kudus, which Muslims should address by cultivating

⁵⁷ Djarum, "About Us," <http://www.djarum.com/>, 2024.

⁵⁸ Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Damaskus: Dār Ṭawq al-Najāh, 1422), iii, 163.

⁵⁹ Keterangan ini penulis dapatkan secara langsung dari Pengajian Tafsir Q.S. al-Nūr [24]: 36 oleh Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi pada tanggal 3 Februari 2010 di Masjid al-Aqsha Menara Kudus.

⁶⁰ al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, iv, 175.

interreligious harmony while observing its theological boundaries and avoiding the prohibited mixing of religions.

Kudus has long inherited a diverse population. In addition to indigenous Javanese residents, the city has for generations been home to a substantial community of Chinese descent, whose presence is reflected in the tomb of Kiai Telingsing⁶¹ and several Chinese temples. The city has likewise had a significant Arab-descended population. Records from 1905 indicate that Kudus already contained approximately 270 Europeans and thirty other foreign residents.⁶²

Kudus's longstanding diversity was partly shaped by its status as a river port and trading city on the Gelis–Wulan–Jepara harbor route. Merchants from the Middle East and China, as well as inter-island traders from across the Indonesian archipelago, traded textiles, ceramics, and agricultural products there.⁶³ Sunan Kudus, also known as Sayyid Ja'far Šādiq and remembered as a founder of the city, was himself known as a merchant. The expression “Gusjigang,” attributed to him, subsequently became a philosophy of life among the people of Kudus.⁶⁴

Kudus also preserves traces of diverse religious traditions. Before Islam became the city's majority religion, Hindu and Buddhist traditions had developed not only in Kudus but throughout Central Java. De Casparis, as cited by Soediman, argues that Central Java was once governed by two dynasties: the Buddhist Śāilendra dynasty around 750 CE and the Śaiva Sanjaya dynasty around 850 CE. This view is based on the existence of Śaiva and Buddhist temples. In the ninth century, the two dynasties were united through marriage, influencing the architectural style of the Prambanan temple complex.⁶⁵

Numerous theories address the arrival of Islam in Indonesia. Irrespective of those debates, substantial evidence indicates that during the Majapahit period communities along the northern coasts of Central and East Java embraced Islam through trade and intermarriage. Islam gradually spread among the coastal Javanese, who subsequently assumed active political and economic roles. Islam is now the city's majority religion, while Hinduism has the smallest number of adherents.⁶⁶

Sunan Kudus was among the figures who played an important role in spreading Islam along Java's northern coast. Born Ja'far Šādiq, he is remembered for teachings that highly

⁶¹ Denys Lombard menyebut Kiai Telingsing sebagai tukang kayu keturunan Tionghoa yang bernama asli The Ling Sing. Ia hidup pada zaman Sunan Kudus, sebagai sahabatnya, dan membantunya menyebarkan agama Islam di kota Kudus. Makam Kiai Telingsing terletak di batas kampung Sunggingan Kecamatan kota Kudus, tidak jauh dari makam Sunan Kudus. Denys Lombard, *Nusa Jawa: Silang Budaya Kajian Sejarah Terpadu Bagian II: Jaringan Asia* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1996).

⁶² Solichin Salam, *Kudus Purbakala dalam Perjuangan Islam* (Kudus: Menara Kudus, 1977).

⁶³ Imam Khanafi, “Etos Gusjigang,” dalam *Yang Asing di Kampung Sendiri: Kudus dalam Prosa Jurnalisme*, ed. oleh Afthonul Afif (Kudus: Parist Penerbit, 2018).

⁶⁴ “Gusjigang” merupakan singkatan dari Bagus-Ngaji-Dagang. Singkatan ini menjadi identitas sekaligus harapan dari Sunan Kudus agar warga kota ini yang umumnya pedagang senantiasa berperilaku bagus dan tidak lupa ngaji atau belajar serta mempraktikkan agama Islam.

⁶⁵ Soediman, *Chandi Laradjonggrang at a Glance* (Yogyakarta: Kanasius, 1969).

⁶⁶ Berdasarkan jumlah penduduk menurut agama yang dianut di Kabupaten Kudus tahun 2019, Islam dianut oleh 842.008 orang, Protestan dianut oleh 12.008 orang, Katolik dianut oleh 4.766 orang, Hindu dianut oleh 13 orang, Budha dianut oleh 967 orang, dan terdapat kepercayaan lain yang dianut oleh 293 orang. Selengkapnya baca BPS Kabupaten Kudus, *Kabupaten Kudus dalam Angka 2020* (Kudus: BPS Kabupaten Kudus, 2020), 65.

valued social harmony. Like other members of the Wali Songo, he pursued a cultural approach to da'wah. Rather than erasing Kudus's pre-Islamic cultural heritage, he preserved it insofar as it did not conflict with Islamic law. This approach attracted non-Muslims to Islam and demonstrates the importance of harmony within his missionary practice.

This commitment is reflected, for example, in the construction of Menara Kudus, whose architecture resembles pre-Islamic temple forms. The tower represents Sunan Kudus's cultural acculturation of Hindu-Buddhist architectural elements. He also maintained respect for older traditions by discouraging the slaughter of cattle and substituting water buffalo, since cows are sacred in Hinduism. As a result, Kudus is known for water-buffalo *soto* rather than beef *soto*.⁶⁷

These are among the values of harmony inherited from Sunan Kudus and sustained by Kudus Muslims to the present day. They contribute to a welcoming expression of Islam in the city. Although Muslims constitute the majority, they coexist with followers of other religions and maintain tolerance, allowing minority communities to feel at ease in a city whose very name carries Islamic associations.

Although they constitute a small minority, Hindu residents generally regard interreligious harmony in Kudus as positive. Diyah Ayu Fitriyani describes how a Hindu community numbering only in the teens can perform its rituals without disruption. The absence of a Hindu temple in Kudus, she argues, results not from discrimination but from population-administration requirements.⁶⁸

Harmony is also visible at the Hok Hien Bio Temple in Jati District, Kudus. Noor Syafaatul Udhma describes the temple as a shared place of visitation for Chinese Indonesians belonging to three distinct traditions: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.⁶⁹

These portraits of interreligious harmony are clearly valuable for sustaining peaceful life in Kudus. Residents uphold mutual tolerance and practice coexistence. Islam, as the majority religion, provides examples of harmony and space for other communities to practice their traditions without discrimination. At the same time, however, harmonious relations should not cross the boundaries established by religion, particularly through the mixing of matters of 'aqīdah and worship.

This final point receives particular emphasis in Muhammad Sya'roni's teaching. When his tafsīr lecture reached Q.S. al-Kāfirūn [109], he stressed that the form he called "religious harmony" is prohibited in Islam. Although he strongly encouraged the congregation to coexist peacefully with followers of other religions, he excluded matters of 'aqīdah and worship from such cooperation.

Sya'roni also considered it necessary to clarify these boundaries because they generated disagreements at the grassroots level. Not all Muslims in Kudus had direct experience of living alongside other religious communities, and those with little interaction sometimes developed antipathy based solely on religious difference. Kudus Muslims were themselves diverse and affiliated with different Islamic organizations: some practiced

⁶⁷ Khanafi, "Etos Gusjigang," 160.

⁶⁸ Diyah Ayu Fitriyani, "Yang Bertahan Karena Menerima Keterbatasan," dalam *Akankah Kami Menjadi Kita?*, ed. oleh Afthonul Afif dan Zakki Amali (Kudus: Parist Penerbit, 2019).

⁶⁹ Noor Syafaatul Udhma, "Tiga Berbeda di Klenteng yang Sama," dalam *Akankah Kami Menjadi Kita?*, ed. oleh Afthonul Afif dan Zakki Amali (Kudus: Parist Penerbit, 2019).

interreligious engagement more strictly, while others adopted a more flexible approach. It is in this context that Sya'roni's oral interpretation gains particular relevance. During his explanation of Q.S. al-Kāfirūn, he stated:

*Dadi genah ngono lho. Dadi wong sing podo geger niku podo durung genah. Ngko nek wis digenahno kan trimo. Mulane ora usah podo geger-gegeran. Diluruske wae.*⁷⁰

Translation:

“This needs to be made clear. Those who quarrel over harmony do so because they have not yet received a clear explanation. Once it is explained, they will understand and accept it. There is therefore no need to keep arguing; simply clarify the matter.”

Through his interpretation, Muhammad Sya'roni hoped that members of the congregation would become agents of harmony while understanding the boundaries of interreligious relations. He also expected them to transmit this understanding to those around them—in other words, to serve as communicators of the discourse of harmony that he promoted.

As a charismatic scholar in Kudus and the surrounding region, Muhammad Sya'roni's statements and guidance in his oral tafsīr could exert considerable influence on public understanding. Members of the congregation were likely to accept his position and encourage others to adopt similar views.

Muhammad Sya'roni used his oral interpretation of Q.S. al-Kāfirūn [109] to encourage the congregation to establish harmonious interreligious relations. He recognized that Kudus, and Indonesia more broadly, is religiously plural. Harmony among religious communities is therefore necessary to prevent division and hostility. Through his explanations of verses and hadiths and his references to exemplary scholars, he encouraged society to practice interreligious harmony. At the same time, he warned Muslims not to enter the prohibited sphere of “religious harmony,” namely the mixing of ‘aqīdah and worship.

The descriptive and analytical discussion above demonstrates how Muhammad Sya'roni foregrounds peace and harmony in interreligious relations. He calls on Muslims to engage and coexist peacefully with followers of other religions in matters of *mu'āmalah*. He maintains that interreligious harmony in worldly social relations is permissible and even recommended, whereas cooperation that mixes ‘aqīdah and worship is prohibited. His treatment of concrete cases shows how he distinguishes matters of *mu'āmalah* from those of doctrine and worship. Both principles are supported through Qur'ānic arguments and examples from the Prophet.

Conclusion

Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis demonstrates that Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi's oral interpretation of Q.S. al-Kāfirūn [109] functions not only as an explanation of the verse's textual meaning but also as a practice of discourse production that shapes public understandings of interreligious harmony. At the textual level, the interpretation is organized around a conceptual distinction between “religious harmony” and “harmony among religious communities.” This distinction is constructed through a systematic argument, the use of Javanese as a medium of communication, analogies drawn from everyday life, and rhetorical

⁷⁰ Ahmadi, “Rekaman Pengajian Tafsir QS. al-Kafirun [109]: 1-6.”

strategies that reject compromise in 'aqīdah and worship while encouraging social relations with followers of other religions. At the level of social cognition, this construction is shaped by Sya'roni Ahmadi's pesantren education, the tradition of Ahl al-Sunnah wa-al-Jamā'ah, and his firm distinction between the domains of 'aqīdah and *mu'āmalah*. At the level of social context, his interpretation interacts with the plural reality of Kudus, so that Q.S. al-Kāfirūn is understood not only as a response to the Meccan polytheists but also as normative guidance for managing contemporary interreligious relations.

This study shows that the discourse of harmony in Muhammad Sya'roni Ahmadi's oral tafsīr results from the interaction of the Qur'ānic text, the social context of Kudus, and the social authority of the kiai. That authority is constructed through textual legitimation based on Qur'ānic verses, historical legitimation through the examples of the Prophet Muhammad and the Wali Songo, and cultural legitimation through language and local illustrations familiar to the congregation. Oral tafsīr therefore does not simply reproduce classical interpretations; it constructs boundaries of tolerance that are relevant to life in a plural society. The findings demonstrate the kiai's important role in mediating theological norms and social practice, allowing tafsīr to function simultaneously as an instrument of religious discourse formation and as a means of strengthening interreligious harmony without obscuring doctrinal boundaries. The study contributes an account of how Qur'ānic meaning is produced in oral tafsīr through the dynamic relationship among interpretation, local plurality, and the interpreter's social authority.

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