

Deradicalisation of Religious Understanding in Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi's Thought: Moderate-Maqāṣidi Islam as a Counter-Narrative to Extremism in Indonesia

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Abstrak: Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis konstruksi pemikiran Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi tentang deradikalisasi pemahaman keagamaan berbasis Islam moderat-maqashidi sebagai kontra narasi terhadap ekstremisme keagamaan di Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui studi kepustakaan dengan menelaah lima karya utama Harfin yang membahas fundamentalisme, radikalisme, deradikalisasi, Islam moderat, potensi terorisme, dan moderasi maqashidi. Data dianalisis melalui analisis isi tematik dengan mengidentifikasi konsep-konsep kunci, mengelompokkannya ke dalam tiga kategori utama, serta menyusun sintesis konseptual mengenai hubungan antara kekerasan keagamaan, literalisme teks, dan Islam moderat-maqashidi. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemikiran Harfin dibangun melalui tiga lapisan argumentasi. Pertama, kekerasan keagamaan dipahami bukan sebagai akibat langsung dari ajaran Islam, melainkan sebagai hasil penyempitan tafsir, klaim kebenaran tunggal, pendangkalan pengetahuan agama, dan ideologisasi teks. Kedua, deradikalisasi diposisikan sebagai koreksi epistemologis terhadap cara baca literal, parsial, dan ahistoris terhadap jihad, qital, serta konsep-konsep keagamaan yang kerap dijadikan legitimasi kekerasan. Ketiga, Islam moderat-maqashidi ditawarkan sebagai model kontra narasi yang menguji pemahaman agama berdasarkan masalah, keadilan, perlindungan martabat manusia, dan harmoni sosial.

Kata Kunci: Deradikalisasi, ekstrimisme, Islam Moderat, Maqāṣid al-sharī'ah.

Abstract: This article aims to analyse Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi's construction of thought on the deradicalisation of religious understanding based on moderate-maqāṣidi Islam as a counter-narrative to religious extremism in Indonesia. This study employs a qualitative approach through library research by examining five of Harfin's major works that discuss fundamentalism, radicalism, deradicalisation, moderate Islam, the potential for terrorism, and maqāṣidi moderation. The data are analysed through thematic content analysis by identifying key concepts, classifying them into three main categories, and developing a conceptual synthesis of the relationship between religious violence, textual literalism, and moderate-maqāṣidi Islam. The findings show that Harfin's thought is constructed through three layers of argumentation. First, religious violence is understood not as a direct consequence of Islamic teachings, but as the result of a narrowing of interpretation, claims to a single truth, superficial religious knowledge, and the ideologisation of texts. Second, deradicalisation is positioned as an epistemological correction to literal, partial, and ahistorical readings of jihad, qital, and religious concepts that are frequently used to legitimise violence. Third, moderate-maqāṣidi Islam is offered as a counter-narrative model that evaluates religious understanding on the basis of public benefit, justice, the protection of human dignity, and social harmony.

Keywords: Deradicalisation, Extremism, Moderate Islam, Maqāṣid al-sharī'ah.



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A. Introduction

The phenomenon of religious extremism remains one of the serious problems in social life. Various acts of intolerance, violence in the name of religion, radicalism, and terrorism indicate that religion has not yet appeared in its peaceful ethical form, but has instead been presented as a symbol of justification for destructive actions (Borum, 2011; Fatah & Huda, 2023; Fenton, 2016; Mahfud et al., 2018; Moghaddam, 2005). This situation raises an important academic problem, namely whether such violence originates from religion as a doctrine, or from the way human beings understand, interpret, and ideologise religion within a particular social space. This question is important in the Indonesian context, given that Indonesian society exists within a plural, multicultural, and multireligious reality (Badrun et al., 2024; Koswara & Viktorahadi, 2022). In such a social space, exclusive and literal religious understanding that closes itself off from difference can turn into a threat to social harmony, especially when claims of religious truth are used to negate other groups.

In the context of Islam, the problem of religious extremism is often associated with the way certain groups understand religious texts in a rigid, scripturalist manner, detached from both historical context and the moral objectives of the sharia. Verses concerning jihad, qitāl, religious loyalty, the Islamic state, and relations with other groups are often understood partially and then used as a basis for justifying intolerant attitudes and acts of violence (Kumala, 2021; Santoso, 2022). Yet, within the Islamic scholarly tradition, religious texts never stand merely as words devoid of context, maqāṣid, public benefit, and ethical consideration (Kamali, 1999). Religious violence must therefore be read as an epistemological problem, namely a problem concerning the way religion is known, understood, and given meaning. It is at this point that the deradicalisation of religious understanding becomes an important agenda, since radicalism does not operate solely through physical action, but first grows within a structure of knowledge that positions a particular interpretation as the only truth.

A number of studies on radicalism and religious extremism can be mapped into several tendencies. The first tendency positions radicalism as a socio-political phenomenon shaped by injustice, alienation, global conflict, and disappointment with a political order perceived as failing to side with Muslims. Within this framework, radicalism is understood as an expression of resistance to social conditions considered to suppress religious identity (Borum, 2011; Hafez & Mullins, 2015; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). The second tendency emphasises ideological factors and movement networks, particularly how certain religious doctrines, transnational organisations, and local networks contribute to the formation of religious militancy (Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Hasan, 2018; Wiktorowicz, 2004). The third tendency pays attention to deradicalisation, religious moderation, and counter-narratives by emphasising the importance of education, rereading texts, strengthening tolerance, and the role of the state and civil society in containing extremism (Sas et al., 2020; Schmid, 2013; Sumpter, 2017).

Although these studies have made important contributions, there remains a space that has not been specifically elaborated in depth, namely how the intellectual construction of an Indonesian Muslim scholar establishes the relationship between the critique of radicalism, the deradicalisation of religious understanding, moderate Islam, and maqāṣid al-sharīʿah as a coherent framework of thought. Many studies discuss radicalism as a movement phenomenon, deradicalisation policy as a state strategy, or religious moderation as a socio-national agenda. Studies that specifically place the thought of Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi as the object of analysis still need to be developed, especially because his works demonstrate a consistent concern with fundamentalism, radicalism, deradicalisation, moderate Islam, maqāṣidi moderation, and the potential for terrorism in the Indonesian context, including West Nusa Tenggara. In one of his writings, Harfin emphasises that religious extremism is often rooted in a mindset that understands texts rigidly, textually, and scripturalistically without considering history, social context, public benefit, and maqāṣid (Zuhdi, 2021).

Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi is chosen as the focus of this study because he is an Indonesian Muslim scholar who has consistently written on radicalism, deradicalisation, moderate Islam, and maqāṣid al-sharīʿah. Academically, he is recorded as a lecturer at Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram and has attained the highest academic rank as a professor, with expertise in the field of Masail fihiyyah. This expertise is significant because masail fihiyyah is directly related to the ability to

examine contemporary Islamic legal issues through the instruments of *fiqh*, *ushul fiqh*, *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, and considerations of public benefit. In his professorial inaugural address, Harfin raised the theme “Formulation of *Mashlahah Maqashidiyyah* in the Study of *Masail fiqhiyyah* in the Contemporary Era”, positioning *fiqh* as the product of an interpretation of the sharia that is dynamic, contextual, and responsive to the developments of the age (Zuhdi, 2025). Against this background of expertise, his works, such as “Fundamentalisme dan Upaya Deradikalisasi Pemahaman Al-Qur’an dan Hadis”, “Radikalisme Agama dan Upaya Deradikalisasi Pemahaman Keagamaan”, “Moderate Islam: The Response of Islamic Law toward Contemporary Issues in Indonesia”, “Potential Islamic Radicalism and Terrorism in the Province of West Nusa Tenggara”, and “Moderasi Maqashidi sebagai Model Kontra Narasi Ekstremisme Beragama”, can be read as parts of a consistent body of Islamic legal thought (Zuhdi, 2010, 2017, 2019, 2021; Zuhdi & Hijrah, 2023). This consistency shows that Harfin is not merely an author who discusses fundamentalism, radicalism, terrorism, and deradicalisation separately, but rather an Islamic legal thinker who gradually constructs a conceptual trajectory from the critique of fundamentalism and radicalism, contextual readings of *jihad* and *qitāl*, and the mapping of the potential for radicalism and terrorism in West Nusa Tenggara, to the affirmation of moderate Islam and *maqashidi* moderation as the basis of a counter-narrative to religious extremism.

Within the map of contemporary Indonesian Islamic thought, Harfin’s position can be clarified by placing him in dialogue with Azyumardi Azra, an Indonesian Muslim scholar with a strong concern for moderate Islam, Islam *wasathiyah*, Islamic education, radicalism, and the future of religious life in Indonesia. In various views, Azra emphasises that the Indonesian Islamic tradition possesses a relatively strong cultural and religious foundation for restraining the growth of radicalism, particularly because Islam in Indonesia developed through processes of acculturation, education, scholarly networks, and more inclusive social traditions. Therefore, Azra’s ideas on Islam *wasathiyah*, religious moderation, and the strengthening of Islamic education can be read as part of a major current of Indonesian Islamic thought that seeks to contain extremism through the reinforcement of open scholarly, national, and religious traditions (Azra, 2005, 2006, 2012). Its relevance to Harfin lies in their shared orientation towards rejecting narrow, exclusive religious perspectives that can easily give rise to both symbolic and actual violence. Nevertheless, they differ in their points of emphasis. Azra develops his arguments largely through the socio-intellectual history of Indonesian Islam, Islamic education, and the relationship between Islam and nationhood, whereas Harfin articulates his critique of radicalism through the instruments of *fiqh*, *masail fiqhiyyah*, *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, and *maqāṣidi* moderation. Thus, the presence of Azra’s thought further strengthens the urgency of studying Harfin, since Harfin can be positioned as a thinker who moves within the broader current of Indonesian moderate Islam, while offering a more specific contribution at the level of Islamic legal epistemology, namely by making *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* the basis for a critical reading of radicalism and the conceptual foundation for the deradicalisation of religious understanding.

Within this framework, Harfin’s thought needs to be examined further at the level of the epistemology of religious understanding. For Harfin, religious violence cannot be placed as a direct consequence of religious teachings, since religion fundamentally contains a system of values that conveys ethical, spiritual, and social messages for human life. The problem of radicalism, extremism, or terrorism emerges precisely when religion is understood, interpreted, ideologised, and used in particular social situations in a closed, rigid manner, detached from the context of public benefit. Harfin therefore makes an important distinction between religion as normative teaching and religious thought as the product of human interpretation. This distinction enables a critique of violence in the name of religion without positioning Islam as a source of violence (Zuhdi, 2010, 2017). In the same direction, deradicalisation for Harfin should not be understood merely as the handling of radical actors or movements, but must be directed towards reforming religious modes of thought, especially ways of reading texts that are overly literal, scripturalist, closed, and prone to becoming a basis for legitimising violence (Zuhdi, 2010).

Departing from the above concerns, this study focuses on the question of how Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi constructs the deradicalisation of religious understanding based on moderate-*maqāṣidi*

Islam as a counter-narrative to religious extremism in Indonesia. This question is directed towards reading Harfin's thought through three layers of discussion. First, how he constructs the problem of religious violence as a problem of understanding, society, and ideology. Second, how he formulates the deradicalisation of religious understanding as an epistemological correction to textual literalism. Third, how moderate-maqāṣidi Islam is positioned as a model of counter-narrative capable of presenting Islam as a religion of mercy, public benefit, justice, and humanity within Indonesia's plural context.

Thus, this study does not position Harfin's thought merely as a collection of normative views on religious moderation. Rather, it reads his works as a construction of thought that moves from a diagnosis of the roots of extremism towards an epistemological formulation of deradicalisation and a model of counter-narrative based on maqāṣid. The main argument of this article is that Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi's thought offers a coherent framework of deradicalisation, in which religious violence is understood as the result of a narrowing of interpretation, deradicalisation is understood as a correction of the way texts are read, and moderate-maqāṣidi Islam is positioned as a paradigm for examining every religious understanding on the basis of public benefit, justice, the protection of human dignity, and social harmony. At this point, the contribution of this study lies in its effort to demonstrate that counter-narratives to extremism in Indonesia cannot be built merely through condemnation of violence, but must be supported by an epistemological reconstruction rooted in the Islamic scholarly tradition itself.

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using the library research method to examine Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi's construction of thought on the deradicalisation of religious understanding based on moderate-maqāṣidi Islam as a counter-narrative to religious extremism in Indonesia. This approach was chosen because the focus of the study is not directed towards empirically measuring the effectiveness of deradicalisation programmes, but rather towards understanding, interpreting, and conceptually organising Harfin's intellectual framework across a number of his academic works. Thus, this study operates within the field of intellectual inquiry into a particular figure, examining how ideas concerning religious violence, deradicalisation, moderate Islam, and maqāṣid al-sharī'ah are interconnected within a coherent argumentative framework.

The primary sources of this study consist of five major works by Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi, namely "Fundamentalisme dan Upaya Deradikalisasi Pemahaman Al-Qur'an dan Hadis," "Radikalisme Agama dan Upaya Deradikalisasi Pemahaman Keagamaan," "Moderate Islam: The Response of Islamic Law toward Contemporary Issues in Indonesia," "Potential Islamic Radicalism and Terrorism in the Province of West Nusa Tenggara," and "Moderasi Maqashidi sebagai Model Kontra Narasi Ekstremisme Beragama". These five works were selected because they directly represent the focus of Harfin's thought on the roots of religious violence, misinterpretations of jihad and qitāl, the need for the deradicalisation of religious understanding, the response of moderate Islam to contemporary issues, and the formulation of maqāṣidi moderation as a model of counter-narrative to extremism. In addition, this study also uses secondary sources in the form of academic literature on radicalism, extremism, deradicalisation, religious moderation, maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, interpretations of jihad and qitāl, and the context of Indonesian plurality in order to strengthen the analytical position and broaden the reading of Harfin's works. The character of this study is descriptive, analytical, and conceptual-synthetic. The descriptive aspect is used to map Harfin's main ideas regarding fundamentalism, radicalism, extremism, terrorism, deradicalisation, moderate Islam, and maqāṣidi moderation. The analytical aspect is used to examine the relationships among these ideas, especially how Harfin positions religious violence as a problem of understanding, society, and ideology. Meanwhile, the conceptual-synthetic aspect is used to reconstruct the trajectory of Harfin's thought into an integrated framework, namely the deradicalisation of religious understanding based on moderate-maqāṣidi Islam as a counter-narrative to religious extremism in Indonesia.

Data were collected through the inventorying, selection, and critical reading of Harfin's works and relevant supporting literature. Inventorying was carried out by collecting Harfin's writings that

are directly related to the theme of the study. Selection was undertaken to determine the works most representative of the focus of the inquiry. Critical reading was then directed towards three main themes established in this study, namely the construction of the problem of religious violence, the deradicalisation of religious understanding as an epistemological correction to textual literalism, and moderate-maqāṣidi Islam as a model of counter-narrative to religious extremism in Indonesia.

The data were analysed using thematic content analysis. The first stage involved identifying key concepts in Harfin's works, such as fundamentalism, radicalism, extremism, terrorism, jihad, qitāl, deradicalisation, moderate Islam, wasathiyah, maslahah, and maqāṣid al-sharī'ah. The second stage involved grouping these concepts into three broad categories in accordance with the focus of the discussion. The third stage involved examining the relationships among these categories in order to identify the pattern of Harfin's argumentation, particularly the relationship between the narrowing of interpretation, the emergence of religious violence, the need for deradicalisation, and the proposal of moderate-maqāṣidi Islam. The fourth stage was conducted through conceptual synthesis to formulate the contribution of Harfin's thought in constructing a counter-narrative to religious extremism. This study is not intended to produce empirical generalisations about radical movements or the effectiveness of deradicalisation policies in Indonesia. Its focus is to construct a conceptual reading of Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi's thought based on his academic works. Therefore, the main contribution of this study lies in its effort to systematically organise Harfin's intellectual framework, from his diagnosis of religious violence, his correction of textual literalism, to his formulation of moderate-maqāṣidi Islam as a model of counter-narrative to extremism. To maintain the quality of the analysis, this study applies academic rigour through the consistent use of primary sources, comparison with relevant secondary literature, and caution in distinguishing between Harfin's explicit ideas and the conceptual synthesis developed by the researcher.

C. Research Finding and Discussing

1. The Construction of the Problem of Religious Violence in Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi's Thought

Religious violence in Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi's thought is not positioned as a direct consequence of religious teachings. Religion is understood as a system of values that carries ethical, spiritual, and social messages for human life. Therefore, when religion appears in the form of radicalism, extremism, or terrorism, the main problem lies in the way human beings understand, interpret, ideologise, and use religion in particular social situations. Harfin reads religious violence as the result of a narrowing of understanding, socio-political tensions, and ideological constructions that turn religion into an instrument for justifying destructive actions (Zuhdi, 2021).

This framework is clearly reflected in the way Harfin distinguishes between religious texts and human understanding of religious texts. In his writing on fundamentalism and the deradicalisation of the understanding of the Qur'an and hadith, he emphasises that his critique is directed at human understanding that reads verses and hadith in a harsh, partial manner, detached from their moral context (Zuhdi, 2010). This position demonstrates Harfin's academic caution. He rejects violence carried out in the name of religion while also avoiding the generalisation that Islam inherently produces violence. Religious violence, within this framework, emerges from a mistaken relationship between text, reader, context, and ideological interest (Zuhdi, 2010).

Through this mode of reading, Harfin positions religious violence as an epistemological problem. Its root lies in a way of thinking that precedes violent action. Bombings, killings, terror, and various destructive acts are outward expressions of a construction of understanding that has already operated within religious consciousness. When religion is understood literally, in a closed and exclusive manner, and accompanied by the claim that only one interpretation is the most correct, religion can change from a source of mercy into an instrument for legitimising violence (Koopmans et al., 2021).

Therefore, radicalism in Harfin's thought cannot be adequately read merely as a security incident. It must be read as a problem of religious knowledge (Zuhdi, 2021).

Harfin explains radicalism as an attitude that seeks fundamental change to the existing order through harsh and extreme means. Radicalism contains a desire to dismantle existing conditions totally and replace them with a new order considered more correct. In this respect, such a desire appears through revolutionary action, coercion, and violence. However, Harfin does not stop at a behavioural definition. He connects religious radicalism with psychological, social, and moral problems that operate among movement figures, followers, and the communities that support them, so that religious violence emerges from a narrowed religious interpretation which then gains space to live within a social atmosphere and collective mentality that sustain it (Zuhdi, 2010).

Within Harfin's framework, fundamentalism, radicalism, extremism, and terrorism are overlapping terms, although they are not entirely identical. Fundamentalism refers to the tendency to return to the foundations of religion in a rigid and closed manner. Radicalism refers to the desire for extreme change in the socio-political order. Extremism refers to a way of being religious that departs from balance. Terrorism refers to the use of violence to create fear for particular purposes. The relationship among the four is not always linear. Not every fundamentalist attitude ends in terrorism. However, a closed religious mindset, when combined with an ideology of violence, radical networks, and a supportive socio-political context, can develop into extremist and terrorist actions (Zuhdi, 2017).

One of the strengths of Harfin's analysis lies in his rejection of a single explanation for radicalism. He does not ignore economic, political, and social injustice factors. However, these factors are insufficient to explain why someone chooses violence in the name of religion. In his writing on the potential for radicalism and terrorism in West Nusa Tenggara, Harfin shows that the growth of radical groups is influenced by misinterpretations of Islamic teachings, the existence of terrorist group networks, geographical position, and the weak role of moderate Muslim groups in constructing counter-narratives (Zuhdi, 2019). This analysis demonstrates that religious radicalism must be understood multidimensionally.

From this point, it becomes clear that religious violence in Harfin's thought is formed through the encounter between erroneous religious interpretation and social conditions that enable such interpretation to operate. Misinterpretations of *jihad*, *qital*, the concept of *kafir*, the defence of religion, and relations with other groups constitute important factors. However, such interpretations move within a particular social ecosystem. They gain energy when they encounter political disappointment, social alienation, identity sentiment, ideological networks, and weak religious literacy. Thus, religious radicalism cannot be understood merely as an individual deviation. It is the result of a socio-religious ecosystem that fails to provide a healthy, open, and contextual reading of religion (Zuhdi, 2010, 2019).

Harfin also sees an ambivalence in the function of religion in society. On the one hand, religion has a manifest function as a source of morality, solidarity, and social cohesion. On the other hand, religion can have a latent function when its symbols are used as emotional banners to justify radical actions. In such conditions, religion becomes the language of struggle that mobilises group militancy. Harfin does not state that religion teaches violence. He shows that a subjective, partial, and ideological understanding of religion can transform spiritual energy into destructive energy (Zuhdi, 2019).

On the basis of this reading, the construction of the problem of religious violence in Harfin's thought can be seen through three layers. The first is the theological-hermeneutical layer, namely errors in reading religious texts, especially texts on *jihad*, *qital*, war, and relations with others. The second is the socio-political layer, namely the emergence of feelings of being threatened, marginalised, unaccommodated, or treated unjustly, which are then expressed in the form of religion-based resistance. The third is the ideological-organisational layer, namely the presence of networks,

doctrines, and communities that transform religious anxiety into an agenda of violent struggle. These three layers reinforce one another and form the structure of religious violence.

In the Indonesian context, Harfin's thought is relevant because Indonesian society lives within a plural, multicultural, and multireligious reality (Fathurrohman, 2022). In such a society, exclusive truth claims and religious interpretations that reject difference can threaten social harmony (Muhammad Yasir et al., 2026). Harfin rejects a mode of religiosity that separates Islam from its historical and social reality. In his writing on moderate Islam, he positions Islam as both a transcendent teaching and a phenomenon of civilisation, culture, and social life. Islam is always in dialectical interaction with the living space of human beings. A perspective that emphasises only the normative-doctrinal aspect while ignoring history, culture, and social plurality risks producing one-sided truth claims and the stigmatisation of other groups as deviant, *bid'ah*, or *kafir* (Zuhdi & Hijrah, 2023).

Ultimately, Harfin constructs the problem of religious violence by dismantling the way religion is narrowed into an ideology of violence. Violence emerges when religion loses its dimensions of mercy, public benefit, justice, and humanity because it is reduced to a slogan of group struggle. In such conditions, religious texts are no longer read as moral guidance for life, but are instead used as a basis for negating others. The main problem that Harfin seeks to answer is how to reform the structure of understanding that makes violence appear religiously legitimate. This construction becomes the basis for the agenda of deradicalising religious understanding in Harfin's thought. If the root of violence lies in the narrowing of interpretation, the answer must address religious modes of thought. If radicalism grows from religion understood in a literal, rigid, exclusive, and ideological manner, then its counter-narrative must be built through a moderate, *maqāṣidi*, contextual, and public-benefit-oriented reading of Islam. At this point, religious violence in Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi's thought can be understood as a problem of understanding, a social problem, and an ideological problem whose resolution must begin with the reconstruction of the way religion is understood and practised.

2. Deradicalisation of Religious Understanding as an Epistemological Correction to Textual Literalism

Harfin does not position the deradicalisation of religious understanding as a project to create a new Islamic teaching. Deradicalisation is directed towards the effort to return the understanding of religion to a more comprehensive, proportional, and contextual framework. Its emphasis lies in correcting a mode of religious reading that is overly literal, narrow, and detached from the moral objectives of Islamic teachings. Therefore, deradicalisation in Harfin's construction is more appropriately understood as an epistemological process, namely the reform of the way religious texts are known, read, interpreted, and connected with social reality (Zuhdi, 2010). In this context, what is corrected is not the texts of the Qur'an and hadith, but the way human beings treat those texts as a basis for justifying exclusive, intolerant, and violent attitudes.

This idea begins from the awareness that religious radicalism continues to emerge from the narrowing of textual meaning. Qur'anic verses and hadith that possess breadth of meaning, historical context, and particular ethical objectives are often reduced to a single proof-text for justifying harsh actions (Amin & Akmal, 2021). In his writing on religious radicalism, Harfin shows that one of the causes of radicalism in the Islamic context is the erroneous understanding of Qur'anic verses and the Prophet's hadith concerning *jihad* and war. He examines these verses by paying attention to their meanings and historical contexts, thereby producing a more accurate and comprehensive understanding. The important conclusion he emphasises is that *jihad* and *qital* in the Qur'an are different from acts of radicalism (Zuhdi, 2017).

Thus, deradicalisation in Harfin's thought operates within the field of interpretation. It seeks to sever the false connection between religious texts and violence constructed by radical groups. This connection is false because violence does not arise from the basic message of religion, but from a distorted way of interpreting religion. When *jihad* is understood only as war, when *qital* is detached from the context of defence and protection, and when religious concepts are placed within the language of permanent hostility, religious texts lose the breadth of their meaning. At this point, deradicalisation functions as a correction to literalism that impoverishes the meaning of religion.

Harfin views textual literalism as one of the fundamental problems in the mindset of extremist groups. The literalism in question is not merely fidelity to the text, since fidelity to the text is an important part of the Islamic tradition. The problem arises when the text is understood only in terms of its outward wording and then separated from the context of its revelation, its legal objectives, the diversity of scholarly interpretations, and the social consequences of its application (Zulfarizal et al., 2026). Such a mode of reading produces a rigid, scripturalist religious attitude that easily moves towards claims of a single truth. In his writing on *maqāṣidi* moderation, Harfin emphasises that religious extremism is often caused by an extreme mindset in understanding religious texts rigidly, textually, and scripturalistically, without considering historical dynamics, social context, public benefit, and *maqāṣid* in religious life (Zuhdi, 2021).

The epistemological correction to textual literalism is clearly visible in Harfin's reading of *jihad* and *qital*. He does not reject the concept of *jihad* as part of Islamic teachings. Rather, he seeks to rescue the meaning of *jihad* from the hijacking of violent interpretation. In Harfin's understanding, *jihad* has a broad spectrum of meanings, encompassing earnest striving, moral struggle, *da'wah*, education, service, and defence when Muslims are attacked or oppressed. Reducing *jihad* solely to war is a form of narrowing meaning that has the potential to generate violence. Therefore, when Harfin distinguishes between *jihad* and *qital*, he is affirming that war is only one possibility under certain conditions, not the entirety of the meaning of *jihad* (Zuhdi, 2017).

Within this framework, *qital* also cannot be understood as an unrestricted command to violence. *Qital* has its contexts, conditions, objectives, and limits. It is related to particular circumstances, especially when Muslims face attack, oppression, or a real threat. When social conditions are peaceful, the meaning of *jihad* must move towards *da'wah* with wisdom, righteous deeds, worship, the pursuit of knowledge, assistance to vulnerable groups, and devotion to parents (Zuhdi, 2017). Such a reading shows that Harfin does not remove the normative dimension of the text, but restores it to the context and intent of the sharia. In this way, the interpretation of *jihad* no longer becomes an entry point for violence, but becomes an ethical energy for social good.

The deradicalisation of religious understanding in Harfin's thought is also connected to a critique of the monopoly of interpretation. Radical groups often act as though they possess sole authority in determining the meaning of religion. Different interpretations are regarded as deviant, weak, secular, or even heretical. Such a pattern produces symbolic violence before it turns into social violence (Muchlis Muhammad Hanafi, 2014). Harfin shows that *jihad* often acquires negative connotations because religion is used to legitimise acts of violence through distorted interpretation. The monopoly of religious interpretation carries destructive implications for social life, since meanings that have been hijacked appear to become mainstream in religious life (Zuhdi, 2017).

Therefore, deradicalisation cannot be carried out merely by condemning acts of violence. What must be addressed is the foundation of knowledge that makes violence appear legitimate. Harfin draws attention to the importance of understanding texts comprehensively, rather than in fragments. Verses on war must be read alongside verses on peace, justice, the protection of life, the prohibition of

transgression, and the principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. Hadith that appear harsh must be placed within their historical contexts, since their emergence was related to particular social situations. Without such a reading, religious texts can easily be used to construct a continuous imagination of hostility.

At a deeper level, deradicalisation in Harfin's thought seeks to shift the centre of religiosity from textual formalism towards substantial understanding. Textual formalism tends to stop at the outward form of a teaching, whereas substantial understanding seeks to grasp the objectives, values, and moral direction of that teaching. It is here that the relationship between deradicalisation and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* begins to appear. Correcting textual literalism is not sufficient merely by multiplying alternative interpretations. Such correction requires a methodological framework capable of reading texts in relation to public benefit, the protection of life, justice, and social harmony (Sainun, 2026). Harfin positions *maqāṣid* as a path towards a more directed understanding of texts, since *maqāṣid* helps the reader discover the legal objectives behind the wording and outward form of the text (Zuhdi, 2021).

Through a *maqāṣidi* approach, texts are not treated as a collection of stand-alone commands, but as part of a structure of sharia that has moral objectives. Sharia is understood as a path to realising public benefit and preventing harm (Sugitanata et al., 2023). Therefore, every religious interpretation that produces harm, hatred, the loss of security, and the destruction of social life needs to be re-examined through the principles of *maqāṣid* (Mukhtar et al., 2024). A reading that invokes religion but contradicts the protection of life, intellect, property, lineage, human dignity, and social harmony cannot be called a reading that is consistent with the objectives of sharia (Zuhdi, 2021).

It is important to emphasise that Harfin's critique of textual literalism does not mean that he rejects texts or relativises religious teachings. He continues to position texts as an important foundation of religious life. However, texts must be read with adequate scholarly instruments, such as linguistic understanding, historical context, the principles of interpretation, *ushul fiqh*, the diversity of scholarly opinions, and considerations of public benefit. Deradicalisation in this sense does not move away from Islam, but instead returns to a richer and more responsible Islamic scholarly tradition. It rejects a mode of religiosity that clings only to fragments of texts while ignoring the whole ethical structure of Islam.

In the Indonesian social context, this idea has significant meaning because society lives within a plural, multicultural space marked by encounters between identities (Koswara & Viktorahadi, 2022). Literal and exclusive religious interpretations can easily generate tension when applied within a diverse society (Khalid et al., 2021). Therefore, the deradicalisation of religious understanding cannot be separated from the need to build a mode of religiosity capable of living together with difference. Harfin positions holistic and contextual religious understanding as a means of restoring Islam to its mission of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* and its spirit of world peace. Deradicalisation is understood as an effort to realign the understanding of Islamic teachings in their entirety, not to introduce a new understanding detached from tradition (Zuhdi, 2017). Thus, the deradicalisation of religious understanding in Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi's thought constitutes an epistemological correction to a literal mode of reading that is closed, partial, and prone to becoming a legitimisation of violence. This correction takes place through a rereading of *jihad* and *qital*, a rejection of the monopoly of interpretation, the strengthening of historical-contextual understanding, and the use of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* as a framework for grasping the moral objectives of texts. Deradicalisation is therefore not only a security agenda, but also an agenda of scholarship, education, and the renewal of religious understanding. It seeks to dismantle the structure of knowledge that makes violence appear religious, and to replace it with an understanding of Islam that is more peaceful, just, beneficial, and humane.

3. Moderate-Maqāṣidi Islam as a Model of Counter-Narrative to Religious Extremism in Indonesia

Moderate-*maqāṣidi* Islam in the construction of Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi's thought can be understood as the culmination of the idea of deradicalising religious understanding. After religious violence is read as the result of a narrowing of interpretation, claims to a single truth, and the ideologisation of religion, Harfin offers a way out through a paradigm of Islam that is moderate, contextual, and oriented towards the moral objectives of the sharia. Moderate-*maqāṣidi* Islam does not appear as a weak compromise with extremism, but as a scholarly framework for restoring religion to its character as *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, just, beneficial, and humane. Within this framework, a counter-narrative to extremism cannot be built merely through the rejection of violence, but must be formulated through the offering of a more comprehensive, more balanced, and more epistemologically responsible understanding of religion.

The idea of moderate Islam in Harfin's thought begins from the awareness that Indonesia is a plural society consisting of diverse religions, languages, ethnicities, and cultures. This diversity requires a model of Islam that is capable of bringing together the universal message of Islam and Indonesian social reality. Therefore, Islam cannot be read merely as a normative doctrinal system closed off from history and culture. Islam is also present as a phenomenon of civilisation, culture, and social reality that continuously enters into dialectical interaction with human life (Sainun, 2026). When some groups view Islam only from a normative-doctrinal perspective and make their interpretation the only truth, such an attitude can produce one-sided claims, accusations of *bid'ah*, deviance, or unbelief against other groups, and a rejection of the historical reality that Islam has a moderate, inclusive, and cosmopolitan face (Zuhdi & Hijrah, 2023).

In this position, moderate Islam becomes an antithesis to an exclusive and harsh mode of religiosity. Moderation does not mean obscuring religious principles. Moderation is a way of placing religious principles in balance between text and context, revelation and reason, norm and reality, ideality and public benefit, and religious identity and shared life (Bashori et al., 2024). Harfin positions moderate Islam as a path for nurturing religiosity that is not trapped between two extreme poles. On the one hand, moderate Islam rejects radicalism that hardens into singular claims and violence. On the other hand, moderate Islam also ensures that religion does not lose its normative foundation. Thus, moderate Islam is not an empty position, but a *manhaj* of religiosity that seeks to present balance, justice, and respect for human dignity.

In his writing on moderate Islam, Harfin positions the values of moderation as an important part of the response of Islamic law to contemporary issues. Moderate Islam is understood through the principles of comprehensive Islamic understanding, a balance between the provisions of the sharia and the changes of the age, support for peace, respect for human values, recognition of religious, cultural, and political plurality, and respect for the rights of minorities (Zuhdi & Hijrah, 2023). With this formulation, moderate Islam is not only an individual ethical attitude, but also a social paradigm capable of responding to issues such as Islamophobia, the Islamic caliphate, *jihad*, radicalism, and terrorism. Moderate Islam is directed towards realising the universality of Islamic law based on public benefit, justice, and civilised humanity as the essence of Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin*.

However, in Harfin's thought, moderate Islam requires a stronger epistemological foundation so that it does not remain merely a moral slogan. It is here that *maqāṣid al-shari'ah* occupies an important position. *Maqāṣid* provides a methodological basis for moderation because it directs religious reading towards the objectives, values, wisdom, public benefit, and social consequences of an understanding. Through a *maqāṣidi* approach, religious texts are not treated as a collection of

isolated words, but as part of the structure of sharia directed towards realising public benefit and preventing harm. Harfin explains that *maqāṣid al-shari'ah* is concerned with the objectives of the sharia in realising benefit for human beings, and that the whole of the sharia contains efforts to bring about *maslahah* and repel *mafsadah* (Zuhdi, 2021).

The strength of *maqāṣidi* moderation lies in its ability to move beyond literal readings that often become sources of extremism. In this paradigm, texts continue to be respected as the foundation of religious life, but their meaning does not stop at their explicit wording. A *maqāṣidi* reading searches for the deeper intent behind the text, connecting it with moral ideas, the objectives of the sharia, public benefit, and the wider social context. In this way, Qur'anic verses and hadith are not easily cut off from the whole structure of Islamic values (Ali Sodiqin, 2024). Interpretations that produce hatred, violence, and social harm must be re-examined through a fundamental question, namely whether such interpretations preserve religion, life, intellect, lineage, property, human dignity, and social peace, or instead undermine them (Zuhdi, 2021).

In the context of counter-narratives to extremism, *maqāṣidi* moderation works by reversing the religious logic of extremist groups. Extremist groups often move from fragments of texts towards closed claims of truth, which they then use as a basis for rejecting, declaring deviant, or showing hostility towards others (Koopmans, 2015). *Maqāṣidi* moderation moves from texts towards the moral objectives of the sharia, and then examines every understanding according to the measure of public benefit and the prevention of harm. Therefore, *jihad*, *qital*, apostasy, *kafir*, *abl al-kitab*, *dar al-Islam*, *dar al-harb*, and other concepts frequently used in extremist narratives must be reread contextually and holistically (Zuhdi, 2021). Such a reading does not weaken religion, but saves it from ideological misuse that can injure humanity.

The model of moderate-*maqāṣidi* Islam also shows that counter-narratives to extremism must not stop at conceptual refutation. They must develop into social, educational, and cultural strategies. Harfin emphasises the importance of disseminating *maqāṣidi* moderation through multicultural education, the rereading of doctrines that have long been misunderstood, and learning models that are active, interactive, persuasive, and oriented towards character formation (Zuhdi, 2021). In this way, counter-narratives are not present only in academic spaces, but enter into the process of shaping public consciousness. Moderate religious understanding needs to be instilled through moral knowledge, moral feeling, and moral action so that it does not remain merely a discourse (Bashori et al., 2024).

In the Indonesian context, this model is relevant because extremism grows within a plural social space. When extremist groups develop narratives of hostility, moderate-*maqāṣidi* Islam offers a narrative of social cohesion. When extremist groups use religion to divide society into categories of truth and deviance, moderate-*maqāṣidi* Islam directs religion towards nurturing difference and realising the common good. When extremist groups turn religion into a symbol of group superiority, moderate-*maqāṣidi* Islam restores religion to its ethical function as a source of peace, public benefit, and respect for human dignity. Therefore, *maqāṣidi* moderation can be read as Harfin's proposal for safeguarding national and civic life through the strengthening of a mode of religiosity capable of becoming social glue amid diversity (Zuhdi, 2021).

The practical relevance of this idea is clearly visible in Harfin's reading of the potential for radicalism and terrorism in West Nusa Tenggara. He shows that the growth of radical groups is related not only to economic factors or injustice, but also to misinterpretations of Islamic teachings, the existence of terrorist group networks, geographical position, and the reluctance of some moderate Muslims to undertake narrative resistance against radical ideology. This finding demonstrates that

moderation is not sufficient as a silent identity. Moderation must appear as intellectual and social courage to construct counter-narratives, strengthen religious literacy, and prevent small radical groups from holding the face of Islam hostage through their claim to be the most religious party (Zuhdi, 2019).

Therefore, moderate-*maqāṣidi* Islam in Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi's thought can be understood as a model of counter-narrative that operates simultaneously at three levels. At the epistemological level, it reforms the way texts are read so that they do not fall into rigid literalism and claims of a single truth. At the normative level, it directs religious understanding towards public benefit, justice, peace, and the protection of fundamental human values. At the social level, it encourages the involvement of society and the state in nurturing diversity, strengthening multicultural education, and building collective resilience against extremism. At this point, moderate-*maqāṣidi* Islam is not only a theoretical idea, but also a scholarly and social strategy for presenting Islam as a liberating force from exclusivism, radicalism, and religious terrorism in Indonesia.

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi's construction of thought on the deradicalisation of religious understanding begins from a critical reading of religious violence as a problem of understanding, society, and ideology. Fundamentalism, radicalism, extremism, and terrorism in his thought are not positioned as direct consequences of Islamic teachings, but as the results of a narrowing of interpretation, claims to a single truth, the shallowing of religious knowledge, and the use of religion as an instrument for legitimising violence. Within this framework, religious violence emerges when religious texts are read literally and partially, and are detached from their historical context, moral objectives, and the breadth of the Islamic scholarly tradition. Therefore, the main problem Harfin seeks to address is not merely the visible act of violence on the surface, but the structure of knowledge that makes violence appear religiously legitimate.

This study also affirms that the deradicalisation of religious understanding in Harfin's thought constitutes an epistemological correction to textual literalism. Deradicalisation is not directed towards forming a new Islamic teaching, but towards realigning the way Muslims understand the Qur'an, hadith, *jihad*, *qital*, and religious concepts that are often used to justify extremist actions. Harfin positions historical, contextual, comprehensive, and *maqāṣid al-shari'ah*-based readings as a means of severing the false connection between religious texts and violence. In this way, *jihad* is not narrowed into war, *qital* is not understood as unrestricted violence, and religious texts are not used as a basis for negating others. Deradicalisation in this sense is an agenda of scholarship, education, and the renewal of religious understanding that seeks to restore Islam to the values of mercy, public benefit, justice, and humanity.

The main findings of this study show that moderate-*maqāṣidi* Islam constitutes the culmination of Harfin's proposal in constructing a counter-narrative to religious extremism in Indonesia. Moderate Islam provides a direction of religiosity that is balanced, inclusive, peaceful, and capable of engaging with the plural reality of Indonesian society, while *maqāṣid al-shari'ah* provides a methodological foundation so that moderation does not remain merely a moral slogan. Through a *maqāṣidi* approach, every religious understanding is examined according to its ability to realise public benefit, prevent harm, protect life, intellect, religion, lineage, property, and human dignity, as well as maintain social harmony. Thus, moderate-*maqāṣidi* Islam in Harfin's thought can be understood as a model of counter-narrative that operates simultaneously at three levels: reforming the way texts are read,

directing religious understanding towards the moral objectives of the sharia, and strengthening society's social resilience against extremism.

The contribution of this study lies in explaining that Harfin's thought does not stop at a critique of radicalism, but constructs a comprehensive framework of deradicalisation. This framework moves from a diagnosis of the roots of religious violence, to a correction of textual literalism, and finally to the formulation of moderate-*maqāṣidi* Islam as a model of counter-narrative. In the Indonesian context, this idea is important because extremism grows within a plural society, while moderate groups are often not yet sufficiently active in constructing narrative resistance. Therefore, the deradicalisation of religious understanding needs to be directed towards strengthening Islamic literacy, multicultural education, *maqāṣidi* readings, and the intellectual courage of moderate Muslims to present Islam as a peaceful, just, beneficial, and humane force in national life.

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