Against the 'Control Argument': Assessing the State's Authority in the State-Commissioned Qur'ān Translation

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Abstract

Indonesia is one of a few countries that has an official Qur'ān translation, namely *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya* (QT). As a country that has always been preoccupied with issues of religious regulation, there is a general consensus among the current scholarship on QT, namely that QT is the state's instrument for creating a standardized Islamic discourse in Indonesia. My paper questions this argument through an analysis of three interpretive cases in QT: the creation verse (Q 4:1), *akābīra mujrimīhā* in Q 6:123, and *awliyāʾ* in Q 5:51, focusing on the extent to which the interpretive outcome of QT is closely controlled by the state. In contrast to the 'control argument,' this study demonstrates that the renderings of QT in these three cases reflect the state's lack of involvement in the actual translation process. Despite the fact that QT is a state-commissioned and authorized Qur'ān translation, the ulama continue to be the masters of QT interpretive authority. While the entire process of producing QT may imply the obvious presence of the state, when we consider the genealogical nature of *tafsīr,* the religious authority of QT returns to the ulama rather than the state.

Keywords: Qur'ān translation, interpretation, state, ulama, religious authority

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Introduction

Nation-states are a vital part of the structures and forces that currently shape the interpretation of the Qur'ān by Muslims. The emergence of modernist Qur'ānic interpretations in Turkey was influenced by a range of factors associated with political changes in the nation, including the implementation of the national language, the replacement of Arabic with Latin script, the dismantling of conventional Islamic educational institutions, and the establishment of theology faculties at universities (Pink, 2019, p. 210). In fact, Turkey also has an official state-sponsored translation of the Qur'ān (Wilson, 2009). In addition to the state, various institutions, regardless of their direct affiliation with the state, also produce Qur'ān commentaries. King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'ān in Saudi Arabia and al-Azhar university are two institutions attempting to establish their influence in the international Islamic community, including through the creation of Qur'ānic translations and commentaries (Wild, 2015). Similar to Turkey, Indonesia has implemented a range of projects pertaining to the Qur'an, encompassing standardized text, translations, commentaries, and other related initiatives. Furthermore, institutions such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) possess their own respective authorized Qur'ān commentaries.

This unprecedented development has caused anxiety for the Muslim community. The timing of the emergence of the Qur'ān translation project in Turkey was not far removed from the nationalization and secularization of Turkey, and is therefore, as Brett Wilson notes, suspected of belonging to one of these secularization initiatives. Such anxiety, for instance, prompted Rashīd Riḍa to criticize the Turkish translation of the Qur'ān, denouncing it as "... [a] heretical idea" that was intended to "turn the devout people among them away from the word of God the Exalted, who revealed in to the Arabian Prophet Muhammad in the clear Arabic tongue." Wilson argues that Riḍā's criticism is inaccurate, as Parliament's support for Qur'ān translation in Turkey was not a state initiative, but rather a response to the demands of the ulama in response to the circulation of Qur'ānic translations comprising alarming errors (Wilson, 2009). Wilson's argument suggests that the production of this translation was related to the maintenance of orthodoxy, but did not necessarily stem from the political initiative of the state.

In the Indonesian context, the state, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, also has an official translation of the Qur'ān, entitled *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya* (henceforth: QT). However, unlike in Turkey, the official translation in Indonesia stems from a state initiative from the beginning. In 1960, the Indonesian parliament

mandated the president to translate the holy books of Indonesia's religions into the Indonesian language. The QT was the only successful scripture translation project. The president followed up the parliamentary mandate by forming a committee of translators who translated the Qur'ān from scratch. Once completed, the translation was authorized by the state and announced to the public as an official state QT on the anniversary of Indonesia's independence in 1965.

Due to the prominent involvement of the state in the production of the official Qur'ān translation of Indonesia, observers believe the project reflects the political initiative of the state, similar to Rida's assessment of the state-sponsored translation of Turkey. In other words, the translation's official status has led scholars to posit that by publishing official Qur'ān commentaries, the Indonesian government is demonstrating its desire to provide a standard reference work for its Muslim population. Feener suggests that QT "may be seen as officially-sponsored attempts to provide Indonesian Muslims with standard work of reference and thus ensure greater uniformity in national discourses on the sacred text" (Feener, 2006, pp. 98–101). Federspiel argues that the state's Qur'ān projects were carried out to gain Muslims' trust by demonstrating that the state endorses Islamic values, demonstrating the intellectual credentials of Indonesian scholars, and establishing a sense of standardization among Qur'ān commentaries and translations (Federspiel, 1994, pp. 27; 65). The assessment of Feener and Federspiel essentially influenced that of later scholars, such as Moch Nur Ichwan (2009, p. 418), Johanna Pink (2015), Peter G. Riddell (2009, 2014), and Munirul Ikhwan (2015). In his investigation into the relationship between Qur'ān commentaries and the New Order government in Indonesia, Islah Gusmian notes that the lack of critical voices speaking out against the New Order government in QT indicates that the committee resorted to *otosensor* (self-censorship) to avoid direct confrontation between the translation and the authoritarian government (Gusmian, 2019, p. 301). Jajang A. Rohmana also argues that the government's Qur'ānic projects represent the religious politicization of the government, through which they contain the potential Islamic political force (Rohmana & Zuldin, 2018). Since QT is a product of the state, it is unsurprising that scholars are quick to assert that it reflects the state's political goals.

My primary objective is to reconsider this thesis by addressing the question, "to what extent does the state intervene in the actual output of QT?" This study examines three cases of translation in QT that have served as the basis for a number of studies in formulating "the control" argument: namely the creation verse (Q 4:1),

akābīra mujrimīhā in Q 6:123, and *awliyāʾ* in Q 5:51. In addition to examining their arguments, the study investigates the underlying assumption in their methodology that leads to such a thesis.

Contrary to the 'control argument,' this study demonstrates that the translations of QT in these three cases reflect the lack of state involvement in the translation's actual output. In spite of the fact that QT is a state-sponsored and authorised Qur'ān translation, the ulama continue to be the translation's actual interpretive authority. Therefore, it is understandable that QT could produce a version that does not conform to the state-approved discourse (Q 4:1). Even when a specific interpretive adjustment is deemed necessary due to a particular political context, translators continue to seek a solution through *tafsīr* (Q 6:123), demonstrating their commitment to the *tafsīr* tradition. QT also maintains its interpretive position when there is a public pressure on a particular rendering (Q 5:51). In conclusion, ulama continue to be the masters of QT interpretive authority, and it would be an exaggeration to say that the state is the ultimate authority in translation.

This paper also suggests that while the entire process of producing QT may imply the obvious presence of the state, when the genealogical nature of *tafsīr* is taken into consideration, the religious authority of QT returns to the ulama rather than the state. It is precisely the absence of this awareness of the genealogical nature of *tafsīr* in previous scholarship that has led scholars to overestimate the role of the state in translation while underestimating the role of the ulama and the *tafsīr* tradition.

Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya of the Ministry of Religious Affairs

The history of Indonesia as a nation-state led to the establishment of a ministry tasked with overseeing the state's religious project. The Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA), which was established on 3 January 1946, has retained its significance for each successive government in Indonesia's post-colonial history; many ministries have ceased operations for various reasons, but not the MoRA. Across the phases of nation-building and national identity formation proposed by Sukarno (1901-1970), Indonesia's first president, the economic developmentalism and political stability of his predecessor, Suharto (1921-2008), and the post-Suharto reform-era government's preoccupation with state security amidst growing Islamism, shocking terrorist attacks, and socio-communal conflicts, the

Ministry of Religious Affairs has served the state through tasks with different political objectives relevant to each government in power (Ichwan, 2006).

While the majority of the Ministry's projects are concerned with the administration of religion (van Bruinessen, 2014, p. 140), it also has projects that touch on a more fundamental aspect of the epistemological formation of the Islamic intellectual tradition: the production of Qur'ānic texts and their *tafsīr*. A department within the ministry, Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an (LPMQ, The Qur'anic Text Review Board), has undertaken several projects closely related to Qur'anic supervision in Indonesia, including the publication of *Mushaf Standar Indonesia, Al-Qur'an Juz ʿAmma, Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya, Al-Qur'an dan Tafsīrnya, Tafsīr Ringkas, Tafsīr Tematik, Tafsīr Ilmi,* and *Tajwid Warna.* With these projects, Indonesia is one of the few countries actively participating in producing official state Islamic texts.

QT is the first official state-owned Qur'ān project. As a translation of the Qur'ān initiated by the state, the QT was created through a constitutional pathway. The initial plan to produce the translation originated with the highest state institution, the Provisional People's Consultative Assembly, which issued TAP MPRS No. II/MPRS/1960, which outlined the translation of the holy book into Indonesian, among other things (M.P.R.S & Departemen Penerangan, 1961, p. 224). This marked an unprecedented event in contemporary Qur'ānic literature, where the authority of a *tafsīr* was proclaimed by a political institution. While regular *tafsīr* are strongly associated with the intellectual and religious credentials of their authors, the QT lacks this criterion. The privilege of being the state's official translation of the Qur'ān has its own repercussions. At the formative level, QT is the product of collective work coordinated by several individuals, whose individual contributions are unidentified, thus falling into a new category of *tafsīr*, namely institutional *tafsīr* (Pink, 2010b, p. 61). Another consequence of having an official state translation of the Qur'ān is that the QT's history is interpreted in terms of the state's history. QT has witnessed the rise and fall of Indonesian regimes, including the Old Order, the New Order, and the Reform period. The relationship between QT and the development of the national language and the modernization of religion in Indonesia is also substantial. The QT has undergone three comprehensive revisions (1989-1990, 1998-2002, and 2016-2019)—thus making up for four editions—and a number of reactive and unsystematic revisions over the course of its existence. In addition, an agreement between the MoRA and Saudi authorities led to the publication of an annual gift edition of the King Fahd Qur'ān Printing Complex, which is distributed to Indonesian pilgrims (Faizin, 2022, p. 163).

It is worth mentioning that the MoRA views its role as that of a facilitator in the production process of QT. According to Muchlis M. Hanafi, who served as the head of LPMQ from 2015 to 2022, the ulama hold the interpretive authority of QT, rather than the ministry or the state. The translation teams comprise of ulama who have been selected based on their credentials, even though some of them are employed by the MoRA as lecturers in Islamic universities that receive state funding. Furthermore, the composition of the committee is characterized by a sense of representativeness, as it comprises members from diverse mass organizations and various types of Islamic educational institutions across the nation. However, there is a tendency to invite only individuals with no record of controversial ideas in Islamic thought, such as Musdah Mulia or Nasaruddin Umar, even though both have been involved in other MoRA projects. Above all, the release of the translation is contingent upon authorization from the Congress of the Ulama of the Qur'ān in Indonesia, with the exception of the initial edition which received authorization from the Minister of Religion.

Three Case Studies: The Translation Spectrum

Q 4:1: A Disinterested Translation

Q 4:1[1] is one of the focal points of contention for Muslim feminists as it has been one of the sources for religious legitimacy for gender inequality. The contention is rooted in the verse's suggestion that creation started with a man, Adam, and his female companion, Hawa (Eve) was created after and from him. This further led to a view that situates men as superior to women, whereas women are servants of men. The hermeneutical problem in this verse revolves around the complexity in understanding what the verse associates *nafs wāḥida* with, what the pronoun in *minhā* refers to, and what *zawjahā* means. Most Qur'ān commentaries identify *nafs wāḥida* as Adam, making him the first human creation of God. The pronoun in *minhā* is considered to refer back to *nafs,* while *zawjahā* points to Hawa. With *minhā*, Qur'ān commentaries provide further identification about from which part of Adam Hawa originated. Referring to a ḥadīth transmitted by al-Bukhārī, Ibn Kathīr conveys that it was from the rib of Adam (Ibn Kathīr, 2000, p. 333). The complete story of

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[1] Q 4:1: "People, be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate …"

this way of reading the verse is that God created Adam first, and from Adam's rib He created his female pair, namely Hawa.

This classical interpretation remains prevalent in the contemporary development of Qur'ān commentaries, including QT. The first edition renders *nafs wāḥida* as *"seorang diri"* (lit. a single self) and identifies the self with Adam placed in the parenthesis. The word *zawjahā* is translated as *"istrinya"* (his wife) and identified as Hawā in the parenthesis. Accordingly, the pronoun *hā* in *minhā*, in this context, unambiguously refers to *nafs*, which stands for Adam. The Saudi edition changes its rendering of *nafs wāḥida* from *"seorang diri"* into *"diri yang satu"* (lit. self that is one). This edition does not identify *nafs wāḥida* as Adam and zawjaha as Hawa. The third edition follows the Saudi edition's rendering of *nafs wāḥida* as *"diri yang satu"*, but recalls the parenthesis identifying it as Adam. The rendering of *zawjahā* also shifts from *"istrinya"* to a more generic word *"pasangannya"* (his pair); also, additional parenthesis identifying the word as Hawa exists. There is also a shift of *minhā* from *"dari padanya"* (lit. from her) to *"dari (diri)nya"* (lit. from itself), most probably to emphasize that the pronoun *hā* refers back to *nafs* instead of its referral, namely Adam. The fourth edition retains the rendering of the third, with a shift in *minhā* from *"dari (dirinya)nya"* to *"darinya"* (lit. from her).

These changes, according to Akhmad Supriadi et.al. (2019, pp. 8–9), indicates the QT has developed from an interpretation with patriarchal view to a gender-equal view on the creation. The shift from *"seorang diri"* in the 1965 edition to *"diri yang satu"* in the 1990 and 2002 editions, reflects a movement towards the relatively gender-sensitive translation. Additionally, he also notes that the 2002 editions remove the footnote that underlines that Adam was the first creature whilst Ḥawā was created from Adam's rib. Hamam Faizin (2022, pp. 320–321) proposes the similar assessment. This removal indicates that the QT eventually realizes that the rib narrative is considered invalid, and thus avoided. He emphasizes this argument further by referring to the work of M. Atho Mudzhar, one of the committee members of the 2002 edition, in which he suggests that women are equal to men. The changes in translation in these editions of QT, for both scholars, cannot be isolated from the ongoing influence of politics and gender ideology in Indonesia. They explicitly mention that the historical conditions of QT's production, from the Old Order, New Order and Reform periods, influenced the choices of QT's translation committees, as reflected in the translation changes.

I contend that these two academics are too quick to judge. In this instance, the translation changes between editions of QT do not reflect substantive changes, and therefore do not acknowledge the evolution of gender discourse in Indonesia. QT consistently adheres to the perspective of the majority of Sunnī Qur'ān commentaries. The removal of the explicit association between Adam and Hawa and the change from *"seorang diri"* to *"diri yang satu"* in the Saudi edition are insignificant. This is the case because both editions contain the same footnote as the first edition. Therefore, this change does not indicate a move towards an impersonal sense of the word, but rather a tendency to adopt a more literal approach in translation, in which the noun plus adjective sequence in *nafs wāḥida* is rendered into an Indonesian phrase with the same noun plus adjective structure in diri yang satu.

The shift from *"istri"* to *"pasangan"* for *zawj* in the third edition might have a rather significant interpretive implication. Istri refers to the relationship of marriage, and it is a feminine form. Pasangan, on the other hand, is genderless and suggests a more primordial relationship between men and women, the concept which Nasaruddin Umar (1999, p. 174) calls "genetical-pair of human species" (*pasangan genetis spesies manusia*). Besides, the absence of footnotes in this edition seems to affirm an assumption that the committee the third edition might have found the classical commentaries on this verse no longer relevant and therefore should be abandoned — as suggested by Faizin. It indeed appears to be the case only if one ignores the fact that *'diri yang satu'* in the third edition is identified as Adam, while *'pasangannya'* is identified as Hawa, both of which remain tying both words to a specific gender and thus avoiding the gender-sensitive interpretation. Finally, the fourth edition essentially follows the third edition on this issue. In conclusion, the changes of translations in these editions of QT does not reflect an interpretive reorientation that moves away from the widely accepted view in Sunni *tafsīr*.

Q 6:123: A Safe Escape Plan

Q 6:123[2] and the shift of the translation for a particular phrase within it, i.e., *akābīra mujrimīhā* in the editions of QT, is perhaps the most intriguing example of the committee's interpretive decision in which the external constraints resulting from the escalating political climate are evident. In the early 1990s, the history of QT documents an intriguing controversy surrounding this verse. Both QT and *Al-Qur'an*

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[2] Q 6:123: "And so We have put *akābīra mujrimīhā* in every city to perpetrate their schemes there..."

dan Tafsirnya were published by the same institution, however, there was a substantial difference in the translation of this verse between both works. This was first reported in the Pelita newspaper. QT translates akābir mujrimīha as *"penjahat-penjahat yang terbesar"* (the greatest villains), while Al-Qur'an dan *Tafsīr*nya renders it as *"pembesar-pembesar yang jahat"* (the infamous leaders). The newspaper referred to this change as taḥrīf (corruption), which is always a delicate topic in relation to the Qur'ān. This controversy escalated, prompting clarifications from the committee, the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI), and a few specialists. The head of the committee for *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, Ibrahim Hosen, recommended that readers consult *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* because the committee reviewed QT while writing that commentary. Muchtar Natsir, the head imam of the Istiqlal Mosque, hypothesized that this difference was due to the fact that each work cited a different source. QT refers to *Gharāʾib al-Qurʾān of Abū Suʿūd* (d. 982/1574), while *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsīrnya* refers to *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*. He and Hasan Basri, the leader of MUI, proposed to form a special committee to solve this problem. Finally, Hafiz Dasuki, the head of *Pusat Penelitian dan Pengembangan Lektur Agama,* dismissed the accusation of *taḥrīf.* He asserted that the variation in this verse's translation was due to variation in interpretation and not to corruption (Kasiri et al., 1992).[3]

Even more intriguing is the fact that the first edition of QT (1965) translates the phrase as *"pembesar-pembesar yang jahat",* identically to Al-Qur'an dan *Tafsīr*nya. This fact reveals an important observation: the difference in rendering in this verse occurred not only between QT and Al-Qur'an dan *Tafsīr*nya, but also between QT editions. According to Ichwan, the revision took place in1974 (Ichwan, 2009, p. 424), and the second edition (1990) retains this translation. The third edition (2002) changed the translation once again into a rendering identical to the first edition, and finally, the fourth edition (2019) changes it into *"orang-orang jahatnya sebagai pembesar"* (its villains as leaders). In contrast to the first two editions, the third and fourth editions contain a footnote that reads: *"menurut sebagian mufassir, akābīra mujrimīha ialah para penjahat-penjahat terbesar"* (according to some exegetes, akābir mujrimīha is the greatest villains). With this footnote, the most recent translation appears to acknowledge that *penjahat-penjahat terbesar* is one of the acceptable translations of *akābir mujrimīha*. As the footnote suggests, there may have been a debate among the translators regarding the best

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[3] I did not obtain the daily Pelita that published the actual reader's opinion. Nevertheless, I obtained direct access to Majalah Tempo that on 25 April 1992 reported the responses from the relevant authorities on this issue.

interpretation of the verse. However, they were unable to reach a conclusion, and both interpretations were ultimately accommodated.

The shift in translation in1974, which coincided with the beginning of the New Order, and the committee's decision to reuse the old translation in the second revision that took place in 1998-2002, when the New Order had collapsed, led observers to interpret it as an explicit indication of state involvement in the translation of QT. The initial shift in translation, according to Ichwan, was prompted by the political climate of the state. He believes that the New Order regime thought that the first translations could potentially jeopardize their authority and therefore changes were needed (Ichwan, 2009, p. 424). Islah Gusmian concurs with Ichwan, arguing that this is an instance of the 'self-censorship' that occurred in the production of *tafsīr* during the New Order due to the state's authoritarian ideology (Gusmian, 2019, p. 301).

Both scholars' observations make sense. By translating the phrase as *"pembesar-pembesar yang jahat",* the first edition of QT portrayed the leaders as potentially infamous. During the New Order, when no reports or criticism could be directed at questioning the government, this was unacceptable to the authorities. A normative interpretation of the translation could lead to distrust of the government, and any religiously-motivated activism against the state could easily refer to the verse as an attack on the government, a situation the New Order government was always eager to prevent. To soften the tone, the 1974 QT translation changed the phrase to *"penjahat-penjahat yang terbesar."* The leaders are no longer in the limelight; instead, the focus shifts from the government to the villains. Given the militarised and absolute nature of the New Order, it is not surprising that the initial translation was deemed inappropriate for their continued rule. Finally, the fall of the New Order was eventually followed by a return to the original version.

One crucial point has been overlooked, which can be illustrated by the following question: from an interpretive standpoint, is the shift from *"pembesar-pembesar yang jahat"* to *"penjahat-penjahat yang terbesar"* valid? In other words, are both *"pembesar-pembesar yang jahat"* and *"penjahat-penjahat yang terbesar"* acceptable translations for akābir *mujrimīhā*?

A thorough examination of the commentaries on the Qur'ān reveals that the majority opinion favours the translation "pembesar-pembesar yang jahat." Al-Ṭabari, Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, and al-Rāzī express this viewpoint. Using linguistic

analysis, al-Rāzī even proposes a view that indicates that the rendering *"penjahat-penjahat yang terbesar"* is inaccurate. He argues that *akābira* and mujrimīhā are two objects of the word *jaʿala* (*akābira* is the second object placed before the first object, *mujrimīha*) and that they cannot form a genitive (*iḍāfa*) construction. (al-Rāzī, 1981, p. 183). With this reading, the correct interpretation for him is 'We have made [verb] in every city its leaders [2nd object] (its) criminals [1st object],' an interpretation that is semantically close to *pembesar-pembesar yang jahat*, despite its distinct grammatical composition. However, a less well-known interpretation provided by al-Bayḍāwī. Using grammatical analysis, he supports a view that justifies this second translation option. For him, the first object of jaʿala is fī kulli qarya (in every city) and the second is *akābira*. Unlike al-Rāzī, he sees the possibility of genitive construction with *akābira mujrimīhā* with *akābira* making a superlative adjective that stands as the first particle of the genitive construction (Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, n.d.). With this reading, the text means 'We have made [verb] in every city [1st object] the greatest criminals [2nd object composed with genitive construction). Thus, according to this perspective, the change from *"pembesar-pembesar yang jahat"* to *"penjahat-penjahat yang terbesar"* is valid.

At this point, I have shown that the *"pembesar-pembesar yang jahat"* and *"penjahat-penjahat terbesar"* both derive their legitimacy from Qur'ānic exegesis. This explains the footnotes added in the third and fourth editions. Thus, although we can see that there were certain political constraints behind the committee's decision to make the shift in 1974, it can be conclusively concluded that the committee remained and was able to find a solution in the Sunnī *tafsīr* tradition. One other important observation to note is that the fourth edition decided to avoid certain ambiguities that lay in the interpretive differences between the previous editions. Instead of choosing between *"pembesar-pembesar yang jahat"* and *"penjahat-penjahat terbesar,"* the current edition prefers to be more literal in its translation.

Q 5:51: Standing Firm

Q 5:51[4] is one of the Qur'ānic verses that has generated ideological polemics in Indonesia. This verse forbids Muslims to establish certain relationships with Jews and Christians referred to as *awliyāʾ*, a word that can have ideological

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[4] Q 5:51: "You who believe, do not take the Jews and Christians as allies [*awliyāʾ*]: they are allies [*awliyāʾ*] only to each other. Anyone who takes them as an ally [yatawallahum] becomes one of them—God does not guide such wrongdoers…"

consequences regarding the constitution of the state, the political rights of its citizens, and the attitude of Muslims towards non-Muslim minorities in Indonesia (Pink, 2010a, p. 7). The word *awliyāʾ* itself contains relatively complex hermeneutical issues. The ambiguous nature of the word poses the problem of determining the precise meaning of the word in each usage throughout the Qur'ān. When it comes to translation, the word represents a profound challenge for any translator seeking equivalence and causes concern about whether opting for a linguistically faithful rendition is likely or not, or maintaining a great deal of liberty in grasping what could be considered as the intended meaning in one particular verse.

The word *awliyāʾ* is mentioned in forty-two places across the Qur'ān. In general, this word is translated in a wide range of options in Qur'ān translations and commentaries produced and distributed in Indonesia. The most popular between those options is its rendering to *pemimpin-pemimpin* (leaders), such as the case for Q 5:51. This translation implies that the verse is understood to cut the possibility of non-Muslims leadership in Indonesia; a position contradicting the constitution (Hosen, 2016a, p. 181; Ichwan, 2006, pp. 49–54). Accordingly, this verse or other similar verses have been constantly employed on the political stage in Indonesian democracy in order to prevent non-Muslims from having significant political positions in the state. In 1974, *Al-Muslimun*, a periodical affiliated with the Islamic Union (Persis) organization, proposed this kind of translation to encourage Muslims to retract their support for parties with Christian figures. During the 1999 election, MUI alongside Muhammadiyah urged Muslims to participate in the election and refrain from voting for any political party that had non-Muslim candidates standing for the legislature as a response to the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), with around 40 per cent of PDI-P's candidates for the legislature allegedly being non-Muslims (Hosen, 2016a, p. 182). Again, after the Reform period, this verse has been frequently referred to hinder non-Muslim political leadership in Indonesia. The latest incident was Chinese-Christian Ahok's candidacy in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election. When it comes to QT, the problem of Q 5:51 is also reflected in the shift of translation between its editions. The first edition renders *awliyāʾ* in the verse as *pemimpin-pemimpinmu.* The second and the Saudi editions retain this translation and the third shifts it to teman setia (faithful companions), and then the fourth edition sticks to this latter translation.

Some scholars consider the rendering of *pemimpin-pemimpin* for *awliyāʾ* as peculiar, narrow, inaccurate, distortive, or deviant from the classical commentaries.

For the case of the periodical *Al-Muslimun* mentioned earlier, Jeremy Menchik, an American political scientist, based on his comparison of the Arabic-English and the Arabic-Indonesian translations, suggests that this translation is unusual, and it has a strong connection to the politicization of the Qur'ān translation taken by Persis, an Islamist organization with which *Al-Muslimun* was affiliated (Menchik, 2016). Ahmad Sahal, an Indonesian scholar, expressed the same concern as Menchik. To highlight this, he uses a comparative argument with a number of English translations to demonstrate that the translation of *awliyāʾ* into *pemimpin-pemimpin* is misleading and, to use his terminology, distorted (Sahal, 2012, 2016).[5] Johanna Pink suggests that the translation of *awliyāʾ* as *pemimpin-pemimpin* is inaccurate, for, according to her, friendship is the most preferred meaning of *awliyāʾ* in classical Qur'ān commentaries. For QT, she argues, the decision to opt for *pemimpin-pemimpin* reflects its uncritical reference to the previous Indonesian Qur'ān commentaries, such as Mahmud Yunus, Ahmad Hassan, and Hamka. Pink also underlines Quraish Shihab's criticism of this translation, who suggests that *awliyāʾ* denotes some forms of closeness that blur all the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims (Pink, 2010a, pp. 43–44). Pink is supported by Indonesian scholars, Nadirsyah Hosen and Ahmad Ishomuddin. Referring to the explanations provided in *tafsīr* tradition on this verse, they argue that none of the authoritative-classical commentaries connect the word *awliyāʾ* in Q 5:51 to leadership (Hosen, 2016a, 2016b, 2017; Putusan Nomor 1537/Pid.B/2016/PN.Jkt Utr. Tahun 2017 Ir. BASUKI TJAHAJA PURNAMA Alias AHOK, 2017).

Hosen's argument deserves more elaboration in this context. He explains that the translation of *awliyāʾ* into *pemimpin-pemimpin* in QT reflects the ideological bias towards the New Order governmental project. The translation of *awliyāʾ* into 'leaders', he explains, is found in the pre-1998 edition of QT, while the current version underwent some revisions including the shift from *pemimpin* to *teman setia* regarding Q 5:51. According to him, the rendering as *pemimpin-pemimpin* in that earlier edition was on purpose to support the government focus on harmony between religions at a time when it was attempting to safeguard the unity of Indonesia. To translate *awliyāʾ* into *teman setia* would contradict the program and create disharmony in society because people did not have the competence to read the commentaries, instead, they only read the translation. However, after the fall of

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[5] The article was published for the first time in Majalah Tempo in the context of 2012 Jakarta Gubernatorial Election when Joko "Jokowi" Widodo and Basuki a.k.a. Ahok took the office. The idea was reproduced and republished in Koran Tempo with a slight difference in 2016, again in the context of Jakarta Gubernatorial Election.

Suharto, the committee revised it to *teman setia*. The reasoning behind the shift was absent in Hosen's explanation, but clearly, he thinks the current translation is better for its subscription to classical Qur'ān commentaries; he just simplifies it with an expression: "they put it back what the classical Muslims scholars said in their commentaries" (McRae, n.d.).

Hosen's argument is nevertheless anachronistic. The government's focus on interreligious harmony was formally introduced in the New Order era (Sila, 2017, p. 123), and hence, it is quite obvious that Hosen tries to identify QT as the product of the New Order regime, just like Federspiel and Feener did (Ichwan, 2009, p. 419). This assumption is inaccurate as QT is the product of the transition of power; the first volume of the first edition of QT (Q 5:51 is in it) was published under Sukarno in 1965, while the second and third volumes were published under Suharto, in 1967 and 1969 respectively. Additionally, Hosen fails to recognize that the rendition of *awliyāʾ* as *pemimpin-pemimpin* in Qur'ān translations in Indonesia is not an exclusive and unprecedented case for QT. Accordingly, connecting the rendering of *awliyāʾ* as *pemimpin-pemimpin* to the project of the New Order is historically inaccurate and to associate the revision from *pemimpin-pemimpin* into *teman setia* in the 2002 edition with the fall of Suharto is equally invalid.

Apart from the historical inaccuracy of Hosen and the superficial comparative semantical exercise of Menchik, these scholars' concern about the peculiarity of *pemimpin-pemimpin* as the rendering for *awliyāʾ* in Q 5:51 is valid. Hosen, Ishomuddin, and Pink accurately observe that there is a lack of explicit endorsement from traditional Qur'ānic commentaries for this interpretation. This is because the historical context of the verse (as derived from *sabab nuzūl* materials) and the paradigmatic textual context (the surrounding verses in the *muṣḥaf*) indicate that the appropriate interpretation for *awliyāʾ* in this verse is alliance.

However, this does not mean that those who endorse *pemimpin-pemimpin* do not have intellectual basis for their view. A further examination of the interpretation of *awliyāʾ* in Qur'ān commentaries shows that there is a way to justify translating the word as 'leaders'. First of all, Arabic dictionaries outline a large range of semantic options for w-l-y, the root of *awliyāʾ*, including helper (*al-nāṣir*), friend (*ṣāḥib*), concepts relating to legal power (in familial affairs, marriage, inheritance, and captivity), authority and management (*mālik al-asyyāʾ jamīʿiha al-mutaṣarrifu fīhā*), and many more (Ibn Fāris, 1979, pp. 141–142; Majma' al-Lughah al-'Arabiyah, 2004, pp. 1057–1058; Mandhūr, 1981). Second, outside Q 5:51, that specifically

piqued the interests of observers and the general public, there are verses that mention the word that a number of Qur'ān commentaries interpret in terms of management nuance. In Q 2:257, many Qur'an commentaries associate the word *awliyāʾ* with *mutawallī umūrahum* (those who oversee people's matters). It is mentioned in *al-Kashf wa al-Bayān of al-Thaʿlabi* (467 H) and is followed by *al-Wajīz of al-Wāḥidi* (468 H), *Zād al-Masīr* of Ibn Jawzi (597 H), *al-Bayḍāwi, al-Nasafī* (d. 710/1310), etc. Third, outside the Qur'ān commentaries, the classical views of Muslim scholars, such as al-Māwardi (d. 1058), al-Ghazalī (d. 1111), Qadi ʿIyāḍ (d. 1149), and al-Nawāwī (d. 1277), as well as the contemporary scholars such as Al-Mawdūdi and Abu Fāris convey that ruler/Imam/Caliph/leader should be a Muslim (Hosen, 2016a, p. 183). With the growing trend in modern Qur'ānic interpretation to seek a more paradigmatic view of the Qur'ān at the expense of viewing each Qur'anic verse in isolation (Coppens, 2021; Pink, 2010a), these three instruments may be deemed adequate for them—including the committee of the earlier editions of QT—to endorse *pemimpin-pemimpin* as the translation for *awliyāʾ*.

One additional point remains to be made in this case: the committee of the fourth edition of QT based their translation of *awliyāʾ* on their fidelity to *tafsīr* tradition. Given the controversy over the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, the court's decision to find Ahok guilty in the case, and the role played by the QT in how the controversy unfolded, Indonesian Muslims, especially those in favour of the *Aksi Bela Islam* (Defending Islam Protest movement) — the series of rallies during the 2017 Jakarta Gubernatorial election against Ahok's alleged blasphemy — expected the fourth edition of the QT, which was in the process of being revised at the time, to change the translation of *awliyāʾ* in Q 5:51 to *pemimpin-pemimpin*. In addition, since the verdict in Ahok's trial explicitly favors this translation, it seems to have additional merit. However, when the online version of this edition was released, members of the anti-Ahok coalition found that it retained the faithful friend translation. This led to another controversy, which then resulted in LPMQ re-issuing the press release emphasizing that the translation as teman setia in Q 5:51 was the most valid translation for the word *awliyāʾ* (Lajnah Pentashihah Mushaf Al-Qur'an, 2018). On the basis that the translation was already firmly based on the classical Sunni exegetical tradition, they felt no need to bow to public pressure to change the translation of *awliyāʾ* from teman setia to *pemimpin-pemimpin* in Q 5:51.

Contradictory as it may be, both interpretations are supported by the tradition of *tafsīr*; ambiguity is one of the epistemological characteristics of *tafsīr* tradition (Pink & Görke, 2014). As far as this study is concerned, the support from the

tradition of *tafsīr* for *pemimpin-pemimpin* and teman setia, the historical inaccuracy of Hosen's argument, and the firm position of the committee of the fourth edition on their translation against public pressure might push us to rethink the notion of government intervention in the actual interpretive product of QT.

The three cases above show the spectrum of QT interpretations in relation to the possibility of state intervention in QT output. All three cases show that QT consistently follows the widely accepted views of *tafsīr* among Sunnī Muslims. The first case shows that QT has no interest in following the gender discourse that has developed in Indonesia at the expense of the widely accepted views provided in classical *tafsīr*. It is worth noting that this position stands in contrast to the other projects of the MoRA on gender discourse. While in the other projects, the MoRA advocates gender equality, for example as recorded by the publication of books that advocate gender equality, such as *Wanita Islam Indonesia dalam Kajian Tekstual dan Kontekstual* (Indonesian Islamic Women in Textual and Contextual Studies) edited by Marcoes-Natsir and Meuleman (1993) that compiles the papers presented at a conference on gender issues organized by the MORA and *Rekonstruksi Metodologis Wacana Kesetaraan Gender dalam Islam* (Reconstructing the Methodology of Gender Equality Discourse in Islam), a volume published by a joint project between the State Islamic Institute (currently: State Islamic University, UIN) Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta and McGill-ICIHEP (Dzuhayatin et al., 2002), QT has forged its own path. The second case shows a situation where the translators faced greater pressure to change the translation. In this case, however, they were still unwilling to depart from the accepted interpretive views among Sunnī Muslims. In other words, they still managed to find a way out of this pressure through the *tafsīr* tradition. Finally, the third case shows that the QT translation team did not have the burden of providing translations that contradict the constitution. Similarly, when there was public pressure to change the translation, they also felt no need to bow to this pressure because they already believed that their translation product was firmly grounded in the *tafsīr* tradition. These three cases show that following the Sunnī exegetical tradition is the main principle of QT and government intervention in the actual output of the translation is very minimal.

Acknowledging the Genealogical Nature of *Tafsīr* Tradition

The preceding interpretive cases demonstrate that the thesis of some scholars that the state intervenes in QT interpretation decisions can be refuted through an in-

depth analysis of the exegetical tradition. In this section, I will demonstrate that this occurs because observers, on the one hand, place an excessive emphasis on the historical production of the text, i.e. QT, and, on the other, disregard the genealogical nature of *tafsīr*.

Studies that explicitly propose the control thesis can be divided into two categories. The first is studies on the history of Qur'ānic literature in Indonesia in general that do not specifically dedicate themselves to investigating the history of QT. The writings of Howard M. Federspiel, Peter G. Riddell, Feener, and Islah Gusmian fall into this group. The second category is studies that specifically make QT the subject of their study. Here we have Moch Nur Ichwan, Hamam Faizin, Jajang A. Rohmana, Munirul Ikhwan, and Akhmad Supriadi. The first group basically starts from the assumption that because QT and *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* are owned by the state, the state has an interest in them. Although they do not mention it explicitly, presumably, similar experiences in Turkey (Wilson, 2009, 2014) and Saudi (Wild, 2015; Yakubovych, 2022) influence their assessment. As for the scholars in the second group, they basically continue the thesis presented by the first group, questioning further, what and how the state's interests are manifested in the production of official state translations. Due to their generalist nature, it is understandable that the first group does not offer much analysis of the actual translation products in QT. In contrast, as far as this study is concerned, the works in the second group deserve more serious attention.

The studies mentioned above have the same tendency; they pay close attention to the production moment of QT in a synchronic perspective. In this case, the state is the producer of QT. Thus, there is an assumption that the state will inevitably pursue the particular interests through QT production. This is the result of the strengthening of the use of historical perspectives developed in Islamic studies in Indonesia, at least since the New Order. In the context of Qur'ānic and exegetical studies, this can be seen in the integration of the social sciences and humanities with Qur'ānic and exegetical studies, especially hermeneutics and critical discourse analysis. Both approaches emphasize the actors who produce the text, and try to investigate what interests lie behind the production of the text. For QT, since it is produced by the state, it is natural that it will be very easy to associate with the political interests of the state.

The cases of Ahmad Sahal, Ahmad Ishomuddin, and Nadirsyah Hosen offer one additional observation. Their views arise in a particular polemical context. Although

they present their arguments in an academic manner, their goal is to engage in polemics. Hence, there is ambivalence in their position; whether as disinterested observers or actors involved in the polemic. However, this model of scholarship is not unique to the case of the three scholars, nor to the context of the controversy of Ahok's blasphemy. It is still very easy to find historical studies of Qur'ānic interpretation products that implicitly or explicitly have an interest in supporting or even advocating a particular religious view. Hamam Faizin, in a number of his interpretations of the QT experience, shows this tendency. Islah Gusmian in *Tafsīr Al-Qur'an dan Kekuasaan* (Interpretations of the Qur'ān and Power) does the same. My point here is that the hermeneutic approach developed in Indonesia has developed in two directions: developing methods of Qur'ānic interpretation relevant to contemporary situations and analyzing the products of particular interpretations in history. Both models pay specific attention to the historical moment of text production. In their analysis of the QT, it is not uncommon to see the tendency of observers to attempt to provide a counter-interpretation of the QT rather than explain the complexities that lie behind the interpretive decision reached by the translation. When this happens, it is only natural that the 'state interest' behind the choice of QT is highlighted to be 'blamed'.

With regards to the problem of ignoring the genealogical nature of *tafsīr*, I refer to the theoretical assumption of *tafsīr* as a 'genealogical tradition' developed by Walid Saleh.

> By "genealogical" I mean a certain dialectical relationship that each new commentary, and hence, each exegete, had with the previous tradition as a whole. At every moment the tradition was in its totality available to the exegete. … Designating this genre as genealogical has certain implications for the proper study of, and approach to, *tafsīr*. One cannot study any given Qur'an commentary in isolation. It has to be seen in conjunction with the tradition that produced it and the influences it left behind.(Saleh, 2004, p. 14)

With this assumption, Saleh underlines *tafsīr* is never a single-independent book; there is always the continuous relationship between any commentator and their predecessors which gives way to the establishment of *tafsīr* as a coherent and internally consistent body of literature. The exegete, in many ways, is not independent since they have to deal with the established and limited hermeneutical principles. In this context, I position Qur'ān translation as one of the

sub-genres of *tafsīr*. This is because a close examination of Qur'ānic translations shows that the role of *tafsīr* is very significant in the production of Qur'ānic translations. This is even to the extent that snippets of text from *tafsīr* might take the place of the Qur'ānic text as the source text when translating the Qur'ān.

The consequence of this view is that when conducting research on Qur'ānic translations, a scholar cannot disengage from the *tafsīr* tradition. Just as translators are bound by historical situations, they are also in a dialectical relationship with exegetical traditions. In other words, the constraint that shapes a product of Qur'ānic interpretation and translation is not only the historical context of its production, but also the rules and forms of exegesis that are defined by the history and tradition of exegesis. As far as the studies analyzed above, disengagement with the *tafsīr* tradition is one of the primary causes of their misinterpretation of the state's involvement in QT. Following the trend of translation theories developed in translation studies in the West, for them, there are only two variables when translating the Qur'ān, namely the source text and the target text, without giving a significant role to *tafsīr* in their analysis. Here lies the common ground between the issue of ignoring the genealogical nature of *tafsīr* and giving sole emphasis to the synchronic historical context of the production of the text. Because their attention is only on the source text, QT is isolated from the tradition of *tafsīr*. As a result, their attention to QT is limited to the actual output of the translation and the producer of the translation, which is the state. By ignoring the dialectical role of the exegetical tradition that also binds the translators when translating QT, it is not surprising that they overvalue the agency of the state in the production of QT.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that for the state, the politicization of translation in the QT case is not a direct and crude intervention in the translation product, but rather a broader effort to create the impression that the state accommodates Muslim interests. Instead of controlling the translation product, the translation is politicized in this instance by adopting a discourse that has already taken root in society; not through a top-down intervention scheme, but through a bottom-up adoption. It is true that every regime has attached its practical political interests to QT, and in some cases, QT interpretations are also biased towards the political development of the nation. Nevertheless, as a translation of the Qur'ān, referring to a particular genre of Qur'ānic literature, the state has exercised little control over the actual translation, as evidenced by the cases of translation described above.

The translators, on the other hand, were more concerned with the continuity of the interpretive tradition when producing the QT, which is why they adhered as closely as possible to the widely accepted interpretations of the Sunni school. They still find a way through *tafsīr* when they are confronted with external pressures in their interpretive decisions. Thus, state favouritism is permissible so long as it is sanctioned by Sunni *tafsīr*. The politicization of *tafsīr* in this instance does not take the form of corruption or distortion, as some have claimed, but of selection, i.e. choosing a meaning option that meets the needs better.

This conclusion can only be reached if one is not trapped in the contextualization of the translation/interpretation text alone in the space of its production and disregards the dialectical relationship between a product of tafsir/interpretation of the Qur'ān and the tradition of *tafsīr* that has developed since the pre-modern era. *Tafsīr* exists between two poles: the historical context of its production space and the *tafsīr* tradition that binds its operational mechanism. This means that, when analyzing the production of *tafsīr* and the interpretive complexity behind each decision made by its authors, we must appreciate both the historical context of the *tafsīr* production and the continuity of *tafsīr* products with the *tafsīr* tradition that has existed since the early centuries of Islam in Arabia. A scholar who only considers the locality of the historical space of *tafsīr* production will overestimate the political elements of the state in it, while a scholar who only considers the centre will be blind to the local complexities of *tafsīr* production.

Acknowledgment:

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