



Moderate Islam in Online Speech: A Textual Studies of The *Arrahim.id*

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Abstract:

In recent years, the issue of moderate Islam has gained significant importance due to the rise of radicalism and extremism, which have disrupted social harmony in various parts of the world. As one of the major sources of religious understanding, In Indonesia, a country with a predominantly Muslim population, the dissemination of religious knowledge through Friday sermons plays a crucial role in influencing the mindset of the Muslim community. Understanding the significance of studying the textual content of Friday sermons disseminated online becomes essential for a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon. This paper addresses the central question: “How is the concept of Moderate Islam interpreted and conveyed within the textual content of The Arrahim.id’s Friday sermons?” Utilizing Roland Barthes’ Semiotics, this study interprets both denotative and connotative texts in the sermon content displayed on the website Arrahim.id, with the object of analyzing Moderate Islam. Furthermore, the research aims to capture how these texts promote an inclusive, harmonious, and respectful understanding of Islam among Muslims and the wider community. The findings of the study indicate that the denotative meaning of tolerant Islam is based on the teachings of the Quran, Hadith, and Islamic attitudes. On the other hand, the connotative meaning within the sermon texts portrays the image of Islam as *Rahmatan lil’alamin* representing Moderate Islam. This meaning is then elaborated through moderate attitudes and practices. However, moderate Islam views personal purity and social engagement as interconnected elements in expressing faith. By prioritizing love and compassion for others, believers embody the true essence of Islamic teachings and contribute to the betterment of society.

Keywords: moderate Islam; online speech; textual studies

INTRODUCTION

Introduction In recent years, the issue of Moderate Islam has become increasingly significant due to the surge of radicalism and extremism that has disrupted social harmony in various parts of the world.¹ As one of the primary sources of religious understanding, Friday sermons (Jumu’ah khutbah) have played a crucial role in shaping the beliefs and perceptions of the Muslim community. However, the impact of Friday sermons on

¹ In the Indonesian context, the degree of influence of radicalism is arguably high. Prevention Director of the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) Ahmad Nurwakhid said there were 33 million people exposed to radicalism in Indonesia (<https://www.kompas.tv/nasional/311315/bnpt-33-juta-penduduk-indonesia-terpapar-radikalisme-butuh-undang-undang-pencegahan>)



knowledge and understanding of Islam, particularly in Indonesia, has become an intriguing topic.

In Indonesia, a country with a majority Muslim population, the dissemination of religious knowledge through Friday sermons plays a vital role in influencing the mindset of the Muslim community. With the emergence of online platforms, Friday sermons have found new means of delivery and have been widely utilized by preachers and religious scholars. One such online platform that provides textual resources for Friday sermons is Arrahim.id. This website claims to promote the ideology of Moderate Islam, presenting itself as a source of content aligned with inclusivity and tolerance values.

Understanding the importance of studying the textual content of Friday sermons disseminated online becomes crucial for a comprehensive analysis of this phenomenon. The content of these sermons can offer valuable insights into the representation and interpretation of Moderate Islam in the digital realm. Therefore, this paper aims to explore and analyze the textual aspects of Friday sermons published on The Arrahim.id, to elucidate how Moderate Islam is portrayed and understood within the context of this website. Subsequently, the main question to be addressed in this paper is, “How is the concept of Moderate Islam interpreted and conveyed in the textual content of Friday sermons on The Arrahim.id?”

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative textual study approach, utilizing the semiotic theory proposed by Roland Barthes (Barthes, 1977), to analyze the representation of Moderate Islam in Friday sermons published on Arrahim.id. This analysis focuses on exploring the denotative and connotative meanings embedded in the textual content, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Moderate Islam is portrayed on the online platform.

Text Selection: Primary data for this research will be collected from a selection of Friday sermons available on Arrahim.id.² To ensure comprehensive representation, sermons explicitly affirming Moderate Islamic ideology will be chosen. Additionally, sermons that have sparked significant engagement and discussions among users will be included to capture diverse perspectives and insights.

² <https://arrahim.id/c/khutbah-jumat/>

Data Analysis: Analysis will commence with carefully examining the selected Friday sermons, emphasizing the identification of denotative meanings, referring to explicit and literal messages conveyed. By systematically coding recurring themes, keywords, and phrases, core elements symbolizing the concept of Moderate Islam will be revealed, offering valuable insights into the surface meanings of these sermons. Each type is a system that has its conventions (Teeuw: 1984). Subsequently, the focus will shift towards exploring connotative meanings, involving interpretations and symbolic associations beyond the literal text. This step will investigate underlying nuances, metaphors, and rhetorical devices used to evoke emotions and specific values associated with Moderate Islam, explaining the deeper layers of meaning conveyed through these sermons.

Application of Semiotic Theory: Roland Barthes' semiotics will serve as the theoretical framework for analyzing the text in-depth. Semiotics explores signs and symbols present in a text and their meanings within cultural contexts (Barthes, 1985). Applying Barthes' theory of signification will help uncover how linguistic signs in the sermons construct the concept of Moderate Islam and how the audience interprets these signs, thus enabling a better understanding of the semiotic processes at play in these sermons.

Significance of the Research: This study has significant implications for understanding the representation of Moderate Islam in the digital era. By focusing on the textual content of Friday sermons on The Arrahim.id, this research contributes to broader discourses on online beliefs and interpretations of Islam. Insights gained from this analysis will enrich academic understanding of how Moderate Islam is understood and disseminated through digital religious platforms, providing valuable knowledge for academics, religious practitioners, and anyone interested in contemporary Islamic discourses.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Roland Barthes Theory

Roland Barthes' semiotic theory is rooted in the field of semiotics. Ferdinand de Saussure plays a significant role in the origination of Structuralism in semiotics. He also introduced the concept of semiology (*sémiologie*; Saussure, 1972: 33). It offers a comprehensive understanding of how signs and symbols convey meaning in various cultural contexts. As Barthes proposed, Semiotics explores signification and communication processes through signs, encompassing linguistic, visual, and cultural

elements. Semiotic studies allow scholars to analyze the complex interactions between signs, their meanings, and the broader social and historical contexts in which the signs are situated.

In the realm of semiotics, Barthes emphasizes the concept of denotative meaning. Denotation is the literal and explicit interpretation of a sign without subjective or cultural associations. This represents the surface-level understanding of a sign, providing a clear and universal meaning that can be shared across different cultures and language communities. The denotative aspect of a sign serves as the foundation upon which further layers of meaning, such as connotations and myths, are built.

Another crucial aspect of Barthes' semiotic theory (1985) is exploring connotative meaning. Connotation delves into a sign's symbolic and interpretative dimensions beyond its literal definition. This involves cultural, social, and emotional associations brought to a sign, shaped by individual and collective experiences. Connotative meanings are subject to diverse interpretations, influenced by personal perspectives and individual cultural contexts. A sign acquires depth and richness through connotation, enabling nuanced expressions of meaning (Rusmana, 2014:200).

In his semiotic analysis, Barthes introduces the concept of myths. Myths involve the distortion of signs to reinforce dominant cultural ideologies or beliefs. Myths transform connotative meanings into naturalized truths that appear universal, concealing the social constructions and historical contingencies that support them. By perpetuating specific cultural myths, societies reinforce existing power structures and normative behaviors, creating a sense of universality and inevitability around specific ideas. Studying myths in semiotics allows for a critical examination of how symbols and signs are manipulated to uphold cultural hegemony and ideological control.

Islamic Moderation Concept

Moderate Islam, also known as "Islam Wasatiyyah" in Arabic, is excessive and lacking in the context of the attitude are the limits set by religion (Miftahuddin, 2010). It is a concept that advocates a balanced and inclusive approach to the practice of Islam. This concept seeks to navigate the middle path, avoiding extremism and embracing harmonious coexistence between religious principles and contemporary societal norms. Moderate Islam emphasizes tolerance, compassion, and rejection of radical interpretations, fostering mutual understanding and acceptance among diverse communities.

The classification of Moderate Islam can be categorized into several main dimensions:

1. **Theological Moderation:** This dimension focuses on interpreting religious texts and doctrines in a way that promotes tolerance and openness. It rejects literalist interpretations and acknowledges the contextual nature of certain verses, considering historical backgrounds and their relevance to current conditions.
2. **Social Moderation:** This aspect advocates balanced engagement with the broader society. It encourages Muslims to participate actively in their communities, fostering positive interactions and contributing to societal progress. Socially moderate Muslims are inclusive and respectful of people from various religions and cultural backgrounds.
3. **Political Moderation:** In the political realm, moderate Muslims emphasize the importance of democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law. They believe in non-violent conflict resolution and promote dialogue to address grievances and disagreements.
4. **Cultural Moderation:** This dimension embraces diverse cultural expressions within the context of Islamic values. It recognizes that Islam is not monolithic and allows for variation in cultural practices that do not contradict core Islamic teachings.
5. **Interfaith Moderation:** Moderate Islam encourages dialogue and cooperation with followers of other religions, seeking common ground and promoting mutual understanding. This dimension rejects exclusivist attitudes and fosters a spirit of interfaith harmony.

Moderate Islam serves as a counter-narrative to extremist ideologies and has gained traction as a response to the challenges of contemporary global dynamics. It reflects the core principles of compassion, justice, and harmony at Islam's heart, aiming to cultivate a balanced and progressive Muslim identity in the modern world.

The following is an analysis of the meaning of the Friday sermon text on the Arrahim.id website using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to determine the meaning of denotation, connotation, and myth.

Denotation Meaning

Keterangan	Kalimat Denotasi	Klasifikasi Islam Toleran
<p>Khutbah Jumat: Bahagia dalam Beragama, Berbangsa, dan Bernegara</p> <p>Dr. H. Syarif Thayib S. Ag, M. Si</p> <p>25 Februari 2023</p>	<p>Bahkan tidak sedikit di antara kita masih mengingkari kehendak Allah SWT akan keberagaman makhluk-Nya yang beraneka suku bangsa, bahasa, agama dan seterusnya. Guru spiritual Jalaluddin Al Rumi (Syamsuddin Tabrizi) menegaskan:</p> <p><i>Kita semua diciptakan Tuhan berdasarkan skenario-Nya, hingga kita pun menjadi orang yang berbeda-beda dan unik. Jika Tuhan menghendaki seluruh manusia sama, Dia pasti akan melakukannya. Maka, sikap tidak menghormati perbedaan dan memaksakan pemikiran kepada orang lain merupakan bentuk pelecehan terhadap “rencana agung” Tuhan.</i></p>	<p>Interfaith moderation</p>
<p>FUNTASTIC GENERATION; Rekonstruksi Visi dan Misi Semua Generasi</p> <p>Dr. H. Syarif Thayib, M. Si</p> <p>22 Juli 2022</p>	<p>Jadikanlah motivasi utama kami dalam hidup adalah untuk menjadi Rahmatan lil ‘alamin, dengan memberi manfaat sebesar mungkin kepada sebanyak mungkin umat manusia.</p> <p>Dan jadikanlah alasan utama kami melanjutkan hidup adalah untuk terus menerus memperbaiki diri kami, keluarga kami dan masyarakat kami, menuju ridhaMu. Hingga kami semua kembali dalam pelukan cintaMu</p>	<p>Theological moderation</p>
<p>[Khutbah Idul Adha] Selembar Kisah Abadi: Pengorbanan Suci dan Cinta Sejati</p> <p>Ach. Shodiqil Hafil</p> <p>28 Juli 2020</p>	<p>Berqurban adalah bagaimana kita memberikan kontribusi terhadap keberlangsungan hidup suatu umat. Berqurban adalah bagaimana kita bersungguh-sungguh untuk berbagi terhadap sesama. Berqurban tidak hanya sekedar berqurban. Apa pun bentuk pengorbanan itu harus didasari oleh nilai takwa yang tinggi terhadap Allah SWT.</p>	<p>Social moderation</p>
<p>[Khutbah Jumat] Halal Bi Halal: Rahmat Allah di Balik Pandemi</p> <p>Abdul Djalal</p> <p>5 Juni 2020</p>	<p>Sesungguhnya kasih sayang merupakan inti dari ajaran Islam. Jika ajaran Islam terkandung dalam al-Qur’an al-Karim, maka inti dari al-Qur’an sebenarnya adalah ajaran yang ada dalam surah al-Fatihah, dan inti dari surah al-Fatihah terdapat dalam <i>بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ</i>.</p>	<p>Theological moderation</p>
<p>[Idul Fitri] Hari Raya Idul Fitri dalam Konteks Kemanusiaan</p>	<p>Agar kita sampai pada kesucian diri, aspek sosial harus dikedepankan. Kecintaan kepada orang lain harus didahulukan daripada kecintaan pada diri sendiri. Aspek kecintaan kepada orang lain merupakan bagian dari iman.</p>	<p>Social moderation</p>

Sahid HM 23 Mei 2020	Iman transformatif adalah iman yang tidak hanya mengarah pada teologis tapi lebih mengena pada aspek humanistiknya.	
[Idul Fitri] Sertifikasi Fitri dengan Takwa Ach. Shodiqil Hafil 22 Mei	Kalau memang bertakwa, apakah pantas kita menyakiti hati orang lain? Kalau memang bertakwa, apakah pantas kita menyalakan mercon sampai begitu kerasnya dan mengganggu orang lain? Kalau memang bertakwa, apakah pantas kita urak-urakan di jalan raya dengan suara gaduh yang menghentak telinga? Kalau memang bertakwa, apakah pantas merayakan hari yang suci ini dengan hura-hura yang tidak bermanfaat?	Social moderation
[Jumat] Dakwah dengan Kelembutan Prof. KH. Moh. Ali Aziz, M.Ag 15 Mei 2020	Kita memang mengemban tugas untuk berdakwah menyebarkan kebenaran Islam ke seluruh penjuru dunia. Untuk tugas suci ini tidak harus selalu dengan teriak-teriak di atas mimbar, walaupun itu juga perlu. Tidak harus juga dengan perhelatan dengan biaya besar, sekalipun ini kadang-kadang juga dibutuhkan untuk syiar Islam.	Theological moderation
[Jumat] Tiga Hikmah Hidup di Balik Musibah Covid-19 Asy'ari, S.Sos 1 Mei 2020	Dalam Islam sendiri hidup bersih itu sangat ditekankan, bahkan dikatakan bersih adalah sebagian dari iman. Di akhirat nanti yang berhak masuk surga adalah orang-orang yang selalu menjaga kebersihan lahir maupun batin. Perhatikan hadits Nabi Muhammad SAW	Cultural moderation

Connotation Meaning

Excerpt from the sermon titled “Happiness in Religion, Nation, and State” by Dr. H. Syarif Thayib S.Ag, M.Si [February 25, 2023] in the context of Moderate Islam emphasizes the acknowledgment and celebration of Allah’s divine will regarding the diversity of His creation, encompassing various ethnicities, languages, and religions. Spiritual teacher Jalaluddin Al Rumi (Syamsuddin Tabrizi) emphasizes that every individual is created by Allah according to His unique plan, resulting in diverse and distinct beings. If Allah desired uniformity among all humans, surely it would be so. Therefore, disrespecting differences and imposing one’s beliefs on others violates God’s “grand plan.”



In the spirit of Moderate Islam, this perspective encourages believers to embrace and respect the beauty of diversity as part of Allah's divine wisdom. This perspective fosters a sense of unity and harmony among different communities, recognizing that each person's individuality is an integral part of Allah's grand plan. By upholding the principles of tolerance and understanding, Moderate Islam advocates for peaceful coexistence, where differences are seen as manifestations of Allah's boundless creativity and wisdom. This inclusive approach aims to promote a society that respects the rights and dignity inherent in all individuals, regardless of their background, language, or beliefs.

In the sermon text titled "Reconstructing the Vision and Mission of All Generations," the statements given indicate aspirations to embody the concept of "Rahmatan lil 'alamin" (Mercy to all worlds) as the primary motivation in life. This includes efforts to be a source of benefit and compassion to as many people as possible, transcending boundaries, and embracing diverse human communities. Additionally, these statements highlight the commitment to continual self-improvement, not only for oneself but also for family and society, with the ultimate goal of attaining Allah's satisfaction and contentment. The journey towards self-improvement and societal betterment is driven by a deep love for Allah, aspiring to be embraced by His loving mercy. By upholding these values, followers of Moderate Islam strive to positively contribute to society, fostering an environment full of empathy, support, and collective progress toward realizing divine blessings for all.

Regarding the sermon "An Eternal Tale: Sacred Sacrifice and True Love" delivered by Ach. Shodiqil Hafil [July 28, 2020] is a sermon delivered on the occasion of Eid al-Adha. According to this text, the meaning of "qurban" (sacrifice) is to contribute to the continuity and welfare of the community. Qurban means sharing and giving wholeheartedly to others, reflecting the spirit of selflessness and genuine altruism towards fellow creatures. The act of sacrifice goes beyond mere ritualistic practice; it encompasses various forms of sacrifice, each rooted in deep devotion and dedication to Allah SWT. As an embodiment of Moderate Islam, qurban reflects a believer's willingness to prioritize others' needs over their own. It expresses love, empathy, and solidarity with less fortunate community members. The act of qurban is not limited to the slaughter of sacrificial animals but also includes various acts of charity and service, all of which stem from a profound awareness of the presence and guidance of the Divine.

Furthermore, the essence of the qurban (sacrifice) ritual lies in its alignment with the values of piety and consciousness of Allah's command. The act of sacrifice should be

driven by a sincere desire to please Allah and fulfill one's responsibility as a steward of His creation. The motive behind qurban should be to draw closer to Allah, to gain His pleasure and blessings through selfless acts of goodness. Therefore, the concept of qurban in Moderate Islam goes beyond mere ritual; it also encompasses a profound understanding of compassion, selflessness, and devotion to Allah. Through the qurban ritual, Muslims strive to build a society that prioritizes the well-being and prosperity of all its members, creating an environment of care, support, and solidarity.

Ach. In their sermons, Shodiqil Hafil and Prof. Ali Aziz emphasized the significance of highlighting the social aspect of seeking spiritual purity within Moderate Islam. Prioritizing love and compassion for others over self-love is fundamental to faith. This transformative faith goes beyond theological aspects and encompasses humanistic dimensions. Moderate Islam acknowledges that achieving spiritual purity intrinsically involves interactions with society. By prioritizing love and care for others, believers contribute to a harmonious and loving community, aligning their actions with the essence of Islamic teachings.

These statements underline that faith in Moderate Islam is more than just a theological belief; it manifests as a positive transformative force that influences how one treats and uplifts those around them. It inspires believers to embrace the humanistic aspects of faith, recognizing that kindness, empathy, and social responsibility are integral expressions of their belief in Allah. The statements encourage a flexible and inclusive approach in pursuing the critical task of *dakwah* (spreading the message of Islam) in Moderate Islam. While delivering sermons vocally from the pulpit is one method, it is not the only way to spread the truth of Islam. Moderate Islam values diversity in *dakwah* strategies and acknowledges the effectiveness of using modern means, such as social media and digital platforms, to reach a broader audience with messages of peace and understanding.

The statements conveyed by Abdul Djalal represent the essence of Moderate Islam itself, which is the true face of Islam—practicing the religion in a courteous, tolerant, gentle, and compassionate manner and living a life that embodies “Rahmatan lil ‘alamin” (Mercy to all worlds), by providing benefits to as many human beings as possible. These statements emphasize that if the entirety of Islamic teachings is encapsulated in the holy book, Al-Qur’an Al-Karim, then the core of Al-Qur’an is found in Surah Al-Fatihah (The Opening). The essence of Surah Al-Fatihah lies in the verse “بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ” (In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful).

This verse is a profound reminder for Muslims of Allah's limitless mercy and compassion. It sets the tone for approaching every aspect of life with love and goodness, reflecting divine attributes of compassion and benevolence. By mentioning Allah's names as the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful, Muslims are reminded of the need to extend love and forgiveness to others, reflecting Allah's divine attributes.

In Moderate Islam, understanding love and compassion goes beyond verbal expression; it also encompasses actions and deeds that benefit others. Embracing the core principles of love and compassion, Muslims are encouraged to show kindness and empathy in their interactions with fellow human beings, regardless of their background or beliefs. Ultimately, the essence of Islam, as encapsulated in Surah Al-Fatihah and the verse "بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ," serves as a guiding light for followers of Moderate Islam. It instills a profound sense of responsibility to uphold the values of love, compassion, and mercy in all aspects of life, fostering an inclusive and harmonious society that embodies the essence of Islamic teachings.

CONCLUSION

Based on the explanation above about the meaning of moderate Islam using Roland Barthes' theory, namely denotation and connotation meanings. It can be concluded that in the text of Friday sermons on the *arrahim.id* website, there are four classifications of moderate Islam meaning, namely moderate Islam in terms of theology, society, culture, and interfaith. The four classifications give rise to the connotation meanings: love, the beauty of diversity, tolerance, respect for the right, harmony, and compassion. These meanings refer to one deep meaning, namely *Rahmatan lil alamin*.

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