



Voicing Religious Tolerance Through Qur'anic Interpretation: An Analysis of Kim Knott's Thought

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Abstract

This article aims to explore the concept of religious tolerance through the interpretation of the Qur'an by analyzing Kim Knott's thoughts about *insider/outsider*. This is motivated by a social fact that is being polemic and viral regarding the request of one Christian to the Indonesian Ministry of Religion to reform the interpretation of the Qur'an. The discussion of *insider-outsider* itself, besides being closely related to the polarization of religious thought and experience, is also loaded with a phenomenological approach. This *insider/outsider* perspective is used by the author to analyze the study, using qualitative methods and *content analysis* techniques. Thus, this article concludes that the *insider/outsider* perspective on the open letter of Christians sent to the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs to reform the interpretation of the Qur'an, is seen as dividing religious communities in Indonesia. Although it received support from the majority of Christians (*outsiders*) and claimed that its request to the Ministry of Religious Affairs specifically to revise the interpretation of QS. al-A'raf [7]: 157 is an act of tolerance, in fact what he did was an act of intolerance that could damage harmony between Muslims and Christians. In the *insider's* perspective, the request is seen as too interfering with Islamic teachings and ignoring one of the indicators of religious moderation promoted by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, namely tolerance. Some posts uploaded related to the request to reform the interpretation of the Qur'an on social media have indirectly become an embryo of intolerance of interfaith harmony, especially between Muslims and Christians.

Keywords: Reformation, Tolerance, Qur'anic Interpretation, Kim Knott

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Introduction

The development of the times that gave birth to digital space or social media has extensively created a shift in the authority that has been considered established.¹ For example, if in the past the dissemination of the meaning of a hadith could only be done by kiyai, ustaz or madrasa teachers, it can now be done by anyone regardless of their scientific background.² Religious authority in the digital space that was previously exclusive and personal to certain groups has become general and impersonal. So, this shift in religious authority does not have to be addressed with skepticism, but it is important to put forward an attitude of tolerance by trying to minimize the preferences of domination and hegemony that occur among the authorities in the digital space and specifically in social media.³

Social media itself is a medium on the internet that can be a place of representation as well as macro self-expression of users.⁴ This medium is also a means of interaction between users, a means to cooperate, share, communicate and form virtual social ties between people.⁵ The existence of social media can make people able to carry out various two-way activities in various forms of exchange, collaboration, and mutual acquaintance in written, visual and audio-visual forms.⁶ Social media has a very important role in shaping the morals and character of a person's personality. It can have both positive and negative influences.⁷ Among the advantages of social media so that it is loved by the wider community is that it offers a new, easy way for users to communicate and interact regardless of distance, time and space.⁸ The easy use of social media for any individual has given them the freedom to express ideas without considering the impact.⁹ Dissemination can be done by uploading words in the form of writing, narration or unethical images, thus causing displeasure and hatred towards someone, especially those who have an interest. Social media has been widely used as a place to berate and even provoke others, either through YouTube, tik-tok, Facebook, Twitter, and so on.¹⁰ One of the issues that is currently developing on social media is the controversial narrative statement of Elia Myron who asked the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs to reform the interpretation of the Qur'an, because it has included the Injil -which is the holy book of Christianity- as a supporter of Islamic theology regarding the sending of Prophet Muhammad after Prophet Isa.¹¹

Elia's statement became a polemic that has not yet reached a meeting point between Muslims and Christians. Of course, this lack of common ground is due to a lack of communication

¹ Grace Arnot, et al, "Australian Youth Perspectives on The Role of Social Media In Climate Action," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 48, no. 1 (2024): 2.

² Miski Abdul Majit, "Pembelajaran Al-Qur'an Secara Digital: Pergeseran Sistem Isnad Dan Peneguhan Otoritas Baru," *Jurnal SMART (Studi Masyarakat, Religi, Dan Tradisi)* 9, no. 1 (2023): 135.

³ Saifuddin Zuhri Qudsi, "Pesantren Online: Pergeseran Otoritas Kegamaan Di Dunia Maya," *Living Islam: Journal of Islamic Discourse* 2, no. 2 (2018): 169-187.

⁴ Rulli Nasrullah, *Media Sosial: Perspektif Komunikasi, Budaya, Dan Sosio-Teknologi*, 3rd ed. (Bandung: Simbiosis Rekatama Media, n.d.).

⁵ Rulli Nasrullah dan Dudi Rustandi, "Meme Dan Islam: Simulakra Bahasa Agama Di Media Sosial", *Ilmu Dakwah: Academic*, *Journal for Homiletic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2020): 115.

⁶ Danis Puntodi, *Menciptakan Penjualan Melalui Sosial Media* (Jakarta: Elex Media Komputindo, 2011).

⁷ Benny Munardi, "Efek Media Massa Terhadap Agama dan Kehidupan Sosial Budaya Dalam Pembentukan Moral Dan Kepribadian Masyarakat", *Waraqat: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 6, no. 2 (2021), h 74.

⁸ Uswatun Hasanah, Busro, "Hold Your Fingers: The Communication Ethics on WhatsApp Based on the Hadith," *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication* 39, no. 3 (2023): 240.

⁹ Bahar Urhan, et al., *Social Media Use and Social Capital: Social Media Usage Habits and Perceptions of School Administrators*, (Heliyon 10, 2024).

¹⁰ Arif Alfani dan Hasep Saputra, "Menghujat Dan Menista Di Media Sosial Perspektif Hukum Islam," *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 4, no. 1 (2019): 37.

¹¹ <https://sleman.pikiran-rakyat.com/viral/pr-3047402119/sosok-elia-myron-tiktokers-viral-yang-minta-kemenag-mereformasi-tafsir-al-quran?page=all>, Accessed on date Mei 29, 2024.

between Elia as a Christian and a representative Islamic figure to *tabayyun* each other.¹² In this context, many Muslims have responded and warned Elia to stop the narrative of the open letter asking the Ministry of Religious Affairs to reform the interpretation of the Qur'an.¹³ Meanwhile, Elia himself along with other Christians who supported him, insisted on his argument that what Elia did was a form of tolerance so as not to interfere and use the Injil as a reference to strengthen the teachings of Islamic theology.

This began with a PodCast on dr. Richard Lee's Youtube channel, Elia Myron had a dialogue about the Israel vs Palestine war from a Christian perspective with dr. Richard, which was posted on November 14, 2023. After a long dialog, Elia mentioned the discussion in the Christian world, that Jesus Christ and Isa Al-Masih are two different people.¹⁴ Elia's statement was supported by dr. Richard through a Voice Note sent to him. Apart from the reason that it can increase the views of dr. Richard's Youtube account, Elia is also considered to have proclaimed the truth of the gospel. According to dr. Richard, only Elia dared to preach the gospel and voice the truth of Christian teachings in Indonesia.¹⁵ This issue by the author will be examined further with an *insider/outsider* perspective, which is a religious studies approach used to look at issues of belief, worldview change, divinity, and so on.¹⁶ In addition, this perspective, according to Amin Abdullah, has been influenced by the broadening of the spectrum on various historical-cultural aspects.¹⁷

In fact, there are already quite a number of experts who review Kim Knott's thoughts on the *insider/outsider* perspective. For example, papers published by Johannes dan David on the *insider-outsider* dilemma in relation to politics,¹⁸ Sonya dan Jennifer, wrote about *insider-outsider* in relation to qualitative research,¹⁹ Sheng-Feng Shen, et al., write about *insider-outsider* conflict resolution in animal societies,²⁰ Md Reiazul Haque, et al., discussing the company's *insider-outsider* CEO in handling Covid-19,²¹ Claudia Seise, mapping *insider* and *outsider* researchers in Indonesia,²² Deqing Zhou dan Wenjie Wang, wrote about *insider-outsider* information heterogeneity,²³ AKM Ahsan Ullah, et al., discusses whether migrants are *insiders* or *outsiders* who have privileges,²⁴ Paul Brockman, et al., discusses the determinants of CEO

¹² Joko Susanto, "Etika Komunikasi Islam", *Waraqat: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 1, no. 1 (2016), h. 20.

¹³ Ustaz Dery Sulaiman is one of the Muslims who responded to Elia Myron's controversial statement. For more details, see: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSYMamBsR/>. Accessed on date Mei 29, 2024.

¹⁴ "Viewed on Youtube," n.d., https://youtu.be/z_NLX4rGntf?si=dBWYSg8ISw5Z1-Vn. Elia in the Tik Tok account, "Accessed on date Desember 20, 2023.

¹⁵ "Viewed on Tiktok," n.d., <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSYMaCSDc/>. Accessed on date Mei 29, 2024.

¹⁶ *Insider/outsider* in John R. Hinnells Kim Knott, *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge Taylor and Fancis Group, 2005).

¹⁷ M. Amin Abdullah, *Relevansi Studi Agama-Agama Dalam Milenium Ketiga* "Dalam Amin Abdullah et al., *Mencari Islam (Studi Islam Dengan Berbagai Pendekatan)*, (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 2000).

¹⁸ Johannes Lindvall dan David Rueda, "The Insider-Outsider Dilemma," *British Journal of Political Science* 4, no. 2 (2013): 460–475.

¹⁹ Sonya Corbin Dwyer Jennifer L. Buckle, "The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 8, no. 1 (2009): 84–63.

²⁰ Sheng-Feng Shen, et. al., *Group Size and the Resolution of Insider–Outsider Conflict in Animal Societies* (Animal Behaviour 205, 2023).

²¹ Md Reiazul Haque, et. al., *Insider vs. Outsider CEO and Firm Performance: Evidence from the Covid-19 Pandemic* (Finance Research Letters 47, 2020).

²² Claudia Seise, "The Muslim Researcher Reflections on Insider/ Outsider Research in Indonesia (Peneliti Muslim Refleksi Penelitian Insider Dan Outsider Di Indonesia)," *Journal of Islam in Asia* 16, no. 1 (2016): 297–324.

²³ Deqing Zhou dan Wenjie Wang, "Insider, Outsider and Information Heterogeneity," *The North American Journal of Economics and Finance* 53, no. 12 (2020): 101193.

²⁴ AKM Ahsan Ullah, et al., "Privileged Migrants and Their Sense of Belonging: Insider or Outsider?," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 49 (2021): 161–69.

compensation by breaking down generalist-specialist versus *insider-outsider*,²⁵ Peter B. R. Carey, discusses the *insider-outsider* who was a speaker at the Exile with Diponegoro,²⁶ Mostafa Ahmadvand dan Ezatollah Karami, wrote about the *insider-outsider* effect in relation to the flood disaster.²⁷

Some of these studies have represented research on *insider/outsider* from various perspectives. However, among these previous studies did not touch any of the themes of religious tolerance as the author will discuss. This study is expected to complement previous research as well as be a basic guideline for the implementation of Kim Knott's approach to *insider/outsider* perspectives on current issues. The reason for choosing Kim Knott's *insider/outsider* perspective is that he has succeeded in simplifying the complexity of understanding religion as *tradition* and religion as *faith*.²⁸ Despite tracing a number of previous researchers' works, Kim Knott succeeded in making an academic contribution in the form of offering a framework for solving problems of religious studies in academic institutions, such as universities. The significance of the *insider/outsider* perspective applies in the context of the approaches and methodologies used by researchers in understanding and analyzing religion.

To get a comprehensive understanding, the author uses a qualitative method with the type of *library research*. The primary data used by the author is Elia Myron's narratives and responses to them found on social media, while several other references that support the theme of the discussion such as books, articles, websites, and others are used by the author as secondary data. In analyzing the data that has been collected, the author uses the *content analysis* technique, which is a mechanism that functions to examine a meaning in depth in the references used. In addition, considering that this article uses pure literature research, the data collection techniques almost all use documentation with an *insider/outsider* perspective approach.

Result and Discussion

Kim Knott's *Insider-Outsider* Perspective: Approaches to the Study of Religion

The *insider-outsider* discourse emerged as a hot issue in the mid-1980s when there was a heated debate about the study of *Sikhism*, namely what are the main contributions and motivations of scholars in studying *Sikh* religion. Many questioned the validity of who can understand and represent the *Sikh* tradition, what are the personal motivations and epistemological perspectives and ideological interests of the scholars? The issue of the Sikh tradition has undergone a long debate among religious scholars. Some scholars have strongly criticized Western scholarship on *Sikhism*, with a particular focus on the work of W. H. McLeod, who is considered to have undermined *Sikh* faith as a result of his historical and context-critical approach to *Sikh* tradition.²⁹

This problem of the *Sikh* tradition was considered by other scholars, especially those concerned with the phenomenology of religion, notably Kristensen, Van Der Leeuw and Otto in Northern Europe, then Eliade and Cantwell Smith in North America, and Ninian Smart in Britain. They hold the view that all religious phenomena are unique, autonomous

²⁵ Paul Brockman, et al., "Determinants of CEO Compensation: Generalist-Specialist versus Insider-Outsider Attributes," *Journal of Corporate Finance* 39 (2020): 53–77.

²⁶ Peter B. R. Carey, "Outsider Insiders: Four Officers' Exile Conversations with Diponegoro, 1830–1837," *Journal of the Humanities and Social Science of Southeast Asia* 178, no. 4 (2022): 440–76.

²⁷ Ezatollah Karami, *Mostafa Ahmadvand Dan Social Impacts Evaluation and Insider-Outsider Paradigm: Floodwater Spreading Project on the Gareh-Bygone Plain as an Illustrative Case* (Evaluation and Program Planning 65, 2017).

²⁸ Linda Woodhead, Christopher Partridge, Hiroko Kawanami, *Religions in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformations*, (London: Routledge Taylor and Fancis Group, 2016).

²⁹ Kim Knott, *Insider/Outsider...*, n.d.

and incomparable, yet capable of being understood through empathy, that is, by reliving one's own experience of religion. Although it is quite difficult to understand religion or sacred things, it is still possible to understand its manifestation or essence. The fundamental aim of the phenomenological approach according to them is to understand - through empathetic and imaginative experience - the *insider's* position while refraining from making judgments about the rightness or wrongness (which is the domain of theologians or philosophers) of the *outsider*.

The phenomenology of religion necessitates a concept offered by Kim Knott of *insider-outsider*. The *insider-outsider* discussion is closely related to the polarization of thought and experience between Western scholars and Muslim scholars in interpreting and articulating Islamic teachings. In the Muslim perspective, an *insider* is a Muslim, while an *outsider* is a non-Muslim who wants to study Islam.³⁰ Given the contemporary view that there is a relationship between religion, locality, and society, Kim Knott has developed a special scientific method to analyze the location of religion in contemporary Western society.

Meanwhile, Russell McCutcheon tries to provide reinforcement to categorize *insider* to *outsider* responses in four dimensions: (1) autonomy of religious experience, which is related to the phenomenological approach, (2) reductionism, which is exemplified by the academic community taking a scientific and objectifying stance as *outsiders*, (3) neutrality and method agnosticism, as adopted by Ninian Smart who relies on *outsider* reports without evaluating their rightness or wrongness, and (4) reflexivity. McCutcheon's discussion of these four categories is introduced with reference to two terms derived from the work of linguist Kenneth Pike, namely the *emic* perspective that emerges from the *insider*, and the *etic* perspective that emerges from the *outsider*.³¹

Kim Knott provides a more comprehensive view of understanding religion in two important contexts, namely the historical-empirical aspect and the normative-theological aspect.³² What she offers can develop a deeper insight into the complexity of religion in everyday life, as well as integrating it within a broader theological context. How religion changes shape and its place in society, how it is interpreted and represented in the media or elsewhere; nor is it isolated from global events and processes, can be understood using an *insider-outsider* perspective.³³

In her framework, Kim Knott proposes an approach that involves a complex interaction between *insider* and *outsider*. In this context, the religious experiences of *insider* individuals, those who have a personal relationship or affiliation with a particular religion, become the starting point in the research process.³⁴ These experiences may include an in-depth understanding of the practices, beliefs and cultural contexts associated with their religion.³⁵ However, what stands out in Kim Knott's approach is the response of *outsiders*, who are often presented as researchers with a more objective and analytical perspective. They bring comparison and critical analysis to the *insider's* religious experience.³⁶

The approach offered by Kim Knott in the study of religion is an alternative that pursues balance and dialogue between relevant elements in religious research. In Kim Knott's view,

³⁰ Tolhatul Choir, *Islam Dalam Berbagai Pembacaan Kontemporer* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2019).

³¹ Russell T. McCutcheon, *The Insider-Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion* (London: Cassel, 1999).

³² Richard S. Martin, "Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 23 no. 1 (1988), h. 45.

³³ Kim Knott, Elizabeth Poole and Teemu Taira, *Media Portrayals Of Religion And The Secular Sacred: Representation And Change*, (London: Routledge Taylor and Fancis Group, 2016), h. 17.

³⁴ Kim Knott, *Insider/outsider...*, h. 244.

³⁵ Sujat Zubaidi Saleh, "Perspektif Kim Knott tentang Insider-Outsider dalam Studi Agama", *Religió: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 4, no. 1 (2014).

³⁶ Kim Knott, *Insider/outsider...*, h. 244.

the three elements of *insider*, *outsider*, and *research subject* (the religious community under study) should not be seen as independent existences or in a subordinate relationship. Instead, they should be seen as circular reflective links that complement each other.³⁷ The spirit or spirit to be displayed in the context of religious studies according to Knott is the creation of meeting points and not the blending or fusion between various religious teachings. This approach creates space for dialogue and deeper understanding between different religious perspectives without eliminating the fundamental identities and differences between them.³⁸ Kim Knott gives a concrete example of this *insider-outsider* perspective by referring to Hinduism. According to her, *insider-outsider* sees Hinduism differently, and those inside Hinduism do not always think the same. From an *outsider's* perspective, a cow is an animal and Hinduism is a religion that doesn't tell us much about what kind of animal a cow is. And what about its symbolic meaning among Hindus? In this case, Kim Knott investigates as an *outsider* to Hinduism, he seeks to see how Hindus and visitors to India view their own religion, and will examine its derivation and changes in meaning. By investigating this problem, the problem of the cow and its relationship to Hinduism in the past and present will be discovered to show what 'Hinduism' means.³⁹

Kim Knott's approach can be adopted by researchers not only placing themselves on one side of the spectrum (completely as an *insider* or *outsider*), but trying to find a balance between the two. As a result, in the context of the approach, *insider* and *outsider* benchmarks or views can be recognized and integrated in the research. This allows researchers to be more flexible in approaching the study of religion, combining the depth of their personal perspective with diligence to maintain objectivity in their research. This approach recognizes that religious realities are often complex, and therefore, religious research must also integrate this complexity in a more inclusive approach to study.

Reforming Qur'anic Interpretation: Elia Myron's Open Letter to the Ministry of Religious Affairs

The issue of controversy that is currently viral on social media, both on Youtube, Instagram, Facebook, and especially on Tik-Tok, is Elia Myron's statement addressed to the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia regarding the reform of the interpretation of the Qur'an. This began with a PodCast on dr. Richard Lee's Youtube channel, Elia Myron had a dialogue about the Israel vs Palestine war from a Christian perspective with dr. Richard, which was posted on November 14, 2023. After a long dialog, Elia mentioned the discussion in the Christian world, that Jesus Christ and Isa Al-Masih are two different people. Although the Islamic teachings state that Jesus Christ himself is Isa Al-Masih, according to him, this is only revealed in the theological assumptions of the teachings of the Muslim book (al-Qur'an), not in the Christian book (Injil).

On this occasion, Elia emphasized the attitude of tolerance which means "allowing". As an Indonesian citizen who is free in religion and as a form of tolerance, Elia mentioned explicitly by respecting Muslims who hold the theological view that Jesus was not crucified and not resurrected, but rather likened and raised by God. However, according to him, historical data that says this does not exist at all, so that the view of Muslim theological assumptions is refuted by historical facts that exist in the Christian tradition. Elia also emphasized the difference in the birthplace of the Islamic version of Isa and the Christian version of Isa,

³⁷ Manuel A. Vásquez, Kim Knott, "Three Dimensions Of Religious Place Making In Diaspora", *Global Networks* 14, no. 3 (2014).

³⁸ Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion A Spatial Analysis*, (London: Routledge Taylor and Fancis Group, 2014), h. 77-79.

³⁹ Kim Knott, *Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Chapter 9.

where the Islamic version states that Isa was born under a date palm tree, while the Christian version states that Isa was born in a sheep pen, in Migdal Eder, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, which in Elia's view, there are no date palm trees in the city. Therefore, Elia regrets that Muslims are too eager to understand religion in theological assumptions but ignore historical facts.⁴⁰ Not only that, Elia extended the problem by making controversial statements through his personal Tik-Tok account. Elia began his upload by sending an open letter to the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, so that Injil verses in Christian beliefs are not used to support the interpretation of Islamic religious beliefs. For Elia, Injil verses in Christianity can only be understood by Christians themselves, and cannot be interpreted by other groups that differ from Christian interpretations. He stated that he found that Injil verses have been used in the *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, especially in relation to the interpretation of QS. al-A'raf [7]: 157, to support theological assumptions related to *nubuwatan*, namely the coming of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. What is contained in the interpretation of the Qur'an, continued Elia, has the potential to damage relations and harmony between religious communities in Indonesia. Because as far as his understanding, since ancient times by the fathers of the Church, the apostles, and the disciples of Jesus, there is no Prophet who will come after Jesus Christ.

Elia then refuted the accusation that the Taurat and Injils had been falsified. According to him, the Taurat and Injil in Christianity today are not the forged Taurat and Injil. In other words, the Taurat revealed to Prophet Musa and the Injil revealed to Prophet Isa are not the Taurat and Injil that Christianity holds and believes in today. In Elia's view, the falsified Taurat and Injil are two books that Muslims believe in, namely those revealed to Prophet Musa and Prophet Isa, not those used as guidelines for Christians. Meanwhile, the Taurat, which is used as a Christian guideline, was not revealed to Prophet Musa, as Muslims believe, but was written by Musa and continued by Joshua. Likewise, the Injil that Christians believe is not the Injil that was revealed to the Prophet Jesus, but the Injil written by Jesus' disciples who were later collected into the synoptic Injil. Because the Taurat and Injil believed by Muslims and Christians are clearly two different things, said Elia, there is no need to use the Taurat and Injil in Christianity to support or be used to interpret the Qur'an.

Elia further presents a quote from QS. al-Kafirun [109]: 6 which is considered a verse of tolerance to support his statements. He analogizes that if the verses of the Qur'an are used to support the interpretation of the trinity or support the divinity of Jesus Christ, it is certain that Muslims will not agree to this.⁴¹ Meanwhile, in another upload, Elia loudly explained that the books after the Injil were false, including the Qur'an. He explained that the Injils were perfect and completed in the 3rd century AD in the Proto-Canonical Catholic Church, so there were no more books revealed afterwards.⁴² Based on this, Elia hopes that the Ministry of Religious Affairs will reform the interpretation of the Qur'an with the aim of producing conduciveness so that there is no debate between Muslims and Christians. In addition, Elia also hopes that tolerance will be upheld in order to create and realize the sustainability of interfaith harmony in Indonesia. This was conveyed by Elia because -once again- the Taurat and the Injil believed by Muslims and Christians are two different things.

Insider/Outsider Perspectives: Exploring the Qur'anic Interpretation Reform Debate Elia Myron

⁴⁰ "Viewed on Youtube," n.d., https://youtu.be/z_NLX4rGntI?si=dBWYSg8ISw5Z1-Vn. Elia in the Tik Tok account, "Accessed on date Desember 20, 2023.

⁴¹ Elia in the Tik-Tok account, <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSNp9PMvm/>. "Accessed on date Desember 20, 2023," n.d.,

⁴² "View: <https://Vt.Tiktok.Com/ZSNpKUn2U/>," n.d., View: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSNpKUn2U/>.

Elia Myron's statement asking for reform of the interpretation of the Qur'an against the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia above - which is positioned as an *outsider*, has generated many responses from both netizens and experts. Seeing from the posting of his statement on Tik-Tok, the video managed to attract attention and has been watched by more than 7.4M, liked by 79.5K, and commented on no less than 91.2K, the most among his other posts. In the post asking for the reform of the Qur'an, Elia has received many responses from netizens with different perceptions. The author categorizes netizen perceptions of Elia's open letter to the Ministry of Religious Affairs into two, namely perceptions with positive and negative sentiments.

First, positive sentiment. Several narratives by netizens contain positive sentiments about Elia's explanation, highlighting his intelligence and wisdom in speaking, praying for Elia's efforts to reform the Qur'an, and full support for him to continue conveying the truth of Christianity. The following are examples of netizen comments that fall into the positive sentiment category:

UserID	Comment
05+	There are still people who don't understand, even though Elia's explanation is very easy to understand.
alexwan	That's the truth, it's painful for them to hear. Cheer up sis Elia.
Marilan Situmorang	Cheer up Elia... Jesus bless...
Longginus22 Minaisti	Good job bro Elia, smart...
ALFRED	Agree, do not hesitate to preach the truth.
Yentri Telaumbanua	Wahhh really cool explanation bang Elia, continue to preach the Injil of Christ. God bless, the peace of Christ be with us all.
Neng lidyas	Keep up the spirit to spread the truth of the Injil, Elia, don't be afraid, the Lord Jesus is always with you.

Second, negative sentiment. Netizen comments also contained narratives that tended to lead to negative sentiment and even hate speech. Some of these narratives did not understand Elia's explanation, responded to disagreements with Elia's views, and even attacked Elia personally. Examples of comments categorized as negative sentiment and hate speech can be seen below;

UserID	Comment
---	If later Allah SWT gives me the opportunity to fight directly against people who have insulted our religion (Islam), then the first person I look for is Elia.
K	Mas Elia looks like Thai artist Phan That
Xysaftr	I don't understand what you're talking about, Ms. Elia.
Ricookta_24	It's a good thing we have human rights. If not, you'd be long gone, Elia.
taehyungV	So what's the point of the letter. What are you asking for exactly, don't confuse people.
dewi anggraeni	The words "then, why and isn't it" are often used, which encapsulates a question that has not been understood, but is answered according to one's own version.
Gaza	Elia, this hurts the hearts of Muslims. <i>Hasbunallahu wanikmal wakil.</i>

From these two examples of netizen comments, the author assumes that the perception of netizens with positive sentiments are those who are Christians, who support Elia and represent his anxiety about the understanding of Jesus Christ who is considered the same as the Prophet Isa by Islamic teachings. While the perception of netizens with negative sentiments and even hate speech are people who are Muslim, where they feel offended by Elia's statement that he wants to reform the interpretation of the Qur'an by not including the teachings of the Injils as an explanation of the verses of the Qur'an. In fact, in Islam itself Jesus Christ is the Prophet Isa who is a messenger of God like the other prophets.

Elia's open letter to the Ministry of Religious Affairs regarding the reform of the Qur'an also received responses from experts. The author will present the various perceptions of experts with Kim Knott's *insider/outsider* perspective, where *insiders* are more aimed at Muslims and *outsiders* to Christians who each comment on Elia's open letter to the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The experts' narratives include explanations of Qur'anic verses and hadith, Injil accounts, as well as Islamic and Christian views on the universal truth of Jesus Christ and Isa Al-Masih.

1. *Outsider* perspective

Elia's open letter to the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs regarding the reformation of the interpretation of the Qur'an has caused tension in Indonesian society in general and among Muslims in particular. The reason is that Elia asked the Ministry of Religious Affairs to revise the interpretation of the Qur'an in order to eliminate references derived from the Taurat and Injil data. However, *outsider* perspectives -in this case Christians- do not fully support and justify Elia's statements. Pastor Esra Soru, for example, commented on Elia's suggestion to not only look at the differences between Jesus Christ and Isa Al-Masih, but also the similarities. Esra Soru explained that Jesus in the Qur'an has a mother named Maryam and a father named Yusuf (in Arabic), similar to the Hebrew names Maria and Yousef.

Furthermore, Soru explained further with a linguistic approach, that Arabic and Hebrew are cognate languages that have a very close relationship. For example, the words *Ullah*, *Illah*, *Allah*, and *Elloah* have similar meanings and are related to each other. The word *abodah*, used in Hebrew, turns into *Ibadah* in Arabic. The word *gahar* in Hebrew changes to *hajar* in Arabic. The word *gabriel* becomes *Jibril*. The hell of Jahannam in Hebrew called *gehena* changed to *Jahannam* in Arabic. Similarly, the word Isa, in Greek is called *iesous* and the Hebrew is *Yoshua*. In Christianity, *Yoshua* is *Jesus*. But due to the language sound connection, it changes from *Yoshua* to *Jesus* and *Jesus* to *Isa*. This is because Jesus can become *Hosea*, *Isaia*, and finally *Isa*. While the word *Al-Masih* in Arabic (where *al* is the article), is also called *Masiab* or *Hamasiab* in Hebrew (where *Ha* is the article like *al* in Arabic). In Greek, *Masih* (in Arabic) is the same as the *Messiah*, *Kristos*, so *Yoshua Hamasiab* is the same as *Jesus Christ*. Thus, according to Esra, based on a linguistic review, the name Jesus Christ in Christianity is the same as the name Isa Al-Masih in Islam. Isa and Jesus are the same in two religious teachings, but have different descriptions of the teachings. For Soru, what should be believed is that Christianity came before Islam.⁴³ In other posts, Soru continues to support and pray for Elia to remain safe in

⁴³ "View Youtube Account Pdt. Esra Alfred Soru: https://youtu.be/Prg93Fyr4c?si=-9_t4i1kguR5FKIF. Accessed on date Desember 20, 2023. The similarities between Jesus and Isa Al-Masih which were conveyed by Pastor Esra Soru were also emphasized by Pastor Mell Atock. https://www.youtube.com/live/Jyy1Xoew0zA?si=FoPY2qrs9DQ2_4iV." Accessed on date Desember 22, 2023., n.d.

God's protection, because despite the differences in views regarding Isa Al-Masih and Jesus Christ, Soru still supports, appreciates and salutes Elia's courage.⁴⁴

In contrast to Pastor Esra Soru who slightly contradicted Elia, the majority of Christians fully supported Elia's statements. For example, in Franz Baruz's Tik-Tok account, a Christian appears to defend Elia by responding to attacks directed at Elia. Baruz refutes the Islamic teaching that the Injils have been altered or even forged by earlier believers. Therefore, Christians have the right to respond to these Islamic accusations and Elia is a representative of those who follow Christianity. Baruz supports Elia that Isa Al-Masih and Jesus Christ are different persons based on historical facts. Christians already believe that the Injil is complete, perfect, and there are no more additions, as Islam believes. According to Faruz, the right of reply from Christianity should not be responded to further, because what is contained in Islamic teachings is very different from Christian teachings. This aims to uphold peace among religious communities in Indonesia.⁴⁵

Throughout the author's search, there is not much support in the form of narratives given to Elia. Instead, a lot of support from netizens is conveyed through comments on each post from him, such as providing support to always preach the Injil and prayers for goodness. Of course, there are not many narratives of support because Christians in Indonesia are a minority, so Elia, who is seen as brave to preach the Injil, is a representation for Christians in Indonesia.

In Kim Knott's *outsider* perspective, what Elia did by asking the Ministry of Religious Affairs to reform the interpretation of the Qur'an cannot be justified. This is because the *outsider* observer has control and plays a full role as an investigator in the context of research on religion.⁴⁶ As is known, Elia did not act as a pure researcher by going directly to understand Islam regarding the interpretation of QS. al-A'raf [7]: 157 which is seen as detrimental to Christians. Although the understanding of the verse contains the teachings of the Injil to support the emergence of the Prophet Muhammad after the Prophet Isa or Jesus Christ,⁴⁷ the verse only describes the teachings of Islam which in no way offends and blames Christianity. In this case, Elia arguably fails to understand the more detailed aspects of Islam that could compromise his position as an *outsider*.

2. *Insider* perspective

In this regard, quite a number of experts - in this case *insider*- have commented on Elia's statement through social media. Teungku Sakhra, for example, in his Tik-Tok account responded to Elia with a statement appreciating Christians who believe Jesus Christ is not the Isa Al-Masih in Islamic teachings. But in Islamic theology, continued Sakhra, Jesus is Prophet Isa who is a messenger of God who was given the book of the Injil to be a guide for the People of the Book. In his explanation, Sakhra mentioned the historical fact that the Injil had been distorted by the previous people before the Prophet Muhammad was sent.

⁴⁴ View Tik-Tok Account: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSNGepLPo/>. Elia in the Tik-Tok account, "Accessed on date Desember 22, 2023., n.d.

⁴⁵ "View Youtube Account Pdt. Esra Alfred Soru: https://youtu.be/Prg93Fyr4c4?si=-9_t4i1kguR5FKIF. Accessed on date Desember 22, 2023.," n.d.

⁴⁶ Michael W. Morris, Kwok Leung, Daniel Ames, Brian Lickel, "Views from Inside and Outside: Integrating Emic and Etic Insights about Culture and Justice Judgment", *Academy of Management Review*, 24, no. 4 (1999), h. 781–796.

⁴⁷ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan dan Keserasian al-Qur'an*, (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2007), Vol. 5, h. 268-269.

Therefore, the revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet - one of them - was intended to correct the mistakes of the previous people -Bani Israil- who had distorted the Injil.⁴⁸

Sakhra quotes from the Qur'an to answer Elia's statement, namely QS. al-Nisa' [4]: 171: "*O People of the Book, do not exceed the limits in your religion, and do not speak against Allah except what is true. Indeed, Jesus, the son of Mary, is a messenger of Allah and was created by His word which He spoke to Mary, and a spirit from Him. so believe in Allah and His Messengers and do not say, "There are three gods," cease (from saying that). (That is better for you. Verily, Allah is the One Lord, glorified is He from having children. To Him belongs what is in the heavens and what is in the earth, and Allah is sufficient as a protector.*"

Indeed, the verse is talking about Jesus who was actually a messenger of Allah who was later deified by the Christians. Contemporary philosopher Wahbah al-Zuhaili interprets this verse, that the Christians have gone beyond the limits and excessiveness regarding the Prophet Isa until they deify him (make him a god). They transferred Isa's status as a Prophet to become a god other than Allah SWT. In fact, the Christians are also excessive towards the followers of Isa who claim that their position is higher than the religion of Isa. Al-Zuhaili also asserted that Isa Al-Masih was a messenger of Allah to the Bani Israil, who was ordered to make the Bani Israil worship and glorify Allah, forbid them from shirk and trinity, call them to piety and zuhud against the world, and proclaim the good news that there will be a closing of the prophets and apostles, namely the Prophet Muhammad SAW.⁴⁹

Another example of an *insider*, a Tik-Tok account by the name of Nisrina, also refutes Elia's argument. She understands the view and will continue to be a debate that Christianity according to Muslims is wrong and Islam according to Christians is also wrong, in the sense that the teachings of Islam and Christianity are true according to their respective beliefs. However, Nisrina was infuriated when Elia entered the realm of policy by asking the Ministry of Religious Affairs to reform the interpretation of the Qur'an using the Injil. There are at least three arguments presented by Nisrina to refute Elia. *First*, Muslims believe that the Qur'an has completed the previous books, namely the Taurat and the Injil, as well as believing that some of these books have been changed by predecessors (not falsified), so that Islam is still allowed to quote the book as long as it does not conflict with the creed or beliefs of Islamic teachings.

Secondly, the use of the Injil to interpret the Qur'an is the same as Christians using the Old Testament, which in fact is a book revealed to the Yahudi or the Bani Israil to justify the Injil. In other words, the Yahudi who do not recognize the existence of Jesus Christ, the book is used by Christians to justify Christianity with the Lord Jesus. Nisrina emphasized this to Elia so as not to blame the Qur'an for quoting the Injil, just as Christians are not blamed when quoting Yahudi books. *Third*, if there are verses of the Qur'an used to interpret the Injil, for example, Muslims have no problem with this. However, when the Qur'an is used to justify the Trinity, for Nisrina, it is something wrong and funny because the Prophet Muhammad according to Christians is a false Prophet, including the book of the Qur'an he brought.⁵⁰

There are many more counter-narratives or warnings from Muslims directed at Elia. A brief sample of these narratives can be seen in the following table;

⁴⁸ "View Tik-Tok Account FranzBaruz: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSNsQjFC3/>. Accessed on date Desember 20, 2023." (n.d.).

⁴⁹ "Wahbah Al-Zuhaili, *Tafsir Al-Munir Fi Al-'Aqidah Wa Al-Syariah Wa Al-Manhaj*, (Beirut: Dar Al-Fikr, 2009), Jilid III, 392.," n.d.

⁵⁰ "View Tik-Tok Nisrina: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSNsxGpVn/>. Accessed on date Desember 20, 2023," n.d.

UserID/ Account	Rebuttal/Warning
Bungsu101	Warning against activities on social media that discuss or review other people's religions (read: Islam).
Rizqi Habibullah	Arguing that the interpretation of the Qur'an is not only a theological assumption, but rather a 'skill' that must be accompanied by an understanding of a set of Qur'anic sciences.
Andi Halifa	It is argued that Elia is the embryo of religious debate and division in Indonesia, having entered and brought Islamic teachings.
Agus Yendrawan	The warning that Muslims love death more than the teachings of Islam must be changed. Elia must guard his tongue and never interfere with the teachings of Islam.
Teungku Muslim Yusva	The warning that Elia should speak about Christian theology alone, there is no need to interfere with Islamic theology which Elia himself does not know the historical facts about.

Some of the narratives of rebuttal or warning from *insiders* to Elia above appear diverse. Overall, Muslims responded that Elia should not interfere in the affairs and teachings of Islam, especially to the extent of asking the Ministry of Religious Affairs to reform the interpretation of the Qur'an. Muslims were furious and many were even hurt by Elia's open letter. However, this rebuttal and warning to Elia, actually wants to emphasize the importance of maintaining diversity and tolerance between religious communities, and emphasizes the need to understand each other's religions deeply without having to consider the teachings of other religions wrong.

The context of the Muslim rebuttal to Elia, in Kim Knott's perspective, is not *insider* research. This is because *insider* researchers are often placed in a stronger or more powerful position. What *insider* researchers need to recognize is that it is difficult to remain uninvolved and impartial when conducting research on religion, regardless of how hard they try to maintain objectivity. Religion is often deeply personal and sensitive to individuals, and engaging research in these aspects can pose significant challenges.⁵¹ Therefore, *insider* and *outsider* researchers in the study of religion are often challenged to find a balance between understanding religion deeply and maintaining an objective scientific perspective.

Analysis of Elia Myron's Open letter: Tolerance or Intolerance?

In his Tik-Tok account, Elia still often posts videos explaining Christianity, both in the form of responses to those who blaspheme him and videos in the form of Christian insights. However, what Elia said has actually been refuted by the arguments presented by the Mualaf -who used to be Christian and now converted to Islam. For example, former pastor Dantje Mumeke, through his YouTube account, often voices that Islam is the last religion that is more favored by Allah Almighty. According to him, after comparing the two books of the Qur'an and the Bible, it is the word of God that has given revelation to Jesus Christ, so the religion of Islam with the holy book of the Qur'an is a perfection for the previous holy books.⁵²

Another former Christian convert, Dondy Tan, also refuted Elia Myron's argument by referring to the Bible. He responded to Elia through a PodCast event between himself and

⁵¹ Kim Knott, "Inside, Outside and the Space in-between: Territories and Boundaries in the Study of Religion", *Temenos - Nordic Journal for Study of Religion* 44, no. 1 (2008), Article 1.

⁵² "View Tik-Tok account Nisrina: <https://youtu.be/WaAMBBalh4?si=mqHVZLJA3adyBs-l>. Accessed on date Desember 22, 2023."

Ari Untung on the youtube account "Cerita Untungs". According to him, the Qur'an and the Bible are two different holy books, where the Qur'an is the completion of the Bible. Therefore, it is not surprising that the verses of the Qur'an contain the same explanations as the previous holy books, including in the interpretation of QS. al-A'raf [7]: 157.⁵³ In addition, in another PodCast, Dandy Ton emphasized that the content of the Qur'an is different and does not plagiarize the Bible, as Elia stated, because there are many contradictions between the content of the Bible and the Qur'an. In the Bible, there is a story that Prophet Nuh was drunk drinking wine while naked, Prophet Harun made a statue of a cow (idol) to be worshiped, Prophet Daud committed adultery with Binor, Prophet Sulaiman was a polytheist, Prophet Ayyub was tested by God and blamed Him, and Prophet Luth who impregnated two of his daughters. According to Dandy, these stories of the Prophet are very contrary to the stories told by the Qur'an. Thus, it is clear that the Qur'an is a holy book that is truly the word of God without any human intervention.⁵⁴

Elia's open letter to the Ministry of Religious Affairs asking to reform the interpretation of the Qur'an has become a hot and viral conversation in Indonesia. The reason is that Elia is not only in direct contact with Indonesian Muslims⁵⁵, who are the largest Muslim population in the world, but also directly related to the policies of the Ministry of Religion. As is known, the Ministry of Religious Affairs is a government institution that accommodates all religions in Indonesia in carrying out the religious activities of religious people in the national life system. As an effort to reconcile religious communities, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has echoed Religious Moderation which is considered to ward off radicalism and always prioritizes a tolerant attitude in differences and is open in appreciating differences.⁵⁶ There are four indicators of Religious Moderation that must be considered by religious communities in Indonesia, namely: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation to local culture. These four indicators can be used to recognize how strong religious moderation is practiced by someone in Indonesia, and how much great vulnerability. These vulnerabilities need to be recognized so that they can be recognized and exploited appropriate steps to carry out strengthening religious moderation.⁵⁷

Tolerance itself is fundamental to the development of inclusive societies and democratic governance. Tolerance is defined as the willingness to extend human rights and civil liberties to all external groups and includes justice, equality, empathy, and consideration of the suffering of others.⁵⁸ Tolerance is open to outside groups so that an attitude of mutual respect, mutual respect and not imposing the will of others is embedded.⁵⁹ In religious life, tolerant behavior is a major prerequisite for every individual who wants a form of life together that is safe and mutually respectful.⁶⁰ In this way, it is hoped that there will also be good interaction and understanding among religious communities regarding the limits of

⁵³ "View Youtube Cerita Untungs: <https://youtu.be/Kb8dlvu8uGk?si=GR2uRT1VsJpayEby>. Accessed on date Desember 25, 2023,," n.d.

⁵⁴ "View, https://youtube.com/shorts/srEhPvkTMuw?si=S0DE_p7FM9n3-nB. Accessed on date Desember 25, 2023,," n.d.

⁵⁵ Sukma Umbara Tirta Firdaus, "Pembaharuan Pendidikan Islam Ala Harun Nasution (Sebuah Refleksi Akan Kerinduan "Keemasan Islam")", *El-Furqania* 5, no. 2 (2017): 168.

⁵⁶ Hadi Pajarianto, et al *Tolerance between Religions through the Role of Local Wisdom and Religious Moderation*, 2022.

⁵⁷ Kementerian Agama RI, *Kementerian Agama RI Moderasi Beragama*, (Jakarta: Kementerian Agama, 2019), 42.

⁵⁸ Rivka T. Witenberg, *The Psychology of Tolerance: Conception and Development*, (T.tp: Springer, 2019).

⁵⁹ Rakhmad Ardi, et al, "Religious schema and tolerance towards alienated groups in Indonesia", *Helijon* 7, no. 7 (2021): 2.

⁶⁰ Khotimah, "Toleransi Beragama", *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 20, no. 2 (2013): 214.

their rights and obligations in social life which consists of various kinds of differences, including ethnicity, race, religion and belief.⁶¹

However, due to the knowledge and maturity of people who lack tolerance, religious issues often trigger the birth of horizontal conflicts. Not a few socio-religious and cultural conflicts have emerged, thus triggering attitudes of intolerance. In a country that adheres to religious freedom, such as Indonesia itself, there have been several examples of this kind of conflict.⁶² There are at least four main things that are sources of social conflict and intolerance that originate from religion, namely; differences in doctrine and mental attitudes, differences in ethnicity and race of religious adherents, differences in cultural levels, as well as problems with majority and minority religious groups.⁶³

Referring to Elia's attitude, which is brave enough to disturb the teachings of Islam by asking for a revision of the interpretation of QS. al-A'raf [7]: 157, because it contains references to the Injil to support the appearance of Prophet Muhammad after Prophet Isa or Jesus Christ, can be considered as an act of intolerance. Although Elia himself claims that his actions include tolerance and asks for tolerance from Muslims so as not to use the Injil as a reference for the interpretation of the Qur'an, but what he did has made noise and caused division between Muslims and Christians. After all, Elia, who was a Christian who only referred to the interpretation of QS. al-A'raf [7]: 157, will never be able to understand Islamic theology as a whole, let alone those related to the verses of the Qur'an which have been clearly authentic since they were revealed during the Prophet's time until now.⁶⁴

Elia's action in sending an open letter to the Ministry of Religious Affairs cannot be justified as a request for tolerance. It should be, in accordance with Elia's own statement and contained in the Qur'an: "for you your religion and for me my religion" (QS. al-Kafirun [109]: 6), Elia does not need to discuss in depth the teachings of Islam and the interpretation of the Qur'an. As for the Qur'anic verse that announces the coming of Prophet Muhammad after Prophet Isa, it is an implicit expression of the word of God that Muslims believe in and is the basis of Islamic theology. In this case, Elia should not be concerned and ask to reform the interpretation of the Qur'an because it is not part of Christian beliefs. Based on this, indirectly, Elia has created an embryo of intolerance of religious harmony in Indonesia through his viral statements on Tik-Tok and other social media.

Conclusion

From the brief description above, this article concludes that the issue of Elia Myron sending an open letter to the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs to reform the interpretation of the Qur'an from Kim Knott's *insider/outsider* perspective is seen as dividing religious communities in Indonesia. Although Elia has the support of the majority of Christians (*outsiders*) and claims that his request to the Ministry of Religious Affairs specifically to revise the interpretation of QS. al-A'raf [7]: 157 is an act of tolerance, in fact what he did was an act of intolerance that could damage harmony between Muslims and Christians. From an *insider's* perspective, Elia is seen as interfering too much with Islamic teachings and ignoring one of the indicators of religious moderation promoted by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, namely tolerance. Some of the posts uploaded by Elia on his Tik-Tok

⁶¹ Adeng Mukhtar Ghazali, "Toleransi Beragama Dan Kerukunan Dalam Perspektif Islam", *Religions: Jurnal Agama dan Lintas Budaya* 1, no. 1 (2016): 28.

⁶² Joachim Wach, *Sociology of Religion*, (London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 35.

⁶³ Eko Digdoyo, "Kajian Isu Toleransi Beragama, Budaya, dan Tanggung Jawab Sosial Media", *Jurnal Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan* 3, no. 1 (2018): 47-48.

⁶⁴ The Writing of the Qur'an after the Prophet and Being Proof That the Qur'an Is Authentic Can Be Read in the Chapter *Jam'u Al-Qur'an*, Manna' Al-Qaththan, *Mabahits Fi Ulum Al-Qur'an*, (Kairo: Maktabah Wahbah, T.th) n.d.

account and other social media have indirectly become an embryo of intolerance of inter-religious harmony, especially between Muslims and Christians.

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