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From Superiority to Universalism: The Genealogical Transformation of *Ummatan Wasaṭan* in Egyptian Tafsīr Tradition

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Abstract: The Qur'anic verse of Al-Baqarah [2]:143 has experienced considerable semantic evolution within the Egyptian exegetical tradition, transitioning from a representation of Muslim communal superiority in the classical era to a foundation for the discourse of wasatiyyah (moderate) Islam in the 21st century. This article investigates the genealogical shift by exploring interpretations of the phrase *ummatan wasatan* through five generations of Egyptian scholars: al-Suyūṭī (15th century), Muḥammad 'Abduh (early 20th century), Muḥammad Muḥammad al-Madanī (mid-20th century), Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha' rāwī (late 20th century), and Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (21st century). By employing a qualitative-interpretive approach based on genealogical-hermeneutic and ideological analysis, the study outlines four phases of semantic development. Initially, during the classical era (al-Suyūṭī), the passage functioned as a doctrinal endorsement of the Muslim community's supremacy. Secondly, during Egypt's modernisation era (Abduh), it turned into a means for internal criticism against the ummah's stagnation. Thirdly, in the context of colonialism and contemporary ideological conflicts (al-Madanī and al-Sha' rāwī), the verse was used as an ideological defence against Western influence and an epistemic foundation for establishing a *manhaj wasaṭī* (moderate methodology). And lastly, in the post-9/11 globalisation age (al-Qaraḍāwī), its meaning expanded to include a diplomatic-ethical concept reflecting tolerance, plurality, and interfaith cooperation within a global context. This study suggests that socio-political circumstances and the ideological orientations of its interpreters consistently influence Qur'anic exegesis. Therefore, the shift from theological exclusivity to ethical universalism exemplifies the dynamic interaction among sacred texts, social realities, and ideological interests within contemporary Islamic exegetical tradition.

Keywords: Quranic Interpretation; Ummatan Wasatan; Egyptian Tafsir; Ideological Transformation; Moderate Islam.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana platform digital merekonfigurasi sistem isnād Islam klasik, berkontribusi pada pembahasan transformasi otoritas keagamaan di era digital. Isnād—secara tradisional merupakan rantai guru-murid linear yang menetapkan kredibilitas akademik—menghadapi tantangan dalam konteks kontemporer di mana kedekatan fisik tidak lagi menjadi penentu utama dalam pengajaran keagamaan. Menggunakan metodologi studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis CariUstadz.id melalui wawancara, analisis dokumen, dan pengamatan platform. Temuan menunjukkan rekonseptualisasi sistem isnād secara sistematis melalui dua mekanisme. Pertama, Dewan Ahli (Majelis Dewan Pakar) platform melakukan verifikasi terpusat, berfungsi sebagai dewan verifikasi fatwa digital yang melakukan penilaian kredensial yang ketat sebelum memberikan dukungan. Kedua, tampilan publik yang transparan dari kredensial yang diverifikasi membuat legitimasi akademik segera dapat diakses. Mekanisme ganda ini mempertahankan prinsip klasik—kelanjutan transmisi (al-tasalsul) dan kredibilitas akademik (maqbuliyyah)—sambil menyesuaikannya secara digital: rantai linier digantikan oleh otentikasi terpusat yang difasilitasi teknologi, menjaga ketatnya epistemic tanpa

kehadiran fisik. Rekonfigurasi ini berdampak signifikan pada praktik Islam kontemporer. Dengan menginstitutionalkan verifikasi yang sebelumnya tertanam dalam hubungan pribadi, platform ini mendemokratisasi akses ke bimbingan yang terverifikasi sambil mempertahankan standar. Platform digital berfungsi sebagai lembaga perantara yang menghubungkan transmisi pengetahuan klasik dengan realitas teknologi, memastikan aksesibilitas dan keaslian dalam lanskap keagamaan yang semakin terdigitalisasi.

Kata kunci: Sistem Isnad Baru; Otoritas Keagamaan Islam; Platform CariUstadz.id; Platform Keagamaan Digital; Kredibilitas Akademik.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]:143 has frequently been associated with the discourse of *wasatiyah Islam*. This association stems principally from the phrase *ummatan wasatan* found in the verse. However, when we review early classical tafsir literature, this verse does not articulate any specific Islamic discourse, assuming that *wasatiyah* can even be described as a distinct Islamic genre. Ibn ‘Abbas (d. 687 CE), for instance, interpreted the word *wasat* in this phrase as *al-‘adl* (justice). Senior exegetes like Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE), Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Tha‘labī (d. 1035 CE), and Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar ibn Aḥmad al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1143 CE) offered interpretations that were mostly in line with that of Ibn ‘Abbas, albeit with additional semantic options such as *al-khiyār*, which means the chosen community. In general, the meanings that were produced during this time tended to emphasise how much more superior the Muslim community was than “others”, especially the other two Abrahamic religions (al-Ṭabarī, 2001; Al-Ṣa‘labī, 2002; al-Zamakhsharī, 1987).

This then raises an important question: when did *ummatan wasata* come to be associated with what is today known as *Islam wasatiyah*, moderate Islam, tolerant Islam, or the middle-path Islam? How did this semantic transition take place, and what elements contributed to its development? Several studies have attempted to address these questions. Nevertheless, their engagement with Qur’an 2:143 predominantly signifies a certain epistemic phase, specifically, a period during which the verse had already been associated with the discourse of *Islam wasatiyah*. Asma Afsaruddin, for instance, seeks to explore values of moderation in two verses, Qur’an 2:143 and Qur’an 5:66. Her study seeks to reestablish moderation and pluralism as universal principles of the Qur’an. In doing so, Afsaruddin draws on both classical and modern exegetical authorities, including al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE), Ibn Kathīr (d. 1374 CE), Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905 CE), Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966 CE), and Abū al-A‘lā al-Mawdūdī (d. 1979) (Afsaruddin, 2009). However, her research does not engage key figures such as Muḥammad Muḥammad al-Madani and Abū Zahra, who are well-known for being some of the first scholars to conceptualise *Islam wasatiyah* as a distinct term (Kamali, 2015).

In a similar vein to Afsaruddin, Mu‘ammar Qadafi Zain examines *ummatan wasata* through four classical Qur’anic commentaries: al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE), al-Tha‘labī (d. 1035 CE), al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1143 CE), and Ibn ‘Aṭīyah. He then correlates these interpretations to the contemporary campaign for religious moderation in Indonesia. Mu‘ammar points out that there is a prevailing tendency among Indonesian intellectuals to privilege the meaning of *al-‘adl* (justice) more than the alternative meaning of *al-khiyār* (the chosen community), which conveys notions of Muslim excellence and superiority, despite them having been supported by three senior exegetes: al-Tha‘labī, al-Zamakhsharī, and Ibn ‘Aṭīyah. Mu‘ammar claims that this latter meaning needs further elaboration in the Indonesian context, as it could contribute to the construction of a more competitive and accomplished Indonesia (Zayn Qadafy, 2024).

A study with a much broader scope is offered by Mohammad Hashim Kamali in *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam: The Qur'anic Principle of Wasatiyyah*. In this work, Kamali seeks to extract the concepts of *wasatiyyah* from the two principal sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the Sunnah, alongside the contributions of other Muslim scholars (Kamali, 2015). Bettina Gräf, Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, and Sagi Polka also write about how Yusuf al-Qaraḍāwī (d. 2022 CE) helped spread the idea of Islam *wasatiyah* among Muslims all over the world (Gräf & Skovgaard-Petersen, 2009; Polka, 2019). These works are especially helpful for analysing the contemporary context of the *Islam wasatiyah* discourse and its connection to Qur'an 2:143. Finally, some more research attempts to demonstrate that the idea of *Islam wasatiyah* is inherently embedded in Qur'an 2:143. These studies typically rely on a single tafsir or a specific hermeneutical approach (Habibie, 2023; Islam & Rahmi, 2024; Ramadhan et al., 2020; Saleh & Fatcholli, 2022).

When looked at together, these studies have substantially enriched contemporary scholarly discussions of Qur'an 2:143, particularly in relation to the concept of *Islam wasatiyah*. Nevertheless, a significant portion of the existing literature reflects a specific epistemic moment and often assumes this interpretation as a given. This study adopts an alternative methodology by analysing the transformations and shifts in the interpretation of Qur'an 2:143, while also investigating how these alterations are influenced by the socio-political contexts of the exegetes who articulated them. Rather than seeking to demonstrate that the Qur'an inherently advocates moderation, tolerance, or a middle path, this research analyses how particular exegetical formulations are produced and mobilised to meet the demands of specific historical circumstances. Accordingly, it asks: when did Qur'an 2:143 become linked to the discourse of *Islam wasatiyah*? Does this linkage marginalise or displace earlier understandings of *ummatan wasatan*? Who are the key actors involved in shaping this discourse, and what interests does it serve? These questions constitute the central focus of this study.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative–interpretive approach, using genealogical–hermeneutical analysis and ideological critique as its principal analytical tools. The main sources of this research are Egyptian scholarly interpretations of Qur'an Surah Al-Baqarah [2]:143 generated between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries. The Egyptian exegetical tradition is selected for several important reasons. First, the concept of *wasatiyah* as a normative idea initially developed among al-Azhar scholars from the 1950s. Muḥammad Muḥammad al-Madani (d. 1968) is thought to be the first figure to author a work entitled *Wasatiyyat al-Islām*, which implicitly highlights the idea of *wasatiyah* (al-Madani, n.d.; Kamali, 2015). Second, Egypt's position as a prominent hub of Islamic education has made al-Azhar influential not only at the local level but also as a principal generator of discourse for the global Muslim community (Bano, 2015). For this reason, al-Azhar can be considered a genealogical hub of the Islamic *wasatiyah* discourse.

The analysis is conducted diachronically, focusing on the key concept of *ummatan wasatan* in Qur'an 2:143. The semantic evolution of this phrase serves as the basis for deriving analytical conclusions. The discussion begins with the fifteenth-century commentary *al-Durr al-Manthūr* by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505 CE), which is a well-known example of classical exegetical work. It then goes on to talk about *Tafsīr al-Manār* by Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905 CE) and *Tafsīr al-Sha'rawī*, which is based on the lectures of Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rawī (d. 1988 CE). Both of these works show how modern

Qur'anic exegesis has changed in Egypt. In addition, two thematic works, *Wasatiyyat al-Islām* by Muḥammad Muḥammad al-Madani (d. 1968 CE) and *Kalimat fī al-Wasatiyyah al-Islāmiyyah wa Ma'ālimihā* by Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (d. 2022 CE), are chosen as examples of how people today think about the idea of *Islam wasatiyah*. The inclusion of these two latter figures exemplifies the dual themes of continuity and transformation in the articulation of *wasatiyah* within the Egyptian exegetical tradition.

For the genealogical analysis, this article adopts the framework suggested by Walid Saleh, conceptualising tafsir as a genealogy tradition. In Saleh's definition, "genealogical" refers to the dialectical relationship that any exegetical work has with preceding interpretations. This relationship, however, does not necessarily take the form of simple repetition or citation. Rather, meanings can be preserved, reduced, or elaborated as time progresses (Saleh, 2004). Tafsir exists within its broader cultural and traditional context, the milieu in which it is produced, indicating that no exegetical work can be considered isolated from its historical setting (Saleh, 2004). Accordingly, this study situates each exegete within their specific social context while examining their interactions with and reconfiguration of prior exegetical authorities.

Table 1. Mapping of Egyptian Qur'anic Exegetes Examined in This Study

Figure and Work	Year of Death	Type of Work	Tafsir Approach
Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (<i>al-Durr al-Manthūr</i>)	1505 CE	Classical Quranic Commentary	Transmitted Tradition (<i>tafsir bil-ma'tsur</i>)
Muhammad Abduh (<i>Tafsir Al-Manar</i>)	1905 CE	Modern Quranic Commentary	Rational, reformist
Muḥammad Muḥammad al-Madani (<i>Wasatiyyat Al-Islam</i>)	1966 CE	Thematic Study	Conceptual, Thematic
Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī (<i>Tafsir Al-Sha'rawi</i>)	1988 CE	Popular Quranic Commentary	Spiritual, Reflective
Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (<i>Kalimāt fī al-Wasatiyyah al-Islāmiyyah wa Ma'ālimihā</i>)	2022 CE	Thematic Study	Contextual, Applied

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This article argues that Qur'an 2:143 has experienced considerable semantic evolution, particularly throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These shifts are largely driven by the social, economic, political, and cultural challenges that Muslim communities have to deal with, especially during the colonial period when Muslim cultures and Western powers interacted more. The interpretations advanced by Muslim scholars have consistently responded to the concrete needs and concerns of their communities. However, these developments do not represent a break from earlier exegetical traditions. Rather, they remain grounded in foundational interpretations of Qur'an 2:143, including *al-'adl* (justice), *al-khiyār* (the chosen community), and *al-wasaṭ bayna al-ṭarafayn* (a position between two extremes).

Ummatan Wasatan as an Affirmation of the Superiority of the Muslim Community

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (1445–1505 CE), whose full name is Jalāl al-Dīn Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, was born about 150 years after the Mongol invasion of Baghdad. In the aftermath of Baghdad's fall, the Ilkhanid forces repeatedly attempted to

expand into Egypt. At that time, however, Egypt was under Mamluk rule, and the Mamluk dynasty successfully repelled these incursions while preserving and revitalising key institutions of Islamic civilisation that had collapsed in Baghdad (Hitti, 2005). The Mamluks initially consisted of enslaved individuals who were purchased by the state and subjected to rigors military and intellectual training. Over time, they transformed into a powerful ruling elite. Within this social and political structure, al-Suyūṭī occupied a position of notable prestige. His father had strong ties to the Mamluk authorities, which made al-Suyūṭī's position in Egypt's scholarly and political circles even stronger (Hamūdah, 1989).

Egyptian society during this period was highly stratified and socially diverse. The Mamluks stood at the apex of this hierarchy and exercised considerable influence over state affairs, at times even overshadowing the authority of the sultan. Alongside them were the ulama, scribes, literati, and judges, who played key administrative roles, served as *qāḍīs*, and enjoyed privileged positions within the state apparatus. Their relationship with the ruling elite was not merely one of subordination; in certain contexts, these scholarly figures emerged as vocal critics of the government, particularly in response to unjust or illegitimate policies (Hamūdah, 1989).

Moreover, the ulama themselves were far from a unified body. Internal disagreements were frequent, and their stances regarding Mamluk authority varied considerably. This complex and contested social environment appears to have shaped al-Suyūṭī's reading of Qur'an 2:143, a connection that will be explored in the following discussion. In his interpretation of Qur'an 2:143, al-Suyūṭī privileges the meaning of *al-ʿadl* (justice) in explaining the term *wasat*. He neither develops a detailed conceptual discussion of *al-ʿadl* nor presents alternative interpretive possibilities, in contrast to his predecessor al-Ṭabarī. A close reading of al-Ṭabarī's tafsīr reveals that he proposed multiple meanings of *wasat*, including *al-khiyār* (the chosen community). Al-Ṭabarī also characterised the Muslim community as situated in a central position between the perceived extremes of the other two Abrahamic faiths: Christians are described as *ahl al-ghulūw*, accused of excess due to the deification of Jesus, whereas Jews are termed *ahl al-taqṣīr*, indicating those who fall short or decline (al-Ṭabarī, 2001). This interpretive pattern was widely adopted by exegetes close to al-Ṭabarī's era, such as Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Thaʿlabī (d. 1035 CE) (Al-Šaʿlabī, 2002) and Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1143 CE) (al-Zamakhsharī, 1987).

This change does not mean that al-Suyūṭī was detached from al-Ṭabarī or earlier ways of interpreting texts. On the contrary, in *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufasssīrīn*, al-Suyūṭī explicitly refers to al-Ṭabarī as the "father of the exegetes" (*raʾs al-mufasssīrīn*). This intellectual indebtedness is seen in his own work, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, which utilises three of the four transmitted reports for the interpretation of this verse, directly sourced from al-Ṭabarī, with the remaining reports credited to Abū Saʿīd al-Manṣūr (al-Suyūṭī, 2003). Nevertheless, a significant difference remains between the two scholars, particularly in the scope of interpretive options they foreground. Unlike al-Ṭabarī, al-Suyūṭī no longer focuses on the Jewish and Christian communities in his exposition of the verse.

Al-Suyūṭī's interpretive preference is closely linked to the socio-political conditions of Mamluk Egypt. By his time, Jewish and Christian communities no longer represented a major religious or political threat to Islam. As Hamūdah notes, they constituted relatively small minority populations, socially positioned below the ulama, with their numbers estimated at twenty thousand. This marginal status often exposed them to discriminatory treatment by the Mamluk authorities (Hamūdah, 1989). At the same time, Egypt's strategic

position at the intersection of East and West attracted diverse groups seeking economic opportunity, including merchants and artisans, thereby producing a relatively plural social landscape in which al-Suyūṭī was formed (Hamūdah, 1989).

Furthermore, although memories of the Crusades had not entirely disappeared, the dominant concern of the Muslim community during al-Suyūṭī's lifetime was the defence of Egypt against Mongol incursions. This changed the way people thought about the main "other", from Jews and Christians to the Mongols. In this context, al-Suyūṭī's choice to not foreground Jewish and Christian communities in his interpretation of Qur'an 2:143 makes historical sense.

Table 2. Meanings of *Wasat* and Interpretive Tendencies among Selected Exegetes: A Comparisan Between Al-Suyuthi and Al-Tabari

<i>Mufasir</i> (Exegete)	Meaning of <i>wasat</i>	Interpretive Tendency	Jews and Christians	Relationship to Earlier <i>Tafsir</i>
Jalal al-Din al-Suyuthi	<i>al-'adl</i> (justice)	Superiority of the Muslim community	Not explicitly discussed, as they were no longer perceived as a major threat to Islam	Three of the four transmitted reports are cited from al-Tabari
Al-Tabari	<i>al-khiyar</i> (the chosen community), <i>al-'adl</i> (justice), <i>al-juz'</i> <i>bain al-tarfain</i> (the middle between two extremes)	Superiority of the Muslim community	Jews: <i>ahl al-taqṣir</i> (those who fall short); Christians: <i>ahl al-ghulūw</i> (those who exaggerate)	Employs multiple and varied transmitted reports

The table above shows how a *tafsir* text enters into a dialectical relationship with earlier exegetical works. When seen through a genealogical lens, these commentaries appear not as isolated interpretations but as participants in an ongoing and dynamic dialogue. Al-Suyūṭī continues to depend on narrations passed down by al-Ṭabarī, but he also narrows the range of interpretations and strengthens a single dominant meaning (al-Suyūṭī, 2003). In this regard, Walid Saleh argues that al-Suyūṭī functions as an active exegetical agent engaged in a process of retention, reduction, and innovation. He maintains earlier interpretations, evaluates them critically, and ultimately privileges the meaning that most closely corresponds with his own socio-historical context. His work demonstrates that even *tafsir* based on transmitted reports (*bi al-ma'thūr*) - traditionally regarded in Sunni scholarship as the most authoritative exegetical mode - remains shaped by *tafsir bi al-ra'y* (reasoned judgement), especially when it comes to selecting and prioritising reports and meanings.

Nevertheless, the impulse to affirm the superiority of the Muslim community over "others" does not entirely disappear in al-Suyūṭī's commentary. This is clear in how he understands the next part of Qur'an 2:143, which says *li-takūnū shuhadā' 'alā al-nās*. Al-Suyūṭī understands this phrase as affirming the moral and spiritual superiority of the Muslim community vis-à-vis others, a superiority grounded primarily in eschatological concepts specifically their esteemed position as witnesses on the Day of Judgement. In a report attributed to Abū Sa'īd, for example, it is narrated that on the Day of Judgement the Prophet Noah will be questioned about whether he conveyed God's message. After

affirming that he did, God asks Noah's community for confirmation, which they deny. Noah is then asked, "Who will testify on your behalf?" He replies, "Muḥammad and his community" (*Muḥammadun wa ummatuhu*) (al-Suyūṭī, 2003). Al-Suyūṭī cites several similar reports to validate this interpretation.

Al-Suyūṭī's method of interpreting texts can also be understood as a way to make the meaning more stable. Al-Suyūṭī's tafsīr differs from earlier remarks, which Saleh calls "encyclopaedic" since they include many different ways to understand something. Instead, al-Suyūṭī's tafsīr follows a *madrasa*-style approach that sets a single, authoritative meaning (Saleh, 2004, 2013). This inclination aligns with the greater intellectual advancements of his time. At this point, Hamūdah observes that during this period, *taqlīd* (adherence to existing authorities) became more important, and scholarly work shifted towards the *ḥāshiyah* genre, which focused on commentary and refining instead of making new synthetic works (Hamūdah, 1989). As a result, al-Suyūṭī's tafsīr serves both as a bridge and as a narrowing point within the exegetical tradition. While it maintains continuity with earlier authorities, it also establishes a stable interpretive baseline. The meaning he consolidates thus becomes a genealogical "zero point" from which later Egyptian exegetes would draw and further develop their interpretations, a continuity that will become apparent in the discussion of subsequent commentators.

Ummatan Wasatan: An Internal Critique of the Muslim Community

When Muḥammad 'Abduh began to formulate and articulate his ideas, Egypt was undergoing a profound wave of transformation. Under the leadership of Ismail Pasha, the state actively pursued modernization through the introduction of new legal frameworks, the establishment of modern schools, and the emergence of new political institutions. These changes also generated a wide range of social, legal, and cultural challenges that had never been imagined by earlier Muslim communities. 'Abduh became deeply involved in these debates, at least from the 1870s until the end of his life, and he was convinced that the spirit of reform was both inevitable and ultimately beneficial for Egypt (Hourani, 1983).

Like his mentor Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, 'Abduh's intellectual project was rooted in an acute awareness of internal decline within Muslim societies and the urgent need to revive strength from within. He believed that the Prophet Muḥammad was not sent merely for individual salvation, but also to establish an ideal social order. Over time, however, changing historical conditions confronted societies and their leaders with new problems that were not directly addressed in prophetic teachings. As a result, practices emerged that appeared to conflict with Islamic values (Hourani, 1983). In response, 'Abduh strongly advocated *ijtihād* (independent reasoning), rejected *taqlīd* (emulation), and promoted a rational engagement with Islam (Haj, 2008).

This intellectual foundation profoundly shaped 'Abduh's understanding of Islam, including his approach to the Qur'an (Saeed, 2014). He sharply criticized the dominant modes of Qur'anic interpretation circulating within Muslim communities. In his view, tafsir had been reduced to a display of specialized expertise, where each interpreter approached the Qur'an through the narrow lens of their own discipline. Linguists focused extensively on language, jurists on legal rulings, and so on. For 'Abduh, such approaches diverted the Qur'an from its essential function as guidance for humanity (*hudan li al-nās*). Consequently, he sought to revitalize the Qur'an's role as a book of guidance (*al-ihdā*) (Abduh, 1990). In this framework, tafsir was no longer merely an intellectual exercise; rather, it functioned as

a form of social praxis, serving as an instrument of reform. This epistemic shift marked the early phase of modern Qur'anic exegesis ('Asyūr, 2008; Saeed, 2014).

The reformist impulse is clearly reflected in 'Abduh's interpretation of Qur'an 2:143. He mobilizes this verse as a platform to critique the Muslim community of his time, particularly groups that, in his view, failed to represent the true spirit of Islam. Although in his early life 'Abduh had been affiliated with a Sufi order, he later turned to criticize certain Sufi perspectives that he regarded as manifestations of excess and imbalance in religious practice,

"Bear witness against those who claim: 'All existence is a prison for the soul and a form of punishment for it. Therefore, we must liberate ourselves by renouncing all bodily pleasures, afflicting the body, denying the rights of the self, and preventing it from all that God has made available in this worldly life.' Bear witness against them that they have deviated from the *wasat* path, and that they have wronged their souls by wronging their bodies and their vital faculties. You are witnesses against this group and against the other group, and you stand ahead of all nations by virtue of your moderation and balance in all matters." (Abduh, 1990).

'Abduh's critique is rooted in his broader reformist agenda, which sought to revitalize Islamic thought by returning to the foundational texts and encouraging rational inquiry. He believed that certain Sufi orders, along with their innovations (*bid'ah*), had contributed to the decline of the Muslim community by fostering division, superstition, and blind *taqlīd*, rather than the balanced spirituality and ethical integrity he associated with the early generations of Muslims (Hourani, 1983).

In this light, 'Abduh attempts to reorient the existing discourse surrounding this verse. Previously, as seen in al-Suyūṭī's tafsir, Qur'an 2:143 was consistently linked to narratives of Muslim supremacy over "others." Under 'Abduh's reading, however, the verse is transformed into a vehicle for critical reflection on internal problems within the Muslim community itself. This does not mean that 'Abduh's understanding of Qur'an 2:143 is entirely disconnected from earlier exegetical traditions. He retains the meanings of *al-ʿadl* (justice) and *al-khiyār* (the chosen community) for the term *wasat*, and he also maintains that *wasat* signifies a middle position between two religious extremes: *al-ifrāt* (excess) and *al-tafrīt* (negligence or laxity) (Abduh, 1990).

What sets 'Abduh's interpretation apart is his attempt to internalise the reformist ethos within the verse itself. This method changes a passage that had previously functioned primarily as affirmation into one that operates as critique. In earlier exegetical traditions, *ifrāt* and *tafrīt* were employed to reinforce Muslim superiority by associating these extremes with Jewish and Christian communities. For Abduh, however, such excess and deficiency are not confined to others but can equally characterise Muslim societies. As a result, *wasatiyah* is understood as a normative ideal intrinsic to Islam, yet it is not automatically realised by Muslims in practice. The verse must therefore be read through a causal framework (*sababiyyah*), in which the attainment of a *wasat* disposition becomes a necessary condition for Muslims to function as moral exemplars and *shuhadā' alā al-nās* (witnesses over humanity) (Abduh, 1990).

This reorientation is further reflected in 'Abduh's deliberate avoidance of transmitted reports that highlight the otherworldly (*ukhrawī*) privileges of the Muslim community, such as their role as witnesses in the Hereafter. Instead, he places the Prophet at the centre of his interpretation, presenting him as the concrete embodiment of *wasatiyah*,

a model of balance that harmonises worldly engagement with spiritual and eschatological responsibility.

Overall, it is clear that changes in the Egyptian context exerted a profound influence on ‘Abduh’s interpretation of Qur’an 2:143. The inherited semantic legacy he received from earlier exegetes is reconfigured in light of the social realities confronting Muslim society at the time. ‘Abduh was positioned between two powerful forces: on the one hand, Egypt was undergoing rapid modernization through intensified engagement with the West; on the other, he perceived that the Muslim community he encountered was failing to practice religion in a proportionate and balanced manner. It is within this tension that he interpreted Qur’an 2:143, producing an exegetical reading marked by internal critique. This critical tone becomes even more pronounced in the works of subsequent al-Azhar scholars, who will be discussed in the following sections.

***Ummatan Wasatan* as an Ideological Fortress Against Western Influence: The Peak of Ideologization of QS Al-Baqarah [2]:143**

The nineteenth century is often described as the century of ideologies. This characterization is evident in the emergence of modern ideologies such as liberalism, socialism, communism, and nationalism as dominant intellectual currents (Martínez & Haan, 2023). Ideology itself can be understood as a system of ideas that seeks not only to “explain the world” but also to “change it” simultaneously (*Ideology | Nature, History, & Significance | Britannica*, 2025). As such, ideology is concerned not merely with how the world operates, but also with how it ought to be organized and governed (Rabī’, 1987). For this reason, ideology is inherently normative in character.

This normative dimension brings ideology into close proximity with sacred texts. In certain contexts, through the agency of its readers, scripture may serve as the foundation of an ideology; conversely, sacred texts themselves may be infused with ideological meanings to serve the interests of their interpreters. This process is commonly referred to as ideologization, derived from the verb to ideologize, meaning the act of attributing an ideological character or interpretation to something (*Definition of IDEOLOGIZE*, n.d.). In this article, the term “ideologization of tafsir” refers to the latter process—namely, the act of embedding particular ideological commitments into the interpretation of Qur’anic verses. Ideology operates in tafsir in multiple ways, one of which is when an exegetical product is deployed to challenge a competing ideology. In such cases, tafsir is no longer merely an exercise in meaning-making; rather, it becomes an effort to mobilize the Qur’an as a vehicle for supporting a specific ideological project.

The ideological currents that emerged in the West infiltrated Egypt via colonial experiences, culminating in the twentieth century. As a result, Egyptian society became more diverse, active, and competitive. Long-standing sources of authority that had shaped Egyptian worldviews were progressively challenged. In this situation, there was an urgent problem arose: how could Muslim communities deal with the realities of contemporary life and the ideas that came with it?

In response to these challenges, Egyptian society gradually divided into two main groups. The first was composed of figures commonly associated with secularism who were often accused of apostasy by their detractors. They were generally open to and accepting of ideas from the West. The second group saw ideologies such as socialism, materialism, and secularism as direct threats to Egypt’s Islamic identity. ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Rāziq is frequently identified as a leading representative of the former group. His controversial book *al-Islām*

wa Uṣūl al-Aḥkām caused a lot of debate and provoked strong reactions across the Arab world, particularly in Egypt (Najjar, 1996).

These tensions became worse after Gamal Abdel Nasser took control in 1956. Even while supporters of secularism seemed to gain more from the new political order, Nasser's policies made the gap between the two groups worse. He made many changes, such as transforming al-Azhar from a traditional madrasa-based institution into a modern university and incorporating secular disciplines into its curriculum. These developments continued to change Egypt's intellectual and religious landscape in the decades that followed.

In this climate of conflict, Muḥammad Muḥammad al-Madanī (1907–1968 CE) emerged as an influential figure. Al-Madani, who is well known as a prominent scholar, played a significant role in shaping Egypt's religious discourse during the first half of the twentieth century. His academic training and career put him at the centre of al-Azhar's reform initiatives. In 1956, he was appointed Dean of the Faculty of Shari'ah at al-Azhar University, though he was later removed from this position due to his opposition to the 1961 Law on the Development of al-Azhar University. Al-Madani also contributed to making Shari'ah studies at al-Azhar more diverse by introducing Shi'i thought within the framework of comparative Islamic jurisprudence (al-Madanī, n.d.).

Al-Madani, who was in the middle of two conflicting groups, saw himself as a key link between the West and the East. He criticised Westernisation as uncritical imitation (*taqlīd*) that would marginalise Islam while affirming that Islam, rooted in its profound intellectual and moral legacy, has the potential to engage constructively with modernity. This stance deeply informed his interpretation of Qur'an 2:143. He believed that *ummatan wasaṭan* evolved from a descriptive term into a comprehensive intellectual framework that served as a foundation for understanding Islam itself. In this framework, what would later be articulated as *Wasatiyyat al-Islām* came about.

Through the development of *wasatiyyah*, al-Madani sought to articulate an epistemic response to Western hegemony in Egypt, which was not just political but also intellectual, shaping how Muslim societies understood and interpreted the world. Consequently, Qur'an 2:143 became the basis for *manhaj wasati*, which was intended to guide Muslims in confronting the challenges of modernity without losing their Islamic foundations.

"The progress of Europe, with its knowledge and power, has dazzled the eyes of Muslims. This reality has led some Muslims to assume that Europe constitutes the standard of judgment, even in deciding matters within Muslim societies. Such excessive veneration of Europe is deeply regrettable, to the point that it is as though they have come to be witnesses and exemplars (*shāhid*) for us (*fa aṣḥābū shuhadā'an lanā*)."

(al-Madanī, n.d.).

Al-Madani criticises the tendency among certain Muslim groups to excessively idealise the West. To articulate this critique, he takes Qur'an al-Baqarah [2]:148 as his point of departure. In his reading, the Qur'anic message conveys precisely the opposite orientation: it is the Muslim community that is called upon to serve as witnesses and moral exemplars for humanity (*wa antum shuhadā' alā al-nās*) (al-Madanī, n.d.). Al-Madani is not against renewal in any way. Instead, he might be understood as carrying on the reforming tradition of Muḥammad 'Abduh while firmly placing himself on a reformist trajectory. Unlike 'Abduh, however, al-Madani elaborated the notion of *ummatan wasaṭan* into a more systematic and conceptually refined framework. For him, *ummatan wasaṭan* is not just a rhetorical or instrumental idea but a source of intellectual inspiration that needs to be

translated into a clear methodological framework (*manhaj fikrī*). The elaboration of this vision can be found in his work *Wasatiyyat al-Islām* (al-Madani, n.d.), where he presents Qur'an al-Baqarah [2]:143 as a divinely revealed constitution (*dustūr ilāhī*) that lays the foundation for what he calls the *manhaj wasatī* (al-Madani, n.d.). Within this framework, al-Madani formulates five key indicators (*mazāhir*) of *wasatiyyah*: harmony with human nature (*al-muwājahah fī ṭabī'at al-insān*); recognition of lived human reality (*al-i'tirāf bi al-wāqī' al-basharī*); alignment with natural disposition alongside the disciplining of human instincts (*musāyarat al-fiṭrah wa tahdhīb al-gharā'iz*); a broad and inclusive creed coupled with ease in religious obligations (*basāṭat al-'aqidah wa yusr al-takālīf*); and grounding in the foundational principles established by the Shari'ah (*min al-uṣūl al-muqarrarah fī al-sharī'ah*) (al-Madani, n.d.).

What al-Madani undertakes within this conceptual framework can be understood as a form of epistemic ideologisation, which is an effort to challenge Western ways of thinking by mobilising Islamic epistemic resources. In this context, Qur'an 2:143 is transformed into an ideological anchor for articulating a *wasatī* worldview. As reflected in the passages above, al-Madani's primary concern is the reaffirmation of Islamic identity amid the growing penetration of Western thought. His goal is to make clear what Islam's normative viewpoint is and to define how Muslims should act in the face of the other ideologies that were popular in Egypt at the time.

The ideological function of Qur'an 2:143 becomes even more pronounced in the interpretation of Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rāwī (1911–1998) in *Tafsīr al-Sha'rāwī*. Unlike al-Madani's more organised and systematic approach, al-Sha'rāwī presents the verse in a more practical and accessible manner, which shows that he is both traditionalist and populist. Known for his relaxed yet assertive style, often infused with humour, al-Sha'rāwī appealed to a broad segment of Egyptian society. The *tafsīr* that people later attributed to him emerged within this milieu and was originally composed of compiled sermons rather than a deliberately planned exegetical project (Qudsiya, 2020). As a result, its language is straightforward, informal, and instantly comprehensible.

Al-Sha'rāwī thus shifts the discourse of Qur'an 2:143 from reformist reflection to explicit ideological confrontation. His goal is clear: to challenge the Western ideologies that had gained significant influence in Egypt. In interpreting the verse, he does not focus on its lexical analysis or elaborates extensively on transmitted reports (*riwāyāt*), as earlier exegetes had done (al-Sha'rāwī, 1991). Instead, he goes straight for the main ideologies of his time. In doing so, al-Sha'rāwī effectively transforms *ummatan wasaṭan* into an ideology in its own right, one that must actively contend with competing worldviews. Among the ideologies he critiques are atheism (*ilhād*), polytheism (*ta'addud al-ilāh*), materialism (*al-mādiyyah*) and its adherents (*al-mādiyyūn*), as well as socialism (*ishtirākiyyah*) and capitalism (*ra'smāliyyah*). According to al-Sha'rāwī, these ideologies are fundamentally unstable. For instance, socialism and capitalism are destined to subvert each other, while materialism and atheism neglect the spiritual dimension of the human being (al-Sha'rāwī, 1991).

Some people ask whether the ideology of socialism, which emerged about half a century ago, has truly succeeded in advancing its followers. We (al-Sha'rāwī) respond: look at the condition of this ideology today. It has become plainly evident that its claims of bringing progress were nothing but falsehood and deception. It will retreat and ultimately collapse. And just as socialism has collapsed, so too will capitalism, for the two are fundamentally opposing ideologies. As for us—the

Muslim community—we are a *wasat* nation, and therefore God has granted us goodness in both this world and the Hereafter.” (al-Sha’rāwī, 1991).

When compared with al-Madani’s approach, the contrast becomes particularly pronounced. Al-Sha’rāwī’s populist and largely pragmatic approach makes his interpretation more explicitly ideological in nature. In one aspect, his interpretation of Qur’an 2:143 aligns with al-Madani’s, specifically on the assertion of Islamic identity in the midst of competing ideologies in modern Egypt. However, as mentioned above, al-Sha’rāwī works in a much more practical way than al-Madani, who works in a more theoretical way. This stylistic approach makes his interpretation more ideologically powerful, but it also makes it less deep and nuanced when he talks about and criticises other ideologies.

***Ummatan Wasaṭan*: Presenting a Friendly and Tolerant Face of Islam Within the Global Community**

The concept of *ummatan wasaṭan* has undergone a long and complex transformation. Initially articulated as a discourse of communal superiority, it then shifted into a mode of internal critique. Later, it developed into a structured way of thought (*manhaj*), and at certain points in history, it crystallised into an explicit ideology. Despite these transformations, much of the discourse continued to draw a firm boundary between the Islamic world and “the Other”. In more recent developments, however, Qur’an 2:143 has been recontextualized within a broader interpretive horizon. By reactivating *ummatan wasaṭan* as a mode of thinking, Yusuf al-Qaradawi sought to open a new semantic space through the formulation of a *wasatī* framework on a global scale. In this formulation, *wasat* is no longer primarily focused on how Muslims define or oppose “the Other”, but rather on how they can coexist and cooperate with others without compromising their own religious identity. Consequently, values such as tolerance, respect for minorities, recognition of diversity, and engagement with pluralism become central to al-Qaradawi’s articulation of *wasatiyyah* (al-Qaradawi, 2007).

This reconceptualisation cannot be separated from the broader historical context in which it emerged. Al-Qaradawi’s *Kalimat fī al-Wasatiyyah al-Islāmiyyah wa Ma’ālimihā*, published in 2007, was written after the September 11 attacks, even though the ideas that made up his work had been around since the 1980s. The events of 9/11 profoundly reshaped global perceptions of Islam. Media-driven narratives intensified suspicions that Islam was inherently violent, contributing to the rise of Islamophobia worldwide. This circumstance significantly shaped subsequent discussions of *wasatiyyah*. After 9/11, there was a big increase in scholarly and public interest in *wasatiyyah* in many Muslim-majority cultures (Bahri, 2012), which reflects a response to both internal and external pressures on Muslims. Internally, many Muslim societies were experiencing political instability and social conflict; externally, Muslim communities, particularly in Western contexts, were increasingly portrayed as terrorists, extremists, or inherently opposed to democracy.

Within this setting, post-9/11 *wasatiyyah* discourse served as both an initiative to restore Islam’s public image globally and a mechanism for addressing internal crises within Muslim societies (Bahri, 2012). Simultaneously, *Wasatiyyat al-Islām*, which is often rendered in Western discourse as “Moderate Islam” or “Moderate Muslims,” gained prominence in Euro-American contexts. Its rise was closely linked to the United States’ political agenda in the so-called war on terror. President George W. Bush’s statement that there could be no neutrality, “either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists,” set the tone for a global alliance

that used both military intervention and cultural strategies (Umar, 2016). Within this framework, the promotion of “moderate Muslims” functioned as a cultural instrument aimed at mobilising Muslim populations in support of U.S. geopolitical objectives (Alvian & Ardhani, 2023).

Aware of the political interests embedded in this discourse, several Muslim intellectuals-particularly those based in the United States-responded critically to the notion of the “Moderate Muslim”. Many argued that the instrumentalization of religion for political purposes contradicted the liberal-democratic values the West claimed to defend. Moreover, the criteria by which moderation was defined and the authority to determine who qualified as “moderate” remained deeply ambiguous. As John L. Esposito observes, the term “moderate Muslim” is inherently unstable, as its meaning depends largely on who employs it and for what purpose. In practice, it often signifies little more than being a “good” European or American (Esposito, 2005).

This ambiguity is further underscored by Asma Barlas, who recounts her experience in a seminar on moderate Muslims: *“For criticising Muslim interpretive violence, I am courted as a moderate Muslim; but for criticising the US’s political violence, I am denounced as a militant anti-American”* (Barlas, 2005). Similarly, other critics argue that the category artificially fragments Islam, implicitly portraying “ordinary” Muslims as inherently intolerant or violent (Manzoor, 2018).

Al-Qaradawi situated himself deliberately in this complex and polarised landscape. Drawing on his extensive transnational influence, he sought to open spaces for dialogue and engagement between Islam and the West, which had become more strained following 9/11. Institutionally, this commitment was reflected in his long-standing leadership roles: he served as chairman of the European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR) from its establishment in 1997 until his demise in 2022 and as president of the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS) from 2004 to 2018 (European Council For Fatwa And Research, 2020).

This dialogical vision, however, was undermined by two opposing currents. On one side were extremist religious groups that showed Islam in a harsh and scary way, imposed singular and exclusionary interpretations, and rejected meaningful engagement with other communities. On the other side were what al-Qaradawi termed radical modernists (*ḥadāthiyyūn*) and Enlightenment-oriented thinkers (*tanwīriyyūn*), whose proposals, in his view, failed to offer viable alternatives. The unrestrained freedom they promoted, he argued, risked eroding moral and ethical foundations (al-Qaradawi, 2007).

In response to these two extremes, al-Qaradawi articulated his interpretation of Qur’an 2:143. For him, neither represented the authentic Islam envisioned as the *ummatan wasaṭan*, the “middle community” promised in the Qur’an,

The community that God describes as the middle community in Q. 2:143 is a community that is complete and balanced in its totality and therefore cannot unite upon misguidance. For this reason, it rejects the approach of those weak and morally corrupt groups, the so-called *tanwīriyyūn* and *ḥadāthiyyūn*, who have severed themselves from the firmest bond. At the same time, this *ummatan wasaṭan* also rejects the approach of extremist fanatics, about whom the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) warned, saying, ‘The extremists shall perish (*halaka al-mutanaṭṭi‘ūn*),’ repeating it three times. Accordingly, it is incumbent upon the scholars, the heirs of the prophets, those entrusted with prophetic knowledge and the legacy of the divine message, who refute the distortions of extremists, the

fabrications of falsifiers, and the misinterpretations of the ignorant-to adopt the moderate (*wasat*) approach, to clarify it for society, to defend it, and to highlight its virtues ...” (al-Qaradawi, 2007).

Like al-Madani, the passage above shows that al-Qaradawi likewise treats *ummatan wasatan* as the foundation of a methodological framework for thought (*manhaj al-fikr*). This, however, does not imply that their projects are identical. Al-Qaradawi seeks to open a new semantic horizon for Qur'an 2:143 by situating it within a global context and mobilising it as an ethical-diplomatic instrument through which Islam can be negotiated on the world stage, particularly in the post-9/11 period, when Islam became increasingly burdened by negative stereotypes. This orientation is reflected in the meanings he develops, which ultimately converge on a social ethic for life within plural societies (al-Qaradawi, 2007). These ethical reflections later crystallise into thirty religious principles articulated in his work (al-Qaradawi, 2007). The following examples illustrate this ethical-diplomatic orientation.

First, al-Qaradawi explicitly connects *ummatan wasatan* to the obligation to respect the rights of religious minorities (*huqūq al-aqalliyyāt al-dīniyyah*) (al-Qaradawi, 2007). This represents a marked departure from classical interpretations that framed the verse as a theological justification for Muslim superiority. Here, by contrast, the verse is reoriented as a normative foundation for safeguarding minority rights, including those of Jews, Christians, and adherents of other faiths. Al-Qaradawi argues that diversity itself constitutes a manifestation of the Qur'anic values of moderation (*wasatīyyah*).

He further maintains that this principle should be realised through sustained social interaction (*mu'āmalah*), conducted in accordance with Islamic ethical guidelines without interference in the beliefs, rituals, or internal religious affairs of others. Religious minorities, he emphasises, are part of the population entitled to protection within Muslim societies (*ahl dār al-Islām*) (al-Qaradawi, 2007). In this context, *wasatīyyah* moves beyond a merely defensive posture to one defined by cooperation (*ta'āmul*) and tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*). This orientation becomes even clearer when al-Qaradawi frames pluralism as an unavoidable reality. One of the core principles of *ummatan wasatan*, he argues, is belief in the inevitability of plurality and diversity (*al-īmān bi al-ta'addudiyyah wa al-tanawwu'*) (al-Qaradawi, 2007). Through this principle, the ideal *ummatan wasatan* emerges as a community capable of cooperation, respect for cultural diversity, mutual assistance, and the cultivation of tolerance. These ideas reflect al-Qaradawi's strong aspiration for Muslims to reengage actively with the global community by grounding their participation in Islamic norms governing interaction within plural societies.

Al-Qaradawi's project may also be read as gesturing towards what Asef Bayat describes as a “post-Islamist” Muslim society. Drawing on more than two decades of research on socio-religious developments in Egypt and Iran (1970–2005), Bayat defines post-Islamism as a condition in which rigid, intolerant, exclusive, anti-democratic, and anti-intellectual images of Islam—often associated with Islamist movements, particularly political Islam—have gradually eroded. According to Bayat, Islamist actors themselves have largely exhausted their ideological momentum and lost much of their legitimacy. Even their most committed supporters have begun to recognise the contradictions and limitations of Islamist projects that were once institutionalised within state structures. This condition, Bayat argues, marks the emergence of post-Islamism (Bayat, 2007). At this point, it can be seen that the long trajectory from al-Suyuti to al-Qaradawi exemplifies a broader

transformation in the interpretation of Qur'an 2:143, from theological exclusivism to ethical universalism.

Nowadays, Qur'an 2:143 and the concept of *wasatiyyah* have circulated widely across the Muslim world, particularly in Muslim-majority societies. Interpretations continue to change in response to specific local contexts, while remaining connected to broader genealogical networks of meaning. In Indonesia, M. Quraish Shihab has emerged as one of the most well-known proponents of Islamic *wasatiyyah*. In his work *Wasatiyyah Islam: Wawasan Islam tentang Moderasi Beragama* (2019), Shihab demonstrates how meanings developed within the Egyptian interpretive tradition are preserved and rearticulated in a selective way. Key concepts such as *al-'adl* (justice), *al-khiyār* (the chosen community), and *al-wasat bayna al-ṭarafayn* (the middle position between two extremes) remain central, even though they are being reformulated within Indonesia's distinctive socio-cultural setting (Shihab, 2019).

Interest in Qur'an 2:143 has continued to expand alongside the growing prominence of discourses such as Islamic *wasatiyyah*, moderate Islam, religious moderation, and Islam as the middle path, among other designations (Bahri, 2012). Despite their constructive aspirations, these interpretations have also become sites of contestation, as different actors define *wasat* in accordance with their own ideological and political interests especially when the state itself is the one doing the interpreting, as in Indonesia (Law No. 8 of 2016). For this reason, tracing the evolution of meanings associated with Qur'an 2:143 is crucial as a critical measure for assessing whether contemporary interpretations remain anchored in their genealogical foundations. Such an approach also expands the horizons of contemporary Qur'anic studies by illuminating the complex, dynamic, and often contested relationship between the Qur'an and its interpreters.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of the meaning of *ummatan wasatan* from an assertion of Muslim communal superiority to an ethical universalism clearly demonstrates that any interpretive product is deeply intertwined with socio-political contexts and ideological constructions. In times of crisis, Qur'anic verses are often mobilized as ideological foundations or even function as ideology *per se*. In this regard, genealogical tracing becomes crucial for two reasons. First, it serves as an analytical gauge to assess whether the circulation of meanings remains connected to its original genealogical network. Second, it helps uncover meanings that have been marginalized or silenced in the process of interpretation. In certain contexts, the selection of specific meanings can be highly tendentious, leading to the neglect or exclusion of alternative interpretive possibilities.

Finally, the discourse surrounding Qur'an 2:143 continues to evolve in contemporary contexts, taking on new forms shaped by local needs and circumstances. This is evident in the emergence of concepts such as "moderate Muslim" in the United States, *wasatiyyah* and religious moderation in Indonesia, and civil society (*masyarakat madani*) in Malaysia, among others. How these discourses are formulated, which genealogical networks inform them, and how they are negotiated across diverse socio-political settings remain open and productive avenues for future scholarly research.

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