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The Slogan "Return to the Qur'an" in Indonesia: The Perspective of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Language Game*

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Abstract

Currently there are Muslim groups in Indonesia who always raise the slogan "Return to the Qur'an", in fact something like this has happened in the past, namely the *tabkim* or arbitration incident. These two phenomena still have the same common thread even though they occurred in different time, namely the opinion of back to the Koran. This paper aims to examine the phenomenon of language use in relation to the slogan "Return to the Qur'an" by certain Muslim groups and the *tabkim* event using the Language Game approach initiated by Ludwig Wittgenstein. This study is qualitative research using a literature review with an analytical descriptive model, namely describing in a straightforward manner the results of the conclusions from the data analysis carried out by the author. The findings in this research are that the slogan "Back to the Koran" is misused by radical and extremist groups for personal interest to gain validation for radicalism and extremism thoughts. It is similar to the Muawiyah group using this slogan opinion as a political step during the *tabkim* event.

Keywords: Radicalism, *Tabkim*, Language Game, Ludwig Wittgenstein.

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INTRODUCTION

Essentially, returning to the Quran is an inevitability. Because the Quran is basically a book containing truth and goodness, every Muslim should therefore return to it. However, the slogan “return to the Quran” must also be alerted to, as it is used by certain groups not for good purposes. Instead, they use this slogan for their own personal interests, whether group interests, political interests, or other negative purposes (Misrawi 2010, 81).

Radical Islamic groups in Indonesia often use this slogan as their argument. They call themselves reformers wanting to return Islam to its pure teachings. However, behind all this, they espouse a radical puritan ideology that will eventually become a movement of extremism and terrorism (Yusran 2021, 2). In fact, the slogan “return to the Quran” and the shout of “*Allahu Akbar*” (God is Greatest) always echo in every movement and mass demonstration held by fundamentalist groups (Ramlan, Erwinsyahbana, and Hakim 2016, 37). Of course, this cannot be trivialized, as it concerns security and well-being.

The slogan “return to the Quran” is often claimed as a movement in the name of renewal. However, their agenda often gets trapped in normative areas, applying medieval theoretical frameworks more nuanced with truth claims and the dominance of a black-and-white view (*a dualistic worldview*), or right-wrong, Islamic-non-Islamic, potentially creating new conflicts and dehumanization. Therefore, creative and innovative, enlightening ideas, not reactive ones, are needed, in responding to the challenges facing Muslims in the contemporary century (Kahar 2019, 2).

On the other hand, another understanding has emerged regarding the slogan that Muslims must return to the Qur’an. Some exegesis activists believe that the slogan “return to the Qur’an” means that Muslims must study the Qur’an through *kitab tafsir* (books of exegesis) written by scholars. This also aligns with the call to teach the Qur’an, a command from Allah SWT to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) (Hidayah 2023, 68–69). In contrast to previous fundamentalist groups having used the slogan “return to the Qur’an” for extreme purposes, the exegesis activists have a better understanding of the slogan. This is because they see it as a form of motivation to study or read *kitab-kitab tafsir* (books of exegesis). This is

because, essentially, not all people in general have the ability and capacity to understand the contents of the Qur'an directly from the original text.

This is because the language of the Qur'an tends to be transcendent (DeYoung and Mian 2019, 791). Therefore, it is not easy to achieve its meaning without in-depth knowledge and analysis. This transcendent nature of the Quran is inseparable from the origin of the Quran itself, constituting *kalamullah*, the speech of God, i.e. Allah (Mansoor 2022, 31). Even, in relation degree, there is a vast difference between humans and Allah. Humans are merely creatures while Allah is the creator. How can the abilities of a creature match the abilities and power of the Creator? Therefore, the group of exegesis activists always warns that laypeople wanting to understand the contents must go through reference books of interpretation having been recognized for their capabilities.

The slogan "return to the Qur'an", according to Fazlur Rahman, must be understood as a message about the importance of education. Rahman, a prominent figure in Islamic education, offered a method called Islamic Neomodernism. He attempted to provide a new interpretation of the slogan "return to the Qur'an." He argued that understanding the slogan must be recognized as a long-term endeavor, and its dissemination and implementation must be carried out by well-educated academics. Therefore, this can only be realized through education (Fahmi 2014, 273)..

Rahman's perspective on understanding the slogan "return to the Qur'an" is quite different from the common view. Rahman's thinking is unique because he does not focus on the object of the slogan, in this case, the Qur'an. Instead, he emphasizes something else that he believes is a crucial element for understanding the Qur'an, i.e. a good education. In fact, Rahman's thinking still shares a common thread with the perspective of exegesis activists in understanding the slogan "return to the Qur'an," but Rahman's perspective is more open and broader. He does not limit it to exegetical education alone, but rather addresses it in general terms, i.e. a good education.

This contrasts with the concept of returning to the Qur'an as understood by the Muhammadiyah organization. For them, the term "return to the Qur'an" is a form of *tajdid*, or a renewal movement keeping pace with the times. All *tajdid* movements in Islamic history have

always emphasized this slogan. The mission of the *tajdid* movement, in the form of reform, is to transform the field of *muamalat* (transactions). *Tajdid* in this *muamalat* is carried out through *ijtihad* (initiative) as an effort to implement Islamic teachings in accordance with the challenges of life's developments in a particular place and time (Rosyadi 2013, 125).

From the explanation above, it can be seen clearly that the meaning of the slogan "return to the Qur'an" has various different understandings and concepts. However, when viewed from Islamic history, this slogan actually emerged during Ali's leadership, the Prophet's Companion. Therefore, a more in-depth and significant study is needed to understand the slogan "return to the Qur'an." This article aims to answer the question using Ludwig Wittgenstein's Language Game theory. This theory arose from philosophical thought. Specifically, in the 20th century, philosophers focused on the field of language. One such philosopher, Wittgenstein, argued in *his Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* that every philosophy is a critique of language (Gufron 2016, 119), which subsequently led to the Language Game theory.

Language, according to Wittgenstein, has a set of rules from which clear and distinct meanings are born. If these rules of language are ignored, language will lose its clear meaning. Therefore, to obtain clear meaning, language must not be separated from its rules of game. Just like the importance of obeying every rule in various types of games, for example, football, chess, volleyball, basketball, etc., various language games have their own rules of game that must not be mixed up to avoid causing confusion in language and its meaning. For example, the rules of language games in scientific contexts and ordinary or everyday contexts. These two types of language use have their own rules of game, which if mixed up will inevitably give rise to chaos in language and its meaning. The rule of scientific games cannot be mixed up in the rules of ordinary language games.

Therefore, Wittgenstein's Language Game theory will help us understand the widespread use of the slogan "return to the Qur'an" in Indonesia. This will allow us to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the slogan and prevent us from being easily influenced and swept away by misconceptions. This perspective is urgently needed today as a way to filter out misconceptions inconsistent with current reality.

Various studies have examined

the slogan “return to the Qur’an” from theological, political, and historical perspectives (Misrawi, 2010; Yusran, 2021; Kahar, 2019). However, only very few studies have been conducted to examine this phenomenon as a linguistic practice that creates contextual meaning and has social impact. Furthermore, previous studies have not explored in depth the use of Wittgenstein’s Language Game theory to analyze how this slogan is understood and used by various groups.

This study offers a new perspective by using Wittgenstein’s Language Game theory to understand the phenomenon of the slogan “return to the Qur’an” in Indonesia. This approach reveals the different rules of the language game between fundamentalist groups, exegesis activists, and figures like Fazlur Rahman in understanding the slogan. This study makes a unique contribution in analyzing how the meaning of the slogan “*return to the Qur’an*” is produced and utilized in contemporary social and political contexts.

This research not only expands the study of the slogan “*return to the Qur’an*” as a linguistic phenomenon, but also identifies its potential positive and negative impacts on social harmony and religious understanding in Indonesia. Thus, this research provides a foundation to interpret the use of religious language more critically and inclusively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein’s Biography Language Game Theory

In the world of philosophy, Ludwig Wittgenstein holds a unique place in the 20th century. This is due to his unconventional thinking, radical characteristic, and the experimental forms he presented to the public. Moreover, Wittgenstein was able to make the complex problems rational. Therefore, Wittgenstein is said to have been influenced by the thinking of Frege, Russell, and Moore, the Viennese philosophers, *Oxford Language Philosophy*, and the analytic tradition. Meanwhile, other philosophers have linked Wittgenstein’s thinking to that of Schopenhauer or Kierkegaard, Derrida, Zen Buddhism, or avant-garde art (Sluga 2006, 1)..

Ludwig Wittgenstein was born in Vienna in 1889, the youngest son of Karl

Wittgenstein, a wealthy Austrian businessman. Most of his extended family's members were Jewish descent, but some of them had converted to Christianity. Wittgenstein's great-grandfather, Moses Mayer, had adopted the family name Hermann Christian for baptism. The Jewish heritage seems to have been abandoned by the Wittgenstein family, as evidenced by Wittgenstein's early 1930s reflections on his Jewishness, alluding to Otto Weininger's thoughts in *Sex and Character*, according to Wittgenstein in his diary: "Even the greatest Jewish thinkers are no longer talented" (Sluga 2006, 2–3).

Wittgenstein's thoughts are divided into two periods: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (period I) or and *Philosophical Investigations* (period II) (Lengga Wangge and Wijanarko 2023, 156). In philosophy, period I leads to the determination of a uniform ideal language (*uniformity*) and period II leads to the actual reality of diversity (*pluriformity*) (Lengga Wangge and Wijanarko 2023, 156).

The Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus or *Picture Theory* is a unique work of philosophy, presented concisely with numerical notation describing the logical priority of its propositions (Kaelan 2004, 135). In *the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, according to Wittgenstein, the world is determined by facts, and facts are everything (Wittgenstein 2021, 25). In other words, language must correspond to the logical structure of the world, and language is a representation of the world (Gufon 2016, 121). So it can be said that Wittgenstein in period I argued that language is what corresponds to the facts.

Meanwhile, *Philosophical Investigations* or *Language Game* is a revision of Wittgenstein's first period theory, emphasizing the axiological aspect of language, i.e. the meaning of a word depends on its background or use in everyday life (Gufon 2016, 122). Wittgenstein's thinking is no longer based on the logic of ideal language, but on ordinary language that is diverse and used by humans in their daily lives; this is what is called a *Language Game* (Kaelan 2004, 136). Wittgenstein states that there are many language games that are dynamic and unlimited. Every human being speaks according to the rules of use that are unique and do not have the same context as others, so in this case there is a special value. For example, the use of language in giving orders, reporting an event, composing a story, thanking, praying, etc. (Wittgenstein 1986, 1:1).

2. About the *Tabkim* event

Tabkim derives from the word *bukkama* or arbitration, meaning the appointment of a person or referee by two people in dispute intended to resolve the dispute peacefully. The person appointed is called *a hakim* (Jauhari 2013, 1395).

Tabkim event occupies an important position in the political history of Muslims, as stated by al-Shahratsani (d. 548 H) in his work *al-Nihal wa al-Nihal*, “The biggest dispute among the people is the dispute about *the imamah* (leadership)” (Miftahur Ridho 2019, 58), in this case *the imamah* referred to is the leadership of the Prophet’s companions. In this context, the interpretation of *the tabkim* event has made the image of the companions bad, such as the stories that are currently developing among Muslims describing the companions taking part in the *tabkim* event as deceivers, and ambitious in seeking power (Miftahur Ridho 2019, 58) .

Tabkim (arbitration) began during the assassination of Caliph Usman bin Affan, where a meeting took place between Muawiyah bin Abu Sufyan represented by Amr bin Ash and Ali bin Abi Thalib as the fourth caliph represented by Abu Musa al-Asy`ari (Nugraha et al. 2024, 172). Muawiyah himself had kinship with Ali from the Abd Manaf line, and Usman from the Umayyad line (Nashiruddin 2020, 76). In this case, Muawiyah urged Ali to take revenge on (*mengqisbasha*) the murderer of Usman bin Affan. However, Ali did not want to make decision hastily, because it was not yet known for sure who was involved in the murder of Usman (Nugraha et al. 2024, 173). Ali himself considered Muawiyah and his followers as rebels because of their refusal to pledge allegiance to Ali and their refusal to implement Ali’s policies (Miftahur Ridho 2019, 66). According to some scholars, this was because Ali wanted to view the case from the perspective of *maslahah* (benefit) and *mafasadah* (harm). Muawiyah’s disappointment due to the rejection of the proposal resulted in Muawiyah’s reluctance to pledge allegiance to Ali as caliph. And finally, a war broke out between the two parties known as the Battle of *Siffin*, having took place in May-July 657 AD (Pihar, Daulay, and Dahlan 2023, 132).

A fierce battle ensued, with Ali’s side thinking that victory was in sight and continually pressuring Muawiyah. Muawiyah’s side suggested that the troops raise the *mushaf* (copies) of

the Qur'an on their spearheads as a sign of peace. Initially, Ali rejected the offer, but due to pressure from his followers, Ali ultimately opted for negotiations or *tabkim*. Not all of Ali's followers agreed with this *tabkim*, and they ultimately chose to leave Ali's ranks and then became the Khawarij (Nugraha et al. 2024, 173). One of the Khawarij, Urwah bin Jarir, said: "Do you take the law in Allah's religion from anyone?" He then linked this statement to QS. Al-Maidah: 44.

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا التَّوْرَةَ فِيهَا هُدًى وَنُورٌ ۖ يَحْكُمُ بِهَا النَّبِيُّونَ الَّذِينَ أَسْلَمُوا لِلَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالرَّبَّانِيُّونَ
 وَالْأَحْبَابُ بِمَا اسْتُحْفِظُوا مِنْ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ وَكَانُوا عَلَيْهِ شُهَدَاءَ ۖ فَلَا تَخْشَوُا النَّاسَ وَاخْشَوْنِ
 وَلَا تَشْتَرُوا بِآيَاتِي ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا ۖ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ

Indeed, We revealed the Torah, containing guidance and light, by which the prophets, who submitted themselves to Allah, made judgments for Jews. So too did the rabbis and scholars judge according to Allah's Book, with which they were entrusted and of which they were made keepers. So do not fear the people; fear Me! Nor trade my revelations for a fleeting gain. And those who do not judge by what Allah has revealed are 'truly' the disbelievers.

From this verse, their slogan emerged, "*laa hukma illa lillah*" (there is no law except the law of Allah) (Husna Amin and Saiful Akmal 2021, 141). And this slogan was used as a basis for separating themselves from Ali's rank because in the case of the murder of Usman, Ali preferred peace and according to the Khawarij group, Ali's move was the same as denying God's law (Harakatuna 2007, 1). Even the Khawarij's thinking has spread to theological sections such as declaring other groups differing from them as infidels and even to the point of killing people having different opinions with them even though they are fellow Muslims (Maram 2023, 4). Currently, this hardline Islamic group is better known as radical Islam.

Radicalism, according to Yusuf Qardhawi, is a person's excessive attitude toward religion, between appropriate and inappropriate religious behavior, between religion and politics, between the laws having been made by Allah and the laws of humans themselves (Ashari 2019, 104).

A radical group is a group or ideology seeking social and political change or renewal through violent means. In Indonesia, radical groups have different ways of expressing their radicalism. Some are radical for themselves in carrying out Islamic teachings without disturbing others, such as considering all the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad SAW as fundamentalist or rules that must be obeyed, without distinguishing between obligatory and sunnah commands, forbidden or makruh prohibitions. However, some others are more violent groups, where they discriminate against groups disagreeing with them, even to the point of declaring them infidels or killing them (Maram 2023, 3–4).

As explained earlier in the *tabkim* event, the slogan or argument used as the basis or argument of the Khawarij was QS. al-Maidah: 44 with its essence taken in the form of the sentence *laa hukma illa lillah* “ (there is no law except the law of Allah). So, this is still related to the slogan “return to the Qur’an” used by certain groups in Indonesia for their own interests. Because what is meant by returning all legal matters to Allah in the context of the *tabkim* event is the must to decide everything based on the evidence of the Qur’an, meaning the same as returning to the Qur’an. Meanwhile, currently the slogan used is returning to the Qur’an, widely used by radicals or extremists inheriting the way of thinking and ideology of the Khawarij for their own interests.

3. Language Game in the Slogan “Return to Qur’an” in Indonesia

The slogan “Return to the Qur’an and Sunnah” is a phrase frequently touted by radical groups everywhere, including in Indonesia. It is no wonder this movement has a sizable number of followers. Radicalism, according to Jamaluddin al-Afghani, is a puritanical Islamic movement aimed at uniting Muslims (Arsyi 2020, 136). Unfortunately, many of these ideas are misinterpreted, leading to harm rather than achieving Muslim unity, as their implementation ignores current social conditions.

Al-Afgani stated that his ideas for reform emerged due to the socio-cultural, religious, and socio-political factors occurring at that time, where the Islamic community still adhered to the Jabariyah or Fatalism ideology (Arsyi 2020, 149). Meanwhile, according to Hasbi Assidieqy, as one of the ranks of the Reformers, said that many people were still *taqlid*, namely not being able to believe something with their mind (Nourouzzaman Shiddiqi 2008, 51).

Based on Wittgenstein's thinking of *Language Game*, where the meaning of a word depends on its background or use in everyday life, so looking at the realm in which the word is used, factors underlying the use, the background behind it, and for what purpose the slogan is used will help understanding the meaning of a slogan; this is called "*the meaning is in the use*" (Lengga Wangge and Wijanarko 2023, 159). If Wittgenstein's way of thinking is applied in everyday life, it will certainly be very beneficial because it can make us people full of caution and attention in responding to all forms of sentences or statements. For example, in understanding the slogan "Return to the Qur'an", by adopting this concept from Wittgenstein, we will not be easily deceived by the motives behind the meaning of the slogan.

Language can be a toy, meaning it can also be misused for personal interest. To prevent from being falling into this trap, we should engage in the game to understand what is happening. In reality, radicals often use language games to promote their ideology, realizing that few people pay attention to or carefully consider the language used. Those who should engage in the game first to understand it comprehensively instead ignore it and simply accept it at face value. This, of course, benefits these radical groups greatly.

For example, in the phenomenon of terrorism, we find distinctive language that they constantly use, e.g. the term "*jihad*." Amrozi and his associates often used this term to justify their bombings of people they considered infidels, killing over 200 people. He even smiled sweetly and innocently, as if proud, when the court sentenced him to death (Rozi and Kunci 2018, 23).

Another phenomenon of language games being exploited can be seen when Hizbut Tahrir, an Islamic group advocating for the implementation of sharia and an Islamic state, held a demonstration following the bombing in front of the Australian Embassy in Kuningan and declared its condemnation of the bombing as a barbaric act. However, what is interesting from a language games perspective is the language used by this group in condemning the bombing. For example, they said, "Indonesia will be safe if Islamic Sharia and the caliphate are upheld" (Rozi and Kunci 2018, 25). This is evidence that radicals often use language games to convey their views to the public. Therefore, we must be careful, including not being trapped into understanding the slogan "return to the Qur'an."

At first glance, language may seem like a value-free and bias-free communication tool. However, it is not merely a system of signs but it can also be transformed into a political weapon due to the unilateral assignment of meanings deprived of their basic meaning. Language, as previously explained, can be used as a high-level weapon with enormous influence. Therefore, in the context of *language games*, the use of *jihad* terminology by fundamentalist and radical groups has its own meaning according to its use (Rozi and Kunci 2018, 24). Likewise, the slogan “return to the Qur’an” they use also has its own meaning according to their interests.

4. The slogan “Return to the Qur’an”: Between Positive Meaning and Radicalism Abuse

The slogan “return to the Qur’an” is a medium most acceptable to the public. Furthermore, it can be quickly disseminated within a short time. Preachers consistently use this slogan because it embodies the ideals and image of true Islam, based on the primary source of revelation, the Qur’an (Wan Ali and Hasmawati 2019, 50). Therefore, they choose this slogan and use it as a means to invite and spread their beliefs through language game. Furthermore, this is supported by the lack of religious literacy and the ongoing lack of religious education in Indonesia. As (Zuhdi and Sarwenda 2020, 1) concluded, the inadequate dissemination of religious education in Indonesia has led to the emergence of challenges of inadequate religious understanding in a pluralistic society.

Understanding a language is closely related to other aspects, including social, cultural, and linguistic aspects. Meanwhile, with such a wide range of interconnectedness and encompassing various aspects, the potential for misunderstandings is unavoidable. A language with a specific meaning may be interpreted differently by some people, influenced by various factors (Kopytko 2007, 805). *Language game* players exploit this potential misunderstanding. They use language as a tool for personal or group interests, even though the understanding reaching the general public is not entirely accurate due to the potential for misunderstandings regarding the complexity of the relationship between social, cultural, and linguistic aspects.

Someone with a poor social and educational background and a weak understanding of linguistics will have a different understanding than someone with a good social and educational background, a modern culture, and extensive linguistic knowledge. Their understanding of a

language will be easily controlled and framed due to their limited linguistic knowledge. This gap is exploited by language game players to exploit language as a tool for their game.

Nevertheless, this slogan deception will not be easily successful if each individual thinks using Wittgenstein's method, always seeking to understand the motives behind a sentence to determine its true meaning. Therefore, with Wittgenstein's Language Game approach to the slogan "Return to the Quran," the goal of radicals and extremists in exploiting the slogan for their own personal interest, rather than its true meaning, can be easily uncovered. On the other hand, strengthening religious literacy is also a key asset for fortifying oneself against misconceptions.

In this context, the movement to enliven interpretation literacy in the wider community is deemed essential, particularly through digital platforms, having become a primary need for every human being. People today rely on digital platforms to seek information due to their practicality. At least, the digitization of Al-Misbah interpretation by Quraisy Syihab can serve as an example of how effective this method can be in revitalizing the Qur'an and interpretation within society as a whole (Ali and Isnaini 2024, 1). In addition to enlivening interpretation digitally, practitioner-based interpretation training can also support efforts to address the challenges of this language game. There has been evidence of this successful interpretation training held at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung using the EQIL training design (Karman et al. 2021, 165).

The government also plays a role in addressing this issue. The religious moderation campaign conducted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs under Lukman Hakim Saefuddin's administration shares the same goal as Wittgenstein's theory in understanding the slogan "Return to the Qur'an." The launch of the book "Religious Moderation" by the Ministry of Religious Affairs on October 18, 2019, represents a concrete step taken by the government in this context (Junaedi 2019, 182). Such steps must continue to be taken collaboratively, not only by the government, but also by all elements of society, both practitioners and academics, both through digital and in-person training.

CONCLUSIONS

There is essentially no problem behind the slogan “Return to the Qur’an.” However, in Indonesia, this slogan has been misused by radical and extremist groups for personal gain. This is evident in the meaning behind the slogan, which was initially positive, but is instead used to misunderstand the context of “return to the Qur’an.” This is due to an inadequate understanding of Islam, especially the Qur’an. They do not delve into the meaning of each verse along with the historical and sociological context of the verses and they only use the slogan “return to the Qur’an” to gain validation for radicalism, actually very dangerous and damaging to the unity of the Muslim community. However, look at history, i.e. the *tahkim event*, where the Muawiyah group also did the same thing by using the opinion of returning to the Qur’an as a form of political tool for their personal interest. This suggests that there is still a common thread of the misuse of slogan “return to the Qur’an” carried out by radical extremists and the Muawiyah group for their respective interests. The extremist radicals used it to defend and validate the truth of their ideology, while Muawiyah’s group used it as a political tool.

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