

The Active Attitude of the Moderates: Semiotic Review of the Term *Ummatan Wasathan* in the Qur'an

Faiz Wildan Mustofa¹, Adib Sofia²

^{1,2} Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Correspondence: 22205032025@student.uin-suka.ac.id

DOI: 10.29240/alquds.v8i3.9455

Submitted: 2024-01-09 | Revised: 2024-09-11 | Accepted: 2024-11-27

Abstract. It has been proven that intolerance incidents colour the history of the Indonesian nation, both in the past and the present. Cases of intolerance usually appear more and more, especially in heated political situations. On one hand, the society has an ideal principle, namely moderation. However, viewing the discussion so far, the principle of moderation is still understood as the middle position. The principle of moderation seems to be a passive attitude without any specific action. The Al-Qur'an explains the principle of moderation with the term *ummatan wasathan* in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 143. This article attempts to interpret the term by using Roland Barthes' semiotics, which sees this term at the level of language and myth. By interpreting the meaning of *ummatan wasathan* at these two levels, a description of the moderation principle can be seen as not a passive position, but rather an active attitude to act fairly in looking at various things. This attitude is an effort to select something in a balanced and fair manner based on various considerations to achieve harmony in life.

Keywords: *Moderation, Semiotics, Ummatan Wasathan*

Introduction

Intolerance events have proven to colour the history of the Indonesian nation, both in the past and present. The condition of multicultural Indonesian society includes various ethnicities, religions, and cultures, making the potential for division always high. Intolerant actions can be triggered by anything, including political differences. Political events, such as the momentum of presidential elections, regional head elections, and legislative or council elections, are often marked by cases of intolerance. In a situation like this, provocateurs and *buzzers* use all means to bring down each other's political opponents. They captivated votes through social media. *Buzzers* are one of the strategic political components because they are in charge of manipulating and throwing intolerant issues to bring down political opponents.¹ One of the worrying things is *the black campaign* and *negative campaigns* that are spread on the internet without any clear filters.

In a situation like this, concrete attitudes are needed to fortify oneself to avoid unexpected intolerant actions. One of those attitudes is to respect each other, including respecting differences in political views. The attitude that is most often echoed is a moderate attitude or the term used by the government is religious moderation. However, in various discussions in the community, it can be seen that the meaning of the term moderate by the community tends to be shallow, namely in the form of a position in the middle. If it is only a matter of position, it is as if this attitude is an

¹ Ariandi Putra, "The Role of Political Buzzers in Dynamics Ahead of the 2024 Elections," *SALAM: Journal of Social and Cultural Syar-I* 10, no. 4 (2023): 1143–58, <https://doi.org/10.15408/sjsbs.v10i4.34076>.

attitude that is not serious and not serious in religion. The message of impartiality in moderation is understood as an attitude that is not based on religious guidelines. This means that the concept of moderation that is now growing and understood by the community is a passive attitude, which is a position without action.

The government through the Ministry of Religious Affairs has tried to formulate the concept of religious moderation based on the postulates of *the wasathan ummatan* in the Qur'an, surah Al Baqarah verse 143. This formulation can indeed be said to be successful if the benchmark is to make religious moderation a trend; realizing this term in various programs; and the familiarity of this term by the public. According to the author, the public's understanding of the term *wasathan ummatan* is certainly not formed briefly but needs to go through a long flow. This means that the understanding of the term needs to be constructed slowly. This is where the importance of this paper is to explain the results of an in-depth study of the stages of the meaning of *the term wasathan* from the Qur'an. This paper uses Roland Barthes' semiotics because Barthes believes that there is a meaning outside the context that can construct the meaning of a word. Barthes based on Saussure's theory of the word as a sign developed the idea that the sign would produce different meanings if interpreted by different people or in different situations and cultures.

This moderation issue is certainly not new. Many writers have tried at length to explore the sides of moderation in the Qur'an. Huzdaeni Rahmawati in her writings tries to reveal the values of *the wasathan ummahan* in Surah Al-Baqarah by using the study of text, context, and contextualization. He concluded that the verse contains several values, namely moderate, fair, *controlling*, patient, tawakkal, and *huznudzon*. However, according to the author, the moderation message conveyed in the article is still too general and used in the footing of the argument seems to have been skipped.² Meanwhile, another article written by Fitri Rahmawati tries to explore the concept of moderate da'wah in the Qur'an, surah Al-Baqarah verse 143. In the article, he concluded that *wasathiyah* is a just attitude and Islam is the only one who has it. This, according to the author, will even add a new branch of intolerance, namely by claiming the truth over the differences that occur.³ Arif Budiono explained in his writing that the value of moderation is one of the important characteristics of Islam and Islamic thought it. It exists in the system, thought, and law of Islam.⁴

Some of these writings have tried to explore the meaning of the Qur'an related to the values of moderation. However, in this paper, the author uses Roland Barthes' semiotics to explore the process of meaning contained in the Qur'an, surah Al-Baqarah verse 143. The type of research used is *library research* with text sources as the main material. The method used is descriptive-analytical, meaning that the author presents the sources of the text and then analyzes it using Roland Barthes' semiotics. The material object used in this study focuses on the term *ummatan wasathan* in the Qur'an, surah Al-Baqarah verse 143 because this term is the most often used as a foothold in the concept of religious moderation in Indonesia. Furthermore, the reference used in

² Huzdaeni Rahmawati, "The Values of *Ummatan Wasathan* to Fight Intolerance (Textual, Contextual, and Contextualization Study of Q.S. Al-Baqarah Verse 143)," *Raushan Fikr Student Scientific Journal* 6, no. 2 (2017): 193–207, <https://doi.org/10.24090/jimrf.v6i2.2741>.

³ Fitri Rahmawati, "The Concept of Moderate Da'wah: A Review of *Ummatan Wasathan* in the Qur'an Surah Al-Baqarah:143," *Studia Quramika* 6, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.21111/studiquran.v6i1.5570>.

⁴ Arif Budiono, "Moderasi Beragama dalam Perspektif Al Quran (Kajian Tafsir Surat Al Baqoroh:143)," *JADID: Journal of Quranic Studies and Islamic Communication* 1, no. 1 (2021): 105–12, <https://ejournal.unkafa.ac.id/index.php/JADID/article/view/336>.

this paper is the book of tafsir in the contemporary era so that the understanding obtained is easier to apply in modern times and the context of Indonesian society.

Discussion

The Science of Signs to Reveal the *Ummah of Wasathan*

The term *semiotics* or 'sign science' used to explore the meaning of *the wasathan ummatan* in this writing comes from the Greek language, namely *same* which means interpreter of signs or *semeion* which means sign. The term *semeion* has been commonly used in the tradition of classical and scholastic studies of the arts of rhetoric, poetry, and logic. It seems that this term was adopted from the term medicine with its focus on symptomatology and diagnostic inferential. At first, the meaning of the sign at this level was still fairly simple. It is only interpreted as something that indicates the existence of other things, for example, there is smoke indicating the presence of fire.⁵ Semiotics is the science of signs, in this case like most other semiotics, Roland Barthes has his definition of his understanding of signs.

Roland Barthes is a structuralist who holds the view that semiotics is a system of signs that reflect the assumptions of a certain society at a certain time. Semiotics in Barthes' language in principle wants to study how humans interpret things. The objects that want to be interpreted are to be communicated and also reconstruct the structured system of signs. Barthes views signification as a total process with a structured structure. According to Barthes, the significance does not stop at the level of language alone, but there is also the possibility of applying it to social life. In other languages, social life, no matter what form it takes, is a system of signs in itself.⁶ This is what is meant by that semiotics or *semiology* (in Barthes's language) can be applied to things outside of linguistics. One of his most famous opinions is that language is a system of signs as a reflection of certain assumptions of society and at a certain time.⁷ Therefore, it is not surprising that now Barthes' theory is widely used to see and study advertisements, movies, magazines, and other works of art.

Roland Barthes applied a lot of theories of his predecessor, Saussure, as his foothold in developing and analyzing things outside of linguistics. Barthes developed Saussure's theory of *signifier-signified*. At this level, Barthes named it the meaning of denotation, or semiotics of the first stage. Next, he developed a second stage of semiotics named connotation. This term has been used often and even appeared since language lessons are delivered at the most basic level in schools. In principle, what has been explained in school is actually per the path, but in this case, a deeper explanation of the denotation and connotation will be given.

Denotation is a sign level that explains the relationship between *signifiers* and *signified* simply and explicitly. It is the most basic concept of marking, connecting the sign and its reference to reality. Denotation is the most prevalent level of signs in society because its meanings are general

⁵ Fatimah, *Semiotics in the Study of Public Service Advertising (ILM)*, ed. Syahril, TallasaMedia, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Gowa: TallasaMedia, 2020).

⁶ Fatimah.

⁷ Dewi Umaroh, "The Meaning of 'Abasa Prophet Muhammad in the Qur'an (Semiotic Application of Roland Barthes to Q.S. 'Abasa [80]: 1)," *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Tafsir Studies* 5, no. 2 (2020): 116–27, <https://journal.uinsgd.ac.id/index.php/Al-Bayan/article/view/11640/5308>.

and are a social agreement, the meaning has been socially agreed upon and its reference is to reality. At this level, the meaning of denotation can be found in language dictionaries.⁸

The second stage of connotation or semiotics is an important part of Barthes' thinking because it is at this stage that Barthes put his development on Saussure's theory which is also known as the *Two Orders of Signification*. The connotation explains the relationship between the marker and the sign. The difference with denotation is that the resulting meaning is not explicit, but an implicitly present meaning. The meaning of connotation can be influenced by various things, such as the social conditions of the community, a certain time, personal experiences, and culture in the process of meaning. The resulting meaning is a second-stage semiotic system built on the denotation system. Therefore, the meaning of connotation will always have a relationship with the meaning of denotation.⁹

Barthes believes that each signification system has one region of Expression (E), and one region of content/content (C), both of which are interconnected or called Relation (R), if all three are written as E R C. This ERC system is the first system that will affect the second-stage sign system. The area of expression is formed by a system of significations if written as (ERC)RC. This way of thinking is called by Hjelmslev as connotative semiotics.¹⁰ This is what was meant at the beginning that the meaning of connotation is a meaning based on denotation. For example, roses symbolize the desire for love. This meaning is certainly obtained from the experience that surrounds the individual who carries it, but it also cannot be separated from the realm of denotation itself.

Barthes also looked at another aspect called myth. Myth is a system of semiotics of the next level that is built based on the previous semiological chain. What was *signed* in the previous stage becomes just *a signifier* at this stage. However, the form of the *sign* at the beginning is only seen as *a signifier* and is considered a form of language itself when captured by myth. This semiological system is a continuous chain, the final result of the initial semiological stage will be part of the later semiological process. Then everything that happens, as if the myth will shift the formal system of the first stage to the side because this shift is important for the analysis of myth.¹¹

Table 1. Stages of Roland Barthes' Semiotic Meaning

<i>Language</i> <i>Myth</i>	{	1. <i>Mean</i>	2. <i>Signified</i>	
		3. <i>Sign</i>		II. <i>SIGNIFIED</i>
		I. <i>MEAN</i>		III. <i>SIGN</i>

At this level, myth is considered to be a valid meaning, because when viewed from the process, it is formed on many connotative meanings, then led into a mutually agreed meaning

⁸ Fatimah, *Semiotics in the Study of Public Service Advertising (ILM)*.

⁹ Journal of Science and Al-Quran Tafsir, "AL-FANAR" 4 (2021): 167–76, <https://doi.org/10.33511/alfanar.v4n2.167-176>.

¹⁰ Roland Barthes, *L'aventure Semiologique (Semiological Adventure)*, ed. Wening Udasmoro, 1st ed. (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Siswa, 2007).

¹¹ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, ed. Annette Lavers, 1st ed. (New York: The Noonday Press, 1972).

(conventional), and accepted without any resistance. Myths are very tied to the interests of the speaker, so the meaning of each person's myth can produce different meanings.

Stages of the Meaning of *Ummatan Wasathan*

The science of signs or semiotics described above is then used to study the term *ummatan wasathan* in the verse of the Qur'an, surah Al-Baqarah verse 143. However, other aspects or verses may also be seen that can help the course of the research.

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا ۗ
 وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْقِبْلَةَ الَّتِي كُنْتَ عَلَيْهَا إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يَتَّبِعُ الرَّسُولَ مِمَّنْ يَنْقَلِبُ عَلَى عَقْبَيْهِ ۗ وَإِنْ كَانَتْ
 لَكَبِيرَةً إِلَّا عَلَى الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ فَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيَضَيِّعَ إِيمَانَكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِالنَّاسِ لَرُءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ

"Likewise, We have made you (Muslims) the middle ummah so that you may be witnesses to human beings and for the Messenger (Prophet Muhammad) to be witnesses to your (deeds). We do not set the Qibla (Bail) to which you (formerly) have a Qibla against it, except so that We know (in reality) who follows the Messenger and who turns back. Indeed, (the removal of the qibla) is very heavy, except for those who have been instructed by Allah. God will not waste your faith. Indeed, Allah is truly the Most Merciful and Most Merciful to man."¹² (Q. s. Al-Baqarah: 143)

The denotation of the term *Ummatan Wasathan*

In this first stage of semiotics, the analysis will be carried out by looking at the meaning of the word that is the object of research to find its literal meaning. The focus of the analysis is on the term *ummatan wasathan* by looking at its meaning from various dictionaries. The term *ummatan wasathan* in the translation of the Qur'an of the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia is interpreted as 'middle ummah'. The middle ummah here is interpreted as the elect, the best, fair, and balanced, both in beliefs, thoughts, attitudes, and behaviours.¹³ The word *ummah* according to the *Al-Munawwir dictionary* comes from the words *amma*, *amaamatan*, *umuumatan* meaning to go to, meaning. The form of its development became *i'tammah* which means to make an imam. This word then developed the word *al-um* which means 'mother' and *imam* which means 'leader'. Meanwhile, the word *wasathan* according to the *Al-Munawwir dictionary* comes from the root word *al-wasathu* which is plural *awsatho*, meaning 'the middle one'. The form of development is *wasatha'u* meaning 'mediator'. From this word, the term referee which means 'match arbiter' emerges.¹⁴ The term *ummatan wasathan* in the *Al-Munawwir dictionary* is indeed not a separate unitary term. The term *ummah* is also not explicitly mentioned, but the basis of the word can be found with a binding meaning on the root word. The term *wasath* is relatively more commonly found because the word form does not change much.

¹² Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, "Qur'an of the Ministry of Religion," quran.kemenag.go.id, 2023, <https://quran.kemenag.go.id/quran/per-ayat/surah/2?from=143&to=286>. Accessed at 10.42 WIB on 21/12/2023

¹³ Republic of Indonesia. Accessed at 10.43 WIB on 21/12/2023

¹⁴ A.W. Munawwir, *Al Munawwir Arabic-Indonesian Dictionary* (Surabaya: Pustaka Progresif, 1997).

Daud Athiyah in the *Al-Mufradat dictionary*, the word *umamun* is interpreted as 'the people' and the word *wasathotun* is interpreted as 'mediation'¹⁵. In this dictionary, the words *ummat* and *wasath* are mentioned only once and explicitly directly accompanied by a straightforward translation. Meanwhile, Raghīb Al-Asfahani said that the word *ummah* is any group that is united by one thing, either in the form of religion, time, or place, with the plural form of *umamun*. Meanwhile, to explain the term *wasatha*, Al-Asfahani explained that what is said to be *wasathu syay'in*, is 'a part of something that has two ends of the same size. He then added that the word *wasatho* can be used as 'an intermediate form between *ifroth* (exceeding the limit) and *tafriidh* (recklessness)'. This term is also described as something that falls between good and bad.¹⁶

Furthermore, the word *ummah* in the book Al-Alfaazh is interpreted as a group of people consisting of certain individuals or bonds, or the same interests, or the same rules'. This word is mentioned with various developments in its meaning. Meanwhile, the word *wasathan* in this book has the root word *al-wasth*, which means 'just' and 'middle-class'. If it means 'excessive', the word *ifraathi* is used and if it means 'too restrictive', the word *tafriidh* or *taqshir* is used. As said by Az-Zujaj quoted in the same book, the word *wasathan* has two meanings, namely '*adlan wa khiyaaran* meaning 'just and middle'. That is, the 'fair means the middle' and 'the middle is just'. These two words are different, but they have the same meaning.¹⁷

In this first semiotics stage, data has been collected from various dictionary sources, and it can be seen that each term *ummah* and *wasath* has various meanings and forms. However, each of these terms has a kind of common thread that can be pulled so that one meaning is obtained. The term *ummah* can be understood as a group consisting of various individuals who are united by various aspects, and who have the same interests, bonds, or regulations, and the binding matter can be coercive or also of their own volition. Meanwhile, the term *wasathan* with its various derivations has the meaning of "the middle one", meaning that it is between two good and bad things, but the connotation is more inclined to positive things.

Connotation of the Terms *Ummatan and Wasathan*

The second stage of meaning is the connotation of the term *wasathan*. In this second semiotics stage, the analysis will be carried out by looking at aspects that exist outside the term itself, but on the other hand, it is bound and constructed from the term. In this section, the opinions of the scholars in the book of *Tafsir* will be the material for analysis as a way to get the meaning of the connotation.

One of the explanations of the meaning of *the wasathan ummatan* can be seen in *the Tafsir Al-Azhar*. Hamka explained that what is meant by the *wasathan ummatan* is a people who take the middle way believe in the hereafter and continue to do charity in the world. The people are said to be people who excel in intelligence of mind (cognitive) as well as strong in terms of worship to train emotional sensitivity. The ummah also makes efforts to seek worldly life and wealth as a tool to do good and become the caliph of Allah on earth to provide for the journey in the hereafter. Hamka also explained that as long as these people are still taking *shiratal mustaqim*, then as long as they are

¹⁵ Daud Athiyah Abduh, *Al-Mufradat Dictionary of 3000 Words Most Often Appears in the Book of Gundul Arabic*, ed. Izzul Islam, Indonesia (Klaten: Wafa Press, 2004).

¹⁶ Raghīb Al-Asfahani, *Al-Mufradat fi Gharibil Qur'an (Kamus Al Qur'an)*, ed. Ruslan Nurhadi (Depok: Pustaka Khazanah Fawa'id, 2017).

¹⁷ Masduha, *Al-Alfaazh The Smart Book of Understanding Words in the Qur'an*, ed. Achmad Zirzis, 1st ed. (Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar, 2017).

still the people of the middle way. This indicates the correlation between the *wasathan ummatan* and *shiratal mustaqim* as the course of the ummah. This meaning emerged by Hamka starting with the history of two great peoples, namely Jews and Christians, each of which is to learn. Jews become a people who are too busy with the world so that they neglect the hereafter, while Christians are too busy with the world after death to abandon the rights and obligations of a human being in the world, like a priest who is forbidden to marry.¹⁸

Meanwhile, az-Zamakhsyari in his book explains that *the ummatan wasathan* is the ummah of Muhammad as a people who are the middle way. This person will be a witnesses to the people of the other Prophets about the truth of the Messengers' treatises that were conveyed to each of them. The testimony asked whether he has carried out his duties as a people who take the middle way by not mixing the *baqq* with the *bathil* or vice versa.¹⁹ In the later period, Quraish Shihab in *Tafsir Al-Misbbah* sat the *ummahan wasathan* as moderate and exemplary, the ummah in question was the Muslims. This ummah is in the middle because it is per the position of the Kaaba which is also in the middle. This position also makes people impartial to the left or right and makes a person to be fair. That is, he can be a witness to other people, as explained in the continuation of the next verse. In addition, there is also an understanding that the *ummatan wasathan* means the middle between God and the world, between the spiritual and the material. These people do not deny the existence of God, but they also do not adhere to the idea of polytheism. It also means that humans should not drown in materialism, but also not soar in spiritualism. When the gaze looks up at the sky, the feet must remain on the earth.²⁰

Sayyid Quthb in his book has several alternative meanings that vary in interpreting the term *ummatan wasathan*. The meaning of the middle ummah is a Muslim ummah who is just in all the sense of justice. Sayyid Quthb said that *the wasathan ummatan* is a just people in terms of understanding and belief, meaning that they are not excessive in spiritual matters and are not immersed in material things (worldly material). They are also people who are just in terms of thoughts and feelings. This Ummah does not close itself from other knowledge but also does not get dragged by the current while still having firm guidelines. They are just people in terms of organization and coordination. That is, in deciding something, they do not let it be carried away by lust, but also do not allow it to be left to power and punishment alone. They are just people in terms of affinity and relationships. They set duties and obligations that can make individuals serve the community and society can serve individuals in the form of harmonious and harmonious relationships. They are just people in terms of place. That is, they inhabit the region in the middle of the earth, between the West and the East, between the South and the North. Thus, they give what they have to all the inhabitants of the earth from one place to another. They are also just people in terms of the times. This means that these people were born at the end of the Dark Age, and became the guardian of the era of human civilization progress. They cleanse mankind of disbelieving beliefs and those who are led astray by lust, and guide them to the straight path.²¹

¹⁸ Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar* (Singapore: Pustaka Nasional PTE Ltd Singapore, 2003).

¹⁹ Abu Qasim Mahmud Umar Al-Zamakhsyari, *Tafsir Al-Kasyaf* (Beirut: Dar Al Marefah, 2009).

²⁰ Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbbah: Messages, Impressions, and Harmony of the Qur'an*, 5th ed. (Jakarta: Lentera Hati Publisher, 2000).

²¹ Sayyid Quthb, *Tafsir fi Zbilalil Qur'an di Bawah Naungan Al Qur'an* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 2003).

At this stage, the opinions of commentators on the term *ummatan wasathan* are known. Next is to see the extent to which this meaning reaches aspects beyond the linguistic side with the help of understanding from the various interpreters above. If we look back at the various meanings of the term *ummatan wasathan*, then we will be able to take some important points. *First*, and the most often mentioned by all the commentators above, *the ummatan wasathan* is interpreted as a people who are in the middle between the worldly life and the hereafter or between the material needs of the world and the spiritual needs. That is, he will always strive to fulfil his obligations as a human being who is responsible for other human beings, and his responsibility as a servant to his Lord. If we borrow the term Quraish Shihab, that is, when the gaze looks up to the sky, then the feet will remain on the ground and use the ability in the world to find provisions on the journey in the hereafter.

Second, the term *ummatan wasathan* is interpreted as a mediator between fellow humans. This means that he is a ummah who is tasked with being a witness to the deeds of other people. This task can be carried out when he can see his right and left clearly. To see clearly, he had to be in the middle position. This middle position is interpreted impartially to the right and not to the left. This task makes humans act fairly. From here, the meaning of 'just ummah' is then correlated to the term *ummatan wasathan*. This meaning arises because it is supported by the continuation of the verse *لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ* (*so that you may be witnesses to human deeds*) so that the encouragement to become a ummah who serves as a witness to the deeds of other people. When he testifies, he should be fair to himself, that is, by not mixing the *haqq* with the *badil*.

Active Attitude as a Myth Term of Ummatan Wasathan

In the next Roland Barthes semiotic system, it is called *myth* analysis. The analysis at this stage is formed based on the meaning that has existed before. *Signifier* and *signified* in the first system order that we call the meaning of denotation, become *the signifier* in the next system order that gives rise to a new *signified*, which is called the meaning of connotation. The connotation system that has been produced forms a global meaning that is very close to culture, as well as history. This is what Barthes calls the ideology of a sign.²² This analysis will be carried out by looking at the context of how the verse descended, the condition of Arab society at that time, and the correlation to the present day to explore the meaning of myths, or their ideology.

Asbabun nuzul from the Qur'an, surah Al-Baqarah verse 143 is narrated by Ibn Ishaq regarding the change of the direction of the qibla from Baitul Maqdis back to the Kaaba. When the qibla led to Baitul Maqdis, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) often asked Allah to return the qibla to the Kaaba. When Allah commands the Qibla to return to the Kaaba, those who lack knowledge ridicule the Prophet as a person who moves the Qibla, a short time there, a little here. People also asked about the fate of the Muslims who had died before the Qibla returned to the Kaaba, in which case Allah calmed them down with the answer that Allah would not waste their faith.²³

Hamka in *Tafsir Al Azhar* explained that what is meant by the *ummah of the wasathan* is the people of the Prophet Muhammad because it is his people who are in the middle between two

²² Barthes, *L'aventure Semiologique (Semiological Adventure)*.

²³ Jalaluddin As Suyuthi, *Asbabun Nuzul Sebab-Sebab Turunnya Ayat Al-Qur'an*, ed. Aba Fira, Indonesia (Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar, 2014).

people, namely Jews and Christians. The Jews are very materialistic people, living on earthly possessions, while Christians, on the other hand, are so immersed in the spiritual world that they abandon their rights and obligations as human beings living on earth. The people of the Prophet Muhammad are the middle of the two attitudes, who use life in this world to seek provisions in the hereafter, which is not excessive. The context of this qibla transition is intended to build a new ummah, namely *the wasathan ummatan*. As we know, after the Prophet emigrated, he went to Baitul Maqdis for approximately 16 to 17 months, while at that time he was very longing to face his worship towards the Qibla. Allah commands the Qibla to be directed to the Kaaba so that it is clear which ones turn away and which ones remain obedient.²⁴

Because at the time when the Qibla was still leading to Jerusalem, the Jews felt that it was their victory over Islam because of the similarity of the Qibla. So when the Qibla was directed to the Kaaba, the Jews showed their dislike. Likewise, hypocrites are always looking for fault with the Prophet. Some people have just converted to Islam when there is a change in the direction of the qibla to become a kafir again. So this qibla transition becomes a real test of which people turn around, or which people remain obedient (in the middle, not to the left, not to the right). Because this incident is indeed heavy, except for the person who is instructed. "*And indeed (the removal of the Qibla) felt very heavy, except for those who have been instructed by Allah*" (Q. s. Al-Baqarah:143)

This verse is classified as the Madaniyyah verse, which means that the context of the Prophet when receiving the revelation is when the Muslims have begun to be strong and widespread.²⁵ But in this case, it needs to be strengthened from within, and one of them is by testing such as the transition of the qibla. At the same time, this verse also reminds Muslims to always learn from the previous two people who were disobedient. That the command to be a *wasathan ummatan* has great responsibility consequences. The command to be in the middle between not being like the Jews, and the Christians who are too concerned with the world, and the other is concerned with the spiritual side. However, it does not stop there, being a *wasathan ummatan* means being a just ummah, in the sense that being fair to oneself, can also be fair to others. Because this is one of the commandments in the verse, to be a witness to other people. At this level, the middle position no longer stops at the realm of mutual understanding and respect but is encouraged to be more active as a mediator and referee, separating the *baqq* and *the badil*. So the meaning of moderate is not only passive but more inclined to the active direction to carry out life choices that are in harmony with life.

²⁴ Humka, *Tafsir al-Azhar*.

²⁵ Muhammad Fuad Abdul Baqi, *Mu'jam Mufabras Li Al-Fadzil Qur'anil Karim* (Dar al Fikr, 1981).

Table 2. Stages of Interpretation of *Ummatan Wasathan*

<p>A nation in the middle</p> <p><i>a. Mean</i></p>	<p>A group of people in the middle position</p> <p><i>b. Signified</i></p>	
<p>A group of people who are in a middle position between various choices in life who tend to choose positive things.</p> <p><i>c. Sign</i></p> <p>I. SIGNIFIER</p>		<p>Muslims who are just to themselves, to their fellow humans, and to God</p> <p>II. SIGNIFIED</p>
<p>An active attitude (not just a passive position) that seeks to choose something in a balanced and fair manner based on various considerations to achieve harmony in life.</p> <p>III. SIGN</p>		

Based on the second table above, several stages of the meaning of *wasathan ummatan* can be explained. In the first stage, namely the *langue stage*, the term *ummatan wasathan* has a *signifier* (marker) of *ummatan wasathan*, while *the signified* (signifier) is a group of people who are in the middle position'. This stage is also called the denotation stage which refers to conventional meanings in the dictionary. The next stage, by looking at the various explanations of the *mufassir*, *signifier* and *signified* that has been found, can be read as a sign, which is a group of people who are in a middle position between various choices in life who tend to choose positive things. This *sign* in various explanations as described in the sub-chapter above, transforms into *a new* signifier. This new *signifier* has another broader meaning called *signified*, which is 'Muslims who are just to themselves, to their fellow humans, and God'. This is a stage called connotation. Finally, by referring to the denotation, connotation, and context of *asbabun nuzul* and various other references, the farthest meaning from the term *ummatan wasathan* is found, namely 'An active attitude (not just a passive position) that seeks to choose something in a balanced and fair manner based on various considerations to achieve harmony in life'.

Conclusion

The term *ummatan wasathan* in the Qur'an surah Al-Baqarah verse 143 contains the meaning of denotation, namely a group of people who are bound to each other, be it religious or otherwise, and he is in the middle position. However, the Central position is not in a literal sense. The Middle Position means that it is between the positive and the negative, but it is more inclined to its positive values. This then gives rise to the meaning that what is meant by a group of people is Muslims. Furthermore, what is meant by moderate is not only those in the middle, but it is encouraged to be more fair. This fair attitude has two directions, namely vertical and horizontal. Vertical means that it must be fair between the life of this world and the life of the hereafter. On the other hand, he must also be fair horizontally, meaning that he must be able to bear witness to other human beings. If we think for a moment, the person who is a witness or referee must also be able to be fair to

himself first. The results of the above interpretation then give rise to a big ideology that a moderate attitude is an active attitude and not a passive attitude. This means that it is not an attitude that does not have a stance, but rather a moderate attitude that encourages humans to be able to be judges among fellow humans.

References

- Abduh, Daud Athiyah. *Al-Mufradat Dictionary 3000 Words Most Often Appear in the Bare Arabic Book*. Edited by Izzul Islam. Indonesia. Klaten: Wafa Press, 2004.
- Al-Asfahani, Raghīb. *Al-Mufradat fi gharibil Qur'an (Kamus al Qur'an)*. Edited by Ruslan Nurhadi. Depok: Pustaka Khazanah Fawa'id, 2017.
- Al-Zamakhsyari, Abu Qasim Mahmud Umar. *The Interpretation of Al-Kasyaf*. Beirut: Dar Al Marefah, 2009.
- As Suyuthi, Jalaluddin. *Asbabun Nuḥul Sebab-Sebab Turunnyā Ayat Al-Qur'an*. Edited by Aba Fira. Indonesia. Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar, 2014.
- Baqi, Mohammed Fuad Abdul. *Mu'jam Mufabras li Al Fadzil Qur'anil Karim*. Dar al Fikr, 1981.
- Barthes, Roland. *L'aventure Semiologique (Semiological Adventure)*. Edited by Wening Udasmoro. 1st ed. Yogyakarta: Student Library, 2007.
- . *Mythologies*. Edited by Annette Lavers. 1st ed. New York: The Noonday Press, 1972.
- Budiono, Arif. "Moderasi Beragama dalam Perspektif Al Quran (Kajian Tafsir Surat Al Baqoroh:143)." *JADID: Journal of Quranic Studies and Islamic Communication* 1, no. 1 (2021): 105–12. <https://ejournal.unkafa.ac.id/index.php/JADID/article/view/336>.
- Fatimah. *Semiotics in the Study of Public Service Advertising (ILM)*. Edited by Syahril. *TallasaMedia*. 1st ed. Vol. 1. Gowa: TallasaMedia, 2020.
- Fernandes, Arya, Edbert Gani Suryahudaya, Dr. Vidyandika D Perkasa, and Nicky D Fahrizal. "Young Voters and the 2024 Election: Post-Pandemic Socio-Political Dynamics and Preferences." *CSIS Department of Politics and Social Change*, no. September (2022): 1–49.
- Hamka. *Tafsir Al-Azhar*. Singapore: National Library of PTE Ltd Singapore, 2003.
- Science, Journal, and Al-Quran Tafsir. "AL-FANAR" 4 (2021): 167–76. <https://doi.org/10.33511/alfanar.v4n2.167-176>.
- Khoyin, Muhammad. *Philosophy Of Language*. 1st ed. Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2013.
- Masduha. *Al-Alfaazh The Smart Book of Understanding the Words in the Qur'an*. Edited by Achmad Zirzis. 1st ed. Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar, 2017.
- Munawwir, A.W. *Al Munawwir Arabic-Indonesian Dictionary*. Surabaya: Pustaka Progresif, 1997.
- Son, Ariandi. "The Role of Political Buzzers in Dynamics Ahead of the 2024 Elections." *SALAM: Journal of Social and Cultural Syar-I* 10, no. 4 (2023): 1143–58. <https://doi.org/10.15408/sjsbs.v10i4.34076>.
- Quthb, Sayyid. *Tafsir Fi Zhilalil Qur'an di Bawah Naungan Al Qur'an*. Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 2003.
- Rahmawati, Fitri. "The Concept of Moderate Da'wah: A Review of Ummatan Wasathan in the Qur'an Surah Al-Baqarah:143." *Studia Quranika* 6, no. 1 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.21111/studiquran.v6i1.5570>.

Rahmawati, Huzdaeni. "The Values of *the Wasathan Ummah to Fight Intolerance* (Textual, Contextual, and Contextualization Study of Q.S. Al-Baqarah Verse 143)." *Scientific Journal of Raushan Students Fiker* 6, no. 2 (2017): 193–207. <https://doi.org/10.24090/jimrf.v6i2.2741>.

Republic of Indonesia, Ministry of Religious Affairs. "Qur'an of the Ministry of Religion." quran.kemenag.go.id, 2023. <https://quran.kemenag.go.id/quran/per-ayat/surah/2?from=143&to=286>.

Shihab, Quraish. *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Message, Impression, and Harmony of the Qur'an*. 5th ed. Jakarta: Lentera Hati Publisher, 2000.

Umaroh, Dewi. "The Meaning of 'Abasa Prophet Muhammad in the Qur'an (Semiotic Application of Roland Barthes to Q.S. 'Abasa [80]: 1)." *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Tafsir Studies* 5, no. 2 (2020): 116–27. <https://journal.uinsgd.ac.id/index.php/Al-Bayan/article/view/11640/5308>.