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Communicative Action or Strategic Communication? A Habermasian Analysis of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs' *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi*

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Abstract. This article examines how the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs constructs ecological responsibility through its official publication *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi: Membangun Kesadaran Ekoteologis Berbasis Al-Qur'an*. This book was written amid rapid industrial expansion and a deepening environmental crisis in Indonesia. Against this backdrop, examining how the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as a state institution, constructs ideal ecological foundations from the Qur'an becomes critical. Rather than evaluating the theological content of the tafsir, the study investigates its communicative function within Indonesia's contemporary environmental and political context. Drawing on Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action, particularly the concepts of communicative rationality, strategic communication, and the colonization of the lifeworld, this research employs qualitative critical discourse analysis of the tafsir's institutional paratext and selected ecological interpretations. The analysis is situated within the historical-political context of Indonesia's expanding extractive development, including mining policy reforms and the growing involvement of religious institutions in environmental governance. The findings show that the tafsir consistently frames ecological degradation through the ethical vocabulary of *amānah, khalīfah*, and individual moral responsibility while only selectively acknowledging the structural role of political authority and extractive capital. Although the text occasionally recognizes state and corporate actors as contributors to environmental destruction, its proposed solutions remain centered on moral exhortation rather than institutional accountability or democratic deliberation. Consequently, the tafsir occupies an intermediate communicative position between communicative action and strategic communication, preserving religion's ethical authority while simultaneously narrowing structural ecological critique into a discourse of moral reform. This study contributes to scholarship on state-sponsored Qur'anic interpretation by demonstrating how official ecological exegesis participates in the communicative governance of environmental crises.
***Keywords**: communicative action; ecological exegesis; Habermas; Ministry of Religious Affairs; state communication;* Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi.

Abstrak. *Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia mengonstruksi tanggung jawab ekologis melalui Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi: Membangun Kesadaran Ekoteologis Berbasis Al-Qur'an. Buku ini ditulis di tengah pesatnya ekspansi industri dan memuncaknya krisis lingkungan di Indonesia. Berangkat dari konteks tersebut, mengkaji bagaimana Kementerian Agama, sebagai institusi negara, membangun fondasi ekologis yang ideal berdasarkan Al-Qur'an menjadi krusial. Berbeda dari penelitian yang berfokus pada substansi teologis tafsir, studi ini menempatkan tafsir sebagai praktik komunikasi negara yang beroperasi dalam konteks politik dan ekologis Indonesia kontemporer. Dengan menggunakan teori tindakan komunikatif Jürgen Habermas, khususnya konsep rasionalitas komunikatif, komunikasi strategis, dan kolonisasi dunia kehidupan (lifeworld), penelitian ini menerapkan analisis wacana kritis terhadap parateks institusional serta penafsiran ayat-ayat ekologis dalam tafsir tersebut. Analisis dilakukan dengan mempertimbangkan konteks historis-politik Indonesia yang ditandai oleh ekspansi pembangunan ekstraktif, reformasi kebijakan pertambangan, dan meningkatnya keterlibatan institusi keagamaan dalam tata kelola sumber daya alam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tafsir secara konsisten membingkai krisis ekologis melalui konsep amanah, khalifah, dan tanggung jawab moral individu, sementara faktor-faktor struktural seperti negara dan kapital ekstraktif hanya diakui secara terbatas. Meskipun beberapa bagian mengkritik peran penguasa dan aktor ekonomi dalam kerusakan lingkungan, solusi yang ditawarkan tetap berpusat pada seruan moral, bukan akuntabilitas institusional maupun deliberasi publik. Dengan demikian, Tafsir Ayat-*

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Ayat Ekologi menempati posisi komunikatif yang berada di antara tindakan komunikatif dan komunikasi strategis. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa tafsir resmi negara tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai produk penafsiran keagamaan, tetapi juga sebagai instrumen komunikasi yang membentuk relasi antara agama, negara, dan tata kelola krisis ekologis di Indonesia.
***Kata kunci**: tindakan komunikatif; tafsir ekologis; Habermas; Kementerian Agama; komunikasi negara; Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi.*

INTRODUCTION

The publication of *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi: Membangun Kesadaran Ekoteologis Berbasis Al-Qur'an* by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) marks a significant expansion of the state's religious communication into the domain of environmental governance. Led by Dr. Reflita, S.Th.I., M.A., a key researcher and functional officer at the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an (LPMQ) specializing in official Qur'anic exegesis and translation (Reflita et al. 2025). By articulating ecological responsibility through officially sanctioned Qur'anic interpretation, the Ministry positions Islamic theology as a public resource for addressing Indonesia's escalating environmental crisis. This intervention emerges amid persistent structural challenges associated with resource extraction, environmental degradation, and uneven regulatory enforcement (Bagir 2025; Husain 2025; Wijsen 2025). Consequently, the publication raises an important question concerning the communicative role of state-sponsored religious discourse in shaping public understandings of environmental responsibility.

Existing scholarship has examined Islamic environmental discourse from two main perspectives. The first focuses on grassroots religious initiatives that translate ecological ethics into community practice. Ecological exegesis has been promoted within pesantren through fiqh al-bīʾah and environmentally oriented religious education (Ubab 2022), while faith-based organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama have developed ecological preaching and community programs to strengthen local resilience in environmentally vulnerable regions (Firdaus and Siregar 2025). Collectively, these studies demonstrate the growing role of religious institutions in fostering ecological awareness, particularly where state environmental governance remains limited.

The second strand of scholarship examines the intersection between religion and state environmental policy. The involvement of Islamic organizations in mining governance following Government Regulation No. 25 of 2024 has generated extensive debate regarding the changing relationship between religious authority and Indonesia's extractive political economy (Miliasari et al. 2025; Rohma 2025; Yunus et al. 2025; Muhammad et al. 2024; Maulidatin et al. 2026; Sudarmin et al. 2025). Parallel studies further show that public criticism of these policies has largely remained confined to digital activism without substantially influencing policy outcomes (Rohma 2025). Together, this literature illuminates the political positioning of religious organizations but pays comparatively little attention to how the state itself constructs ecological theology through officially authorized Qur'anic interpretation.

This omission is analytically important. Although recent studies have explored ecological theology, grassroots environmental activism, and the political economy of religion, little attention has been devoted to examining whether state-produced ecological tafsir functions primarily as a medium of public deliberation or as a strategic form of state

communication, particularly when produced in the aftermath of controversial extractive policies. Consequently, the communicative character of *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi* remains insufficiently understood.

To address this gap, this article employs Habermas's theory of communicative action. Habermas distinguishes communicative action, which seeks mutual understanding through rational dialogue, from strategic action, which aims to influence others in pursuit of institutional objectives (Fathurokhmah and Pratiwi 2025; Kim et al. 2020). His concepts of the colonization of the lifeworld and systematically distorted communication provide an analytical framework for examining whether state-sponsored religious discourse facilitates communicative engagement with environmental stakeholders or primarily advances administrative and political imperatives (Hidayat 2023; Rochmawati 2025).

Building on this framework, this study investigates how *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi* constructs ecological responsibility within contemporary Indonesian Islamic discourse. Rather than presuming that the text either promotes ecological ethics or serves as an instrument of state legitimation, the analysis examines how environmental degradation, human agency, and institutional responsibility are discursively configured throughout the tafsir. Particular attention is given to whether ecological responsibility is predominantly articulated through individual moral obligations, potentially generating communicative asymmetries regarding structural environmental accountability, or whether the interpretation also addresses the broader political and institutional dimensions of environmental governance.

Accordingly, this article examines how *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi* constructs ecological responsibility within its Qur'anic interpretation. Drawing on Habermas's theory of communicative action, it further investigates whether this state-sponsored discourse primarily fosters communicative rationality by encouraging public understanding and dialogue, or instead reflects a form of systematically distorted state communication that reconfigures environmental responsibility through strategic religious discourse (Duvenhage 2024). The choice of Habermas stems from his differentiation between communicative rationality and strategic rationality, which yields a suitable conceptual model to analyze how broad moral ideals are institutionalized into administrative-jurisdictional systems (Habermas 1985, 173-174). Under this model, the interpretation of the Qur'an is positioned as a normative discursive act aimed at establishing universal, rational, and moral validity claims (*Geltungsansprüche*) in the public religious domain.

This study contributes to the scholarship on Islam and environmental governance in three respects. First, it shifts analytical attention from grassroots environmental initiatives to state-produced Qur'anic interpretation as an official mode of religious communication. Second, it extends Habermasian communicative theory to the study of contemporary Islamic ecological discourse by examining how state-sponsored tafsir mediates relationships between religion, environmental ethics, and public authority. Third, it demonstrates that official Qur'anic interpretation can be understood not only as a theological text but also as a communicative intervention through which environmental responsibility is discursively negotiated within contemporary environmental governance in Indonesia.

This study employs a qualitative interpretive approach to examine *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi* published by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs as a form of state-sponsored

religious communication. Rather than evaluating the theological validity of its interpretations, the analysis focuses on how the tafsir constructs ecological responsibility and communicates environmental ethics to its intended audience. Particular attention is given to the discursive configuration of environmental problems, the attribution of responsibility, and the communicative relationship established between the state, religious authority, and the public. In this sense, the tafsir is approached not merely as an exegetical text but as a communicative practice through which ecological meanings are produced and disseminated within Indonesia's contemporary public sphere.

The analysis proceeds in two stages. First, the tafsir is situated within its historical, social, and political context by examining the broader dynamics of environmental governance in Indonesia, including the expansion of extractive development, environmental policy reforms, and the growing involvement of religious institutions in ecological governance. This contextualization provides the interpretive horizon for understanding the conditions under which the tafsir was produced. Second, drawing on Habermas's theory of communicative action, the study analyses the communicative patterns of the tafsir by assessing how it frames ecological issues, addresses its audience, and articulates environmental responsibility. The analysis further considers whether these communicative strategies primarily encourage public deliberation and communicative rationality or instead reflect patterns of strategically mediated state communication in responding to Indonesia's ecological crisis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Indonesia's Escalating Ecological Crisis: *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi* within the Historical–Political Colonization of the Lifeworld

The publication of *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi* in 2025 coincided with mounting evidence that Indonesia's environmental crisis had reached an increasingly systemic scale. Although environmental degradation has long been recognized as a major development challenge, recent studies demonstrate that ecological pressures are no longer confined to isolated cases of pollution or deforestation but are embedded across multiple sectors of natural resource governance.

One of the most pressing challenges concerns the country's growing plastic pollution. Using a nationwide Material Flow Analysis (MFA), Ramadan et al. (2026) estimate that Indonesia generates approximately 9.2 million tonnes of plastic waste annually, with more than one million tonnes classified as mismanaged plastic waste that potentially leaks into rivers, coastal ecosystems, and the broader environment (Ramadan et al. 2026). Their findings further reveal substantial disparities in waste management capacity across subdistricts and highlight the continuing dependence on informal recycling systems, indicating persistent weaknesses in environmental governance.

Environmental degradation is equally evident in Indonesia's extractive sector. Employing longitudinal data spanning nearly five decades, Hardi (2026) demonstrates that increasing bauxite and copper production has significantly intensified Indonesia's ecological footprint. The study further shows that economic growth, driven partly by mineral extraction,

has consistently generated long-term ecological pressures, underscoring the tension between developmental priorities and environmental sustainability (Hardi et al. 2026).

These empirical findings are reinforced by broader analyses of Indonesia's environmental governance. Ghazali (2026) argues that although Indonesia has formally adopted environmental conservation policies and environmental impact assessment mechanisms, their implementation is frequently undermined by collusion, cronyism, and weak governance in natural resource management (Ghazali 2026). Consequently, environmental degradation cannot be understood solely as the consequence of individual behavior but must also be situated within institutional and political arrangements that shape policy implementation.

Similar concerns are reflected in the legal sphere. Nugroho (2026) contends that Indonesia's constitutional and regulatory framework remains insufficient to address contemporary ecological challenges because environmental sustainability has yet to become an explicit constitutional principle. The fragmentation of environmental regulations and the absence of a coherent legal foundation continue to constrain the state's capacity to integrate ecological protection into national development policies (Nugroho et al. 2026).

Taken together, these studies suggest that Indonesia's ecological crisis extends beyond environmental management alone. Rather, it reflects a broader governance problem in which environmental degradation is produced through the interaction of extractive economic development, fragmented regulatory institutions, and persistent weaknesses in political accountability. It is within this broader context that the state's growing reliance on religious discourse to promote ecological responsibility, including the publication of *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi*, becomes analytically significant.

Indonesia's contemporary environmental governance has developed within a persistent tension between constitutional commitments to ecological sustainability and an increasingly extractivist model of economic development. Although the 1945 Constitution recognizes environmental rights and embeds sustainable development as a constitutional principle, recent legislative reforms have progressively prioritized investment liberalization and mineral exploitation. Satriawan (2025) argues that the enactment of Law No. 3 of 2020 on Mineral and Coal Mining and Law No. 11 of 2020 on Job Creation widened the gap between Indonesia's constitutional commitment to environmental protection and the practical orientation of state policy. Rather than strengthening ecological safeguards, these reforms facilitated greater flexibility for resource extraction, illustrating an expanding divergence between environmental norms and developmental priorities (Satriawan et al. 2025).

This legal transformation was accompanied by significant changes in Indonesia's political economy. Drawing on Jeffrey Winters' theory of oligarchy, Saputro and Makhasin (2024) argue that the revision of the Mineral and Coal Mining Law reflected the consolidation of political and business elites whose interests converged around the expansion of Indonesia's mining sector (Saputro and Makhasin 2024). Although the government justified the reform through the language of nationalism and public welfare, the legislative process was criticized for limited public participation, weak transparency, and the disproportionate influence of mining interests (Hidayati 2021). These developments suggest that environmental governance

increasingly operated within an institutional configuration in which state authority and extractive capital became mutually reinforcing.

The extractive orientation of state policy became even more apparent through Indonesia's developmental agenda. Rather than displacing extractive development, the discourse of energy transition largely incorporated mineral expansion into the state's strategy of downstream industrialization and economic modernization (Abisono 2024). Collectively, these studies suggest that Indonesia's environmental crisis is deeply embedded in structural patterns of governance rather than resulting solely from individual behavior.

This political trajectory reached a new stage with Government Regulation No. 25 of 2024, which opened opportunities for major Islamic organizations to participate in mining concession management. The policy expanded the relationship between religious authority and extractive governance, positioning religious institutions within the broader political economy of natural resource management. Consequently, environmental governance became increasingly intertwined not only with legal and economic institutions but also with religious authority, raising new questions concerning the role of religion in legitimizing, mediating, or critically engaging state environmental policies.

It was within this evolving political landscape that the Ministry of Religious Affairs published *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi* in 2025. Rather than treating the publication merely as an expression of Islamic ecological ethics, this study situates it within the wider communicative environment in which the state sought to respond to intensifying ecological concerns while simultaneously advancing an extractive development agenda. This context provides the analytical foundation for examining whether the tafsir functions primarily as a communicative space that invites public reflection on the structural causes of environmental degradation or whether it reconstructs ecological responsibility through forms of strategic state communication. Accordingly, the historical-political context is not presented here as a chronological background but as the communicative horizon within which the production, circulation, and political significance of *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi* can be critically understood.

This historical trajectory illustrates a structural process that can be analytically understood through Jürgen Habermas's action-theoretic framework. Habermas attributes the "paradoxes of modernity" to the unchecked dominance of autonomous subsystems which, despite democratic promises, destructively react against the rationalized lifeworld from which they emerged. He clarifies that interaction or interference between system and social integration is not inherently pathological; rather, the mediatization of the lifeworld escalates into a "colonization of the lifeworld" only when systemic mechanisms displace social integration in symbolic domains where communicative coordination is indispensable (Habermas 1985b, 277). Applying this framework to religious discourses, institutional paratexts often serve as crucial communicative arenas that safeguard symbolic reproduction against systemic encroachment. In this context, the significant communicative feature of *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi* does not begin with its interpretation of Qur'anic verses, but with its institutional paratext. Before readers encounter the exegetical discussion, they are first introduced to three successive institutional voices: the Minister of Religious Affairs, the Head of the Agency for Religious Moderation and Human Resource Development (Badan Moderasi

Beragama dan Pengembangan SDM), and finally the Head of the Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an (LPMQ) (Reflita et al. 2025).

This sequencing is analytically significant because it establishes the communicative horizon within which the Qur'anic interpretation is expected to be received. Rather than entering the text through the authority of scripture alone, readers first encounter the authority of the state and its bureaucratic institutions. The foreword by the Minister frames ecological degradation primarily as an ethical and spiritual responsibility through concepts such as *khalifah, amanah, taskhīr, and mīzān*, while the subsequent foreword from the Agency for Religious Moderation explicitly links the publication to the second priority of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and to the eighth Asta Cita of the Prabowo–Gibran administration. Only after these political and administrative legitimations does the LPMQ explain the exegetical methodology employed in the book (Reflita et al. 2025, vii-xi). Rather than allowing the exegetical discussion to stand on its own, the text first establishes a communicative framework through state policy and bureaucratic authority before introducing its interpretive arguments. This sequence suggests that ecological exegesis functions not only as a scholarly engagement with the Qur'an but also as part of a wider governmental communicative project.

This structural dynamic embodies Habermas's formulation regarding the ambivalent role of institutional frameworks, which function either as "the institutional framework that subordinated system maintenance to the normative restrictions of the lifeworld" or "as the basis that subordinated the lifeworld to the systemic constraints of material reproduction" (Habermas 1985b, 275–276). Applied to *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi*, the paratext serves as the primary site where this fundamental tension is negotiated—determining whether the state-sponsored exegesis genuinely subjects extractive governance to the normative limits of religious ethics, or conversely, subordinates Qur'anic ecotheology to the systemic imperatives of state legitimacy. Because this institutional framing is established before readers engage with the theological exegesis itself, the institutional paratext functions as the first communicative arena in which administrative legitimacy precedes interpretive deliberation, shaping the conditions under which the subsequent Qur'anic arguments acquire public authority.

Wasaṭiyyah as a Lifeworld Virtue: Between Ethical Resistance and Systemic Absorption

The deployment of Qur'anic ecotheology in *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi* finds its conceptual anchor in the principle of *wasaṭiyyah* (moderation). Within contemporary Indonesian Islamic discourse, *wasaṭiyyah* has predominantly been framed as an official state paradigm, most visibly institutionalized through the Ministry of Religious Affairs' *Moderasi Beragama* program, to counter religious extremism and maintain social harmony. In this exegesis, however, the scope of *wasaṭiyyah* is expanded beyond social tolerance into the ecological realm. The text rearticulates moderation as a cosmic and moral virtue, positioning environmental degradation as an act of excess (*isrāf*) and corruption (*ifsād*) that violates the divine balance (*mīzān*). This conceptual translation is explicitly grounded in the exegesis of Surah al-Syu'arā': "And do not obey the order of the transgressors, who spread corruption in the land and do not bring about reform." (*al-Syu'arā'*: 151–152)

By invoking this prohibition against "transgressors who spread corruption," the tafsir directly aligns the theological imperative of *wasaṭiyyah* with a critique of destructive environmental practices. Yet, when filtered through a state-sponsored framework, this concept of moderation acquires a distinct communicative function. Rather than functioning as a radical call to dismantle extractive economic structures, *wasaṭiyyah* is deployed to encourage a balanced, non-confrontational mode of stewardship. In this way, moderation serves as an interpretive bridge that mediates between normative Qur'anic ethics and the state's developmental imperatives, framing ecological responsibility through measured ethical conduct rather than systemic confrontation. This analytical tension between structural critique and ethical reform comes into sharpest relief in the commentary's concluding synthesis on Surah al-Syu'arā': 151–152:

> *Musrifīn serves as a symbol of greed and the destroyer of the order of life, both social and ecological. Thus, the prohibition against following the musrifīn is a warning against participating in systems that exploit the earth and other living beings. Through the prohibition against obeying the musrifīn, the Qur'an sends a firm signal that consumptive, greedy, and uncontrolled behavior constitutes a major root of the ecological crisis. This verse instills the awareness that isrāf is not merely an individual sin, but can become a structural crime when institutionalized and followed collectively. Within an ecotheological framework, this verse calls for a lifestyle transformation toward balance (wasaṭiyyah), ecological justice, and spiritual awareness of humanity's role as khalīfah on earth* (Reflita et al. 2025, 142).

This passage represents the conceptual peak of the exegesis, explicitly acknowledging that *isrāf* is not merely a matter of personal piety, but a "structural crime" (*kejahatan struktural*) when institutionalized and collectively practiced. Yet, precisely at the moment where the text reaches its most radical diagnostic potential, its prescriptive scope is swiftly redirected. The remedy for this institutionalized crime is formulated not in terms of structural confrontation or legal-institutional reform, but through a "lifestyle transformation" (*perubahan gaya hidup*) grounded in *wasaṭiyyah*. In Habermasian terms, this discursive pivot illustrates how structural contradictions are absorbed back into the sphere of individual ethical agency. By framing *wasaṭiyyah* primarily as a call for personal balance, spiritual stewardship, and lifestyle moderation, the text successfully articulates a critique of systemic greed while safely neutralizing its political urgency, ensuring that the demand for ecological justice remains an ethical appeal rather than an institutional challenge.

This discursive shift from a "structural crime" to an ethical appeal of "lifestyle transformation" perfectly illustrates what Habermas describes as the shamming of communicative relations within an administered public sphere. In such a context, the state apparatus does not outright suppress the normative claims of the 'lifeworld' (religious ethics, *wasaṭiyyah*, and ecological justice); rather, it strategically absorbs them. As Habermas sharply observes, in bureaucratized public domains, "systemically self-sufficient organizations are fictively put back into a simulated horizon of the lifeworld. While the system is draped out as the lifeworld, the lifeworld is absorbed by the system" (Habermas 1985b, 386). Applied to *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi*, the state-sponsored exegesis drapes the bureaucratic-developmental system in the moral horizon of Islamic ecotheology. Yet, by channeling the systemic critique of extractive capital into a call for individual ethical moderation (*wasaṭiyyah*), the radical

potential of the Qur'anic *lifeworld* is ultimately absorbed into, and neutralized by, the imperative of state maintenance.

Existing scholarship has shown that Religious Moderation functions not only as a theological discourse but also as a state communication strategy through which the Ministry of Religious Affairs disseminates normative understandings of religion to wider society (Muthia 2024). Rather than relying upon coercive regulation, the Ministry communicates religious moderation through educational materials, official publications, public campaigns, and religious guidance, thereby producing a common vocabulary through which citizens are encouraged to understand religious diversity and social harmony.

Within this communicative architecture, *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi* represents an important expansion of the moderation agenda. Environmental stewardship is no longer presented merely as an ethical recommendation but becomes incorporated into the institutional discourse of religious moderation itself. As argued by Fardiansyah and Admizal (2023), ecological awareness has increasingly been framed as an integral dimension of religious moderation, where maintaining harmony with nature is understood as inseparable from maintaining harmony among human beings (Fardiansyah and Admizal 2023). Similarly, studies on religious moderation in post-conflict Indonesia demonstrate that state-sponsored moderation consistently employs religious communication to cultivate socially desirable attitudes and reinforce national cohesion (Zulkarnain and Muhazir 2025). Within this broader communicative framework, ecology becomes another domain through which the state articulates moderation as a comprehensive moral project extending beyond interreligious relations into environmental responsibility.

This development can be interpreted through the concept of governmentality proposed by Syaifuddin Zuhri (2021). Zuhri argues that Religious Moderation should not be understood simply as a discourse promoting tolerance but as a governmental technology through which the Indonesian state regulates religious subjectivity by defining normative forms of Islamic citizenship. Rather than governing exclusively through law or coercion, the state governs by shaping the moral dispositions through which citizens understand themselves and their social responsibilities (Zuhri 2021). From this perspective, the institutional placement of *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi* under the Agency for Religious Moderation is unlikely to be merely administrative. Instead, it signals the expansion of governmentality into the ecological sphere, where environmental ethics become incorporated into the state's broader project of producing responsible religious subjects. The paratext repeatedly defines environmental degradation as a moral crisis requiring spiritual consciousness, emphasizing humanity's role as *khalīfatullāh fī al-arḍ* entrusted with preserving creation. Such interpretations undoubtedly resonate with a long tradition of Islamic ecotheology that understands environmental stewardship as a religious obligation grounded in concepts of divine trusteeship and ecological balance.(Fadllurrahman et al. 2026; Rasyid et al. 2024) Yet the significance of the present publication lies not simply in reiterating these theological concepts but in embedding them within an official bureaucratic framework through which ecological responsibility becomes part of the state's normative religious program. Ecotheology therefore operates simultaneously as a theological discourse and as an institutional language through which environmental ethics are standardized and disseminated within state-sanctioned religious communication.

The issue, therefore, is not whether the ecological interpretations advanced in *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi* are theologically valid, since many of the concepts employed are well established within the Islamic intellectual tradition. Rather, the analytical question concerns how these interpretations are communicated within a particular institutional setting. By framing ecological awareness through successive layers of ministerial authority, religious moderation policy, and official Qur'anic interpretation, the publication constructs a communicative environment in which ecological responsibility is introduced as a state-endorsed religious norm before readers encounter the exegetical arguments themselves. This observation does not in itself demonstrate that the tafsir constitutes strategic state communication; such a conclusion requires close textual analysis of the interpretive chapters. Nevertheless, the institutional paratext reveals that the communicative conditions surrounding the tafsir are already structured by administrative authority. It is precisely this convergence of political legitimacy, bureaucratic communication, and Qur'anic interpretation that makes *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi* an especially important case for examining how contemporary states employ religious interpretation as part of broader strategies of environmental governance.

From Structural Diagnosis to Moral Communication: Advising Power Rather than Transforming Institutions

A particularly revealing shift emerges in the commentary on Q. Āl ʿImrān [3]:104, where *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi* moves beyond its earlier emphasis on individual ecological responsibility to explicitly acknowledge the role of political authorities and capitalist actors in producing environmental degradation. Unlike previous passages that predominantly frame ecological destruction as the consequence of humanity's failure to uphold the divine trust (*amānah*) as *khalīfah fī al-arḍ*, this section identifies "political rulers and capitalist entrepreneurs" as principal agents of ecological destruction, illustrating their responsibility through examples such as destructive fishing practices using explosives and cyanide, as well as the privatization of coastal areas that threatens both marine ecosystems and the livelihoods of fishing communities (Reflita et al. 2025).

> *Providing criticism, input, and calls to goodness to rulers is a form of moral power given directly by Allah to humanity. In the context of ecology, political rulers as well as capitalist entrepreneurs are often the main perpetrators of environmental damage, such as the use of bombs and cyanide in catching fish that damage coral reefs and marine ecosystems. Likewise with the practice of fencing off coastal areas for personal or corporate interests, which threatens the survival of fishing communities and marine life. Da'wah to these perpetrators is a moral obligation that must not be abandoned* (Reflita et al. 2025, 194).

Such statements mark a crucial discursive shift, as the framing of "moral power given directly by Allah" asserts lifeworld ethics against systemic encroachment. By explicitly identifying 'political rulers' and 'capitalist entrepreneurs' as perpetrators of ecological destruction—citing practices like cyanide fishing and coastal enclosures—the text recognizes that environmental crises stem from unequal configurations of political authority and economic power rather than individual moral failures. Read against Indonesia's political trajectory, including the revision of the Mining Law and the expansion of mining concessions to religious organizations via Government Regulation No. 25 of 2024, this acknowledgment

acquires significant weight. Although the tafsir avoids naming specific policies, its critique directly confronts the material imperatives of the state and market, establishing a textual locus where religious exegesis challenges the institutional arrangements organizing resource exploitation.

Yet it is precisely at this point that the communicative logic of the tafsir becomes more complex. Having identified structural actors as contributors to ecological destruction, the text does not proceed toward a critique of environmental legislation, administrative decision-making, or state regulatory frameworks. Instead, it immediately reformulates the problem into an ethical obligation of *da'wah*. Advising political rulers, reminding them of their moral responsibilities, and calling them back to justice are presented as religious duties entrusted by God to the Muslim community. Consequently, the relationship between society and political authority is not articulated through the language of democratic accountability or institutional reform but through a moral vocabulary of ethical exhortation. Political power remains open to criticism, yet that criticism is primarily expressed as religious counsel rather than as a demand for structural transformation.

According to Habermas, when political domination is institutionalized alongside modern economic media, "money is legally institutionalized as a steering medium for depoliticized economic activity," while "positive law becomes the guarantor of the calculability of private business activity" (Habermas 1985b, 167). Applied to Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi, this theoretical distinction illuminates the fundamental limitation of the text's communicative strategy. By addressing "political rulers" and "capitalist entrepreneurs" through moral admonition rather than demanding legal-institutional reform, the tafsir misdiagnoses the structural nature of modern ecological exploitation. It operates under an outdated assumption of personalized authority, treating systemic actors as moral subjects to be ethically transformed rather than agents operating within depoliticized, state-sanctioned economic systems. Consequently, the communicative emphasis shifts away from institutional accountability toward individual moral persuasion, leaving the legal frameworks that guarantee extractive capital entirely unchallenged.

This tendency becomes even more apparent when the tafsir extends its appeal beyond political elites to ordinary citizens. The text criticizes not only those who actively destroy the environment but also those who remain silent in the face of ecological injustice. Individuals who neither commit environmental destruction nor participate in its prevention are portrayed as morally deficient because they fail to contribute to the collective obligation of safeguarding creation. Such an argument broadens ecological responsibility into a universal religious duty while simultaneously reaffirming the centrality of individual moral agency. Every believer is called upon to become a guardian of the earth through ethical conduct, environmental stewardship, and moral advocacy (Reflita et al. 2025).

The communicative consequence of this formulation is particularly noteworthy. Although the tafsir begins with a structural diagnosis that implicates political authorities and capitalist actors, it ultimately returns to a discourse centred upon individual ethical participation. Environmental degradation is recognized as a product of political and economic power, yet its proposed remedy lies primarily in religious preaching, moral advice, and the cultivation of virtuous character. Structural critique is thus translated into ethical

communication without being accompanied by an equivalent discussion of institutional mechanisms capable of transforming environmental governance. The text therefore moves from identifying structural causes to prescribing predominantly moral solutions.

This discursive pattern should not be interpreted simply as evidence that *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi* functions as an instrument of state legitimation. On the contrary, the commentary demonstrates that the tafsir retains an important critical capacity by explicitly acknowledging political rulers and capitalist entrepreneurs as contributors to ecological destruction. Such recognition complicates any straightforward characterization of the work as merely reproducing official state ideology. Nevertheless, the scope of its critique remains carefully circumscribed. Political authority is criticized in ethical rather than institutional terms, and environmental governance is approached primarily as a question of moral responsibility rather than political accountability. Consequently, the transformative potential of the critique is constrained not because structural actors are ignored but because the discourse consistently redirects structural problems toward ethical reform.

From the perspective of Habermas's theory of communicative action, this represents an important communicative tension (Fuchs 2026). On the one hand, the tafsir preserves the prophetic function of religion by legitimizing criticism of political authority and recognizing ecological injustice as a consequence of unequal power relations. On the other hand, it refrains from developing this critique into a deliberative discourse concerning environmental regulation, extractive policy, or institutional accountability. Public communication therefore remains situated within the domain of moral exhortation rather than communicative rationality oriented toward transforming political institutions. Instead of facilitating critical public deliberation over the structural conditions producing ecological degradation, the tafsir reconstructs these conditions as objects of ethical persuasion.

Accordingly, the principal contribution of this section lies not in demonstrating whether the tafsir criticizes the state, but in revealing how such criticism is discursively mediated. The text neither completely absolves political authority nor fully politicizes environmental governance. Rather, it occupies an intermediate communicative position in which structural diagnoses coexist with predominantly moral prescriptions. This ambivalence illustrates a broader pattern of state-sponsored religious communication: ecological crises are recognized as products of political and economic power, yet their resolution is imagined primarily through the ethical transformation of individuals and rulers rather than through institutional restructuring. It is precisely this movement, from structural diagnosis to moral communication, that constitutes one of the most distinctive communicative features of *Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi* and provides a fertile site for evaluating the boundary between communicative action and strategic communication in contemporary state-sponsored Qur'anic interpretation.

CONCLUSION

By examining Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Ekologi through Habermas's theory of communicative action, this study demonstrates that official state exegesis operates as a communicative artifact positioned between autonomous communicative action and strategic communication. From

the outset, the institutional paratext—comprising introductory endorsements from the Ministry of Religious Affairs—pre-structures the communicative arena, establishing administrative legitimacy and framing ecological protection through state-sanctioned Moderasi Beragama. Although the commentary offers radical structural diagnoses by recognizing environmental degradation as an institutionalized "structural crime" (isrāf) driven by political and capitalist actors, its prescriptive scope consistently deflects structural accountability toward individual moral agency, spiritual stewardship (khalīfah), and ethical lifestyle changes (wasaṭiyyah). This discursive shift illustrates what Habermas terms the absorption of the lifeworld by systemic imperatives, wherein structural ecological problems are translated into moral exhortations, safely neutralizing their political urgency. Ultimately, the politics of state-sponsored exegesis resides not merely in its theological arguments, but in how its communicative logic preserves religion's capacity to critique ecological injustice while subtly reconfiguring that critique to privilege individual moral reform over systemic transformation and public deliberation.

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