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Deconstructing the Concept of Caliphate in Modern Thought: A Critical Analysis of Theocracy and Islamic Democracy

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ABSTRACT:

This study aims to critically analyze the concept of khilafah in modern Islamic political thought through a deconstructive approach to the ideas of theocracy and Islamic democracy. The concept of khilafah, which was originally interpreted as a universal system of government for Muslims, has been transformed into an ideological symbol that is often misinterpreted politically. Using a qualitative approach and literature study, this research examines the reinterpretation of contemporary Muslim scholars such as Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, Mohammad Hashim Kamali, and Nurcholish Madjid, who emphasize the values of justice, benefit, and deliberation as the essence of the caliphate. The results show that in the Indonesian context, the application of caliphate values does not have to be realized in the form of formal political institutions, but rather in a leadership ethos based on the principles of Pancasila democracy. This deconstruction confirms that Islam and democracy are not two conflicting entities, but rather complement each other in building a just, inclusive, and civilized system of government. Thus, this research contributes to strengthening the paradigm of modern Islamic politics that places spiritual values as the ethical foundation for democracy in multicultural Muslim countries such as Indonesia.

Key words: *Caliphate, Islamic Democracy, Deconstruction, Theocracy, Indonesian Islamic Politics*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of the caliphate is one of the most debated political ideas in the history of Islamic civilization. Etymologically derived from the word khalifah (successor), this term originally referred to the leadership position of Muslims after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. In the classical historical context, the caliphate became a system of government that claimed to be the divine representation on earth, with leaders who were considered representatives of God and the Messenger in managing the affairs of the people (Al-Mawardi 1996). However, the development of Islamic political history shows that the concept of the caliphate is not singular and static. It underwent shifts in meaning, form, and legitimacy in accordance with the socio-political context of its time (Hallaq 2013).

In the early days of Islam, the caliphate was considered an ideal system because it was believed to be capable of uniting the Muslim community under a single leadership based on Sharia law. However, after the fall of the Abbasid Caliphate in 1258 AD and the formal dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1924, the debate over the existence and

urgency of the caliphate in modern Islamic politics intensified (Lapidus 2002). Some Islamic revivalist groups, such as Hizbut-Tahrir, consider the loss of the caliphate institution to be the main cause of the decline of Muslims and therefore believe it needs to be reestablished as a universal system of government based on Sharia law (Nabhani 1953). However, on the other hand, there are also modern Islamic thinkers who deconstruct the concept of the caliphate, arguing that the system is no longer relevant to contemporary political realities and actually has the potential to hinder the development of democracy in the Islamic world (Abou El Fadl 2004).

In the context of modern thought, the concept of caliphate is often positioned in the dialectic between theocracy and Islamic democracy. Theocracy here is understood as a system that places divine authority absolutely within the political power structure, where God's will is the sole source of political legitimacy. Meanwhile, Islamic democracy seeks to harmonize the values of shura (consultation), justice, and public participation with the principles of modern democracy (Esposito 1998). The tension between these two paradigms raises a fundamental question: is the caliphate still relevant as a model of Islamic government today, or does it need to be reinterpreted within a more contextual and pluralistic framework of democracy?

Contemporary thinkers such as Ali Abdel Raziq, Fazlur Rahman, and Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im offer a deconstructive approach to the caliphate. Ali Abdel Raziq, for example, in his work *Al-Islam wa Ushul al-Hukm* (1925), asserts that Islam never specifies a particular form of government, and that the caliphate is merely a historical institution, not a theological one (Raziq 1925). This idea was later reinforced by Fazlur Rahman, who emphasized that Qur'anic ethical principles such as justice and public interest are more important than the formal form of the government system (Rahman 1982). Meanwhile, An-Na'im argues that modern states should be functionally secular in order to guarantee religious freedom and social justice without the intervention of religious dogma (An-Na'im 2008).

Deconstructing the concept of caliphate in this context is not an attempt to deny Islamic values, but rather to criticize the formalization of religion in politics, which is often used as a tool to legitimize power. The deconstructive approach seeks to dismantle the layers of meaning and ideological assumptions contained in the classical concept of caliphate. Within the framework of deconstruction theory developed by Jacques Derrida, the meaning of a concept is always open to reinterpretation (Derrida 1976). Thus, the caliphate cannot be understood as a sacred and singular system, but rather as a political discourse shaped by historical and social constructs.

In addition, the emergence of modern nation-states in the Islamic world requires conceptual adaptation to the idea of leadership of the ummah. State systems based on nationalism, constitutions, and popular sovereignty have become an inevitable political reality. Therefore,

maintaining the idea of the caliphate in its classical form without taking into account the context of modernity can actually lead to ideological conflict and political violence, as seen in transnational Islamic movements that reject national borders and democratic systems (Roy 2004). The political relevance of Islam today lies not in attempts to revive the caliphate in its literal form, but in the reinterpretation of Islamic ethical values within an inclusive and civilized political system.

In contemporary academic discourse, there is a new awareness that Islam and democracy do not have to be dichotomously opposed. A number of Muslim scholars such as Nurcholish Madjid and Azyumardi Azra in Indonesia emphasize that the principles of democracy are actually a manifestation of Islamic values such as justice (*al-'adl*), deliberation (*syura*), and social responsibility (*mas'uliyah*) (Azra 2000). Thus, deconstructing the caliphate does not mean rejecting Islam as the moral and spiritual basis of politics, but rather opening up space for the development of an Islamic political paradigm that is contextual, rational, and in line with the spirit of the times.

Based on the above explanation, this article attempts to critically examine the concept of the caliphate through a deconstruction approach to modern Islamic thought. The aim is not to erase the theological existence of the caliphate, but to reinterpret its meaning and political legitimacy. By tracing the debate between the paradigms of theocracy and Islamic democracy, this paper will show how a reinterpretation of the caliphate can pave the way for a more egalitarian, participatory Islamic political system that is compatible with universal human values.

Methods

Research Approach

This study uses a qualitative approach with library research methods. This approach was chosen because the focus of the study is not on empirical phenomena, but rather on tracing, interpreting, and deconstructing the philosophical, theological, and political ideas contained in the discourse on the caliphate. Thus, this study emphasizes understanding the meaning, arguments, and historical and intellectual context behind the construction of the concept of caliphate in classical and modern Islamic thought (Creswell 2014).

The qualitative approach allows researchers to interpret texts and discourse in depth, as well as to reveal the ideological structures hidden behind religious and political narratives. Meanwhile, the library method allows researchers to collect and analyze data from various authoritative sources, such as classical books (*turats*), modern scientific works, academic journals, and contemporary publications relevant to the issue of deconstructing the caliphate (Zed 2014).

Types and Sources of Data

The sources of data for this study are divided into two main categories, namely:

1. Primary sources, including original works by classical and modern Islamic thinkers that are the subject of analysis, such as *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah* by Al-Mawardi (1996), *Al-Islam wa Ushul al-Hukm* by Ali Abdel Raziq (1925), *Islam and Modernity* by Fazlur Rahman (1982), *Islam and the Secular State* by Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im (2008), and Wael B. Hallaq's *The Impossible State* (2013). These works are used as the main texts in an effort to understand the conceptual structure and shift in the meaning of the caliphate from the classical to the modern era.
2. Secondary sources, namely supporting literature in the form of books, journal articles, research reports, and scientific documents that critically discuss the issues of caliphate, theocracy, and Islamic democracy, such as the works of Esposito (1998), Roy (2004), Azra (2000), and various recent scientific publications that review the development of global Islamic politics. These secondary sources are used to enrich the analytical perspective and provide a comparative context for the dynamics of the caliphate discourse in various social and political settings.

Deconstructive Analysis Approach

This study uses a deconstructive approach as introduced by Jacques Derrida (1976), which rejects the existence of a single, final meaning in a text. This approach views the concept of khilafah not as a fixed system established theologically, but as a historical construct that is always open to reinterpretation. In this context, the method of deconstruction is used to:

1. Deconstruct the conceptual structure of the caliphate as understood in classical Islamic discourse, highlighting the surrounding relations of power, ideology, and religious authority.
2. Trace the shifts in the meaning and legitimacy of the caliphate in modern thought, especially in relation to the ideas of democracy and secularization.
3. Reinterpret the concept of the caliphate by emphasizing Islamic ethical values such as justice, public interest, and deliberation as the basis for an inclusive and egalitarian modern political system.

This approach allows researchers to avoid getting caught up in a simplistic dichotomy between “authentic Islam” and “secular West,” but rather opens up space for a new, more dialogical synthesis between Islamic values and universal democratic principles (Abou El Fadl 2004).

Data Analysis Techniques

Data is analyzed through the following stages:

1. Data Reduction, which is the process of selecting and grouping relevant information from various sources. The researcher identifies main themes such as the legitimacy of Islamic politics, the relationship between religion and the state, and the debate between theocracy and democracy.
2. Text Interpretation, which is a critical reading of key texts using a deconstructionist perspective. At this stage, an analysis is conducted of the contradictions, paradoxes, and tensions of meaning that arise in classical and modern texts.
3. Conceptual Synthesis, which is an attempt to formulate a new understanding of the caliphate by linking the results of the previous analysis to the context of contemporary Islamic politics. This stage produces a framework of thinking that places the caliphate not as a historical political system that must be revived, but as a moral-political ethos that can be adapted to modern state systems.

Data Validity and Reliability

To maintain the validity and reliability of the research, a process of triangulation of sources and interpretations was carried out. The researchers compared the views of various figures from different ideological backgrounds (traditionalists, modernists, and secularists) in order to obtain a comprehensive and balanced understanding. In addition, the analysis also took into account the historical and social contexts surrounding the emergence of these ideas, so as to avoid ahistorical generalizations (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2014).

Using this method, the study is expected to produce an in-depth, critical, and argumentative analysis of how the concept of the caliphate is reconstructed in modern Islamic political discourse. The deconstructive approach not only reveals the hidden meanings behind religious narratives but also invites us to reflect on how Islam can play a constructive role in building a just and civilized political order in the modern era.

Result

1. Historical Dynamics and the Crisis of Legitimacy of the Concept of Caliphate

The first finding of this study shows that the concept of caliphate has undergone a long and complex historical dynamic, as well as a crisis of legitimacy since its inception. In the context of early Islamic history, the caliphate was not formed on the basis of an explicit theological mandate, but rather as a political solution after the death of the Prophet Muhammad SAW to avoid a leadership vacuum among the ummah (Hallaq 2013). Therefore, from the outset, the institution of the caliphate was political and pragmatic in nature, rather than doctrinal or sacred as is often understood by revivalist groups.

The leadership model of the first four caliphs, known as the *Khulafā' al-Rāsyidīn*, is often used as a normative ideal. However, in reality, even during that period, serious political conflicts arose, such as the Battle of Jamal and the Battle of Shiffin, which showed that the caliphate never ran smoothly and was not without disputes over legitimacy (Lapidus 2002). After shifting to a hereditary monarchy during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, the caliphate lost the essence of deliberation and egalitarianism that formed the moral basis of Islam. Thus, the results of this study reinforce the view that the classical concept of the caliphate is more a historical and political product of power than a fixed part of the core teachings of Islam (Raziq 1925).

The crisis of legitimacy of the caliphate became even more acute when this institution was used as an ideological instrument to maintain dynastic hegemony. Many fuqaha and scholars were forced to develop Islamic political theories to justify the status quo of power, as Al-Mawardi did through *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah*, which justified the caliph's power as "God's representative" on earth (Al-Mawardi 1996). However, according to the findings of this study, this justification was more of a theologization of politics, not the other way around. The legitimacy of power ultimately did not come from Islamic morality, but from political compromises between scholars and rulers.

2. The Emergence of Modern Criticism of the Ideology of the Caliphate

The second finding shows that in modern Islamic thought, there has been a paradigm shift from sacralization to functional secularization of the concept of the caliphate. This shift arose as a result of modernization, colonialism, and the rise of the idea of the nation-state in the 19th and 20th centuries. Ali Abdel Raziq was the first figure to explicitly deconstruct the caliphate as a political institution rather than a religious one. In his work *Al-Islam wa Ushul al-Hukm* (1925), Raziq argues that the Prophet Muhammad did not establish a state, but only carried out his prophetic mission to spread moral and spiritual teachings (Raziq 1925). According to him, any system of government that guarantees justice, welfare, and freedom for the people can be considered Islamic without necessarily being called a caliphate.

An analysis of Raziq's thinking shows that he used a rational and historical approach in understanding religious texts. He rejected the claim that the Qur'an and Sunnah regulate the system of government in concrete terms. Thus, he opens up space for a plural and contextual interpretation of Islamic politics. These findings show that the deconstruction of the caliphate in the early 20th century was not merely the result of

Western influence, but also the fruit of internal reflection on the stagnation of Islamic politics and the need for religious reform.

Raziq's views were subsequently criticized by conservatives, but they also gave rise to a new generation of progressive Islamic thinkers who emphasized the substance of Islamic ethics rather than the formalism of political systems. Fazlur Rahman (1982), for example, asserted that Islam emphasizes universal moral values such as justice (*'adl*) and benefit (*maslahah*), rather than a particular form of government. He argued that attempts to revive the caliphate in its literal form actually contradict the spirit of *ijtihad* and the dynamism of Islam, which is always adaptive to the times. Thus, the results of the analysis show that modern Islamic thought tends to move from “political Islam” to “Islamic ethical politics.”

3. Deconstruction of the Caliphate in the Thought of Fazlur Rahman and An-Na'im

The next finding reveals that Fazlur Rahman and Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im are two important figures who expanded the direction of the deconstruction of the caliphate towards strengthening Islamic moral values within the framework of a modern and democratic state. Fazlur Rahman (1982) strongly rejected the view that Islam must be realized in the form of a theocracy. According to him, theocracy tends to lead to absolutism and to the elimination of the principles of deliberation and social justice. He proposes that Muslims understand revelation as a source of inspiration for public ethics, not as a blueprint for a state system. For Rahman, the ideal state is one that is capable of implementing Islamic moral values in its public policies without having to claim formal religious legitimacy.

Meanwhile, Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im (2008) continued the process of deconstruction by introducing the idea of an Islamic secular state. He rejected the view that secularism is synonymous with anti-religion. According to him, secularism is necessary so that religion can develop authentically without becoming a tool of political power. A secular state, in An-Na'im's understanding, does not mean removing religion from the public sphere, but rather ensuring that every citizen has the freedom to interpret and practice their religion without coercion from the state. This finding shows that the deconstruction of the caliphate is essentially a project of political emancipation of Islam from the domination of a single authority.

An analysis of An-Na'im's thinking shows that modernity in Islam should be built on the basis of self-criticism and moral autonomy. By rejecting the formalization of the caliphate, An-Na'im actually broadens the horizons of Islamic theology to make it more

compatible with universal values such as democracy, pluralism, and human rights. This also shows a transformation from an authoritative paradigm to a dialogical paradigm, in which Islam acts as a source of moral values, not a legitimization of political power.

4. Wael B. Hallaq's Criticism of the Modern State and the "Crisis of Islamic Political Ethics"

The following analysis reveals a more complex dimension of the deconstruction of the caliphate, namely criticism of the modern state itself as expressed by Wael B. Hallaq. In his work *The Impossible State* (2013), Hallaq argues that the modern state is fundamentally incompatible with Islamic law because it is built on a secular and capitalistic epistemological foundation. The modern state, according to Hallaq, is a machine of power that centralizes authority and subordinates moral law to political law. In this context, both the classical caliphate and the modern state face an ethical crisis: the caliphate fell into religious formalism, while the modern state fell into legalistic formalism without morality.

This finding shows that the deconstruction of the caliphate is not merely a rejection of the old system, but also a critique of the modern political paradigm that has failed to integrate morality into public law. For Hallaq, the solution is not to revive the caliphate institutionally, but to build a moral society based on Islamic ethics, where power is exercised not for domination, but for service to God and the benefit of humanity (Hallaq 2013). This finding enriches the direction of research by positioning deconstruction not only as a process of dismantling, but also as a moral and epistemological reconstruction of Islamic politics.

5. General Patterns of Deconstruction of the Concept of Caliphate in Modern Thought

From the analysis of the above thinkers, it can be concluded that there are general patterns in the process of deconstructing the concept of caliphate, namely:

- a. Desacralization of political forms, namely the separation between Islamic moral values and historical political institutions.
- b. Reinterpretation of religious authority, from hierarchical authority to rational and participatory authority.
- c. Democratization of Islamic political thought, which emphasizes the principles of justice, deliberation, and social responsibility.
- d. Dialogue between Islam and modernity, placing Islam as a source of universal values, not an exclusive political identity.

This pattern shows that the deconstruction of the caliphate in modern thought is not a form of rejection of Islam, but rather an effort to purify Islamic ethics from the politicization and sacralization of power. Thus, the results of this study confirm that the

future of Islamic politics lies in strengthening the moral ethos and participation of the people, not in the symbolic restoration of the classical caliphate system.

Discussion

1. Placing Deconstruction in the Study of Islamic Politics: Theoretical Argumentation

This discussion begins with an attempt to apply the deconstructive method as formulated by Jacques Derrida to the discourse on the caliphate. Deconstruction rejects one-dimensional readings that anchor meaning to binary oppositions (e.g., sacred/profane, text/context, orthodoxy/ijtihad) and instead highlights differences, aporias, and the iterability of meaning in texts (Derrida 1976). In the context of the caliphate, the deconstructive approach requires us to dismantle the commonly used binary pairs: caliphate = singular divine authority vs. modern state = secular/foreign. Instead of accepting this dichotomy, deconstruction opens up space to read the caliphate as a series of practices, symbols, and rhetoric whose meanings continue to change according to specific historical and rhetorical conditions. In other words, the caliphate is not a single essence “waiting” to be reinstalled; it is a network of discourses that can be disconnected, reassembled, and reconditioned according to the normative functions desired by contemporary society.

Deconstructive reading reveals three important theoretical implications: first, the desacralization of form, namely the separation between Islamic ethical values and the historical political institution of the caliphate; second, the deconstruction of the hierarchy of authority, which questions the monopoly of religious legitimacy over political decisions; third, the reconstruction of ethics, in which maqāsid values (sharia objectives) become the normative foundation instead of historical institutional claims. These principles enable modern thinkers to free the ideals of justice and benefit from the shackles of old institutional formalism, so that the Islamic political sphere can be democratically enriched without losing its religious dimension.

2. Rereading Legitimacy: From Divine Claims to Democratic Legitimacy

The results of the study show that claims of legitimacy attached to the caliphate (divine authority, successor to the prophet) are often used as a basis for rejecting modern accountability mechanisms. Deconstruction reveals that these claims are not a single theological fact that automatically gives rise to political legitimacy without a socio-constitutional process. In modern Islamic political tradition, for example, Ali Abdel Raziq has reminded us that the texts do not prescribe a specific form of government; political

legitimacy must be read as a social practice involving popular consent and accountability mechanisms (Raziq 1925). From this perspective, the concept of caliphate can be reallocated: not as an absolute authority of divine legitimacy, but as a moral-leadership role that gains legitimacy through representative and constitutional processes.

Abdullahi An-Na'im took a similar but more systematic path: he advocated functional secularism, which allows religion to serve as a source of values without dominating state structures that force the application of religious dogma on all citizens (An-Na'im 2008). It is important to note that the secularism recommended by An-Na'im is not the expulsion of religion from the public sphere, but rather a functional separation that protects religious freedom while ensuring that state law is neutral and guarantees human rights. The deconstruction of the legitimacy of the caliphate, therefore, paves the way for democratic legitimacy rooted in consent, the constitution, and respect for religious freedom.

3. Maqāsid as a Tool for Normative Reconstruction

One of the most productive contributions of modern literature is the use of maqāsid al-sharī'ah as a normative framework for reconstructing Islamic political ideas. Unlike the focus on legal formalism (*hukm*), the maqāsid paradigm places emphasis on objectives: the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property, with contemporary extensions encompassing dignity, human rights, and human development (Kamali; source of maqasid). This allows us to formulate “khilafah maqāsidī”: a concept of khilafah that is no longer a monolithic institution, but rather a set of ethical principles for governance, maintaining dignity, justice, and welfare, realized through democratic mechanisms and constitutional institutions.

Operationally, the maqāsidī khilafah framework requires:

- a. Maqāsid-based constitutionalism, a constitution that explicitly guarantees maqāsid principles (e.g., human rights, protection of minorities, welfare).
- b. Institutionalization of ijtihad, an interpretive mechanism (e.g., public/academic Interpretation Council) that is deliberative, pluralistic, and transparent, not monopolized by state religious institutions.
- c. The principles of subsidiarity and decentralization, normative decisions based on local contexts, not transnational central dictates.
- d. Legal accountability, leaders who claim religious authority must be subject to constitutional courts and impeachment mechanisms.

This framework aims to mitigate two extremes: absolute theocracy that denies pluralism, and secularism that alienates religion from public ethics. It positions the caliphate as a system of governance rather than an attempt at transnational institutional restoration, making it relevant to modern nation states.

4. Facing “The Impossible State”: Hallaq's Criticism and Practical Implications

Wael Hallaq asserts that the modern state as an institutional form is incompatible with the premises of pre-modern Islamic legal norms. He calls this thesis “The Impossible State,” which underlines the epistemological tension between pre-modern sharia and the modern legal bureaucratic machine (Hallaq 2013). Hallaq's critique calls for caution: reconstruction should not merely replace institutional names but preserve the logic of the modern state that marginalizes ethics. He warns that attempts to incorporate Islam into the modern state often result in distortions of both Sharia and democracy.

In response to Hallaq, this discussion proposes a mitigation strategy: the maqāṣidi and democratic approaches outlined above must be placed within the framework of institutional transformation rather than formal transplantation. This means that reform must be two-pronged: institutionalizing moral values (e.g., exemplary leadership, public service, distributive justice) into modern bureaucratic practices, while also changing the mentality of positive law to be more responsive to these moral values (e.g., through maqāṣid-based constitutional review and legislative procedures involving non-state religious institutions). Thus, Hallaq's concerns are acknowledged but treated as motivators for careful and contextual institutional reconstruction.

5. Normative Model: “Democratic Caliphate”

Based on the results of analysis and conceptual references, I propose an operational model called the Democratic Caliphate (as a working term): not a claim to a transnational caliphate state, but rather a framework of values and institutions that integrates maqāṣid, constitutional democracy, and pluralistic interpretation mechanisms. Core specifications:

- a. Democratic Legitimacy: The head of state/representative who refers to the role of caliph is elected through a democratic process, with a limited term of office, impeachment mechanisms, and public accountability (elections, parliament, legal control). (Adapting Raziq/An-Na'im's argument on the need for social and constitutional legitimacy).
- b. Maqāṣidi Constitution: Constitutional provisions affirm maqāṣid as the state's objectives, placing the protection of the right to life, freedom of religion, and social

justice as fundamental norms that cannot be violated. (Referring to maqāṣid literature as an ethical framework).

- c. Interpretive Pluralism: The establishment of a public ijtihād forum consisting of scholars, academics, and human rights activists as a non-monopolistic body to provide normative opinions, rather than imposing a single interpretation. Final decisions on public law remain with constitutional institutions. (Maintaining a balance between religious authority and the supremacy of constitutional law).
- d. Human Rights & Minority Protection: The principles of non-discrimination and minority rights protection are codified; policy decisions that could potentially restrict religious freedom are subject to a proportionality test based on maqāṣid.
- e. Maqāṣidi Policy Review: All major legislation must undergo a “maqāṣidi test” that measures the policy's contribution to modern sharia objectives (e.g., welfare, protection of dignity).

This model aims to replicate the moral essence of the caliphate: justice, service, social care in a transparent, accountable, and compatible institutional format with popular sovereignty.

6. Potential Criticisms and Weaknesses of the Model

Every reconstruction is vulnerable to criticism. Some criticisms that need to be anticipated are:

- a. The “Impossible State” argument (Hallaq): If the epistemological differences between pre-modern Islamic legal traditions and the modern state are too great, reconstruction efforts could become inconsistent or overlapping. Solution: long-term work on legal bureaucratic reform and Islamic legal education to produce a generation of policymakers who are proficient in both vocabularies.
- b. Risk of Instrumentalization: The term “khilafah” remains sensitive and can be politically misused. Practical solution: use more technical terminology (e.g., “Islamic Leadership Ethics” or “Maqāṣidi Constitution”) in public policy, while maintaining theological discourse in academic/community circles.
- c. Transnational vs Nation-State: Transnational caliphate claims contradict the reality of modern state sovereignty. Solution: limit the discourse on caliphate to the realm of values and ethics, not jurisdictional claims.
- d. Religious Legitimacy vs. Popular Legitimacy: The redefinition of the role of religious scholars and institutions must be done carefully so as not to create a moral

vacuum that could then be filled by authoritarian actors. Solution: institutionalize checks and balances mechanisms, including the involvement of civil society.

7. Case Study: Reinterpretation and Deconstruction of the Concept of Caliphate in Indonesia

a. Caliphate and the Context of Islamic Politics in Indonesia

Indonesia provides the most dynamic example in the debate on caliphate in the modern Muslim world. It has the largest Muslim population in the world, but constitutionally it is not an Islamic state. The nation's founders rejected the formalization of Sharia law in the constitution in order to maintain plurality and national unity (Effendy 2001). Pancasila, which places belief in one God as its first principle, became the ideological foundation that was expected to bridge Islamic and national values without having to form a theocratic institution.

However, in the last three decades, various discourses on the caliphate have reemerged through transnational movements such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), which rejects the democratic system and calls for the establishment of a global caliphate. This movement asserts that the modern political system is a secular Western product that is incompatible with Islam. In its public rhetoric, HTI considers democracy to be a system of kufr because it gives sovereignty to the people, not to Allah (Hasan 2018).

From a deconstructive perspective, HTI's argument reveals a classic binary opposition between Islam and the West, caliphate and democracy, which is actually a discursive construction rather than an absolute theological truth. Derrida's deconstructionist approach leads us to dismantle this opposition: how the claim of "authentic Islam" is constructed through the erasure of other meanings that are also Islamic, such as deliberation, consultation, and social justice, which are substantially in line with the principles of democracy (Derrida 1976; Madjid 1999).

In other words, deconstruction of HTI discourse shows that their idea of the caliphate is more of an ideological project to build political identity than a theological project to build social justice. This is where the importance of reinterpreting the caliphate in the context of a pluralistic Indonesian nation lies, where Islamic values must be expressed through constitutional mechanisms, not institutional domination.

b. The Dissolution of HTI: Between National Security and Ideological Deconstruction

In 2017, the Indonesian government officially dissolved HTI based on the legal basis of Perppu No. 2 of 2017 concerning Mass Organizations. The government's

reasoning was that the caliphate ideology championed by HTI was contrary to Pancasila and threatened the integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. This decision sparked heated debate among academics, as on the one hand it was seen as a measure to maintain national stability, but on the other hand it was also considered a restriction on freedom of expression (Mujani 2020).

From a deconstruction perspective, the dissolution of HTI was not merely a legal measure, but also an epistemological moment in which the state negotiated the meaning of “political Islam” in the public sphere. The state's actions show that modern authorities no longer provide space for claims of singular truth in the name of Islam that reject the democratic system. However, this step also signals the need for alternative reconstruction, not just repression. Without space for dialogue and constructive reinterpretation, banned ideologies can continue to exist underground and even undergo symbolic radicalization (Fealy 2020).

The deconstruction of the caliphate in the Indonesian context must therefore be accompanied by the reconstruction of a new narrative about Islam and the state. The government and Muslim scholars need to emphasize that true Islamic values, justice, benefit, and trust can be realized in an open, participatory, and socially just democratic system. This is the concrete form of the *maqāṣidiyyah* caliphate described earlier: the caliphate as a code of ethics for governance, not as an absolute political institution.

c. The Role of Islamic Organizations and Academics in Reinterpreting the Caliphate

Major religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah play an important role in deconstructing the concept of transnational caliphate in Indonesia. NU, through the concept of “Islam Nusantara,” emphasizes that Islam in Indonesia must be rooted in local culture, tolerance, and national principles. KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf, for example, states that the idea of a caliphate that removes national borders is unrealistic and contradicts the *maqāṣid syariah*, which emphasizes social stability and the welfare of the people (Staquf 2019).

Muhammadiyah, on the other hand, introduced the concept of “Negara Pancasila sebagai *Darul 'Abd wa al-Syahadah*” (Pancasila State as *Darul 'Abd wa al-Syahadah*), which is a state of covenant and testimony, where Muslims are committed to upholding justice and public interest within the framework of the constitution, without having to establish a formal Islamic state (Syamsuddin 2011). These two major mass organizations have in fact provided examples of deconstructive praxis: dismantling

claims of monopoly over political Islam and replacing them with ethical paradigms compatible with democracy and pluralism.

From the perspective of deconstruction theory, these steps demonstrate a reversal of the hierarchy of meaning: what was originally considered “secular” and contrary to Islam is now interpreted as a means of realizing Islamic values in a contextual manner. Democracy is not the antithesis of Islam, but rather an instrument of social *ijtihad* to achieve *maqāsid sharia*.

Within this framework, the reinterpretation of the caliphate in Indonesia does not end in a total rejection of the idea of the caliphate, but in a transposition of meaning from an institutional form to a moral-political principle. The caliphate is no longer understood as a global system of government, but as the collective moral responsibility of Muslims to manage power fairly, honestly, and trustworthily at the nation-state level.

d. Deconstruction in Government Practice: Democracy and *Maqāsid*

The reinterpretation of the caliphate in Indonesia can also be seen in contemporary political practices that adopt the values of *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah* in public policy. For example, the concepts of protection of life (*hifẓ al-naḥs*) and welfare (*maṣlahah*) are used as the basis for social security programs, health services, and education. Several policies such as strengthening the Islamic economy, halal certification, and zakat empowerment also demonstrate the integration of Islamic values into the modern government system without having to form a formal Islamic state (Azra 2020).

This shows that “substantive *khilafah*” can exist in a democratic system that upholds accountability, social justice, and the protection of human rights. This is the meeting point between Islam and modernity, which was previously considered impossible by some fundamentalists. Through *maqāṣid*-oriented policies, the Indonesian state shows that Islamic values can be operationalized in the public sphere without negating religious and ideological plurality.

e. Critical Reading: The Caliphate as an Ethical Responsibility, Not an Institutional Ambition

From the results of the deconstruction and empirical analysis above, it can be concluded that Indonesia's experience offers an important model for the Islamic world: the caliphate does not need to be restored as a global political institution, but can be revived as a *maqāṣidi* and democratic public leadership ethic.

The deconstruction of the caliphate in the Indonesian context has succeeded in separating the ethical dimension from the formal dimension. It opens up space for new

interpretations of power as a mandate, government as service, and the state as a vessel for the actualization of the values of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. In other words, the caliphate is no longer a symbol of domination, but rather a contextual and pluralistic socio-political moral practice.

Conclusion

The concept of the caliphate in Islamic history has undergone a long journey, from its ideal form during the era of the *Khulafā' al-Rāsyidīn* to complex political and symbolic transformations in the contemporary era. In its development, the caliphate can no longer be understood narrowly as a single system of government that must be formally implemented in the context of the modern state. Contemporary Islamic thought emphasizes that the caliphate is a moral and ethical concept of leadership oriented towards justice (*'adl*), public interest (*maslahah*), and responsibility (*amānah*) in the management of power.

Critical analysis shows that the deconstruction of the concept of the caliphate is not an attempt to eliminate Islamic values in political life, but rather to place them in a proportional and contextual manner in accordance with the demands of the times. The view that places the caliphate as an absolute and singular political system has proven problematic, as it ignores the social, political, and legal realities of the diverse Islamic world. This deconstruction opens up space for reinterpreting the values of the caliphate into principles of democratic, participatory governance that uphold human dignity.

In the Indonesian context, the process of reinterpreting the concept of *khilafah* has found strong relevance. The country has a Muslim majority, but it is founded on the ideological basis of Pancasila, which guarantees freedom of religion, social justice, and people's sovereignty. The relationship between Islam and the state in Indonesia is not one of theological subordination, but rather a functional symbiosis between Islamic values and national principles. The thinking of figures such as Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), and Azyumardi Azra shows that democracy and Islam can reinforce each other as long as both are based on the same ethical values: justice, humanity, and moral responsibility.

Thus, the caliphate in Indonesia is more accurately understood not as a formal political institution, but as an Islamic leadership ethos that prioritizes the principles of deliberation (*shūrā*), social justice, and the common good. The Pancasila state has been able to accommodate the basic values of Islam without having to be trapped in a theocratic political model. The success of Indonesian democracy, although not without challenges, shows that Islamic principles can live and thrive in a modern state system that respects pluralism and human rights.

However, challenges to this understanding still arise in the form of transnational Islamic political movements that propagate the formalization of the caliphate. Such movements often disregard the historical, sociological, and legal context in Indonesia, and have the potential to threaten national stability and the spirit of diversity. Therefore, deconstructive thinking about the caliphate is important as a form of critical awareness that the ideals of Islam do not lie in the form of institutions, but in the moral substance and justice embodied in good governance.

The novelty of this research lies in its attempt to integrate the values of the caliphate into the Pancasila democratic paradigm. This approach shows that Islamic values can serve as a moral foundation for strengthening Indonesia's democratic system without negating the concept of the nation-state. Within this framework, the caliphate is no longer understood as a transnational political project, but rather as an ethical-spiritual framework for building public leadership that is just, transparent, and accountable.

Therefore, the articulation of the concept of khilafah in the Indonesian context needs to be directed towards strengthening moral values in democratic practice rather than attempting to form an exclusive political system. The deconstruction of the concept of khilafah is an important step towards renewing Islamic political thought in line with the dynamics of modernity and national diversity.

By placing the caliphate as a source of ethical inspiration, rather than a political blueprint, Indonesia has the potential to present a distinctive model of Islamic politics, namely Islam that is down-to-earth, democratic, and oriented towards social justice. This is the new face of Islamic politics, which affirms that the values of *ukhuwah*, *'adl*, and *maslahah* can coexist with the principles of nationality within the framework of a civilized democratic state.

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