

From Tafsīr to Takfīr: When Differences in Interpretation are Regarded as Differences in Creed in the Literalism of the Divine Names and Attributes

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ABSTRACT

Debates over *asmā' wa ṣifāt* (divine names and attributes) have produced lasting differences in Islamic theological interpretation, particularly over terms such as *istiḥwā'*, *yad*, and *wajh*. A problem arises when such differences are no longer treated as legitimate disagreement but become grounds for defining orthodoxy, deviation, and, in some cases, *takfīr*. This study aims to clarify how semantic reduction in *tafsīr* discourse may contribute to religious exclusion and how literalist hermeneutics relates to exclusive interpretive authority. It employs a qualitative conceptual-documentary design based on close reading and analytical synthesis of scholarly literature and one official document, the Qur'an translation guideline of the Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an. The analysis combines semantic-pragmatic analysis, philosophical and contextual hermeneutics, and Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power. The analysis suggests that literal interpretation does not in itself constitute *takfīr*. Exclusion becomes possible when one interpretation is positioned as the sole criterion of theological legitimacy and alternative readings are characterized as deviant. The study distinguishes four forms of judgment: criticism of an interpretation, the judgment that it is incorrect, the labeling of it or its adherents as deviant, and explicit *takfīr*. It concludes that the movement from disagreement to exclusion is conditional rather than automatic, shaped by interpretive authority and the construction of boundaries of legitimate belief. As the study does not analyze primary texts or digital discourse directly, it offers a mechanism to be tested in future research.

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between tafsīr, the interpretation of the Qur'an, and takfīr, the judgement that another Muslim has fallen outside the bounds of Islam, has become an increasingly important issue in contemporary Islamic discourse (Dasim and Widigdo 2026; Hsb et al. 2024; M. Munir and Solihah 2026; M. Munir et al. 2026). At stake is not simply a disagreement over the meaning of a religious text, but also the question of who has the authority to determine which interpretation is legitimate and, consequently, whose religious position is recognized as acceptable (Chairawati et al. 2026; Masruddin et al. 2026). Interpretive disagreement may therefore acquire consequences beyond the semantic level when one particular reading is treated as the only valid interpretation and alternative readings are consequently regarded as erroneous, deviant, or illegitimate (Ardianto et al. 2026; Lestari et al. 2025). In contemporary Muslim societies, including Indonesia, such processes can be observed in debates concerning the meaning of Qur'anic expressions, the interpretation of divine attributes (*asmā' wa ṣifāt*), the relevance of historical and linguistic contexts, and the boundaries of legitimate religious interpretation (Alzahrani 2022; Azmiana et al. 2025). Understanding how interpretive disagreement can develop into religious exclusion is therefore important for examining the relationship between textual interpretation, religious authority, and the production of boundaries within Muslim communities.

Recent scholarship has examined several dimensions of this problem, although these strands of research have not always been brought into a single analytical framework. Studies of Salafī theology, for example, have discussed the preference for the apparent or literal meaning of scriptural expressions, particularly in debates surrounding *asmā' wa ṣifāt* (Istiqamah, 2020a; Ahmad, Fauzi, 2022). Other studies have examined the relationship between literal interpretation and exclusivism, understood here as the tendency to privilege one interpretation while restricting the legitimacy of alternative readings. Khalid (2021) Khalid et al. (2021), for instance, demonstrate how interpretive exclusivism can be connected to claims of religious authority and the construction of boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate interpretations. At the same time, scholars working from contextual and hermeneutical perspectives have emphasized that the interpretation of religious texts cannot be separated from linguistic, historical, social, and cultural contexts (Zayd, 2019; Nurhayati, 2021; Saeed, 2018). These perspectives challenge the assumption that the meaning of a sacred text can always be reduced to a single interpretation independently of the circumstances in which the text is read.

The debate is further complicated by the persistence of competing understandings of interpretive authority. On one side, literalist approaches tend to emphasize the apparent meaning of the text and may regard extensive reinterpretation as a departure from the intended meaning of revelation (Istiqamah, 2020a; Ahmad & Fauzi, 2022). On the other side, contextual and hermeneutical approaches stress that interpretation involves linguistic choices, historical circumstances, interpretive traditions, and the horizon of the reader (Zayd 2019; Nurhayati 2021; Saeed 2018; Ricœur and Thompson 2016; Badawi 2026; Amin et al. 2025). This disagreement should not, however, be reduced to a simple opposition between literal and non-literal readings. A literal interpretation does not necessarily lead to takfīr, and theological disagreement does not automatically constitute religious exclusion. The more significant question is under what conditions an interpretation becomes sufficiently exclusive to be used as a criterion for judging the faith of others. This distinction is particularly important because the movement from interpretive disagreement to religious exclusion involves not only the content of an interpretation but also the authority, social position, and discursive mechanisms through which that interpretation is established as legitimate.

Recent research has also drawn attention to the relationship between religious interpretation, epistemic authority, and symbolic power. Hasan (2019) examines the ideological dimensions of tafsīr and the contestation of meaning within contemporary Islamic discourse, while Mughisuddin (2020) discusses transformations in religious authority in an era characterized by the circulation of knowledge beyond traditional scholarly institutions. In the Indonesian context, Rakhmat (2023) highlights the relationship between religious narratives and symbolic violence in the digital era, where religious claims can circulate rapidly and acquire authority through repeated forms of public discourse. These

developments are significant because contemporary interpretation does not take place only within established scholarly institutions. Religious meanings are increasingly negotiated across study circles, educational settings, public lectures, and digital platforms, creating new arenas in which competing claims to religious authority can be produced and contested (Alam et al. 2026; Cahyani et al. 2026; Desmiati et al. 2023). Nevertheless, existing studies tend to examine literalism, hermeneutics, religious exclusivism, symbolic authority, and digital religious discourse as related but relatively separate problems.

This separation leaves an important analytical gap. Existing scholarship has provided substantial accounts of literalist interpretation, interpretive exclusivism, and religious authority, but less attention has been given to the mechanism through which a reduction of textual meaning can become a basis for evaluating the religious status of another Muslim. In particular, the relationship between semantic reduction, exclusive interpretive authority, and the movement from tafsīr to takfīr requires further clarification. In this study, semantic reduction refers to the narrowing of the possible meaning of a religious expression by treating one interpretation as exhaustive while minimizing or excluding relevant linguistic, historical, social, or contextual dimensions. The problem, therefore, is not simply whether a particular interpretation is literal or non-literal, but how interpretive closure can transform a disagreement over meaning into a judgement concerning another person's faith. Addressing this gap is especially relevant to contemporary Indonesian Muslim discourse, where religious interpretations increasingly circulate across both offline and digital spaces.

Against this background, this study investigates the relationship between semantic reduction in tafsīr, exclusive claims to interpretive authority, and the use of tafsīr as a basis for takfīr. The study focuses on the discursive and hermeneutical process through which a particular interpretation may be presented as the only legitimate reading and alternative interpretations, together with those who advocate them, may consequently be delegitimized. The unit of analysis is therefore the interpretive discourse surrounding Qur'anic meaning and religious authority, particularly the mechanisms through which differences in interpretation are constructed as differences in religious legitimacy. The study does not assume that literal interpretation inevitably produces takfīr. Instead, it examines the conditions under which restrictive approaches to meaning can contribute to interpretive exclusion and, potentially, to judgements concerning the faith of others.

Accordingly, the study addresses two research questions: (1) in what ways can semantic reduction in tafsīr discourse contribute to the transformation of scriptural interpretation into takfīr? and (2) how does literalist hermeneutics relate to the construction of exclusive religious authority? To address these questions, the study brings together semantic-pragmatic analysis, philosophical hermeneutics, and a sociological perspective on religious authority. This interdisciplinary approach is intended to clarify how meaning is constructed, how contextual dimensions of interpretation may be restricted, and how interpretive claims can acquire social authority. Its central argument is that the movement from tafsīr to takfīr cannot adequately be explained by doctrinal disagreement alone. Rather, it may emerge through a process in which contextual dimensions of meaning are progressively narrowed, one interpretation is elevated into an exclusive criterion of orthodoxy, and that criterion is subsequently applied to assess the religious legitimacy of others.

The remainder of this article develops this argument in three stages. First, it examines the semantic and pragmatic dimensions of religious meaning and explains why the interpretation of scriptural language cannot be separated entirely from contextual and inferential processes. Second, it analyzes tafsīr as a field of meaning-making in which religious authority and symbolic power shape the boundaries of legitimate interpretation. Third, it examines the hermeneutics of difference as an alternative framework for understanding interpretive plurality and for critically assessing the mechanisms through which tafsīr may become associated with takfīr. By connecting these dimensions, the article seeks to provide a clearer account of the relationship between textual meaning, interpretive authority, and religious exclusion in contemporary Muslim discourse.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative, conceptual-documentary design based on close reading and analytical synthesis of scholarly literature and one official document. The design was chosen because the study seeks to clarify how differences in the interpretation of *asmā' wa ṣifāt* may shift from semantic and theological disagreement toward claims about religious legitimacy and, under particular conditions, *takfīr*. Rather than measuring how often such claims occur, the study aims to reconstruct the interpretive and discursive processes through which this shift may take place.

The data consist of two kinds of material. The first is scholarly publications on the interpretation of divine names and attributes, *ta'wīl*, interpretive authority, religious exclusivism, and symbolic violence, including studies of Salafi theology, Qur'anic hermeneutics, and religious authority in Indonesia. The second is one official document, the translation guideline *Pedoman Terjemahan Al-Qur'an Edisi Penyempurnaan* (Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an 2020), which serves as an institutional reference point. Sources were selected purposively for their relevance to the analytical focus, not for statistical representativeness. The study does not analyze primary theological texts or contemporary digital discourse directly, a limitation that is discussed in the Conclusion.

The unit of analysis is interpretive discourse about Qur'anic meaning and the divine attributes, as it is described and discussed in the selected sources: how an interpretation is presented as legitimate, how alternative interpretations are evaluated, and how the religious standing of their adherents is addressed. The analysis attends to three dimensions: the treatment of textual meaning, the construction of interpretive authority, and the movement from theological evaluation toward religious exclusion.

Each source was read closely for passages bearing on these dimensions, and the material was organized around the two research questions. The analysis uses a four-part framework that distinguishes criticism of an interpretation, the judgment that an interpretation is incorrect, the labeling of an interpretation or its adherents as deviant, and explicit *takfīr* (Table 3). The framework is intended to prevent stronger claims about religious exclusion from being inferred merely from theological disagreement, and it is applied here as an analytical lens on the literature rather than as a coding scheme applied to primary data.

Three complementary perspectives inform the interpretation. Semantic-pragmatic analysis is used to examine how the meaning of expressions relating to the divine attributes is constructed beyond their lexical form (Levinson 2000), Philosophical and contextual hermeneutics, drawing on Gadamer's concept of the fusion of horizons and Abū Zayd's emphasis on the historical and linguistic dimensions of Qur'anic interpretation, is used to examine how textual meaning is situated within interpretive horizons (Gadamer 2004; Zayd 2006, 2019), Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power is used to examine how particular interpretations may acquire authority and define legitimate and illegitimate positions within a religious field (Bourdieu 1991). These perspectives are treated as complementary rather than competing.

To support the trustworthiness of the analysis, claims drawn from one source were compared with other sources where possible, and care was taken to distinguish what a source states from the authors' own interpretation. Claims about *takfīr* were retained only where a source gave explicit grounds for them; criticism of an interpretation, or its characterization as deviant, was not treated as *takfīr*. This procedure was intended to limit overinterpretation of sensitive theological material.

Because the study concerns accusations of deviation and *takfīr*, ethical caution was maintained. The analysis does not treat contested theological judgments as established fact, and it focuses on the content and discursive function of the material rather than on condemning particular individuals or communities.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Literal Interpretation of Divine Attributes as a Criterion of Theological Correctness

The sources reviewed suggest that disagreement over the divine names and attributes (*asmā' wa ṣifāt*) concerns not only the meaning of particular Arabic terms but also the standards by which an interpretation is judged acceptable. Terms such as *yad* (hand), *wajh* (face), and *istiwā'* (ascending over) stand at the centre of a long-running tension between fidelity to the apparent wording of scripture and the preservation of divine transcendence. The question is whether such terms should be affirmed as they appear without specifying how they apply to God, interpreted through *ta'wīl*, or approached by another method.

Table 1 lists the principal sources and the role each plays in the analysis. Istiqamah (2020) presents the Salafi critique of *kalām* approaches to the divine attributes and thus serves as a reference point for the literalist position. Khalid et al. (2021) examine exclusivist constructions in the tafsīr of Muḥammad ibn Ṣāliḥ al-ʿUthaymīn, showing how an interpretive position can be framed as the only legitimate one. Hayati et al. (2022) offer a comparative perspective on figurative language and the personification of God in scripture. Read together, these studies show how particular ways of reading the attributes can become claims to theological correctness.

Table 1. Principal Sources and Their Analytical Role

Source	Type	Focus	Role in the analysis
Istiqamah (2020a)	Journal article	Salafi theological critique of <i>kalām</i> approaches to the divine attributes	Reference point for the literalist position
Khalid et al. (2021)	Journal article	Exclusivism in the tafsīr of Muḥammad ibn Ṣāliḥ al-ʿUthaymīn	Reference point for exclusivist constructions of interpretation
Hayati et al. (2022)	Journal article	Comparative study of divine names, attributes, and personification in scripture	Reference point for figurative interpretation
Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an (2020)	Official guideline	Translation of Qur'anic expressions	Institutional reference point

Source: authors' analytical synthesis based on the literature reviewed.

Ta'wīl and the Boundaries of Acceptable Interpretation

A second area of disagreement concerns the legitimacy of *ta'wīl*. Some approaches permit figurative or contextual interpretation of expressions concerning the divine attributes, particularly where this is considered necessary to preserve divine transcendence. Other approaches give priority to the apparent wording of revelation and are more reluctant to accept readings that depart from it. The term "literalist" is used here as an analytical label and not necessarily one that the proponents of this position would adopt. Table 2 summarises the two approaches as an analytical synthesis of the literature reviewed.

Ahmad and Fauzi (2022) discuss literalism in contemporary Salafi theology, while Hayati et al. (2022) compare how scriptural traditions treat divine names, attributes, and figurative language, including the relation between language and referent. Together, these studies suggest that the dispute concerns method as well as meaning.

A critique of *ta'wīl* is a judgment about an interpretive method. It does not by itself amount to a judgment about the person who uses it. Takfīr, by contrast, requires a separate determination of an individual's or a group's religious status. Two questions must therefore be kept apart: whether an

interpretation is linguistically and theologically defensible, and whether its holder remains within the faith.

Table 2. Analytical Comparison of Interpretive Approaches to Divine Attributes

Aspect	Literalist approach	Ta'wīl approach
Meaning of expressions such as <i>yad</i> , <i>wajh</i> , <i>istiwā'</i>	Tends to affirm the apparent meaning of the text	Allows contextual or figurative interpretation to preserve divine transcendence
Relation to divine transcendence	Emphasises fidelity to the wording of revelation	Emphasises interpreting the meaning to avoid an anthropomorphic understanding
Typical criticism of the other approach	May criticise interpretations regarded as inconsistent with the textual meaning	May regard certain literal understandings as risking the likening of God to created beings

Source: authors' analytical synthesis based on the literature reviewed.

From Interpretive Disagreement to Religious Exclusion

A third area concerns the relationship between theological disagreement and the exclusion of rival interpretations. Iqbal and Afdillah (2021) and Nurrohman (2019) discuss literalism, religious exclusivism, and the marginalisation of alternative interpretations. These studies support reading interpretive disagreement not only as a dispute over meaning but also as a dispute over religious legitimacy.

However, the literature reviewed does not support the claim that interpretive disagreement leads directly to takfīr. Such a claim would require explicit evidence linking a specific interpretation to an accusation of unbelief. Criticising an interpretation, declaring it incorrect, labelling it or its adherents as deviant, and declaring someone outside Islam are all forms of religious judgment, but they differ in kind and in consequence. Table 3 sets out these four categories as the analytical framework of this study.

Table 3. Analytical Framework: Forms of Theological Judgment

Category	Meaning in the analysis	Indicator in the text
Criticism of interpretation	An objection to how a verse or attribute is understood	A statement addressing a specific method or reading
Judgment that interpretation "incorrect"	An interpretation is declared wrong or inaccurate	Explicit wording that a reading is mistaken
Labelling as deviant	An interpretation or its adherents are associated with doctrinal deviation	Terms of deviation applied to a reading or to those who hold it
Takfīr	A statement that an individual or group has left Islam	An explicit accusation, which cannot be inferred from criticism or from a label of "deviant" alone

Source: authors' analytical framework.

On this basis, the study proposes a possible discursive mechanism. An interpretation may first be classified as incorrect, then associated with doctrinal deviation, and in some circumstances used to question the religious status of those who hold it. This sequence is offered as an analytical proposition

grounded in the literature reviewed, not as a universal or inevitable progression. Testing it against specific textual and discursive cases is a task for further research.

Documentary Authority and the Regulation of Religious Meaning

Debates over the divine attributes also take place within institutional and documentary settings. One relevant reference point is the Pedoman Terjemahan Al-Qur'an Edisi Penyempurnaan, an official guideline for translating the Qur'an issued by the Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an (2020) under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Such a document shows that religious meaning is shaped not only in theological debate but also through authoritative documentary practice, which determines how expressions are rendered and presented to readers.

Alfian (2023) discusses symbolic violence in Indonesian religious discourse, which is relevant to the broader question of interpretive authority: how particular interpretations may acquire public legitimacy, and how competing interpretations may be positioned within a field of unequal symbolic authority. However, the existence of competing interpretations, or of an official guideline, does not by itself demonstrate that an institution has established theological hegemony. Such a claim requires explicit evidence from the relevant institutional documents. This study therefore distinguishes between the existence of competing interpretations and the stronger claim that a particular institution or discourse has exercised authoritative control over religious meaning.

Taken together, the sources suggest that debates over the divine attributes involve not only differences in textual interpretation but also questions of theological correctness and of who has the authority to determine legitimate religious meaning. These dimensions are best examined in relation to one another while remaining analytically distinct. Conclusions about wider social implications are limited to what the sources reviewed can support.

Table 4. Synthesis of the Literature Reviewed

Research theme	Focus of the debate	Sources discussed	Limit of the conclusion
Literal interpretation of the divine attributes	The meaning of <i>yad</i> , <i>wajh</i> , and <i>istiwā'</i> , and the criteria for theological correctness	Istiqamah (2020a); Khalid et al. (2021)	A literalist position may be identified, but this alone does not demonstrate <i>takfīr</i>
<i>Ta'wīl</i> and the boundaries of interpretation	Disagreement over textual meaning, figurative interpretation, and divine transcendence	Ahmad and Fauzi (2022); Hayati et al. (2022)	Rejecting <i>ta'wīl</i> does not automatically mean declaring its users unbelievers
Disagreement and religious exclusion	Labelling an interpretation as incorrect, deviant, or illegitimate	Iqbal and Afdillah (2021); Nurrohman (2019)	A claim of <i>takfīr</i> requires explicit evidence of an accusation of unbelief
Documentary authority and religious meaning	The role of official guidelines and the public legitimacy of interpretations	Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an (2020); Alfian (2023)	Claims about institutional effects require evidence from the relevant documents

Discussion

Meaning, Context, and the Standard of Correctness

The literature reviewed suggests that disagreement over *asmā' wa ṣifāt* is not only a dispute about the lexical meaning of terms such as *yad* (hand), *wajh* (face), and *istiwā'*. It is also a dispute about the standard by which an interpretation is judged acceptable. This is where the movement from interpretation to theological judgment appears to begin. A particular reading comes to be treated not as one possible interpretation but as the measure against which all others are assessed. The pattern is consistent with Istiqamah (2020a), who presents the Salafi critique of *kalām* approaches to the divine

attributes, and with Khalid et al. (2021), who show how exclusivist constructions of interpretation can shape judgments about theological legitimacy.

A semantic–pragmatic perspective helps explain why this matters. The meaning of a religious expression cannot always be read off its lexical form, because it also depends on linguistic, textual, and communicative context. Levinson (2000) shows that what speakers communicate often goes beyond what their words encode, since hearers draw inferences from the setting in which something is said. Applied to the divine attributes, this perspective does not require rejecting literal interpretation. It asks only that literal claims be read within the theological and linguistic context in which they are made. The point, then, is not that literalism is mistaken. It is that raising one reading to the status of an exclusive criterion of correctness narrows the room for legitimate disagreement. We refer to this narrowing as semantic reduction.

This claim should not be overstated. The sources reviewed do not support the view that every literal reading leads to *takfir*. The relationship appears to be conditional. A literalist position can remain a theological position as long as disagreement with it is treated as disagreement over interpretation. A problem arises only when that position becomes a test of the religious legitimacy of those who read differently (Dewi et al. 2025; Khoir et al. 2024).

***Ta'wīl*, Hermeneutical Plurality, and the Limits of Interpretation**

The second area, the status of *ta'wīl*, shows that the dispute is not between those who interpret scripture and those who do not. It concerns how far interpretation may legitimately go. Some approaches allow figurative or contextual readings where this is considered necessary to preserve divine transcendence. Others give priority to the apparent wording of revelation and are more reluctant to move beyond it. Fauzi (2022) offer a perspective on literalism in contemporary Salafi theology, while Hayati et al. (2022) compare how scriptural traditions treat divine names, attributes, and figurative language. Together they indicate that the disagreement concerns method as well as meaning.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics gives this disagreement a useful frame. For Gadamer (2004), interpretation is an encounter between horizons, not the mechanical recovery of a single meaning that exists apart from the interpreter. Yoran (2021) similarly stresses that historical consciousness is part of the interpretive process, because meaning is always encountered through historically situated acts of understanding. From this standpoint, a difference between two interpretations does not automatically mean that one interpreter has left the tradition. It may reflect different linguistic assumptions, theological premises, or interpretive methods.

Abū Zayd's contextual approach points in a similar direction. By emphasizing the historical and linguistic dimensions of Qur'anic interpretation, he challenges the assumption that revelation can be exhausted by one decontextualized reading (Abu Zayd 2006, 2019). This does not make every interpretation equally persuasive, and it does not make the text's own constraints irrelevant. It means that the validity of an interpretation has to be argued through language, context, and the structure of the text. In this light, *ta'wīl* should not be treated automatically as a sign of deviation. The analysis supports a clearer line between criticizing an interpretive method and judging the religious status of the person who uses it. That line matters socially because interpretive methods can be assigned unequal degrees of legitimacy. Iqbal and Afdillah (2021) discuss the tension between literalism and hermeneutical approaches, and Nurhayati (2021) underlines the social and contextual dimensions of contemporary Qur'anic interpretation.

From Disagreement to Exclusion: Interpretive Authority and Symbolic Power

The third area concerns how theological disagreement relates to religious exclusion. Table 3 distinguishes four forms of judgment: criticism of an interpretation, the judgment that an interpretation is incorrect, labeling an interpretation or its adherents as deviant, and explicit *takfir*. These should not be treated as interchangeable. *Takfir* is a much stronger claim about religious status, and it needs explicit

evidence of an accusation of unbelief, which neither criticism nor a label of deviance can supply on its own.

The distinction clarifies the mechanism proposed in this study. An alternative interpretation may first be described as incorrect, then associated with doctrinal deviation, and in some circumstances be used to question the religious standing of those who hold it. We present this as an analytical possibility grounded in the literature reviewed, not as a universal or inevitable sequence. What gives it significance is the moment at which a disagreement about meaning becomes an exclusive judgment about religious legitimacy.

Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power helps explain why that moment matters. Bourdieu (1991) argues that symbolic power lies in the capacity to make particular classifications recognized as legitimate within a social field. In religious discourse, interpretive authority is therefore not only a matter of producing an interpretation. It is also a matter of whose interpretation is socially recognized as authoritative (Ma'arif et al. 2025; Supriyanto et al. 2025; Bourdieu 2011). When one reading becomes authoritative enough to define the boundaries of legitimate belief, disagreement can acquire consequences beyond the text, and it can mark the difference between those regarded as full members of a community and those regarded as suspect. This resonates with Nurrohman (2019), who relates religious exclusivism to symbolic violence, with Alfian (2023), who discusses symbolic violence in Indonesian religious discourse, and with Khalid et al. (2021). The contribution of the present study lies in bringing these concerns into one analytical sequence: semantic disagreement does not itself amount to religious exclusion, and exclusion becomes possible when interpretive authority is turned into an exclusive criterion for judging others.

Institutional Documents and the Stabilization of Meaning

Debates over the divine attributes also take place in institutional and documentary settings. The *Pedoman Terjemahan Al-Qur'an Edisi Penyempurnaan* issued by the Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Al-Qur'an (2020) is one example of an official document through which expressions are rendered and presented to readers. It shows that religious meaning is shaped not only in informal theological debate but also through authoritative documentary practice.

Here caution is needed. An official guideline does not by itself demonstrate theological hegemony, and disagreement with an institutional position does not automatically amount to religious exclusion (Abas et al. 2025). Claims about institutional dominance require evidence from the relevant documents and practices. The more limited conclusion is that institutional and documentary sources are important sites where religious meanings can be stabilized, communicated, and publicly authorized. From the perspective of symbolic power, this is why interpretive authority should be studied not only at the level of doctrinal propositions but also at the level of the processes through which interpretations become visible, repeatable, and potentially authoritative. The study does not claim that any particular institution or community holds exclusive theological authority merely because it promotes a given reading.

Reconsidering the Relationship between *Tafsīr* and *Takfīr*

Taken together, the analysis offers answers to the two research questions. In response to the first, semantic reduction in *tafsīr* discourse can contribute to the movement toward *takfīr*, but only as one stage in a conditional process: interpretive possibilities are narrowed, one reading is raised to an exclusive criterion of legitimacy, and alternative readings or their adherents are then classified as deviant. The sources reviewed do not show a direct or inevitable path from literal interpretation to *takfīr*. In response to the second, literalist hermeneutics relates to exclusive religious authority conditionally rather than necessarily. The relationship emerges when apparent meaning is treated as the only valid criterion and is backed by recognized interpretive authority.

The semantic-pragmatic, Gadamerian and contextual, and Bourdieusian perspectives address different dimensions of the same phenomenon. The first explains why meaning cannot be reduced to lexical form, the second why interpretation is historically situated, and the third how interpretations acquire social authority. Together they yield an analytical model for distinguishing interpretive disagreement, theological criticism, religious exclusion, and *takfīr* (Juliana et al. 2026; Gerrard and Farrell 2014; F. Munir 2025).

The practical implication is modest but useful. A more careful distinction between these forms of judgment creates analytical space for legitimate theological disagreement without implying that all interpretations are equally valid. It does not require anyone to give up doctrinal commitments. It requires only that the evaluation of an interpretation be kept separate from the evaluation of the person who holds it. Because the analysis rests on a review of the literature and one official document, it points to a mechanism to be tested, not to its prevalence. Testing it against primary texts and digital religious discourse is a natural direction for further research.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the transition from *tafsīr* (interpretation) to *takfīr* (excommunication) does not result from the literal interpretation of divine attributes in itself. Rather, the possibility of religious exclusion emerges when a particular interpretation of *asmā' wa ṣifāt* is elevated as the sole criterion of religious legitimacy, while alternative interpretations are treated as evidence of doctrinal deviation. The findings further distinguish three levels of interpretive action: semantic disagreement, theological criticism, and accusations of disbelief. This distinction is important because it prevents theological disagreement from being treated automatically as *takfīr* and clarifies the conditions under which interpretive differences may acquire consequences for religious belonging.

The study contributes to the discussion of Islamic hermeneutics by clarifying the relationship between semantic reduction, interpretive authority, and religious exclusion. Rather than treating literalism as an inherent cause of *takfīr*, the study proposes an analytical distinction between accepting a particular interpretation and delegitimizing competing interpretations. This perspective helps explain why disagreements concerning *asmā' wa ṣifāt* may develop into forms of religious exclusion without implying that every literal interpretation produces such consequences. The study also demonstrates the value of documentary and textual analysis for examining the linguistic and epistemological dimensions of contemporary religious discourse, particularly where questions of interpretation and religious authority intersect.

The study is limited by its reliance on selected theological writings, scholarly publications, and documentary sources rather than interviews or systematic field observations. Consequently, its findings are limited to the texts and discourses examined and cannot be used to determine the prevalence of particular interpretive strategies across Muslim communities more broadly. Further research should expand the range of documentary sources, examine theological traditions and digital religious discourse across different geographical contexts, and investigate how readers and religious communities understand and respond to claims concerning interpretive and religious authority. Such research may provide a broader empirical basis for examining the relationship between interpretive authority, theological disagreement, religious exclusion, and *takfīr*.

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