

Localizing The Qur'an in Javanese Pesantren: A Socio-Cultural Interpretation of *Al-Ibriz* and *Al-Iklil*

Lokalitas Al-Qur'an dalam Tradisi Pesantren Jawa: Tafsir Sosio-Kultural atas Al-Ibriz dan Al-Iklil

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Abstract

The production of Javanese Qur'anic commentaries in Pegon script within the pesantren (Islamic boarding school) tradition reflects the authors varying degrees of engagement with the socio-cultural realities of Javanese society. This paper investigates the influence of socio-cultural factors in *Al-Ibriz li Ma'rifat Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Aziz* by Bisri Mustafa from Pesantren Raudhatut Thalibin (Rembang, Central Java), and *Al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* by Misbah Mustafa from Pesantren Al-Balagh (Tuban, East Java). Adopting a descriptive-analytical method, this study explores how both authors responded to socio-cultural phenomena or offered culturally grounded interpretations in their tafsir works. Their use of local knowledge and their responses to cultural practices are analyzed through content analysis to determine their interpretive orientations—whether leaning toward Arabization, Islamization, or localization. The findings reveal that both authors utilize local knowledge to explicate Qur'anic meanings. In responding to social phenomena, they adopt two main approaches: critical evaluation and selective accommodation of cultural practices. This study affirms the dynamic intellectual engagement of pesantren kiais in contextual Qur'anic interpretation.

Keywords: *Pesantren Tafsir, Socio-Cultural Interpretation, Javanese Tafsir, Localization of Islam, Contextual Hermeneutics*

Abstrak

Produksi karya tafsir al-Qur'an berbahasa Jawa dalam aksara Pegon di lingkungan pesantren mencerminkan keterlibatan dinamis antara penafsiran al-Qur'an dan realitas sosial-budaya masyarakat Jawa. Artikel ini mengkaji sejauh mana faktor sosial dan budaya memengaruhi dua karya tafsir utama: *Al-Ibriz li Ma'rifat Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Aziz* karya Bisri Mustofa dari Pesantren Raudhatut Thalibin (Rembang, Jawa Tengah) dan *Al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* karya Misbah Mustofa dari Pesantren Al-Balagh (Tuban, Jawa Timur). Dengan pendekatan deskriptif-analitis, studi ini menelaah bagaimana kedua penafsir merespons fenomena sosial budaya setempat serta menyisipkan interpretasi yang berpijak pada kearifan lokal dalam karya tafsir mereka. Melalui analisis isi, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi kecenderungan penafsiran yang meliputi Arabisasi, Islamisasi, dan lokalisasi budaya. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kedua penulis secara strategis memanfaatkan pengetahuan lokal untuk menjelaskan makna ayat-ayat al-Qur'an, dengan menerapkan dua pendekatan utama: evaluasi kritis dan akomodasi selektif terhadap praktik budaya Jawa. Kajian ini menegaskan peran



intelektual aktif para kiai pesantren dalam merumuskan hermeneutika al-Qur'an yang kontekstual dan berakar pada realitas lokal.

Kata Kunci: *Tafsir Pesantren, Penafsiran Sosio-Kultural, Tafsir Jawa, Lokalisasi Islam, Hermeneutika Kontekstual*

Qur'an, Penolakan Sunnah

Introduction

Throughout its history, Qur'anic interpretation in tafsir texts has demonstrated diversity rather than uniformity.¹ Peter Riddell captures this aspect of diversity in his study of Malay-language tafsir works.² The interpretations of the Qur'an by *pesantren*-based exegetes also reflect such diversity, despite the commonalities present within them. This diversity can be understood as a consequence of various influencing factors, such as the social context, the exegete's sources, the audience, and other considerations.³ In essence, the diversity in Qur'anic interpretations forms part of a complex dialectical space within Qur'anic exegesis, reflecting unique local elements.

The interpretation of the Qur'an has a long history in Indonesia. Since the 16th century, when Hamzah Fansuri (d. 1590) introduced translated or interpreted excerpts of the Qur'an,⁴ these works have gradually expanded into various regional languages and scripts, including Indonesian, Malay, Javanese, Madurese, Sundanese, Batak, Balinese, Duri, and Buginese, with scripts such as Arabic, Latin, *Pegon*/Jawi, Carakan, and Lontara. Izza Rohman Nahrowi has studied the development of Qur'anic translations and interpretations before the 20th century, while Yunan Yusuf focuses on the 20th century, and Islah Gusmian examines works from 1990 to 2000.⁵ In addition, Nurdin Zuhdi analyzes local interpretations from 2000 to

1 Islah Gusmian, "Bahasa dan Aksara dalam Penulisan tafsir di Indonesia Era Awal Abad 20 M" in *Mutawatir Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadis* 5, no. 2 (December 2015), 223. <https://doi.org/10.15642/mutawatir.2015.5.2.223-247>.

2 Peter G Riddell, "Variations on an Exegetical Theme: Tafsir Foundations in the Malay World" in *Studia Islamika: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies* 21, no. 2 (2014). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v21i2.1072>.

3 Supriyanto, "Al-Qur'an dalam Ruang Keagamaan Islam Jawa: Respon Pemikiran Keagamaan Misbah Mustafa dalam Tafsir *Al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil*," in *Jurnal THEOLOGIA* 28, no. 1 (2017), 31. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21580/teo.2017.28.1.1294>.

4 Izza Rohman Nahrowi, "Profil Kajian Al-Qur'an di Nusantara Sebelum Abad Kedua Puluh" in *Al-Huda: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu-Ilmu Islam* II, no. 6 (2002), 9-22.

5 Islah Gusmian, *Khazanah Tafsir di Indonesia: Dari Hermeneutika hingga Ideologi* (Yogyakarta, LKiS: 2013)

2010.⁶ Scholars such as Jajang A Rohmana,⁷ and Farid Saenong have also highlighted various local-language Qur'anic interpretations in Indonesia.⁸

In Indonesia, Qur'anic exegesis texts, including those emerging from *pesantren* traditions, have become a significant area of interest for both local and international scholars. Studies by Anthony H. Johns,⁹ Peter G. Riddell,¹⁰ and Howard Federspiel¹¹ illustrate the influence of Middle Eastern exegetical dynamics on Indonesian Qur'anic interpretations.¹² Some scholars like Supriyanto,¹³ Nur Rohman,¹⁴ and Gusmian¹⁵ have explored social and cultural dimensions in their tafsir. Perspectives on Javanese tafsir have been addressed by Nurtawab¹⁶ and Gusmian,¹⁷ while the characteristics

- 6 Nurdin Zuhdi and Sahiron Syamsuddin, "The Contemporary Qur'anic Exegesis: Tracking Trends in The Interpretation of The Qur'an in Indonesia 2000-2010" in *Jawi*, 1, no. 1 (2018), 1-48. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24042/jw.v1i1.2840>
- 7 See Jajang A Rohmana, *Sejarah Tafsir Al-Qur'an di Tatar Sunda* (Bandung: Mujahid Press, 2014), 7-8
- 8 <https://saidnazulfiqar.wordpress.com/2004/12/22/arkeologi-pemikiran-tafsir-di-indonesia/> retrieved on April 19, 2025, at 07.00.
- 9 Anthony H Johns, "The Qur'an in the Malay World: Reflection on 'Abd al-Rauf of Singkel (1615-1693)" in *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 9, no. 2 (1988). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26198058>.
- 10 Peter G Riddell, "The Use of Arabic Commentaries on the Qur'an in Early Islamic Period in South and Saouth East Asia: A Report on Work Process", in *Indonesia Circle Journal* LI (1990); "Controversy in Qur'anic Exegesis and Its Relevance to Malay-Indonesia World" in Anthony Reid (ed.), *The Making of an Islamic Political Discourse in South East Asia* (Calyton: Monas Paper on South East Asia, 1993), 27-61.
- 11 Howard M Federspiel, "An Introduction to Qur'anic Commentaries in Contemporary South East Asia" in *The Muslim World* LXXXI, no. 2 (1991), 149-161. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.1991.tb03519.x>.
- 12 Islah Gusmian, "Tafsir Alquran di Indonesia: Sejarah dan Dinamika" in *Nun: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Tafsir di Nusantara* I, no. 1 (2015), 2. <https://doi.org/10.32495/nun.v1i1.8>.
- 13 S. Supriyanto, "Harmoni Islam dan Budaya Jawa dalam Tafsir Al-Qur'an Basa Jawi" in *Wawasan: Jurnal Ilmiah Agama dan Sosial Budaya* 3, no 1 (Augus 31, 2018), 26-30. DOI: 10.15575/jw.v3i1.2578.
- 14 Nur Rohman, "Enkulturası Budaya *Pesantren* dalam Kitab Al-Iklıl Fi Ma'ānı At-Tanzıl Karya Mishbah Musthofa" in *Jurnal Suhuf*, 12, no. 1 (2019), 58. <https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v12i1.397>
- 15 Islah Gusmian, "Penulisan Tafsir Al-Qur'an di Indonesia Era Awal Abad 20 M" in *Jurnal Mutawatir*, Vol 5, No. 2, 2016, 223.
- 16 Ervan Nurtawab, "Qur'anic Translation in Malay, Javanese and Sundanese" in Majid Daneshgar, Peter G Riddell dan Andre Rippin, *The Qur'an in the Malay-Indonesian World* (London-New York: Roudledge, 2016), 39-55. Juga, "The Tradition of Writing Qur'anic Commentaries in Java and Sunda" in *Jurnal Suhuf* II, no. 2 (2009), 163-195. <https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v2i2>., dan "Qur'anic Readings and Malay Translation in 18th-century Banten Qur'ans A.51 and W.277" in *Jurnal Indonesia and the Malay World*, 12 Maret 2020, <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cimw20>
- 17 Islah Gusmian, "Tafsir Al-Qur'an Bahasa Jawa: Peneguhan Identitas, Ideologi, dan Politik" in *Jurnal Şuhuf* 9, no. 1 (June 2016). <https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v9i1>.

of *pesantren* tafsir are examined by Ahmad Baidowi,¹⁸ Muhammad Asif¹⁹ and Ari Hidayatur Rohmah with Syaifuddin Zuhri Qudsy.²⁰ Johanna Pink discusses the use of the level of Javaneese language in the translation of Qur'anic commentaries of *pesantren*.²¹ However, these studies have yet to sufficiently capture the socio-cultural influences within *pesantren* tafsir texts, particularly *Al-Ibriz li Ma'rifat Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Aziz* (*Al-Ibriz*) by KH Bisri Mustafa and *Al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* (*Al-Iklil*) by KH Misbah Mustafa.

This article is based on the premise that studying Qur'anic exegesis in Indonesia must include the contributions of *pesantren* kyai (religious scholars of *pesantren*) who authored these works. *Al-Iklil* and *Al-Ibriz* are popular Qur'an commentaries that are highly regarded among Javanese Muslim communities, especially within traditional Muslim circles. Unlike Qur'an commentaries in Indonesian with Latin script, which are widely referenced in Islamic universities, *Al-Ibriz* and *Al-Iklil* are commonly recited and discussed in mosque study groups and religious assemblies. More recently, as Indonesian tafsir studies have gained traction in academic institutions, these works have also become subjects of academic analysis.

This paper aims to demonstrate that *Al-Ibriz* and *Al-Iklil* are unique tafsir works emerging from the distinctive social environment of the *pesantren*. These tafsir will be examined through three key aspects: the composition style characteristic of *pesantren* tafsir appears as a dialectical response to the cultural setting, the interpretations within these texts are inseparable from the socio-cultural contexts encountered by their authors as *pesantren* kyai in Java, and the unique perspectives shaped by their individual responses to cultural realities. This study adopts perspectives on the dialogue between the Qur'an and culture, and highlights how the authors of *Al-Ibriz* and *Al-Iklil* responded to social and cultural phenomena in society or provided cultural and locally nuanced explanations. The passages on their use of local knowledge and their responses to socio-cultural matters are analyzed using content analysis to identify their interpretive patterns: Arabization, Islamization, or localization.

18 Ahmad Baidowi, "Dinamika Karya Tafsir Al-Qur'an Pesantren Jawa" in *Al-Itqan: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an* 8, no. 2. Doi: doi.org/10.47454/itqan.v8i2.814.

19 Muhammad Asif, "TAFSIR DAN TRADISI PESANTREN: Karakteristik Tafsir al-Ibriz Karya Bisri Mustofa" in *Jurnal Suhuf* 9, no. 2 (December 2016). <https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v9i2>.

20 Ari Hidayatur Rohmah dan Syaifuddin Zuhri Qudsy, "Unsur-Unsur Budaya Jawa dalam Kitab Tafsir Al- Ibriz karya KH Bisri Mustofa" in *Hermeneutik: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 14, no. 2 (2020), 283-306. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21043/hermeneutik.v14i1.6569>.

21 Johanna Pink, "The kyai's voice and the Arabic Qur'an" 21, no. 3 (2020), 338. <https://doi.org/10.17510/wacana.v21i3.948>; "Fathers and sons, angels and women: Translation, exegesis and social hierarchy in Javanese *tafsir*" in Johanna Pink (ed), *Qur'an Translation in Indonesia, Scriptural Politic in Multilingual State* (New York: Routledge, 2024), 99-131.

Grounding Tafsir in Javanese *Pesantren*: The Scholarly Background of *Al-Ibriz* and *Al-Iklil*

Bisri Mustafa and Misbah Mustafa were well-known scholars and highly productive writers. Achmad Zainal Huda documented more than 176 works written by Bisri Mustafa,²² while Misbah Mustafa authored approximately 200 works.²³ Both produced a wide range of works across various fields of Islamic studies, including translations of Arabic texts as well as independent works, primarily in Javanese using the *Pegon* script. Bisri was born in 1915 in Sawahan village, Palen Alley, Rembang, Central Java, with the birth name Masjhadi, while Misbah was born on May 5, 1916, named Masruh. They were the sons of Zainal Mustafa and Siti Chotijah. They adopted the names Bisri and Misbah after returning from the Hajj pilgrimage with their family in 1923 when they were still children. Their father, Zainal Mustafa, passed away at the age of 63 during their return journey.

At the age of 10, Bisri began his studies at the Kajen Pati *Pesantren* under KH. Hasbullah, and later at the Kasingan *Pesantren* under Kyai Kholil Harun in 1930. Misbah, however, had already started studying at the Kasingan *Pesantren* in 1928. During their time at the *pesantren*, both focused on various religious sciences such as fiqh, kalam, hadith, and tafsir. Misbah went on to study with KH. Hasyim Asy'ari at the Tebuireng *Pesantren* in Jombang. Later, the two brothers continued their studies in Mecca during a time when Islamic intellectualism was flourishing in Indonesia, with many Indonesians studying in Mecca and Medina (*Haramain*), often beginning with the Hajj pilgrimage and staying to study, a group known as the *Ashabul Jarwiyyin* (Jawi Community)²⁴. At that time, Indonesia saw two opposing Islamic intellectual movements: the modernist and the traditionalist. The modernist movement, oriented toward purifying Islam, included figures like Imam Bonjol, who, with a reformist spirit, resisted traditionalists, resulting in the Padri War. This modernist movement evolved with the emergence of organizations such as Muhammadiyah, Persatuan Islam, and Al-Irsyad. Meanwhile, the reformist-oriented purists faced resistance from traditionalist circles, especially *pesantren*-based communities, which led to the formation of religious organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama (1926), Al-Khairat (1930),

22 Achmad Zainal Huda, *Mutiara Pesantren: Perjalanan Hikmah KH Bisri Mustafa* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2005), 73.

23 According to the wife of the late KH Abdullah Badi, one of KH Misbah's sons, more than 200 of KH Misbah's works were sold and published by various publishers in Surabaya, Pekalongan and al-Ma'arif Bandung. However, many of these works are no longer published along with the death of the publisher. The interview was conducted on October 19, 2018 at PP Al-Balagh, Bangilan

24 See Saifuddin Zuhri Qudsy, Zaenudin HP, Ahmad R, Teuku Z, "The Social History of Ashab al-Jarwiyyin and the Hadith Transmission in the 17th Century Nusantara," in *ISLAMIYYAT* 43, no. 2 (2021), 105 – 115. <https://doi.org/10.17576/islamiyyat-2021-4302-09>.

Nahdlatul Wathan (1932), Mathla'ul Anwar, Persatuan Tarbiyah Islamiyah, Darud Da'wah wal Irsyad (1936), Jami'atul Wasliyah, and Persatuan Umat Islam. These two forms of Islamic intellectualism in Indonesia were deeply influenced by the debates occurring in Mecca and Medina, the heart of Islamic development.

After returning from Mecca, Bisri married Ma'rufah, the daughter of Kyai Cholil Harun, head of the Kasingan *Pesantren*, in July 1935. He assisted in teaching there and eventually succeeded him as the head in 1939. In 1950, Bisri founded the Raudhatut Thalibin *Pesantren* in Leteh, Rembang, which has continued to thrive and is now overseen by KH. Mustofa Bisri, Bisri's son. Misbah, in turn, married Masruhah in 1948, the daughter of KH. Ridhwan, who headed the Al-Balagh *Pesantren* in Bangilan, Tuban, and eventually took over the leadership of that *pesantren*. Amid their teaching responsibilities, Bisri and Misbah Mustafa continued to write, translated various books, and deliver religious lectures to the Muslim community.²⁵ Although Bisri Mustafa and Misbah Mustafa were siblings, they had notably different styles of thought. The older brother, Bisri, was generally gentle in approach, whereas the younger, Misbah, was perceived as firm. For instance, they held opposing views on the Family Planning program. Bisri supported it, publishing a book titled *Islam dan Keluarga Berencana* (Islam and Family Planning, 1970) to argue for its permissibility. In contrast, Misbah opposed it, declaring it forbidden for both political and theological reason²⁶ Such differences in opinion were evident on various other matters as well.

The works *Al-Ibriz li Ma'rifat Tafsir Al-Qur'an al-Aziz* by Bisri Mustafa and *Al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* by Misbah Mustafa are the Qur'an commentaries that written in the Javanese language and using Pegon script. The writing of Javanese-Pegon Qur'anic with *makna gandhul* (interlinear word-for-word translation) like *Al-Ibriz* and *Al-Iklil* became a hallmark of exegesis originating from *pesantren* traditions.²⁷ Pegon script, a modified Arabic script adapted to local languages, is regarded by scholars like De Graaf (1899-1984) and Pigeaud (1899-1988) as a characteristic of the Islamic-Javanese Civilization. Initially, Pegon script was used for literary and correspondence purposes before being adopted in *pesantren* writings. The use of Javanese-Pegon in *pesantren* exegesis serves several purposes: (1) affirming

25 Zazuli Hasan, "Tafsir Pondok Pesantren: Karakteristik Tafsir *Tāj al-Muslimīn min Kalām Rabb al-Ālamīn* by KH Misbah bin Zainal Mustofa", Wonosobo: Program Pascasarjana UNSIQ Jawa Tengah in Wonosono, 1-12.

26 Supriyanto, "Kajian Al-Qur'an dalam Tradisi Pesantren: Telaah atas Tafsir Al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil" in *Tsaqafah: Jurnal Peradaban Islam* 16, no. 2 (2016), 286. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v12i2.757>. Islah Gusmian, "Al-Iklil Fi Ma'ani Al-Tanzil and Family Planning in Indonesia", in *Advances in Sosial Science, Education and Humanities Research* (ASSEHR) 137 (2018), 85-86.

27 Islah Gusmian, "Tafsir Al-Qur'an Bahasa Jawa", 146.

Javanese-Islamic identity, (2) reinforcing the existence of *pesantren* literature, and (3) facilitating comprehension among *pesantren* communities by fulfilling three functions—translation, grammatical application, and explanatory commentary of Qur'anic verses.²⁸

The works *Al-Ibriz* and *Al-Iklil* share a similar format: they are written in Javanese using the *Pegon* script and provide an interlinear translation of Qur'anic verses, followed by an interpretation. In *Al-Ibriz*, terms such as “*tanbih*,” “*faidah*,” “*hikayat*,” “*muhimmah*,” and “*mujarrab*” are used, while *Al-Iklil* employs terms like “*keterangan*” (explanation), “*tanbih*,” “*mas'alah*,” “*faidah*,” and “*qissah*”.²⁹ Overall, *Al-Ibriz* spans 2270 pages, whereas *Al-Iklil* has 4678 pages, with *Al-Ibriz* in a slightly larger format.³⁰ Unlike *Al-Ibriz*, *Al-Iklil* frequently incorporates stories from early Islamic history and addresses social issues. *Al-Iklil* provides a more complex interpretation style of the Qur'an, to the extent that Mustofa Bisri noted that anyone who speaks Javanese and can read *Pegon* script could easily understand Tafsir *Al-Ibriz*, but not necessarily Tafsir *Al-Iklil*.³¹ According to Mustofa Bisri, his father began writing Tafsir *Al-Ibriz* in 1951 and completed it in 1960,³² after which it was published by Menara Kudus. *Al-Iklil*, however, was written over eight years, from 1977 to 1985. When *Al-Iklil* was eventually published by Al-Ihsan in Surabaya, many of its explanations were removed, much to Misbah's disappointment.³³ Consequently, Misbah started another work, *Tāj al-Muslimīn min Kalām Rabb al-Ālamīn*, in 1987, published by Majlis Ta'lif wa al-Khattāt. Unfortunately, this work was only completed

28 Ahmad Baidowi, “Pegon Script Phenomena In The Tradition Of Pesantren's Qur'anic Commentaries Writing”, in *Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 20, No. 2 (2020), 469-490. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14421/qh.2020.2102-12>.

29 The term *tanbih* is used when the verse being interpreted contains a warning. The term *faidah* is used when the verse contains teachings, whether practical (*amaliyah*), moral advice (*mau'izah*), or parables. The term *muhimmah* is used to explain very important matters, particularly concerning social-scientific issues or *asbab al-nuzul* (reasons for revelation). The term *mujarrab* is used to add explanatory notes of a practical and somewhat “mystical” nature, such as in matters related to healing. Meanwhile, *hikayat* or *qasas* is used to explain the stories of the prophets, previous people, or the events of the last day. See also Johanna Pink, “The kyai's voice and the Arabic Qur'an” in *Wacana* 21, no. 3 (2020), 338. <https://doi.org/10.17510/wacana.v21i3.948>.

30 *Al-Ibriz* was printed in two versions: a 3-volume and a 30-volume version. However, both were arranged with consistent pagination. Meanwhile, *Al-Iklil* was printed in a 30-volume format, corresponding to each juz of the Qur'an. However, the pagination for juz 1 through 29 continues sequentially, ending on page 4482. For juz 30, titled *Tafsir Juz 'Amma Fī Ma'ānī al-Tanzīl*, a separate pagination is used, beginning from page 1 and ending on page 192.

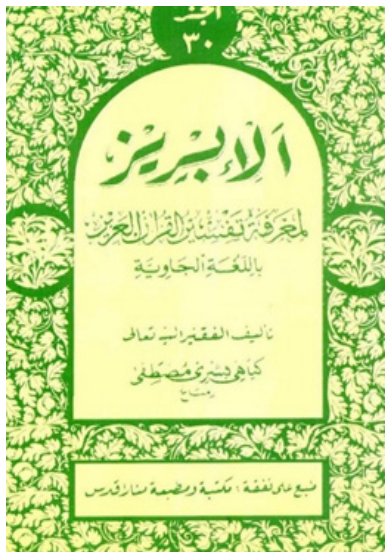
31 Interview with Gus Mus on November 19, 2018, at his residence.

32 Bisri Mustafa, *Al-Ibriz*, 2270. KH. Bisri Mustafa, *Al-Ibriz versi Latin: Tafsir Al-Qur'an Bahasa Jawa* by Lembaga Kajian Strategis Indonesia, 2 ed. (Wonosobo: LEKAS, 2015), vi.

33 Islah Gusmian, “K.H. Misbah Ibn Zainul Musthafa (1916-1994 M): Pemikir dan Penulis Teks Keagamaan dari Pesantren”, in *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 14, no. 1 (2016), 121. DOI: [10.31291/jlk.v14i1.474](https://doi.org/10.31291/jlk.v14i1.474)

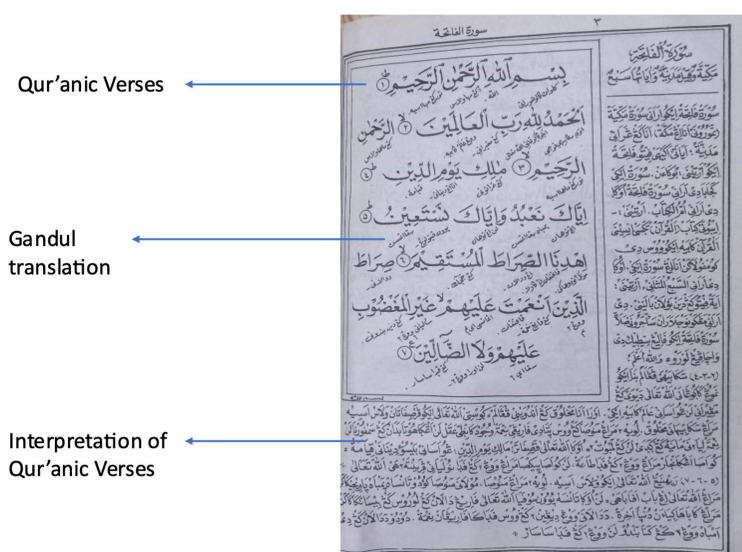
up to four juz before Misbah passed away in 1994.

The *Al-Ibriz* and *Al-Iklil* commentaries represent a unique intellectual contribution of Javanese *pesantren* culture, written in Javanese using Arabic *Pegon* script. The choice of *Pegon* script for these works is deeply rooted in the educational practices and cultural context of Javanese *pesantren*. Firstly, the *gandhul* model, in which each word's meaning is written directly beneath it, is a distinct *pesantren* technique aimed at building vocabulary mastery and understanding of word structure within sentences.³⁴ Secondly, translations and explanations placed alongside or below the Qur'anic verses help readers interpret the authors' views on specific verses. Thirdly, the use of the Javanese language in these commentaries reflects the authors' intention to make the messages of the Qur'an accessible to Javanese-speaking audiences, particularly the Javanese community.³⁵



34 Islah Gusmian, "Bahasa dan Aksara Tafsir Al-Qur'an di Indonesia", 22. Ahmad Baidowi, "Fenomena Aksara Pegon dalam Tradisi Penulisan Tafsir *Pesantren*", 471-472

35 Abu Rokhmad, "Telaah Karakteristik Tafsir Pegon Al-Ibriz" in *Jurnal Analisa* XVIII, no. 1 (2011), 27.



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In interpreting the Qur'an, both *Al-Ibriz* and *Al-Iklil* go beyond a literal reading of Qur'anic verses; the authors weave these interpretations with an understanding of the socio-cultural realities of their time. Evidence of their awareness of social and cultural phenomena is evident, for instance, when *Al-Ibriz* and *Al-Iklil* discuss issues like *kejawen* traditions (rituals practiced by some Javanese), *kenduri* (a communal feast tradition in Javanese society), religious-magical concepts, and more. By integrating local knowledge in addressing social and cultural issues, these two tafsirs demonstrate their relevance and significance for Javanese Muslim communities. Johanna Pink notes a distinction between these two works, particularly in their use of Javanese *Krama* (a high-register form of Javanese) when interpreting verses that involve communication—91 instances in *Al-Ibriz* compared to only 21 in *Al-Iklil*. According to Pink, this difference is due to two factors: geographical and temporal context, with East Java being more egalitarian than Central Java.³⁶

Vernacularization of the Qur'an in the Javanese *Pesantren* Tafsir: A Case Study on the Commentaries of *al-Hurūf al-Muqatta'ah*

Fadlou Sachedina suggests that the dissemination of Islamic values involves both adoption and adaptation processes,³⁷ which exhibit forms of acculturation

36 Johanna Pink, "Fathers and sons, angels and women: Translation, exegesis and social hierarchy in Javanese *tafsir*" in Johanna Pink (ed), *Qur'an Translation in Indonesia, Scriptural Politic in Multilingual State* (New York: Routledge, 2024), 99-131

37 Cited from Islah Gusman, "Bahasa dan Aksara Tafsir Al-Qur'an di Indonesia. . .", 2.

that are either absorptive or dialogical.³⁸ Rejecting an acculturative approach in favor of a strict focus on Islamic authenticity can, in fact, lead to resistance against both tradition and modernity, potentially causing divisions within society. This has prompted Lee to propose a cross-cultural strategy to address the complex issues faced by communities.³⁹ Based on his research on Islam in Java, Woodward concludes that Islam in this region has developed a distinctive character through its interaction with local culture, resulting in a unique form of Islam. This Javanese Islam does not reflect a fusion with Hindu or Buddhist elements but represents a variant of Islam, much like Indian Islam, Syrian Islam, and others.⁴⁰ This distinctiveness owes much to the successful use of local wisdom by Islamic propagators as a means of cultural adaptation. Abdurrahman Wahid refers to this concept as the “Indigenization of Islam.”⁴¹

Epistemologically, the dialogue between the Qur'an and local culture is not a recent phenomenon but has occurred in the pre-Qur'anic, Qur'anic, and post-Qur'anic eras. The effort to engage the Qur'an with local culture through adoption and adaptation in the post-Qur'anic period has given rise to what is known as enculturation. This process of enculturation, as noted by Anthony H. Johns, has taken place across various fields of knowledge, including in Qur'anic exegetical works.⁴² In these works, enculturation is manifested by the authors through what can be described as adoptive complement and adoptive reconstructive approaches. The first approach reflects an acceptance of existing traditions, while the second aims to reconstruct those traditions.⁴³ Authors of exegetical texts often display a socio-cultural framework within their works, either by accommodating or critiquing prevailing socio-cultural phenomena in society. In essence, Qur'anic exegeses, including those in Java, do not emerge from a vacuum but rather from the context surrounding them. This approach lends a vernacular dimension to these exegetical works.

38 Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi, “Dakwah dan Dielektika Akulturasi Budaya” in *Jurnal Religia* 15, no. 1 (2012), 46-47.

39 Robert D Lee, *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity: The Search for Islamic Authenticity* (Westview Press, A Division of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1997).

40 Cited from Islah Gusmian, “Bahasa dan Aksara Tafsir Al-Qur'an di Indonesia...”, 2.

41 Abdurrahman Wahid, *Pergulatan Negara, Agama dan Kebudayaan* (Jakarta: Desantara, 2001), 111.

42 Anthony H Johns, “Quranic Exegesis in the Malay World” in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988)

43 Ali Sodikin, *Antropologi Al-Qur'an; Model Dialektika Wahyu dan Budaya* (Yogyakarta: Ar-Ruzz MediaGroup, 2008), 117-125.

The lives of Muslims in Indonesia are closely intertwined with the process of vernacularization, or the localization, of the Qur'an.⁴⁴ Historically, the vernacular Qur'an began as part of the methods and strategies used by early Islamic scholars in their efforts to spread Islam, writing in languages and scripts characteristic of local Islamic expression.⁴⁵ The vernacularization later expanded to include translation, authorship, and publication of Qur'anic interpretations in both regional languages and Indonesian.⁴⁶ In other words, the history of Islam in Indonesia is inextricably linked to the process of adapting the Qur'an into the various local languages spoken within its geographical boundaries.⁴⁷ The localization of the Qur'an in Indonesia adopts various forms: translations by word (either *gandhul* or interlinear), narrative translations, and translations embedded within interpretive commentary.⁴⁸ These practices often involve integrating various concepts into the local language and culture, reflecting a diversity within the "Islamicate" cultural sphere.⁴⁹

The *Al-Ibriz* and *Al-Iklil* demonstrate that the interpretation of the Qur'an by these two authors—despite their similarities and differences—clearly considers local socio-cultural elements when explaining the content of the Qur'an in various contexts. This can be seen when they explain *al-ḥurūf al-muqatta'ah* (mysterious letters) by adopting local knowledge to make understanding the Qur'an easier. Exegetes

44 Farid F. Saenong, "Vernacularization of the Qur'an: Tantangan dan Prospek Tafsir Al-Qur'an di Indonesia, Interview with Prof. AH Johns," *Jurnal Studi Qur'an* 1, no. 3 (2006), 579

45 See Jajang A Rohmana, *Sejarah Tafsir Al-Qur'an di Tatar Sunda* (Bandung: Mujahid Press, 2014)

46 There are various models of localization in Indonesia. Firstly, the use of the Arabic script (with certain modifications adapted to the local language) for writing expressions in Malay. This is subsequently referred to as Arabic Malay, Jawi, or Arabic *Pegon* script. Secondly, the emergence of loanwords from Arabic into local languages; Thirdly, the significant influence of Arabic literary models on local Indonesian works. Ichwan adds that localization also involves the adoption of Arabic linguistic structures, rules, and grammar. See Anthony H Johns, "Penerjemahan Bahasa Arab ke dalam Bahasa Melayu: Sebuah Renungan," in Henri Chambert-Loir, *Sadur: Sejarah Terjemah di Indonesia dan Malaysia* (Jakarta: KPG, 2009), 51-53; Moch Nur Ichwan, "Literatur Tafsir Qur'an Melayu-Jawi di Indonesia: Relasi Kuasa, Pergeseran, dan Kematian," *Visi Islam: Jurnal Ilmu-ilmu Keislaman* 1, no.1 (January 2002), 1-12, 13.

47 Regarding the diversity of theories of the entry of Islam into the archipelago, see Farid F Saenong, "Vernacularization of the Qur'an: Tantangan dan Prospek Tafsir Al-Qur'an di Indonesia" in *the Journal of Al-Qur'an Studies* 1, no. 3 (2006); Ahmad Mansur Suryanegara, *Menemukan Sejarah: Wacana Pergerakan Islam Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 1995), 73-94; Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama* (Bandung: Mizan, 2002), 76

48 The words "terjemah" and "tafsir" originate from Arabic, and in the history of Quranic interpretation, they have not always been strictly differentiated. For example, the tafsir work by Abd al-Rauf al-Sinkili is titled *Tarjuman al-Mustafid*

49 Marshall G S Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), I: 57-58. Also see Albert Hourani, *Islam dalam Pandangan Eropa*, terj. Imam Baihaqi dan Ahmad Baidowi (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1998), 104-110.

differ in interpreting *al-ḥurūf al-muqatta'ah*. Some argue that only Allah knows the meaning of these letters, others associate them with the attributes of Allah,⁵⁰ some consider them as an oath, others see them as a code between Allah and the Prophet, while others believe these letters are related to the revelation of the Qur'an, and so on.⁵¹ Bisri Mustafa and Misbah Mustafa provide an interesting explanation regarding the meaning of *al-ḥurūf al-muqatta'ah*. After presenting the diversity of opinions among scholars, Bisri Mustafa suggests that *al-ḥurūf al-muqatta'ah* serves as a kind of signal to draw the audience's attention to the revelation of the Qur'an, explaining it with a metaphor that is "easy" for the audience to understand in their context.

When interpreting the verse *Alif Lām Mīm* in Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:1⁵², Bisri states:

Saweneh ngulama maneh ono kang duwe panemu yen Alif Lām Mīm iku minangka kanggo wiwitan dhawuh, saperlu mundhut perhatiane manusa. Umpamane mangkene: Naliko arep den anakake rapat naliki podho omongan dherwe-dhewe, yen pimpinan rapatujuk-ujuk banjur pidato mestine ora oleh perhatian seko hadirin. Nanging yen pimpinan rapat sakdurunge miwiti guneman nuli andhindhok mejane dhingin "dhok dhok dhok" iku biasane hadirin banjur anggatekake (Some thinkers say that *Alif Lām Mīm* marks the opening of an announcement to call attention of the audience. Like, for instance, there is a meeting going on, and the audience is busy chattering among themselves. The speech of the speaker will not make an impact at all. But if the meeting leader bangs upon the table with a "knock knock knock" sound and then speaks, the audience will give proper attention. Once the audience is attentive, the leader can begin speaking)

Meanwhile, Misbah Mustafa emphasizes the impossibility of knowing the meaning of the phrase *Alif Lām Mīm* except for certain individuals like the Prophet and the saints. In this regard, Misbah⁵³ likens *Alif Lām Mīm* to a letter code, similar to "No. 10/A/II/C." He explains this by saying:

50 Irfan Shahid, "Fawatih al-Suwar: The Mysterious Letters of the Qur'an" in Issa J Bolatta (ed.), *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), 125-139

51 Al-Alūsī in *Rūh al-Ma'ānī* for example, explains that *Alif Lām Mīm* stands for *Anā Allāh A'lam* ("I am Allah, the All-Knowing"). *Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), 125-139. Muḥammad Ḥusain al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī mentions around 20 interpretations of these letters but rejects them, asserting that the letters are a special code between Allah and His Messenger, whose meaning is beyond human comprehension except as speculation. Muḥammad Ḥusain al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* XVIII: 6-16

52 Bisri Mustafa, *Al-Ibriz*, 4.

53 Misbah Mustafa, *Al-Iklil*, 10

Ora ana kang ngertina nomer surat kejaba kepala jawatan lan ora kena disiyarake artine, kerana iku rahasia negara. Semono uga Alif Lām Mīm, Alif Lām Rā, Nūn lan liyane. Para pembedare Allah kaya Nabi Muhammad SAW lan para waliyullah akeh kang pirsane artine nanging ora kena nyiar-nyiarake. (No one knows the meaning of a letter code except the head of the office, and it should not be disclosed as it is a state secret. Likewise Alif Lam Mim, Alif Lam Ra, Nun, and others. Beloved figures of Allah, such as the Prophet Muhammad pbuh and the saints, understand the meaning of *Alif Lām Mīm* but are not permitted to reveal it)

Elsewhere, quoting ‘Abd Azīz al-Dabbāgh, Misbah states:

“Yen kalimat singkatan iku isyarah marang acara tertentu kang terkandung ono ing Surah Baqarah iki lan liya-liyane, ora bedo karo nomer lan tanda-tanda surat pemerintah lan liya-liyane” (If the abbreviated words are a reference to certain events contained in Surah Al-Baqarah and others, they are no different from the codes and markings on government letters and the like).⁵⁴

From the above quote, it would be quite easy to realize that the two have different perspectives. Bisri Mustafa elaborated *Alif Lām Mīm* as how Allah changes the audience’s attention towards the Qur’an through simple logics, similar to how the speaker would knock on the table or microphone with a “knock knock knock” sound to get the attention of a wayward audience. As Bisri says, *Alif Lām Mīm* is Allah’s method of seizing the audience’s attention, since it is an incomprehensible “strange” phrase to them, all the attention should go to the words proceeding from it. According to Misbah, *Alif Lām Mīm* is a secret of the Prophet and the saints.

These commentaries show the influence of local factors in interpretation, reflecting the traditions and knowledge systems of both the general public and the *pesantren* community. The explanations of *al-ḥurūf al-muqatta’ah* by Bisri Mustafa and Misbah Mustafa are simplified within the tradition of Qur’anic interpretation, where the meanings of these letters are diverse. Bisri Mustafa’s view of *al-ḥurūf al-muqatta’ah* as a way to draw the audience’s attention with a “knock-knock-knock”

⁵⁴ The abbreviated phrase, according to Misbah, signals meanings contained within Surah Al-Baqarah and others, akin to the numbers and signs on government documents and the like. KH Misbah Mustafa, *Tāj al-Muslimīn min Kalām Rabb al-‘Ālamīn* (Bangilan: Majlis Ta’līm wal Khattāt, 1990), 33.

sound made by tapping on a table or a microphone is an effective and easily understood explanation. Similarly, Misbah Mustafa's interpretation of these letters as a special divine code using a numbering system for letters allows the audience to grasp the meaning more easily. Despite their differences, both interpretations aim to convey the meaning of *al-ḥurūf al-muqatta'ah* with accessible "local wisdom" that readers can readily understand. These explanations become even more effective through oral elaboration by the kyai in their religious lectures.

Cultural Critique and Adaptation in Javanese *Pesantren* Tafsir: Ritual Practices in *Al-Ibriz* and *Al-Iklil*

Both exegetes often refer to social phenomena in Indonesian society, especially in Java where both live. In trying to relate the Qur'an to socio-cultural phenomena, they often criticize social-religious traditions that, according to them, are in conflict with Islam. The Javanese tradition of charity is one such practice that draws their attention. In his interpretation of QS Al-Baqarah 2:10, Misbah Mustafa says:

*Kelakuane wong munafiq ono ing iki ayat yaiku tumindak salah nganggo alasan yen dheweke garwe becik, yoiku anut marang wong-wong tuwa-tuwa, nanging ora rumangsa keliru. Sebab mendalam olehe tumindak anut-anutan kang tanpa ono dhasare. Kang mengkene iki akeh lumaku ono ing kalangane wong-wong Jowo kang ugo wong Islam kelawan sah. Kadang-kadang ono ing kalangane wong kang dadi pengarepe agama. Koyo ngedekake omah nganggo sajen, kondangan nganggo tumpeng lan liya-liyane kang iku kabeh lakune wong Budha zaman kuno.⁵⁵ (In this verse, the hypocrites engage in wrongdoing while believing that they are doing morally; that is, they follow the traditions of their ancestors while supposing that their practices are right and without reference to religion. In Java, Muslims frequently engage in this sort of behavior, particularly among religious authorities. For instance, utilizing gifts (*sajen*) in constructing a house, preparing a feast with a *tumpeng*⁵⁶, and other customs that were once practiced by Buddhists).*

Meanwhile, Bisri Mustafa responds to these traditions in his interpretation of Surah Luqman 31:21, stating:

⁵⁵ Misbah Mustafa, *Al-Iklil*, 15.

⁵⁶ *Tumpeng*, in Indonesian, refers to a dish of rice that is shaped into a cone and served at special occasions, particularly in Javanese culture.

Ono ing kalangan kito Islam dhewe iki, kadang-kadang iyo isih ono kang nindaake tindakantindakan kang alasane namung miturut nenek moyang. Bab iku ora keno den padhaake babar pisan karo kang kasebut ono ing ayat iki. Balik isih kudu ditafsir: yen sekiro tentangan karo aturan Islam, iyo kudu diberantas. Koyotho aturan sajen-sajen, jare ngaturi dhahar danyang. Ambuwaki kembang bubur lan jajan-jajan ono ing prapatan lan sepadhane. Dene kang ora tentangan karo Islam, balik namung ngerupaake adat, ora dadi opo. Koyo slametan nganggo ambeng, slametan mithoni lan sepadhane, iku ora dadi opo. Opo maneh iku mau prinsip (pokoke) sodagoh.⁵⁷ (Within our own Muslim community, there are sometimes people who carry out actions solely based on ancestral tradition. This is in no way comparable to what is mentioned in this verse. However, a distinction must still be made: if a practice goes against Islamic teachings, it must be eliminated. For example, offerings (*sesajen*) such as scattering flowers, gruel, and various foods at crossroads or other locations to 'feed' the *dhanyang*⁵⁸ spirits thought to rule over certain places. However, traditions that do not contradict Islam are not a problem, such as ceremonial *slametan*⁵⁹ with rice platters, *mitoni*⁶⁰ celebrations, and similar events. Especially when the principle is charity (*sodagoh*).

The above quotes show that these two Qur'anic commentaries reflect both authors' perspectives on local traditions and culture within the context of Islamic teachings. Certain Javanese ceremonial practices that have been acculturated with Islamic values, such as the tradition of visiting the graves of saints or family members, as well as the customs of *slametan* and *tingkeban*, are affirmed as practices that may continue. In these activities, tradition is understood as a vessel that carries Islamic values, thus viewed as cultural practices not in conflict with Islamic principles but rather as applications of charitable teachings. This contrasts with offerings (*sesaji*), which are considered contradictory to Islamic teachings and should be eradicated.⁶¹

On the other hand, both commentators also critique traditions in society that they believe are inconsistent with Islamic values, such as fortune-telling using *keris* (ceremonial knives), gem stones, and similar practices. While not outright condemning them as apostasy, Kyai Bisri emphasizes, "aturan kang kaya mengkono

57 Bisri Mustafa, *Al-Ibriz*, 1414.

58 A Javanese term referring to a spiritual entity or guardian spirit believed to possess supernatural powers and associated with specific locations, such as villages, mountains, or rivers.

59 A traditional Javanese ritual feast or ceremony, typically held to mark important life events, express gratitude, or seek blessings.

60 A Javanese term referring to a traditional ceremony or ritual held to celebrate a pregnancy, typically during the seventh month.

61 Bisri Mustafa, *Al-Ibriz*, 1413.

iku ing agama Islam ora ono” (such practices have no basis in Islam), and they could even lead the practitioners to a state of apostasy.⁶² Misbah Mustafa similarly criticizes cultural practices that may deviate from Islamic values, including traditional death ceremonies, house-building rituals, and even certain practices associated with Qur'an recitation competitions (*Musābaqah Tilāwat al-Qur'ān*).⁶³

The two authors adopt at least two approaches in addressing issues of local traditions and culture. The first approach involves criticizing societal customs they deem incompatible with Qur'anic values. The second approach involves appreciating cultural practices that do not conflict with, or even align with, the Qur'an. In some instances, the authors may hold similar views on certain cultural practices, but in other cases, their perspectives diverge. Clearly, their interpretations of the Qur'an are influenced by the intent to either reinforce or critique existing traditions within society. When they view a tradition as consistent with Qur'anic values, they affirm it through their interpretation; conversely, if they consider a tradition misguided, they challenge it, as seen in the aforementioned examples.

Expanding Qur'anic Concepts through Local Lexicon: Interpreting *Qabilah* in Javanese *Pesantren* Tafsir

Bisri Mustafa and Misbah Mustafa adopt an open approach when interpreting the word *qabilah* in QS Al-Hujurat, 49:13: *Yā Ayyuhā al-nās Innā khalaqnākum min žakar wa unšā wa ja'alnākum syu'uban wa qabāil lita'ārafū, inna akramakum 'inda Allāhatqākum, inna Allāh 'Alīm Khabīr*. (O mankind, indeed We created you from a male and a female and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted).

Commenting on the meaning of this verse, Bisri writes:

*He para manusa kabeh!!! Temenan Ingsun Allah nitahake sira kabeh sangking siji wong lanang (iya iku Nabi Adam) lan siji wong wadon (iya iku Ibu Hawwa), lan ingkung andadekake sira kabeh dadi pirang-pirang cabang lan dadi **pirang-pirang pepanthan** supaya sira kabeh padha kenal mengenal (aja padha unggul-unggulan nasab). Sejatine kang luwih mulya saking sira kabeh mungguh Allah Ta'ala iku wong-wong kang luwih taqwa. Temenan Allah iku tansah mirsani lan tansah waspada.*⁶⁴ (O all mankind! Indeed, I, Allah, have created you all from one man (namely

62 Bisri Mustafa, *Al-Ibriz*, 1414.

63 Misbah Mustafa, *Al-Iklil*, 137.

64 Bisri Mustafa, *Al-Ibriz*, 1890.

Prophet Adam) and one woman (namely Mother Eve), and I have made you all into various branches and into various groups so that you may recognize one another (and not pride yourselves on lineage). Truly, those who are most honorable among you in the sight of Allah are those who are more pious. Indeed, Allah constantly observes and is always aware).

Meanwhile, Misbah translates the verse as follows:

*He para menusa! Ingsun iku gawe sira kabeh sangking lanang lan wadon, yaiku Adam dan Hawwa, lan ing sun iku andadeake sira kabeh dadi bangsa-bangsa lan dadi sak kelompok-sak kelompok, supaya sira kabeh padha kenal-mengenal. Sira iku kang paling mulya mungguh Allah, yaiku wong kang paling wedi marang Allah, paling ngati-ati. Sira ngertiya! Allah iku zat kang paling ngudaneni tur waspada. Dadi aja ngaku taqwa yen during bener-bener taqwa.*⁶⁵ (O mankind! I have created all of you from male and female, namely Adam and Eve, and I have made you into nations and into groups, so that you may know one another. The most honorable among you in the sight of Allah is the one who fears Allah the most and is most cautious. Know this! Allah is the one who observes the most and is ever-aware. So do not claim piety if you are not truly pious).

Quraish Shihab translates the word *qabā'il* as tribes⁶⁶, while Bakri Syahid⁶⁷ and Penjiaran Islam⁶⁸ translate the word as *turunan* (descendants). Bisri Mustafa, using the word “pepanthan”, and Kyai Misbah, using “kelompok”, in explaining the term “qabā'il”, have gone farther than the meaning of tribe and descendants. Both terms refer to groups in general—not necessarily ethnic groups, but also other types, such as cultural, ethnic, religious, and so forth. Such an extension of the meaning shows both authors are well aware of the historical meaning in the contextualization of the Qur'an.

Additionally, both authors strive to convey interpretations of the Qur'an that extend beyond its literal meaning. As a result, their interpretations are more open and flexible. For instance, Bisri Mustafa interprets the word *qabīlah* as *pepanthan*, and Misbah Mustafa as *kelompok*, expanding the meaning of *qabīlah* beyond the

⁶⁵ Misbah Mustafa, *Al-Iklīl*, 4165.

⁶⁶ M. Quraish Shihab, *Al-Qur'an dan Maknanya* (Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2021), 517.

⁶⁷ Bakri Syahid, *Al-Huda: Tafsir Al-Qur'an Basa Jawi* (Yogyakarta: Bagus Arafah, 1983), 1036.

⁶⁸ Penjiaran Islam, *Qur'an Tardjamah Djawi* (Yogyakarta: Penjiaran Islam, tt), 986.

ethnic-geographical focus of the term. With this interpretation, the concept of group—which was initially limited to ethnic-geographical associations—broadens to include various other groups, such as economic, social, political, and religious groups. Thus, the Qur'an's command to foster relationships between groups is multicultural, extending beyond geographic and ethnic boundaries to a wider, more diverse range of communities.

Interpretive Diversity in *Pesantren* Tafsir within the *Mazāhib al-Tafsir* Framework

Bisri Mustafa, the author of *Al-Ibriz fi Ma'rifat Tafsir Al-Qur'an al-'Aziz* and Misbah Mustafa, the author of *Al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil*, are siblings who received similar educations and later both led Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). However, despite sharing a common background in the *pesantren* environment, they have differences in how they convey and interpret the Al-Qur'an. Sometimes, these differences are within the same thematic framework, while at other times, they are quite contrasting. Ahmad Mustofa Bisri, the son of Bisri Mustafa, understands these differences in two ways: First, they stem from the freedom of thought inherent in human existence. Second, they are shaped by the different audiences and social conditions each faced, which naturally led to varied interpretations.⁶⁹

Additionally, their different interpretative approaches are likely influenced by their respective backgrounds. Misbah Mustafa's strong political background makes him more direct and assertive compared to his brother, who is better known as a preacher. The distinct nature of the communities they addressed also led each of them to adopt different styles in their responses. This difference is also noted by Johanna Pink in her study of these two Qur'anic commentaries.⁷⁰ However, considering their above interpretations of Qur'anic verses, they tend to avoid the model of Arabization or Islamization when dialoguing the Qur'an with the local culture. Instead, the model of localization seems to be a choice for both exegetes.

The interpretative differences between these two authors from the *pesantren* tradition demonstrate that the dynamics of Qur'anic interpretation are present within *pesantren* circles. Within the context of *Mazāhib al-Tafsir* (Schools of Qur'anic Exegesis), such differences are commonplace, given the internal and external factors that shape interpretations.⁷¹ Previously, a similar case arose with Hasyim Asy'ari and

69 Interview with KH Ahmad Mustafa Bisri, at PP Raudlatuth Thalibin Rembang on 19 October 2018

70 Pink, *Qur'an Translation*, 99-131.

71 Ghazali Munir, *Warisan Intelektual Islam dalam Pemikiran Kalam Muhammad Shalih as-Samarani* (Semarang, Walisongo Press, 2008), 55-58.

Ahmad Dahlan, who were both students of Sholeh Darat, the author of *Tafsīr Faiḍ al-Raḥmān fī Tarjamat Kalām al-Mālik al-Dayyān*. Hasyim Asy'ari later became the founder of the Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), while Ahmad Dahlan founded the Muhammadiyah organization. These two Islamic organizations in Indonesia adopted distinct strategies in their histories: NU focuses on tradition, whereas Muhammadiyah leans towards modernity.⁷²

Disagreement within the *pesantren* community, which is often associated with NU, is quite common, as NU identifies with the *Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah* school, which allows for a range of perspectives in areas of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), mysticism (*tasawwuf*), and theology. In this context, comparing the interpretations of these two authors is well-suited to the framework of *Mazāhib al-Tafsīr*, viewed within the diversity of *Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah*. Historically, interpretation within *Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah* has embraced differences, influenced by the author's expertise in *fiqh*, theology, mysticism, or other fields.⁷³ Despite their differences, these two *tafsīr* works emphasize shared values aligned with *Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah* principles.

Conclusion

The Holy Qur'an holds the utmost importance and plays a major role in the lives of Muslims, regardless of time or place. Therefore, translating and explaining it in local languages is an essential part of localizing the Qur'an, a practice that has long been established. This necessity has motivated *pesantren* scholars to write Qur'anic interpretations in various languages across Indonesia.

As other Muslim communities have taken up Qur'anic translation and interpretation, *pesantren* scholars, or kyais, have similarly translated or interpreted the Qur'an into Indonesia's regional languages. Examples of such efforts include *Al-Ibriz li Ma'rifat Tafsīr Al-Qur'an al-Aziz* by KH Bisri Mustafa and *Al-Iklil fī Ma'ānī al-Tanzīl* by KH Misbah Mustafa—both are interpretations of the Qur'an in Javanese, created by *pesantren* scholars. These works feature interlinear translations along with Javanese Qur'anic interpretations written in *Pegon* script.

Elements of local culture are evident in *Al-Ibriz* and *Al-Iklil*, particularly in their format, communication, and interpretation. Using the Javanese language and *Pegon* script as communication mediums highlights both authors' dedication to conveying Qur'anic messages to their Javanese-speaking Muslim audience, familiar with *Pegon* script. The localization process is reflected in the interpretations of these

⁷² KH A Muchitt Muzadi, *NU dan Fiqih Kontekstual* (Yogyakarta: LKPSM NU, 1995); Mahsun, *Mazhab NUMazhab Kritis* (Depok: Nadi Pustaka, 2015).

⁷³ Muḥammad Ḥusein Ṣābi. *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*

two scholars. Their work incorporates local elements, regional knowledge, and relatable explanations to address various social and religious issues faced in daily life. By embracing these local aspects, these Qur'anic interpretations are effectively communicated to and easily understood by the intended audience.

This comparative study remains limited and requires further research. *Pesantren* tafsir texts are important to examine from various perspectives, given the central role of *pesantren* and the kyai in navigating social change within society. As noted in Hiroko Horikoshi's research, the kyai acts as a mediator and "cultural broker," playing a significant role in societal transformation.⁷⁴

Supplementary Materials

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Authors' contributions

All listed authors contributed to this article. A.B wrote the original draft, reviewed and edited it, and wrote the formal analysis, compiled the resources, conceptualised the study, and managed the project administration. Y.M was responsible for the methodology and validation and supervised the project

Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Conflicts of Interest

None of the authors of this study has a financial or personal relationship with other people that could inappropriately influence or bias the content of the study.

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⁷⁴ Hiroko Horikoshi, *Kyai dan Perubahan Sosial*, terj. Abdi Muaraly Sunrawa (Jakarta: P3M, 1987)

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