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Munʾim Sirry (ed.)

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Text, Context,
and Interpretation

New Trends in Qur'anic Studies

International Qur'anic Studies Association
Studies in the Qur'ān

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David S. Powers

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New Trends in Qur'anic Studies
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Mun'im Sirry, editor

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Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Contributors	ix
Foreword by Reuven Firestone	xiii
Notes on Transliteration and Translation	xvi
Abbreviations	xvii
Introduction: Recent Trends in Qur’anic Studies — <i>Mun’im Sirry</i>	1
PART 1: TRENDS AND ISSUES IN QUR’ANIC STUDIES	
Reflections on the History and Evolution of Western Study of the Qur’ān, from ca. 1900 to the Present — <i>Fred M. Donner</i>	21
Indonesian Muslim Responses to Non-Muslim Approaches to Qur’anic Studies — <i>Yusuf Rahman</i>	45
Semitic Rhetoric and the Qur’ān: The Scholarship of Michel Cuypers — <i>Adnane Mokrani</i>	61
From Clerical to Scriptural Authority: The Qur’ān’s Dialogue with the Syriac New Testament — <i>Emran El-Badawi</i>	83
A Qur’anic Theodicy: Moses in the <i>Sūrat al-Kahf</i> (Q 18) — <i>David Penchansky</i>	95
Contemporary Shi’i Approaches to the History of the Text of the Qur’ān — <i>Seyfeddin Kara</i>	109
The Computer and the Qur’ān: An Analysis and Appraisal — <i>Adam Flowers</i>	125
PART 2: TRENDS AND ISSUES IN TAFSĪR STUDIES	
Reading the Qur’ān Contextually: Approaches and Challenges — <i>Abdullah Saeed</i>	151
“Qur’anism” in Modern Qur’ān Interpretation — <i>Izza Rohman</i>	163

Understanding Patriarchal Interpretations of Q 4:34 in the Light of Stanley Fish's "Interpretive Communities" — <i>Adis Duderija</i>	173
The Global Islamic Tradition and the Nation State in the Contemporary Muslim Exegesis of the Qur'ān — <i>Johanna Pink</i>	193
Interpreting the Qur'ān between Shari'ah and Changing Custom: On Women's Dress in Indonesia — <i>Munirul Ikhwan</i>	211
The Hermeneutics of Legitimate Leadership: Qurṭubī's Commentary on Q 2:30 (the Adam Verse) — <i>Han Hsien Liew</i>	233
"Deviant" Qur'anic Interpretation in Indonesia: Reading Lia Eden's Defense of the Claim to Prophethood — <i>Al Makin</i>	249
Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'ān in Indonesia: The Poetry of Ḥamzah al-Fanṣūrī and Haji Hasan Mustapa — <i>Jajang A. Rohmana</i>	261
Bibliography	279
Subject Index	305

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“Deviant” Qur’anic Interpretation in Indonesia: Reading Lia Eden’s Defense of the Claim to Prophethood

AL MAKIN

This chapter explores commentaries on the Qur’ān by Lia Aminuddin, (b. 1947), known as Lia Eden. In 2000 Eden founded a religious group called the Salamullah, known as the Eden community. She declared herself a *mahdī* (Islam’s awaited messiah) who can save Indonesia, and a prophet who warns the people.¹ Her claim to prophethood and the announcement of the new religion has led to public debates and controversy. The MUI (Council of Indonesian Ulama) issued a *fatwā* condemning her and branding her teachings as “deviant” (*sesat*). She responded that the MUI was attempting to dominate the truth and to promote its own political interest. In this chapter I focus on Lia Eden’s use of qur’anic verses to reinforce the legitimacy of her claim to prophethood. After presenting a short biography of Lia and her spiritual journey, I will turn to her Qur’ān commentary.

Lia Eden

Every epoch in Indonesia has produced new religious movements and leaders. Rebellions against the Dutch colonial government from the sixteenth to

1. On Lia Eden, see further Al Makin, *Challenging Islamic Orthodoxy: Accounts of Lia Eden and Other Prophets in Indonesia* (Cinnaminson, NJ: Springer, 2016); trans. Al Makin, *Nabi-Nabi Nusantara: Kisah Lia Eden dan Lainnya* (Yogyakarta: Suka Press, 2017).

twentieth centuries were mostly motivated by religious sentiments, from Sisnangamaraja (1849–1907) to Diponegoro (1785–1855). After the declaration of Indonesian independence in 1945, political and economic crises triggered new religious movements. The economic and political turmoil that led to the fall of the Suharto authoritarian regime continued that trend. In the aftermath of the 1998 reform movement,² along with a new wave of democratization, and when, ironically, Islamic radicalism was on the rise, new religious movements found fertile ground. To save the nation from crisis, many people on different islands claimed to have received revelations from God. They established religious groups and attracted a number of followers.

Lia Eden is an Indonesian housewife whose father was a preacher of the Muhammadiyah, the largest modernist Muslim organization, in Surabaya, East Java.³ She claims that the Archangel Gabriel has been whispering to her since 1997. The divine revelations take several forms, for example, books and hundreds of individual pages that she has posted online since 2003. In 2012 she ordered her followers to take these writings down.⁴

At first, the Salamullah delivered Islamic sermons that were open to anyone who wanted to join, while also providing therapy for the many clients who came and went in her house. Eventually, the group became more closed, limiting membership and asserting its own identity and rules based on the divine revelations that Lia claims to have received from Gabriel. In 2000 the community chose a site in Bogor for its rituals. However, due to a stricter rule, such as wearing only white robes and shaving hair, the number of her followers decreased.

During the early stage of Eden group, some members observed shari‘ah and daily prayers, but eventually, based on Gabriel’s command to Lia, they abandoned Islamic teachings, and she was ordered by God to establish the Salamullah, which was to take its place alongside the six religions officially acknowledged by the government of Indonesia, namely, Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.⁵ In 1997, the Archangel Gabriel identified himself to Lia as “Ḥabīb al-Hudā,” and Lia suspect-

2. Indonesians call the period after the fall of Suharto in 1998 the “reform period” (*era reformasi*).

3. Al Makin, “Pluralism versus Islamic Orthodoxy, the Indonesian Public Debate over the Case of Lia Aminuddin, the Founder of Salamullah Religious Cult,” in Thomas J. Conners (ed.), *Social Justice and Rule of Law: Addressing the Growth of a Pluralist Indonesian Democracy* (Tembalang, Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia; New Haven: Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Diponegoro University; Yale Indonesia Forum, 2010), 187–206.

4. *Ibid.*, 20.

5. *Ibid.*, 65–84.

ed he was a *jinn*.⁶ After a few years, however, she realized that her guide and teacher, whom she later married, was in fact the Archangel Gabriel. Gabriel came on special occasions, particularly when Lia needed advice on problems in her life. She memorized the divine words uttered by the Archangel and often recorded them in books. She then delivered them to her followers. When Gabriel began to visit here more frequently, she produced a large number of works based on Gabriel's guidance. She regarded her works as a Holy Scripture. Lia's goal is to write her own Scripture based on Gabriel's revelation.

Lia is a talented flower-arranger who appeared on national TV programs during the Suharto period and gained recognition for her artistic works.⁷ She is well-connected within the circles of Suharto, Megawati, and Abdurrahman Wahid, and she knows many high-ranking Indonesian politicians and national celebrities, including Akbar Tanjung, Jimly Ash-Shiddiqy, and W. S. Rendra. Her flower exhibitions inside and outside the country brought her into contact with individuals in the Islamic missionary domain, including famous Muslim preachers such as Zainuddin MZ, Nur Iskandar SQ, and Anton Medan.

In cooperation with those three preachers, Lia established the Yayasan at-Taibin (Foundation for Those Who Repent), which educates prisoners with the goal of giving them skills to prepare for life after jail. Eventually, however, Lia came into conflict with her three co-founders, and she was expelled from the Yayasan. Disappointed with the preachers, she spent several nights asking God for guidance. Although born in Makasar, Sulawesi, she grew up in Surabaya and went to high school in the city, but never graduated. She is familiar with, and knowledgeable about, qur'anic terms, and her allegiance to the Muhammadiyah is firm, as reflected in her books. For example, she often expresses her belief in *tawhīd*, echoing Muḥammad Abduh's influence on the second largest Muslim group in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah. She also talks about the great sins of the *mushrikūn* (those who associate God's power with others). In many early messages to the Muslim community, she condemns the belief in many gods, myths, and sorcery.

Her Knowledge of the Qur'ān

I have interviewed Lia periodically since 2011. In these interviews, she has acknowledged that she does not read the Qur'ān in Arabic. Although all of her sisters learned Arabic as children, she did not. After she became well-known as a flower-arranger, she turned to spirituality. She became friends with an activist in the Muslim Student Association, Muḥammad Abdul Rachman, who

6. Lia Aminuddin, *Perkenankan Aku Menjelaskan Sebuah Taqdir* (Jakarta: Yayasan Salamullah, 1998).

7. Lia Aminuddin, *Membuat dan Merangkai Bunga Kering* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1991).

taught her Arabic so that she might read the Qur'ān. She also knows learned Muslims like Komaruddin Hidayat, Bambang Pranowo, Hidayat, Yeni, Nadir, and some MUI leaders, such as Ibrahim Hosen and Hasan.

Abdul Rachman, a student at the department of philosophy and theology at the State Institute for Islamic Studies (IAIN) in Jakarta, was involved in many demonstrations against Suharto's regime. He was well-connected with NGO activists. After 1998, he, like other IAIN students, often visited Lia in Jalan Mahoni in Senen, Jakarta. Rachman is familiar with the Qur'ān, *kalām* (theology), and Islamic and western philosophy. Many of his friends explained to me that he is a bright student with a critical mind. When Rachman met Lia, his life took a new turn. At first, he taught Lia to read Arabic, but soon their roles were reversed. Rachman was stunned by Lia's ability to explain complex theological and philosophical concepts, despite her limited education. When Rachman tried to explain some Islamic concepts to Lia, the student gave more sophisticated answers. This convinced Rachman that Lia is not merely a housewife with a promising career in flower arrangement. She is indeed guided by Gabriel, who whispers to her. For Rachman, it is impossible that Lia, with her limited education, should understand philosophy and theology without the assistance of Gabriel. Rachman was one of the first to believe in Lia's prophethood, and he played a critical role in the development of the Eden community. Rachman earned the title Imam Besar (Great Imām), and is recognized as a *mahdī* (messiah), and the reincarnation of the Prophet Muḥammad, whose task is to awaken and lead the Indonesian Islamic community to a new enlightenment.

Lia's knowledge of the Qur'ān and her interpretation of the Scripture is distinguished by the claim that Gabriel plays a critical role in the act of interpretation. From the beginning of her spiritual development she has given new interpretations to verses of the Qur'ān under Gabriel's guidance. Her interpretation is of course different from conventional exegesis (*tafsīr*). The Qur'ān contains God's words received by the Prophet Muḥammad from the Archangel Gabriel in the seventh century, whereas exegesis is an attempt by Muslims to grasp the meaning of the text. Exegetes attempt to contextualize the divine revelation in accordance with different times and spaces. Whereas the Qur'ān was revealed in a specific time and place, namely, the Arabian peninsula in the seventh century CE, exegesis has been produced in numerous cultures and contexts across Islamic history. It is hard to fathom the meaning of the Qur'ān in classical Arabic, even for contemporary Arab speakers, without the help of interpretation and translation. This applies even more to Muslims who live in Asia, Africa, Europe, Australia, and America. Indonesian Muslims also need exegesis that explains the meaning of the Qur'anic verses in the Indonesian context and culture. Lia's *tafsīr*, like other Indonesian commentaries, is a product of the current Indonesian political, social, and economic crisis.

Lia's claim to prophethood and to be the mouthpiece of Gabriel means that her *tafsīr* is not generally accepted by Muslim 'ulamā', and in 1998 the Council of Indonesian Ulama issued a *fatwā* branding her movement and teachings as a deviation from Islam. That act raised the question whether she should be allowed to continue to engage in *tafsīr*. Her supporters defend her right to pursue that activity by making a comparison with the Qur'ān's relationship to the earlier Scriptures. Since the Qur'ān itself serves as an interpretation of earlier Scriptures and traditions (Jewish, Christian, Persian, Mesopotamian, and pre-Islamic Arab), it naturally must refer to those earlier Scriptures (the *Zabūr*, *Tāwrah*, and *Injīl*). Abdul Rachman, the Great Imām, argues that Jesus was persecuted for his bold claim to be a Messiah in accordance with the Jewish tradition; similarly, Muḥammad based his claim to prophethood on the Israelite tradition. The story of Lia Eden, Rachman asserts, is similar to that of Jesus, who was condemned by Jewish rabbis, and to that of Muḥammad, who was branded as a heretic by Jewish and Christian religious leaders. Thus, the Indonesian Muslim 'ulamā' who condemn Lia Eden's prophethood are no better than those who opposed Jesus and Muḥammad.⁸

Deviant Status

After the 1998 reform, several new religious movements that offered teachings different from those of Sunni Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the Muhammadiyah emerged in Indonesia.⁹ The MUI (Council of Indonesian Ulama), founded in 1975 during the New Order period to accommodate Muslim aspirations and the government's political interest, often monitored Islamic teachings and the activities of Muslim groups, including that of Lia Eden. After 1998, the Sunni MUI gained momentum and branded many groups and their teachings as deviant. At first, they targeted the Ahmadiyah, whose mosques were destroyed by mobs in several provinces and whose followers were expelled from villages. Recently, the Shi'is have faced a similar fate. In 2014, in Yogyakarta, Rausan Fikr, a foundation that focuses on Shi'i philosophical and intellectual discussion, came under attack.¹⁰ In Sampang Madura, some Shi'i families were expelled and their houses burnt. They still live in

8. Muḥammad Abdul Rachman, *Pembelaan, Pledoi dan Duplik* (Jakarta: Komunitas Eden, 2006).

9. See, for instance, Al Makin, *Plurality, Religiosity, Patriotism: Critical Insights into Indonesia and Islam* (Yogyakarta: Suka Press, 2017).

10. Al Makin, "Homogenizing Indonesian Islam: Persecution of the Shia Group in Yogyakarta," *Studia Islamika: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies* 24:1 (2017): 1–32.

camps in Sidoarjo. Muslim minority groups in Indonesia face serious threats in an era when radicalism and conservatism are on the rise.¹¹

Eden community sermons call on people to adhere to the truth of Islam. What distinguishes the Eden community from other groups is Lia's healing therapy. Lia realizes that her spiritual experience with Gabriel goes against Islamic teachings, and for this reason, she has consulted with the MUI and asked for guidance. The MUI did not at first take the issue seriously. Subsequently, however, a son of one of Eden's members wrote to the MUI reporting that Lia regularly claims to receive divine revelations from Gabriel during healing therapy and sermons. As the "heirs" of the Prophet and guardians of Islam, the MUI felt threatened. After a heated dialogue between Lia and other members of Salamullah, the MUI concluded that Gabriel never visited any human being after Muḥammad, the last Prophet and seal of all prophets. A *fatwā* issued in 1997 says:

The belief or faith in angels, including Gabriel, must be based on [God's] revelation [viz., the Qur'ān and the ḥadīth]. There is no single verse in the Qur'ān or ḥadīth that states that the Archangel Gabriel still performs God's task to deliver teachings to mankind, or to deliver new or additional explanations to religious teaching that are already at our disposal. This is because God's teachings have been completed. The claim of someone that she/he is guided by and receives spiritual teachings from the Archangel Gabriel contradicts the Qur'ān. Therefore, the claim should be seen as deviant and causing the deviation [of others].¹²

The MUI *fatwā* brands Lia and her claim to prophethood as heretical and deviant. The struggle between Lia and the MUI ended with the victory of the MUI and the arrest of Lia, who was brought to court and jailed twice, each time for two and a half years. According to the Indonesian criminal code (KUHP), Lia violated the 1965 blasphemy law, according to which anyone who insults a religion acknowledged by the government can be sentenced to five years in prison. Let us now turn to Lia's interpretation of the Qur'ān.

11. Makin, *Challenging Islamic Orthodoxy, Accounts of Lia Eden and Other Prophets in Indonesia*, 16–17.

12. Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), *Himpunan Fatwa MUI Sejak 1975* (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2011), 59–70; MUI (Majelis Ulama Indonesia), "Fatwa Dewan Pimpinan MUI Tentang Malaikat Jibril Mendampingi Manusia," Pub. L. No. 768/MUI/XII/1997 (1997).

Lia's Qur'anic Interpretation

In her refutation of the MUI *fatwā*, Lia Eden cited Q 50:41, "And listen on the day when the caller calls out from a place that is near." This verse, she explains, refers to her and to her followers who entered the MUI office on July 9, 1999, seeking an explanation for the *fatwā* branding her as a heretic and deviant. Lia demanded that the MUI review the *fatwā*, arguing that it is not she who is deviant and opposed to God's truth, but rather the MUI.

Lia wrote: "The accusation against Lia Aminuddin and Salamullah has no basis or reasonable argument. The *fatwā* was issued and it has become a tool to oppose the mission of Salamullah and Lia Aminuddin, [who is] under the Archangel Gabriel's guidance. The *fatwā* should be reviewed and reconsidered since it could be misused by other people."¹³ Lia states that MUI never wanted to reconsider their *fatwā* against her and her group, and that they acted as if they were the only authority on Islam in Indonesia. Additionally, the MUI never fulfilled its promise to guide the Eden group. In Lia's eyes, the MUI has "monopolized" the truth as if it were the only institution that determines who has the right faith. Lia asserts that "the *fatwā* is deemed as *qaf'ī* (absolute) and perfect and the MUI have acted like police who scrutinize people's beliefs and thoughts."¹⁴

In addition to the MUI's condemnation of Lia's claim to be the Messiah, the messenger and prophet of God, and the disciple of Gabriel, the Council also rejected the claim that her son, Mukti Day, is a reincarnation of Jesus. For the MUI, all of Lia's claims are irrational and deviant, and they warned Indonesians against following her mission. In response, the Eden community condemned the MUI as a closed institution. Lia stated that the MUI should be more open and should listen to the people whom it condemns, like herself.

Lia believes in the coming of Jesus in the person of her son, Mukti, and she advocates the unity of Islam and Christianity. Her syncretic tone resonates with, and is a response to, the situation of several minorities in Indonesia. She writes, "The merger of Islam and Christianity is God's command, which I am delivering now. Today it is not easy to encourage the two religious communities of God to unite, as the majority of the Indonesian population is Muslim. Persecution and the burning of churches would not have occurred if the majority [Muslims] had spread peace and compassion to all (*rahmat^m li'l-ālamīn*), particularly to minorities."¹⁵ She believes that the resurrection of Jesus will take place in Indonesia and among Muslims.

13. Lia Aminuddin, *Lembaran Al-Hira, Fatwa Jibril Alaihissalam Versus Fatwa MUI* (Jakarta: Yayasan Salamullah, 1999), 3.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., 7.

In response to the MUI's *fatwā*, Lia claimed that her words are divine revelation that contain only truth, like the Qur'ān and earlier Scriptures. Like the Prophet Muḥammad, she has received Gabriel's guidance. Lia and her followers believe that she delivers divine revelation. Gabriel, through Lia, says:

O MUI, look at Lia Aminuddin's situation and her experience and Salamullah. All of these revelations are similar to those contained in the *Injīl*, and their meaning is contained in the Qur'ān. Are these messages in accordance with the *Injīl* and the Qur'ān? Why do you not look at them more deeply instead of insulting them. Indeed, my task is similar to what I did when I delivered the revelation of the *Injīl* to the prophet 'Īsā long ago, when all monks, priests, and rabbis believed that truth belonged only to them.¹⁶

In her response to the *fatwā*, Lia claimed that she is under the guidance of Gabriel, to whom she attributes her understanding of the Qur'ān. This makes her qur'anic commentary different from conventional commentaries. Acting through Lia, Gabriel says:

I, the Archangel Gabriel, the deliverer of divine revelation, say that I am the one who judges the MUI and its *fatwās*, all *fatwās* about Salamullah, and about political legitimacy.... I, the Archangel Gabriel, give my response to the decision made in the MUI's *fatwā* number 768/MUI/XII/1997, which contains an opinion about Lia Aminuddin's and Salamullah's deviant status, decided in the council of the MUI's leaders about Gabriel guiding human beings. According to the MUI's conclusion, following an investigation and examination, Gabriel will never descend [to earth] again. However, according to Lia's divine revelation, after the completion of the prophethood of Muḥammad, peace and blessing upon him, it is only God [not the MUI] who sends Gabriel whenever He wants to.¹⁷

It is clear that, for Lia, the MUI's *fatwā* has no divine status, whereas her words and Gabriel's are sacred, for they come directly from God. Lia urges Indonesians, and particularly the MUI, to consider this fact: "I am God's messenger, who scrutinizes [people's] sins and *shirk*. I am God's messenger, who scrutinizes [people's] mistakes and sins. I am God's messenger who judges sins." According to Lia, the MUI committed many mistakes in many of their *fatwās*: First was their declaration that a female cannot be president of Indonesia. Second, they branded many Muslim minority groups as deviants and apostates. These *fatwās*, according to Lia, are incorrect. Lia also reports Gabriel's statement, "I am the Archangel Gabriel, who sees that the *fatwās* are not based on sound considerations, and are unfair and closed, immune from

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., 8.

review and criticism." Lia concludes that there is gap between the *fatwās* and the truth brought by the Archangel Gabriel."¹⁸ She cites Q 59:2:

It is He who expelled the ones who disbelieved among the People of the Scripture from their homes at the first gathering. You did not think they would leave, and they thought that their fortresses would protect them from God; but [the decree of] God came upon them from where they had not expected, and He cast terror into their hearts [so] they destroyed their houses by their [own] hands and the hands of the Believers. So take warning, O people of vision.

According to Lia, it is the MUI that has gone astray. Lia and Gabriel serve as warners sent by God to the MUI because of the latter's many mistakes and sins. Lia claims that members of the MUI hide in an ivory tower, ignoring the real issues faced by Indonesian society. Instead, the Council pursues its own interest in its *fatwās*, particularly by barring women from becoming leaders in politics and religion. Lia asks, "Why do you [MUI] not allow women to become leaders, when God shows you that women can become leaders? Does not God show you that He makes women victorious? Can you stop this when God wants women [to win]?"¹⁹ In 2004, some MUI *ūlamā'* in East Java issued a *fatwā* against the presidency of Megawati Sukarnoputri, who, however, won the election. According to Lia, the MUI *fatwā* was against God's will, since He eventually appointed Megawati as President of Indonesia in succession to Abdurrahman Wahid.

With regard to the *fatwā* issued by the MUI on the heretical status of many groups, including Lia Eden's, Gabriel says:

O MUI, they [viz., the many minority groups] do not truly become apostates, as your *fatwās* say; neither do they become dissidents against God, as your *fatwās* say. Are they truly apostates and dissidents in the eyes of God, whereas God himself proclaims their victory [instead of being defeated by your *fatwās*]? Do not you see that God makes them victorious; why do not you see them [victorious]?²⁰

The role of Lia as a prophetess and messenger of God is to warn about the destruction of the nation of Indonesia, just as Muḥammad warned the tribe of Quraysh. She cites Q 26:208: "And We did not destroy any city but that it had warners." Lia's claim that God may send an angel in the form of woman is supported by Q 17:40: "Then, has your Lord chosen you for [having] sons and taken from among the angel's daughters? Indeed, you say a grave saying." The gender issue is addressed again by Lia when she cites another verse that stresses the equality of sons and daughters, men and women, males

18. Ibid., 9.

19. Ibid., 11.

20. Ibid.

and females (Q 52:38–39). “Or have they a stairway [into the heaven] upon which they listen? Then let their listener produce a clear authority. Or has He daughters while you have sons?”

For Lia, with or without the MUI *fatwā*, the Salamullah community is God’s promise for human salvation. Lia came to earth to deliver God’s messages and to judge what is wrong, particularly wrongs committed by the MUI. She is outspoken about the mixing of politics and religion by the MUI and other Muslim leaders. For Lia, this combination will lead to the destruction of the nation. By contrast, Lia promises paradise, not in the hereafter but on earth. She cites Q 50:31–32: “And Paradise will be brought near to the righteous, not far. [It will be said:] This is what you were promised—for every returner [to Allah] and keeper [of His covenant].”

Lia and her followers have decorated her house in Jalan Mahoni with wall paintings, gardens with water fountains, ponds, fishes, bonsais, flowers, and other exotic plants—like paradise. They sing songs praising Gabriel and Lia and they promote good deeds. They fast regularly and frequently, and practice seclusion (*ṣ’tikāf*) and other rites. As an artist, Lia is skillful in making her house beautiful, comfortable, and artistic—like paradise on earth.

The Archangel on Earth

According to Lia, the MUI *fatwā* violates common sense because it condemns minority groups whose members are, in fact, innocent. On the one hand, both the government and majority Muslim society have persecuted these groups; on the other hand, the MUI is silent with regard to violations of human rights, oppression, and corruption.

Lia writes:

Is there any MUI *fatwā* dealing with all the violations of law during the reform era? Is there any *fatwā* dealing with discrimination [in the form of killing] related to race, ethnicity, and religion, or murder resulting from sorcery, *ninja* [a criminal gang with ninja dress] and other chaos in Banyuwangi, Ciamis Pangandaran, or ethnic conflicts in Pontianak, Sambas which involved cruelty and metaphysical belief? Is there any *fatwā* dealing with the schisms in Islam due to political parties?²¹

Her interpretation of the Qur’ān is strengthened by her claim to be guided by Gabriel. She refers to Q 40:15: “[He is] the Exalted above [all] degrees, Owner of the Throne; He casts the spirit [of inspiration] by His command upon whom He wills of His servants to warn of the Day of Meeting.” According to Lia, God can send Gabriel to earth whenever He wants. At the

21. *Ibid.*, 18.

present time, God has sent Lia Eden to warn Indonesians about the imminent Day of Judgment. Her arguments are also supported by Q 16:2: "He sends down the angels, with the spirit [of inspiration] of His command, upon whom He wills of His servants, [telling them], "Warn that there is no deity except Me; so fear Me."

Lia stresses the unity of God (*tawhīd*), which she mentions in many places and on many occasions. She also cites Q 17:95 "Say, if there were upon the earth angels walking securely, We would have sent down to them from the heaven an angel [as a] messenger." This verse supports Lia's claim that an angel can be sent down to earth whenever God wants, without any limit of time and space. She also adduces Q 19:64: "[Gabriel said], 'And we [angels] descend not except by the order of your Lord. To Him belongs that before us and that behind us and what is in between. And never is your Lord forgetful.'" On the basis of these verses, Lia concludes:

It is clear that the Archangel Gabriel, peace be upon him, may possibly meet someone [on earth]. The Archangel, peace be upon him, often comes to human beings during the night of *laylat al-qadr* [literally, "night of power"] bringing a miracle, encircling the earth and finding those who are chosen by God to receive the divine power with which this night is infused.²² *Laylat al-qadr* was granted to many human beings, and to all of these the Archangel Gabriel comes to earth to bring revelation.²³

In Lia's eyes, Gabriel comes to earth frequently to communicate with chosen people, to whom he gives divine revelation. All forms of communications based on God's generosity to human beings are *wahy* (revelation), including *shafā'āt* (intercession), and *mu'jizāt* (miracles). She also identifies some holy men and saints who received guidance from God through Gabriel, such as Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir Jaylānī, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Shāfi'ī, Ibn Taymiyya, and nine saints in Java. Lia asks rhetorically:

Who is the angel who is responsible for delivering [God's] revelation? Is there any other angel who delivers revelation? All of these holy men and saints lived after the Prophet Muḥammad, peace be upon him. There is no angel who delivers revelation but Gabriel. There is no saint of God who receives God's guidance from an angel other than from Gabriel himself, peace be upon him.²⁴

22. Muslims believe that the Qur'ān was first revealed on *laylat al-qadar* and they regard it as the holiest night of the year.

23. *Ibid.*, 21.

24. *Ibid.*, 22.

The MUI argument that Gabriel never brings messages to women was rejected by Lia, who argues that Gabriel frequently comes to earth to meet women, such as the mystic Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, and Maryam, the mother of Jesus.²⁵

Concluding Remarks

Lia Eden is a Muslim woman who has been denounced as a heretic because of her innovative readings and interpretations of the Qur'an. Her case teaches us that the Qur'an can generate unpredictable meanings. Whereas Indonesian '*ulamā*' use the Qur'an to argue for the finality of the prophethood of Muḥammad, Lia Eden uses the Qur'an to defend her claim that Gabriel whispers divine revelations to her and that Gabriel has never retired from his duty to deliver messages to humankind.

Just as the Qur'an legitimizes the prophethood of Muḥammad with reference to earlier Scriptures, Lia uses the Qur'an to justify yet another prophethood. However, to read Lia Eden's qur'anic commentary, one needs to consider the Indonesian context in which she interacts with the MUI, the symbol of Indonesian Islamic orthodoxy, but which she accuses of persecuting and prosecuting minority groups. Her messages not only offer a new interpretation of the Qur'an, but also reflect what has happened in Indonesia during the economic and political crisis of the reform period. Lia's qur'anic interpretation must be understood in this context.

Lia uses the Qur'an not merely to defend her position vis-à-vis the MUI *fatwā* but also to address the situation in Indonesia, where the rise of Islamic orthodoxy threatens minority rights and democratization. The Qur'an remains open to anyone who wants to read and assign new meanings to it. Indeed, Scripture belongs to humankind regardless of religious affiliation and faith, not only to those who believe in the prophethood of the man through whom it was revealed in seventh-century Arabia.

25. *Ibid.*, 48.