

VERNACULARIZATION IN MALAYSIAN TAFSIR: A STUDY OF TAFSIR NUR AL-IHSAN BY MUHAMMAD SA'ID AL-KEDAHI

Wahyuni Nuryatul Choiroh

Universitas Islam Negeri Profesor Kiai Haji Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, Indonesia
Wahyuni.nch@gmail.com

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Abstract

This article discusses vernacularization in Malay-Language Tafsir by examining Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan by Syaikh Muhammad Sa'id al-Qadhi al-Kedahi as an analytical study. This oldest tafsir was written in 1344H/1926M during the reign of the 21st Sultan of Kedah by a Qadhi in Kedah Malaysia, as well as the first Malaysian *mufassir* who interpreted the Qur'an in Javanese with Arabic alphabet letters. This research focuses on three main problems: how vernacularization is applied in the book of Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan in the linguistic, writing, and interpretation aspects. Through the theory of vernacularization, this research explains the implementation of vernacularization related to the phenomenon and the facts of the text that developed in the book of Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan. By using a qualitative approach through the literature study method, the results of this study show that; First, vernacularization in the linguistic aspect through the use of local languages commonly used by the local community in the use of the word "sembahyang" and the designation "lembu" for naming surah al-Baqarah. Second is vernacularization in Malay writing using the Arabic-Jawi script (*pegon*). Third, vernacularization is found in the interpretation of QS. al-Maidah verse 38 and QS. Al-Baqarah verse 17, which dominantly reflects aspects of locality such as the expression, morality, and character of the Malaysian Muslim community, as well as the lives and habits of Malaysian Muslims, especially in the Kedah area.

Keywords: *Vernacularization, Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan, Muhammad Sa'id, Malaysian Tafsir*

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas vernakularisasi pada tafsir berbahasa melayu dengan mengkaji Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan karya Syaikh Muhammad Sa'id al-Qadhi al-Kedahi sebagai studi analitis. Tafsir tertua ini ditulis pada tahun 1344H/1926M pada era kekuasaan Sultan Kedah ke-21 oleh seorang Qadhi di Kedah Malaysia, sekaligus seorang mufassir pertama Malaysia yang menafsirkan al-Qur'an dengan bahasa Jawa bertuliskan huruf abjad Arab. Penelitian ini fokus pada tiga permasalahan utama, yakni bagaimana vernakularisasi diaplikasikan dalam kitab Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan pada aspek kebahasaan, aspek penulisan dan aspek penafsiran. Melalui teori vernakularisasi, penelitian ini menjelaskan implementasi terkait vernakularisasi pada fenomena dan juga fakta teks yang berkembang dalam kitab Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui metode studi kepustakaan, hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa: Pertama, vernakularisasi dalam aspek kebahasaan melalui penggunaan bahasa-bahasa khas lokal yang umum digunakan oleh masyarakat setempat pada penggunaan kata “sembahyang” dan sebutan “lembu” untuk penamaan surah al-Baqarah. Kedua, vernakularisasi dalam aspek penulisan bahasa Melayu dengan memakai aksara Arab-Jawi (pegon). Ketiga, vernakularisasi dalam aspek penafsiran terdapat pada penafsiran QS. al-Maidah: 38 dan QS. Al-Baqarah ayat 17, yang secara dominan mencerminkan aspek lokalitas seperti ekspresi, moralitas, dan tabiat masyarakat Muslim Malaysia, juga kehidupan dan kebiasaan Muslim Malaysia khususnya di daerah Kedah.

Kata Kunci: *Vernakularisasi, Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan, Muhammad Sa'id, Tafsir Malaysia*

Introduction

From the 19th century to the early 20th century, the Malay tafsir movement was influenced by the thoughts of classical *Mufasssirs* such as *Tafsir al-Jalalain*, *Tafsir al-Baidhawī* which is known as *Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil* by Imam Baidhowi, *Tafsir al-Khazin al-Musamma Lubab al-Ta'wil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* by Imam Abdullah Ahmad ibn Mahmud al-Nasafi. Historical evidence says that Southeast Asian countries, especially Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines, have developed the most classical Malay Tafsir. As for the context of Indonesian interpretation, specifically experiencing a new period by applying modern exegesis methods influenced by contemporary Islamic thinkers such as Muhammad Abduh, Rasyid Ridha, and Sayyid Qutb. For example, in the early 11th century, a Malay classical tafsir from Aceh, Indonesia, was born as a manuscript containing a

commentary (*Syarah*) on QS. al-Kahf in Malay is stored at the Cambridge University Library as a collection of classical books.¹

The second period of Malay classical tafsir in the 17th century written by Sheikh Abdul al-Rauf al-Sinkili (d.1693) with a complete 30 juz Tafsir entitled “*Tarjuman al-Mustafid*”. This work continues to evolve through various teaching media, and it is believed to have influenced the variety of styles and approaches in Nusantara tafsir. The shift in knowledge of tafsir scholars and the development of tafsir science occurred through active recitation activities and the writing process.² *Tafsir Tarjuman* is a translation of *Tafsir al-Jalalain* and is supplemented with the interpretation in *Tafsir al-Baidhawi*, namely *Tafsir Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil*.³

The third period is the birth of scientific works related to *Tajweed* and *Fadhail al-Qur'an* by Muslim intellectuals in Malay cultural centers. Furthermore, two manuscripts of Malay interpretations by Sheikh Said and Ahmad Bashier were found but not titled, the two interpretations are reflections of the connection of the *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* interpretation by Sheikh Abdul al-Rauf al-Sinkili. The following period in the 18th and 19th centuries saw the birth of many books of translation and interpretation of Qur'anic verses using Javanese and Sundanese, such as *Kuran Winedhar*, *Serat-Serat al-Fatekah*, *Kitab Kur'an*, *Kuran Jawi*, *Marah Labid*, *Rawdat al-Irfan fi Ma'rifat al-Qur'an*, and others.

The study of tafsir in Malaysia began in the 17th century at the Institution of Religious Education, but active tafsir emerged in the 20th century. In the early 20th century, the influence of reform movements in the Middle East increased the number of Malay graduates from Egypt's al-Azhar University and Mecca Islamic Institute. This made the period of development of tafsir studies and Malay tafsir writing in Malaysian state around the end of 1920, although the development was not as progressive as in Indonesia.⁴

Tafsir and translation of the Qur'an developed along with the spread of Islam, because interpreting and translating the Qur'an was written using the local language. Even in Malaysia, there is cultural acculturation with customs and language, making Islam in Malaysia has distinctive characteristics. This kind of reaction is known as Vernacularization (Localized Language) according to Anthony H. Johns.⁵ The process

¹ Islah Gusmian, *Khazanah Tafsir Indonesia: Dari Hermeneutika Hingga Ideologi* (Yogyakarta: Lkis Pelangi Aksara, 2013).

² Hasani Ahmad Said, “Mengenal Tafsir Nusantara: Melacak Mata Rantai Tafsir Dari Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapura Hingga Brunei Darussalam,” *Refleksi: Jurnal Kajian Agama Dan Filsafat* 16, no. 2 (2017).

³ Islah Gusmian, *Khazanah Tafsir Indonesia: Dari Hermeneutika Hingga Ideologi*.

⁴ Mustaffa Abdullah, *Khazanah Tafsir Di Malaysia* (Malaysia: Book Pro Publishing Service Akademi Pengajian Islam Universiti Malaysia, 2009).

⁵ Anthony H. Johns, “Qur'anic Exegesis in the Malaya World,” Andrew Rippin (ed.). *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 579.

of Islamization and Arabization in a community creates linguistic and cultural crossovers through the influence of religious texts such as hadith and Islamic literature when interacting with the Qur'an which uses the Arabic language. This phenomenon resulted in various local interpretations in multiple regions, including *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* in Malaysia, which is unique to Malay. Globally, interpretations in local languages reflect the social, governmental, political characteristics, as well as the traditions and customs of Malay society.

Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan is less known in Indonesia and Malaysia and is considered less familiar than classic tafsir such as *Tafsir Jalalain* and *Tafsir Baidhawiy*. Since the 16th century, these classical commentaries have become the prima donna of Qur'anic tafsir scholars in Southeast Asia and have become a permanent curriculum in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools. The difficulty of accessing the author's detailed biography is one of the factors why *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* is less prevalent.⁶ Naturally, this tafsir study is less known and only accessed by a small circle. Nevertheless, this Malay-language tafsir shows the existence of Malay-Jawi interpretation of the Qur'an in the 20th century along with the romance of the interpretation script from Arabic-Jawi (*Pegon*) writing to Latin script writing.

Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan is accessed by small circles in religious education institutions in Malaysia such as Islamic boarding schools, mosques, and *surau*, and remains an important reference. For example, weekly recitations in Malaysia at Pondok Tuan Guru Haji Bakar Parit Panjang, Baling Kedah, and Pondok Tuan Guru Haji Soleh Musa in Sik Kedah rely on this tafsir. Nonetheless, criticism has arisen against the content of this tafsir for lacking factual references and being based more on personal opinion, and triggered a cautionary reading warning from Muhammad Ismi.⁷

Previous research, such as the *Ushuluddin Journal* (2018) by Arivaie Rahman, et al. entitled: *Tafsir Melayu: Mengenal Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan Karya Syekh Muhammad Sa'id Al-Qadhi*, which discusses the Malay tafsir Nūr al-Ihsān from the nuances of interpretation, as well as theological, *fiqh*, and Sufistic examples. Another article in the *World Journal of Management* (2020) by Mohd Sholeh, et al., entitled: "*Bacaan Intertekstual Terhadap Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan*" examines the influence of nine classical tafsir works, dominated by *Tafsir Jalalain*. Another article in the *Islamic Science journal* (2019) by Rabiah Abdul Rahman, et al., entitled: *Metodologi Syekh Muhammad Said Bin Umar dalam Mentafsirkan Ayat Mutashabihat di dalam Kitab Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan: Satu Kajian Analisa*, which discusses the application of *Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan* methodology based on *tafwidh* and *ta'wil* in interpreting *mutashabihat* verses.

⁶ Arivaie Rahman, Munzir Hitami, and Zikri Darussamin, "TAFSIR MELAYU: MENGENAL TAFSIR NŪR AL-IHSĀN KARYA SYEKH MUHAMMAD SA'ĪD AL-QADHĪ," *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 26, no. 1 (2018).

⁷ Mohd Sholeh. ShehMohd Shahid Azim Mohd Sauf. Yusuf Othman Yusuff, "Bacaan Intertekstual Terhadap Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan: Kajian Menurut Kaedah Ekspansi (Intertextual Reading on Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan: A Study of the Expansion Method)," *Jurnal Dunia Pengurusan* 2, no. 2 (2020).

A thesis entitled "*Praktek Pengkajian Kitab Tafsir Bahasa Melayu (Studi Terhadap Pembelajaran Kitab Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan Di Pondok Pesantren Ihya 'Ulum Al-Diniyah, Kampung Brangan, Yarang, Pattani, Thailand Selatan)*" which is written by Mr. Adulhakam Salaebing, which reviews the practice of teaching *Tafsir Nur Ihsan* at Ihya 'Ulum Al-Diniyah Islamic Boarding School, Pattani, South Thailand. Furthermore, written by Saifuddin Bin Asyari in a thesis entitled: "*Metode Dan Corak Penafsiran Al-Qur'an Muhammad Said Bin Umar Dalam Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan Serta Implementasinya Dalam Penafsiran*" which discusses the method and style of Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan and its implementation. And a thesis with the title "*Imajinasi Eskatologis Dalam Tafsir Melayu-Jawi (Studi Tafsir Nūr al-Ihsān Karya Muhammad Said al-Kedahi)*" by Arivaie Rahman who discussed the construction of eschatological imagination in Tafsir Nūr al-Ihsān, influenced by the debate between religious texts and the Malay natural weltanschauung.

The difference and novelty of this research is that it focuses on three main problems related to vernacularization in the book of Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan, namely, the linguistic aspects, aspects of writing, and aspects of interpretation. Using the theory of vernacularization through literature study, this research explains the application of vernacularization in the phenomenon of Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan text, involving constructive aspects, pure literature study, and intercontextuality data analysis. The author limits the object of study by not discussing the entire vernacularization in Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan, and only focuses on the object of study on the vernacularization of interpretation based on the background of the problem and the formulation of the problem above.

Biography of Syaikh Muhammad Sa'id

Syaikh Muhammad Sa'id in his tafsir book, clearly mentioned his full name at the end of his book by name:

سعيد بن عمر القدحي بلدا الشافعي مذهبا النقشبندي الأحمدي طريقة القاضي شرعيا

That he lived in Kedah State, a district in Malaysia. It is stated that in matters of *fiqh*, Sa'id Al-Qadhi is an adherent of the *Syafi'i Madzhab* who applies the practices of *Tariqat Naqsabandy al-Ahmady*. Then it was emphasized that he had served as a *Qadhi* in Malaysia.⁸

Shyaikh Muhammad Sa'id was born in Kuar Village, Jerlung, Kedah in 1270 AH/1854 AD,⁹ some argue in 1275 AH.¹⁰ His father was a preacher known by the title

⁸ Muhammad Sa'id al-Qadhi, *Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan* (Bangkok: Maṭba'ah Muhammad al-Nahdī wa Awladih, 1956).

⁹ Wan Mohd Saghir Abdullah, *Muhammad Sa'id Bin. Umar: Pengarang Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan* (Malaysia: Utusan Malaysia, 2004).

¹⁰ Hamza Yusoff, Zulkifli Hj Mohd dan Muhammad, "Biografi Haji Muhammad Sa'id Dan Sejarah Penulisan Tafsir Nur Al-Ehsan," *Al-Bayan: Journal of Al-Quran & AlHadith*, 2005.

'Umar Khatib.¹¹ Having a father who was a preacher and a scholar in Kedah, he was raised with strong religious provisions, so he became a *Qadhi* and a respected scholar in Kedah like his father. It is explained in the closing of his tafsir that he was appointed as a Qadhi in Kedah Darul Aman during the era of the 25th Kedah sultanate in 1881-1943 AD, led by Sultan Abdul Hamid Halim Syah bin Ahmad Tajuddin Mukarram Shah.¹²

Sheikh Muhammad Said is one of the 25 Malaysian *mufassir* figures listed in the book “*Khazanah Tafsir Di Malaysia*” which reviews the life history, contributions and approaches used in interpreting the Qur'an.¹³ His excellence in knowledge made him known as *Tok Lebai*, Writer and Teacher of Quranic Tafsir. However, the most appropriate nickname is '*Guru Tafsir*' about his contribution by producing the phenomenal work *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* in Malay. Today, his work has received such great attention from the Malay community in Malaysia that it has been published repeatedly to meet the high demand.¹⁴

There are not many works written by Muhammad Said, his magnum opus entitled *Fatawa al-Qadah fi Ahkam al-Nikah* was first launched on 7 Sha'ban 1348 AH in Penang. A book with discussions about *fiqh* issues in the *munakahat* chapter. This work is very relevant when viewed from Muhammad Said's position as a *Qadhi* who always struggles with studies about Islamic law. The next work is the book of tafsir that researchers will discuss in this article, namely *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan*, which completed its writing in the year 1346 of the month of *Rabi'ul akhir* or in October 1927 M in Malay language and using Arabic-Jawi script.

At the end of his career as *Qadhi* at the age of 75, he suffered from an illness that required him to undergo surgery, and at the age of 78 he died on Wednesday, in the afternoon after 'Ashar time on 22 *Dzulka'dah* 1350 AH coinciding with March 9, 1932 AD. His remains were buried at Alor Merah Mosque, Alor Star, Kedah.¹⁵ Muhammad Said's biography is rather difficult to trace; his name is not even recorded in the list of scholars in Kedah, and he is also not in the books that compile the life history of scholars from Malay.¹⁶

The passing of Sheikh Muhammad Said is considered a jewel loss for the Muslim community in Kedah. His intellectual legacy continues to benefit the Malay people's understanding of the Quran. Since 1991, many studies have been conducted to

¹¹ Mohd Nazri. dkk Ahmad, “Pengaplikasian Kaedah Tafsir Al-Qur'an Dengan Qira'at Oleh Muhammad Sa'id Bin Umar Di Dalam Tafsir Nurul Ihsan,” *Jurnal Al-Turath* 1, no. 1 (2016).

¹² al-Qadhi, *Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan*.

¹³ Mustaffa Abdullah, *Khazanah Tafsir Di Malaysia* (Pahang: Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia, 2009).

¹⁴ Mohd Nazri Ahmad, *Israiliyyat: Pengaruh Dalam Kitab Tafsir* (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publication & Distributors Sdn. Bhd, 2007).

¹⁵ Abdullah, *Khazanah Tafsir Di Malaysia*.

¹⁶ Ahmad, “Pengaplikasian Kaedah Tafsir Al-Qur'an Dengan Qira'at Oleh Muhammad Sa'id Bin Umar Di Dalam Tafsir Nurul Ihsan.”

document Muhammad Said's biography and tafsir works, as his life history has not been written comprehensively. However, some questions have arisen regarding his name, which is not listed in the Kedah 'Ulama Name List or the biographical books of the scholars of Tanah Melayu. Muhammad Said's data is limited, mostly from conversations with his descendants and notes he made.¹⁷

Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan: Insights and Discussions

The beginning of the writing of *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* in 1344 H/1926M in *Dzulhijjah* month which coincided with the era of the 21st Sultan of Kedah and was completed in 1346 H/1927M in *Rabi'ul Akhir* month. Produced in four volumes, each volume is organized according to the *surah* of the Qur'an. The contents of this book are complete and comprehensive, including explanations of the *Asbab Al-Nuzul* of the verse, Prophetic *Hadith*, *Isra'iliyyat* stories, *Nasikh* and *Mansukh*, also the *fadhilah* of the verses. It took about 1.5 years for the complete tafsir book to be completed consisting of 4 volumes, namely:

1. The first volume contains 5 surahs (from Al-Fatihah [1] to al-Maidah [5]) with 254 pages.
2. The second volume contains 12 surahs (from Al-An'am [6] to al-Isra' [17]) with 353 pages.
3. The third volume contains 22 surahs (from al-Kahf [18] to al-Zumar [39]) with 359 pages.
4. The fourth volume contains 75 surahs (from Al-Mu'min [40] to al-Nas [114]) with 313 pages.

The background of the writing is explained in the preface of the book, informed that the existence of this tafsir book is due to the emergence of requests from several friends of Syeikh Muhammad Said. Without writing the names of his friends from Kedah, explaining their difficulty in understanding the Arabic literature in the Qur'an, they instructed Muhammad Sa'id to interpret the Qur'an in Malay Language. "...Adapun kemudian daripada itu sungguh telah pinta pada hamba oleh setengah ikhwan yang mulia-mulia bahwa hamba surat bagi mereka itu dengan bahasa Melayu Kedah akan Qur'an supaya dapat faham mereka itu akan suruhan-Nya dan tegah-Nya dengan mudah dan tiada bergoyang-goyang hati pada ta'at dan iman."¹⁸

The writing of *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* was also motivated by the existence of a signal and official approval from an Islamic Sheikh of Kedah Darul Aman named Sheikh Sulaiman and he was given the title *al-waqat wa al-tariqah mursyidi wa ustadzi*.¹⁹ Even some of the sovereigns of the country namely Hadhrat Najal Maulana

¹⁷ Rabiah Abdul. Rahman and Abdulloh Kadir, Kauthar Abd. Salah, "Metodologi Syeikh Muhammad Said Bin Umar Dalam Mentafsirkan Ayat Mutashabihat Di Dalam Kitab Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan: Satu Kajian Analisa," *Sains Islami* 4, no. 1 (2019).

¹⁸ al-Qadhi, *Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan*.

¹⁹ al-Qadhi.

al-Mu'azham Tengku Ibrahim Rijin and Hadhrat Syaqq Maulana Tengku Mahmud Bais President, who were both members of the Kedah state palace, both played role in compiling this tafsir book by Muhammad Sa'id. So, some interpretation researchers categorize this interpretation as having a political power base.²⁰

It is stated in the book *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* that the interpretation quotes and takes from the tafsir books of previous scholars, either directly or indirectly. In this case he admitted in the foreword to the book *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* that: "...dan adalah tempat perpegangan hamba padanya itu tafsir Jalālain dan Baidhawi dan Jamal dan lainnya daripada kitab tafsir al-Qur'an."²¹ The tafsir books that are used as a reference when interpreting the verses of the Qur'an are *Tafsir al-Jalalain* by Imam Jalaluddin Al-Mahalli Al-Mishri and Imam Jalaluddin al-Misri as-Suyuthi asy-Syafi'i al-Asy'ari. Then *Tafsir al-Baidhawi* or *Tafsir Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil*, by Imam Baidhawi. Next is *Tafsir Jamal*, namely the interpretation of *Futuhāt al-Ilāhiyah bi Taudhihi Tafsir al-Jalalain li al-Daqa'iq al-Khafiyah* by Sulaiman bin 'Umar bin Manshur al-'Ujaili al-Mashri al-Azhari ash-Shafi'i.

In addition to the three books of interpretation, other books of interpretation are used as reference books by Muhammad Sa'id's interpretation, namely: *Tafsir al-Baghawi al-Musamma Ma'alim al-Tanzil*, *Tafsir al-Khazin al-Musamma Lubab al-Ta'wil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil*, *Tafsir al-Thabari* entitled *Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an*, *Tafsir al-Qurthubi* namely *al-Jami' Li Ahkam al-Qur'an*, *Tafsir al-Razi* namely *Mafatih al-Ghaib*, *Tafsir al-Nasafi* entitled *Tafsir Madarik al-Tanzil wahaqaiq al-Ta'wili*, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* or *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Adzim*, and also *Tafsir al-Tsa'labi* entitled *al-Kasyf wa al-Bayan fi al-Tafsir Al-Qur'an*. It can be said that Muhammad Sa'id's tafsir book is very closely related to the classical tafsir literature that already existed previously.

Method and Style of Interpretation of Nur al-Ihsan

There are four methods of interpreting the Qur'an that have been established by previous Islamic scholars, namely *ijmali* (global), *tahlili* (analytical), *muqarin* (comparative) and *maudhu'i* (thematic). The most common classical method of interpreting the Qur'an is *ijmali*, in which the verses of the Qur'an are interpreted concisely with a systematic discussion of each verse according to the structure of the Qur'an. For example, Sheikh al-Sinkili in *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* used the *ijmali* method in his interpretation with the Malay language.²²

The style of the interpretation of *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* uses a general style which is not dominated by one specific thought. Still, it includes various conceptions

²⁰ Arivaie Rahman, Munzir Hitami, and Zikri Darussamin, "TAFSIR MELAYU: MENGENAL TAFSIR NŪR AL-IHSĀN KARYA SYEKH MUHAMMAD SA'ĪD AL-QADHĪ," *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 26, no. 1 (2018).

²¹ al-Qadhi, *Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan*.

²² Abd al-Rauf bin Ali al-Fanshuri Al-Jawi, *Tarjuman Al-Murstaḥid* (Singapura: Maktabah wa Mathba'ah Sulaiman Mar'i, 1951).

according to the content of the Qur'anic verse.²³ This kind of interpretation does not refer to one type of interpretation (*Fiqh, al-Adab al-Ijtima'i, Falsafah, Tasawwuf* or others), the interpretation will flow according to the content of the verse which is interpreted with various styles according to the verse being discussed.

An example in this context is that when interpreting legal verses, he interprets the *fiqh* laws of the verse. When interpreting theological verses, he discusses faith-related ideology with an adequate section. Then when interpreting history and stories in the Qur'an, he interprets them without excessive explanation. The concisely structured interpretation of Nur al-Ihsan causes the ideas and concepts when interpreting the verses of the Qur'an to be less visible so that they can be categorized as diverse style or general style as a label of its interpretation style.

Systematization of Interpretation

In the Systematic interpretation of Sheikh Sa'id there are two stages, namely: *First*, listing the name of the surah in the Qur'an that will be interpreted. *Second*, listing whether the surah is interpreted as a *Makkiyah* or *Madaniyah* surah. Each surah begins with *basmalah*, which is only interpreted in detail in the surah al-Fatihah and does not reinterpret it in subsequent surahs.

In the first stage, Sheikh Sa'id identifies the specific Qur'an surah that he will focus on. This involves naming the surah to clarify and structure the interpretation process. The second stage consists in categorizing the surah based on its revelation period, distinguishing between *Makkiyah* (revealed in Mecca) and *Madaniyah* (revealed in Medina) surahs. This classification helps in understanding the context and background of the surah.

Moreover, every surah starts with the *basmalah*, which Sheikh Sa'id provides a detailed interpretation of the *basmalah* in the surah al-Fatihah but does not repeat this detailed interpretation for other surahs. Instead, he assumes that the foundational understanding of the *basmalah* established in al-Fatihah applies to subsequent surahs. This approach streamlines the interpretation process while ensuring that the essential meaning of the *basmalah* is consistently acknowledged.

This interpretation often mentions various versions of the number of verses of the Qur'an in a chapter, without explaining the comparison in the number of verses listed. This can be seen in the chapter al-Baqarah which has 286 or 287 verses, also the chapter al-Nisa which has 175 or 176 or 177 verses without explaining what is behind the difference in the number of verses he listed. Then, regarding the naming of the chapter, he always explains the arguments and background of the naming of the chapter. For example, when interpreting the reason for the naming of the chapter from surah al-Baqarah with the following explanation: “*Sebab dinamakan Baqarah karena ada*

²³ Nashruddin Baidan, *Wawasan Baru Ilmu Tafsir* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2011).

*di dalamnya cerita lembu bagi anak yatim yang banyak berbuat kebaktian kepada ibunya Musa beli dengan harga sepenuh kulit emas.”*²⁴

The trimming of each verse in the Qur'an becomes partial (in pieces) by being distinguished through the provision of two brackets that aim to distinguish between interpretation and translation, because both interpretation and explanation in Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan are placed in two brackets so that both can be distinguished easily. More details are as follows: First of all, he gives a special *harakat* or line for each verse only, then the tafsir is not given a *harakat* or line marks. Then, the verses use Arabic while the interpretation is in Malay using Arabic-Jawi alphabet writing.

The new paragraph contains a sub-heading at the beginning of an explanation that is different from the object of discussion related to the verse explained previously. The objects of discussion are listed in the table of contents at the end of each volume of the book. For example, Surah al-Kahfi has discussion topics that include the story of the prophet Moses and the prophet Khidzir, the story of Dzulqarnain and King Baidarus in the *ashab al-kahfi*. All of these will be given a small title before the interpretation and listed in the table of contents according to the page in each interpretation volume.²⁵

Each interpretation of the surah ends with a description of the privileges of the surah, whether writing it down, memorizing it, reading it, or practicing it. For example, in his explanation of the privilege of reading the Surah Al-Baqarah, which can protect a person and his house from being disturbed by ghosts for three days, also about the privilege of reading the Surah Ali Imran, which can save the reader from the punishment of hellfire.²⁶

Vernacularization in Malay *Tafsir*

Social, cultural, and linguistic aspects influence the interpretation of the Qur'an in a region. Islam spread through cultural channels from various places such as Gujarat, Persia, and Arabia, significantly impacting the development of Islam in Southeast Asia. Thus, the spread of Islam involved two important processes, according to the concept introduced by Fadlou Shahedina, namely First, the process of adopting elements of other cultures, especially the Nusantara culture (to adopt). Second is the filtration or adaptation of the external culture with internal cultural values (to adapt).²⁷ Islam in Malaysia has its own cultural identity, experiencing two cultural processes that make it not as authentic as Islam in Arabia. It is difficult to prove the true sanctity of Islam in that context.

²⁴ al-Qadhi, *Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan*.

²⁵ al-Qadhi.

²⁶ al-Qadhi.

²⁷ Islah Gusmian, “Bahasa Dan Aksara Tafsir Al-Quran Di Indonesia,” *Jurnal Tsaqofah* 6, no. 1 (2010).

The practice of vernacularization in writing Qur'anic interpretations, such as Malay-language interpretations, produces religious phenomena with local scripts such as *pegon-jawi*. For example, Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan, written in the Arabic-Jawi alphabet, uses colloquial language to be more relatable and understandable to the people of Kedah and Malaysia. The writing of this kind of interpretation is undoubtedly following the community of its readers, so this process integrates two cultural variations known as Arabization of script language. This vernacularization process adapts the script and language of Qur'anic interpretations to the local context. This approach preserves the sacred Arabic script while effectively communicating the message, blending traditional Arabic elements with local cultural practices and exemplifying script-language Arabization.

Vernacularization is the localization of language related to Arabic religious teachings, then transliterated and written using the script of a typical local community language. Language, tradition, culture, and customs also experienced the process of processing ideas and became something commonplace. As a result, the Arabic language permeates into the local language. Therefore, the vernacularization of the Qur'an is translating its verses into local scripts without retaining the original concepts, leading to adopting Arabic into the local language. This aims to facilitate understanding of the Qur'an by translating Arabic into regional languages such as Malay, Sundanese, and Javanese.

The factors behind the vernacularization of the Qur'an by local scholars include the fact that the Qur'an is the holy book of Islam, serving as a guide and reference, so the Muslim community must understand their sacred text easily through translated works. Additionally, the diversity of languages and scripts used by Nusantara exegetes in their interpretations not only serves to convey the messages of the Qur'an but also reflects the richness of local culture and the social conditions at the time of writing.²⁸ There are three notable influences of the Arabic language on Nusantara culture. *First*, the Arabic script, known as Jawi script, was used. *Second*, many loanwords from Arabic were adopted. *Third*, the strong influence of Arabic and Persian literature in the creation of Nusantara literary works.²⁹

This theory states that vernacularization not only interprets the text but also aligns the Qur'an's values with the translator's cultural context. Language, as a key element, reflects ethnic and cultural identity. Using the local language in Qur'anic interpretation facilitates understanding and extends the influence and local wisdom in the interpretation. Additionally, this practice helps preserve and promote the linguistic and cultural heritage of the community, fostering a deeper connection between the sacred text and the everyday lives of its readers.

²⁸ Mursalin, "Vernakularisasi Al-Qur'an Di Indonesia (Suatu Kajian Sejarah Tafsir AlQur'an)," *Jurnal Komunikasi Dan Sosial Keagamaan* 16, no. 1 (2014).

²⁹ Lilik Faiqoh, "VERNAKULARISASI DALAM TAFSIR NUSANTARA Kajian Atas Tafsir Faḍ Al-Raḥmān Karya KH. Sholeh Darat Al-Samarani," *Living Islam* 1, no. 1 (2018).

Vernacularization in Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan

This discussion relies on research findings on Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan to understand the interpretation by Sheikh Sa'id that is relevant to the local community. Therefore, examples of vernacularization in Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan will be discussed, along with an analysis of contextualization in this vernacularization process. The aim is to understand the contextual meanings of the interpretations that are relevant to the local community.

Vernacularization in Linguistic Aspects

The Word: "*Sembahyang*"

Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan shows the identity of Islam Nusantara, evident through the use of the Malay language in interpreting the verses of the Qur'an. For example, when Sheikh Sa'id interprets QS. Al-Fatihah: 5, the phrase نَعْبُدُ إِيَّاكَ, which means "Only You do we worship," is interpreted as "'Hanya kepada Engkaulah kami menyembah'" olehnya ditafsirkan dengan "Akan dikao kami sembah pada ibadah kami daripada *sembahyang dan puasa dan zakat dan haji dan lainnya*".³⁰ The word "sembahyang" is a term commonly used in the regional languages of the Nusantara (locality of regional languages), encompassing the Southeast Asian region. This term "*Sembahyang*" has become familiar to the people of the Nusantara.

The word "*Sembahyang*" originates from two parts: "*Sembah*" and "*Yang*." "*Yang*" is related to the concept of "*Hyang*" in Sundanese, Javanese, and Balinese languages, signifying "worshipping or venerating the ruler of the universe." While currently used for religious practices in various religions beyond Islam, the term originally stemmed from the reverence for ancestral spirits and protective nature spirits called "*Hyang*," later associated with deities in a belief system.³¹ Quoting from the *Tafsir Jalalain* commentary, Sheikh Sa'id explains that verse 5 of Surah Al-Fatihah represents a sincere declaration of servitude solely to Allah. This applies to obligatory acts and other devotional practices like prayer (*shalat*), fasting (*shaum*), almsgiving (zakat), and pilgrimage (*haji*). It also emphasizes seeking His sole assistance in performing these acts and other endeavors in worldly life and the hereafter.³²

The term "*sembahyang*" serves as a linguistic acculturation, employed by various religious communities within a region to denote the act of praying or worshipping God. In the Islamic context, "*sembahyang*" refers explicitly to "*shalat*," one of the five pillars of Islam. *Shalat* is a form of worship performed by Muslims five times a day, adhering to a prescribed set of movements, recitations, and timings.

³⁰ al-Qadhi, *Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan*.

³¹ Anthony Reid, *The Islamization of Southeast Asia". Historia: Essays in Commemoration of the 25th Anniversary of the Department of History, University of Malaya* (Malaysian Historical Society, Australian National University, 1984).

³² al-Qadhi, *Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan*.

Broadly speaking, "*sembahyang*" within a religious context serves as an individual's means of connecting with the Almighty, expressing gratitude, seeking forgiveness, or strengthening their spiritual bond. The practice of "*sembahyang*" can vary depending on the religion and specific religious traditions one adheres to. Such interpretations highlight the significance of incorporating local values into interpretive literature, utilizing the vernacular Malay language as a tool to convey Qur'anic understanding to local communities.

The Word: "*Lembu*"

The naming of surah al-Baqarah in Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan has a specific explanation related to the argumentation and background of the naming of the surah, with the following explanation: "*Sebab dinamakan Baqarah karena ada di dalamnya cerita lembu bagi anak yatim yang banyak berbuat kebaktian kepada ibunya Musa beli dengan harga sepenuh kulit emas.*"³³ The word "*lembu*" is a term for a cow in Malay. According to it, "Baqarah" is named so because it contains the story of the cow purchased by Moses for its weight in gold to benefit the orphaned children. The term "*lembu*" used here refers to a cow in Malay language.

The name for cow in the everyday Malaysian language is "*lembu*." The word "*lembu*" is used generically to refer to farm animals that are often raised for meat, milk or other purposes. The words "*lembu*" and "*sapi*" vary across cultural and geographical contexts. In some areas, the terms "*lembu*" and "*sapi*" are used interchangeably, while in others, there are distinctions in the usage of these term.³⁴ Such as the interpretation of surah al-Baqarah for Indonesian mufasssirs who refer to it as "*sapi betina*" (female cow). Thus, the Malaysian Tafsir clearly shows its locality aspect in the interpretive literature, which involves using the local Malay language to convey the understanding of the Qur'an to the local community.

Vernacularization in Writing (*Pegon*)

Sheikh Muhammad Sa'id wrote his interpretation using the Arabic Pegon script. He wrote the verses of the Qur'an using Arabic while his interpretation was in Malay using the Arabic-Jawi script, which is called "*pegon*" as in the following example:

(الم) الله تعالى امة مغيهوي دغن كهندقث يث دمكين ايت (ذلِكَ الْكِتَابُ)
 اين كتاب قرآن يغدباچ اوليه محمد ايت (لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ) تياد شك فداث درفد
 الله تعالى (هَدَى لِلْمُتَّقِينَ) لکی هداية باكي سكلين اورغ يث متقين (يُغِي تَاكُوَة)
 اكن الله تعالى دغن منجنجوغ سكل سوروهنت دان منجاوه سكل كتكاهنت

³³ al-Qadhi.

³⁴ Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, *Kamus Dewan* (Malaysia: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2017).

(صفة المتقين) (الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ) سَكَل مريك ٢ يغبرايمان دغن خبر
يغ غائب ٢ (درفد بغكية قبور دان شركا دان نراك)³⁵

“Allah ta’ala amat mengetahui dengan kehendak yang demikian itu, (لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ) ini kitab Qur’an yang dibaca oleh Muhammad itu, (ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ) tiada syak pada-Nya daripada Allah ta’ala, (هَدَى لِلْمُتَّقِينَ) lagi hidayah bagi sekalian orang yang muttaqin (yang teguh akan Allah Ta’ala dengan menjunjung segala suruhan-Nya dan menjauhi segala keteguhannya yakni sifat al-Muttaqin), (الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ) segala mereka2 yang beriman dengan kabar yang ghaib2 (daripada bangkit kubur dan syurga dan neraka).”

We can find the Jawi script in the Malay region, which is similar to Pegon, where the Jawi script is used to write the Malay language. Historically, Islamic educational institutions in Java and Sumatra widely used books written in Arabic script, whether in the original Arabic language or local languages such as Malay, Javanese, and even Southern Thai.³⁶ Similar to other books written in *Pegon* script in both Indonesia and Malaysia, *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* was written using the general guidelines in Pegon Arabic.

Pegon is a modification of the Arabic alphabet used for writing local languages, closely related to the Jawi script in the Malay region. This script is employed in the intellectual tradition of pesantren, especially when writing works in local languages such as Javanese or Malay. This development emerged alongside the growth of Muslim intellectualism, the increase in readers from various backgrounds, and the influence of diverse styles of exegesis in the Nusantara, particularly in Indonesia. It was inspired by *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* by Sheikh al-Sinkili in the 17th century, which used Malay Arabic Pegon, becoming a reference for subsequent mufasssirs.

The arrival of Islam brought the Arabic script, which evolved into the Malay script with several additional characters specifically for the language. It is possible that the Jawi script served as a unifying medium for a language encompassing all Malay peoples. This is evidenced by numerous Malay writings from the 16th and 17th centuries that use terms such as "*Orang Melayu*" (Malay people) and "*Negara Melayu*" (Malay country). In these writings, the term "*Bahasa Jawi*" can also be found when referring to the Malay language. It is known that Arabs used the term Jawi to refer to all people from the archipelago. Therefore, it can be concluded that in the historical context of the Malay language, the Malay people themselves referred to their language as "*Bahasa Jawi*."³⁷

³⁵ al-Qadhi, *Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan*.

³⁶ Uka Tjandrasasmita, *Kajian Naskah-Naskah Klasik Dan Penerapannya Bagi Kajian Sejarah Islam Di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Puslitbang Lektur Keagamaan, Badan Litbang dan Diklat, Departemen Agama RI., 2006).

³⁷ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-attas, *Islam Dalam Sejarah Dan Kebudayaan Melayu* (Bandung: Mizan, 1990).

The use of Pegon Arabic script in *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* certainly facilitates understanding for Muslims who use local languages to grasp the ideas conveyed by Sheikh Sa'id. For a local Muslim intellectual, the use of *Pegon* script in this work undoubtedly aids in comprehending the structure of the Quranic language. This understanding is of significant importance for a *santri* (Islamic boarding school students) because, in the Islamic Boarding School (*pesantren*) tradition, the ability to read and understand texts in Arabic is closely related to the comprehension of the language structure within those texts.

Vernacularization in Terms of Interpretation

Interpretation of *Nur al-Ihsan*, Verse 38 Of Al-Maidah

Muhammad Sa'id's interpretation practice on Surah al-Maidah verse 38: “(wa al-sāriq wa al-sāriqat fāqtha'ū aidiyahumā) dan bermula lelaki yang mencuri dan perempuan yang mencuri itu maka kerat oleh kamu akan tangan keduanya pada pergelangan tangan kanan dan jika balik dikerat kaki kiri dan yang ketiga tangan kiri dan yang keempat kaki kanan kemudian dita'dzir dengan api yang dipikir oleh Raja-raja (jazām bimā kasabā) balasan dengan barang yang diusahakan mencuri (nakālām min allah) siksa daripada Allah bagi keduanya teladan bagi lainnya (wallahu 'azīzun hakīm) dan bermula Allah ta'ala itu Tuhan yang amat berkekerasan di atas kerajaan lagi amat hakim pada perbuatannya.”³⁸

The interpretation is rendered as if the text were written in its plain form. There is a sense of locality in the interpretation through the use of the word "*Kerat*," which in the *Kamus Dewan Malaysia* means to cut or to cut off (a part of something).³⁹ The punishment for theft is the cross-amputation or cross-cutting (*Kerat*), where for the first theft, the right wrist of the thief is cut off. If repeated, the left foot is cut off. If the thief steals again, the left wrist is cut off, and the right foot is cut off if stealing continues. However, it is explained that such a *hadd* punishment can only be implemented if supported by the local government's law or following the decision of the local ruler. If it contradicts, then such a *hadd* punishment may not be enforced. It is evident that the interpretation is heavily influenced by its locality, reflecting the *Shafi'i madzhab's* understanding applied to the interpretation of legal verses in the Quran.

As a *Qadhi*, his interpretation of the Qur'an in his tafsir book is heavily influenced by legal (*fiqh*) nuances, often leading him to write specific subheadings within his interpretations. For instance, in the interpretation mentioned above, he includes a subheading before beginning to interpret the Quranic verse, titled: “*hukum mencuri*” (the law of theft). This perspective reflects a policy with a degree of leniency, in line with humanistic and social community values. Although he was an expert jurist responsible for legal matters in Kedah, his views remained in agreement

³⁸ Muhammad Sa'id al-Qadhi, *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan*, Jilid. I, hlm 221.

³⁹ Pustaka, *Kamus Dewan*.

with the higher authorities, indicating a relationship between Quranic interpretation and the local community background.

Interpretation of *Nur al-Ihsan*, Verse 17 Of Al-Baqarah

The vernacularization of Sheikh Muhammad Said's interpretation is also evident in the explanation of “menyala api pada kelam malam” in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 17: “(*matsaluhum kamatsali alladzī istauqada nārā*) umpama mereka itu munafiqin itu seumpama mereka itu yang menyala api pada kelam malam, (*falammā adzqat mā haulahu*) maka tatkala cerah barang sekelilingnya (dan hilang barang yang ditakutinya), (*dzahaballāhu binūrihim*) memadam Allah dengan cerah mereka itu, (*wa tarakahum fī dzulumātil lā yubsirūn*) dan tinggal ai akan mereka itu pada dalam kelam tiada kelihatan mereka itu (demikianlah kelakuan segala munafiqin mendzahirkan mereka itu akan iman dan sembunyi mereka itu kalimah kufur maka apabila mati mereka itu datang akan emreka itu ketakutan dan adzab)”⁴⁰

Sheikh Said likens hypocrites (*munafiq*) to people who light a fire in the darkness of night; then, when their surroundings are illuminated (and what they fear disappears), Allah extinguishes their light, leaving them in darkness, which represents being in a place that is not visible. The behavior of all hypocrites is such that they show their faith outwardly but conceal it, similar to uttering words of disbelief (*kufur*). Consequently, when they die, they will be struck by fear and subjected to the torment of hell (*adzab*).

In the past, oil lamps with flames were used as traditional lamps in rural Malaysia to illuminate dark areas. Made from bamboo and filled with kerosene, these lamps were placed in front of houses at night as a daily light source before the advent of electricity.⁴¹ Some rules and norms can be likened to illuminating lamps guiding us in human life. For example, at night we carry a light source to prevent us from stumbling or getting lost in the darkness, according to the Malay perspective.

Sheikh Muhammad Said's interpretation demonstrates a strong sense of locality when interpreting “*istauqada nārā*” as lighting a fire in the dark of night (*menyala api pada kelam malam*). To light is to ignite a fire or lamp, to make something illuminate, providing light in a pitch-dark place and thus serving as an illuminator.⁴² This type of interpretation, including Sheikh Said's use of local language, employs metaphors familiar to the daily lives of the local community. This approach facilitates the community's understanding of the verse, serving as an effort to seek guidance for the next life.

⁴⁰ al-Qadhi, *Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan*.

⁴¹ Rika Purnama Sari, “TRADISI LAMPU COLOK DIDESA LUBUK MUDA KECAMATAN SIAK KECIL KABUPATEN BENGKALIS,” *Jom FISIP* 2, no. 1 (2015).

⁴² Pustaka, *Kamus Dewan*.

Conclusion

Sheikh Sa'id's achievement in interpreting the Qur'an in full 30 juz symbolizes the rebirth of Malay-Jawi interpretation which has been vacuumed for 252 years after the emergence of *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* in 1675 AD. *Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan* is among the most significant works in the scope of Qur'anic interpretation, significantly the scope of Nusantara literature. This interpretation still exists in the scene of the romance of the alphabet, especially with the widespread understanding of the Qur'an in Malay. Sheikh Sa'id is a Mufassir and an expert in Islamic Fiqh Law in Kedah Malaysia. Although in the *Muqaddimah* of his tafsir, he states that he is not a tafsir expert, but his work is an intellectual actualization in interpreting the verses of the Qur'an.

Vernacularization of the Qur'an is the process of translating the holy verses into local languages, aiming to facilitate understanding without neglecting the original meaning and message. It also considers tradition and culture, so Arabic gradually becomes embedded in the local community's language. The results of vernacularization in *Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan* are: *First*, vernacularization in the linguistic aspect through the use of local languages commonly used by the local community on the use of the word “Sembahyang” and the designation “Lembu” for naming surah Al-Baqarah. *Second*, vernacularization in Malay writing is achieved by using the Arabic-Jawi script (*pegon*). *Third*, vernacularization in the aspect of interpretation is found in the interpretation of Surah al-Maidah: 38 and Surah Al-Baqarah: 17, which dominantly reflects aspects of locality such as the expression, morality, and character of the Malaysian Muslim community, as well as the lives and habits of Malaysian Muslims, especially in the Kedah area.

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