

## The Early Generation of Qur'anic Exegetes in Indonesia: Intellectual Legacy, Interpretive Methodologies, and Socio Historical Context

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### ABSTRACT

Studies on the history of Qur'anic exegesis in Indonesia have largely focused on modern figures, while the earliest generation of local exegetes remains insufficiently mapped in a systematic manner. Yet their works and interpretive approaches played a crucial role in transmitting Islamic scholarship and shaping indigenous intellectual traditions. This study aims to identify prominent early Indonesian mufassirs, examine their exegetical writings, and analyze their methodologies as well as the socio historical contexts that informed their interpretations. Employing a qualitative design with a historical-philological approach, the research is based on library study of early printed tafsirs, manuscript sources, and relevant secondary literature. Data were analyzed through thematic content analysis and comparative methodological examination. The findings indicate that early Indonesian exegetes were strongly influenced by Middle Eastern scholarly networks, while simultaneously articulating local elements through the use of Malay language, engagement with communal religious practices, and responses to colonial conditions and social change. The study concludes that early Nusantara tafsir represents a synthesis of global Islamic traditions and local realities, providing a foundational framework for the later development of Qur'anic studies in Indonesia.

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### Introduction

Qur'anic exegesis in Indonesia exhibits distinctive dynamics because it developed within linguistic, cultural, and socio political landscapes different from those of the traditional Arab centers of learning. Along with the growing discourse on "Indonesian tafsir" or "Nusantara tafsir," there has emerged a need to reorganize the historiography of Qur'anic interpretation so that it does not stop at broad periodization, but is instead able to map actors (exegetes), texts (exegetical works), and contexts (networks of knowledge and social realities) in a more integrated manner (Lukman, 2021). At this juncture, a close reading of the early generation of exegetes namely, those who pioneered the writing and dissemination of tafsir prior to the wave of twentieth century modernization becomes crucial for understanding the epistemic foundations of Qur'anic studies in Indonesia (Syam, Nasution, & Siregar, 2024).

In terms of the literature, recent scholarship has provided an important foundation. Historiographical studies have highlighted how the term “Nusantara tafsir” has been constructed and debated in Indonesian Qur’anic studies, while also underscoring the need for conceptual precision when mapping local exegetical traditions. At the level of key texts, a number of articles identify *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* by ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Singkili as a seminal milestone that shaped the direction of vernacular Qur’anic interpretation in the Malay Indonesian world, in terms of its sources, modes of composition, and claims to originality (Lail, Hidayat, & Wijaya, 2024). Other studies reinforce this methodological reading by emphasizing interpretive orientations, chains of scholarly transmission, and al-Singkili’s position in responding to religious debates in Aceh so that tafsir is understood not merely as a text but also as a product of socio-religious contestation (Faqih, Rusmana, & Rahtikawati, 2022). More recent research even argues that *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* is best understood as a form of “compilative vernacular” exegesis that synthesizes classical authorities (al-Khāzin, al-Bayḍawī, al-Jalālayn) while simultaneously striving for accessibility for local audiences (Fahrizal & Khoiriyyah, 2025).

Nevertheless, three tendencies remain strong in contemporary scholarship: (1) a focus on a single work or a single figure especially al-Singkili; (2) a separation between discussions of exegetical methodology and socio-historical context; and (3) an inconsistent mapping of the early generations that fails to connect intellectual trajectories (networks of knowledge transmission, scholarly mobility, and sanad based authority) with the interpretive methodologies manifested in the texts themselves (Natasya, 2023). Yet the scholarly tradition of the Malay-Indonesian world also moved through Haramain networks and transregional transmissions of learning, which significantly shaped scholarly authority and the diversity of Islamic production including tafsir during the formative centuries (Ghozali, 2024).

Building on these gaps, this study proposes three forms of novelty. First, it maps the early generation of Qur’anic exegetes as an intellectual ecosystem that links figures, works, sources, and social arenas rather than merely providing biographical inventories. Second, it integrates analysis of exegetical methodology (e.g., *ijmālī tahlīlī* tendencies, choices of sources, patterns of vernacularization, and stylistic idioms) with socio-historical readings (scholarly authority, institutions and patronage, and socio-religious dynamics) in order to show how “ways of interpreting” were intertwined with the “lived situations of the interpreters.” Third, it positions early works especially *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* as primary cases for formulating analytical indicators that can be used to assess originality, strategies of source synthesis, and forms of localization of meaning in the works of subsequent generations.

The importance of this research is both academic and strategic. Academically, mapping the early generation of exegetes strengthens a more precise historiography of Indonesian tafsir (who-what-how-why) and avoids generalizations that reduce local exegesis to mere “derivatives” of Middle Eastern works, without recognizing the creative processes of synthesis and vernacularization evident in the texts. Strategically, this study supports the development of Qur’anic studies curricula and the study of Islamic manuscripts and texts in Indonesia by highlighting the roots of local exegetical traditions as sources of contextual, moderate, and socially relevant Islamic literacy. In this way, the research is expected to contribute to strengthening the intellectual map of Qur’anic interpretation in Indonesia while opening future research agendas including philology, manuscript digitization, and studies of scholarly networks to revive and reassess the early corpus of Qur’anic exegesis in Indonesia.

## Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a library research design (Nurhayati & Rosadi, 2022), as its primary objects of inquiry consist of exegetical texts, manuscripts, and documentary traces of the intellectual traditions of early Qur'anic exegetes in Indonesia (Fahrizal & Khoiriyah, 2025). The analytical framework combines historical and philological approaches to read tafsir texts both as historical products reflecting the contexts in which interpretations emerged and as manuscript artifacts, including textual variants, modes of writing, and material features of the codices (Rohman et al., 2024). A philological approach is employed when the primary sources take the form of manuscripts or early editions, involving procedures such as manuscript identification, codicological description (e.g., paper types, watermarks, and writing formats), and the establishment of textual legibility prior to interpretive analysis (Kuswandi, Rusli, & Kalsum, 2025).

Primary data sources consist of selected early generation tafsir works chosen purposively according to the following criteria: (1) their association with the pioneering phase of the Nusantara tafsir tradition, (2) the accessibility of the texts (manuscripts, digital editions, or printed versions), and (3) their relevance for examining exegetical methodologies and socio-historical contexts. Secondary sources include recent journal articles and studies on Nusantara tafsir, scholarly networks, and shifts in exegetical methodology in Indonesia, which are used to contextualize interpretations and to guide the mapping of typologies ((Sugiyono, 2022).

Data collection is conducted through systematic literature searches, text inventories, and the extraction of analytical units (Nurhayati, Lias Hasibuan, 2021). Data analysis employs thematic content analysis to code methodological themes such as sources of interpretation, modes of verse exposition, jurisprudential, mystical, or ethical orientations, and strategies of vernacularization as well as cross textual and cross exegete comparisons to identify recurring patterns and distinctive features of individual works. To connect texts with social realities, this study complements content analysis with a historical critical reading of scholarly institutions, religious authority, and socio-political dynamics that shaped the production and dissemination of Qur'anic exegesis.

The validity of the findings is ensured through source triangulation by comparing manuscripts and editions, previous scholarship, and relevant historical data and through consistency checks of analytical categories, carried out by re examining textual excerpts that represent each methodological category (Creswell, 2021). Through these procedures, the research methodology enables a more robust mapping of the intellectual trajectories, exegetical methodologies, and socio historical contexts of the early generation of Qur'anic exegetes in Indonesia.

## Results and Discussion

### Periodization of the Early Generation of Indonesian Qur'anic Exegetes

The periodization of the early generations of Qur'anic exegetes in Indonesia can be read as a gradual process moving from the pioneering of vernacular exegetical traditions, to the consolidation of scholarly institutions and networks, and finally to the emergence of early modern patterns supported by organizations, print media, and reformist ideas. Across these phases, the "exegete" is understood not merely as the author of voluminous commentaries, but also as an intellectual actor who circulated interpretive authority through manuscripts, teaching activities, and periodical publications in accordance with the demands of their respective contexts.

In the seventeenth eighteenth centuries (the pioneering phase), the Nusantara tafsir tradition was marked by the appearance of early exegetical works that underscored the importance of vernacularization the use of Malay and explanatory modes accessible to local audiences. A major landmark of this phase was the position of *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* by ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Singkili as a foundational text in the Malay Indonesian exegetical corpus, in terms of its scholarly sources, modes of presentation, and its role in mediating between global Islamic scholarship and the needs of local readers. During this phase, the intellectual trajectories of early exegetes were also closely tied to scholarly mobility such as connections with the Haramain which were subsequently “translated” into linguistic choices, stylistic features, and interpretive orientations relevant to Nusantara societies (Amin, 2021).

Still within the pioneering phase, the eighteenth century is often read as a period that did not necessarily produce a massive proliferation of new exegetical works, but rather as a time of consolidation, during which interpretive authority was transmitted through teaching networks, the reinforcement of classical references, and the adaptation of religious discourses at the community level. The literature further notes that Qur’anic exegesis in Indonesia experienced a significant surge after what has sometimes been perceived as a “stagnant” period following the eighteenth century, especially with the rise of reformist currents in the early twentieth century. Accordingly, the seventeenth eighteenth centuries are best understood as a foundational phase establishing texts, languages, and argumentative patterns even if they were not always marked by large-scale exegetical production.

Entering the nineteenth century (the phase of institutionalization), the development of tafsir became increasingly linked to the strengthening of scholarly institutions such as pesantren, halaqah circles, and transregional networks as well as to the formalization of authority through chains of transmission (sanad), written works, and transnational scholarly connections (Firdaus & Imawan, 2024). Studies of nineteenth century exegetical networks highlight the transmission links between Nusantara scholars and the ulama of the Haramain, which significantly shaped exegetical traditions for instance, in the scholarly networks behind the works of Kiai Ṣāliḥ Dārāt and the transformation of Javanese Islamic scholarship. In this phase, centers of learning also produced Nusantara figures who were active in the Haramain such as Nawawi al-Bantani and Mahfudz at-Tarmasi thereby strengthening local intellectual authority while simultaneously exerting reciprocal influence on the development of Islamic thought in the archipelago.

Institutionalization in the nineteenth century is further reflected in the diversity of regional tafsir manuscripts that display forms of “methodological hybridity,” bridging classical traditions with local communal needs and signaling the expansion of exegetical ecosystems beyond a single center. Philological studies of nineteenth century Palembang Malay tafsir manuscripts, for example, reveal adaptive modes and methods, indicating that Nusantara exegetical traditions at this stage were not merely repetitive but also involved ongoing negotiation between classical frameworks and specific social contexts. In addition, the spread of printing technologies such as lithography, which began to circulate in Indonesia in the nineteenth century provided the material conditions for wider dissemination of religious texts, thereby broadening public access to Qur’ans and related literature, including exegetical explanations.

In the early twentieth century (the early modern phase), the Indonesian tafsir landscape was significantly transformed by the convergence of three factors: (1) currents of Islamic intellectual reform (including modernist discourses), (2) the emergence of

organizations and educational institutions, and (3) the expansion of print media and magazines that enabled tafsir to circulate in popular and rapidly distributed formats. Research indicates that early twentieth century reformism stimulated a rise in exegetical publications not only in book form but also in magazine columns as exemplified by the activities of A. Hassan and traditions of tafsir disseminated through periodicals. Within the same landscape, periodizations of twentieth-century Indonesian tafsir (e.g., 1900s–1960s) are also marked by tendencies toward the interpretation of particular surahs or themes and by the development of distinctive exegetical styles in subsequent decades. For this reason, the early twentieth century may be understood as an early modern phase that transformed the “modes of circulation” of tafsir from the dominance of manuscripts and institutional teaching toward wider, more responsive modern publications oriented to emerging socio-religious concerns (Muhyi, Umar, Raya, & Hasan, 2023).

### Major Figures and Their Works

The principal figures of the early generations of Qur’anic exegetes in Indonesia can be understood through the interconnections among their exegetical works, linguistic and media choices, and the methodological orientations they developed in response to the needs of their communities. Within the historiography of Nusantara tafsir, these figures mark a shift from Malay Jawi/pegon script commentaries closely tied to local communities toward Indonesian-language tafsir disseminated widely through schools, organizations, and modern print media. Accordingly, the study of these figures should go beyond simple scholarly biography and situate their works as nodal points in traditions of learning, intellectual networks, and socio-religious transformation in Indonesia.

In the pioneering phase, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Singkili occupies a central position through his *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*, often regarded as one of the earliest and most influential relatively comprehensive Malay tafsirs in the Nusantara region. Recent studies emphasize that the distinctiveness of this work lies in its strategy of “vernacular tafsir” rendering Qur’anic meanings in Malay (Arabic Jawi script) to make them accessible to a broad readership while remaining firmly grounded in classical exegetical authorities. In terms of interpretive tendencies, recent scholarship also highlights an *adabī-ijtimā’ī* (socio-ethical) orientation discernible in several passages, indicating an effort to bridge sacred scripture with the social realities of its readers (Nurkholilah, Kurniawan, & Rosa, 2024).

Entering the nineteenth century, Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani emerged as a Nusantara scholar of international stature through his widely circulated Arabic-language commentary, *Marāḥ Labīd* (often associated with the so-called *Tafsīr Munīr*). Recent academic work reads Nawawi’s tafsir as an example of “interpretive hybridity”: faithful to orthodox frameworks and classical exegetical tools, yet capable of negotiating the modern-colonial circumstances of the nineteenth century, thereby positioning Southeast Asian voices not merely as recipients but also as producers of exegetical discourse. Methodological analyses further note his predominantly *tahlīlī* (sequential, mushaf-based) approach, supplemented at times by concise and global explanatory modes, reflecting the flexibility of his exegetical presentation (Islami, Rosada, & Badegesy, 2025).

In the Javanese context of the nineteenth century, Kiai Shaleh Darat underscored the importance of localized tafsir through his *Fayḍ al-Raḥmān*, written in Arabic Pegon script, which functioned both as a vehicle of religious literacy and as a medium of cultural communication for indigenous communities. Recent studies stress that this commentary represents a dialectic between scripture and local realities: interpretation was directed not merely toward explicating Qur’anic meanings but also toward shaping a contextual form of public religiosity within the colonial socio political environment. Shaleh Darat is

therefore significant not only as an exegete but also for consolidating tafsir as a pedagogical and cultural instrument within nineteenth century Javanese society (Ansori & Hamzah, 2024).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, figures such as Mahmud Yunus marked a decisive shift toward practical, education-oriented Indonesian-language tafsir through works such as *Tafsir Qur'an Karim / Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*. Recent research highlights that Yunus's approach prioritized clarity and accessibility so as to reach readers across diverse educational backgrounds, thereby modernizing public access to Qur'anic understanding through communicative translation-cum-tafsir models. Other studies even identify attention to linguistic-rhetorical devices (e.g., kinayah/metonymy), suggesting that his work can be analyzed as a discourse on language rather than solely as a juridical or doctrinal product (Mardiah, 2025).

Within the reformist modernist spectrum, A. Hassan is known for his *Al-Furqān: Tafsir Qur'an*, which recent scholarship characterizes as exhibiting a rational-reformist orientation: emphasizing doctrinal purification, critiquing taqlid, and advocating a return to the Qur'an and Hadith as primary sources. Contemporary studies point to his use of a tahlili method (following the order of the mushaf) combined with a firm argumentative style, consistent with his position in pre independence and early modern Indonesian religious debates. In this way, A. Hassan's tafsir functioned not merely as verse-by-verse explanation but also as an instrument of reformist discourse that shaped public religious reasoning (Iman, Fikri, & Komarudin, 2024).

Buya Hamka, meanwhile, through his *Tafsir al-Azhar*, represents a distinctly Indonesian modern exegetical voice marked by a strong adabi-ijtimā'i (socio-ethical) dimension and by engagement with ethical, educational, and cultural issues prevalent in society. Contemporary scholarship shows that Hamka's interpretations are frequently linked to educational values, demonstrating how tafsir operates as a bridge between Qur'anic teachings and character formation as well as communal social orientations. Within the early modern map, Hamka is often aligned with reformist currents seeking to respond to the challenges of modernity, albeit with a more culturally inflected and reader-friendly narrative style (Iryanti, 2024).

Another significant figure of the early modern phase is T.M. Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy, whose *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Majid "An-Nur"* (along with works such as *Al-Bayan*) consolidated the Indonesian language tafsir tradition while drawing extensively on both classical and modern exegetical sources. Recent research on Hasbi's distinctive manhaj emphasizes that his exegetical project did not proceed along a single line but rather combined riwayat dirayah approaches (bil ma'thūr and bil ma'qūl) in response to the needs of modern Indonesian readers. Thematic-contextual studies examining issues of social jurisprudence such as adoption (tabanni) in *An-Nur* further demonstrate the productivity of Hasbi's tafsir in mediating between interpretation and contemporary Indonesian regulatory and social concerns.

### **Methodology and Interpretive Styles of Qur'anic Exegesis**

Methodologies and interpretive styles of Qur'anic exegesis in Indonesia particularly from the early to the early modern phases often appear along a spectrum between tafsir riwayat (tradition based interpretation drawing on the Qur'an itself, hadith, and reports of the Companions and early transmitters) and tafsir dirayah (reason based interpretation employing linguistic analysis, contextual reading, legal principles, and independent reasoning). In practice, many Indonesian exegetical works do not adhere exclusively to one pole but instead combine both approaches: transmitted reports function

as authoritative foundations, while rational analysis serves to expand explanations, connect verses to social issues, and formulate understandings that are communicative for local audiences. This synthetic tendency can be observed in methodological discussions that frame *riwāyah* and *dirāyah* as complementary “schools” within the interpretive process (Nugraha, 2024).

In the realm of *fiqhī* (legal/*ahkām* oriented) exegesis, interpretive focus is directed toward legal verses those concerning ritual practice, social transactions, family law, criminal matters, and normative ethical frameworks so that juristic tools such as *istinbāt* (deriving rulings), *tarjih* (weighing opinions), and reference to legal schools become prominent. Recent literature emphasizes that the *hukmī* style typically selects verses directly related to law and interprets them in light of juristic maxims and cross *madhhab* debates. In the early modern Indonesian context, this orientation is also evident when exegetes attempt to “bring Qur’anic law closer” to lived experience through rational and contextual explanatory modes, as illustrated by readings of legal dimensions in *Tafsir al-Azhar*, which stress breadth of outlook, *maqāsid* (higher objectives of the law), and public welfare.

The mystical dimension in Indonesian *tafsir* generally unfolds in two major forms: *tafsir isyārī* (intuitive or symbolic interpretation that discerns inner spiritual meanings) and *tafsir nazārī* (more philosophical theoretical approaches built upon conceptual systems). Studies of Indonesian Sufi exegesis indicate that Sufi and *ṭarīqa* traditions have influenced how exegetes process Qur’anic meanings for instance, through emphases on *tazkiyat al-nafs* (spiritual purification), ethics, and inward religiosity without necessarily abandoning classical authorities. In Indonesian *tafsir* scholarship, Sufi tendencies frequently coexist with socio cultural (*adabī ijtimā’ī*) orientations, especially when exegetes cultivate refined language while linking Qur’anic messages to the spiritual and moral formation of society.

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Meanwhile, reformist modernist styles in Indonesian *tafsir* are commonly characterized by emphases on doctrinal purification, critiques of *taqlīd* (uncritical adherence to precedent), encouragement of *ijtihād*, and rational contextual readings of verses intended to address the challenges of modernity. Research on the resonance of reformism in Nusantara exegetical traditions positions such works as intellectual responses to social change, educational reform, and evolving religious dynamics, as well as efforts to reassert the public relevance of the Qur’an in modern settings. Within this current, interpretation functions not merely as an explanation of meaning but also as an argumentative instrument for shaping new, more critical and responsive forms of religious reasoning.

In practice, these four orientations *riwāyah* *dirāyah*, *fiqhī*, mystical, and reformist modernist frequently converge in hybrid forms: a single *tafsir* may begin with transmitted reports, reinforce them through linguistic and contextual analysis, derive legal or spiritual implications, and conclude with socially reformist messages. For example, methodological

studies of Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy's Tafsir An-Nur identify the use of both *ijmālī* and *tahlīlī* methods, engagement with Prophetic traditions, scholarly opinions, *munāsabah* (inter-verse coherence), and *sabab al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation), illustrating the fusion of *riwāyah* and *dirāyah* devices within an Indonesian language exegetical format. Accordingly, the most productive way to read Indonesian tafsir methodologies and styles is through the lens of an "ecology of interpretation": these orientations are not closed compartments but strategic choices made by exegetes in response to their scholarly authority, intended audiences, and the challenges of their times (Sukamto, 2024).

### Global and Local Influences

Global and local influences in the Indonesian exegetical tradition are most clearly visible in the ways exegetes negotiated global scholarly authority while simultaneously ensuring the intelligibility and social reception of Qur'anic messages within local socio-cultural settings. Recent scholarship emphasizes that "Nusantara tafsir" should be read as a distinctive and unique corpus, particularly in its scripts and languages, modes of presentation, and meaning-making processes that emerge from the indigenization of universal teachings within Indonesian contexts. Within this framework, three major nodes shape the character of Indonesian tafsir: the Haramain scholarly networks, the use of Malay Arabic scripts (Arab Jawi/pegon), and the adaptation of local cultures that enable tafsir to function as a religious cultural bridge.

The Haramain (Mecca Medina) scholarly networks served as a "global axis" through which chains of transmission (*sanad*), authoritative texts, and academic legitimacy flowed to Nusantara scholars. Studies of nineteenth-century exegetical networks demonstrate transmission lines connecting Nusantara exegetes not only with Haramain scholars but also with figures in Egypt; these networks formed both vertical (teacher student) and horizontal (inter scholarly) relationships that significantly influenced the development of tafsir traditions in the archipelago, particularly from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. In other words, local exegetical traditions did not arise in a vacuum but matured within global scholarly webs that supplied both epistemic legitimacy and methodological repertoires (Basthoh, Ariyadi, & Ziyadulhaq, 2026).

These global influences were not confined to personal mobility and chains of authority but were also documented in intellectual genealogies preserved in scholarly works that mapped teacher student relations and the circulation of knowledge. Research on the scholarly lineages of Shaykh Mahfudz at-Tarmasi (nineteenth century), for instance, illustrates how Haramain networks functioned as channels for the transfer of ideas and scholarly recognition including in the disciplines of tafsir and hadith thereby situating Nusantara scholarly authority within the broader ecosystem of international Islamic learning. Such patterns help explain why Nusantara tafsir often displays strong madhhab affiliations (e.g., Shafi'i jurisprudence and Ash'ari theology) alongside pronounced ethical Sufi orientations, reflecting the intellectual traditions absorbed from global centers of learning.

The most tangible expression of "locality" appears through the use of Malay Arabic scripts especially Arab Jawi as a medium of vernacularization, translating Qur'anic meanings into the languages of local communities. Recent studies affirm that *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* represents one of the earliest complete Malay tafsirs and a landmark in Southeast Asian Islamic intellectual history, distinguished by its capacity to synthesize global authorities (such as al-Jalālayn, al-Bayḍāwī, and al-Khāzin) while maintaining

accessibility for Malay Nusantara readers. Other research likewise underscores the Arab Jawi (Malay) identity of Tarjumān al-Mustafid, situating it as an early comprehensive tafsir in the archipelago and noting the author's Haramain training thereby directly linking global scholarly formation with local linguistic choices.

MalayArabic (including local scripts such as Javanese pegon) functioned not merely as translation tools but as socio epistemic strategies enabling tafsir to circulate as public knowledge. By employing familiar languages, exegetical works became meeting spaces between global Islamic vocabularies and everyday idioms, allowing Qur'anic values to be understood not only cognitively but also internalized through culturally resonant semantic categories. For this reason, script and language are often regarded as among the most crucial markers distinguishing Nusantara tafsir and explaining why local works exhibit modes of exposition distinct from purely Arabic commentaries.

In terms of local cultural adaptation, Nusantara tafsir demonstrates processes of "indigenization," whereby universal Qur'anic messages are connected to lived realities customary practices, local terminology, socio-cultural analogies, and historical figures or memories. Recent articles (2026) on vernacularization in Indonesian tafsir stress that integrating local elements (such as Javanese culture) into interpretation aims to mediate between universal doctrines and indigenous wisdom; as a result, Qur'anic teachings become more readily comprehensible and practicable while simultaneously enriching Indonesian exegetical traditions with distinctive local inflections. In other words, cultural adaptation does not diminish Qur'anic meaning but rather functions as a pedagogical and cultural strategy for keeping tafsir vibrant within plural societies (Huda & Syakur, 2021).

In sum, global local influences in Indonesian tafsir operate dialectically: Haramain networks provide authority, sources, and legitimacy; Malay Arabic language choices ensure accessibility; and local cultural adaptations supply social efficacy. Formulations in Nusantara tafsir studies underscore the urgency of understanding how Indonesian scholars methodologically and conceptually grounded Qur'anic teachings within their socio cultural milieus so that Nusantara tafsir is recognized not merely as a historical legacy but also as a productive foundation for the further development of Qur'anic studies. Reading global and local influences together thus enables us to view Nusantara tafsir as an intellectual project that connects the world's Islamic centers of learning with the concrete needs of Indonesian society.

### **Social and Political Dynamics**

Colonialism created both a "space of constraint" and a "space of creativity" for the development of Qur'anic exegesis in Indonesia, insofar as tafsir functioned not only as an explanation of Qur'anic meanings but also as a response to socio political inequalities, regimes of knowledge control, and the need to consolidate communal identity. Studies of Indonesian tafsir during the colonial period emphasize that the complexity of colonial conditions shaped the direction, methods, and stylistic features of exegetical works; exegetes incorporated elements of nationalism, calls to abandon taqlid and "superstition," and efforts to construct a contextualized Islamic identity as forms of cultural resistance.

Colonial dynamics also influenced educational and literacy infrastructures: colonial educational policies stimulated the emergence of Muslim "counter-initiatives" – whether through the strengthening of pesantren, the establishment of modern Islamic schools, or the creation of madrasah institutions that selectively adopted aspects of colonial school methodologies in order to survive and compete. In studies of pesantren modernization, reforms beginning in the early twentieth century are understood as reactive responses to socio-religious change, colonialism, and the expansion of Christian

missions, rendering these reforms not merely pedagogical but also political–ideological in nature (Pertiwi & Hidayat, 2025).

Early twentieth century reforms in Islamic education subsequently broadened the readership of tafsir through institutional and curricular transformation: traditional surau and pesantren began shifting toward graded, certificate granting systems that combined religious and general sciences, and in some contexts emphasized mastery of languages (Arabic and English). Research on the modernization of Islamic education in West Sumatra illustrates how the emergence of modern religious schools such as Adabiyah, Sumatera Thawalib, and Diniyah marked a transition from traditional learning patterns to more structured educational systems, which in turn demanded more systematic Islamic teaching materials, including tafsir and concise commentaries tailored for school use.

Within this context, madrasah emerged as “bridging” institutions that gained strength under colonial pressures while simultaneously responding to the imperatives of modernity: they arose both as affirmations of religious identity and as strategies for educational self-reliance at a time when formal state recognition was still limited. A 2025 study of madrasah development underscores that these institutions grew in response to colonialism and modernity, expanded through community initiatives and reformist leaders, and came to represent more organized forms of Islamic education than traditional surau or pesantren.

From the perspective of printing and publishing, colonialism and modernization proceeded in tandem with a “media revolution” – from manuscripts to printed texts, and from restricted circulation to wide distribution. Historical studies of Qur’anic manuscript production and tafsir in Indonesia stress that these developments resulted from complex interactions among religion, culture, technology, and politics; the introduction of printing technologies and the modernization of sacred text management reshaped how Muslims accessed the Qur’an and its exegetical literature (Al-Ayyubi, 2020).

Furthermore, research on the Indonesian Qur’an printing industry indicates that modern publishing did not merely expand access but also concretely shaped religious educational practices for example, through the standardization of reading and memorization methods. Historical analyses of PT Menara Kudus (1951–2023) demonstrate how innovations in Qur’anic production, such as the Mushaf Pojok, influenced tahfīz traditions and pesantren pedagogy, illustrating that printing and publishing houses functioned not only as distribution channels but also as actors that actively “regulated” patterns of religious literacy.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the early generations of Qur’anic exegetes in Indonesia developed through a gradual historical process beginning with the pioneering phase of the seventeenth eighteenth centuries, followed by nineteenth-century institutionalization, and culminating in an early modern phase in the early twentieth century shaped simultaneously by global scholarly networks, colonial socio-political contexts, reforms in Islamic education, and transformations in print media. Rather than merely reproducing Middle Eastern exegetical traditions, Indonesian exegetes engaged in creative processes of linguistic vernacularization (Malay Arabic/pegon), local cultural adaptation, and the selective adoption of diverse exegetical methodologies, including *riwāyah dirāyah* syntheses, *fiqhī* orientations, mystical approaches, and reformist modernist perspectives.

Theoretically, these findings underscore that Nusantara tafsir is best understood through a global-local dialectical framework that is, through the dynamic interaction between transnational scholarly transmission and the socio-cultural needs of Indonesian society. The study's principal contribution lies in strengthening a model of Indonesian tafsir historiography that is grounded not only in chronological periodization but also in the interrelations among figures, works, methodologies, media of circulation, and social contexts. In this way, the research enriches theories of Qur'anic exegetical development in the Muslim world by demonstrating that regional tafsir traditions are not merely derivative of global centers of learning but constitute autonomous, adaptive, and context-sensitive arenas of knowledge production.

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