

Examining Tafsir Nurul Bajan by Moh. Romli and N.H.S. Midjaja: A Nusantara Tafsir Study in Sundanese

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ABSTRACT

The interpretation of the Qur'an in local languages is an effort to make Islamic teachings more easily understood by local communities. This study examines *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* by Moh. Romli and N.H.S. Midjaja, a Qur'anic exegesis written in the Sundanese language. The research aims to analyze its content, method of interpretation, and the Islamic values it contains, particularly within the Sundanese cultural context. Through a literature review, the study finds that this tafsir uses simple and easily understandable Sundanese. Its interpretation emphasizes ethics, sharia, Sufism, and moral messages relevant to daily life. The author also utilizes Sundanese proverbs and expressions to clarify the meaning of the verses. It is concluded that *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* is a significant example of local tafsir, demonstrating the vital role of Nusantara scholars in conveying Islamic teachings in a contextualized and grounded manner to their local communities.

Keywords: *Moh. Romli, N.H.S. Midjaja, Nurul Bajan, Nusantara Exegesis, Sundanese Language.*

ABSTRAK

Tafsir Al-Qur'an dalam bahasa daerah merupakan upaya agar ajaran Islam lebih mudah dipahami masyarakat setempat. Salah satu contohnya adalah *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* karya Moh. Romli dan N.H.S. Midjaja yang ditulis dalam bahasa Sunda. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji isi dan metode penafsiran dalam Nurul Bajan, serta menelusuri nilai-nilai Islam yang tercermin di dalamnya, khususnya dalam konteks budaya Sunda. Metode yang digunakan adalah kajian pustaka melalui analisis mendalam terhadap isi tafsir. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa tafsir ini menggunakan bahasa Sunda yang ringan dan mudah dimengerti. Penafsiran banyak menekankan akhlak, syariah, tasawuf, serta pesan moral yang relevan dengan kehidupan sehari-hari. Romli juga menggunakan peribahasa dan ungkapan khas Sunda untuk memperjelas makna ayat. Kesimpulannya, *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* adalah contoh penting tafsir lokal yang membuktikan peran besar ulama Nusantara dalam menyampaikan ajaran Islam yang kontekstual dan membumi.

Kata Kunci: *Bahasa Sunda, Moh. Romli, N.H.S. Midjaja, Nurul Bajan, Tafsir Nusantara.*

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INTRODUCTION

The Nusantara interpretation is a dynamic manifestation of Indonesian Muslims' efforts to contextualize the Qur'an within local cultures, including through regional languages like Sundanese (Rohmana, 2018). One significant work within this tradition is *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* by Moh. Romli and N.H.S. Midjaja. This tafsir was written in Sundanese and served as a means of Islamic da'wah (preaching) and education during the colonial era. However, to this day, *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* has rarely been subjected to academic study, particularly concerning its methodology, interpretive style, and the socio-cultural context surrounding it. Tafsir research in Indonesia tends to focus on national figures using Indonesian or Arabic, while tafsirs in regional languages haven't received substantial attention (Rohmana, 2013). This situation reveals a scientific gap in the study of local tafsir, which has the potential to enrich Islamic discourse in Indonesia. Therefore, an exploration of *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* is crucial. This will help revive the legacy of Sundanese tafsir, strengthen Nusantara tafsir studies, and acknowledge the vital role of regional languages in conveying and developing Islamic understanding.

Studies on *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* by Moh. Romli and H.N.S. Midjaja have garnered the attention of several researchers, though still limited in terms of approach and discussion focus (Nurmawati, et al., 2023), in their article titled "Vernacularization in Sundanese Tafsir: A Study of *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* by Muhammad Romli and H.N.S Midjaja," published in the Tajdid journal, employed a descriptive-analytical method with the vernacularization theory developed by Anthony H. Johns. This research identified local elements within Tafsir Nurul Bajan, particularly in the use of undak-usuk basa Sunda (Sundanese language levels) which reflects values of politeness and local customs. The findings indicate that *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* represents a process of vernacularization, where the Qur'an is translated and explained in accordance with the linguistic and cultural norms of the Sundanese community (Nurmawati et al., 2023).

Another study was conducted by Lilik Azkiyah Zilfi in 2024, through her thesis titled "Epistemology of *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* by Muhammad Romli and H.N.S Midjaja." This research was qualitative-descriptive, employing an epistemological theoretical approach to examine the aspects of validity and sources of knowledge within the tafsir. The findings indicate that *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* possesses a strong epistemic foundation, referencing classical Islamic sources, yet it's presented in a simplified manner to be easily understood by the general public. The researcher concluded that this tafsir demonstrates coherence with the principle of correspondence epistemology, especially in conveying the normative messages of the Qur'an (Zilfi, 2024).

Meanwhile, in 2024, Afiffah Syawalia Arifin, et al., in their article titled "The Concept of Infaq in the Perspective of *Tafsir Nurul Bajan*: A Case Study of QS. Al-Baqarah Verse 254" published in the Intelek Insan Cendekia journal, conducted a thematic analysis of the concept of infaq as interpreted in this work. Using a library research approach, this study aimed to uncover the interpretive method employed by Moh. Romli, as well as the connection between the understanding of the verses and the context of community life. The study concluded that *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* doesn't just explain the textual meaning of the verses; it also connects them to social and moral values that are applicable in daily life

(Arifin et al., 2024).

The three previous studies have indeed provided important initial insights into *Tafsir Nurul Bajan*, covering its use of the Sundanese language, its content, and its Islamic approach. However, these studies haven't comprehensively discussed how the historical background and intellectual thought of the interpreters influenced the tafsir's content. There's also been no in-depth research into the specific methodology used for interpreting the Qur'an, nor how the collaboration between two interpreters from different backgrounds could produce this work.

Yet, *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* was written by Moh. Romli, a pesantren scholar, and N.H.S. Midjaja, a bureaucrat who worked during the colonial period. Their collaboration is fascinating to study because it represents the convergence of two worlds: the pesantren (traditional Islamic boarding school) and the bureaucracy. This research aims to fill that gap, with the goal of understanding more deeply how this tafsir was compiled, what methods were used, and how the authors' backgrounds influenced their interpretation. In this way, this research not only complements previous studies but also offers a new perspective on understanding Qur'anic tafsir within the context of Sundanese culture and Nusantara.

In this research, the author focuses on and relies upon the integration of mutually supportive theory and data to comprehensively explain the study's focus. Thus, it's necessary to briefly discuss the exploration of tafsir, which originates from the word *al-faṣr*, meaning to open or reveal something hidden (Al-Qattan, 1973). Therefore, the term is understood as a form of explanation, revelation, and communication of the Qur'an's meanings in an intellectually comprehensible way. This is done by elaborating on meanings that are difficult to grasp or remain ambiguous, with the ultimate goal of fulfilling its primary function as a guide for humanity to achieve happiness in both this world and the hereafter (Abduh, 2007).

The linguistic diversity in Qur'anic interpretation indicates a process of localization or vernacularization of the holy book. This process is reflected in the emergence of various tafsirs in regional languages, such as Malay, Javanese, Batak, and Sundanese. This phenomenon has given rise to the term "tafsir pribumi", which refers to local interpretive works compiled by exegetes of Nusantara descent or those originating from indigenous communities (Qudisyah, 2023).

The region of West Java is one of the most productive areas in the Nusantara for producing various tafsir works. This region is the second largest in terms of ethnic diversity, with Sundanese as the primary language spoken by its people. One prominent Sundanese tafsir is *Tafsir Nurul Bajan*, authored by Moh. Romli and N.H.S. Midjaja. This work is not only an academic legacy but also a reflection of the vernacularization process of Islam in the land of Pasundan. *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* emerged during the era of Islamic modernism in West Java, a time when scholars sought to harmonize Islamic teachings with local cultural values without losing the essence of the religion (Arifin et al., 2024).

The theoretical foundation of this research refers to the ideas of Islah Gusmian, a key figure in Nusantara tafsir studies. According to him, Nusantara Tafsir is a term referring to Qur'anic interpretive works that originated, developed, and were practiced in the Nusantara region, specifically Southeast Asia, with Indonesia as its primary center. This tafsir not only presents explanations of the Qur'anic text but also demonstrates the dialectic between the Qur'an's message and the local socio-cultural context of Nusantara society (Gusmian, 2015).

Nusantara Tafsir emphasizes the importance of a contextual approach, meaning an interpretation that considers the social, cultural, historical conditions, and needs of the local community. This tafsir emerged from a dialogue between Qur'anic teachings and the realities of Nusantara society, resulting in a unique interpretation that is relevant to the daily lives of the local people (Hakam, 2023).

This research stems from the need for an in-depth exploration of *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* by Moh. Romli and N.H.S. Midjaja, a Sundanese tafsir that represents Nusantara tafsir with a cultural and local language approach. Therefore, the main question guiding this research is: what is the form of interpretive exploration in *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* as part of Indonesia's Islamic intellectual heritage, especially in the context of a regional language like Sundanese. The objective of this study is to comprehensively examine the content, methodology, and interpretive characteristics employed by both authors in conveying the Qur'an's messages to the Sundanese community. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the literature on local tafsir within Islamic studies in Indonesia. Practically, it aims to serve as a valuable reference for researchers, academics, and the general public interested in tafsir studies in regional languages and the preservation of Nusantara's Islamic intellectual heritage.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach through a library study, which is a research method relying on literature sources (library research) (Nasution, 2023). The qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to deeply understand the intellectual legacy of Sundanese tafsir, specifically *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* by Romli and N.H.S. Midjaja. It also seeks to explore Romli's interpretations of the Qur'an from the perspectives of shari'a (Islamic law), aqidah (creed), and akhlak (morality).

This research utilizes a hermeneutic approach to Nusantara tafsir studies, which allows the researcher to interpret Romli's interpretations more deeply and understand the social and cultural contexts that influenced his perspective in interpreting the Qur'an. The data sources for this study consist of primary data, namely the Qur'an Tafsir *Basa Sunda Nurul Bajan*, and secondary data, including journal articles, books, and other references relevant to the research topic. The data analysis technique employed is thematic analysis, which involves organizing the data, identifying key themes from the collected information, interpreting these themes within the framework of *Tafsir Sunda Nurul Bajan*, and presenting the analysis results in a structured and clear narrative (Ramli et al., 2023).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Brief Biography

Muhammad Romli was a prominent scholar hailing from Kadungora, Garut, born in 1889 during the Dutch East Indies colonial period. He passed away at the age of 92, around 1981, and was buried in Haurkuning Village, Hegarsari, Kadungora District, Garut Regency. During his lifetime, he was blessed with three sons and also raised a nephew. His father's name was H. Sulaiman. However, detailed historical records regarding Muhammad Romli's

family background remain limited and not extensively documented (Rohmana, 2014).

Romli began his education at a public school before continuing his religious studies at Pesantren Gunung Puyuh in Sukabumi, West Java. This pesantren was led by Kiai Abdurrakhim, the father of Kiai Ahmad Sanusi, at the time. Besides West Java, he also pursued religious knowledge in East and Central Java. He then furthered his religious education in the Holy Land, Mecca, for eleven years, which deepened his scholarly insights into Islamic studies.

In the academic sphere, particularly in his tafsir works, Romli showed a strong influence from modernist Islamic ideology. He was known as a reformist scholar with progressive religious views, firmly rooted in the idea of renewal. He was active in the reformist organization called MASC (Majelis A'maal Soewargi Cipasung). This served as a space for reformist scholars and figures like KRH M. Zakaria, KH Muhammad Anwar Sanusi, RH Soetawijaya, KH Abdul Qohar, and KH Fattah to gather and collaborate. Through this organization, they played a crucial role in spreading Islamic da'wah (preaching) and understanding through various methods. These included general deliberations, khutbah (sermons), tabligh (public lectures), religious studies, the establishment of formal educational institutions, and the dissemination of writings in Sundanese through print media such as *Tjahya Islam*, *Atikan Darajat*, and *Sipataoenan* (Maulina, 2020).

In his hometown of Haurkoneng, Kadungora, Garut, Muhammad Romli once established a pesantren named *Nurul Bajan*. However, after his passing, the pesantren ceased operations. Its building is now used for afternoon religious classes for children, while the mosque continues to function as a place of worship for the local community. In the publication process of *Tafsir Nurul Bajan*, Muhammad Romli did not work alone. He was accompanied by H.N.S. Midjaja, better known as Jaksa Neneng. This female figure was born on December 15, 1903, in Ciamis and is known as the founder of Perusahaan Bumiputera (Perboe), the publishing house that released the tafsir work.

Jaksa Neneng had a unique background. She was arrested by the Dutch colonial government during World War II for being perceived as too close to Japan. During her detention, she began to deepen her understanding of Islam and studied under Tuan A. Hassan, a significant figure from Persatuan Islam (Persis). It was also during this time that she studied the Qur'an through a Dutch translation by Sudewo. When Japan took over power in Indonesia, she was released from detention. After Indonesia gained independence, during the New Order era, Jaksa Neneng briefly resided in the Netherlands before returning to Indonesia and passing away in Bandung. Her role in assisting Muhammad Romli highlights her significant contribution to the development of modern Islamic da'wah (preaching) and literacy in Indonesia, particularly through publishing (Rohmana, 2014).

The close relationship between Muhammad Romli and Jaksa Neneng was most likely based on their shared views in the reformist Islamic ideology. Additionally, Jaksa Neneng's position as a printing entrepreneur at the time further strengthened their collaborative relationship. Her diligence in studying the Qur'an during her detention by the Dutch was also a significant factor that encouraged her to finance the publication of *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* in 1960. In this tafsir project, Romli maintained the primary role due to his strong Islamic scholarly authority. Meanwhile, Jaksa Neneng's involvement was more limited to the technical aspects of publication. Nevertheless, her participation in the tafsir work makes her

one of Indonesia's rare female figures to contribute to the field of tafsir, particularly in the context of Sundanese-language interpretations. After *Tafsir Nurul Bajan*, Muhammad Romli continued his scholarly endeavors by independently publishing his next Sundanese tafsir work, *Al-Kitabul Mubin*, in 1974 (Lathief, 2011).

Regarding *Tafsir Nurul Bajan*

Tafsir Nurul Bajan is a work of tafsir compiled in the post-independence era, specifically in the 1960s. This book was written by two modernist Islamic figures, Muhammad Romli and H.N.S Midjaja (Rohmana, 2015). The writing of *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* was driven by Muhammad Romli's personal desire, as explained in the preface of the work, to be easily understood by Indonesian speakers. It states:

"Spreading Islamic teachings, including teaching the Qur'an, is an important obligation, considering the Qur'an is the primary source and fundamental basis for Muslims. Through a correct understanding of the Qur'an's content and purpose, Muslims are expected to be able to lead their religious lives appropriately and in accordance with authentic teachings. In his tafsir work, Muhammad Romli, as a reformist Islamic figure, strived to instill a pure religious understanding in the Muslim community. He consistently urged people to shun practices deemed deviations from Islamic teachings, such as bid'ah (innovation in religion), takhayul (superstition), and other elements lacking basis in nash syar'i (Islamic legal texts)" (Romli, Midjaja, 1996).

Tafsir Nurul Bajan by Muhammad Romli was written using the Latin script in Sundanese and compiled into three volumes. Each volume represents a specific part of the Qur'an; however, the work does not cover the entire 30 juz. This tafsir only extends up to Surah Ali 'Imran, verse 91, thus not completing the entire Qur'an. The first volume begins with a cover displaying the title and author's name, followed by an introduction (mukaddimah), various additional explanations, and the tafsir content from Surah Al-Fatihah up to Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 141, totaling 366 pages. The second volume continues the tafsir from Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 142, to verse 243. Meanwhile, the third volume contains the tafsir from Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 253, up to Surah Ali 'Imran, verse 91. This systematic compilation demonstrates Romli's dedication to conveying the Qur'an's messages to the Sundanese community through a more familiar linguistic and cultural approach (Romli, Midjaja, 1966).

Tafsir Nurul Bajan was compiled using the old, unperfected spelling system and only covers up to Juz 3, specifically Surah Ali 'Imran verse 91, with a one-volume-per-juz pattern. In its compilation, Muhammad Romli utilized various tafsir sources, primarily those in Arabic, such as *al-Manar*, *Fathul Qadir*, *Al-Baidawi*, *Madarikut Tanzil*, *Lubabut Ta'wil*, *Al-Thabari*, and *Al-Maraghi*. Additionally, he referenced several English and Dutch sources. For Indonesian sources, there were only two tafsirs: *Tafsir Al-Qur'anul-Karim* by Al-Ustadz H.A. Halim Hasan, Zainal Arifin Abbas, and Abdurrohman Haitami, and *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* by Mahmud Yunus (Lathief, 2011).

Beyond works of tafsir, Romli also referred to various hadith and fiqh books as supplementary sources for his interpretations. These include *Sahih Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*,

Sunan Abu Dawud, Nailu Al-Autar, Bidayah Al-Mujtahid, Syarah Al-Qashththalani by Qashthalani, *Syarah Muslim, Tuhfat Al-Bari, and Taisiru Al-Wusul* (Romli, Midjaja, 1966).

1. Sources and Methods of Interpretation

To deeply understand Muhammad Romli's utilization of tafsir sources, I'll first outline how he integrated various references into his work. Given the breadth and depth of the explanations in this tafsir, I find it necessary to conduct a more focused and in-depth study of how these sources were used as a crucial part of *Nurul Bajan's* interpretive methodology, such as in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 45. In this verse, I found several sources that I explored: regarding the phrase "*wastainu bi al-shobri*," Muhammad Romli in *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* frequently quoted the opinions of classical scholars, one of whom was Ibn Jurayj. Additionally, he used authentic hadiths as a basis for explaining certain verses, such as in the exposition concerning the phrase "*as-shaumu nisfu al-shobri*." There, Romli cited the opinion of Imam Al-Qurtubi, combined it with an authentic hadith, and then continued with his own *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) in explaining the meaning of the verse. In the subsequent verse, the mufassir (exegete) included a hadith of Prophet Muhammad SAW quoted through Imam Ibn Jarir, followed by a quotation from another mufassir, and concluded with his own *ijtihad* (Romli, Midjaja, 1966).

Based on this interpretive pattern, I believe the method used is *tafsir bil ma'thur makhluṭ bi al-ra'y* (interpretation combining textual sources with personal opinion). This is evident from the balance between the use of textual proofs and the application of the mufassir's *ijtihad* in this tafsir. Although some previous studies suggested that *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* predominantly employed *ra'y* (personal opinion), I found that not all parts of the tafsir are based solely on *ra'y*; rather, it's a blend of authentic proofs and focused *ijtihad*.

In this interpretive process, Muhammad Romli applied several techniques: he drew upon the opinions of previous mufassirūn (exegetes), referenced the views of prominent imams in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and *tasawwuf* (Sufism), and then concluded with his personal *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) to provide a comprehensive and contextual understanding of the interpreted verse.

From a methodological standpoint, Muhammad Romli interpreted the Qur'an verse by verse in sequential order, beginning from Surah Al-Fatihah up to Surah An-Nas. His systematic approach starts with presenting the Qur'anic text, followed by a word-for-word translation into Sundanese, and then a Latin transliteration. After that, a comprehensive translation of the verse is provided, concluding with a general interpretation that encapsulates the global meaning of the verse.

However, in discussing certain verses, Muhammad Romli didn't stop at general interpretations. He deepened his discussions by referring to authentic hadiths and quoting the opinions of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah mufassirūn, both classical and modern. Romli also inserted additional explanations when he deemed it necessary to clarify the verse's meaning contextually and practically for his readers.

Based on the explanation, it can be concluded that *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* by Muhammad Romli was compiled using the tahlili method of tafsir, which is an interpretive method that expounds on the verses verse by verse according to the order of the mushaf. The writing of this tafsir is also systematically organized, starting from Surah Al-Fatihah up to Surah An-Nas, and uses a left-to-right reading direction. This in-depth, coherent, and contextual interpretive style strengthens the character of *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* as a work representing a scholarly approach within the tradition of regional-language tafsir, particularly Sundanese (Romli, Midjaja, 1966).

2. Pattern of Interpretation

After identifying the sources and methods used in the compilation of *Tafsir Nurul Bajan*, the next step is to identify the interpretive characteristics (corak) of the tafsir. This is important as it is one of the main objectives of this research to gain a deep understanding of the interpretive style employed by M.H.D. Romli in his work.

However, before drawing conclusions about the interpretive characteristics (corak) of *Tafsir Nurul Bajan*, it's important to first consider the aims and objectives behind its compilation as explained by the mufasssir himself. In the "Bubuka" or introduction on the first page of *Tafsir Nurul Bajan*, M.H.D. Romli explicitly states his reasons and the background for compiling this work.

According to Romli, the primary purpose of writing this tafsir is to provide understanding to Muslims, especially the Sundanese community, regarding the content of the Qur'an in a language they can directly comprehend: their mother tongue. He also expressed his concern about the scarcity of comprehensive tafsir works in Sundanese that align with a pure understanding of Islam, specifically returning to the Qur'an and Sunnah, and keeping the community away from unfounded practices like bid'ah (innovation in religion), khurafat (superstition), and takhyul (myth) (Romli, Midjaja, 1966).

Thus, it can be indicated that *Tafsir Nurul Bayan* has an adabi ijtima'i (socio-cultural) interpretive characteristic, with a strong reformist nuance. This is reflected in the spirit of Islamic renewal championed by the author, as well as the effort to convey the messages of the Qur'an in a language easily understood by the general public, while also guiding their understanding to align with principles of pure monotheism, free from elements of shirk (polytheism) and bid'ah (religious innovation) (Ihsany et al., 2023).

3. Systematics of Tafsir Writing

The systematics of this tafsir's writing follow a consistent pattern. First, the author includes the Qur'anic text. Second, each verse is then translated word-for-word using Sundanese. Third, the verse is also accompanied by Latin transliteration. After that, the author provides a complete translation of the entire verse in Sundanese, followed by a comprehensive and general tafsir explanation.

Nevertheless, in discussing certain verses, Muhammad Romli doesn't just provide a literal explanation of the meaning. He also strengthens his interpretation by referring to

authentic hadiths and the opinions of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah tafsir scholars, both classical and modern. This additional explanation shows that Romli aimed to provide a deep and contextual understanding, in line with the societal developments of that time (Afif, 2018).

Generally, Muhammad Romli's interpretations in *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* contain the main principles of each verse discussed, accompanied by a thematic exposition of specific issues found within the Qur'anic text. In explaining these verses, Romli occasionally refers to authentic (sahih) hadiths and the opinions of tafsir scholars from both classical and modern periods. Every issue raised is not only explained textually but also provided with an explanation of its urgency and relevance in societal life.

This indicates that the interpretation in *Nurul Bajan* is not merely literal, but also reflective and applicable. In fact, for a single verse, Romli can provide a quite lengthy tafsir explanation, averaging two to three pages. This style of interpretation reflects a deep and comprehensive approach, aiming to provide readers with a contextual understanding of the Qur'an's messages (Nurmawati et al., 2023).

The Thoughts of Romli in the Sundanese *Tafsir Nurul Bajan*

1. Romli's Thoughts in Tafsir from a Sharia Perspective

Numerous Sundanese translations and tafsirs have been widely disseminated in the form of commentary books, indicating the strong enthusiasm of the Sundanese community in embracing and adapting Islamic teachings. (Siti Novi Nafisah, 2022) The process of rendering the Qur'an into Sundanese serves as a crucial means to deepen spiritual understanding and pave the way for more profound enlightenment of the heart. (Rohmana, 2013). However, along with social and religious developments, the localization of the Qur'an has also become an arena for ideological competition among various groups.

As expressed by Ignaz Goldziher, every individual seeks their beliefs in holy scriptures and specifically finds in them what aligns with what they are looking for. (*kullumri'in yatlub 'aqa'idah fi hadha al-kitab al-muqaddas, wa kullumri'in yajid fih 'ala wajh al-khusus ma yatlubuh*) (Goldziher, 1955). *Tafsir Nurul Bajan*, authored by Romli, is closely associated with the reformist movement. He is considered to have been an active participant and part of this movement. This tafsir reflects a critical response to the socio-religious conditions of his society, which was dominated by traditional understandings. (Rohmana, 2013).

In explaining the ruling on a congregant (makmum) reciting Al-Fatihah during prayer, Romli tends to be neutral and moderate. This is evident from his detailed exposition of three opinions regarding the ruling on a congregant reciting Al-Fatihah during prayer. The first opinion states that congregants are forbidden from reciting Al-Fatihah during prayer and should merely remain silent in every rak'ah.

As the tafsir text in the book *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* reads:

"Golongan kahidji: ngalarang ma'mum ngaos fatihah (komo surat atawa ayat Qur'an nu sanesna), sanaos dina sholat-sholat sirrijjah (bangsa nu tara ditarikkeun aosanana), atawa dina roka'at-roka'at anu imamna henteu tarik aosanana, sapertos dina roka'at ka tilu sareng ka opat. Djadi numutkeun golongan kahidji,

ma'mun the kedah djempe bae ulah maos fatihah (komo surat) dina unggal-unggal roka'at. Anu pandanganana kieu the para 'Ulama Hanafijah'.

He explained the first opinion, which prohibits congregants from reciting Al-Fatihah during prayer, by referencing a hadith narrated by Imam Daruqutni, which states:

"An 'Abdillahibni saddadin: annanabija çaw. qola: man kána lahú imámun faqiróatul-Imami lahú qiróatun".

That hadith explains that all of the imam's recitation becomes the recitation of the congregant. This opinion is held by many Hanafiyyah scholars (Romli, Midjaja, 1966). The second opinion he included is that of Imam Malik, Ahmad, and Ishaq ibn Rahawaih, who recommend that congregants do not recite Al-Fatihah but instead listen to the imam's recitation in every rak'ah where it is recited aloud. However, if the imam's recitation cannot be heard due to distance or any other condition, then the congregant is obligated to recite Al-Fatihah. This aligns with the verse from Surah Al-A'raf, verse 204.

His opinion as stated in his tafsir reads:

"Golongan kedua, sapertos para Imam Malik, Ahmad, Ishaq ibn Roháwaih, njaurkeun: ma'mum hénteu kenging maos fatihah, naming kédah ngadangukeun bae kana aosan imamna, dina roka'at-roka'at anu imamna tarik aosanana. Nanging upami aosan imamna hénteu kadangu, margi tébih atawa kumaha bae, ma'mum the kédah maos fátihahna".

He also included a hadith narrated by Al-Khamsah (the five compilers of hadith: Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, An-Nasa'i, and Ibn Majah) except Al-Tirmidzi, stating that the imam is there to be followed. If he says takbir, the congregant must also say takbir, and when the imam recites, the congregant must remain silent and pay attention to his recitation (Romli, Midjaja, 1966).

The third opinion states that it is obligatory for the congregant to recite Al-Fatihah, even in rak'ahs where the imam recites aloud, and even if the imam's recitation can be heard. Romli's opinion on this third view in his tafsir is as follows:

"Golongan katilu ngawadjibkeun ma'mum maos fatihah, sanaos dina raka'at-raka'at anu ditarikkeun aosan imamna, saréng sanaos kadangu pisan oge aosanana".

This third group's opinion is based on a hadith narrated by Al-Jama'ah, which explains that the prayer of a person who does not recite Al-Fatihah (in every rak'ah of prayer) is not valid. This opinion is certainly well-known and widely held by the Indonesian community in applying the ruling on reciting Al-Fatihah in prayer.

2. Romli's Thoughts in Tafsir from Aqidah (Creed) Perspective

Romli appears to use a rationalistic approach in interpreting the Qur'an. This is evident from his effort to seek the literal and rational meaning of each verse, as well as to connect it with the social and cultural context of society (Arifin et al., 2024). Muhammad Romli's theological orientation, especially evident in his work *Tafsir Nurul Bajan*, is strongly influenced by the ideology of al-ruju' ila Al-Qur'an wa as-Sunnah. This means that Romli focused on returning to the Qur'an and Sunnah as the primary sources of Islamic teachings (Qorni et al., 2023).

Romli was also active in religious organizations such as Majelis Ahlus Sunnah Cilame (MASC) and Persatuan Islam (Persis), both of which championed Islamic reform based on these principles. Furthermore, his modernist approach and the use of vernacular language in his tafsir demonstrate an effort to make Islamic teachings more accessible to the wider community (Arifin et al., 2024). This is proven when Romli interpreted Surah Al-Fatihah, verse 4.

The wording of the interpretation:

“Dupi margi-margi kabagdjaan saréng hahalang nu dihidjab ti urang, anu hénteu tiasa diusahakeun ku djalmi, eta mah kédah dipasrahkeun kana pangersa Gusti Allah swt., ku njuhunkeun tulung, khusus ka andjeuna nyalira, dina ngahasilkeunana saréng ditebihkéunana tina balahina. Ku kituna, anu sok njaruhunkeun tulung ka kuburan-kuburan, nu dianggap aja karamatna, boh kanggo ngahasilkeun kabutuhna, boh kanggo ngagampilkeun nu sésahna atawa njagurkeun panjakitna, ngalumpuhkeun musuhna saréng lian-lianna, terang pisan kaluarna tina papagon gusti nu maha kawasa, njimpang tina agama nu disareatkeun ku gusti Allah swt”.

Here's the translation of the tafsir's meaning: "As for the paths to happiness and the hidden obstacles from us, which cannot be achieved by human effort, these must be surrendered to the will of Allah SWT, by seeking special help from Him alone, both in achieving them and in being kept safe from all dangers. Therefore, anyone who habitually seeks help from graves believed to possess karomah (supernatural grace or miracles), whether to fulfill their needs or to facilitate other matters, has clearly deviated from the rules of Almighty Allah, strayed from the revealed religion, gathered His enemies, and that person is committing shirk (polytheism), no different from the worship of idols, inanimate objects, or taghut (false deities), because they believe it can cause destruction." (Romli, Midjaja, 1966).

Regarding the phrase *"wa iyyāka nasta'in"* (And You alone we ask for help), Romli interprets it as a prohibition against seeking help from anyone other than Allah. In contrast, traditional Islam still adheres to what he views as archaic teachings, such as visiting graves (ziarah kubur), which Romli considers an act of shirk (polytheism) because it involves seeking help from the deceased (Arifin et al., 2024).

3. Romli's Thoughts in Tafsir from an Akhlaq (Ethics) and Tasawwuf (Sufism) Perspective

Romli stated he was inspired by Mohammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, who were prominent modern Islamic figures in Indonesia. This influence is clearly visible in *Tafsir Nurul Bajan*. Besides citing his personal opinions, Romli also utilized the interpretations of these two figures. For example, he employed the Bi al-Ra'yi method of interpretation, which is interpretation based on ijtihad (independent reasoning). This is evident in his interpretation of Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 25.

Its interpretation reads: *“runtuhan ajat-ajat atawa dawuhan-dawuhan gusti nu maha Agung kieu the kabiasaan andjeunna swt, nyaeta upami nérangkeun*

pérkawis nu kalapir saréng siksaanana, téras disusul ku kaajaan nu maru'min saréng gandjaranana, saparantos ngajakeun inḍar=panjingsieunan, kedah bac diṭeraskeun ku busro=pangbubungah. Eta eh kanggo ngemutan kaom-kaom nu airman, supados langkung-langkung taqwana ka andjeunna swt, ulah mokahaan, ulah ngalumajankeun dina urusan amal-amalan, lahiriah boh batiniahna, urang ulah mung ngemutkeun kadunjaan wungkul, naming oge kaajaan acherat supados ulah dipohokeun, sareng sawangsulna”.

His addition: “*njakitu deui iman sareng amal sae, ngahidji, henteu tiasa dipisahkeun. Tawisna djalmi iman, moal hénteu, kédah ngadjalankeun amal sae. Nu mawi dina qur'an salamina disébatkeun ‘amanu wa ‘amiluṭ-ṭolihah (nu iman djéung migawe amal hade) nu bakal tiasa ka sawarga teh”* (Romli, Midjaja, 1966).

Romli explained that every verse threatening punishment is always accompanied by the concept of reward for believers. The purpose of this is to make believers always remember Allah and increase the quality of their piety, not only focusing on worldly aspects but also considering afterlife aspects.

Romli also explained that humans consist of two elements: physical (jasmani) and spiritual (rohani). Both are interconnected and cannot be separated. Similarly, faith is always accompanied by righteous deeds, because a believing person cannot not perform righteous deeds. In the Qur'an, the phrase "amanu" (those who believe) is always paired with "amilu al-Shalihah" (and do righteous deeds), because, according to him, attaining paradise is not solely through faith, but must also be implemented in the form of righteous deeds (Romli, Midjaja, 1966).

This aligns with the opinion of Al-Tabari in his tafsir, who stated that righteous deeds without faith are worthless, and even good actions will yield nothing. Conversely, if an action is simple but accompanied by faith, it will be valuable (and receive reward) (Romli, Midjaja, 1966).

4. Strengths and Weaknesses of Tafsir Nurul Bajan

After an in-depth analysis, the author explored and found the strengths and weaknesses of this *Tafsir Nurul Bajan*. The first strength of this tafsir is its use of familiar and communicative Sundanese language. This tafsir is written in a refined and communicative Sundanese, making it easily understood by the general Sundanese community, including those who do not master Arabic or Indonesian (Mulyana, 2013). Secondly, its contextual and cultural approach. This tafsir often connects the meaning of verses with the context of Sundanese community life, making it feel more relatable (Rohmana, 2015). Thirdly, it possesses historical and cultural value. As one of the local tafsirs in Sundanese with a reformist understanding, it stands as an important legacy in the history of Islamic scholarship in Indonesia (LPMQ, 2007). Fourth, its narrative and educational writing style. It contains many explanations presented in the form of stories, parables, and moral

expositions, which are both educational and emotionally engaging for the reader (Saepudin, 2021).

Here are the weaknesses of *Tafsir Nurul Bajan*: First, it has limited scientific tafsir methodology. This tafsir leans more towards a traditional tahlili (analytical) approach and hasn't integrated modern scientific methods such as linguistics, sociology, or maqashidi (purposive) tafsir. Second, there's a lack of academic and classical tafsir references. This tafsir relies more on the author's personal understanding and rarely directly references authoritative tafsir books like *Tafsir al-Tabari*, *al-Qurtubi*, or *al-Razi* (Kodir, 2018). Third, limited distribution and digitalization. Access to this book is restricted because it has not been widely reprinted or digitized, making it difficult for a broader audience to access. (Rohmana, 2020).

5. Public Views and Criticisms of Tafsir Nurul Bajan

The Sundanese *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* by Muhammad Romli and H.N.S. Midjaja has received diverse responses from the public and academics, reflecting the dynamic between appreciation for its localized approach and criticism of its ideological content. On one hand, this tafsir is appreciated for using the old Sundanese orthography, making it easier for the Sundanese community to understand the teachings of the Qur'an. The use of traditional expressions and descriptions of Sundanese nature strengthens the reader's emotional connection to the sacred text. This demonstrates a profound effort at vernacularization, making this tafsir a reflection of local wisdom in understanding the Qur'an (Rohmana, 2014).

However, this tafsir also faces criticism for being heavily imbued with modernist Islamic ideology. The author, who had a background as a Persis activist, tended to interpret Qur'anic verses with a rational and contextual approach, and criticized religious practices deemed inconsistent with the principle of tauhid (monotheism). This is seen as an effort to spread modernist Islamic thought and critique local Islamic traditions perceived as rife with bid'ah (innovation in religion) and tahayul (superstition). Furthermore, this tafsir is also criticized for not being completed across all 30 juz, only reaching the third juz, Surah Ali 'Imran, verse 91. This is considered to reduce the tafsir's completeness and consistency as a religious reference (Rohmana, 2014).

Overall, *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* is a tafsir work that reflects an effort to integrate Islamic teachings with local Sundanese culture, but also demonstrates a strong ideological content, mirroring the dynamism between tradition and modernity within the context of Islam in Indonesia (Lestari & Anggraini, 2022).

6. Local Nuances of Tafsir Nurul Bajan

This tafsir was written using the old, unrefined Sundanese spelling. This shows the author's effort to bring the teachings of the Qur'an closer to the Sundanese community using a language they understood (Nurmawati et al., 2023). *Tafsir Nurul Bajan* incorporates elements of locality, including: Sundanese Language, the use of the local language as the primary medium for interpretation. Socio-Cultural Aspects: descriptions of Sundanese

nature and culture within its interpretations. Proverbs: The use of traditional Sundanese proverbs to elucidate the meaning of Qur'anic verses (Rozzaq, 2023)

In Arabic, there are no specific words or phrases that denote honor or dishonor in address. For example, the word "Hum", meaning the second-person plural pronoun "you all," is used indiscriminately whether addressing a Prophet, an Angel, or a disbeliever. However, this differs significantly in Sundanese. In Sundanese, "Hum" is translated as "*arandjeun*" when referring to Prophets and Angels, serving as a form of respect (refined Sundanese). Conversely, for devils and disbelievers, the word "*manehna*" is used, which is a common or coarse form of address. From this explanation, it can be concluded that Sundanese possesses a system of linguistic etiquette (*undak-usuk basa*) that reflects politeness and respect in its usage (Nurmawati et al., 2023).

Unlike the word "*manehna*," which derives from "*maneh*" (meaning the second-person pronoun "you" or "thou"), the word "*sia*" is often equated with "*maneh*" but is actually a third-person pronoun. In Sundanese, "*manehna*" falls under the category of rude or informal language, lacking respect, and is used to refer to Iblis (Satan) because he refused Allah SWT's command to prostrate to Prophet Adam. The verse illustrates Iblis's arrogant attitude, as he considered himself superior to Prophet Adam (Alfani & Mawaddah, 2023).

The natural environment of Sunda is a distinctive feature of Sundanese tafsir. Depictions of Sundanese nature not only describe the environmental atmosphere but also illustrate the local flora and fauna, helping readers to better grasp the message written in the tafsir (Lathief, 2011). In Surah Ali Imran, verse 15, Romli interprets the verse with a distinct Sundanese natural nuance, depicting that worldly life is temporary "*seperti hudjan numbuhkeunana pepelakan, nu njukakeun ka tukang-tukang tanina: tuluj maneh nendjo (njaksian) djadi koneng malah laju pisan, tuluj kaajaanana djadi antjur*" He likened the world to rain that makes plants grow, which are then shown to farmers. Eventually, these plants turn yellow and finally perish. This expression reflects the fertile natural conditions of Sunda, where rain causes plants, like rice, to grow green, then yellow, and eventually wither or decay over time. According to Romli, the verse conveys the message that in the afterlife, there will be recompense in the form of punishment, forgiveness, and pleasure from Allah SWT, while worldly life is merely temporary and not eternal (Romli, Midjaja, 1966).

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that Tafsir Nurul Bajan by Romli is a significant manifestation of the effort to contextualize Islamic teachings in the Sundanese region during the early 20th century. Through a blend of the tahlili method and an adabi ijtimai (socio-cultural) interpretive characteristic, this tafsir successfully localized the messages of the Qur'an by utilizing the richness of Sundanese language, idioms, and cultural approaches, making it easily accessible and relevant to its community. This work essentially affirms the vital role of the mother tongue and local wisdom in the transmission of religious knowledge and the formation of an Islamic identity deeply rooted in the Nusantara tradition, while also serving as authentic proof of the intellectual productivity of Sundanese scholars in responding to the needs of the ummah.

The implications of these findings underscore the importance of further study into the specific moral, social, and spiritual values within Tafsir Nurul Bajan, as well as an intertextual analysis with other sources that may have influenced Romli. Additionally, a comparative study with other regional-language tafsir works in the Nusantara archipelago could enrich our understanding of the dynamics of Qur'anic interpretation oriented towards local contexts. Preservation efforts through digitalization and continuous critical study are also essential to ensure the accessibility and relevance of this intellectual legacy for future generations and for the development of Nusantara Islamic studies.

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