

THE BIBLICAL INSERTION IN THE JAVANESE QURANIC EXEGESIS Textual and Contextual Analysis of *Tafsir Soerat Wal- 'Asri* by Siti Chayati, Surakarta

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Abstract: This study examines the insertion of Biblical sources as references in *Tafsir Soerat Wal-'Asri* by Siti Chayati, a Javanese Quranic exegete who interprets chapter 103 (al-Asr) of the Quran in Javanese using Javanese Script. The Chayati's work using some Biblical verses of Barnabas, Matthew, and John as its references, is unique and thought-provoking to understand the motives and its historical background. This study finds that the use of Bible verses in her work was aimed to strengthen her claims on the truth of Islamic teachings against the missionary activities of the Dutch in Java. At the beginning of the 20th century, they attempted to weaken the Islamic community by conducting the *Zending* movement and establishing Seminary Christian Schools in several regencies in Java. Therefore, debates on religious concepts had become a central issue to win the heart of the traditional Javanese society. The tensions between Christian missionaries and Muslim preachers in that era turned out to be significant factors influencing the insertion of Biblical references in the work of Chayati's Quranic exegesis.

Keywords: Quranic exegesis; Bible; Javanese, interpretation.

Introduction

Muslims believe that Quran is a source of principles and fundamental guidance of life. Its guidance and instructions should be understood comprehensively. It cannot just be read routinely without understanding its basic meanings and moral messages. However, the Qur'an contains verses with both clear (*muhkamat*) and unclear

meanings (*mutashābihā*). In this regard, further explanations of certain passages were definitely required to understand the meaning of revelation. On the other hand, exegetes have different methods, approaches and perspectives to understand the God's messages. Such efforts accordingly result in variously different products of interpretations. Therefore, interpreting Qur'an as an attempt to understand the messages of God has been widely considered as a never-ending work.¹

The Qur'ān, as the source of Islamic teachings and doctrines which is believed as absolutely right and compatible in any given time and space (*ṣālib li kulli ḡamān wa makān*) should be contextualized based on the contemporary social dynamics, development and changes.² Subsequently, the contextualization of the Qur'ān becomes highly necessary to make the works of interpretation always relevant. It should be applicable for being creatively and productively applied as solutions to various problems and challenges experienced by contemporary societies.³ Consequently, attempts to contextualize Quranic messages have successfully generated tremendous series and volumes of *tafsīr* (Quranic exegesis), which are incredibly rich with various perspectives, approaches, tendencies and characteristics. These treasures can be traced from various Islamic literatures produced by either medieval or contemporary Islamic scholars advancing their various styles, methods and approaches.⁴ The Quranic exegesis grew from time to time with the expansion of Islam when the religious scholars from different backgrounds of regions, cultures and nationalities came up. Contemporary scholars tried to propose perspectives and postulates of *tafsīr* by adopting contemporary theories in social sciences to produce the more religiously and socially good

¹ M. Nur Kholis Setiawan, *al-Qur'an Kitab Sastra Terbesar* (Yogyakarta: eLSAQ Press, 2005), p. 1.

² See Abdul Mustaqim, *Paradigma Tafsir Feminis, Membaca al-Quran dengan Optik Perempuan: Studi Pemikiran Rifat Hasab tentang Isu Gender dalam Islam* (Yogyakarta: Logung Pustaka, 2008), p. 32.

³ See: Izza Rohman, "Intra-Quranic Connections in Sunni and Shi'i Tafsirs: A Meeting Point or Another Area of Contestation?", *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 3, 1 (2013), p. 75.

⁴ M. Amin Abdullah, "Arah Baru Metode Penelitian Tafsir di Indonesia (a Glocary)," in Islah Gusman, *Khazanah Tafsir: Dari Hermeneutika Hingga Ideologi* (Jakarta: Teraju, 2003): pp. 17-18.

innovations, solutions, or understanding of Islam. The works of Quranic exegesis and commentaries (*sharh tafsir*) are not of the monopolies of the intellectual communities from particular regions. These intellectual treasures were not only written by Quranic exegetes from areas of ‘great tradition’—i.e., Middle Eastern countries—but also by those from areas of small tradition, i.e., Africa, Europe, and India, also Southeast Asia, including Indonesia.⁵ Nevertheless, the differences in distance and period of interaction among the regions become important variables in influencing Quranic exegesis.

Geographically, Indonesia is located far away from the Middle East, the birthplace of Islam and the place where the Qurʾān was revealed. This geographical factor has been widely regarded as a crucial issue in resisting and inhibiting the early process of Islamization in the country. On the other hand, Islam also came to Indonesia when it was no longer a superior religion either politically, economically, militarily or culturally. Islam entered to the country when it generally experienced its periods of decline.⁶ All these situations have been considered to influence the quality and advancement of Islamic intellectual dynamics. However, this historical fact in the Indonesian archipelago (Nusantara) shows that works of translation and exegesis of the Qurʾān are still thriving and produce very large local ideas of tafsir.⁷

For example, in the early 17th century, there was Hamzah Fansuri’s poetic *tafsir*. Also, there was *Kitāb Tarjuman al-Mustafid* written by Abd al-Ra’uf al-Sinkili from Aceh (1615-1693) which a tafsir written in Malay language using Arabic script. Furthermore, in the 18th century, there were *Tafsir al-Asrār* by Syaikh Habibuddin Arifuddin. In the 20th Century CE before and after independence, there was al-Azhar tafsir by Buya Hamka. There were also several *tafsir* limited to certain chapter of the Qurʾān, namely *Tafsir al-Muanwidhatayn* by Ahmad Yasin Asmuni, *Kitāb al-Tibyan fī Tafsir al-Āyāt al-Aḥkām* by Achmad Nasrullah, *Kitāb Jāmi‘ al-Bayān* by Muhammad bin Salman Solo to name a few.

⁵ The concept of ‘Great Tradition’ and ‘Little Tradition’ was deeply elaborated by Clifford Geertz in his book entitled *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

⁶ Fauzan Saleh, *Teologi Pembaharuan: Pergeseran Wacana Islam Sunny di Indonesia Abad XX* (Jakarta: Serambi, 2004), p. 19.

⁷ Abad Badruzaman, “Toward an Indonesian Current in Islamic Exegesis: An Attempt to Contextualize the Maqasid al-Quran”, *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 13, 2 (2019)

While Some of these local commentators of the Qur'ān wrote their *tafsir* in Arabic, others use local language such as Malay, Madura, Sundanese or Javanese languages. Some interpretations were written in Javanese language using *Hanacaraka* letters and *Pegon/Arab Melayu* scripts such as *Tafsir Serat Fatekah*, *Tafsir Javen*, including *Tafsir Al-Ibriz* written by Bisri Mustofa Rembang, *Tafsir al-Iklil wa Taj al-Muslimin* by Misbah Mustofa; *Kitab Raudatul 'rfan* by Ahmad Sanusi Sukabumi, *Kitab Faid al-Rahman* by Soleh Darat; *Tafsir al-Mahalli* by Mujab Mahalli Jogjakarta, *Tafsir Anom* by Penghulu Anom Surakarta who was the student of Soleh Darat, and others. These incredible local Islamic intellectual treasures have indicated how the diverse socio-historical backgrounds among the Indonesian Muslim scholars (*mufasssir*) have made the works of *tafsir* more unique and special.

So far, the study of the Javanese Quranic exegesis is classified into three major parts. *First*, a study of the methodology of Indonesian Quranic interpretation.⁸ In Indonesia, the study of Quranic interpretation has different methodological dynamics in each period. *Second*, the existing studies of Quranic commentary/interpretation tend to review and introduce the characters of previous studies.⁹ Each period has famous exegetes. Then the study of their interpretation will be a reference for comparison and context analysis. *Third*, a study that reviews specifically about Javanese exegetes.¹⁰ From the existing

⁸ Ahmad Atabik, "Perkembangan Tafsir Modern di Indonesia," *Hermeneutik* 8, 2 (2014): p. 305–24; Taufikur Rohman, "Kajian Tafsir di Indonesia," *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadis* 2, 1 (2015): pp. 1–26; Muhammad Iqbal and Ja'far, "Contemporary Development of Qur'anic Exegesis in Indonesia and Iran," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 3, 1 (2019), p. 83; Rohimin, "Tafsir Aliran Ideologis di Indonesia: Studi Pendahuluan Tafsir Aliran Ideologi Sunni dalam Tafsir Kementerian Agama," *Madania: Jurnal Kajian Keislaman* (2016).

⁹ Rithon Igisani, "Kajian Tafsir Mufasssir di Indonesia," *Potret Pemikiran* 22, 1 (2018): pp. 11–31; Mohd. Zikri Samngani and Arief Salleh Rosman, "Perbandingan Metodologi Penafsiran Tafsir al-Azhar dan Fi Zilal al-Quran dalam Surah al-Ra'du," (2008); Zulkifli Mohd Yusoff, "Tafsir al-Mawdu'i: Kajian Pensejarahan," *al-Bayan: Journal of al-Quran and al-Hadith* 1 (2003): pp. 27–41; Ahmad Baidowi, "Pegon Script Phenomena in the Tradition of Pesantren's Qur'anic Commentaries Writing," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 21, 2 (2020): pp. 469–90.

¹⁰ Suci Wulandari, "Gender dalam Tafsir Jawa (Studi Atas Tafsir al-Huda Karya Bakri Syahid)," *Qof: Jurnal Studi al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 2, 1 (2018): pp. 76–93; Supriyanto, "al-Qur'an dalam Ruang Keagamaan Islam Jawa: Respons Pemikiran Keagamaan Misbah Mustafa dalam Tafsir al-Iklil Fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil," *Jurnal Theogogia* 28, 1 (2017): pp. 29–54; Abdul Mustaqim, "The Epistemology of Javanese Qur'anic Exegesis: A Study of

studies, the study of Quranic commentary works in Javanese language and script using references to scriptures of other religions as a reference is a study that has been out of the researchers' attentions. Also, this study is remarkable for it shows the attachment of Islam to the local language culture.

Studies on the insertion of Bible references into the Quranic exegesis have been carried out by several researchers. Ahmadi Fathurrohman Dardiri, in his thesis research that examines the thinking of Mustansir Mir, found that the framework for quoting the Bible in the Quranic exegesis, both classical and modern ones, is quite accommodating and appreciative, for instance, in terms of the teachings of Ibrahim, the story of the Prophets, and concepts in Islam.¹¹ Whereas in her research on cross-reference between the Bible and the Qur'an, Nur Asih Rohmawati elaborated Abdullah Yusuf Ali's views and strategy in exploring and quoting the Bible as one of the sources of his exegesis. It uses the cross-reference method, as introduced by Muslim reformists, to explore biblical quotations in understanding the Qur'an. By such method, Rahmawati describes and elaborates on the quotations made by Abdullah Yusuf Ali in his book *The Holy Qur'an*.¹² Another similar work was written by Siti Asiah that attempts to find the background and method of biblical quotation within the Quranic commentary by the Muslim reformists; Edip Yuksel, Layth al Shaiban and Marta Schulte Nafeh. This study focuses on chapter 2 (al-Baqarah) and uses inter-textuality to analyse.¹³

However, the discussion and research above are studies on western scholarship in the Qur'anic exegesis born from the academically established countries. Studies on cross reference of the bible in the Quranic exegesis born from the context of developing countries that

Ṣāliḥ Darat's *Fayḍ al-Raḥmān*," *al-Jamī'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 55, 2 (2017): pp. 357–90; Jajang A. Rohmana, "Kajian al-Quran di Tatar Sunda Sebuah Penelusuran Awal," *Subuf: Jurnal Pengkajian al-Qur'an dan Budaya* 6, 2 (2015): p. 197–224.

¹¹ Ahmadi Fathurrohman Dardiri, "Bibel Sebagai Sumber Tafsir al-Qur'an (Studi Pemikiran Mustansir Mir dalam Understanding The Islamic Scripture: A Study of Selected Passages from The Qur'an)" (UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2015).

¹² Nur Anis Rohmawati, "Cross-Reference terhadap Bibel dalam The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary Karya Abdullah Yusuf Ali," *Nun: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Tafsir di Nusantara* 7, 2 (2021): pp. 329–48.

¹³ Siti Asiah, "Bibel Sebagai Sumber Tafsir dalam Quran, a Reformist Translation (Studi Inter-Tekstualitas terhadap QS. al-Baqarah)" (UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2017).

experienced colonization such as Indonesia need to be studied as well to see a different context. In this study, Muslim local exegesis such as Chayati's work is as important as those to be raised in academic studies. Furthermore, it aims to fill the gap of previous studies that do not show the tradition of exegesis using the local language. The exegesis of the Qur'ān in the local language is still fresh and considerably rare to find. Likewise, this study would like to show that in the tradition of exegesis, the use of other scriptures (Bible) as the primary reference is still rarely discussed. Among the distinctive works of local Quranic exegesis is *Tafsir Soerat Wal-'Asri* by Siti Chayati, a female muslim exegete from Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia. Suparmini subsequently popularized her exegesis through the Warasoesila publisher based in Solo, Central Java in 1924. The *tafsir* was authored in Javanese script and languages and is now stored in the Radya Pustaka Museum, Surakarta with the code of Taf 297.122. The characteristics of this *tafsir* also indicate the very intense works of Quranic exegesis advanced by a local scholar under the Islamic kingdom of Kasunanan Surakarta's administration.

Tafsir Soerat Wal-'Asri is unique due to several reasons. Firstly, it was authored by a female exegete. It is quite unusual especially in the context of Java in the early 1900s. Second, it is exceptional for referring to the Biblical verses to strengthen the arguments about the truth of Islam. The biblical references wherein have implied the author's fairly intense academic connection with the Christianity which the colonial government intensively introduced through the establishment of Seminary Christian schools in the land of Java.

In the context of Surakarta society, specifically in the third decade of the twentieth century AD, the biblical references in this Javanese language and Javanese Quranic exegesis are a very distinctive feature. The method and approach are barely discovered in the traditions of *tafsir* that developed at that time. Moreover, the reference to the Bible is not so much found in the later exegetical works. This phenomenon subsequently generates further fundamental questions: Why did *Tafsir Soerat Wal-'Asri* written by Siti Chayati use the Biblical verses as part of its references? How did socio-historical backgrounds influence the insertion of biblical references in the Chayati's *tafsir*?

Siti Chayati, Suparmini and the *Tafsir Soerat Wal-‘Asri*

Tafsir Soerat Wal-‘Asri is a booklet in relatively thin piece of Quranic exegesis with 16 pages only.¹⁴ It was published by the Warasoesila publisher, a Solo-based publishing company in 1924.¹⁵ Different from previous Quranic exegesis in Indonesia using the Arabic script,¹⁶ it was well-written in the Javanese script and language. Even though it is thin, it contains quite rich works of interpretation that translated the three verses of the chapter *wal-‘Asri* and provided a well-developed and deeper explanation related to it. As mentioned earlier, the exegesis combines information sourced from both Quranic and Biblical verses. The author seems to create a more sophisticated and convincing explanation to strengthen the messages enclosed within her work.

In terms of the author, there is no single document providing satisfactory clarification and detailed explanation about who Siti Chayati exactly is and Suparmini, who introduced and popularized this incredible work of interpretation. The book’s cover explains that Siti Chayati originated from Tulungagung, East Java, and did a lot of activities in Surakarta (See Figure 1). At the same time, Suparmini was an activist of Aisiyah, the wing of the Muhammadiyah organization focusing on the issues of women participation and advocacy. Suparmini was also known as a journalist of Warasoesila, a Solo-based-newspaper company that was also in charge of the business of publication. Although Suparmini is not the author of the *tafsir*, she played a considerably significant role enhancing the quality of this manuscript. She added many notes and commented on fortifying this Quranic exegesis to make its explanations more contextual and relevant.

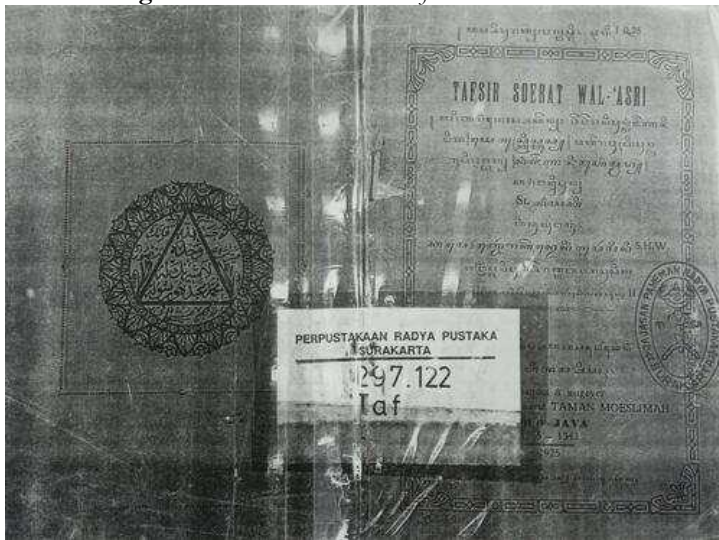
¹⁴ In his work explaining eight books of Qur’anic exegesis and commentaries in Java and Sunda, Ervan Nurtawwab does not explain further information about the work of Chayati. See Ervan Nurtawwab, “The Tradition of Writing Qur’anic Commentaries in Java and Sunda,” *Subufi: Jurnal Pengkajian al-Qur’an dan Budaya* 2, 2 (2009), p. 172.

¹⁵ Imam Samroni, *Daerah Istimewa Surakarta: Wacana Pembentukan Propinsi Daerah Istimewa Surakarta Ditinjau dari Perspektif Historis, Sosiologis, Filosofis dan Yuridis* (Yogyakarta: Pura Pustaka, 2010), p. 67.

¹⁶ Arabic script was introduced since its early phases of Islamization in Indonesia. See: Theodoor Gautier Thomas Pigeaud, *Literature of Java: Catalogue Raisonné of Javanese Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Leiden and Other Public Collections in the Netherlands* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967): pp. 25–27.

Seeing how such exegesis refers to the Bible, it seems reasonable to say that Siti Chayati and Suparmini were the ones who were capable of reading and understanding the Christianity literature. These two Javanese women also seem to have a critical perspective and high sensitivity to the social problems occurring in the surrounding environment. The tradition of Islamic thought in Surakarta at the beginning of the 20th century was also marked by the development of the tradition of Quranic exegesis. This phenomenon had not yet appeared massively in earlier eras until the late nineteenth century AD. Van Den Berg also acknowledged that *tafsir* had not been considered a very important subject in the curriculum of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) located in Surakarta.¹⁷

Figure 1. Book's Cover of *Tafsir Soerat Wal 'Asri*



However, the situation changed when the movement of 'Islamic modernism' emphasizing on the attempts to refer back to Qur'an and Sunnah (*al-ruju' ilā al-Qur'an wa al-Sunnah*) became popular. The changing atmosphere among Islamic societies gradually brought severe impact on the public awareness in the importance of the works of Qur'anic exegesis. This situation subsequently stimulated many traditionalists Islamic scholars who felt obliged to seriously begin

¹⁷ Martin van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, dan Tarekat: Tradisi-Tradisi Islam di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 1995), p. 159.

paying more attention to *tafsīr* works. In short, the wind of changes pervaded by the Islamic modernism movement seemed to influence the direction of the Quranic exegetical tradition in Surakarta at the time. This sociological background might be seen as the pivotal factor encouraging the woman Islamic activist Siti Chayati to write her perspectives on the Quranic exegesis.

Biblical References in *Tafsir Soerat Wa al-'Asri*

To start this discussion, it is necessary to know that there is nothing wrong to connect the Bible and the Qur'ān, and that both have been in connection since centuries. Wilt¹⁸ asserts that the Bible as an academic reference can be connected with the realms of: (1) translation studies, (2) communication theory, (3) linguistics, (4) cultural studies, (5) biblical studies and literary studies; (6) rhetoric. In line with that, its existence can help interpret the messages of the Qur'an. Kaltner and Mirza¹⁹ say that, apart from being a source of Christian teachings, the Bible is used by Muslims as a source of Quranic exegesis. Since the Prophet's time, not a few of the companions used *isrā'iliyyāt* stories to interpret the Qur'ān, especially regarding the verses about the history of the previous people. The use of the Bible as a source of exegesis is not only found in classical commentary books, such as *Tafsir Ibn Kasir*, *Tafsir al-Bagawi*, *Tafsir al-Qurtubi* but also in modern commentary books.²⁰ There are several factors for this phenomenon; *first* is the similarity between the Qur'ān, the Torah, and the Bible, especially concerning stories of past Prophets and the previous people. *Second*, the method used by the Qur'ān in telling the story is global and concise, while the Torah and the Bible are detailed.²¹

Remarkably, Chayati referred to three Bibles in her work; the Gospel of Barnabas, the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of John. Of the many references used in the *Tafsir Soerat Wal-'Asri*, which is among the shortest chapters in the Qur'ān, the Biblical references were more frequently used rather than other sources. In interpreting this

¹⁸ Timothy Wilt, *Bible Translation* (England: Routledge, 2014).

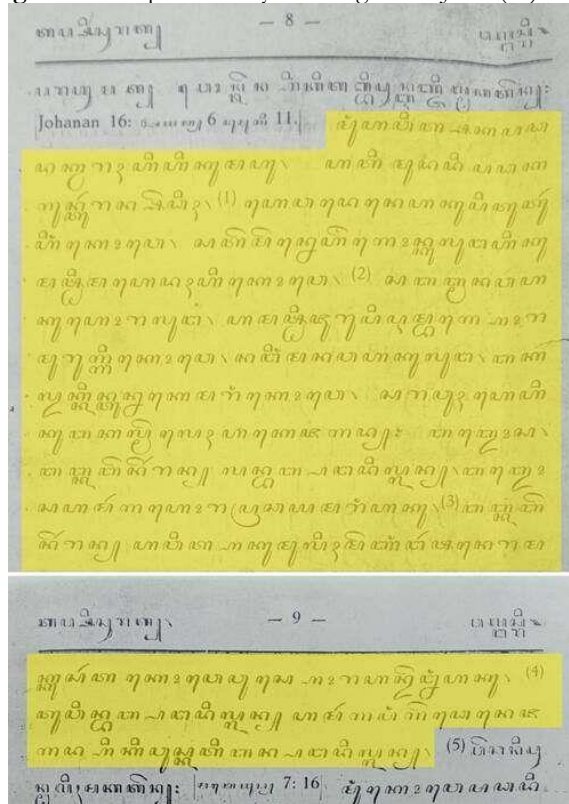
¹⁹ John Kaltner and Younus Y. Mirza, *The Bible and the Qur'an* (Bloomsbury: T&T Clark, 2017).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

chapter 103 of the Qur'ān, Chayati attempted to build a nexus between this chapter with the understanding of the day of resurrection. Although the chapter does not even mention the word *al-qiyāmah*, *yawm al-hisab*, *yawm al-dīn*, *yawm al-ba'th* or any other terms with similar meaning, Chayati associated it with the day of the destruction of the universe or the day of punishment. Chayati tried to use the word of *kbusr* (loss) as the entry point which has a close meaning or connotation with the day of resurrection. Many Quranic commentators have widely used the word of *kbusr* (loss) to indicate the situation of the end of the world.

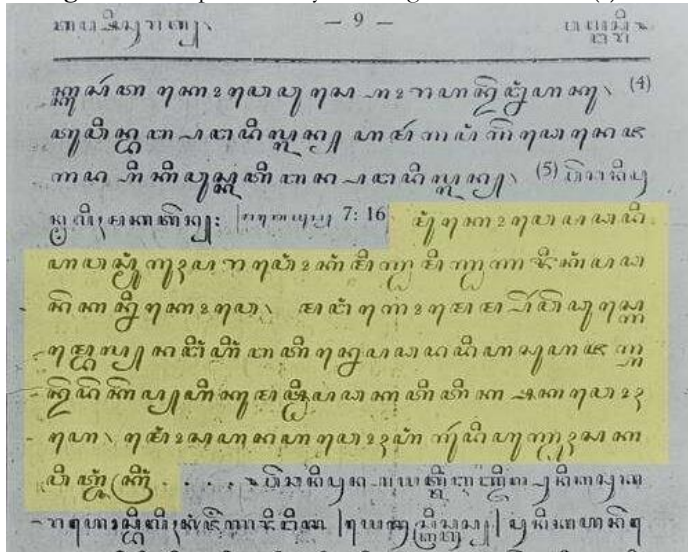
Figure 2. Interpretation by referring to the John (16): 6-11



The Islamic doctrine teaches that humankind will know about their fates when the universe ends in the hereafter. Therefore, it is understandable why Chayati associated it with this chapter.

Furthermore, Chayati explained that if a person does not want to lose or regret in the Day of Judgment, they must strengthen their faith. From this point of view, Chayati subsequently elaborated on each of the six fundamental beliefs (faiths) in Islam, which are the belief in God, angels, prophets, holy books, day of judgement, and destiny. In explaining these six pillars, Chayati elaborates the belief in God and prophets in the biggest portion.²²

Figure 3. Interpretation by referring to the Matthew (7): 16.



Thus, Chayati explained that the believers should believe that the prophets were equipped with the holy books as a guide for the followers to get happiness in the world and hereafter. Chayati also stated that the work of the prophets will always be a guide and example in carrying out the perfection of commendable character. The prophets used to call people to worshipping God and show the right and wrong, what is righteous and evil. The great characteristics of the prophets are: *sidq*, *amānah*, *tablīgh* and *faṭānah* which means: honesty, trustworthy, conveying all the words of God, and intelligence. Chayati then explained that the Prophet Muhammad had indeed been predicted by the Prophet Jesus (Jesus Christ) as the comforter of the

²² Siti Chayati, *Tafsir Soerat Wal-'Asri* (Surakarta: Warasoesila, 1924), p. 6.

universe or the negotiator of humanity by referring to the John (16): 6-11, which can be seen on Figure 2.²³

The Gospel of John was not the only Bible Chayati referred to. She also referred to the Gospel of Matthew, the earliest written Gospel among the four Gospels in the New Testament. Chayati then described further about the arrival of Prophet Muhammad after the absence of Jesus by referring to the Matthew (7): 16, which can be seen on Figure 3.²⁴

Based on these Bible verses, Chayati highlighted that the Prophet Jesus (Jesus Christ) had witnessed the coming of a prophet named Prophet Muhammad who would be the last Prophet sent by God. In this regard, Chayati explained on Figure 4.²⁵

²³ “It is only because I teach that your hearts are sad (1) As for me to give you advice, in fact my departure will be useful for you (2) because if I don’t go, the negotiators will not come to you, but if I go, I will leave it to you, his presence will amaze the world. A matter of sin, a matter of truth and trial. The question of sin for not believing in me (3) The question of truth because I returned to my father and you no longer see me (4) also about the trial because the official of this body was in court”. The original version says: “*Mung awit saka padha dak-warai iku mau, atimu dadi padha kagunturan sedih 1) ewudene aku, pitutur ing kowe, sak temene anggonku lunga iku mesti maedahi kowe. 2) sebab menawa aku ora lunga, amesti juru pirembag ora murugi kowe, nanging menawa aku lunga bakal tak-kentunake marang kowe, sak rawuhe iku bakal melehake jagad. Bab dosa, bab kebeneran lan pengadilan. Bab dosa mergo ora percaya marang aku. 3) Bab kebeneran, awit aku mulih menyang ngarsane ramaku sarta kowe wus ora andeleng aku. 4) Tuwin bab pengadilan amarga penggede’ne jagad iki wus katiban pengadilan*”. Ibid., pp. 8–9.

²⁴ “You are overseen by people pretending as prophets who come to you, dressed up as goats, but their hearts are like hunted dogs, which must be seen from the fruit of the *Cangkkring* tree]. The original version says: *Mung kowe padha diawasi mungguh para wong kang mindha-minda Nabi kang padha nekani kowe, manganggo memper wedhus gembel, nanging bathine padha asu ajag, andedekep iku mesthi padha katitik saka who’e mongso ana awuh anggur dirunduk saka wit Cangkkring*”. Ibid., p. 9.

²⁵ “Forecast of the Gospel verse implies that the Prophet Jesus (Jesus Christ) testified that after his death there would be another prophet of Allah’s last messenger, i.e., our role model of Prophet Muhammad who can be seen from good and smooth results. This is truth until now that the results of our role model of the Prophet Muhammad were truly excellent. Until all corners of the universe wherever his followers get good luck”. The original version says: *Wecanipun ayating Injil punika suka raos bilih kanjeng Nabi Ngisa (Jesus Kristus) punika anekseni bilih saktilaring sariranipun badhe wonten malih Nabi utusaning Pangeran ingkang mungkesi, sariranipun inggih punika, papanutan kitba kanjeng Nabi Muhammad SAW ingkabi saged katitik saking sabe sarta mulusing wobipun. Bab punika pancen uga dumugi samange bilih wobipun papanutan kita kanjeng Nabi Muhammad punika sanyata sabe, hingga saklumaning jagad punika wara din pundi-pundi mesti katekan para umat kebekan para umat ingkang dados panderekipun*. Ibid., pp. 9–10.

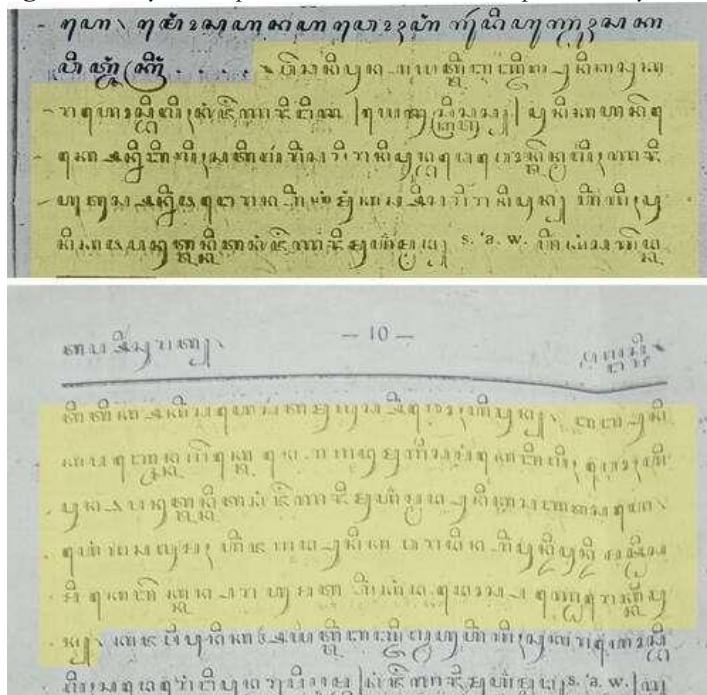
Chayati clarified that the presence of Prophet Muḥammad as the last Prophet who propagated the perfect religious doctrines had been prophesied by Isa or Jesus.²⁶ Likewise, Chayati elucidated that Jesus' departure was precisely to provide sufficient space for the presence of the Prophet Muhammad. If Jesus did not go away, the Prophet Muhammad would not come. In addition, Chayati quoted the Gospel of Matthew which expounded that in the period between the departure of the Prophet Jesus and the coming of the Prophet Muhammad, a false prophet named Paul would come to destroy the teachings of the Prophet Jesus. In more detail, Chayati asserted on Figure 5.²⁷

Chayati portrayed Paul, the false Prophet, as a person who is clothed in holy clothes but his heart is full of lies. The Gospel of Barnabas has also predicted Paul's lies and the presence of the Prophet Muhammad. Chayati regretted that the Gospel of Barnabas, an authentic gospel, was not considered a sacred guide for Christians. Chayati then continues her explanation that human beings should be careful in responding to God's warning not to accept the consequences

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

²⁷ "In addition, the Gospel verse also states that before the negotiator (the Prophet Muhammad) comes, there will be people disguised as prophets and dressed as trash goats. But the people who disguised themselves in their hearts like hunted dogs are barking. Thus, it appears from the final results. It is very real—namely the disguise of Paul or the apostle who claimed to be a prophet. Paul precisely damaged or changed the Sharia (teachings) of the Prophet Jesus. Whereas Paul's iniquity when disguising or staying in our apostolic role, the Prophet Muhammad SAW became so clear when reading the prophecy of Jesus in the Gospel of Barnabas. It is truly disappointing that the Gospel of Barnabas, which contains clear prediction of the coming of Prophet Muhammad, is not considered sacred or even made a reference for Christians. Surprisingly, people do not believe in the prophecy and teachings of the gospel of John, Matthew, and Barnabas". The original version says: "*Kejawi punika, ayating Injil wau, inggih suka raos bilih sakderengipun juru pirembag (Kanjeng Nabi Muhammad SAW) nika rawuh, badhe wonten para tetiyang ingkang sami mindha-mindha nabi, sarwa mangangge memper mendho gembel, nanging sejatosipun ingkang sami mindha-mindha wau ing salebeting manahipun, kadi dewe angganing segawon ajag, Andedekep mekaten nika dining katitik saking wobipun. Bab punika inggih nyata, inggih punika pamindha-mindhani Paulus ingkang ngakeni nabi. Paulus inggih punika ingkang malah ngrisak utawi ngenawi sarengatipun Kanjeng Nabi Ngisa. Wondene durbakanipun Paulus anggenipun amimindha Nabi, punapa dene malih teteping karasulanipun panutan kitha Kanjeng Nabi Muhammad SAW punika soyo terang malih menawi mirid wecalipun Kanjeng Nabi Ngisa ing Injil Barnabas ingkang wonten wecanipun ingkang wenteh-wenteh terangipun punika malah mboten dipun anggep suci utawi dipun angge dening tetiyang Kristen. Lah punika ingkang nggumunaken sanget baya kados punapa benjing ing dinten wewales tetiyang ingkang sami mboten pitados datheng wecahipun Injil Johanes, Matthius, and Barnabas)*". Ibid., pp. 10-11.

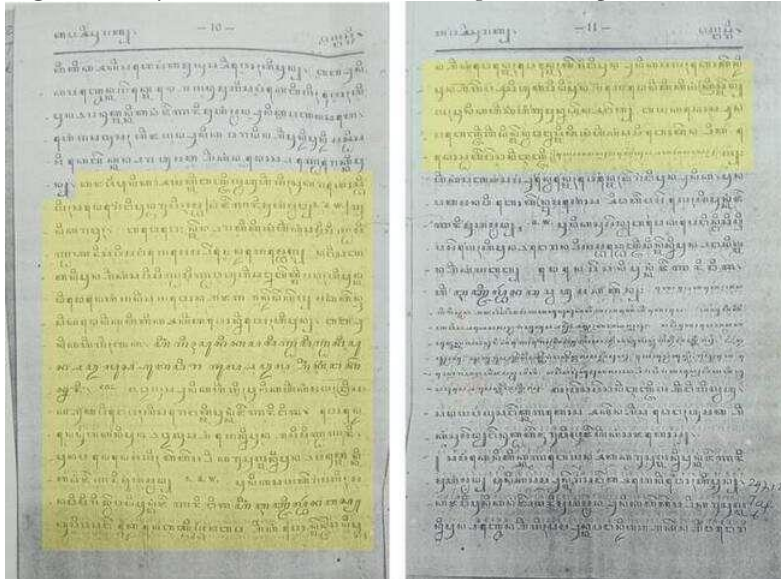
Figure 4. Chayati's Explanation about the last Prophet sent by God



The presence of the Prophet Muhammad will not occur at the time of Jesus' friends, but at a time far after, namely after the destruction of the gospel. The teachings of the Gospel about the presence of the Prophet Muhammad must be believed by the people who want to follow the true guidance. Now this view of the prophecy and the Prophet Muhammad has been so good. In addition, by quoting verses from the Qur'an Chayati further explains that Allah has also explained the prophetic and apostolic persistence of the Prophet Muhammad by taking an oath in the Qur'an that Muhammad was one of the

messengers of Allah (the Qur'ān Sūrah Yāsin: 1-2).²⁸ Subsequently, Chayati emphasizes that there is no reason for Christians for refusing and denying Islamic teachings. By accepting Islamic doctrines, Chayati believes as pointed out in the Qur'ān chapter of *al-'Aṣr* that in the Day of Judgment, the Christians will not fall into the category of the losers.

Figure 5. Chayati's asserted about the coming of the Prophet Muhammad



The final appeal that Chayati calls for in ending the apostolic discourse of the Prophet Muhammad was addressed to the Christians. She explicitly states that if the information of Prophet Muhammad's coming as the last Prophet has been so clear in the Christian literature as the Gospels of John, Matthew and Barnabas, there would be no longer reason to reject the teachings of Islam. Therefore, Chayati calls for Christians to discard this beliefs that have deviated and to embrace Islam, so they will not regret in the future (hereafter).²⁹

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 11–12.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

The Dynamics of Power Relations and Ethno-Religious Tensions: Socio-Historical Background of the *Tafsir Soerat Wal-'Asri*

These Biblical references in the work of Qur'anic exegesis are certainly interesting to observe for two major reasons. *First*, the Biblical references are undoubtedly intended to strengthen or provide a reinforcing argument in terms of the purpose. The Gospels of John, Matthew and Barnabas as referenced texts (hypo gram texts) in this case are positioned as a model and amplifier. Several verses in the three Bibles had been used to corroborate the apostolic argument of Prophet Muhammad as the last Prophet. *Second*, in terms of interpretive context it unquestionably becomes more thought-provoking. The commentary or exegetical work was not written in a vacuous culture without a particular socio-historical setting. Indeed, some socio-historical factors became its background and determined how the approach of Chayati's exegesis emerged within Surakarta's society. The red line connecting the message in this Quranic exegesis with its socio-historical realities seems clear. Chayati's appeal and persuasion to Christians, not to other believers, to believe in the teachings of Islam can depict how was the social-religious setting at the time of the writing of *Tafsir Soerat Wal-'Asri*. Under the Dutch colonial administration, the local Javanese public sphere was significantly influenced by the colonial policies who allow groups of Christian mission to spread Christianity in Java. This situation stimulated severe tension between Islam and Christian followers in Surakarta, and the surrounding environment that leads to disharmony within the society.

Indeed, Islam and Christianity were certainly not the only two religions that existed or were embraced by the settled community in Surakarta. There were also Hindus and Buddhists in Surakarta. But, there was no significant clash and friction between Muslims and Hindus, and Buddhists. Instead, the clash was between Muslims and Christians in the Swapraja region. The clash and tension between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia, as written by Michael Feener, have begun since sixteenth century due to the movement of the European missionaries in the archipelago. Yet, Christian missionaries made very few converts among the Javanese Muslims because of the strong sense of cohesion produced by the commitment to Javanese

norms.³⁰ The situation started to change in 1876 when the acculturated Indo-European and native 'Christians attempted to invite new followers to a faith previously seen as a 'foreign' religion. It resulted in local Christian communities' establishment and subsequent growth within a predominantly Muslim society.³¹ In addition, the colonial government also supported the Christian missionaries with funds, salaries, and other educational facilities.³²

Since then, the tension among the two religion followers escalated in some parts of Java. The narration of nationalism and anti-colonialism also strengthened the tension. Muslim activists tried to use the narrations of Islam and nationalism to forge public discourse for fighting the values spread by the colonial government. On the other hand, it was believed that the colonial administration had intentionally intensified their attempts to establish the strong foundation of Christianity within the Javanese society as a strategy to gradually weaken the anti-colonial Islamic social movements. At the same time, as the Kasunanan Surakarta was identified as one of the strongest basis of Islamic center, it was pivotal for the colonial administration to tame it by using various attempts and strategies. The attempts were implemented by intensifying the 'Zending' activity, generally known as the Christianization of Javanese society. The 'Zending' gradually became a big issue among Muslim activists, especially in Surakarta. In fact, not only Surakarta, other autonomous regions such as Yogyakarta was also targeted by the Dutch colonial government for 'Zending' activity. Surakarta and Yogyakarta which were widely known as the forefront of Islamic civilization in the land of Java had become the 'soft battle field' for the colonial government, and Muslim activists who wanted to defend and to free their homeland from colonization. Religion had been used as a 'soft-bullet' to tarnish the rivals. This situation was considered critical since Surakarta and Yogyakarta were surrounded by the intensified 'Zending' movements. It can be seen from the demographic development in which centres of Christianization have

³⁰ R. Michael Feener, "Religious Competition and Conflict over the Longue Durée: Christianity and Islam in Indonesian Archipelago," *Asian Journal of Religion and Society* 5, 1 (2017), p. 10.

³¹ Feener, "Religious Competition and Conflict over the Longue Durée: Christianity and Islam in Indonesian Archipelago."

³² Husni Mubarak, "Babak Baru Ketegangan Islam dan Kristen di Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 21, 3 (2015): pp. 579–601.

increasingly seized Surakarta and Yogyakarta from Ungaran, Salatiga, Boyolali, Kebumen, and Magelang as the centre of Dutch soldier education.

In Surakarta, the *Zending* began to grow rapidly. At first time, Sunan Pakubuwana X, the ruler of the Islamic Surakarta Palace at the time, protested against the *Zending* activity by sending a letter to Resident W. de Fogel (1897-1905) in 1896. This protest was forwarded to the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies in Batavia by the Resident of Solo. The Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies in Batavia received the protest and understood the king's objections. But in the end, the greatest king in the history of Surakarta Palace was also forced to allow the *Zending* that the European land tenants supported in 1910. Since that time the spread of Christianity began to develop intensively in Surakarta.³³ Nevertheless, not only did the king take a strategic policy to make a major breakthrough by establishing Islamic schools (*madrasah*)—through which he aimed to produce reliable and high-quality clerical cadres—but also he took the fight in a subtle but stunning form. The king changed the preaching system of Friday sermon by using Arabic to the Javanese language to facilitate the transfer of knowledge for local Muslims so that they could easily comprehend Islamic teachings.

In a formal jurisdiction, establishing *madrasah* was actually a violation of Staatblad van Nederland-Indie 1893. In this colonial law it was stated that the teaching of Islam in schools run by the government and private was a strict prohibition and could be subject to sanctions of dissolution.³⁴ But Sunan Pakubuwana X did not care with the regulation. The king was deeply troubled by the Christianization movement and the establishment of schools run by the *Zending* or Christian institutions. In contrast, the king did not want his people to convert to Christianity. So, the establishment of *madrasah* officially opened on July 23, 1905 had a significant and strategic resolution in anticipating the development of Christianity in Surakarta.³⁵ At the time, the presence of modern Islamic schools even had become a hot issue in the Dutch parliament. Blackmail entitled "*Een Mohammuransch*

³³ Kuntowijoyo, *Budaya dan Masyarakat* (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 2006): pp. 39–41.

³⁴ Siti Nuryati, "Mambaul 'Ulum dalam Peningkatan Pengamalan dan Syiar Islam: Dinamika Pendidikan Islam dalam Mencetak Ulama di Surakarta Tahun 1905-1945" (Fakultas Sastra Universitas Sebelas Maret, 2010), p. 92.

³⁵ H. S. Djalal Soejoeti, "Riwayat Mamba'ul 'Ulum,'" *Adil* 2 (1984), p. 18.

Universiteit op Soerakarta” spread among the parliament members and saddled them. An Islamic educational institution equivalent to a college was free to flourish in Surakarta. A Dutch magazine also considered that with the establishment of the modern schools, Sunan Pakubuwana X was no longer neutral in religious affairs due to the presence of *Zending* projects in the region of the *Kasunanan*.³⁶

The resistance to the Christianization movement was not only launched through the symbolic-political pathway by the Sunan Pakubuwana X. Muslim scholars also apparently resisted in their ways. For instance, K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of Muhammadiyah organization and other local *Kiai* who were subsequently identified as the traditional Muslim leaders, also actively performed public sermons (*tabligh*), held discussions and argued with priests and pastors. He performed the resistance movement in various regions, from Yogyakarta to Surakarta. The aim was of course to sustain the supremacy of Islam.³⁷ However, he avoided a direct confrontation with the Christianization movement. He used many methods of *mujādalāh*, argument and debate, to deal with the movement. In Surakarta, he held an open debate with a Christian missionary named Domine Baker from the Netherlands, Zwemer, an American missionary, and Lamberton, successfully defeated them.³⁸

Concerning the *Tafsir Soerat Wal-‘Asri*, it is clear that these socio-historical background related particularly to the tension between Islam and Christianity under the colonial administration in Surakarta particularly and Java in general. It seems to become a determining factor why and how Chayati is very determined and felt necessary to get involved in such battle of religious discourse. Islam-Christian friction in Surakarta significantly influenced the characteristics, method, and approach of the work of *Tafsir Soerat Wal-‘Asri* authored by Chayati. The Islamic-Christian debate did not only happen at the top level like KH. Ahmad Dahlan versus Christian missionary leaders, but also at the lower level, even in the grassroots. Siti Chayati and Suparmini become exemplary models of Muslim activists who decided to take part in the fight against the Christianization movement

³⁶ Kuntowijoyo, *Budaya dan Masyarakat*, p. 40.

³⁷ Afif Azhari and Mimien Maimunah, *Muhammad Abdul dan Pengaruhnya di Indonesia* (Surabaya: al-Ikhlas, 1999), p. 101.

³⁸ Alwi Shihab, *Membendung Arus: Respon Gerakan Muhammadiyah terhadap Penetrasi Misi Kristen di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 1998), p. 161.

supported by the Dutch colonial administration.

The use of the Bible as a reference in writing *Tafsir Soerat Wal-'Asri* is driven by the condition of the people in the debate of two conflicting religious teachings. The development of the two religions, each of which shows positive progress, has an impact on the efforts of religious leaders to present religious teachings in an “accommodative” spirit, including using the holy books of other religions as references in writing interpretations. This tendency is hardly found in other works of commentary. All works of interpretation of the Qur'an almost always refer to similar works, authored by Muslims. The existence of Chayati's interpretation shows that there has been a critical and open attitude in the work of interpretation by opening itself up to the inclusion of multidisciplinary scientific references. The use of the Gospel of John, Matthew, and Barnabas as references in *Tafsir Soerat wal-'Asri* is intended to confirm and strengthen arguments for the truth of Islamic teachings.

Explaining Islamic teachings to Christians only referring to the Qur'an, hadith or other Islamic literatures, for example, would not be effective. Therefore, other alternatives are needed to convince Christians that this is the solution that can be chosen. The alternative is to refer to the Bible to emphasize that Muhammad's presence as the last Prophet was actually predicted long in advance. In this case, Muhammad's presence was predicted long in advance, and the explanation is found in the Bible. In other words, this effort aims to show Muhammad's status as a continuation of the previous prophetic mission, including that of Jesus Christ. Chayati refers to the Gospel of John, Matthew, and Barnabas of course not without reason. The socio-historical context of society is one of the drivers of the emergence of this interpretation. The social, political, and religious circumstances of the Surakarta community in the early 20th century AD was a context that connected the moral message in his commentary work with the social reality of society. Tensions in Muslim-Christian relations encourage an attempt to make interpretations more accommodating to the interests of the opposing parties. In this case, the Islamic-Christian contestation impacts the choice of the birth of an interpretation model. In addition, the interpretation of this model is a way to find a formulation of the relationship that bridges the two religions recognizing each other on the one hand while remaining in the corridor of each other's teachings on the other.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the life of the people of Kasunan Surakarta was marked by tension in relations between Christians and Muslims as a result of the Dutch colonial government's policies that allow Christian missions. For Muslims, it is considered a shift from previously neutral stance of the Dutch administration on religious issues. As conveyed by Michael Feener, the tension between the adherents of these two religions has started since the 16th century AD. European missionaries tried to spread Christianity in Java. However, this missionary activity did little to attract Javanese people to become Christians because of the strong sense of cohesiveness resulting from a commitment to Javanese norms. The situation changed in 1876 AD when Christian missionaries started attracting many followers by impressing Christianity as no longer a foreign religion.³⁹ It made the growth rate of Javanese people who embraced Christianity increase. In addition, the Dutch colonial government's policy of providing financial assistance, scholarships, and educational facilities also made Christian missionaries more intensive in spreading their religion.⁴⁰ However, after the separation of Church and the state was introduced in the Dutch constitution in the late XIX Century, the Dutch administration was no longer responsible for Christian mission. Any mission effort should be conducted privately. Then, *Zending* (Dutch Missionary Society for propagating and endorsing Christianity, especially for the infidels, NZG) was founded.⁴¹ The Islam-Christian clash resulting from *Zending* activities in Java at that time was a serious problem that often surfaced. Together with other autonomous regions, Surakarta was targeted by the Dutch colonial government for the field of evangelization. Surakarta and Yogyakarta have been surrounded by centres of Christianization education from Ungaran, Salatiga, Boyolali, Kebumen, and Magelang was the education center for Dutch soldiers.

The relationship tension between Muslims and Christians did not escape from Chayati's observation. As a Muslim who understood the map of ideological battle, she felt challenged to be involved in this inter-religious competition. She also had an interest in preaching her

³⁹ R. Michael Feener, "Social Engineering through Shari'a: Islamic Law and State-Directed Da'wa in Contemporary Aceh," *Islamic Law and Society* 19, 3 (2012): pp. 275–311.

⁴⁰ Mubarak, "Babak Baru Ketegangan Islam dan Kristen di Indonesia."

⁴¹ Maryse Kruithof, "Shouting in a Desert: Dutch missionary encounters with Javanese Islam 1850-1910" (Dissertation, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2014), p. 72.

religion to Christians. She used to preach to Christians by referring to their holy book, i.e., John, Matthew, and Barnabas. In this context, it can be understood why the social reality in Surakarta at the beginning of the 20th century could influence Chayati's tendency in referring to the Bible in her exegesis. Her work is an excellent learned lesson for commentators of the Qur'an and scholars in other fields of Islamic studies. So far, Islamic works frequently only refer to similar Islamic works, for example, *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) writers, often and mostly, only refer to *fiqh* and *ushul fiqh* (Islamic legal theory) books. The writers of the field of *hadith* only go to the books of *hadith* and *'ulumul hadith* as the references. The writers of the field of Sufism do so. Chayati's Quranic exegesis has its own characteristics for it opens to respond its context. She used alternative Christian sources as a reference as she got involved in the tension at that time.

In this very context, a work of Quranic exegesis has a wider scope because non-single references support it. The resulting works of exegesis become more alive and functional for social reality. Nevertheless, one might wonder to what extent Chayati's exegesis influenced people's socio-religious life at that time. Therefore, further research and investigation are certainly needed to find out the extent to which Chayati's work influenced the religious social reality of her time. However, her work is an important treasure for the local Quranic exegesis works as a response toward the context coped with.

Conclusion

This article confirms that the work of Quranic exegesis will most likely be influenced by the socio-historical settings surrounding the exegete. *Tafsir Soerat Wal-'Asri* which was written by Siti Chayati and re-popularized by Suparmini is an excellent example of how socio-historical settings involve the dynamics of power relations, and dialectical relations, and ethnographic scenes among communities within the society. Such relations and scenes could significantly influence the interpreter's subjectivity. When primordial factors and political identities synergize as an integral part, they can be like a lethal gun with bullets wherein. Likewise, the Chayati's work is in line with the analogy in the battle of religious discourses to win the public supports under colonial pressure. Chayati's Quranic exegesis quoting some parts of the Gospel John, Mathew and Barnabas can be of the efforts to find justification and legitimacy to weaken religious

arguments spread by the '*Zending*' activities. It means that the social changes and political atmosphere experienced by Chayati considerably affected her method and approach in her exegesis.

In the archipelago's discourse of Quranic exegesis, Chayati's work is also an exemplary model as it was developed by Islamic woman scholar that very rarely happens within the characteristically patriarchy Islamic society. It constitutes new gendered norms and identities that demonstrate middle-class and well-educated Muslim women's significant roles in Javanese society. It depicted how the local Muslim women actively fought religious discourse, especially when Muslim-Christian relations were getting more tensions due to political-economic factors under colonial administration. This *Tafsir Soerat Wal-'Asri* can also be seen as a symbol of awareness massively addressed to middle-class Muslim society, especially among Muslim women, for building stronger basis of identity of orthodox Muslims when the colonial government intensively attempted to evangelize the society. It highlights that the role of women clearly cannot be underestimated in the local attempts to establish strong Islamic identities, which was fundamental for the domestic anti-colonialization movements. In short, Chayati's Quranic exegesis has laid a clear foundation for gender politics in the local Islamic movements, especially in the central regions of old Javanese civilization.

In addition, *Tafsir Soerat Wal-'Asri* has also successfully revealed socio-historical background, which subsequently impacted the massive transformation of Javanese religious demography. As the symbol of confrontation to the colonial strategy of *Zending* activities, this Quranic exegesis highlights the historical process of religious diversity in Java, especially how the central regions of Islamic civilization such as Surakarta and Yogyakarta have subsequently been surrounded by the relatively strong basis of Christian communities like in Salatiga, Ungaran, Magelang, Kebumen, and others. This battle of religious discourses lately constituted the foundation of religious pluralism in Java.[]

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