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## Hermeneutics of the *Syahādah* in Kiai Sa'īd's *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'īn fī 'Aqā'id al-Dīn*: A Reflective Theological Analysis

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### Abstract

This study explores Kiai Sa'īd's unique hermeneutical approach in his seminal work, "*Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'īn fī 'Aqā'id al-Dīn*," focusing on the *syahadah* (Islamic declaration of faith). Kiai Sa'īd's integration of regional language (Javanese Pegon) and his nuanced response to diverse religious and social dynamics of his era underpin the analysis. The research employs a qualitative analysis of Kiai Sa'īd's interpretative techniques, examining his selective engagement with *Qur'anic* verses and the integration of jurisprudential terms. The study contextualizes Kiai Sa'īd's work within the broader socio-political framework of his time, drawing on the principles of Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Hermeneutics* to understand the historical influences on his exegesis. Kiai Sa'īd's exegesis demonstrates a reflective theological approach, categorized as '*tafsīr bi al-ra'y*' (interpretation based on opinion). His selective focus on parts of verses and the infusion of jurisprudential terminology illustrate a strategy to make the text accessible and relatable to his contemporary audience. His interpretations reveal an underlying objective to balance theological depth with practical applicability, addressing both philosophical and legal aspects of Islamic creed. Kiai Sa'īd's work transcends traditional exegesis, acting as a testimony to the political, economic, and cultural upheavals of his time. His approach showcases an imaginative leap in understanding, framing *Qur'anic* interpretation within the *syahadah*'s context. This method reflects a deep engagement with the socio-political and religious dynamics of his era, suggesting a nuanced theological response to these challenges.

**Keywords:** Exegesis, Hermeneutics, Islamic Creed, *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'īn fī 'Aqā'id al-Dīn*, *Syahādah*

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### INTRODUCTION

This scholarly paper seeks to elucidate the social-theological perspectives of Kiai Sa'īd bin Armia (1891-1974 CE), a prominent Islamic figure during the pivotal era of transition from colonial rule to Indonesian independence. The focal point of this research is the critical analysis of Kiai Sa'īd's seminal work, *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'īn fī 'Aqā'id al-Dīn*, a text having attracted attention

for its interpretative approach to Qur'an. The primary objective is to explore the extent to which Kyai Sa'ïd employs Qur'an in articulating and reinforcing specific interpretive stances, both on an individual and collective level. Notably, *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'in fî Aqāid al-Dīn* is recognized in certain circles as a creed book, predominantly addressing the essential elements of Islamic faith, with a particular emphasis on the doctrine of *syahādah* (testimony of faith). This study, however, delves deeper to uncover Kyai Sa'ïd's nuanced understanding of various Qur'anic verses, with a presumption that his commentary transcends mere doctrinal exposition and ventures into the realm of theological interpretation.

Methodologically, this research conducts a meticulous analysis of Kyai Sa'ïd's text, wherein he cites at least seven Qur'anic verses, including Q. al-Sajdah (32): 19-20, Q. Tāha (20): 14, Q. al-Jinn (72): 3, Q. al-A'rāf (7): 28, Q. al-Baqarah (2): 159, Q. al-Nahl (16): 125, and Q. al-Zumar (39): 62. A critical observation of Kyai Sa'ïd's commentary reveals a selective approach, where he apparently focuses on specific aspects of these verses, arguably neglecting their broader thematic context. For instance, his interpretation of Q. Sūrah al-Sajdah (32):19-20<sup>1</sup> centers exclusively on the notion of God's transcendence beyond human attributes,<sup>2</sup> potentially overshadowing other interpretive dimensions of these verses.<sup>3</sup>

The paper posits that Kyai Sa'ïd's selective approach is intricately linked to the creedal nature of his book. Nonetheless, an analysis of his writing style suggests that it aligns more closely with a creed-based exegesis rather than a straightforward creed text. Traditionally, Islamic creed books (*kitāb al-tawhīd*), particularly those prevalent in Islamic educational institutions like *madrasas*, emphasize the articulation of core doctrinal beliefs rather than extensive scriptural interpretation. Contrasting this norm, Kyai Sa'ïd's work is notable for its extensive engagement with Qur'anic verses, offering interpretations that extend beyond the mere presentation of creedal doctrines.

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<sup>1</sup> The verse reads: 'As for those who believe and do righteous deeds, for them are gardens of residence, as a reward for what they have done' (Q. 32: 19). 'And as for those who are wicked (disbelievers), their place is Hell. Every time they wish to escape from it, they will be returned to it, and it will be said to them: "Taste the punishment of the Hellfire which you used to deny"' (Q. 32: 20).

<sup>2</sup> See Sa'ïd ibn Armia, *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'in fî Aqāid al-Dīn*, Vol. 2, Tegal: Majlis Ta'lim wa al-Daw'ah al-Tawhīdīyah, 1421, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Kyai Sa'ïd ibn Armia, in his book "*Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'in fî Aqāid al-Dīn*," concisely explains the impossibility of God admitting disbelievers to Paradise and believers to Hell. This impossibility arises because it contradicts what is promised in the Quran, including certain verses, one of which, for Kyai Sa'ïd, is al-Sajdah (32):19-20.

This study also draws parallels with similar scholarly endeavors, such as Ameer Latif's research on Jalāluddīn al-Rumī's (1207-1273 CE) poetry. Latif argues that al-Rumī's poetic works, inspired significantly by the Qur'an, especially the narratives about Pharaoh, constitute a form of Qur'anic interpretation, falling within the purview of Sufistic hermeneutics.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the research by Wardani, Mazlan Ibrahim, and Wardatun Nadhiroh on Šeḥ Aršad al-Banjari's (1710-1812 CE) *Tuhfab al-Ragibn*, another creedal text, demonstrates how the author's commentary on Qur'anic verses transcends mere doctrinal exposition and ventures into theological interpretation.<sup>5</sup> This finding leads to a reevaluation of the categorization of such texts, drawing a parallel to the academic debates surrounding Mālik ibn Anas's (711-795 CE) *al-Muwāṭa'*, which oscillates between being classified as a hadith collection and a jurisprudence (*fiqh*) text. Consequently, this paper argues for a reexamination of Kyai Sa'īd's *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'in fi Aqaid al-Din*, positing that it may more aptly be characterized as an exegesis interwoven with creedal elements, rather than a conventional creed book.

This scholarly paper presents a comprehensive analysis of Kyai Sa'īd's unique approach in his book, where he employs a blend of Arabic and Javanese languages. This distinctive style, as evidenced by my research, appears to be a rarity in the Qur'anic exegesis of the era in which the author lived.<sup>6</sup> A prime example of this is Kyai Sa'īd's interpretation of the phrase “*Lā ilāha illa Allāh*,” where he intricately weaves Arabic and Javanese, creating a complex yet insightful linguistic tapestry. His interpretation, “*Fa ma'na Lā ilāha illa Allāh lā mustağniya 'an kulli mā siwāhu wa muftaqira ilaihi kullu mā 'adābu Illa Allāh tegese mangka utawi artine Lā ilāha illa Allāh iku ora anane zat kang wajib sugih adob saking saben-saben barang kang sa liyane dzat*” (“The meaning of *Lā ilāha illa Allāh* is: there is no being that is necessarily self-sufficient and independent of everything other than Himself, while every other being is in need of Him — except Allah.”) serves as a

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<sup>4</sup> See Ameer Latif, *Qur'anic Narrative and Sufi Hermeneutics: Interpretations of Pharaoh's Character*. Dissertations, Stony Brook University, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Wardani, Mazlan Ibrahim, & Wardatun Nadhiroh, “Syeh Muḥammad Aršad al-Banjari and the Application of Critical Theological Interpretations to Local Traditions in Banjar Region, Indonesia,” *Al-Bayān: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies*, 21, 2023, pp. 27–53.

<sup>6</sup> To this day, the book “*Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'in fi Aqaid al-Din*” is still studied in several Pesantrens in Java, such as in Pesantren Attauhidiyah, Central Java, Pesantren Darul Hadits al-Faqihiyah under the guidance of Habib Abdurrahman in Malang, East Java, and at the Majlis of Habib Hidayat in Pesisir, Indramayu, West Java.

quintessential example of this unique melding of languages.<sup>7</sup>

The premise underlying this research is the recognition of language as a fundamental component of culture. Kyai Sa'īd's innovative amalgamation of Arabic and Javanese in his exegesis is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also a cultural and theological statement.<sup>8</sup> This study utilizes Hans-Georg Gadamer's (1900-2002 CE) concept of affective history to understand the deep-seated values and cultural influences inherent in Kyai Sa'īd's interpretive approach.<sup>9</sup> Affective history, in this context, is perceived as a dynamic interplay of individual experiences and cultural heritage, shaping and continuously evolving the individual's worldview.<sup>10</sup>

Methodologically, this paper adopts a multi-faceted approach. The primary source of analysis is Kyai Sa'īd's *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'in fi Aqāid al-Dīn*, supplemented by a thorough literature review to contextualize his work within the broader spectrum of Islamic exegesis. Additionally, the research incorporates interview methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Kyai Sa'īd's life and influences. This multi-dimensional approach facilitates a deeper exploration into the reconstruction of Kyai Sa'īd's interpretive methodology and the logical underpinnings of his Qur'anic exegesis.

Scholarly attention to Islamic thought in Southeast Asia has increasingly emphasized how local scholars reinterpret Islamic texts through their own linguistic, cultural, and political sensibilities.<sup>11</sup> In the specific domain of Qur'anic exegesis, extensive exegetical corpus illustrates how Indonesian scholars use the Qur'an as both a theological and moral framework for

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<sup>7</sup> Sa'īd ibn Armia, *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'in fi Aqāid al-Dīn*, Vol. 2. Tegal: Majlis Ta'lim wa al-Daw'ah al-Tawhīdīyah, 1421, pp. 20-24.

<sup>8</sup> Ahmad Muttaqin's semiotic analysis of several Quranic verses reveals that the language of the Quran inherently contains symbolic meanings of social ethics, indicating that the Quranic text represents a broader context. See Ahmad Muttaqin & Alimin, "Social Ethics on Sūra Yāsīn (Q. 36): A Structural Semiotic Analysis", *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Ḥadīth Studies*, 21, 2023, pp. 1-26.

<sup>9</sup> Sahiron Syamsuddin. *Hermetika dan Pengembangan Ulumul Qur'an*, Yogyakarta: Pesantren Nawesea Press, 2009, pp. 45-46.

<sup>10</sup> See Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, New York: Continuum, 2006, p. XV/254 for a related discussion.

<sup>11</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004); Martin van Bruinessen, "Kitab Kuning: Books in Arabic Script Used in the Pesantren Milieu." *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 146 (1990): 226-269.

engaging with social realities.<sup>12</sup> Beyond Indonesia, scholars such as Michael Laffan, Chiara Formichi, and Kari Vogt have shown that Southeast Asian Islam should be understood as a dialogical field where theology, politics, and culture continuously shape one another.<sup>13</sup>

The central thesis posited in this study is that Kyai Sa'īd's book is not just a theological commentary on the Qur'an but represents a dialogic interplay between his personal interpretations and the socio-political and religious milieu of his time. This paper argues that Kyai Sa'īd's work should be viewed as a theological genre of Qur'anic exegesis standing out for its unique linguistic approach and its reflection of the complex interrelations between language, culture, and religious understanding. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Kyai Sa'īd's contribution to Qur'anic exegesis, highlighting his innovative use of language as a medium to express theological insights and cultural identity.

By situating Kyai Sa'īd's exegesis within the broader context of Southeast Asian Islamic scholarship, this study also contributes to the growing body of literature that explores how local *ulama* engage with and reinterpret classical Islamic texts in response to regional cultural dynamics and political transformations. It extends current debates in the study of Islam in Southeast Asia emphasizing the dialogical nature of religious knowledge, how textual authority is continually negotiated within specific historical and linguistic contexts. Through its focus on the intersection of theology, language, and culture, this research not only enriches our understanding of Indonesian Qur'anic interpretation but also highlights the intellectual vitality and diversity of Islamic thought in the region.

### **Qur'an and Sunni Theological Tradition in Indonesia**

The development of Islamic theology (*‘ilm al-kalām*) in Indonesia is deeply rooted in the transmission of Sunni orthodoxy (*Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah*) through the *ulama Jawi* networks that connected the Malay–Indonesian world with the Hijaz from the seventeenth to the early

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<sup>12</sup> Howard M. Federspiel, *Popular Indonesian Literature of the Qur'an* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1994); Munirul Ikhwan, "An Indonesian Initiative to Make the Qur'an Down-to-Earth: Muhammad Quraish Shihab and His School of Exegesis," *PhD Dissertation* (Berlin: Freien Universität Berlin, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> Chiara Formichi, *Islam and Asia: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Michael Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); Kari Vogt, Lena Larsen, and Christian Moe (eds.), *New Directions in Islamic Thought: Exploring Reform and Muslim Tradition* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

twentieth century. As documented by Azra<sup>14</sup> and Bruinessen,<sup>15</sup> this transoceanic network facilitated the circulation of *Ash‘arī–Māturīdī* theological texts alongside Syāfī‘ī jurisprudence and Ghazālīan mysticism, which became the canonical triad of the pesantren curriculum.

Within this framework, the teaching of theology in Indonesian pesantren has traditionally centered on classical *Ash‘arī* texts, particularly *al-Sanūsīyyah* by Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d. 1490), *Ḥāshīyah al-Bājūrī ‘alā Jawbarat al-Tawḥīd* by Ibrāhīm al-Bājūrī (d. 1860), and *Kifāyat al-‘Anwām fīmā Yajib ‘alā al-‘Awām min al-‘Ilm* by Muḥammad al-Faḍlī (n.d.). These works, alongside *Umm al-Barāhīn* and *Sharḥ al-Dusuqī ‘alā al-Sanūsīyyah*, were widely taught from Aceh to Java and Sulawesi.<sup>16</sup> They were transmitted not only in Arabic but also through Jawi and Pegon translations, forming what Islah Gusmian calls a “vernacular corpus of Islamic theology,” where scholastic arguments were adapted to local linguistic and epistemological contexts.<sup>17</sup>

In these texts, Qur’an functions primarily as an authoritative source rather than an object of interpretation. Verses are employed as *adilla naqliyyah* (revealed proofs) to support rational-theological propositions. For example, *al-Sanūsīyyah* and its commentaries cite “*Laysa kamithlibi syai‘un*” (Q. 42:11) to affirm divine transcendence and “*Allāhu lā ilāha illā huwa*” (Q. 2:255) to assert the unity of God. Similarly, *al-Bājūrī’s Ḥāshīyah* uses Qur’anic citations to substantiate discussions of God’s attributes (*ṣifāt al-kamāl*) and negate anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*). As such, these theological manuals use the Qur’an not as a hermeneutical field but as a theological warrant, reflecting the scholastic orientation of the Ash‘arī tradition.<sup>18</sup>

The sources of these theological texts can be traced to the Maghribī–Egyptian scholastic tradition of the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, institutionalized in al-Azhar through figures such as *al-Sanūsī*, *al-Laqqānī*, and *al-Bājūrī*. Their works reached Malay–Indonesian world through Hijaz network of the Jawi scholars, notably *Syaikh Nawawi al-Bantani* (1813–1897), *Syaikh Mahfūz al-Tarmasī* (1868–1919), *Syaikh Aḥmad Khaṭīb al-Minangkabawi* (1860–1916), and *Syaikh Mukhtār*

<sup>14</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay–Indonesian and Middle Eastern ‘Ulama’ in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, “Kitab Kuning: Books in Arabic Script Used in the Pesantren Milieu.” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 146 (1990): 226–269.

<sup>16</sup> Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Memadu Modernitas untuk Kemajuan Bangsa* (Yogyakarta: Nawasea Press, 2011); Michael Feener, *Muslim Legal Thought in Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> See Islah Gusmian, *Khaṣanah Tafsir Nusantara: Kajian Naskah, Metodologi dan Corak Penafsiran* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2020).

<sup>18</sup> C. A. Qadir, *Philosophy and Science in the Islamic World* (London: Routledge, 1988).

‘*Aṭṭharīd* (d. 1930). These scholars not only taught in Mecca and Medina but also sent students and manuscripts back to Southeast Asia, ensuring the continuity of the Asy’arī–Syāfi’ī paradigm.<sup>19</sup>

Against this historical backdrop, Kyai Sa’id ibn Armia’s *Ta’līm al-Mubtadi’īn fī Aqāid al-Dīn* represents a significant departure from the standard theological genre. In contrast to the classical creed books merely citing the Qur’an to affirm dogma, Sa’id’s text interprets selected Qur’anic verses, blurring the boundary between theology (*‘aqīdah*) and exegesis (*tafsīr*). His selective engagement with the Qur’an, integration of jurisprudential reasoning, and use of the Javanese Pegon language suggest a form of “creedal hermeneutics”, a local synthesis of Asy’arī theology, Syāfi’ī legalism, and vernacular spirituality. This approach not only reflects the intellectual autonomy of pesantren scholars in the colonial period but also illustrates how the Qur’an functioned as both a theological and cultural text in the making of Indonesian Islam.

### ***Intellectual Biography of Kyai Sa’id ibn Armia: A Comprehensive Analysis***

Kyai Sa’id ibn Armia, born in 1891 in Cikura, Bojong sub district, Tegal, Central Java,<sup>20</sup> is a figure of significant historical and religious importance in Indonesian Islamic scholarship. His father, Armia (1838-1935 CE), a native Javanese, was recognized with the esteemed title of Kyai by the local community, a testament to his respected status.<sup>21</sup> Kyai Sa’id’s upbringing in a pesantren environment ingrained in him a profound familiarity with Islamic rituals, the study of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), and the traditions of Islamic scholarship from a tender age.<sup>22</sup>

Encouraged by his father, Kyai Sa’id pursued religious studies at the *Attauhidiyyah Pesantren* (Islamic Boarding School) in Tegal, under the guidance of Kyai ‘Ubaidah (1842-1940 CE), an authority on Islamic creed (*‘aqīdah*) during that period. This phase of rigorous study under Kyai

<sup>19</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia*; Michael Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> An interview with Habib Lutfi, conducted in Cirebon on April 13th, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Aiko Kurawasa, in her book *“Mobilisasi dan Kontrol: Studi Perubahan Sosial di Pedesaan Jawa 1942-1945,”* describes how during the Japanese occupation policy, Islamic teachers were commonly referred to as ‘alim ulama’ and were given the honorary title “Kyai,” or *Shumuka*, which functioned to make decisions and implement daily policies. These *Kyais*, serving as *Shumuka*’s assistants in every district and sub-district, were referred to as *Kyai Shidoin* (*Kyai Instructors*) and *Kyai Yuzēi Shisatsuin* (*Kyai Supervisors*). See Aiko Kurawasa, *Mobilisasi dan Kontrol: Studi Perubahan Sosial di Pedesaan Jawa 1942-1945*, translated by Hermawan Sulystio, Jakarta: Grasindo, 1993.

<sup>22</sup> An interview with Ustaḍ Mudzoffar, conducted in Tegal on Wednesday, January 30th, 2019.

Ubaidah's mentorship deeply influenced Kyai Sa'īd's intellectual development, particularly through his engagement with seminal works like *Ḥaṣṣiyah Bajūrī 'alā Matn Sanūsīyah, Kifāyat al-Anwām*, and *Kifāyat al-Atqiyā'* (*Syarh Hidāyat al-Adkīyā'*).<sup>23</sup> Although no direct evidence suggests that Kyai Sa'īd studied in the Hijaz, his intellectual genealogy can be traced through his teacher, Kyai 'Ubaidah of Pesantren Attauhidiyyah, who transmitted the theological curriculum based on *al-Sanūsīyyah, Kifāyat al-Anwām*, and *Ḥāshīyah al-Bajūrī*. These texts were central to the Jawi scholarly network in Mecca under the tutelage of Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani (1813–1897), Shaykh Mahfudz al-Tarmasī (1868–1919), and Shaykh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi (1860–1916). Through this chain of transmission, Kyai Sa'īd inherited the Asy'arī-Syāfī'ī theological orientation characteristic of the *ulama Jawi* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His selective engagement with Qur'anic verses and integration of jurisprudential terminology in *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'in fī Aqāid al-Dīn*, thus, reflect the intellectual legacy of this transregional network, localized within the Javanese pesantren tradition.

Kyai 'Ubaidah, recognizing Kyai Sa'īd's intellectual prowess, proposed a matrimonial alliance between Kyai Sa'īd and his daughter, Nyai Munawarah. Kyai Sa'īd's acceptance of this proposal marked the beginning of his stewardship of the *Attauhidiyyah Pesantren*, a role he dutifully fulfilled, upholding his father-in-law's legacy until his demise on July 29, 1974. Beyond Kyai 'Ubaidah, other influential figures in Kyai Sa'īd's religious philosophy included Kyai 'Abdul Manan, the father-in-law of his second wife, Nyai Jamilah, and Kyai Romdon, Kyai Abdul Manan's father. Endorsed by these mentors, Kyai Sa'īd embarked on the journey of composing his notable work, *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'in fī Aqāid al-Dīn*.<sup>24</sup>

The impetus behind Kyai Sa'īd's decision to write stemmed from a profound understanding of the enduring value of written works as legacies for future generations.<sup>25</sup> His focus on monotheism (*tawhīd*) was not merely a reflection of his expertise but also underscored his belief in the criticality of creed (*aqāidah*) in a Muslim's spiritual life. This belief was rooted in the Islamic doctrine emphasizing the lifelong recitation of the testimony "*Lā Ilāha illa Allāh Muhammad Rasūl Allāh*" and its consequential spiritual benefits and rewards. Thus, Kyai Sa'īd dedicated his

<sup>23</sup> Sa'īd ibn Armia, *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'in fī Aqāid al-Dīn*, Vol. 2. Tegal: Majlis Ta'lim wa al-Daw'ah al-Tawhīdīyah, 1421, pp. 2-12/80.

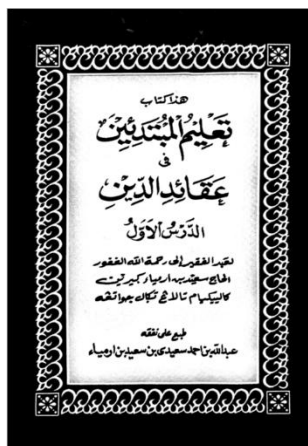
<sup>24</sup> Sa'īd ibn Armia, *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'in fī Aqāid al-Dīn: al-Dars al-Anwāl*, Tegal: Majlis Ta'lim wa al-Daw'ah al-Tawhīdīyah, n.d., p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> An interview with Kyai Aḥmad Saidi, conducted in Tegal on Wednesday, January 30th, 2019.

intellectual endeavors to the exploration of the *syahādah* (testimony of faith), believing that a comprehensive understanding of this testimony was of paramount importance.<sup>26</sup>

Historically, *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'īn fī Aqāid al-Dīn* is notable for its existence in two versions: the first titled "*Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'īn fī Aqāid al-Dīn: al-Dars al-Annwal dan al-Dars al-Tsānī*", and the second, a revised edition, "*Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'īn fī Aqāid al-Dīn: al-Dars al-Tsānī*." Both versions, penned around 1941, exhibit discernible differences.<sup>27</sup> The second book, more contemporary in its paper quality and preservation, deviates from the first in various aspects, including textual completeness and content. These disparities are attributed to the fact that Kyai Sa'īd did not pen these texts himself; they were instead written by Kyai Harun Kempek, a fellow disciple of Kyai 'Ubaidah, and Kyai Mustafa, Kyai Sa'īd's son. The protracted duration of writing process, spanning Kyai Sa'īd's lifetime until 1974, and the differing materials used for each version further contributed to these variations.

This study focuses on the second, more comprehensive version of the book. This edition, encompassing 103 pages, uniquely blends Arabic and Javanese (Arabic Pegon) in its discourse. Measuring 21.3 x 15.5 cm with a text size of 0.5 cm, the book is penned in black ink using the *Ḥaṭ Nash* style on brown paper. Its structure includes an introduction, background, interpretations of Sūrah Sajdah (32): 19-20, an elucidation of the *syahādah*, theological interpretations of various Qur'anic verses, and an in-depth explanation of the term "*Ilāh*" within the context of the *syahādah*. This comprehensive analysis aims to provide a holistic understanding of Kyai Sa'īd ibn Armia's contributions to Islamic scholarship and his unique approach to the fusion of religious doctrine and cultural identity.



<sup>26</sup> An interview with Kyai Ḥasani bin Said, conducted in Tegal on Wednesday, January 30th, 2019.

<sup>27</sup> An interview with Ustaḍ Mudoffar, conducted in Tegal on Wednesday, January 30th, 2019.

### ***Exegesis of Syahadah Verses in the Context of Religious, Social, and Political Dynamics of the Colonial Era***

Kyai Saʿīd ibn Armia's approach to the interpretation of the *syahādah*, the Islamic declaration of faith, is situated within the complex interplay of religious, social, and political narratives of the colonial era. This paper examines Kyai Saʿīd's use of seven specific Qur'anic verses: Q. al-Sajdah (32):19-20, Q. Tāha (20):14, Q. al-Jinn (72):3, Q. al-A'rāf (7):28, Q. al-Baqarah (2):159, Q. al-Nahl (16):125, and Q. al-Zumar (39):62, to construct a holistic understanding of the *syahādah*. It aims to explore the connections between his interpretations, the contemporaneous discourses surrounding the *syahādah*, and their relevance to the prevailing religious and social milieu.

Initially, it is essential to contextualize Kyai Saʿīd's interpretations within the prevailing theological schisms of the time. The theological landscape was prominently divided between two factions: the Bāṭiniyyah and Sufi groups perceiving truth as an intangible, deeply personal essence residing in the heart, and the Zāhiriyyah and Fuqahā regarding truth as observable and visible. This division largely centered on divergent ontological views of truth and its manifestation.<sup>28</sup> Kyai Saʿīd's interpretation of Q. Sūrah Sajdah (32): 19-20, with its emphasis on righteous deeds, appears to navigate beyond this binary perception of truth. Focusing on 'righteous deeds' as a new paradigm, Kyai Saʿīd suggests a more integrative approach to understanding the divine-human relationship. This approach implies that the authenticity of one's faith is not merely reflected in outward expressions or hidden beliefs but is significantly determined by the impact of one's actions on others. The varied religious affiliations in Tegal, where Kyai Saʿīd resided, likely influenced this inclusive and action-oriented perspective.

Furthermore, Kyai Saʿīd's interpretations subtly address the contentious issues of his time, particularly regarding the translation of the Qur'an, a hotly debated topic among early 20th-century Islamic scholars.<sup>29</sup> While interpreting Q. Sūrah al-A'rāf (7):28, Kyai Saʿīd's repeated

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<sup>28</sup> According to al-Kilanī in his book, the term '*Salafī*,' embodies a spirit having spread throughout the Islamic world since the era of the Tabi'īn. It is known as '*al-Salaf*' or '*al-Aṭar*,' contrasted with '*Ahl al-Ra'yi*' and '*al-Mutaṣannif*,' or the '*Ahl al-Ḥadīs*' stream as opposed to '*Ahl al-Kalām*' in creed, and '*Ahl al-Ra'yi*' in jurisprudence. See Musa Zaid al-Kilanī, *al-Harakat al-Islāmiyyat fī al-Urdūn: Dirāsāt wa al-Taḥqīm Ikbwān al-Muslimīn, Ḥiṣṣ al-Tabrīr al-Islāmī*, Amman: Darul Basyar li Nasyr wa al-Tawzi', 1990, p. 190.

<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the Shia group interprets Surah al-Hujurat (49):13. The Shia believe that a person, even if they were a companion, is judged based on their deeds, as this aligns with the principles of the Quran, QS. al-Hujurat (49):13. Any companion of the Prophet who remained sincere and steadfast in preserving Islam and loyalty to the Quran after the Prophet's death is recognized by the Shia as righteous. See Tim Ahlul Bait

references to *'ba'du al-mutarjimīn'* (some translators) allude to this debate. Kyai Sa'īd was known to hold a conservative view on this matter, considering the translation of the Qur'an as a potential threat to its sanctity and the integrity of Muslim faith.<sup>30</sup> His careful selection of terms like 'error' and the 'need to be as trustworthy as the messengers' in his exegesis subtly reveals his critical stance toward Qur'an translation. This implicit critique suggests that, in his view, the translators risked distorting the divine message, thus undermining the essence of Islamic teachings.

Kyai Sa'īd's nuanced approach in this regard seems to position the translators as a group that, while arguing for the necessity of making the Qur'an accessible to the layperson, potentially jeopardized its sanctity. He strategically employs the aforementioned verse to mirror the translators' activities, portraying them as a faction that, under the guise of necessity and tradition, could inadvertently contravene the authentic teachings of Islam. This analysis of Kyai Sa'īd's interpretations not only sheds light on his exegetical methodology but also offers insights into the complex interrelations between religious exegesis and the socio-political context of the colonial era in Indonesia.

In the early 20th century, the translation of Qur'an into other languages, notably Indonesian, sparked considerable debate among Islamic scholars.<sup>31</sup> Kyai Sa'īd ibn Armia was a prominent figure in this discourse, who frequently referenced *'ba'du al-mutarjimīn'* (some translators) in his writings, signifying his attention to the Qur'an translators of his era. His perspective, shaped within the context of these theological debates, was that the translation of Qur'an could potentially desecrate its sanctity, thus impacting the Muslim identity's integrity. Kyai Sa'īd's critique of Qur'an translators, while not overtly explicit, is discernible through his employment of terms such as "error" and the emphasis on "the necessity to act with trustworthiness like the messengers."<sup>32</sup> His approach subtly indicates a disapproval of the act of translating the Qur'an.

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Indonesia (ABI), *Kitab Putih Mazhab Syiah: Menurut para Ulamanya yang Muktabar*, Jakarta: Dewan Pengurus Pusat Ahlul Bait Indonesia, 2012, p. 54. Compare with Wiliam Montgomery Watt, *Fundamentalism Islam dan Modernitas*, translated by Taufik Adnan Amal, Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2001, pp. 259-282.

<sup>30</sup> The verse reads: *'And when they commit an indecent act, they say: "We found our ancestors doing it, and Allah has ordered us to do it." Say: "Indeed, Allah does not order indecency. Do you say about Allah that which you do not know?"'* (Q. 7: 28).

<sup>31</sup> See Fahdli Lukman, *The Official Indonesian Qur'an Translation, The History and Politics of Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya*, Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2022, pp. 57-58. <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0289>

<sup>32</sup> Sa'īd ibn Armia, *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'īn fī Aqā'id al-Dīn*, Vol. 2. Tegal: Majlis Ta'lim wa al-Daw'ah al-Tawhīdīyah, 1421, p. 66. To reinforce, Mark R. Woodward in his book *"Islam Jawa: Normative Piety versus Hermeneutics of the Syahādah.....312-341(Abdul Hanan)*

This stance is further elucidated when considering that Kyai Sa'īd refrained from aligning himself with the proponents of Qur'an translation. The particular verse he references serves as a warning against justifying actions under the guise of divine, traditional, or ancestral commands, a principle he believed was being compromised by the translators.<sup>33</sup>

The act of translating the Qur'an, especially from Arabic into vernacular languages such as Javanese or Indonesian, inherently carries the risk of meaning alteration—a risk that Kyai Sa'īd viewed as a potential threat to the Qur'an's sanctity. For him and those who shared his perspective, any deviation, however minor, from the original Arabic text was considered an act of desecration. This anxiety over translation was not unique to Kyai Sa'īd; it echoed a broader theological and political concern that had long existed within the Indonesian Muslim intelligentsia. As Nico J. G. Kaptein<sup>34</sup> has shown, this anxiety had manifested earlier in the controversy surrounding Sayyid 'Uthman's prohibition of Bagus Ngarpah's Javanese Qur'an translation in the late nineteenth century. Sayyid 'Uthman, a leading scholar and advisor to the Dutch colonial government, denounced Bagus Ngarpah's attempt to render Qur'an into Javanese as both theologically unsound and socially dangerous. He feared that vernacular translations might distort the divine message and undermine Arabic as the sacred linguistic vehicle of revelation. This prohibition marked one of the earliest documented moments when the issue of Qur'an translation became entangled with questions of orthodoxy, authority, and colonial control.

Kyai Sa'īd's exegesis, especially toward the end, hints at perceived errors in the translators' interpretations of creed-related verses. His strong disapproval of these translators is evident in his writings, where he carefully differentiates between the general body of translators and a

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*Mysticism*" states that the structure of Islam is primarily supported by the main pillar, "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." However, this pillar is now surrounded by a series of works that are incompatible with it, amounting to a profanation of its simplicity. See Mark R. Woodward, *Islam Jawa: Normative Piety versus Mysticism*, translated by Hairus Salim HS, Yogyakarta: LKiS Printing Cemerlang, 2012, p. ix.

<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, Idham Kholid argues that ideological conflict involves a clash of thoughts and beliefs among the community members who are pro and contra in addressing a tradition within the Islamic community. This ideological conflict concerns social issues in religion related to beliefs, norms, and values of Islamic teachings. See Idham Kholid, *K.H. M. Sanusi 'Al-Babkani: Philosophy, Values, Religious Understanding, and Struggle*, Bekasi: Pustaka Isfahan, 2011, p. 52.

<sup>34</sup> Nico J. G. Kaptein, "My dear professor 'Abd al-Ghaffar': the letters of Sayyid 'Uthman to C. Snouck Hurgronje as a reflection of their relationship," In L. Buskens, L. J. Witkam, and A. van Sandwijk (Eds.), *The History of Oriental Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 9-11.

specific group he criticizes. For instance, in one of his statements, Kyai Sa'ïd warns against blindly accepting interpretations that attribute specific attributes to the components of the *syahādah* phrase, as claimed by some translators. He categorically dismisses such interpretations as incorrect.

In examining the complex relationship between the activity of translating the Qur'an and its impact on the sanctity of the text and the Islamic creed, it is essential to understand the concept of *tahrij*, or the reduction of meaning. This issue is particularly critical when considering the translation from Arabic, the original language of Qur'an, into other languages, such as Indonesian. The inherent challenge lies in the fact that a direct translation can never fully capture the exact nuances and meanings of the original Arabic text. This potential for the diminution or augmentation of meaning in translation is not typically contentious in the realm of ordinary language. However, when it pertains to Qur'an, which is revered as a sacred text, even minor alterations are viewed with significant concern and, by some, including Kyai Sa'ïd, as acts of desecration. Such changes are believed to pose a risk to the purity of the Islamic creed and the individual's faith.

Throughout his exegesis, Kyai Sa'ïd indicates that there are errors in the translators' understanding of verses related to the Islamic creed. This observation underpins his strong disapproval of the specific groups of translators' actions he believed were compromising the integrity of Qur'anic message. It is noteworthy that Kyai Sa'ïd's critique does not encompass all translators universally. His specific use of the term '*ba'du*,' meaning "some," is indicative of his intention to target a particular subset of translators.<sup>35</sup> This reflects Kyai Sa'ïd's concern about the potential misinterpretation of the Qur'an's fundamental tenets due to translation errors. His careful choice of words highlights the delicate balance between preserving the Qur'an sanctity and making its teachings accessible through translation. Kyai Sa'ïd's perspective, thus, contributes significantly to the broader discourse on the challenges and responsibilities inherent in the translation of sacred texts, particularly within the context of Islamic scholarship and practice.

In his scholarly work, Kyai Sa'ïd not only addresses the complexities of translating the Qur'an but also engages with the multifarious political scenarios during the Japanese colonialism

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<sup>35</sup> Sa'ïd ibn Armia, *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'in fi Aqaid al-Din*, Vol. 2. Tegal: Majlis Ta'lim wa al-Daw'ah al-Tawhidiyah, 1421, pp. 80-81.

in the Nusantara region. The Japanese occupation, albeit brief, was marked by intricate maneuvers designed to realize Japan's global dominion ambitions. A notable aspect of this strategy involved exploiting the socio-religious dynamics of the predominantly Muslim Nusantara society. The Japanese authorities, recognizing the community's adherence to Kyai and their teachings, often based on Arabic texts, leveraged these cultural underpinnings to sow division. They attempted to co-opt individuals with linguistic prowess, like Abdullah Aidid (1900-1969 CE), to translate specific Arabic manuscripts, aiming to subtly steer these translations in a direction favorable to their imperialistic objectives.<sup>36</sup>

Kyai Sa'īd's literary response to such maneuvers appears to be strategic and multifaceted. His choice to compose in a blend of Pegon and Javanese (Tegal) language is indicative of a deliberate effort to circumvent Japanese surveillance.<sup>37</sup> This linguistic strategy in Kyai Sa'īd's writings transcends mere theological exposition, embedding within it a nuanced form of discursive resistance against the Japanese occupation. Consequently, Kyai Sa'īd's fusion of Arabic and Javanese languages emerges not only as a cultural assertion but also as a subtle political stance.

This approach to Qur'anic exegesis, employing textual interpretation to address contemporaneous societal issues, aligns with historical precedents in Islamic scholarship. Preceding Kyai Sa'īd, Islamic scholars like Jalāluddin al-Mahallī (1389-1460 CE) and Jalāluddin al-Suyūṭī (1445-1505 CE) in their *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* utilized similar methodologies. Their interpretation of Q. Sūrah al-A'rāf 28, for instance, criticized practices deviating from religious teachings under the guise of ancestral traditions.<sup>38</sup> Such interpretive patterns resonate in Kyai Sa'īd's work, where he addresses the misappropriation of religious and traditional practices.

In his analysis of Sūrah al-Nahl (16): 125, Kyai Sa'īd adopts a balanced perspective.<sup>39</sup> His

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<sup>36</sup> Aiko Kurasawa, *Mobilisasi dan Kontrol: Studi Perubahan Sosial di Pedesaan Jawa 1942-1945*, translated by Hermawan Sulystio, Jakarta: Grasindo, 1993, p. 277.

<sup>37</sup> See also Muhammad Fathur Rozaq, "Hermeneutika Terjemah al-Qur'an Era Kolonial: Telaah Kitab Terjemah al-Qur'an Hidāyah al-Raḥmān," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan*, 16(2), 2018, pp. 454-463.

<sup>38</sup> Imam Jalālayn explains that the context involves people performing *ṭawaf* (circumambulation) without clothes, as they believed that clothes could be used for sinful acts. Therefore, this verse was revealed to prohibit performing *ṭawaf* without clothing. See Jalāluddin al-Mahallī dan Jalāluddin al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr Jalālayn*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981, p. 132.

<sup>39</sup> The verse reads: 'Call people to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of those who are guided.' (Q. 16: 125).

specific reference to “some translators” rather than a sweeping generalization reflects a nuanced understanding of the translator community. This balanced approach echoes the prophetic tradition of moderation in discourse, as highlighted by a contemporary scholar, Quraish Shihab,<sup>40</sup> and bears resemblance to the interpretative style noted in *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, emphasizing the efficacy of argumentative discourse.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, Kyai Sa’id’s interpretation of 16:125 can be viewed as a response to the then-prevailing disputes between the Sharia and Tariqa factions.<sup>42</sup> While the proponents of Sharia often accused the Tariqa followers of heresy and polytheism, the latter criticized the former for their rigidity. Kyai Sa’id, without overtly aligning with either side, sought a middle ground, suggesting that fault-finding in debates overshadowed the pursuit of truth. He posited that the apparent contradiction between Sharia and Tariqa stemmed from a lack of constructive dialogue. By advocating for “argumentative debate,” Kyai Sa’id endeavored to bridge these ideological divides.<sup>43</sup>

Kyai Sa’id’s scholarly endeavors in interpreting texts extend beyond theological discussions, demonstrating a profound understanding of the interplay between religious doctrines and sociopolitical dynamics. His work reveals a concerted effort to create a synergy between Sharia (Islamic law) and *Tariqah* (Sufi orders).<sup>44</sup> This alignment, as portrayed in his writings, serves not only the spiritual and worldly interests of the community but also acts as a unifying force against

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<sup>40</sup> According to M. Quraish Shihab, besides functioning as a good example and as a martyr (bearer of glad tidings and a warner), the Prophet Muhammad SAW in Q.S. al-Fath (48):8 ultimately leads to the spread of mercy throughout the universe. Allah said: *‘Thus, We have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people, and the Messenger will be a witness over you.’* (Q. 2: 143). See M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan Al-Quran: Tafsir Mauḍu’i atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat*, Bandung, Mizan, 2013, pp. 53-54.

<sup>41</sup> See Imād al-Dīn Abī al-Fida’ Ismaīl ibn ‘Umar ibn Kaṭīr al-Busrowī, *Tafsir Ibn Kaṭīr, Vol. 3*, Riyadh: Maktabah al-Rusyd, 1999, p. 232.

<sup>42</sup> See also Andree Feillard, *NU vis a vis Negara: Pencarian Isi, Bentuk dan Makna*, translated by Lesmana, Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2013, pp. 6-7.

<sup>43</sup> To reinforce, Cragg states that a very important principle upheld by the reformist group is *Tawhid*. It is a significant issue that can be connected to the Islamic belief that *Tawhid* is the main characteristic of Islam, distinguishing it from other religions. See Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1956, pp. 109-118.

<sup>44</sup> What is meant by “*tariqah*” according to Kyai Sa’id is the practice of *ḍikr*, the recitation of *Lā ilāha illa Allāh Muḥammad Rasūl Allāh*, with heart and mouth while remembering the attributes of Allah SAW such as *Quḍrah* (Allah’s Power), *‘Ilm* (Knowledge), and others. Sa’id elaborates in his book: “*Lā Rabba ghairahu wa lā ma’buda sinwahu nasaluhu an yaj’alanā wa akhibbatanā ‘inda al-mauti nāṭiqin bi kalimat al-syahadat ‘alimin bihā nuwun kula ing gusti Allah muga-muga andosaken ing kula sedaya lan kekasih kula sedaya benjang nalika pejah supados saged maca kalimat syahadat loro tur sumerap ing maknae tegese mati husn al-khatimah Allahumma amin.* See Sa’id ibn Armia, *Ta’lim al-Mubtadi’ in fī Aqāid al-Dīn, Vol. 2*. Tegal: Majlis Ta’lim wa al-Daw’ah al-Tawhīdīyah, 1421, pp. 102-103.

colonial oppression. His interpretation of *Tariqah* goes beyond mere ritualistic practice, positioning it as a vital component in maintaining harmony and ensuring safety, transcending the confines of worldly existence to the realm of the hereafter.<sup>45</sup>

In his role as a theologian, Kyai Sa'ïd skillfully integrated examples from his surrounding environment with seven specific verses from the Qur'an to elucidate his understanding of the *syahādah*. His approach in this exegesis was multifaceted, encompassing linguistic, jurisprudential, and theological dimensions. This comprehensive methodology not only addressed the debates surrounding the "*mutarjimīn*" (translators) and the dynamics between Sharia and *Tariqah* groups but also reflected his personal insights and sentiments as an influential theological figure of his era.

Furthermore, Kyai Sa'ïd's writings are deeply embedded in the sectarian discourses prevalent among religious organizations of the time. His work engaged with the criticisms directed towards Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) by Muhammadiyah and Persatuan Islam (Persis), who accused NU of indulging in practices they deemed superstitious and heretical.<sup>46</sup> The distinct focus of these organizations on different societal strata – with NU primarily active among rural lower to middle classes and Muhammadiyah and Persis catering to urban middle and upper classes – underscored varied religious experiences and interpretations. Kyai Sa'ïd, closely associated with NU, navigated these complex dynamics, reflecting the perspective of his community.<sup>47</sup>

The ideological clashes between reformist and traditionalist factions significantly influenced Kyai Sa'ïd's intellectual journey, particularly in his Qur'anic interpretations. The recurring confrontations and debates he witnessed and participated in shaped his perspectives, leading to a defensive but reconciliatory tone in his exegesis. His interpretations suggested an underlying assertion that the differences between groups like NU and Muhammadiyah, despite their divergent practices, were not fundamentally discordant. Both, in his view, were ultimately

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<sup>45</sup> According to Kyai Muhammad Hasanī bin Sa'ïd, "*if a person at the end of their life recites the Shabada, 'Lā ilāha illā Allāh Muḥammad Rasūl Allāh,' they will enter paradise, regardless of their past actions, be it prostitution, adultery, or others. As long as their life ends with the recitation of the Shabada, they are saved*" (Interview with Kyai Muhammad Hasanī bin Said, January 30th, 2019). See also Abdurrahman Badawī, *Mausū'ah al-Falsafah, Vol. 2*, Beirut: al-Muassasah al-'Arabiyyah li al-Dirāsah wa al-Nasyr, 1984, p. 86.

<sup>46</sup> See Deliar Noer, *Gerakan Modern Islam di Indonesia 1900-1942*, Jakarta: LP3S, 1980, p. 108. See also Mt. Arifin, *Muhammadiyah: Potret yang Berubah*, Solo: Institut Glanggang Pemikiran Filsafat Sosial Budaya dan Kependidikan, 1990, p. 30.

<sup>47</sup> Suaidi Asyari, *Nalar Politik NU dan Muhammadiyah: Over Crossing Java Sentris*, translated by Mohamad Rapiq, Yogyakarta: LKiS Printing Cemerlang, 2009, pp. 56-66.

aligned in their devotion to Allah.

Kyai Sa'īd's exegesis of al-Baqarah (2):159 offers insights into his engagement with contemporary groups that rejected the established *madhhabs*.<sup>48</sup> Differing from Muhammadiyah and Persis, these groups sought direct reliance on hadith and the Qur'an, bypassing the interpretations of classical scholars. Kyai Sa'īd's affiliation with NU, an organization that upheld the teachings of various *madhhabs*, shaped his interpretations to counter this rejection. Referencing esteemed *madhab* scholars in his exegesis, Kyai Sa'īd positioned himself against the anti-*madhhab* sentiment of his time. His subtle resistance to this trend, evident in his interpretation, reflects NU's then-peripheral position, contrasting its majority status later.<sup>49</sup>

Kyai Sa'īd's method of Qur'anic exegesis can be distilled into five key aspects. Firstly, he adopted a non-textualist flexible approach, using the Qur'anic text as a basis to delve into diverse issues. Secondly, his interpretations focused on mediating and bridging conflicts, moving beyond simple dichotomies to embrace a post-colonial logic of accommodation. Thirdly, his references were predominantly from classical Islamic literature, showing a strong inclination toward the principal texts of various *madhhabs*. Fourthly, his interpretations were guided by the principle of *maslahah*, aligning with the core tenet of public interest central to *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*. Finally, the *Tariqah* model implicit in his interpretation emphasized the importance of ethics in everyday life, underscoring the practical applications of religious tenets.<sup>50</sup>

### ***Kyai Sa'īd's Hermeneutic Methodology in His Creedal Texts***

Kyai Sa'īd's approach to interpreting religious texts, particularly Qur'an, demonstrates a

<sup>48</sup> The verse reads: *Indeed, those who conceal what We have sent down of clear proofs and guidance after We have made it clear for the people in the Scripture - those are cursed by Allah and cursed by those who curse.'*

<sup>49</sup> See Yayat Hidayat, *NU dan Masa Depan Pertanian*, Indramayu: Pustaka Aura Semesta, 2012, pp. 34-40. Compare with Andree Feillard, *NU vis a vis Negara: Pencarian Isi, Bentuk, dan Makna*, translated by Lesmana, Yogyakarta: LKiS Printing Cemerlang, 2013.

<sup>50</sup> See Andree Feillard, *NU vis a vis Negara: Pencarian Isi, Bentuk, dan Makna*, translated by Lesmana, Yogyakarta: LKiS Printing Cemerlang, 2013. According to Noer's account, in the journey of the Muslim community in Indonesia, the 'reformist' faction focused greatly on educational activities, *tablīg* (discussing matters of faith, worship, and rejecting heretical practices), and publication (spreading Islam through mass media). For instance, the Persis (Persatuan Islam) group had already published several magazines by 1929, including *Pembela Islam*, which was issued in Bandung with a print run of 2,000 copies distributed across Indonesia. In 1931, Persis also published the magazine *'al-Fatwa'* in the Indonesian language using Jawi script, printing around 1,000 copies distributed in Sumatra and Kalimantan. Then, in 1935, they published the magazine *'al-Lisan*, which had a print run of approximately 2,000 copies and was distributed throughout Indonesia. See Deliar Noer, *Gerakan Modern Islam di Indonesia 1900-1942*, Jakarta: LP3S, 1980, pp. 110-115.

nuanced process encompassing more than mere textual analysis. This process typically involves engaging with a variety of existing exegeses and employing a vivid imagination regarding the intended audience. This discussion will focus predominantly on the linguistic aspect, specifically exploring the strategic and consequential decisions behind Kyai Sa'īd's choice of language. Questions arise as to why Kyai Sa'īd chose a particular language, why he did not exclusively use Javanese or Arabic, and the relation of his *syahādah* interpretation to the assertiveness portrayed in his writings. Within this discourse, Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory of historical effect (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) becomes increasingly relevant.

### 1. Local Language and the Task of Translating the *Syahada*

The primary factor making Kyai Sa'īd's language choice in his writings intriguing is the prevalent preference for Arabic among scholars during the early 20th century. Notable scholars like Kyai Nawawi Banten, Kyai Mahfudz Termas, Sheikh Yasin al-Fadani, and Kyai Hasim Asy'ari typically utilized Arabic for their scholarly works.<sup>51</sup> This period, marked by a dominance of Arabic in religious texts, sets the backdrop against which Kyai Sa'īd's choice to write in Javanese is especially striking. As observed by Michael Albin, the literary landscape of late 19th-century Indonesia was dominated by texts from the Middle East and the Dutch East Indies, primarily in Arabic and Dutch.<sup>52</sup> The scholars' reliance on foreign-language literature during this era renders Kyai Sa'īd's deviation to use Javanese in his religious texts a bold and unconventional move.

This linguistic choice, however, does not imply an absence of efforts to employ local languages for religious writings in Nusantara during that time. As noted by Zamakhsyari Dhofier, the first figure known to write religious books blending local languages with Arabic was Hamzah Fansuri in the 16th century.<sup>53</sup> This historical precedent suggests that Kyai Sa'īd's decision to use Javanese, potentially influenced by Fansuri, could be seen as a

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<sup>51</sup> See Muhammad Fathur Rozaq, "Hermenutika Terjemah al-Qur'an Era Kolonial: Telaah Kitab Terjemah al-Quran Hidāyah al-Rahmān," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan*, 16(2), 2018, pp. 454-463.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Albin, *The Islamic Book*, in Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (eds), *A Companion to: The History of the Book*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 175.

<sup>53</sup> See Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren Memadu Modernitas untuk Kemajuan Bangsa*, Yogyakarta: Nawasea Press, 2011, pp. 34-37.

continuation of this earlier tradition.<sup>54</sup>

Engaging with a student from Kyai Sa'īd's pesantren revealed insights into the accessibility and familiarity of Javanese for religious texts. The hierarchical nature of Javanese language, which varies depending on the speaker and the audience, was particularly suited for discussions of creed. For instance, using the term *Gusti Pengeran* for God in Javanese was perceived as more courteous compared to the Indonesian equivalent. This linguistic choice facilitated the study of these texts by the broader community, not limited to the pesantren environment. Especially given Kyai Sa'īd's use of the Tegal Javanese dialect, it allowed locals to engage with the texts directly due to their familiarity with the language.<sup>55</sup>

During Kyai Sa'īd's tenure as a pesantren leader, the regional language proficiency among Tegal's population was more prevalent than Bahasa Indonesia. This demographic reality influenced Kyai Sa'īd's strategic decision to use Tegal Javanese in his writings. The intermittent incorporation of Arabic terms was a deliberate effort to maintain a balance between linguistic accessibility and theological accuracy, particularly when discussing creed-related concepts that might lose their potency if translated.

Four significant aspects are intertwined with Kyai Sa'īd's use of Tegal Javanese in his book. Firstly, his interpretation of Q. Sūrah al-Sajdah (32):19-20 showcases a harmonious blending of the Arabic phrase "*wa allahu a'lam bi al-sawab*" and its Javanese translation.<sup>161</sup> This combination mirrors a common practice in pesantren scholarship, where opinions are often concluded with "*wa allahu a'lam,*" reflecting a tradition of humility and acknowledgment of the plurality of perspectives.<sup>56</sup> This combination reflects a common practice among pesantren scholars who conclude their opinions with "*wa allahu a'lam,*" a tradition rooted in Islamic scholarly heritage. Pesantren scholars often assume that early Islamic scholars (*salaf*) are exemplary models for emulating Prophet Muhammad's behavior.

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<sup>54</sup> See also Basil Hatim, *Communication Across Cultures: Translation Theory and Contrastive Text Linguistics*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997, p. 35.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Ustaḍ Mudzoffar, conducted in Tegal, Wednesday, January 30th, 2019.

<sup>56</sup> In Ibn al-Arabī's explanation, the text (*naṣ*) must align with reason. If not, it should be subjected to interpretation (*ta'wīl*). It is important to note that this interpretation should not be far-fetched (*ta'assub*) or forced, and must remain objective. If a text cannot be interpreted, then it must be believed that the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) did not make such a statement. For more details, see Abu Bakar Muhammad Ibn Abdillah Ibn al-Arabī, *Qānūn al-Ta'wīl*, Beirut: Mu'assasah 'Ulūm al-Qur'an, 1986.

Hence, they adopt a similar pattern in their general opinions. This tradition represents humility (*tawāḍu*), acknowledging that one's viewpoint is just one among many possible perspectives on a particular issue.

Furthermore, in interpreting the aforementioned verse, Kyai Sa'īd emphasizes that the dichotomy of good and evil neither means those deemed good have always been inherently good, nor vice versa. The juxtaposition of these concepts indicates that life, like a pendulum, swings between its worst and best points. The measure of who is good or bad ultimately returns to God as the rightful judge. In some sections, Kyai Sa'īd writes: "*Artine wa allahu a'lam mekaten: anapun utawi wongkang pada mukmin kabeh lan kang pada gelem amal saleh kabeh tegese ngelakoni taat lan ngadohi maksiat iku panggonane ana ing suarga, lan anapun utawi wongkang pada fasikfasik tegese kafir-kafir kabeh iku panggonane ana ing neraka*" (Meaning: The meaning of *wa allahu a'lam* is: as for those who believe and do righteous deeds, meaning they obey and avoid sin, their place is in paradise, and for the wicked, meaning the disbelievers, their place is in hell).<sup>57</sup>

Secondly, Kyai Sa'īd's approach involves partial interpretation of verses. Out of the seven verses addressed, three are only partially examined. This method aligns with Ahmad Shawi's stance in "*Hasyiyah al-Shawī 'alā Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*," where partial interpretation is validated based on the principle of considering the generality of the words rather than the specificity of the cause. This perspective posits that understanding the linguistic aspect of a part of a verse could suffice to grasp its overall meaning. Consequently, even if Kyai Sa'īd interprets only a segment of a verse, he inevitably engages with its entire context to construct a comprehensive interpretation.<sup>58</sup> In other words, to understand the meaning of a verse, one might only need to grasp its linguistic aspect, not necessarily the entire sentence or just the keywords. This view is supported by the assumption that understanding one sentence of a verse automatically leads to an understanding of other sentences. Even though Kyai Sa'īd might only interpret the beginning of a verse, for instance, he would inevitably read its middle and end to formulate a comprehensive view.

Kyai Sa'īd's approach to interpreting specific segments of Qur'anic verses demonstrates

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<sup>57</sup> Sa'īd ibn Armia, *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'īn fī Aqā'id al-Dīn*, Vol. 2. Tegal: Majlis Ta'lim wa al-Daw'ah al-Tawhīdīyah, 1421, pp. 104-105.

<sup>58</sup> See Syaikh Ahmad al-Shawī al-Malikī, *Haşyiyah al-Allāmah al-Shawī 'alā Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, Beirut Libanon: Dār al-Fikr, 1993 for more details.

a nuanced and focused methodology, aligning with the principles outlined by Ahmad Shawi regarding the interpretation based on the generality of words. In his exegesis of Q. Sūrah Tāha (20):14, Kyai Saʿīd’s analytical lens is concentrated on the initial part of the verse, “*innanī anā Allāhu lā ilāha illa anā faʾbudnī*,” eschewing the subsequent segments, “*wa aqim al-ṣalāta*,” and “*li dīkri*.” This selective focus suggests that Kyai Saʿīd perceived the essential message of the verse to be encapsulated within its opening lines. He concludes that once the core essence is grasped, extending the analysis to the entire verse becomes superfluous. Kyai Saʿīd articulates this interpretation as, “*tegese utawi panjenengan ingsun iku Allah oranana pengeran anging ingsun Allah*” (Meaning: I am Allah, there is no deity except Me, Allah), emphasizing the declaration of divine singularity and commandment to worship.<sup>59</sup>

In contrast, Kyai Saʿīd’s treatment of Q. Sūrah al-Jinn (72):3 diverges from this pattern, as he directs his interpretative efforts toward the middle and concluding parts of the verse, namely “*mā ittabaḍa ṣabibatan*” and “*wa lā waladan*,” while disregarding the beginning. This shift from a deductive approach in Sūrah Tāha to an inductive one in Sūrah al-Jinn underscores a transition in Kyai Saʿīd’s interpretative strategy—from focusing on the general essence to detailing specific elements. He posits that delving into the intricacies of these parts inherently constructs an understanding of the verse’s overarching message. Kyai Saʿīd explicates, “*tegese ora ngalap Allah ing bojo lan ora ngalap Allah ing anak tegese mubal gusti Allah ngalap bojo atawa anak*” (Meaning: Allah takes neither a wife nor a child, it is impossible for Allah to take a wife or a child), addressing the theological concept of God’s transcendence above human attributes.<sup>60</sup>

Central to Gadamer’s hermeneutics is the claim that “being that can be understood is language” (*Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache*).<sup>61</sup> Meaning is not merely conveyed by language but comes into being through linguistic articulation. Kyai Saʿīd’s treatment of the *Syabādah* as the linguistic embodiment of divine truth mirrors this principle. His commentary displays a deep awareness of the performative and ontological dimensions of speech. The utterance of the *Syabādah* is both a linguistic act and a transformation of being;

<sup>59</sup> Saʿīd ibn Armia, *Taʿlim al-Mubtadiʿin fī Aqāid al-Dīn*, Vol. 2. Tegal: Majlis Taʿlim wa al-Dawʿah al-Tawhīdīyah, 1421, p. 69.

<sup>60</sup> Saʿīd ibn Armia, *Taʿlim al-Mubtadiʿin fī Aqāid al-Dīn*, Vol. 2. Tegal: Majlis Taʿlim wa al-Dawʿah al-Tawhīdīyah, 1421, p. 72.

<sup>61</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed (London: Continuum, 2004), 470.

it marks the transition from ignorance to faith, from multiplicity to unity.

By analyzing the morphology and syntax of the phrase *lā ilāha illā Allāh*, Kyai Sa'īd uncovers its layered significations. The negation (*lā ilāha*) signifies the human condition of limitation and the rejection of false absolutes, while the affirmation (*illā Allāh*) introduces divine plenitude as the grounding of all existence. This interplay of negation and affirmation exemplifies what Gadamer describes as the dialectical movement of understanding, wherein meaning arises through tension and reconciliation. In the act of uttering the *Syahāda*, the believer participates in a linguistic event that fuses the horizon of divine revelation with the interpreter's finite historical horizon.

Language here is not an inert vessel but the very medium of the divine-human encounter. Kyai Sa'īd's careful exposition of Arabic terms, *'ilm*, *īmān*, *'amal*, reveals his conviction that language shapes thought and belief. Each term bears the sedimented history of interpretation within the Islamic intellectual tradition. To speak these words is to enter into a pre-existing dialogue with past scholars, saints, and communities of faith. The act of understanding thus becomes what Gadamer calls a *conversation* (*Gespräch*) in which both interpreter and text are transformed.<sup>62</sup>

## 2. Kyai Sa'īd's Qur'anic Interpretation: Blending Subconscious Insight and Methodical Strategy

Kyai Sa'īd's interpretive approach to the Qur'an, characterized by a selective focus on particular verse segments, can be viewed as a sophisticated blend of his subconscious insights and methodical strategies. This technique transcends mere academic choices, representing a synthesis of both micro and macro elements of his identity and experiences. It is apparent that Kyai Sa'īd's interpretative process was not confined to conscious scholarly decisions. Rather, it was significantly shaped by the deeper, internalized aspects of his persona, encompassing both his lived experiences and inherent cognitive processes.

Kyai Sa'īd's long tenure as the spiritual leader of the At-Tauhidyyah pesantren in Tegal constitutes a crucial part of the *horizon of understanding* that informs his exegesis. His interpretive decisions is inseparable from the formative world of the pesantren, a microcosm of Javanese Islam where Arabic scholasticism, Sufi ethics, and local linguistic

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 385.

traditions interact continuously. Gadamer reminds us that understanding is always *situated*; it unfolds within a horizon shaped by the interpreter's historical life-world (*Lebenswelt*).<sup>63</sup> Thus, Kyai Sa'īd's interpretive gestures; his emphasis on moral formation, his attention to the pragmatic dimensions of faith, his recourse to familiar metaphors, all bear the imprint of his pedagogical environment and communal responsibility.

Moreover, Kyai Sa'īd's exegesis bears traces of experiences likely predating his leadership at At-Tauhidiyyah. His interpretive imagination was already attuned to the textures of daily piety, the rhythm of pesantren life, and the ethical imperatives of community guidance. These experiences function as what Gadamer calls the "effective history" (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), the accumulation of influences silently informing one's understanding. They shape not only *what* Kyai Sa'īd sees in the Qur'an, but also *how* he sees it. His reading, therefore, is an unfolding of this historical self within the space of the divine word, a living conversation between his own horizon and that of the text. His engagement with Qur'an appears deeply rooted in a wealth of internalized knowledge and experiences, enabling him to draw upon a rich reservoir of memory and intuition in his interpretations. The use of Javanese Pegon language in Kyai Sa'īd's works, while not exclusive to him during that era, was part of a broader trend identified by scholars such as Susan Bassnett, Harish Trivedi, Muhammad Hanbali, Islah Gusmian, Laffan, Hugo, and Bassil Hatim.<sup>64</sup> Their research indicates that the use of local languages in religious texts served multiple purposes: it was an act of preserving traditional values, a subtle form of resistance against colonialism, and a means to enhance community understanding and representation.<sup>65</sup>

This statement not only reflects Kyai Sa'īd's educational intent but also mirrors the religious diversities and tensions of his time. Kyai Sa'īd's approach to Qur'anic interpretation aligns with the *tafsīr bi al-ra'y*' or *'tafsīr bi al-ijtihad'* category. This method permits the integration of personal opinions, linguistic analyses, and intellectual reasoning.<sup>66</sup> It accommodates the explanation of Qur'anic meanings in the Javanese language, using

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 301.

<sup>64</sup> See Muhammad Fathur Rozaq, "Hermenutika Terjemah al-Qur'an Era Kolonial: Telaah Kitab Terjemah al-Quran Hidāyah al-Raḥmān," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan*, 16 (2), 2018, pp. 454-463.

<sup>65</sup> Sa'īd ibn Armia, *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'in fi Aqāid al-Dīn*, Vol. 2. Tegal: Majelis Ta'lim wa al-Daw'ah al-Tawhīdīyah, 1421, pp. 6-7.

<sup>66</sup> See Muhammad Hasbi Ash-Shiddiqiey, *Sejarah dan Pengantar Ilmu al-Qur'an dan Tafsir*, Semarang: Pustaka Riski Putra, 2000, p. 202.

Pegon script, thereby preserving local linguistic and cultural identities. This interpretative style of Kyai Sa'īd thus serves as a bridge between traditional Islamic scholarship and the cultural context of his community, enriching the religious discourse with a unique blend of scholarship and cultural resonance.<sup>67</sup>

### 3. Kyai Sa'īd's Interpretative Approach to the *Syhadah*: Clarity and Spiritual Depth

Kyai Sa'īd's interpretation of the *Syhadah* in his book reveals a distinctively assertive approach, especially when contrasted with his methodological choices. His assertiveness is particularly evident in his frequent use of jurisprudential terms while elucidating aspects of creed. While creedal discussions typically revolve around philosophical matters, Kyai Sa'īd's focus on jurisprudence anchors these discussions in the realm of practical legal application, necessitating a more definitive stance. This approach reflects his emphasis on the practical implications of creedal beliefs.<sup>68</sup> Kyai Sa'īd's declaration encapsulates a total and unwavering commitment to the core tenets of Islam, encompassing a deep spiritual acceptance that transcends mere ritualistic adherence. Kyai Sa'īd interprets this as a commitment to unconditionally follow Allah's commandments and to find joy and satisfaction in doing so, a sentiment aligning with the ultimate pursuit of happiness in Islam. Kyai Sa'īd's view of the *Syhadah* transcends its role as a mere Islamic symbol or a prerequisite for identifying as a Muslim.<sup>69</sup> Instead, he sees it as a continuous spiritual journey, an ongoing commitment that shapes one's entire existence as a Muslim. This perspective is in line with the notion of the *Syhadah* being a lifelong spiritual practice, where its declaration is just the beginning of a deeper, more transformative spiritual path.<sup>70</sup>

He often correlates the *Syhadah* with Sūrah Al-Fatihah and the recitations of *salawat*, highlighting their interconnected spiritual significance. The inclusion of Al-Fatihah, known

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<sup>67</sup> See Abdul Wachid Bambang Suharto, *Dimensi Profetik Puisi A. Mustofa Bisri: Kajian Hermeneutika dan Pragmatik Sastra*, Surakarta: Pendidikan Bahasa Indonesia Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan Universitas Sebelas Maret, 2018, p. 29. See also A. Teeuw, *Sastra Baru Indonesia*, Ende, Flores: Nusa Indah, 1980 for more details.

<sup>68</sup> Sa'īd ibn Armia, *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'in fi Aqāid al-Dīn*, Vol. 2. Tegal: Majlis Ta'lim wa al-Daw'ah al-Tawhīdīyah, 1421, pp. 10-11.

<sup>69</sup> See Syed Ameer Ali, *Api Islam*, Jakarta: PT. Pembangunan, 1967, p. 99.

<sup>70</sup> Sa'īd ibn Armia, *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'in fi Aqāid al-Dīn*, Vol. 2. Tegal: Majlis Ta'lim wa al-Daw'ah al-Tawhīdīyah, 1421, p. 100.

as ‘the opener,’ symbolizes the *Syabādab*’s role as the gateway to Islam and the understanding of the Qur’an.<sup>71</sup> This interpretation echoes Abdul Rauf al-Singkili’s views in his exegesis, “*Tarjuman al-Mustafid*.”<sup>72</sup> Moreover, Imam Suyuthi’s association of al-Fatihah with prayer and healing underscores the *Syabādab*’s function as both a prayer and a means of spiritual healing.<sup>73</sup> This aligns with the idea of embracing Islam as embarking on a restorative and more fitting path in life.

Ibn Kaṣṣir’s interpretation of al-Fatihah encompasses four aspects: light, sufficiency, a repository of goodness, and healing. These aspects metaphorically relate to the transformative power of the *Syabādab*, its comprehensive encapsulation of Islamic tenets, and its role in guiding individuals towards a righteous and discerning life path.<sup>192</sup> In his discourse, Kyai Sa’id also addresses the interplay between divine assertiveness and flexibility, particularly concerning God’s dispensation of rewards and retributions. He suggests that while God promptly rewards good deeds, the punishment for evil deeds is often deferred, highlighting God’s merciful and patient nature. This perspective points to the necessity of ambivalence in maintaining the dynamic balance of life, asserting that the existence of evil is a divine allowance for the manifestation of good. Through his interpretative lens, Kyai Sa’id presents the *Syabādab* not only as a fundamental Islamic tenet but also as a profound spiritual journey that embodies the essence of Islamic faith, ethics, and jurisprudence.

Kyai Sa’id’s interpretation of the syahadah in *Ta’līm al-Mubtadi’īn fī Aqā’id al-Dīn* reveals an interpretive orientation grounded in what Gadamer would call a *fusion of horizons* (*Horizontverschmelzung*), wherein the horizon of tradition and the interpreter’s present understanding intersect to produce meaning. Sa’id’s interpretive method, marked by assertiveness and practical orientation, cannot be understood as an isolated act of exegesis but as a dialogical encounter between his Javanese-Sunni intellectual tradition and his lived historical world. His engagement with the Qur’an is not merely exegetical but phenomenological, a process of understanding that continuously reconfigures the meaning of faith within the contingencies of time and place.

<sup>71</sup> Manna’ al-Qaṭan, *Mabāḥiṭ fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’an*, Manṣūrah al-’Ash al-Hadiṭ, 1973, p. 139.

<sup>72</sup> Abdul Rauf al-Singkili, *Tarjuman al-Mustafid*, Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1990, p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Jalāluddīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’an*, Riyadh: Markaz Dirasat Qur’aniyah, pp. 167-171.

The case of Kyai Sa'id ibn Armia demonstrates that Qur'anic hermeneutics in the region cannot be confined to formal *tafsir* works alone. Instead, the Qur'an is dynamically interpreted within theological, juridical, and pedagogical genres reflecting the intellectual habitus of the pesantren. This expands the analytical scope of Southeast Asian Qur'anic scholarship beyond the study of Arabic exegesis or modern reformist commentaries, such as those by Shaykh Daud al-Fatani, Shaykh Ahmad Khatib, or Hamka, to include vernacular and creedal interpretations. Situating *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'in fi Aqaid al-Din* within the continuum of the Asy'ari-Shafi'i tradition and its local adaptations, the study highlights the Qur'an's role as a living discourse, mediating between global Sunni orthodoxy and local cultural expression. Hence, Kyai Sa'id's hermeneutical engagement represents not only a localized theology but also a distinct Southeast Asian mode of *tafsir bi al-ra'y*, contributing to comparative and postcolonial Qur'anic studies in the region.

## CONCLUSION

Kyai Sa'id ibn Armia's *Ta'lim al-Mubtadi'in fi Aqaid al-Din* exemplifies how Qur'an functions as both a theological and socio-cultural discourse within the Javanese pesantren tradition. Through his use of the local Pegon-Javanese language, Kyai Sa'id localized the Qur'an's theological message, engaging diverse audiences across social and religious spectra, from *santri* and *ṭariqah* adherents to *abangan* and anti-*madhab* groups, amid the colonial and ideological turbulence of his era. His hermeneutics of the *ṣahāda* reinterprets classical Asy'ari theology through a contextual, reflective reading of selected Qur'anic verses, employing *tafsir bi al-ra'y* while maintaining traditional tools such as *munasabah*, *asbab al-nuzul*, and *maqashid*.

Beyond its local importance, Kyai Sa'id's work expands the understanding of Qur'anic hermeneutics in Southeast Asia. It illustrates that *tafsir* in the region extends beyond formal commentaries to include theological and pedagogical texts that embody lived interpretations of the Qur'an. Thus, this study contributes to the global discourse on vernacular and postcolonial Qur'anic studies, revealing how Southeast Asian scholars creatively rearticulated Sunni orthodoxy through local idioms, transforming theology into a dynamic mode of Qur'anic engagement rooted in historical experience.

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