

Qur'anic Interpretation among Sasak Muslims across Communities, Theologies, and Ideological Conflicts

Tafsir al-Qur'an Muslim Sasak dalam Lintas Komunitas, Teologi, dan Konflik Ideologis

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Abstract

The Sasak Muslim community in Lombok, Indonesia has a long history of interpreting the Qur'an in ways that reflect their unique social and cultural setting—especially through oral traditions and communal religious practices that date back to the 16th century. Despite this, most studies on Islam in Lombok have focused mainly on rituals, teachings, or the sociocultural differences between *Islam Wetu Telu* and *Waktu Lima*. What often gets overlooked is how these communities actually make sense of the Qur'an, and how their interpretations influence their religious identity or even contribute to tensions between groups. This study addresses that gap by looking closely at how Qur'anic interpretation works on the ground among Sasak Muslims. Using a qualitative approach—through field observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis—this research explores how different forms of tafsir have emerged within the *Wetu Telu* and *Waktu Lima* communities. It finds that *Wetu Telu* Muslims built their religious identity through oral interpretation, delivered by early preachers in simple, local language during the initial spread of Islam in Lombok at the end of the 16th century. Their approach tends to be flexible, adapting Qur'anic teachings to local traditions and values. In contrast, *Waktu Lima* Muslims developed a more textual and orthodox form of tafsir, rooted in classical Arabic commentaries brought home by Sasak scholars (tuan guru) who studied in the Middle East. They institutionalized this knowledge in *pesantren*, turning them into centers of formal Islamic learning. This study contributes to the growing field of tafsir studies by expanding the focus beyond written texts, showing that interpretation can also be oral, social, and embedded in everyday religious life. By comparing local and textual models of tafsir, this research offers a new way to understand how the authority of interpretation is shaped—and contested—within the diverse landscape of Indonesian Islam.

Keywords: *Sasak Muslims, Oral Hermeneutics, Local Islamic Tradition, Interpretive Authority, Islamic Practice in Lombok*

Abstrak

Komunitas Muslim Sasak di Lombok, Indonesia memiliki tradisi panjang dalam menafsirkan al-Qur'an, terutama melalui cara-cara lisan dan praktik keagamaan komunal yang telah berlangsung sejak abad ke-16. Namun sayangnya, sebagian besar kajian tentang Islam di Lombok lebih banyak menyoroti aspek ritual, ajaran, atau perbedaan sosiokultural antara *Wetu Telu* dan *Waktu Lima*. Yang sering terabaikan adalah bagaimana komunitas-komunitas ini memahami al-Qur'an dalam kehidupan nyata mereka, serta bagaimana tafsir tersebut membentuk identitas keagamaan—bahkan memicu



ketegangan antar kelompok. Penelitian ini mencoba mengisi celah tersebut dengan mengamati secara langsung bagaimana tafsir al-Qur'an dijalankan di tengah masyarakat Muslim Sasak. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif melalui observasi lapangan, wawancara mendalam, dan analisis dokumen, studi ini menelusuri munculnya dua model tafsir yang berbeda. Komunitas *Wetu Telu* membangun identitas keagamaannya lewat tafsir lisan yang disampaikan secara sederhana oleh para da'i pada masa awal Islamisasi di Lombok pada akhir abad 16. Tafsir mereka cenderung lentur, menyerap nilai-nilai lokal, dan selaras dengan tradisi adat. Sebaliknya, komunitas *Waktu Lima* mengembangkan tafsir yang lebih ortodoks dan tekstual, bersumber dari kitab-kitab klasik berbahasa Arab yang dibawa oleh tuan guru alumni Makkah, Mesir, dan Yaman. Tradisi ini kemudian dilembagakan melalui pesantren sebagai pusat pembelajaran Islam formal. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi penting bagi pengembangan kajian tafsir, dengan menunjukkan bahwa penafsiran al-Qur'an tidak hanya hadir dalam bentuk teks tertulis, tetapi juga hidup dalam bentuk lisan dan sosial, serta melekat dalam keseharian umat. Dengan membandingkan model tafsir lokal dan skriptural, riset ini membuka perspektif baru tentang bagaimana otoritas tafsir terbentuk dan diperebutkan dalam dinamika Islam Nusantara.

Kata Kunci: *Muslim Sasak, Hermeneutika Lisan, Tradisi Islam Lokal, Otoritas Interpretatif, Praktik Keislaman di Lombok.*

Introduction

How can a Muslim community that has engaged with the Qur'an since the sixteenth century—through religious practices, oral exegetical traditions, and collective rituals—remain marginalized in the dominant historiography of Islamic exegesis in Nusantara? In Lombok, Indonesia, diverse Sasak Muslim communities such as *Islam Wetu Telu*, *Waktu Lima*, and Salafi-Wahhabi groups do not merely observe Islamic law; they also interpret the Qur'an through distinct theological orientations, cultural expressions, and structures of religious authority. Yet, these vibrant and communally embedded exegetical practices are often overlooked in contemporary tafsir studies in Indonesia.¹ Ironically, Qur'anic interpretation—ideally a medium for spiritual and cultural articulation—has become a contested arena for ideological and political authority. This is evident in socio-religious tensions, including the rejection of mosque construction, the dissolution of religious gatherings (*majelis taklim*), and even the burning of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). When tafsir transforms into a site of both legitimation and resistance, the central question shifts from merely “what is believed” to “how is the Qur'an interpreted—and by whom?”

Previous studies on Islam in Lombok have extensively examined the distinctions between *Islam Wetu Telu* and *Waktu Lima*, particularly from anthropological, sociological, and cultural perspectives. Key scholars such as Van Ball, Sven Cederroth, and Erni Budiwanti have critically explored how the religious consciousness of the

1 Islah Gusmian, “Tafsir Al-Qur'an Di Indonesia: Sejarah Dan Dinamika,” in *Nun : Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Tafsir Di Nusantara*, vol. 1, no. 1, December 2015, <https://doi.org/10.32459/NUN.V1I1.8>.

Sasak people has emerged through a dialectical interplay between Islamic teachings and local traditions. Van Ball portrays *Wetu Telu* Islam as a flexible religious expression deeply embedded within local cultural practices, while *Waktu Lima* is characterized as more stringent in its adherence to Islamic legal norms (shari'a).² Cederroth examines the Bayan community, adherents of *Wetu Telu*, highlighting the role of two distinct social strata—*perwangse* (nobility) and *jajar karang* (commoners)—in shaping comparable religious practices.³ Meanwhile, Budiwanti emphasizes the syncretic nature of *Wetu Telu*, which merges Islamic elements with animistic and Hindu-Buddhist traditions, in contrast to the more orthodox and purification-oriented *Waktu Lima*.⁴ Collectively, these foundational works have significantly contributed to our understanding of Sasak Islam as a dynamic outcome of cultural negotiation and power relations.

Nevertheless, these earlier studies remain largely confined to viewing Sasak Islam as a static cultural product, without delving into the dynamic ways in which the Qur'an is interpreted, practiced, and contested within the religious life of the community. The hermeneutical dimension—particularly forms of interpretation that are oral, practical, and communal in nature—has received insufficient scholarly attention. Yet, within the Sasak context, Qur'anic interpretation is not merely a reflection of theological understanding; it functions as a crucial instrument in the contestation of identity, authority, and ideology. This calls for an alternative approach—one that not only recognizes Sasak Islam as a cultural expression but also critically examines how Qur'anic hermeneutics underpin systems of belief, shape religious praxis, and ignite ideological polarization amid the evolving landscape of local Islamic expression.

Geographically and socially, many members of the *Wetu Telu* community reside in the foothills of Mount Rinjani, in northern Lombok. However, the characteristics of Islam *Wetu Telu* cannot be separated from their understanding and interpretation of the Qur'an, which are influenced by the social and cultural conditions of the Sasak people. In contrast, Islam *Wetu Lima* is a more orthodox and strict interpretation of Islamic law. Islam *Wetu Lima* is closely associated with

2 Jan Van Ball, *Pesta Alif Di Bayan*, ed. Nalom Siahaan, terjemah., vol. 55 (City of California : Jakarta Bhratara, 1976).

3 Sven Cederroth, *The Spell of the Ancestors and the Power of Mekkah: A Sasak Community on Lombok (Gothenburg Studies in Social Anthropology)* (Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1981); Sven Cederroth, "Gods and Spirits in the *Wetu Telu* Religion of Lombok," in *Animism in Southeast Asia*, 2018.

4 Erni Budiwanti, "The Purification Movement in Bayan, North Lombok: Orthodox Islam Vis-à-Vis Religious Syncretism," in *Between Harmony and Discrimination: Negotiating Religious Identities within Majority-Minority Relationships in Bali and Lombok*, 2014; Erni Budiwanti, "Reislamizing Lombok Contesting the Bayane Adat," *Masyarakat Indonesia XXXVII*, no. 2 (2011).

Islam propagated by Tuan Guru alumni from the Middle East—Makkah, Egypt, and Yemen. These Tuan Guru, as proponents of Islam Wetu Lima, often target the Wetu Telu community in their missionary work, viewing Wetu Telu as an Islam that still contains many deviations.⁵

In the post-Reformasi era, within the *Waktu Lima* Islamic community, the phenomenon of polarization has become increasingly evident. On one hand, there is a traditionalist group that tends to align with the teachings of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Nahdlatul Wathan (NW), advocating for a moderate and inclusive religious approach. On the other hand, a puritan group has emerged, such as the followers of Salafi-Wahhabi, who promote the purification of Islamic teachings through more stringent and literal religious practices. This polarization reflects profound ideological differences regarding Islam within the Sasak community and, therefore, cannot be understood merely from the perspective of social movements and political identity. Such polarization must be viewed in a deeper context, particularly in studies of Qur'anic interpretation, as differing interpretations of the Qur'an are a key element distinguishing these two groups.

Using a qualitative case study approach⁶, this article seeks to investigate the agency of the interpretive community within the Sasak society in interpreting the Qur'an. Specifically, it examines how they interpret theological issues, which contribute to the emergence of distinct forms of Islam and ideological variations within the community. Through observation, the author examines the daily realities of the Sasak Muslim community, which is divided into several groups such as Islam Wetu Telu, Islam Wetu Lima (NU & NW), and the Salafi group. In-depth interviews were conducted to gather data on the dissemination of Qur'anic exegesis studies, the emergence of theological interpretative differences, and ideological conflicts within the Sasak community. Data was obtained from various informants, including members of the Islam Wetu Telu community, citizens of NW and NU, and the Salafi-Wahhabi group. These data were then analysed using the Miles and Huberman model,⁷ which involves data reduction, data display, and interpretation.

This study employs a hermeneutic approach as its theoretical framework⁸. Hermeneutics serves as an analytical tool for understanding the construction of religious meaning that develops within the Sasak Muslim community, particularly

5 Interview with Sahabudin, Mataram, 11 Mei 2025.

6 W John Creswell and J David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative Adn Mixed Methods Approaches*, *Journal of Chemical Information and Modeling*, vol. 53, 2018.

7 MB Miles and AM Huberman, "Miles and Huberman Chapter 2," in *Qualitative Data Analysis*, 1994.

8 Richard Kearney, "Paul Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Translation," *Research in Phenomenology* 37, no. 2 (2007).

among the interpretations of the Wetu Telu, Wetu Lima, and Salafi-Wahhabi groups. In the context of Lombok, key-actors such as pesantren scholars, traditional leaders, and the Wetu Telu community play a central role in shaping and reproducing religious meanings. The interpretive differences between the Wetu Telu, Wetu Lima, and Salafi-Wahhabi groups highlight the contestation of meaning among these interpretive communities, suggesting that Qur'anic exegesis is not singular, but rather plural and contextual.

Within the framework of hermeneutics, the interpretative products of these groups are understood as a fusion of horizons between the text and the reader, where the sacred text interacts with the socio-cultural reality of the interpreter.⁹ Local interpreters' efforts to align Qur'anic teachings with local values, such as the symbolic and spiritual interpretation of monotheism, indicate an active dialogue between religious doctrine and the local context. However, this process also generates tension between the textual, scriptural approach and the more flexible contextual approach, often leading to ideological conflicts. Furthermore, the hermeneutic approach also contains a critical-ideological dimension that questions how exegesis is used within power relations.¹⁰

As a complement to the hermeneutic framework, this article also draws on Talal Asad's anthropological approach in the *anthropology of Islam*.¹¹ Asad proposes the concept of Islam as a "discursive tradition"—a social construct that continuously evolves through interpretation, social practices, and the political-historical dynamics of Muslim societies.¹² From this perspective, Islam is understood as the result of the interaction between religious texts (exegesis), knowledge authority (interpretation), and the social context in which it is practiced. Therefore, the interpretation of the Qur'an among the Sasak community cannot be separated from the role of religious institutions, the state, and local actors such as *tuan guru* and traditional leaders, who shape and reproduce the meanings of Islam in accordance with specific social realities and political interests.¹³ This context helps explain why there are differences in exegesis between groups such as Wetu Telu, Wetu Lima, and Salafi-Wahhabi, as well as how these interpretations become part of the process of negotiating identity,

9 Rusli Rusli and Muhammad Yunus, "Aspek Hermeneutika Tafsir Al-Qur'an: Studi Kitab Tafsir Jalalain," *Jurnal AlijLam Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 2, no. 2 (2021).

10 Francisco J. Gonzalez, "Dialectic and Dialogue in the Hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur and H.G. Gadamer," *Continental Philosophy Review* 39, no. 3 (2006).

11 Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Qui Parle* 17, no. 2 (2009).

12 Ovamir Anjum, "Islam as a Discursive Tradition: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 3 (2007).

13 Talal Asad and Saba Mahmood, "Talal Asad: Modern Power and the Reconfiguration of Religious Traditions," *Stanford Humanities Review* 5, no. 1 (1996).

authority, and power within Lombok society

Theological Hermeneutics and Interpretive Communities in Lombok

Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, *tafsir* is more than a linguistic exercise;¹⁴ it is a dynamic epistemological enterprise shaped by layers of meaning, historical evolution, and socio-political context.¹⁵ Quraish Shihab underscores that the task of interpretation demands both ethical seriousness and methodological precision,¹⁶ as the interpreter must not only clarify what is readily understood but also uncover the subtle, obscure dimensions of the Qur'anic message.¹⁷ Building on this, Abdul Mustaqim classifies the history of *tafsir* into three rational paradigms: the narrative-based formative period, the ideologically driven medieval phase,¹⁸ and the critical, reformative era that responds to contemporary challenges.¹⁹ Walid Saleh extends the discourse by demonstrating that *tafsir* has never been a theologically neutral act, but one deeply entangled with political structures and authority.²⁰ He argues that throughout history, interpretations have served to legitimize ruling powers, while in modern times, the move toward contextual and reformist readings often encounters resistance from conservative circles.²¹ Taken together, these perspectives illuminate *tafsir* as a historically situated and ideologically charged practice—one that negotiates divine meaning within shifting landscapes of power, tradition, and modernity.

For non-Arab communities, engagement with the Qur'an as an Arabic text involves a process of adaptation and contextualization. The Sasak Muslim community, as a non-Arab interpretive community, has a distinctive approach to *tafsir*, prioritizing

14 Abdul Hameed and Mian Saadat Ali Nadeem, "A Brief Review of Historical Promotions of Interpretive Methods of the Holy Quran in Early Times" 6, no. 3 (n.d.), www.alqamarjournal.com.

15 Mesut Kaya, "Ta'wil in the Early Period of Tafsir: Mujahid b. Jabr's Rational Qur'an Exegesis," *Islam Arastirmalari Dergisi* 2021, no. 45 (2021).

16 Rahmatullah Rahmatullah, Hudriansyah Hudriansyah, and Mursalim Mursalim, "M. Quraish Shihab Dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Dinamika Studi Tafsir Al-Qur'an Indonesia Kontemporer," *SUHUF* 14, no. 1 (2021).

17 Muhammad Iqbal, "Metode Penafsiran Al-Qur'an M. Quraish Shihab," *TSAQAFAH* 6, no. 2 (2010).

18 Abdul Mustaqim, "Epistemologi Tafsir Kontemporer (Studi Komparatif Antara Fazlur Rahman Dan Muhammad Syahrur)," *Disertasi* (2007).

19 Mustaqim, "Epistemologi Tafsir Kontemporer (Studi Komparatif Antara Fazlur Rahman Dan Muhammad Syahrur)."

20 Omar Alí-de-Unzaga, "Walid Saleh, The Formation of the Classical Tafsir Tradition: The Qur'ān Commentary of al-Tha'c Labī," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2006).

21 Mu'ammar Zayn Qadafy, "Menghidupkan Yang Mati Suri: Walid Saleh Dan Revitalisasi Kajian Sejarah Intelektual Tafsir Klasik," *SUHUF* 15, no. 2 (2023).

oral translation and contextual interpretation. As an interpretive community, the Sasak people form their understanding of the Qur'an based on their traditions and social norms. In this context, tafsir is not merely understood as a sacred text but also as a part of their cultural life that is relevant to their social conditions. While there are more orthodox groups, such as the Salafi-Wahhabi, who emphasize a scriptural understanding, traditional groups like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Nahdlatul Wathan (NW) maintain classical tafsir derived from the Sunni school, though adjusted to local customs (Interview with Subki, East Lombok 3 March 2025).

In Lombok, differences in Qur'anic interpretation within the Sasak community occur not only in linguistic terms but also in profound theological dimensions. These variations reflect how tafsir or interpretations of sacred texts are deeply influenced by the ideological and social constructs that develop within each religious group. In this regard, Talal Asad's theory of discursive tradition provides a highly relevant explanation. Asad argues that religion, including the interpretation of sacred texts, is not only shaped by individual understanding but also by the traditions that evolve within society.²² Thus, the tafsir of the Qur'an in Lombok is not a product of detached understanding of the text, but rather a part of a discursive tradition that is shaped by the local social, political, and cultural context.

The Wetu Telu community, known for its syncretic Islamic practices, interprets the Qur'an through the lens of pre-Islamic local traditions that existed before the arrival of orthodox Islam. In their view, sacred texts are not always understood literally but are rather seen within symbolic and contextual frameworks relevant to Sasak culture. This interpretation reflects a discursive tradition that blends Islamic teachings with local values and traditions. For this group, the Qur'an is not merely a religious guide but also a part of a broader cultural life. In this way, the Wetu Telu community forms a discursive tradition deeply influenced by local social and cultural factors that shape them.

On the other hand, the Wetu Lima community develops a more orthodox discursive tradition that strictly follows Islamic law. The Waktu Lima group places a stronger emphasis on interpreting the Qur'an in accordance with classical teachings from the Sunni school, as represented by Nahdlatul Wathan (NW) and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Lombok. Both of these organizations play a significant role in shaping religious understanding in Lombok, emphasizing a more traditional interpretation of Islam that aligns with the principles taught in the Sunni school²³. While NW, rooted

22 Asad and Mahmood, "Talal Asad: Modern Power and the Reconfiguration of Religious Traditions."

23 Muh. Alwi Parhanudin, "Nahdlatul Wathan Dan Masyarakat Sipil," *Jurnal Agama Hak Azazi Manusia* 2, no. 1 (2012).

in Lombok, and NU, with broader influence in Indonesia, accommodate Sasak local traditions and culture, they still uphold an orthodox understanding of Islam, regarded as the pure and authentic teaching.

Despite recognizing the cultural and traditional diversity in Lombok, both NW and NU view the practices of Wetu Telu with a critical eye. For groups like Wetu Lima, affiliated with organizations such as NW and NU, the religious practices of Wetu Telu are seen as deviations from the true teachings of Islam. The syncretic practices of Wetu Telu, which incorporate elements of pre-Islamic religions like Hinduism and Buddhism, are regarded by Wetu Lima as a deviation from the pure shari'a.²⁴ However, while viewing Wetu Telu as deviating from orthodox Islam, the Wetu Lima community still accommodates many local traditions in their religious practices, with an emphasis on consistency with established Islamic teachings. NW and NU, as representations of Wetu Lima, strive to maintain a balance between preserving orthodox Islamic teachings and respecting local traditions and culture, though within boundaries deemed appropriate by Islamic law.

In contrast, the Salafi-Wahhabi group is more radical, rejecting religious practices that lack clear textual justification in the Qur'an and Sunnah. In their view, local traditions practiced by Wetu Telu and Wetu Lima, such as visiting graves and other religious ceremonies, are considered bid'ah (innovations) that are inconsistent with pure Islam. From Stanley Fish's perspective, the differences in Qur'anic interpretation can be understood as the result of different interpretive communities. Fish argues that the understanding of a text is heavily dependent on the community interpreting it. In this case, although all groups (Wetu Telu, Wetu Lima, and Salafi) refer to the same text—the Qur'an—they have vastly different understandings based on their respective communities. The Wetu Telu community, as an interpretive community, gives meaning to the Qur'an by considering their unique local cultural context, which is more flexible and contextual. Their understanding of the sacred text is not solely based on the written words but also on how the text relates to their lives and Sasak traditions.

On the other hand, the Wetu Lima and Salafi-Wahhabi communities form their interpretive communities based on a stricter understanding of tafsir texts. They emphasize interpretations that align with the widely accepted teachings of Islam globally. In this regard, their understanding of the Qur'an results from a rigorous tafsir tradition based on authoritative tafsir works. Thus, although all three groups

24 Saputra BE Mulyaningsih SS, Mas'ud L, "Penelusuran Islam Wetu Telu Di Lombok Timur," *KAGANGA: Jurnal Pendidikan Sejarah dan Riset Sosial Humaniora* Vol. 6, no. No. 1 (2023); Gusti Ayu Santi Patni Ribut, Ida Bagus Gde Yudha Triguna, and I Wayan Suija, "Didactic Strategy of Wetu Telu Cultural Heritage on Sasak Tribe," *International journal of linguistics, literature and culture* 5, no. 3 (2019).

refer to the Qur'an as a sacred text, their methods of interpretation are heavily influenced by their respective traditions and social contexts.

The differences in tafsir, arising from divergent discursive traditions and interpretive communities, not only create diversity in religious practices and expressions but also provoke ideological tensions between the groups. These tensions often lead to social conflicts, manifested in competitions over mosque management, differences in religious practices, and broader ideological disputes. Therefore, the tafsir of the Qur'an within the Sasak community is not merely a discourse but also an ideological battleground that reflects the social, political, and power dynamics within that society.

Oral tafsir in the early days of Islam in Lombok and the formation of Wetu Telu Islam.

The early Islamization in Lombok took place in the late 16th century, and during this phase, the interaction between the Sasak people and the Qur'an occurred orally. Religious figures, known as *kiai* and *lebe*, conveyed the meanings of the Qur'anic verses orally to the community without referring to classical tafsir books (Interview with Azhari, North Lombok, 5 February, 2025). This process inherently involved the translation of the Qur'an from Arabic into the local Sasak language, with the aim of ensuring that the meanings and messages of the Qur'an could be understood by the community. In this context, the oral translation of the Qur'an served as a form of oral tafsir that facilitated the interpretation and understanding of the sacred text within the framework of the local culture.

The concept of oral tafsir was popularized by Andreas Görke in his article *Redefining the Borders of Tafsir: Oral Exegesis, Lay Exegesis, and Regional Particularities*. According to Görke, the phenomenon of oral tafsir has its origins during the time of Prophet Muhammad.²⁵ In fact, oral tafsir can be considered the earliest form of Qur'anic exegesis.²⁶ The Prophet Muhammad frequently provided verbal explanations of Qur'anic verses, which were subsequently recorded in the Hadith literature. Following the Prophet's era, oral tafsir continued during the period of the Companions, as the explanation and interpretation of the Qur'an were predominantly conducted orally by the Companions.²⁷ As Islam expanded beyond the Arabian

25 Edited by Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink, *Tafsir and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre*, *Qur'anic Studies Series*, 2015.

26 Islah Gusmian and Mustaffa Abdullah, "The Qur'an: Its Orality and Interpretation," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Literature and Muslim Society* 7, no. 2 (2023).

27 Angelika Brodersen, "Tafsir and Islamic Intellectual History. Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre, Edited by Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink, 2014," *Die Welt des Islams* 57, no. 2 (2017).

Peninsula, the demand for oral tafsir increased. Non-Arab Muslim communities required Qur'anic explanations in the local languages they spoke. In this context, the tradition of oral tafsir evolved and became a significant historical process in the spread of Islam beyond the Arab world.

In Lombok, oral tafsir is realized in the form of religious study sessions, where a teacher (Tuan Guru) explains the meanings of Qur'anic verses to the congregation (audience), who then understand the content, with some even taking notes during the session. According to Gorke, in this process of religious study, it is highly likely that additional explanations are provided by the Kiai or Tuan Guru that are not found in classical tafsir texts. These supplementary explanations typically emerge as a response to the social and contextual conditions of the audience. Oral tafsir continues to take place in rural areas of Lombok to this day, remaining the primary method used by Tuan Gurus to communicate the meanings of the Qur'an to the lay community. As a result, the lay community heavily relies on the interpretations provided by the Tuan Guru to understand the meaning of the Qur'an.

This article argues that oral tafsir was a method employed by early *muballigh* during the Islamization process in Lombok. Delivered in a pragmatic and communicative manner, oral tafsir made the Qur'an more accessible to the Sasak community, who are not native Arabic speakers. As Islam became more widely accepted among the Sasak people, figures known as Kiai and Lebe emerged.²⁸ These individuals, after embracing Islam and committing to studying it, became authoritative figures capable of delivering oral tafsir of the Qur'anic verses to the community. Consequently, the practice of orally conveying the meaning of the Qur'an by Kiai and Lebe, which was then accepted and interpreted by the community in their daily lives, formed an interpretive community that gave rise to the distinctive Wetu Telu form of Islam.

Despite ongoing academic debates about Wetu Telu Islam, often referred to as minimalist or syncretic Islam, this article contends that Wetu Telu Islam is a variant of Islam in Lombok that emerged as a product of the interpretive community during the early stages of Islamization in the region. Wetu Telu Islam is the result of Qur'anic interpretation by the early Muslim community in Lombok, striving to understand Islamic teachings within their social and cultural context. Furthermore, this article argues that Wetu Telu Islam represents a form of vernacularization of Islam in Lombok, which developed during a time when the Muslim community in

28 RUTH KRULFELD, "The Spell of the Ancestors and the Power of Mekkah: A Sasak Community on Lombok. SVEN CEDERROTH," *American Ethnologist* 10, no. 2 (1983); Cederroth, "Gods and Spirits in the Wetu Telu Religion of Lombok"; Sven Cederroth, *The Spell of the Ancestors and the Power of Mekkah: A Sasak Community on Lombok (Gothenburg Studies in Social Anthropology)*.

Lombok faced linguistic barriers in accessing classical tafsir texts written in Arabic.

The Wetu Telu Islamic community interprets the Qur'an through various ritualistic expressions, utilizing symbols and traditions as integral parts of their Islamic practices. For example, in the Wetu Telu community, there are traditions such as the Maulid Adat, traditional weddings, and the Sasak Shahada. In this context, the teachings of Islam, as practiced by the Wetu Telu community, are not merely a system of doctrine but also represent a historical and cultural experience that creates a distinctive form of Islam in the region.

Wetu Telu Islam, as a discursive tradition²⁹, constitutes a system of thought and Islamic expression that emerges through the interaction between the sacred text (the Qur'an), the community (the followers of Wetu Telu), and religious practices within particular regional contexts. The understanding of Islam, or the interpretation of the Qur'an and its practices, is invariably intertwined with the prevailing power structures within society.³⁰ For instance, it involves the ways in which religious authorities define what is regarded as 'authentic Islam' across various historical and geographical settings.

So far, the scholarly discourse surrounding Sasak Islam has predominantly adopted an essentialist framework, frequently conceptualizing a dichotomy between Wetu Lima and Wetu Telu. This approach is deeply rooted in the colonial biases propagated by early anthropologists.³¹ The characterization of Wetu Telu as a syncretic form of Islam emerged from the works of Western anthropologists, such as Van Ball and Cederroth, and has since been perpetuated by numerous Indonesian scholars, including Erni Budiwanti and others. This labeling reflects a broader trend in the academic literature that tends to oversimplify the complexities of religious practices within the Sasak community.

In contrast to Van Ball, Cederroth, and Budiwanti, this article argues that Wetu Telu Muslim community constitutes an interpretive community that engages in the oral interpretation of the Qur'an, translating it into the practice of the living Qur'an in Lombok, specifically in the village of Bayan. In this context, Ahmad Rafiq articulates that the oral exegesis practiced by non-Arab Muslim communities constitutes a form of the living Qur'an³²; a phenomenon of appropriation in which the Qur'an is continuously reinterpreted by society in a heterogeneous manner,

29 Anjum, "Islam as a Discursive Tradition: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors."

30 Asad and Mahmood, "Talal Asad: Modern Power and the Reconfiguration of Religious Traditions."

31 Ahmad Fathan Aniq, "Lombok Islam in the Eyes of Anthropologists: A Literature Review on Islam Wetu Telu and Waktu Lima," *Al Qalam* 28, no. 2 (2011).

32 Ahmad Rafiq, *The Reception of the Qur'an in Indonesia: A Case Study of the Place of the Qur'an in a Non-Arabic Speaking Community* (Pennsylvania, 2014).

undergoing constant transformation through the processes of knowledge transmission, encompassing written, oral, and practical forms of expression. The transmission of the Qur'anic meaning reflects the synchronic ideality of the interpreting community, thereby requiring a transformation in the forms of knowledge and practices associated with the Qur'an.³³ This implies that the Qur'an is interpreted and actualized through various ritual practices and traditions within non-Arab Muslim communities. Similarly, within the Wetu Telu Muslim community, the Qur'an is practiced as a tradition that is institutionalized within their socio-cultural framework.

In the Wetu Telu Muslim community, the tradition of oral exegesis goes beyond the mere reading of the Qur'an. This tradition also emphasizes the revered position of the Qur'an, which is intentionally preserved and honored, becoming a framework for social and cultural practices. This indicates that, in the face of language barriers in understanding the Qur'an, the Wetu Telu community developed innovative strategies to disseminate the values contained in the holy text. They transcribed the teachings of the Qur'an into manuscripts, incorporating them into texts such as *Serat Rengganis*, *Usada Rara*, and *Tuhfab al-Mursalāh ilā Rūḥ an-Nabī*, which were written in Kawi and Jawi scripts. These manuscripts reflect the creative adaptation of Qur'anic exegesis within the context of local language and culture.

These manuscripts, written in the post-Islamic period, are clearly influenced by the oral Qur'anic exegesis taught by early missionaries during the Islamization of Lombok. The *Serat Rengganis* manuscript explores the relationship between humans, God, and nature, emphasizing religious practices such as prayer and pilgrimage (*al-ḥajj*). This manuscript uses metaphorical language to connect spiritual practices with an awareness of the environment. Meanwhile, *Usada Rara*, which primarily focuses on traditional healing, also integrates Islamic teachings, particularly those related to worship and environmental ethics. This manuscript advocates ethical treatment of nature, using medicinal plants alongside Islamic prayers.³⁴ The text of *Tuhfab al-Mursalāh ilā Rūḥ an-Nabī* links worship with responsibility towards the environment, highlighting humanity's obligation to care for nature, symbolized by the elements of fire, water, wind, and earth. These manuscripts reflect a fusion of Islamic spiritual practices and environmental stewardship within the local Lombok context.

Collectively, these three manuscripts emphasize the importance of maintaining harmony with nature as an integral part of worship. For the Wetu Telu Muslims, their relationship with nature is inseparable from their relationship with God and

33 Ahmad Rafiq, *The Reception of the Qur'an in Indonesia: A Case Study of the Place of the Qur'an in a Non-Arabic Speaking Community*.

34 Abdul Quddus et al., "Environmental Theology and Worship Teaching of Lombok Wetu Telu Old Manuscripts," *Al-Ihkam: Jurnal Hukum dan Pranata Sosial* 19, no. 1 (2024): 249–270.

fellow humans. This belief is rooted in the concept of *tawhīd* (the oneness of God) and a cosmological understanding that connects the “macrocosm” (the sun, moon, planets) with the “microcosm” (humans, animals, plants).

The Wetu Telu community also practices *pepaosan*, a ritual reading of these manuscripts, which is central to the transmission of religious and environmental teachings. This tradition involves public recitations of these manuscripts, often accompanied by explanations from experts, and includes participants from various religious backgrounds, demonstrating the integrative and interfaith nature of Wetu Telu practices.

Talal Asad's theory of the anthropology of religion tends to emphasize the relationship between religion and the state, as well as how religion is influenced by social and political structures. For Asad, religion cannot be separated from the power and external ideologies that shape it. However, this approach sometimes overlooks the internal dynamics that emerge within religious beliefs and practices, particularly in the context of specific religious communities. For example, in the Wetu Telu Muslim community in Lombok, their religious beliefs and rituals are not entirely shaped by political power influences, but rather stem from their understanding of Islamic teachings. This understanding, based on their interaction with and interpretation of the Qur'an, is then manifested in their personal and social lives, including the rituals and spirituality embedded in the local community's social life.

In this context, to understand the emergence of Islamic variants in Lombok, the approach of *Quranic anthropology* and *social hermeneutics* is more relevant to apply. This approach positions the Qur'an as an authoritative text interpreted by religious communities, such as the *Wetu Telu* and *Waktu Lima* Muslims, while considering the local social and cultural context in the interpretation process. Therefore, a more holistic understanding of religion in this context requires an approach that acknowledges the active role of the community in shaping and interpreting religious teachings according to their experiences and social needs.

Thus, the Wetu Telu community's reception of the Qur'an is not only informational but also performative, especially manifested in the tradition of *pepaosan* and various cultural rituals. This process exemplifies the duplication of Qur'anic appropriation, where the Qur'an functions both as an active subject and an active object in the ongoing interaction of reception within the Wetu Telu community. Through this dynamic, the Wetu Telu Muslim community continues to interpret the ideals of the Qur'an and integrate them with the values, practices, and traditions that they have upheld throughout history.

The Role of Tuan Guru in Qur'anic Exegesis through Arabic Classical Books.

Michael Feener observes that the practice of Qur'anic interpretation in the Malay world, or Southeast Asia, commenced several centuries ago.³⁵ By the 17th century, the region began to produce its own tafsīr. An example of this can be found in a Malay manuscript from Aceh, preserved at the University of Cambridge, which demonstrates that the techniques of writing and methods of interpretation used during that time were relatively rudimentary.³⁶ This manuscript, a tafsīr of Surah Al-Kahfi, is written in red ink and includes both a translation and commentary, the latter written in black ink.³⁷ Furthermore, Feener highlights that early tafsīr works in the region were largely based on classical tafsīr texts, such as those by Al-Khazin, Al-Tha'labi, and Al-Baghawi. He also examines the role of Isra'iliyyat narratives within these tafsīrs and how these stories were integrated into local interpretations. Feener's research offers valuable insights into how the tradition of Qur'anic interpretation developed in Southeast Asia³⁸, demonstrating the adaptation and integration of local elements in the understanding of the sacred text.³⁹

In Lombok, the Tuan Guru play a very important role in the teaching of the Qur'an and its tafsir. Most of them are leaders of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), which serve as the main centers for tafsir studies. The Tuan Guru teach classical tafsir texts such as Tafsir Jalalayn, Ibn Kathir, Al-Qurtubi, Al-Tha'bari, and Al-Maraghi. They also organize regular tafsir study sessions at village mosques once a month. During these public tafsir sessions, the Tuan Guru bring tafsir books and read one to three verses of the Qur'an, then explain their interpretations.

In the process of transmitting the meaning of the Qur'an, the *Tuan Guru* deliver tafsir by taking into account the social and cultural contexts of the local community.⁴⁰ They endeavor to explain how the teachings of the Qur'an can be

35 Francis Robinson, "Islamic Connections: Muslim Societies in South and Southeast Asia. Edited by R. Michael Feener and Terenjit Sevea. Pp. Xxiv, 245. Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009.," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 20, no. 3 (2010).

36 R. Michael Feener, "Notes Towards the History of Qur'anic Exegesis in Southeast Asia," *Studia Islamika* 5, no. 3 (1970).

37 Daniel Andrew Birchok, "Islam and the Limits of the State. Reconfigurations of Practice, Community, and Authority in Contemporary Aceh, Edited by Feener, R. Michael, David Kloos, and Annemarie Samuels," *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde / Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 172, no. 4 (2016).

38 R. Michael Feener et al., "Islamisation and the Formation of Vernacular Muslim Material Culture in 15th-Century Northern Sumatra," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 49, no. 143 (2021).

39 Feener, "Notes Towards the History of Qur'anic Exegesis in Southeast Asia."

40 Muhammad Rifqi Subakti Bahtiar, Hishamuddin Salim, and Ari Safar Wadi, "Discovering Rhetorical Strategies in the Islamic Discourse of Tuan Guru Bajang Muhammad Zainul Majdi," *International Journal*

applied and remain relevant to the socio-cultural life of the Sasak people. Tafsir presented by the *Tuan Guru* tends to be practical and applicative, aimed at facilitating the community's understanding and enabling them to live in accordance with the principles outlined in the Qur'an.⁴¹ Furthermore, the *Tuan Guru* play a significant role in integrating Islamic teachings with local wisdom and Sasak traditions, emphasizing the importance of harmonizing religious principles with local customs.⁴²

One notable *Tuan Guru* who pioneered the tradition of tafsir study based on Arabic-language texts was *Tuan Guru Umar* of Kelayu.⁴³ He was a distinguished figure who served as a teacher at the Masjid al-Haram in the late 19th century, and his students went on to spread across Southeast Asia.⁴⁴ Among his students in Lombok were *Tuan Guru Rais Sekarbela*, *Tuan Guru Muhammad Saleh Lopan*, *Tuan Guru Muhammad Saleh Hambali Bengkel*, *Tuan Guru Muhammad Siddik Karang Kelok Mataram*, and others. The network of *Tuan Guru Umar*'s students continued the tradition of tafsir study based on Arabic-language texts in their respective regions. The influence of *Tuan Guru Umar* also spread throughout Indonesia via his students, including Kiai Abdul Fattah from Pontianak, Kiai Daud from Palembang, Kiai Nawawi from Lampung, Kiai Abdurrahman from Kedah, and Syekh Muhammad Zen from Bawean, as well as KH Hasyim Asy'ari.⁴⁵

Tuan Guru Zainuddin Abdul Madjid (1989-1997), from Pancor, established Madrasah NWDI (Nadhlatu Wathan Diniyah Islamiyah) in 1937 as a central institution for Islamic education, with a particular emphasis on the Qur'an and its tafsir. In 1966, he further contributed to Islamic scholarship by founding *Ma'had Dârul Al-Qur'an wa-alhadis*, a higher-level institution dedicated to Qur'anic and tafsir studies.⁴⁶ The Arabic-language tafsir texts taught at this institution were predominantly of the Sunni tradition, including *Tafsir Jalalayn*, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*,

of English and Applied Linguistics (IJEAL) 2, no. 2 (2022).

41 Ahmad Tohri et al., "Tauhid View Tuan Guru Umar Kelayu: Intellectual History Study of Lombok Theologian Central Figure," *Paramita: Historical Studies Journal* 32, no. 1 (2022).

42 Adi Fadli, "Intelektualisme Pesantren: Studi Geneologi Dan Jaringan Keilmuan Tuan Guru Di Lombok," *Jurnal El-Hikam IX*, no. 2 (2016): 287-310.

43 Ahmad Tohri, H. Habibuddin, and Abdul Rasyad, "Sasak People's Resistance Against Mataram-Karangasem and Dutch Colonial Rulers: The Role of Tuan Guru Umar Kelayu," *Journal of Asian Social Science Research* 2, no. 1 (2020).

44 Tohri, Habibuddin, and Rasyad, "Sasak People's Resistance Against Mataram-Karangasem and Dutch Colonial Rulers: The Role of Tuan Guru Umar Kelayu."

45 Fadli, "Intelektualisme Pesantren: Studi Geneologi Dan Jaringan Keilmuan Tuan Guru Di Lombok."

46 Khirjan Nahdi, "Makna Pendidikan Nahdlatul Wathan : Telaah Interpretatif Visi Kebangsaan Dan Religius : Refleksi Pemikiran Dan Perjuangan Kyai Hamzanwadi 1904-1997," *Jurnal Educatio* 4, no. 2 (2009).

and *Tafsir al-Baidhowi*.⁴⁷ Through his network of students, he established madrasas in nearly every village in Lombok, thereby perpetuating the tradition of *ngaji* (Qur'anic study) focused on Arabic tafsir texts.⁴⁸ Among the most widely taught tafsir texts within the NW network of *Tuan Guru* was *Tafsir Jalalayn*.

Similarly, *Tuan Guru* Zainuddin Arsyad Mamben founded the *pesantren* Maraquit Ta'limat as a center for Qur'anic and tafsir studies. He undertook dakwah (preaching) throughout the villages in the eastern part of Lombok to "embed" the values of the Qur'an within the local community. His congregation extended across the villages of Mamben, Pohgading, Sambelia, and Sembalun.⁴⁹ Likewise, *Tuan Guru* Abdul Manan established the *majelis ta'lim* "Pesantren Al-Mannan" in the village of Bagik Nyaka as a center for *pengajian tafsir*.⁵⁰ His efforts focused on disseminating the teachings of the Qur'an throughout the villages of Bagik Nyaka, Aikmel, Lenek, Anjani, and Sembalun.

In the southern region of East Lombok, *Tuan Guru* Mutawalli imparted the values of the Qur'an in the coastal areas, particularly in the village of Jerowaru and its surrounding regions. He translated the teachings of the Qur'an into a movement for the empowerment of marginalized coastal communities, focusing on the development of infrastructure such as roads, bridges, dams, and reforestation initiatives.⁵¹ In this context, *Tuan Guru* Mutawalli interpreted the Qur'an in an applicative manner, aligning its teachings with social action.⁵² This exemplifies how the interpretation of the Qur'an is adapted to address the specific social circumstances and needs of the local community.

In West Lombok, there are at least five prominent *Tuan Guru* who have a significant influence within the community: *Tuan Guru* Muhammad Sholeh Hambali (Pesantren Darul Qur'an Bengkel), *Tuan Guru* Abhar Muhyidin (Pesantren Darul Falah, Pagutan), *Tuan Guru* Ibrahim al Halidi (Pesantren Islahudiny, Kediri), *Tuan Guru* Mustafa Al Halidi (Pesantren Islahudiny, Kediri), and *Tuan Guru* Ridwanullah

47 Bustanul Karim and Zulkarnaen Senep, "Pengaruh Teologi Asyariyah Terhadap TGKH. Zainuddin Abdul Madjid Di Lombok," *Jurnal AlifLam Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 4, no. 1 (2023).

48 Khirjan Nahdi, "Dinamika Pesantren Nahdlatul Wathan Dalam Perspektif Pendidikan, Sosial, Dan Modal," *ISLAMICA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 7, no. 2 (2014).

49 Nazar Naamy, "Tuan Guru, Islamic Da'wah, and Competition: The Fragmentation of Authority in Lombok-Indonesia," *Journal of Namibian Studies : History Politics Culture* 34 (2023).

50 Ida Bagus Putu Wijaya Kusumah, *NU Lombok (1953-1984)*, ed. Adi Fadli, I., vol. I (Mataram: Pustaka Lombok, 2010).

51 Fahrurrozi Fahrurrozi and Muhammad Thohri, "Map of Da'wah: Religious Polarization and Affirmation of Identity of Islamic Societies In Lombok, Indonesia," *SANGK&P: Jurnal Kajian Sosial Keagamaan* 3, no. 2 (2020).

52 Hasan Gauk and Muhamad Zaryl Gapari, "TGH Sibawaihi Mutawalli : Kajian Lingkungan Dalam Dakwah Modern Islam Di Lombok," *FONDATLA* 5, no. 1 (2021).

(Pesantren Darussalam, Babussalam).⁵³ These *Tuan Guru* played key roles in West Lombok in disseminating the values of the Qur'an through *pengajian tafsir* and the establishment of pesantren institutions. *Tuan Guru* Shaleh Hambali, for example, founded an educational institution named Darul Qur'an in Bengkel Village in 1921. He also authored several Arabic-language books across various disciplines, including Tajwid, Fiqh, Sufism, Hadith, and Tawhid.⁵⁴

In Post-reform 1998, religious leaders from among the alumni of Al- Azhar University, Egypt, have increasingly dominated the Islamic public space in Lombok, surpassing the influence of alumni from Mecca and Yemen. One of the prominent figures among the alumni of Egypt is TGB Zainul Majdi, who is known as a Qur'anic scholar graduate of Al-Azhar. With his background as a Qur'anic scholar from Al-Azhar, TGB Zainul Majdi entered the local political arena and successfully served as governor for two terms (2008-2019).⁵⁵ In addition to Zainul Majdi, many other alumni from Egypt have also contributed to the Sasak Muslim community, developing a Qur'anic exegesis tradition that emphasizes the principles of moderate Islam (*washatiah*). Even to this day, during his travels for preaching around Lombok island, TGB Zainul Majdi always takes the time to open the Tafsir Jalalayn, read one or two verses, and then interpret them in detail and at length for the community (Interview with Zainul Majdi, Mataram, 19 Maret 2025).

The presence of *Tuan Guru* and the establishment of numerous Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in Lombok have facilitated the formal and intensive study of Qur'anic exegesis within these educational institutions. As a result, the *Tuan Guru* leading these pesantren naturally acquired authority as *mufassir*, responsible for explaining the meaning of the Qur'an to the community. In this context, the shift from oral exegesis methods to a pesantren-based system, which uses Arabic-language texts, has contributed to the emergence of a new generation of Sasak Muslims skilled in the literacy of classical Arabic exegesis texts. Consequently, this new generation, shaped by the pesantren system, has formed a religious elite hierarchy, effectively replacing traditional religious elites such as *kiai*, *lebe*, or local religious leaders.

This shift represents the bureaucratization of religious authority through the pesantren education system. Moreover, the formalization of religious practices, which developed through the pesantren and *madrasah* systems, has significantly altered the way the Sasak community interacts with the Qur'an. While Islam (the

53 Fadli, "Intelektualisme Pesantren: Studi Geneologi Dan Jaringan Keilmuan Tuan Guru Di Lombok."

54 Fadli, "Intelektualisme Pesantren: Studi Geneologi Dan Jaringan Keilmuan Tuan Guru Di Lombok."

55 Mochammad Zia Ulhaq, *Retorika Dakwah Dalam Politik Studi Kasus Tgb Muhammad Zainul Majdi*, Tesis, 2019.

Qur'an) was previously studied organically through oral exegesis, it is now studied in a more formal and systematic framework as part of the pesantren curriculum. The strengthening of exegesis studies through pesantren institutions has built a stable and structured foundation for Islamic literacy within the Sasak community. This system has given rise to a generation proficient in a strong Islamic tradition, with mastery over classical exegesis texts as the primary reference in Islamic teachings.

In this regard, the oral exegesis tradition, which was once dominant, has shifted to a more formal and systematic form through the pesantren system. This process demonstrates how exegesis is not only linked to the Qur'anic text itself but also to the social and cultural structures that shape how the text is understood and transmitted. This shift illustrates how the Sasak community has developed a more structured and formal exegesis tradition, reflecting changes in how society interacts with their religious texts. Furthermore, the role of the *Tuan Guru* as an authoritative *mufassir* aligns with Asad's view on the role of religious figures in shaping discursive traditions.⁵⁶ The *Tuan Guru* not only explains the meaning of Qur'anic verses but also provides interpretations that adapt to local social and cultural conditions. This shows that exegesis in the Sasak tradition is not merely an effort to understand the text literally but also part of a broader social tradition that reflects the worldview of the Sasak people.

The agency of *Tuan Guru* alumni from Mecca, Egypt, and Yemen in Lombok has played a crucial role in strengthening the position of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja), particularly through the interpretation of the Qur'an in the Sunni exegesis genre. These *Tuan Guru* do not only teach classical exegesis texts such as *Tafsir Jalalayn*, Ibn Kathir, and al-Qurtubi but also integrate these exegeses with the more moderate values of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah and the principle of moderation in religion (*washatiyah Islam*). In this context, the *Tuan Guru* alumni from Mecca, Egypt, and Yemen function as an interpretive community that shapes how the Sasak community understands and applies the Qur'an. These *Tuan Guru* also provide interpretations that are in line with the local social and cultural context, making the interpretations more relevant and easily accepted by the community. In this sense, the *Tuan Guru* acts as an authority leading the interpretive community, determining how religious texts are understood and applied in daily life. The understanding provided by the *Tuan Guru* shapes the religious identity of the Sasak people, as they accept the exegesis presented as part of their religious tradition, aligned with moderate Islamic values.

56 Asad and Mahmood, "Talal Asad: Modern Power and the Reconfiguration of Religious Traditions"; Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam."

The exegesis tradition brought by the *Tuan Guru* alumni from Mecca, Egypt, and Yemen serves to form the religious worldview of the Sasak community, linking Islamic teachings with their local culture. In other words, although the exegesis taught is based on classical Arabic texts, the teachings remain relevant to the local culture and traditions because they are conveyed in a way that is acceptable to the community. As leaders in this discursive tradition, the *Tuan Guru* not only explain the meaning of Qur'anic verses but also integrate these teachings with social and cultural practices in Lombok. They provide contextual and applicable interpretations, tailored to the social needs of the Sasak community. Through this teaching, Qur'anic exegesis becomes not only a religious doctrine but an integral part of daily life, shaping ways of thinking, behavior, and widely accepted social norms.

Salafi Literal Interpretation and Ideological Conflict in Lombok

The presence of Wahhabism in Lombok, Indonesia, has sparked significant socio-religious tensions and conflicts, primarily due to its puritanical and reformist approach that often clashes with the local Islamic traditions. Wahhabism, emphasizes a strict interpretation of Islam, which has led to its opposition to certain cultural practices prevalent in Lombok. This has resulted in a dichotomy between Wahhabi followers and the broader Islamic community, leading to social unrest and challenges to religious harmony on the island.⁵⁷

In the past two decades, Lombok has become a recurring arena of conflict between Salafi-Wahhabi groups and traditionalist Islamic communities affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Nahdlatul Wathan (NW). The first major tension emerged in 2004 in Pancor, East Lombok, when the spread of Salafi-Wahhabi teachings, which reject the traditions of Maulid and Tahlil, sparked a strong reaction from the local community. This incident led to the expulsion of the group, the dissolution of religious study groups (*majelis ta'lim*), and the burning of an Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*). A similar tension occurred in 2006 in Beroro Hamlet, West Lombok, after a Wahhabi preacher claimed that traditional Islamic religious practices were forms of *bid'ah* (innovation), which triggered riots and a ban on their religious activities in the area. Clashes again occurred in 2010 in Kabar Village, East Lombok, due to intense debates between Wahhabi leaders and NW figures, which led to an attack on a mosque managed by the Wahhabi group. Meanwhile, in 2024, the people of Mamben Village rejected the construction of a Salafi mosque, fearing it would threaten the continuity of local Islamic traditions. In the same year, a major

⁵⁷ Saparudin Saparudin, "GERAKAN KEAGAMAAN DAN PETA AFILIASI IDEOLOGIS PENDIDIKAN ISLAM DI LOMBOK," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-ilmu Keislaman* 42, no. 1 (2018).

conflict broke out in Bagik Nyaka Village following the circulation of a video sermon by a Wahhabi preacher, which was deemed to misguide the practice of visiting graves and disrespect the ancestors' tombs of the Sasak people. This incident sparked public outrage and led to the burning of the Assunah Islamic Boarding School by local residents.

One of the main sources of conflict is the Salafi-Wahhabi group's rejection of various rituals they consider to be *bid'ah* (innovation), such as the practice of visiting the graves of religious scholars, which they view as a deviation from authentic Islamic teachings.⁵⁸ Additionally, differences in religious authority also become a point of contention, with Tuan Guru, as a religious leader in Lombok, teaching a more moderate form of Islam based on local traditions, while the Ustaz of Wahhabi faction emphasizes a stricter and more literal approach.⁵⁹

The interpretive methods between Wahhabism and traditionalist Islam are distinctly visible in their approaches to the Qur'an, tradition, and socio-cultural contexts. Wahhabism, which originates from the Salafi movement, tends to follow a literal approach in interpreting the Qur'an, focusing on a direct understanding of the text without paying much attention to contextual interpretations.⁶⁰ They reject many religious practices that have developed within Islamic traditions, such as visiting graves or celebrating the Prophet's birthday, as they are considered to lack a clear basis in the Qur'an and Hadith. For Wahhabis, the teachings of Islam must return to the original understanding found during the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW and his companions, without being influenced by the traditions and cultures that developed afterward.⁶¹ They are also more resistant to socio-cultural developments that do not align with their literal understanding of the faith.

In contrast, Aswaja tends to be more open in its approach. They accept traditions and practices that have developed within the Muslim community, as long as they do not contradict the fundamental principles of the Qur'an and Hadith. Aswaja is more flexible in interpreting the Qur'an and believes that religious understanding can be adapted to local social and cultural contexts, as long as it preserves the core teachings of Islam. They also allow greater space for *ijtihad* and *ijma'* in determining

58 Zaenal Abidin, "Tindak Anarkis Terhadap Kelompok Salafi Di Lombok Barat, Nusa Tenggara Barat," *Harmoni Jurnal Multikultural dan Multireligius* VIII, no. 31 (2009).

59 Saparudin Saparudin, "DESAKRALISASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN TUAN GURU PURIFIKASI SALAFI VERSUS TRADISIONALISME NAHDLATUL WATHAN," *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora* 20, no. 1 (2022).

60 Cameron Zargar, "Origins of Wahhabism from Hanbali Fiqh," *UCLA Journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law* 16 (2017).

61 Christopher M. Blanchard, "The Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya," in *Modern Islam: Traditions and Concerns*, 2011.

Islamic rulings. As a result, Aswaja recognizes that religion and culture can coexist, making their interpretations of the Qur'an more contextual and relevant to the changing times.

The main difference between these two schools of thought lies in how they understand religious texts and how they integrate social and cultural values into Islamic teachings. Wahhabism places a greater emphasis on textual uniformity and accuracy, while Aswaja prioritizes a balance between the text and the social, cultural, and temporal context. This makes Aswaja more open to innovation in religious interpretation, while Wahhabism remains more conservative in maintaining an understanding that is purely aligned with the time of the Prophet.

The Salafi-Wahhabi movement in Lombok has significantly disseminated its teachings through the establishment of pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) across various regions, particularly in East Lombok.⁶² These pesantren serve as central hubs for the propagation of Salafi ideology and have also established mosques that function as venues for religious instruction. A notable example of a prominent Salafi pesantren in Lombok is Pondok Pesantren Assunah, recognized as the largest center for Wahhabi teachings in the region.⁶³ At this pesantren, Qur'anic tafsir sessions are conducted by several Ustaz (religious instructors) who are alumni of the University of Madina. These *pengajian* are held regularly on a weekly basis, utilizing a hybrid model that accommodates both offline and online participation.⁶⁴

Several tafsir (Qur'anic exegesis) works written by scholars from the Wahhabi or like-minded perspectives play an important role in understanding the Qur'an from a literal and textual standpoint. One of the main works frequently used by Wahhabi circles in Lombok is *Tafsir al-Sa'di* (Tafsir al-Muyassar), authored by Shaykh Abdurrahman as-Sa'di. This tafsir is renowned for its simplicity and explanations that prioritize a direct understanding of the Qur'anic verses without heavily relying on metaphorical or speculative interpretations. Additionally, *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*, although written by two Sunni scholars (al-Suyuti and al-Mahalli), is also used by Wahhabis due to its clear, concise, and literal approach. While *Tafsir al-Tabari* was written long before the emergence of the Wahhabi movement, it is still used as it emphasizes a direct understanding and prioritizes the original texts without interpretations that stray too far from the literal meaning.

62 Muharrir, *Resiliensi Pendidikan Salafi Di Lombok Pasca Orde Baru* (Mataram, 2022).

63 M Alwan, "Resilience, Accommodation and Social Capital Salafi Islamic Education in Lombok," *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* (2022).

64 Nazar Naamy, "Islamic Da'wah and Cancel Culture on Virtual Media (A Case of Salafi in Lombok)," *Lentera: Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah dan Komunikasi* (2022).

Moreover, *Tafsir Zad al-Ma'ad* by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, which focuses on explaining Qur'anic verses and Hadith in line with Wahhabi thought, is also an important reference in understanding Islamic teachings according to the Wahhabi tradition. Lastly, *Tafsir al-Ma'arif al-Qur'an* by Shaykh Muhammad al-Amin al-Shanqiti, although not entirely focused on literal interpretation, remains part of the literature used by Wahhabi scholars due to its emphasis on understanding that aligns with the pure teachings of Islam without being influenced by innovative or bid'ah elements. These tafsir works reflect the Wahhabi approach, which is more conservative and emphasizes a textual and literal understanding of the Qur'an.

In Lombok, conflicts between the Wahhabi and Aswaja groups arise due to differences in the interpretation of the Qur'an and Islamic teachings. Wahhabis tend to prioritize a literal approach to religious texts and reject traditions considered as bid'ah (innovations), such as the celebration of the Prophet's birthday (maulid) and visits to graves. In contrast, Aswaja is more accepting of traditions that have developed, as long as they do not contradict the fundamental principles of Islam. These differences often lead to tensions, particularly during religious celebrations, such as the *maulid*, and other Islamic traditions in Lombok.⁶⁵ This tension exacerbates social polarization in Lombok, dividing groups with differing practices and ways of worship.

Wahhabism's attempt to deculturalize Islam by removing it from local traditions has been met with resistance, as Islam has been integrated into the local culture for centuries. This deculturalization effort is perceived as an attack on the local belief system, leading to social disintegration and conflict⁶⁶. Furthermore, the influence of Wahhabi televangelism, such as the Rodja TV channel, has penetrated even remote areas, spreading Wahhabi ideology and creating divisions within previously unified Muslim communities.⁶⁷ Wahhabism in Indonesia is often associated with radicalism and a totalitarian approach to Sharia law, which poses a threat to the pluralistic and tolerant nature of Indonesian society.

In Lombok, the Salafi-Wahhabi movement utilizes mosques as platforms to spread its ideology, leading to conflicts with mainstream Islamic organizations such as NW and NU. This strategy has allowed Salafi groups to strengthen their position

65 Lutfatul Azizah et al., "Convention Strategy of the Islamic Cultural in Responding to the Wahhabi Movement in Suralaga Village, East Lombok Regency," *Potret Pemikiran* 27, no. 2 (2023).

66 Saipul Hamdi, "DE-KULTURALISASI ISLAM DAN KONFLIK SOSIAL DALAM DAKWAH WAHABI DI INDONESIA," *Jurnal Kawistara* 9, no. 2 (2019).

67 Ibnu Burdah, "GROWING EXCLUSION OF THE MAJORITY The 'Triumph of Wahhabism' and Its Threat to Indonesian Islam in the Democratic Society," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 17, no. 1 (2023).

despite being a minority⁶⁸. Even Wahhabi leaders, such as Ustaz Mizan Qudsiyah from Bagik Nyaka Village, deliver their controversial lectures from the mosque pulpit, condemning practices such as the pilgrimage to graves, which is commonly performed by Sasak Muslims. These lectures have received negative responses from the local Muslim community. Wahhabi sermons often use a textual approach to the Qur'an, disregarding the cultural context and historical practices of the local population. As a result, the community has staged protests and filed legal complaints against Mizan Qudsiyah, viewing his sermons as a threat to religious harmony in Lombok.⁶⁹

In Suralaga Village, East Lombok, the Wahhabi movement's rejection of local religious traditions, such as customary celebrations on religious holidays, has led to polarization within the community. The traditional Islamic community has responded by strengthening their internal solidarity to counter the Wahhabi challenges.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, in Aikmel District, the contestation between the ideologies of Nahdlatul Wathan (NW) and Salafi-Wahhabi are particularly evident in the educational sector, where both groups use madrasahs to promote their respective ideologies. This contestation extends beyond formal education into mosques and virtual preaching, further escalating tensions within the community⁷¹

One of the prominent theological debates in Lombok pertains to the interpretation of verses related to the attributes of Allah. For traditionalist groups (NU & NW), these verses are classified as *ayât mutashâbihât*, and the most appropriate approach to understanding them is to entrust their meanings to Allah or to interpret them metaphorically (*ta'wil*). In contrast, the Salafi-Wahhabi group considers the verses related to Allah's attributes as *muhkam* (clear) in both their wording and meaning, but acknowledges their *mutashâbih* (ambiguous) nature with regard to their modality (*kaifiyyah*). The theological polemic between traditionalists and Wahhabis extends to the interpretation of verses that are perceived to imply *al-tajsim* (anthropomorphism) and *al-tahyis* (spatial localization) in the understanding of Allah's attributes, including concepts such as *istiwa* (ascension), *jihad*, *al-jismiyah*

68 Saparudin and Emawati, "Ideological Framing, Mosques, and Conflict: Bargaining Position of the Salafi Movement in Lombok, East Indonesia," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 18, no. 1 (2023).

69 Muhammad War'i, "MENEGUHKAN HARMONI BERAGAMA MELALUI DAKWAH INKLUSIF: ANALISIS ISI DAN RESPON SOSIAL CERAMAH KONTROVERSIAL TENTANG HUKUM ZIARAH MAKAM DI PULAU LOMBOK," *Harmoni* 21, no. 1 (2022).

70 Lutfatul Azizah et al., "Convention Strategy of the Islamic Cultural in Responding to the Wahhabi Movement in Suralaga Village, East Lombok Regency," *Potret Pemikiran* 27, no. 2 (2023).

71 Muharir Muharir, "KONSTESTASI PENDIDIKAN ISLAM DI LOMBOK: NAHDLATUL WATHAN VIS A VIS SALAFI-WAHHABI," *Jurnal al Muta'aliyah: Pendidikan Guru Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* 2, no. 1 (2022).

(corporeality), and *al-maji* (figurative representation).⁷²

Conclusion

This study reveals several key findings regarding the Sasak variants of Islam, namely Wetu Telu and Waktu Lima, which emerged as a result of the interaction and Qur'anic interpretation activities within the Sasak community as an interpretative community. The Wetu Telu community was formed through oral interpretation that developed since the early Islamization of Lombok in the late 16th century. During this period, the Sasak people, who had just embraced Islam, did not have access to the Arabic language and only received simple explanations of the meanings of the Qur'anic verses, which they then integrated into the traditions and local cultures inherited from their ancestors (*toaq lokaq*). In contrast, Islam Waktu Lima emerged through the role of the Tuan Guru—alumni of Islamic education in Mecca—who mastered Islamic literature in Arabic and transmitted the teachings of the Qur'an based on classical tafsir texts. These Tuan Guru also established pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) as centers for strengthening Islamic teachings, which later became known as Islam Waktu Lima.

Additionally, this study also uncovers the dynamics of the development of Islam in Lombok through an ethnographic and hermeneutic-based tafsir approach. In traditional communities, such as the Wetu Telu community, the understanding of the Qur'an is more practical and communal. Their understanding of the Qur'an is not directly sourced from classical tafsir books but through oral transmission that has been deeply rooted in the social life of the local community across generations. While this study makes a significant contribution to tafsir studies in the context of Sasak Islam variants, there are limitations to its scope. This study is still at the initial analysis stage and has not yet addressed specific issues related to the differences in interpretation between the Wetu Telu and Waktu Lima communities. Therefore, further research could develop this study by focusing on specific themes, such as the differences in tafsir between these two communities, to uncover the contestation of tafsir authority between the Wetu Telu and Waktu Lima communities.

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⁷² Faizah, "Pergulatan Teologi Salafi Dalam Mainstream Keberagamaan Masyarakat Sasak."

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Author's Contribution

Muhammad Taufiq proposed the title, method, and analysis used to write this article, while Muhammad Said carried out the writing, discussion, analysis, and compilation with all formats as required by *Jurnal Studi Ilmu Alqur'an dan Hadith*.

Conflict of Interest

With full assurance, on behalf of all authors, I the corresponding author, state that there is no conflict of interest. I also declare that we have no competing financial, professional, or personal interest that might have influenced the performance or presentation of the work described in this manuscript.

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