

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN THE QURAN

The Qur'ān in the Malay– Indonesian World

Context and interpretation

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4 The pursuit of new interpretive approaches to the Qur'ān in contemporary Indonesia

Izza Rohman

Against the backdrop of the common neglect of the development of Islamic thought in Southeast Asia in the study of Islam, Indonesian Muslim scholars have actively made various efforts to rethink interpretive approaches to the Qur'ān – a prominent theme in contemporary debates on Islamic reform – over the past three decades. Some of them, for instance, have proposed new ideas popularized under certain brands like *tafsīr transformatif* (transformative interpretation), *tafsīr kontekstual* (contextual interpretation), *tafsīr emansipatoris* (emancipatory interpretation), *paradigma al-Qur'ān* (the paradigm of the Qur'ān), *al-ta'wīl al-'ilmī* and so on; some seek to introduce perspectives commonly known outside the field of Islamic studies, while others focus more on re-evaluating existing methodologies of Qur'ān interpretation.¹

This study takes a closer look at why and how those scholars propose, reconsider or critique certain interpretive approaches to the Qur'ān, particularly since the 1980s – the era of the so-called 'Indonesian Muslim intellectual boom'. This study may be regarded as an attempt to introduce Indonesian Muslims' views concerning methodological issues of Qur'ān interpretation that represent valuable contributions to illuminating the future development of Muslim culture and society at home and abroad. Its scope is limited to the published works (books, book chapters, as well as articles in journals, magazines and newspapers) by Indonesian Muslim scholars – consisting of not only scholars specializing in Qur'ānic studies or Islamic studies more broadly, but also scholars from many other disciplines. In doing so, this study focuses on three particular themes most frequently discussed by Indonesian scholars: the method of thematic interpretation, the historicity of the Qur'ān, and contemporary Western hermeneutical theories.

Rethinking Qur'ān interpretation in Indonesia: the context of contextualization

Even though the emergence of new ideas of reinterpretation and approaches to the Qur'ān in Muslim societies has often been linked to Muslim encounters with the West (interchangeably called Western scholarship, Western modernity or Western civilization more generally),² the reasons behind Muslims' changing