

ICQS Proceeding Conference
The International Conference on Quranic Studies
Ilmu al-Quran dan Tafsir, Fakultas Ushuluddin, IAIN Kudus

**The Modernity of Mahmud Yunus's Interpretation
(Tafsir al-Quran al-Karim) in the Middle of the Network
Currents of Egypt and India**

Muhammad Khoirul Anwar

Institut PTIQ Jakarta

khoirulanwar@ptiq.ac.id

Abstract

This article aims to conduct an in-depth analysis related to the elements of modernity of Mahmud Yunus as outlined in his commentary, Tafsir Qur'an Karim. Periodically, this interpretation was written during the era of massive modern thought from Egyptian and Indian currents, both of which are evidence of the intertwining of the scientific network of Indonesian scholars with scholars from the two countries. From Egypt emerged Tafsir al-Mannar written by Rashid Ridla and from India there was the work The Holy Qur'an by Maulana Muhammad Ali, both of which contributed to the interpretation discourse in the archipelago. The two interpretations are each claimed to be the trigger for the birth of the era of modernity in interpretation in the Archipelago. However, to what extent the influence of these two interpretations has on the development of discourse on Al-Qur'an interpretation in the Archipelago, special research is needed to track this down. This article intends to conduct an analysis of Mahmud Yunus's interpretation of the issue of modernity, which includes issues of science, gender, economics and politics in the midst of the emergence of Tafsir Al-Mannar and The Holy Qur'an. This article concludes that Mahmud Yunus in his commentary is very responsive to issues of modernity, but in his explanation he does not mention many academic references so that he does not provide a comprehensive scientific explanation. This

style is what differentiates Mahmud Yunus from *Tafsir Al-Mannar* and *The Holy Qur'an* even though it appears at the same time.

Keywords: Modernity, Mahmud Yunus, Egypt, India.

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk melakukan analisa mendalam terkait dengan unsur modernitas Mahmud Yunus yang dituangkan dalam karya tafsirnya, *Tafsir Qur'an Karim*. Secara periodik, tafsir ini ditulis pada era masifnya pemikiran modern dari arus Mesir dan India, yang keduanya sebagai bukti terjalannya jaringan keilmuan ulama Indonesia dengan ulama dari dua negara tersebut. Dari Mesir muncul *Tafsir al-Mannar* yang ditulis oleh Rasyid Ridla dan dari India terdapat karya *The Holy Qur'an* karya Maulana Muhammad Ali yang keduanya ikut mewarnai diskursus tafsir di Nusantara. Kedua tafsir tersebut masing-masing diklaim sebagai pemantik lahirnya era modernitas dalam tafsir di Nusantara. Namun sejauhmana pengaruh kedua tafsir tersebut terhadap perkembangan wacana tafsir Al-Qur'an di Nusantara, perlu dilakukan riset khusus untuk melacak ini. Adapun artikel ini hendak melakukan analisis terhadap tafsiran Mahmud Yunus terhadap isu modernitas, yang meliputi isu ilmu pengetahuan, gender, ekonomi dan politik di tengah munculnya *Tafsir Al-Mannar* dan *The Holy Qur'an*. Artikel ini berkesimpulan bahwa Mahmud Yunus dalam karya tafsirnya sangat respon terhadap isu-isu modernitas, tetapi dalam penjelasannya tidak banyak menyebut referensi akademik sehingga tidak memberikan penjelasan ilmiah secara komprehensif. Corak seperti ini yang menjadi deferensiasi Mahmud Yunus dengan *Tafsir Al-Mannar* dan *The Holy Qur'an* meskipun muncul pada rentang waktu yang bersamaan.

Kata Kunci: Modernitas, Mahmud Yunus, Mesir, India.

Introduction

The birth of Al-Qur'an Interpretation in Indonesia cannot be separated from the influence of the development of Al-Qur'an Interpretation which was born from various other Islamic worlds, both from the Middle East and other countries. However, in the era of Mahmud Yunus (1899-1983) working on his commentary work, *Tafsir Qur'an Karim*, who is often referred to as the pioneer of Al-Qur'an

translation in Indonesia, at that time there was a trend of scientific networking between Indonesian scholars with Egypt and India (Muh Nur Ichwan, 2001). This trend was a transformation from what originally had a close relationship between Indonesian ulemas and Haramain and was also influential in requests for fatwas, but at that time had shifted to Egypt and India because Haramain himself had been brought to the Wahhabi ideology.

Mahmud Yunus himself began writing Tafsir Qur'an Karim in 1922, which was originally used as an article he published in Tafsir Qur'an Magazine (Khadher Ahmad & Khairuddin Mawardi, 2014). This work of interpretation is considered by many researchers as a simple work but shows an important role both as a pioneer and as the method used by Mahmud Yunus in writing the work. But there are also those who see the position of Tafsir written by Mahmud Yunus from the influence of other works.

As was done by Rosihon Anwar, Asep Abdul Muhyi and Irma Riyani who saw the influence of the renewal idea initiated by Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905). The influence of these ideas can be traced through Abduh's ideas contained in Tafsir Al-Mannar by conducting a comparative study of Mahmud Yunus's ideas in Tafsir Qur'an Karim (Anwar et al., 2020). Their research concluded that there was Abduh's influence on Mahmud Yunus' work, including in the context of rejecting bid'ah, khurafat, rejecting taklid, prioritizing rationality over mystical matters, and trying to find compatibility in the meaning of the Qur'an with the development of science and public.

The results of this research can actually be traced from some of Mahmud Yunus' tendencies towards Tafsir al-Mannar. For example, when Mahmud Yunus interpreted surah al-Nisa verses 157-158 about the appointment of the prophet Isa, Yunus strengthened his argument by quoting Abduh's opinion. In his statement, Yunus wrote:

“Tadi diterangkan bahwa arti Allah mengangkat Isa kepada-Nya ialah mengangkatnya kepada tempat mulia-Nya atau tempat yang disukai-Nya” (Yunus, 1957, hal. 95)

The research findings are actually interesting because on the one hand they refute Riddel's view that generalizes that interpretations by Indonesian ulema are more mystical in origin due to the influence of local geniuses (Peter G Riddel, 2001). Even though the influence of reform ideas was massive, it inspired Indonesian scholars to do the same, including Mahmud Yunus who was the pioneer. Riddel is different from Federespiel who is more objective in looking at the development of the Nusantara interpretation. For Federespiel, several interpretations of the archipelago are ordinary works, but when one looks at them and examines them, they contain many features. Among those exemplified by Federespiel is Tafsir Rahmat by Oemar Bakri (Tajul Arifin, 1993).

To analyze this, the author actually departs from Ichwan's scientific network theory which shows that in the 1920s, there was a scientific network with Egypt and India, each of which also carried scientific traces of Al-Qur'an Interpretation in the Archipelago. Tafsir Al-Mannar as an icon of Egyptian scholars who has a strong influence on renewal ideas in interpretation discourses in the archipelago. Similar to the influence of India, which was marked by the attention of Nusantara scholars to one of the Interpretations of the Qur'an by Indian scholars, an Ahmadiyah Lahore leader named Maulana Muhammad Ali who wrote a work of commentary entitled The Holy Qur'an which was published in 1917.

Muhammad Ali's work was well received by Nusantara scholars, and even encouraged the formation of a project for translating the work into Indonesian spearheaded by Tjokroaminoto with the approval of Sarikat Islam and several important Muhammadiyah figures, although in the end the project had to stop due to causing polemics and receiving a veto. from the Muhammadiyah group. But what really matters is the trend of interpretation studies in that era which have entered Indonesia,

apart from Al-Mannar as an indicator of the presence of the Egyptian network which contains reform ideas, but no less important The Holy Qur'an also contains reform ideas. and full of modern spirit. Agus Salim admits this fact when giving a foreword to the translated edition of The Holy Qur'an.

Haji Agus Salim, when giving a foreword to Tjokroaminoto's translated edition, revealed at length regarding the urgency of presenting a translation of The Holy Qur'an as a work of interpretation of the Qur'an which contains modern knowledge in accordance with the scientific developments of that era. Because according to Agus Salim, the interpretation of the Koran that contains this information does not exist in other interpretations of the Koran. Therefore, Agus Salim claimed that Muhammad Ali's work was suitable for the educated people of that era. Because one of its advantages is being able to refute accusations by Europeans of the weakness of Islam, which are responded to with very strong arguments. Even so, Maulana Muhammad Ali was assessed by Agus Salim as still surviving the zahiriyah and psychic delusions. This means that no matter how modern Maulana Muhammad Ali is, he is still not trapped in materialistic notions, rationalism and mysticism which are far from true faith and monotheism (Bachrun, 2000).

These two important works coincide with the birth of Mahmud Yunus' work, and in the spirit of interpretation Mahmud Yunus has actually given the same discourse. This is where the author strongly suspects that the presence of these two works had a strong influence in the preparation of Karim's Tafsir Quran. However, how far is this influence and where is the difference between Mahmud Yunus' work and the two works in discussing issues of modernity?

The issues of modernity that the author refers to in this research are issues born from the development of modern science, such as science, politics, gender and economics. It is these four major issues that the author will analyze through a descriptive-comparative approach by using

Karim's Tafsir Qur'an as the main data and two commentary works, Tafsir Al-Mannar and The Holy Qur'an as a comparison.

Discussion

Mahmud Yunus and Tafsir Quran Karim

Mahmud Yunus began writing this commentary in November 1922, which he did in stages until he reached chapter 3. Then the fourth chapter of his writing was continued by H. Ilyas Muhammad Ali under the guidance of Mahmud Yunus himself, then in 1935 it was continued by HM. Kasim Bakry reached the 18th juz, and then completed it himself by Mahmud Yunus in 1938 (Islah Gusmian, 2013).

In his foreword, Mahmud Yunus emphasized that the work he presented presented the contents of the Qur'an relating to laws and science as well as other matters which were explained on an ijmal (global) basis only. In it, Yunus also emphasizes that Muslims really glorify and uphold the Qur'an, but if they are asked what is the content of the Qur'an? They didn't answer anything. However, with the publication of his work, he hopes to be the answer for Muslims. He also claimed that if Muslims could read the knowledge that he conveyed, then it could become a capital for progress and safety from this world to the hereafter. For this reason, he invited all Muslims to be serious with all their might and be able to invite colleagues to be able to fight on the same path.

According to Yunus, extracting laws or science and other things from the Qur'an is like removing pearls from the ocean. If the person who took out the pearls only used old and lacking tools, of course he would only be able to extract a few. But if he had modern and perfect tools, surely he would be able to produce a lot of pearls. But even so, the pearls deep in the ocean would not run out. So that's how issuing laws and science from the Al-Qur'an (Yunus, 1957).

Views of Modernity Mahmud Yunus

Modernity is a change in global currents due to the impact of modernization of technology and science. According to Dawam Rahardjo, in the 1970s this influence gave rise to massive discourse in Indonesia. At that time modernity became a pejorative term and had connotations that gave rise to suspicion among Muslims, not only among ordinary people but also among intellectuals. According to him, there are two main factors that make the discourse lively. First, the Islamic modernism movement was accused of being closely related to the project of secularism. Second, modernism was also accused of being influenced by certain politics that brought Western agendas and cornered Muslims in Indonesia (Rahardjo, 1993).

Modernity is essentially an applied effort in order to adapt thinking to the times. Or applying modern values that arise due to the impact of cultural changes that are influenced by the development of science, technology and science, as well as social life, and a rational perspective on the joints of life. As for Islamic modernity, it can be said that it is the response of Muslims to participate in talking about the development of the modern world, which even includes all aspects of human life.

According to Cooper, modernity encourages people to have good choices related to morals, politics, economics, equality, freedom of thought, and so on. The problem of rationality in modern life is the main issue that dominates the life of the modern era (J. Cooper, 2000). The Muslim community's response to this issue is divided into two groups, namely fundamentalists and progressives or modernists. This second group emphasizes that there must be a correlation between religion and reason, because religion will only be empty and not develop.

The author uses the discourse on modernity to analyze the cases in Mahmud Yunus' *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* and to make comparisons with *Tafsir Al-Mannar* and *The Holy Qur'an* as contemporary works of

modern commentary. These two interpretations are very concerned when talking about modernity with its own various styles.

For example Muhammad Ali in *The Holy Qur'an* when talking about the urgency of science, can be seen as when interpreting the word 'mata' in surah al-Ra'ad verse 17 au matâin zabadun mitsluhu (or a tool like that produced from being melted down with fire). Muhammad Ali gave examples of all the tools used in life such as plates, props, applied tools to war tools. He gave reference to this statement with code (S) which means the work of *The Shihah* (Maulana Muhammad Ali, 1917, p. 502).

The same model was also carried out by Muhammad Ali when giving a statement in sura al-Mulk verse 5, related to the adornment of the world's sky with stars and used as a thrower of demons. According to Ali, the linguistic approach he quoted from (Rgh) Ragib al-Asfahani, (LL) Lane Lexicon is used to understand the meaning of rujum as a plural form of rajm which is interpreted by means of conjectures, the meaning of conjectures. To explain this he quotes from the opinion of the mufasir Baidlawi (Bdg) and the book of *Tajul 'Arus* which says that "We (Allah) made it as a revealer of the alleged intentions of the devils and human demons." From here Muhammad Ali gave an explanation if what was meant by this statement was that astronauts who studied clusters of stars had answers from stories of witches, shamans, demons who had guesses about the stars so far based on speculation or predictions (Maulana Muhammad Ali, 1917, p. 1097).

Likewise with Muhammad Abduh, when he spoke related to human science he gave the view that human knowledge is very broad. He also agreed with Abu Idris al-Shafii's view that the human mind is very broad, so that when you gain new knowledge you will definitely feel that the knowledge you have so far is still very narrow (Muhammad Abduh, 1947, p. 247). The need for knowledge by using reasoning by Muhammad Abduh can be seen when he interpreted surah al-Baqarah

verse 29. According to the editor, *khalaqalukum ma fil ardli* (created for you everything that is on earth).

According to Abduh in this verse there are two theories. First, what is on this earth can be utilized for physical life. Second, it can be used as a lesson in reason. That what is called the earth is what is under our feet, while what is called the sky is what is above our heads. And humans can take advantage of whatever is in the earth, both on land and in the sea, both growing and non-growing. And if there is something that is still not utilized by humans, then it can be thought of according to the ability of their minds (Muhammad Abduh, 1947, p. 247).

The style of argument contained in *al-Mannar* is similar to that developed by Mahmud Yunus whenever he gives a description of the importance of science and other issues. Mahmud Yunus was the same as Abduh who did not explain in detail or provide an explanation from the views of the experts. In the same case Mahmud Yunus only stated globally that science and technology had an important role in Islam. It is different from what Muhammad Ali built in *The Holy Qur'an*, who used the arguments of experts to support his ideas about modernity.

Mahmud Yunus's style can be seen when he interprets related verses related to science and science. Among them when he interpreted the *Qur'an Surah al-Syuara* verse 78:

“Dia yang menjadikan aku dan memberi petunjuk kepadaku.”

When interpreting the verse, Mahmud Yunus saw the importance of knowledge as the request made by the Prophet Abraham to Allah. But according to him, referring to the verse, science is oriented towards beneficial actions (good deeds). The two must complement each other, cannot be separated. So it is not complete if you only do good deeds but do not have knowledge.

According to Mahmud Yunus, it is very wrong if people are only concerned with knowledge but are not accompanied by beneficial actions, or only concerned with beneficial actions but not concerned with

knowledge. Because both of these, according to Mahmud Yunus, made Muslims ever victorious starting from the Prophet Muhammad to the golden age of Islam. Furthermore, he also mentions that Muslims who experience setbacks, he calls people who ignore these two important things:

“Then came the Muslims who neglected knowledge and good deeds, so that they backed down and lost their power from the face of the earth, in fact most of them were colonized by foreign nations. If Muslims want to become caliphs again on earth, let's seek knowledge and do good deeds. Here we should be aware that what is said to be good practice is not just praying, fasting, zakat and pilgrimage, but doing business activities such as weaving, making yarn, providing various factories needed by the community, all of this is part of good practice whose law is *fardu kifayah*. ” (Yunus, 1957).

Mahmud Yunus' concern for good deeds and knowledge actually wants to combine implementation and creativity, both of which must be based on beneficial practices. Because this is related to a person's morals which cannot be separated from his position as a creature of God whose main basis is belief in things that are unseen (faith). Strong evidence of this can be seen when he interprets the definition of pious people in surah Al-Baqarah verse 2. According to him, one of the characteristics of pious people is believing in something unseen, namely things that cannot be grasped with one of the five senses, such as believing that above the power of humans and nature there is still another almighty power, namely God. According to him, religious people believe in things like that, in contrast to those who are not religious, who only believe in natural science or chemistry.

To strengthen this argument, Mahmud Yunus took the example of a case that occurred in the XX century. According to him, in that century, many professors in Europe and America began to believe in the occult.

This happened when they did research on the science of Spiritualism and Hypnotism (presenting spirits and the science of putting people to sleep) as done by Victor Hugo, Edmund, Louis, Dr. James Celly, George Sectun, Mr. Balfour, and others. It was through their experiments that many educated people in Europe began to believe in the existence of the human spirit as the basis for believing in God, angels, and others (Yunus, 1957, p. 3).

Mahmud Yunus' admiration for technological and scientific developments also occurred again when he interpreted surah al-Naml verse 79:

“Katakanlah, berjalanlah kamu di muka bumi dan perhatikanlah bagaimana akibatnya orang-orang yang berbuat dosa.”

From this verse Mahmud Yunus understood that this verse gave two commands to Muslims. First, the verse instructs Muslims to travel abroad, such as going to Egypt, paying attention to the legacy of the ancient Egyptian kings (Pharaohs). There is a symbol of the Pharaoh who used to be a brave king and had very high intelligence and knowledge as evidenced by the Pyramid (Ahram) Sphinx (Abul Haul) and others which are still fine even though they have been made thousands of years ago. past. Or go to Spain to see the remains of the former Islamic kings, or see the legacies of the Greek, Roman and other empires that used to be very popular. Second, the verse instructs people to be able to read historical books. This is an alternative if you cannot afford to go abroad. Like reading Greek history books, Islamic history and others. According to him, by reading these historical books one can find out why the earlier people could advance and could retreat. That's why Europeans and Americans really like to go abroad and study history (Yunus, 1957, p. 415).

His concern for science is also expressed when he interprets surah al-Ankabut verses 19-20, according to him in this verse there is an

affirmation that the Qur'an requires humans to study botany, zoology and human science as well as geology (Yunus, 1957, p. 428).

Then the next case also occurred when Mahmud Yunus gave his views on verses that intersect with gender issues, for example when referring to his translation of surah al-Nisa verse 34:

“Laki-laki itu menjadi tulang punggung (pemimpin) kaum perempuan, sebab Allah melebihkan setengah mereka daripada yang setengah dank arena laki-laki itu memberi belanjat sebagian hartanya kepada perempuan. Perempuan-perempuan yang salih adalah perempuan yang taat kepada suaminya, sambil memelihara kehormatannya waktu suaminya tidak ada di rumah sebagaimana Allah memelihara dirinya. Perempuan-perempuan yang durhaka kepadamu hendaklah kamu beri nasehat akan dia, dan kamu tinggalkanlah ia di tempat tidurnya dengan sendirinya, dan boleh kamu pukul akan dia jika ia durhaka juga kepadamu (tetapi dengan pukulan yang tidak sampai menyakiti badannya) (Yunus, 1957, hal. 69).

His views on gender verses are built more from arguments because the verses were revealed without including sources of quotations. For example, when interpreting surah al-Ahzab verse 35, Yunus cited the reason for the revelation of the verse, that at that time the Prophet's wives protested why the khitab in the Qur'an was only shown for men, why was there not specifically for women. So then came down the verse which specifically also mentions women (Yunus, 1957, p. 461).

The pattern is the same when Mahmud Yunus talks about political issues. For example, when interpreting surah al-Naml verses 14-44 about the reign of Prophet Sulaiman, Mahmud Yunus emphasizes that being the head of government is not prohibited in the Qur'an, as long as you can act fairly and prioritizing the benefit of the people rather than selfishness (Yunus, 1957, p. 413). But again, this affirmation is more about personal opinion which is the essence of the description of the verse being interpreted.

Another issue of modernity is about the modern economy. For example when interpreting surah al-Nahl verses 5-8. When interpreting this verse, Mahmud Yunus further emphasizes that the Qur'an in this verse is giving confirmation regarding establishing an economy which can be done by producing clothing from animal hair or cotton for the purpose of covering the body. But the Muslims did not pay attention to these instructions, causing them to retreat and fall behind. Then Mahmud Yunus confirmed again that Muslims should make these clothes by setting up weaving factories and thread factories because this is a necessity for Muslims to cover their genitals.

Then in the explanation in paragraph 6, Mahmud Yunus also provides an explanation if the verse provides recommendations for economic forms such as raising livestock that have great economic value. Whereas in verses 7-8 there is an editorial which says "unknown vehicles," namely those that were not known to the Arabs at the time the Qur'an was revealed. If it is now, according to Mahmud Yunus, it is certain that it can be known, such as train vehicles, auto airplanes and others.

He explains:

“Inilai keajaiban Al-Qur’an, semenjak seribu tahun lebih ia telahewartakan, bahwa akan terjadi kendaraan yang aneh-aneh. Tetapi kendaraan itu tidaklah akan ada dengan tiba-tiba melainkan mesti dengan mempergunakan akal dan pikiran. Dengan akal dan pikiran itulah di dapat orang bermacam-macam kepandaian baru yang menakjubkan kita masa sekarang,” (Yunus, 1957, hal. 281).

Conclusion

In the context of the idea of modernity, Mahmud Yunus has similarities with two interpreters who have interest in Indonesia, between Al-Mannar and The Holy Qur'an. It's just that when viewed from the style used in writing Karim's Tafsir Qur'an, Mahmud Yunus is more

dominant with the method used by Muhammad Abduh in building arguments.

Reference

- Anwar, R., Muhyi, A. A., Riyani, I., & ... (2020). Menelusuri pengaruh pembaharuan di Mesir terhadap tradisi tafsir di Nusantara: Kajian terhadap tafsir Qur'an Karim karya Mahmud Yunus. *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Humaniora*, 18(2). <http://digilib.uinsgd.ac.id/30649/>
- Bachrun, H. M. (2000). *Qur'an Suci*. Darul Kutubil Islamiyah.
- Islah Gusmian. (2013). *Khazanah tafsir Indonesia: dari hermeneutika hingga ideologi*. LKiS.
- J. Cooper, D. (2000). *Islam and Modernity: Muslims Intellectual Respond*. Tourist.
- Khadher Ahmad & Khairuddin Mawardi. (2014). Contributions Of Mahmud Yunus To The Interpretation Of The Quran: A Study Of Tafsir Qur'an Karim. *Online Journal of Research in Islamic Studies*, 1(1).
- Maulana Muhammad Ali. (1917). *The Holy Quran: Containing Arabic Teks With English Translation and Comentary*. The Islamic Review Office.
- Muh Nur Ichwan. (2001). Differing Response to an Ahmadi Translation and Exegesis. *Archipel*, 62.
- Muhammad Abduh. (1947). *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*. Dar al-Mannar.
- Peter G Riddel. (2001). *Islam and The Malay-Indonesia World: Transmission and Responses*. Hurst & Comapany.
- Rahardjo, M. D. (1993). *Intelektual, Itelegensia, dan Perilaku Politik Bangsa: Risalah Cendekiawan Muslim*. Mizan.
- Tajul Arifin. (1993). *Kajian al-Quran di Indonesia Terj Terj. Populer Indonesia Literature of The Quran. Howard M. Federspiel*. Mizan.
- Yunus, M. (1957). *Tafsir Qur'an Karim*. Pustaka Mahmudiyah.

