

Women's Head Covering in Acehnese Tafsīr: Genealogical and Socio-Historical Readings of Two Vernacular Exegeses

Penutup Kepala Perempuan dalam Tafsir Aceh: Pembacaan Genealogis dan Socio-Historis atas Dua Tafsir Vernakular

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Abstract

This article examines how women's head covering is interpreted in Acehnese exegetical works across two centuries by comparing *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* of 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Fansūrī al-Singkili (d. 1693) and *Al-Qur'an al-Karim dan Terjemahan Bebas Bersajak dalam Bahasa Aceh* by Tengku Mahjiddin Jusuf (d. 1994). Using a genealogical approach and social-historical reading, it traces the interpretive transmission and local adaptation of key Qur'anic terms related to female modesty—especially *khimār*/*khumur*, *jalābīb*, and *juyūb*—within Aceh's shifting socio-political contexts. The analysis shows that Acehnese meanings of head covering are not fixed outcomes of the Qur'anic lexicon alone, but emerge through selective appropriation of earlier Sunni authorities and vernacularization into local dress-terms (e.g., *telekung/sileukom* and *ija tob ulē*). Social-historical comparison further indicates that al-Singkili's reading helped form an early interpretive horizon of female modesty in the period of royal governance, whereas Jusuf's interpretation functions as a reinforcing discourse in a later setting no longer shaped by sultanate structures. Overall, the study clarifies how vernacular tafsīr operates as a mediating space where Qur'anic language, inherited exegetical authority, and local social practice continually reshape one another.

Keywords: Women's head coverings, Aceh interpretation, Genealogical tradition, Social history, Vernacular Exegeses

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana makna penutup kepala perempuan dibentuk dalam karya tafsir Aceh lintas dua abad dengan membandingkan *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* karya 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Fansūrī al-Singkili (w. 1693) dan *Al-Qur'an al-Karim dan Terjemahan Bebas Bersajak dalam Bahasa Aceh* karya Tengku Mahjiddin Jusuf (w. 1994). Dengan pendekatan genealogi dan pembacaan sejarah sosial, studi ini menelusuri transmisi penafsiran dan adaptasi lokal atas istilah-istilah kunci al-Qur'an yang berkaitan dengan kesopanan perempuan—terutama *khimār/khumur*, *jalābīb*, dan *juyūb*—di tengah perubahan konteks sosial-politik Aceh. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa penafsiran penutup kepala perempuan di Aceh bukan produk makna yang tunggal dan final, melainkan terbentuk melalui apropiasi selektif terhadap otoritas Sunni terdahulu serta proses vernakularisasi ke istilah busana lokal (mis. *telekung/sileukom* dan *ija tob ulē*). Dalam perspektif sejarah sosial, tafsir al-Singkili berperan membentuk cakrawala interpretatif awal tentang norma kesopanan perempuan pada masa pemerintahan kerajaan, sedangkan Jusuf memosisikan tafsirnya sebagai wacana penguatan dalam konteks yang tidak lagi berada dalam struktur kekuasaan kerajaan. Dengan demikian, studi ini menegaskan bahwa tafsir vernakular bekerja sebagai ruang perjumpaan antara bahasa al-Qur'an, otoritas penafsiran yang diwariskan, dan praktik sosial lokal yang terus berubah.



Kata kunci: Penutup kepala perempuan, Tafsir Aceh, Tradisi genealogis, Sejarah sosial, Tafsir Vernakular

Introduction

The practice of covering the ‘aurat (parts of the body that must be covered in Fiqh studies), particularly the use of head coverings for women, has become an important topic of discussion in Islamic society.¹ Head coverings for women are a fundamental-global phenomenon used in various parts of the world, such as North Africa, Asia Minor, the Middle East, Australia, Latin America, Europe, and beyond. It is a phenomenon that is simultaneously symbolic (laden in meaning), material (the fabric used), spatial (its position in social space), gendered (the social construct between men and women), and discursive (the movement of discourse).² In Aceh, a region known for its strong Islamic identity and traditions, the issue of covering the ‘aurat is shaped not only by religious interpretation, but also by historical, political, and sociocultural dynamics. It has become one of the symbols of the application of Islamic teachings, which are regulated in *Qanun* (regional regulation) No. 11/2002 in the fields of *Aqidah*, *Ibadah*, and *Syi’ar Islam*.³

There are several studies that discuss women’s head coverings in Indonesia, such as Rina Rahmi⁴ and Khairul Hasni⁵ argued in their study that the practice of hijab among Acehnese women emerges from an interplay between Islamic symbolism, family structure, social norms, and local sharia-based political policies in Aceh. Subsequently, taking Minangkabau as the locus of study, Fadhli Lukman said that the forms and practices of women’s head coverings in Minangkabau have undergone historical transformation, from *Mudawarah* as a local product of early twentieth century Islamic educational reform to *fashioned hijab*, driven by state political intervention, syaria-based regulation, and the capitalization of fashion.⁶ These studies explain women’s head covering mainly through social and political

1 Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam; Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

2 Anna Mari Almila, “Introduction: The Veil Across the Globe in Politics, Everyday Life and Fashion,” in *The Routledge International Handbook to Veils and Veiling Practices* (London: Routledge, 2018), 1.

3 Moch. Nur Ichwan, “Official Reform of Islam; State Islam and the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Contemporary Indonesia, 1966-2004” (Tilburg University, 2016), 248-250, dikutip dari Gubernur Provinsi Aceh, “Qanun Provinsi NAD Nomor 11 Tahun 2002” (Banda Aceh, 2002), 13.

4 Rina Rahmi, “Analysis of Factors That Background Aceh Women Using Hijab,” *Sunan Kalijaga International Journal on Islamic Educational Research* 3, no. 1 (2019): 80-89.

5 Khairul Hasni, “Increasing Hijab Acehnes Women : A Political Perspective” 4, no. 1 (2021): 56-63.

6 Fadhli Lukman, “Sejarah Sosial Pakaian Penutup Kepala Muslimah di Sumatera Barat,” *Musāwa Jurnal Studi Gender dan Islam* 13, no. 1 (2014): 47.

aspects, and treat religious texts as background. Meanwhile, this article foregrounds *tafsir* as an intellectual tradition and examines how meanings of head covering are adapted, produced, and transmitted through exegetical practice.

In this regard, Acehnese exegetical works play an important role in the discourse on the limits of modesty for Acehnese society, especially in relation to women's head coverings. Exegetical works such as *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* by 'Abd al-Ra'uf bin 'Alī al-Fansūrī al-Jāwī al-Singkili (d. 1693) and *Al-Qur'an al-Karim dan Terjemahan Bebas Bersajak dalam Bahasa Aceh* by Tengku Mahjiddin Jusuf (d.1994), provide diverse views on the obligation and symbolic meaning of head coverings for Acehnese women. Some of their interpretations reflect the cultural context in Aceh. Thus, the head covering is not merely a religious symbol, but also a cultural identity. The debate about the head covering in these interpretations shows how religious discourse continues to evolve and adapt to social changes.

This paper examines the concept of women's head coverings in Acehnese exegetical works through a genealogical and social history approach. By focusing on the interpretations produced by al-Singkili and Jusuf, this study explores how interpretations of women's head coverings have developed in line with cultural and social changes. This study examines how these scholars contextualize the verses of the Qur'an on modesty and traces the role of these interpretations in shaping the experiences of women in Aceh. This research shows that the meaning of head coverings has also undergone a process of adaptation between classical interpretive traditions and the social context of Aceh. Their interpretations are heavily influenced by Sunni exegetical traditions (particularly from the Middle East) and adapted to the local cultural roots of Aceh. Interpretations of women's head coverings not only reflect religious understanding but also illustrate the social, intellectual, and cultural dynamics that were developing when the interpretations were written.

There are several terms used to refer to women's head coverings, such as *jilbab*, *hijab*, *khimar*, *selendang*, and *kerudung*. Due to differences in the concepts and practices associated with these terms, this paper chooses to use the term "women's head covering". The use of this term aims to avoid interpretive bias that may arise from the selection of a specific term. In addition, the term "head covering" provides flexibility in understanding the various social, cultural, and historical contexts surrounding the practice of head covering in Aceh.

Reading Interpretation Through the Genealogical Tradition and Social History Perspectives

This study treats Qur'anic exegesis as a genealogical tradition, in line with Walid A. Saleh's approach, rather than as an autonomously produced interpretive work. This concept asserts that every work of interpretation always has a relationship with previous interpretations in a continuous discursive network. Within this framework, a *mufassir* does not operate in isolation, but rather within a complete and continuously available landscape of tradition. Even when differences of opinion arise, they are generally not done by ignoring their predecessors, but rather by adding new layers of interpretation on top of the existing legacy. Thus, the process of change in interpretation takes place subtly and incrementally, making innovation sometimes appear not as radical renewal, but rather as a shifting of the horizon of meaning. Therefore, the genealogical approach allows us to read an interpretation not merely as an individual work, but as the result of a long interaction with the structure of knowledge inherited and developed within the Islamic interpretive community.⁷

Through this framework, the two Acehnese interpretations⁸ examined in this paper will be analyzed in relation to various references used in interpreting the Qur'an. Information about references is traced through the *muqaddimah* (introduction) or direct quotations mentioned by the *mufassir*. Thus, the contributions of previous interpretations to the thought constructs of the two *mufassirs* will be revealed. Furthermore, this study also uses a social history framework. Azyumardi Azra notes that Indonesian Islamic historiography has undergone several developments,⁹ which then gave rise to the term "new history" as an alternative to "old history," which tends to be political history. This new history is then referred to as "social history," which emphasizes analysis of the social factors that influence the occurrence of historical events themselves.

However, Azyumardi Azra, quoting E.J. Hobsbawm,¹⁰ acknowledges that the term "social history" is not so easy to define. Until the late 1980s, there was a shift in which the understanding of social history in Indonesia was generally based

⁷ Walid A. Saleh, "The Formation of the Classical Tafsir Tradition: The Quran Commentary of Al-Tha'labi" (Netherlands, 2004), 14-15.

⁸ This article considers Jusuf's translation as an interpretation, because the process of transferring the meaning of a word always involves a process of interpretation first. Only then will the translator choose the meaning that he or she considers most appropriate.

⁹ Azyumardi Azra, "Historiografi Islam Indonesia; Antara Sejarah Sosial, Sejarah Total, dan Sejarah Pinggir," in *Menjadi Indonesia; 13 Abad Eksistensi Islam di Bumi Nusantara* (Jakarta Selatan: Mizan, 2006), 3-5.

¹⁰ E. J. Hobsbawm, "From Social History to the History of Society," *Historical Studies Today* 100, no. 1 (1971): 20-45.

on historical studies conducted by Sartono Kartodirjo.¹¹ He was a historian who was a towering figure in introducing and developing social history in Indonesia. According to Hobsbawm, in the past, “social history” could be interpreted in at least three ways. *First*, the term refers to the history of the poor or the lower classes, and more specifically refers to the history of the poor, labor movements, or social organizations. *Second*, the term refers to works on various human activities that are difficult to classify except in terms such as *manners, customs*, and *everyday life*. *Third*, this term is used in combination with “economic history,” with the assumption that this combination will explain many things about structures and changes in society, particularly regarding social classes and groups. Simply put, the economic aspect itself is the foundation of society.¹²

These three concepts offered by Hobsbawm reflect the development of social history studies.¹³ Indonesian historiographical works that have applied this approach can be seen in the works of Anthony Reid (1988) and Denys Lombard (1996).¹⁴ In Reid’s work in particular, Southeast Asia is examined through several aspects, such as geography, demography, clothing, folk and royal festivals, housing, material culture, food, sexuality, the position of women and men, and others. Ongkokham, in his foreword to the Indonesian translation of Reid’s book, emphasizes that all of these aspects are elements of the past that have shaped our current civilization.¹⁵ This includes the head covering for women discussed in this article. Therefore, tracing the relationship between interpretation and adaptation through a social history approach can help us understand the development of the meaning of head coverings for women in Aceh.

Two Exegetes in Different Centuries

The two exegeses examined in this study were written by Acehnese exegetes in different periods. The first exegesis is *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* by al-Singkili,

11 Sartono Kartodirdjo, “The Peasants’ Revolt of Banten in 1888, Its Conditions, Course and Sequel; A Case Study of Social Movements in Indonesia,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (University of Amsterdam, 1966), 7-8.

12 Hobsbawm, “From Social History to the History of Society”, 20-22.

13 With this broad scope, Azra equates social history with total history. See Azra, “Historiografi Islam Indonesia” (Indonesian Islamic Historiography), 19. This is particularly relevant to the second definition, which discusses everything related to human activity, referred to in German as *culture* or *sittengeschichte*. This model of social history is not necessarily related to lower class society.

14 Azra, “Historiografi Islam Indonesia; Antara Sejarah Sosial, Sejarah Total, dan Sejarah Pinggir”, 6-14.

15 Anthony Reid, *Asia Tenggara dalam Kurun Niaga (1450-1680); Tanah di Bawah Angin* (Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2014), xiv.

written around 1670 or in the 17th century.¹⁶ The second interpretation written after Indonesia's independence in the 20th century, is *Al-Qur'an Terjemah Bersajak dalam Bahasa Aceh* by Tengku Mahjiddin Jusuf, which was first published in 1955.

The selection of these two interpretations was based on several considerations, namely: *First*, among the Acehnese exegetical works discovered, these two works cover all thirty juz of the Qur'an, allowing me to trace the thoughts of the interpreters from other verses relevant to the theme of the study. *Second*, these two works were produced in different historical and social context. Al-Singkili wrote his tafsir in seventeenth century when Aceh under the sultanate politics and institutional religious authority. Meanwhile, Jusuf produced his tafsir in the mid-twentieth century, when Aceh had become part of postcolonial Indonesia, a period marked by political transition and changing forms of religious expression. *Third*, these works were written in different languages; Al-Singkili used Malay and Jusuf used Acehnese. To provide a clearer picture of the context of each work, the following is a brief biography of the interpreters and a description of their interpretations.

Sheikh Abdur Rauf al-Singkili and Tarjumān al-Mustafīd

In the history of Islam in the archipelago, it is mentioned that 'Abd al-Ra'uf bin 'Ali al-Fansuri al-Jawi al-Singkili was a prominent intellectual in the 17th century. Al-Singkili, also known as Teungku Syiah Kuala, was a prolific scholar who produced dozens of works. He was appointed *Qadhi Malikul Adil* (*Grand Mufti of the Kingdom*). This position was second in command in the kingdom.¹⁷ He was born around 1615 and passed away around 1693.

One of his works, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, is claimed to be the first complete Qur'an commentary to appear in the early history of Islam in Indonesia in the 17th century. It was written in Arabic script and Malay (Arabic Jawi). Riddel said that this work was written around 1675.¹⁸ According to Riddel, this exegesis is more accurately described as a translation of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, although it also quotes from *Tafsīr al-Baydāwī*, *Tafsīr al-Khāzin*, and several other exegeses.¹⁹

Hasjmy mentioned that *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* was written during the reign of Queen Tajul 'Alam Safiatuddin (1641-1675).²⁰ No data indicates that this tafsir

16 Peter G Riddel, *Malay Court Religion, Culture, and Language; Interpreting the Qur'an in 7th Century Aceh* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 102.

17 A. Hasjmy, 59 Tahun Aceh Merdeka di Bawah Pemerintahan Ratu. (1977), 130.

18 Peter G Riddel, *Malay Court Religion, Culture, and Language; Interpreting the Qur'an in 7th Century Aceh* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 15.

19 Peter G Riddel, *Malay Court Religion, Culture, and Language*, 61.

20 Hasjmy, 59 Tahun Aceh Merdeka di Bawah Pemerintahan Ratu, 109-110.

was written at the request of the Queen. Information states that Queen Sufiatussaudah asked al-Singkilī to write the book *Mir'āt al-Tullāb* on Islamic law. The work was completed in 1663 and formally presented to the Sultanah in 1672.²¹ In *Mir'āt al-Tullāb*, al-Singkilī notes that he was not particularly fluent in the Malay language because he spent nineteen years (1642-1661) studying the Islamic sciences in the Arab world, including in Mecca, Medina, Yemen, and Cairo. To overcome this challenge, in writing the book *Mir'āt al-Tullāb*, al-Singkilī asked for help from two of his friends in the use of the Jawi (Malay) language.²² Importantly, *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* was written more than a decade later (around 1675), so the authorial statements in the *Mir'āt al-Tullāb* should be understood as temporally and cannot be directly extrapolated into his tafsir. Following Riddell, the Malay of the *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* is better understood as a methodological choice within the tradition of scriptural translation, rather than as an indicator of linguistic limitations.²³

Tengku Mahjiddin Jusuf and His Work

Tengku²⁴ Haji Mahjiddin Jusuf was born in Peusangan, North Aceh, on September 16, 1918, into a family of scholars.²⁵ He received his basic education at several Islamic boarding schools in North Aceh and continued his studies at Madrasah Al-Muslim until 1937, then at *Normal Islam* in Padang until 1941.²⁶ After returning to Aceh, he led Madrasah Al-Muslim.

In P.P. No. 21 of 1950, it was declared that Aceh was included in the province of North Sumatra, with its capital in Medan. This decision was met with resistance from almost all levels of society. The refusal to join the province of North Sumatra led several Acehnese clerics to unite in resistance against the Indonesian government. This resistance gave birth to the DI/TII (Darul Islam/*Indonesian Islamic Army*) movement led by Tengku Muhammad Daud Beureueh. The ulama who were members of PUSA

21 A. Ginanjar Sya'ban, *Mahakarya Islam Nusantara; Kitab, Naskah, Manuskrip, dan Korespondensi Ulama Nusantara* (Tangerang: Pustaka Kompas, 2017), 30.

22 See Henri Chambert-Loir, "Islamic Law in 17th Century Aceh," *Archipel*, no. 94 (2017): 51-96. Also see in Muqaddimah (introduction) of al-Singkilī's *Mir'āt al-Tullāb*, A. Ginanjar Sya'ban, *Mahakarya Islam Nusantara*, 30-31.

23 Peter G Riddell, "Literal Translation, Sacred Scripture and Kitab Malay," *Studia Islamika* 9, no. 1 (2002), 11-13.

24 *Tengku* is a title given to people who are knowledgeable in Islam or to religious teachers in Aceh. Unlike *Teuku*, this title is associated with noble descent or is used to refer to officials of the sultan, such as commanders and *uleebalang*. The title "tengku" is not only used for men, but also for women who study or teach at *dayah* (Islamic boarding schools in Aceh).

25 Jusuf, *Al-Qur'an Al-Karim dan Terjemahan Bebas Bersajak dalam Bahasa Aceh (The Holy Qur'an and Free Verse Translation in the Acehnese Language)*, iii.

26 Muhammad Musaddad, Para Penjaga Al-Qur'an; Biografi Huffaz Al-Qur'an di Nusantara, ed. Muhammad Shohib and M. Bunyamin Yusuf Suruf (Jakarta: Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, 2011), 312.

(Persatuan Seluruh Ulama Aceh or *Union of All Acehnese Clerics*) also joined the resistance, including Tengku Mahjiddin Jusuf. He resigned from his position as head of Religious Education in North Sumatra Province. This led to Tengku Mahjiddin Jusuf being imprisoned in Binjai for four years.²⁷

In prison, Mahjiddin Jusuf began translating the Qur'an into Acehnese poetry (*nazham*) with a specific pattern, namely: 1) Each stanza has four lines. 2) Each line consists of ten syllables. The rhyme at the end of each line is sometimes the same, sometimes different, depending on his choice of words. While in prison, Jusuf managed to translate three surahs of the Qur'an, namely *al-Inshirāh*, *Yāsīn*, and *al-Kahfī*. Then, he continued until he completed 30 juz after his release. His translation manuscript was written in Arabic-Malay script and edited into Latin script between 1993 and 1994, before his death on 1 Shawwal 1414 (March 14, 1994).²⁸ Another work by Jusuf is *Hikayat Nabi Yusuf* (in Acehnese Transliteration). The original form of this work was written in Acehnese with Arabic-Malay script. It was then transliterated into Latin script.²⁹

Head Covering Verses as Understood by Two Exegetes

Within Islamic discourses on bodily discipline, several domains are commonly discussed, including clothing, worship, health, corporal punishment, gender roles, and bodily purity. This study deliberately narrows its focus to women's head covering, because it has received the most sustained and intensive regulation in public moral discourse compared to other forms of bodily discipline. Accordingly, the comparative reading of the two Acehnese exegetes is anchored in two primary Qur'anic loci on women's modesty: Q 24:31 (al-Nūr) and Q 33:59 (al-Ahzāb). In Q 24:31, believing women are instructed to guard modesty and not display adornment, and are specifically told to draw their head coverings (*khumur/khimār*) over their chest openings (*juyūb*), with further clarification on social visibility of adornment within defined kinship relations. In Q 33:59, the Prophet is instructed to tell believing women to draw down their outer garments (*jalābīb*) over themselves so that they may be recognized and protected from harm. These two verses provide the textual anchor for tracing how Acehnese exegetical works translate, domesticate, and operationalize the key terms (*khumur/khimār*, *juyūb*, *jalābīb*) into local moral vocabulary and dress

27 Jusuf, *Al-Qur'an al-Karim dan Terjemahan Bebas Bersajak dalam Bahasa Aceh*, iv-v.

28 Jusuf explained to the Editorial Team about several references he used, namely the tafsir of Ibn Kaśir, Tafsir al-Zamakhsyārī, and al-Tabarī. Jusuf, *Alquran Al-Karim dan Terjemahan Bebas Bersajak Dalam Bahasa Aceh*, ii, xiii.

29 Tgk. H. Mahjiddin Jusuf, *Hikayat Nabi Yusuf; in Acehnese Transliteration* (Banda Aceh: Hasanah Grafika, 2002), vi-vii.

practices across different historical settings.

Interpretation by Al-Singkili in Tarjumān al-Mustafīd

In Q 24:31, the Qur'an speaks of disciplining the body, which includes the gaze, the private parts, covering the head and body, and adornments. Following the flow of the verse, al-Singkili gives five rules to women, namely: 1) The command to guard the gaze; 2) Guarding the private parts (genitals); 3) The prohibition of showing adornments; 4) The command to cover the head, neck, and chest; and 5) The prohibition of stamping the feet. The fifth rule relates to the jingling sound of anklets so that others cannot hear it. Of these five rules, this article focuses solely on the concept of head coverings for women.

The following is al-Singkili's interpretation of several sentences related to the 'aurat and head covering for women.³⁰

Wa lā yubdīna zīnatahunna illā mā ẓahara minhā

Dan jangan kiranya dinyatakan mereka itu **perhiasan** mereka itu melainkan yang **telah nyata** daripada yaitu **muka dan tapak tangan kedua karena darurat** seperti hendak naik saksi atasnya.

Wa l-yaḍribna bi-khumurihinna 'alā juyūbihinna

Dan hendaklah ditutup mereka itu atas segala **kepala** dan **lehernya** dan segala **dada** mereka itu dengan segala **telekung** mereka itu.

Wa lā yubdīna zīnatahunna illā li-bu 'ūlatihinna

Dan jangan dinyatakan mereka itu hias mereka itu yang (turun) yaitu lain daripada **muka dan dua tapak tangan** melainkan **bagi suami mereka** itu.

"Adornment" in the first sentence above does not mean jewelry or specific accessories, but rather all parts of a woman's body that are considered adornments. Of all these parts, only the face and the palms of the hands may be visible. This is because, according to al-Singkili, a woman's face and palms are two parts that are normally visible. In addition, these two parts of the body may also be visible when acting as a witness.

Furthermore, the head covering he refers to is the *telekung*. Among the Acehnese people, "telekung/telkung" is understood as a *mukena* (usually used for prayer),³¹ which is long enough to reach the knees. If this is what al-Singkili means,

30 'Abd al-Ra'uf bin 'Ali al-Fansuri al-Ja'wi al-Singkili, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, 1951, 254.

31 Based on reviewing of several Acehnese and Malay dictionaries, there are several terms that share the same meaning of women's praying veil, include *telekung*, *leukom*, *teuleukom*, and *seuleukom*. There is no data indicating when these terms began be used by Acehnese society with the specific meaning of prayer attire. However, it can be ascertained that these terms remain popular among Acehnese communities until today. See on R.J. Wilkinson, *A Malay-English Dictionary* (Singapore: Kelly and Walsh, 1901), 178 dan 398; Bakar,

then it is very possible that it can cover the head, neck, and most of a woman's body.

The third sentence explains which parts of a woman's body may be shown to mahram and non-mahram members. From al-Singkili's statement, it can be understood that all parts of a woman's body may be shown in front of her husband. As for anyone other than her husband and other mahram members, only her face and palms may be seen.³²

An interesting point from al-Singkili's explanation is his interpretation of Qs 33:59, he said;

“Hai Nabi kata olehmu kepada istimu dan anak perempuanmu, dan juga istri segala mukmin, dilebihkan mereka itu kiranya atas segala muka mereka itu **segala tutup muka** mereka itu adalah yang demikian itu terlebih hampir kepada dikenali bahwa mereka itu perempuan yang merdeka maka tiadalah disakiti akan mereka itu dengan melintang² mereka itu”.³³

Al-Singkili encourages women to wear a veil or niqab (*cadar*). He reinforces this opinion by quoting al-Khāzin opinion on a case that occurred in Medina. Al-Singkil said,

[Kata mufasir tersebut] Di dalam Khazin adalah segala orang yang berbuat zina di dalam Madinah berjalan mereka itu pada segala jalan Madinah menyakiti mereka itu akan segala perempuan yang keluar pada malam karena hajat mereka itu. Maka diikat mereka itu seorang apabila diam iya maka diikat mereka itu lah akan dia dan apabila dihardikkan daripadanya maka tertegah mereka itu daripadanya maka tiada dituntut mereka itu melainkan perempuan yang hamba orang jua tetap (i) dikenal mereka itu akan perempuan yang merdeka dan sahaya karena pakaian segala mereka itu suatu (jua) maka turun firman Allah Ta'ala menegahkan segala perempuan yang merdeka menyerupai pakaian segala hamba orang *Wallahu A'lam*.

“...dan adalah Allah Ta'ala yang amat mengampun bagi yang telah lalu daripada mereka itu dengan **sebab meninggalkan daripada menutup muka** lagi mengasihani akan mereka itu tatkala ditutup mereka itu akan dia”.³⁴

Aboe dkk, *Kamus Aceh Indonesia 2* (Jakarta: Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa Debdikbud, 1985), 859; Bukhari Daud and Mark Durie, *Kamus Basa Aceh* (Canberra: Pacific Linguistic, 1999), 172; and <http://sealang.net/malay/dictionary.htm>, accessed Januari 3rd, 2026.

32 Abd al-Ra'uf bin Ali al-Fansuri al-Jawi al-Singkili *Tarjuman al-Mustafid*, 254.

33 'Abd al-Ra'uf bin 'Ali al-Fansūrī al-Jāwī al-Singkili, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, 1951, 427.

34 'Al-Singkili, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, 427.

This recommendation differs from his opinion in interpreting Q 24:31, where he states,

“And let them not display their adornments except what is apparent of them, namely **their faces and hands...**”

From these two statements, it can be understood that al-Singkili gives two different interpretations regarding the limits of women's head coverings. In al-Nur [24]: 31, he appears to be more lenient, while in Q 33:59, he adopts a stricter approach. Although the object of these two verses is the same, namely female believers, al-Singkili applies different views. The reason why Al-Singkili distinguishes between the two is not entirely clear.³⁵

Interpretation by Tengku Mahjiddin Jusuf in Al-Qur'an al-Karim dan Terjemahan Bebas Bersajak dalam Bahasa Aceh

In interpreting Q 24:31, Mahjiddin Jusuf says that women should not show their headdresses (*hiasan ulee*).

<i>Bak mukmin inong pih meunanan ulah</i>	Likewise, it is conveyed to believing women
<i>Tayue theun mata jaga meunalee</i>	Command them to lower their gaze and guard their modesty
<i>Hiasan ulee bek tabri peuhah</i>	Do not allow your head covering to be uncovered
<i>Hiasan tuboh kalong boh bajee</i>	Body adornment wear a necklace and clothes
<i>Bandum nyan teuntee bek jipeuleumah</i>	All of these must not be shown
<i>Meulengkan peue nyang lahe u lua</i>	But rather something that is visible to the outside
<i>Nyang leumah nyata sabe cit teuhah</i>	What is clearly visible is always open
<i>Meunan pih jingui ija tob ulee</i>	Likewise, a head covering is worn
<i>Di ateuh bajee mangat bek leumah</i>	On top of the clothes so that it is not visible

There is no further explanation regarding the meaning of “head adornment” in this context. It remains unclear whether the term refers to a head accessory or

³⁵ Al-Singkili's opinion on face coverings is also discussed in his work *Mir'ab al-Tullab Mir'ah al-Tullab* in the discussion of “*kiswah*”. He mentions the husband's obligation to provide clothing according to his wife's size and the local weather. Al-Singkili obligates husbands to provide shirts and *sirwal* (trousers). 'Abd al-Ra'uf bin 'Ali al-Fansuri al-Jawi al-Singkili, *Mir'ab al-Tullab*, 440.

perhaps to the hair itself. However, if we look at Jusuf's interpretation further on, at the end of the verse, it can be assumed that "adornment" here means accessories such as necklaces, headdresses, and anklets. According to Jusuf, these three types of jewelry should not be shown.³⁶

The word "*Khumūr*" is interpreted as *ijsa tob ulee* or head covering. Jusuf mentions that this cloth should be draped over the clothing. From Jusuf's interpretation, it can be understood that Jusuf tends to favor a head covering that also covers the neck to the chest, such as *al-Singkīlī*. The prohibition against hiding the sound of anklets at the end of the verse is intended to prevent others from knowing that a woman is wearing jewelry (*mangat gob teupeue na perhiasan*).³⁷ This means that Mahjiddin Jusuf tends to avoid social and economic jealousy.

Regarding Q 33:59, Jusuf interprets "*Yudnīna 'alayhinna min jalābībihinna*" as *jingui sileukom mangat gop turi* (wear *sileukom* so that others can recognize you). For the people of Aceh, *sileukom* has the same meaning as *telekung*³⁸ mentioned by *al-Singkīlī*, which is a veil that reaches down to the knees. For Jusuf, wearing this type of head covering is intended to make it easier to be recognized and not be disturbed (*han jijeut ganggu meu ka jitusoe*).³⁹

The question is: recognized by whom, and left undisturbed by whom?. Referring to the background of this verse,⁴⁰ the answer is related to the immoral men of Madinah who often harassed women at night. By referring to the *asbāb al-nuzūl*, Jusuf tends to align his interpretation with the historical context of revelation, a period in which the system of slavery was still in place. Nevertheless, this system was no longer operative at the time he wrote his *tafsir*. To avoid making excessive claims, it may therefore be assumed that Jusuf's interpretation seeks to position Acehnese women in a safer social position when appearing in public spaces, particularly through more covering forms of dress.

Exegetical Analysis

This section will attempt to explore the complex relationship between the text of interpretation, the tradition of interpretation, and the surrounding socio-cultural conditions. Two approaches will be used here, namely, *first*, the genealogy of

36 Jusuf, *Al-Quran al-Karim dan Terjemahan*, 537-538.

37 Jusuf, *Al-Quran al-Karim dan Terjemahan*, 537.

38 See footnote no. 33.

39 Jusuf, *Al-Quran al-Karim and Translation*, 653-654.

40 This information can be found in Al-Wahidi An-Naisaburi, *Asbabun Nuzul* (Surabaya: Amelia, 2014), 577-578 and As-Suyuthi, *Asbabun Nuzul* (Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar, 2014), 437-438.

interpretation and social history by highlighting interpretation as a product that has been influenced by previous books of interpretation. *Second*, analyzing the interaction between the mufassir and the social context.

Analysis of Several Keywords: Tracing the Genealogy of Source Usage

This section will analyze the sources of the two exegetical works through an exegetical tradition approach. The analysis will be conducted in two stages: *First*, tracing the references used; *Second*, tracing the possible meanings of the words chosen by the exegetes, taking into account the sources used. There are three keywords discussed here, namely: *khumur*, *juyūb*, and *jalābīb*. Based on the interpretations of the two exegetes, these three keywords converge on one meaning, namely a wide cloth that can cover the head to the chest. The table below shows al-Singkili's interpretation of these three words:

Exegete	Interpretation		
	Khumur	Juyub	Jalābīb
Al-Singkili	<i>Teulekung</i> (women's prayer veil in Acehnese and Malay) (Q 24:31)	All their heads and necks and all their chests (Q 24:31)	All face coverings (Q 33:59)
	Explanation		
	Q 24:31	Q 33:59	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The command to cover the head, neck, and chest. The parts of a woman's body that may be exposed are the face and the palms of her hands. The recommended head covering is a <i>telekung</i> (mukena). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommending to cover the face so that it is easy to recognize as an independent woman.

Based on the table above, at first glance, al-Singkili appears to impose an approach on believing women. In Q 24:31, he allows women to uncover their faces, while in Q 33:59, al-Singkili quotes from al-Khāzin,⁴¹ introducing the "face covering" as extra protection for women from social harassment.⁴²

41 'Abd al-Ra'uf bin 'Ali al-Fansuri al-Jawi al-Singkili, *Tarjuman Al-Mustafid*, 427.

42 Al-Khāzin, *Lubāb al-Ta'wil fī Ma 'āni al-Tanzil* (Tafsīr al-Khāzin) (Beirut: Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilmiyah, 2004), 436-437.

Before further discussion on the factors behind these differences in interpretation, it is important to explore the various interpretations related to Q 24:31, especially from the works of interpretation that are assumed to be al-Singkili's main references, such as *Tafsir al-Jalālayn*, *Tafsir al-Khāzin*, and *Tafsir al-Bayḍāwī*. This exploration is important to understand the genealogy of al-Singkili's interpretation.

When observed from the aspect of systematic discussion, al-Singkili's interpretation has many similarities with *Tafsir al-Jalālayn*.⁴³ The phrase “*illā mā zahara minhā*” is interpreted as adornments in the form of body parts that are normally visible, namely the face and palms. These two body parts may be seen by non-mahrams. The parts of a woman's body that are recommended to be covered are the head, neck, and chest.⁴⁴

It is interesting to note that al-Singkili interprets the word “*khumur*” as *telekung* (women's prayer veil in Acehnese and Malay). Of course, in Arab culture, there is no such word as “*telekung*”. The basis for this adaptation of meaning (*khumur* to *telekung*) is not known for certain. However, if the “*telekung*” referred to by al-Singkili is the *mukena* as understood by the Acehnese community today, then *the telekung* can cover the head, neck, chest, and wrists.

Discussion on the limits of ‘*aurat* is an important theme in determining women's head coverings. In this verse, al-Singkili and the three mufassir show the same conclusion, namely: the ‘*aurat* that may be seen are the face and palms. They also agree that the meaning of *zīnah* (adornment) in this verse is not material adornments, such as earrings, necklaces, and bracelets, but rather the places where these adornments are worn, such as the ears, neck, head, and wrists. This means that these four body parts are ‘*aurat* and must be covered.⁴⁵

Information regarding exceptions may be seen in emergencies or when necessary to testify (give evidence) in al-Singkili's interpretation, which is information that can also be found in *Tafsir al-Bayḍāwī*⁴⁶ and *Tafsir al-Khāzin*,⁴⁷ because *Tafsir al-*

43 Peter.G. Riddell, “The Sources of Abd Al-Rauf's Tarjuman Al-Mustafid,” *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 57, no. 2 (1984): 113–118.

44 Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Al-Mahalli and 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Abi Bakr Al-Suyuti, *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn Wa Ma'abu Hashiyah Hidayah Al-Muwahhidin* (Riyadh: Madar al-Wathni li al-Nasr, 2015), 353.

45 Al-Khāzin, *Lubāb al-Ta'wil fī Ma'ānī al-Tanzil* (Tafsir al-Khāzin), 292, Nāṣir al-Dīn ibn 'Umar ibn Muhammad al-Shirāzī al-Shāfi'i al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzil wa Asrār al-Ta'wil*. (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya' al-Turats al-'Arabi, n.d.), 104–105, and al-Mahallī and al-Suyūṭī. *Tafsir al-Jalālayn wa ma'abu Hāshiyah Hidāyat al-Muwahhidin*, 353.

46 Nāṣir al-Dīn ibn 'Umar ibn Muhammad al-Shirāzī al-Shāfi'i, *Anwār al-Tanzil wa Asrār al-Ta'wil* (Beirut: Dar al-Ihya' al-Turats al-'Arabi, n.d.), 104–105.

47 Al-Khāzin, *Lubāb al-Ta'wil*, 292.

Jalālayn does not mention this. This means that in interpreting this verse, al-Singkili combines several mufassir's thoughts.

According to al-Khāzin, Q 33:59 discusses women wearing *jalābīb*. He interprets this word as a cloth worn by women to cover their armor (*al-dar'u*) and headscarves (*al-khimār*). Al-Khazin also quotes the opinion of Ibn 'Abbās, who states that women should extend *their "jilbāb"* so that it covers their heads and faces, leaving only one side of their eyes visible.⁴⁸

Although al-Singkili only mentions one name of a mufassir, this interpretation is also found in *Tafsīr al-Baydāwī Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*.⁴⁹ All of their opinions on al-Azāb [33]: 59 lead to one conclusion: the command to cover both the head and face. The argument constructed is that free believing women (*al-mukminah al-ḥurrah*) should be protected from the harassment of immoral men at night.

Observation of al-Singkili's pattern of interpretation reveals two conclusions, including: *First*, vernacularization (the process of compromise between the original word and the translated word)⁵⁰ carried out by al-Singkili on the word *khumur* to become *telekung* is a process of adaptation of meaning that does not correspond to all the alternatives given by the mufassir he refers to, namely *kerudung* (a veil that covers the head, neck, and chest). *Second*, Al-Singkili interpreted the urgency of women covering their heads by linking it to the context of sexual harassment in Medina. In his view, this incident of harassment occurred because women did not comply with covering their *'aurat*, which he believed could invite the risk of indecent behavior. This model of interpretation also shows the formation of exegetical authority through adaptation between the open meanings of the Qur'anic text, the inherited tradition of exegesis, and the socio-cultural context of Aceh.

48 Al-Khazin, *Lubaab al-Ta'wil*, 437.

49 Al-Mahalli and Al-Suyuti, *Tafsīr al-Jalalain*, 426.

50 Anthony H. Johns, "She Desired Him and He Desired Her" (Qur'an 12:24): 'Abd Al-Ra'ūf's Treatment of an Episode of the Joseph Story in *Tarjumān Al-Mustafid*," *Archipel* 57, no. Volume II (1999): 109–134, in Ervan Nurtawab, "The Problems of Translation in *Turjuman Al-Mustafid*; A Study of Theological and Eschatological Aspects," *Studia Islamika*, Vol. 18, no. 1 (2011), 37.

The next discussion is about Jusuf's interpretation. To facilitate reading, his thoughts are summarized in the following table;

Tengku Mahjiddin Jusuf	Interpretation		
	Khumūr	Juyūb	Jalābīb
	<i>Ija tob ulee</i> or head covering (Q 24:31)	<i>Di ateuh baje</i> or over the clothes (Q 24:31)	<i>Sileukom</i> (mukena in Acehnese) (Q 33:59)
Explanation			
Q 24:31		Q 33:59	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women should not display their adornments, such as necklaces, headdresses, and anklets. The word "Khumūr" is interpreted as <i>Ija tob ulee</i> (head covering). This cloth is draped over the clothing. Jusuf tends to favor a head covering that also covers the neck and chest. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jusuf refers to "sileukom" (mukena) to cover a woman's head and body. According to Jusuf, the main purpose of the recommendation to cover the head in verse 59 is to make it easy to recognize. 	

Regarding the sources of interpretation, Jusuf does not provide explicit information in his translation. Information about the works of interpretation used as reference materials can be found in the introduction, namely: *Tafsir Ibnu Kašir*, *Tafsir al-Zamakhsharī*, and *al-Tabarī*.⁵¹ There is no information which interpretation he referred to most in interpreting Surah Q 24:31 and Q 33:59.

To find out, it is necessary to trace these three sources. Regarding Q 24:31, *al-Tabarī* provides a fairly detailed explanation of the differences of opinion regarding the meaning of hidden jewelry (*zīnah*) and jewelry that is usually visible (*illā mā zahara minhā*). Hidden jewelry includes anklets, bracelets, necklaces, and pendants. Meanwhile, there are three variations of interpretation regarding visible jewelry in twenty-six narrations, including: *First*, clothing, with nine supporting opinions; *Second*, eye makeup, rings, bracelets, and the face, with fifteen supporting narrations; *Third*, the face and clothing. He lists two opinions regarding this category. Of all these variations in meaning, *al-Tabari* chose the opinion that had the most supporting accounts, namely the second opinion. He concluded that the jewelry that is usually visible is the face and palms. Using this opinion, it is permissible to show the eyes,

⁵¹ Jusuf, *Alquran Al-Karim dan Terjemahan*, xiii.

rings, bracelets, anything colored with henna, and clothing. He supports his choice by saying that women may show their faces and palms when performing prayer, and cover all other parts of their bodies.⁵²

This opinion is also in line with the interpretations of al-Zamakhsyari and Ibn Kaśir. In Q 24:31, al-Zamakhsyari distinguishes between visible and invisible adornments. Like al-Tabari, al-Zamakhshari also permits women to show their faces and palms, arguing that these body parts are difficult to cover due to various activities.⁵³

As for Q 33:59, al-Tabari presented two variants of opinion, including one that says that this verse refers to covering the face and head. He quoted three opinions, all of which stated that women must cover their heads and faces, and only show one of their eyes.⁵⁴ The second variant only requires them to tie (tighten) the cloth above their foreheads, without the command to cover their faces. Four accounts support this opinion. Al-Tabari supports the first opinion by stating, “*Lā yatashabbahna bi al-imā'i ... fa-kashafnā shu 'ūrahunna wa wujūhahunna*” (Do not imitate them (female slaves)... (who, when they leave the house), uncover their hair and faces).⁵⁵

This opinion is also in line with al-Zamakhsyari and Ibn Kaśir. Both emphasize that *the jilbab* is a wider garment (above the headscarf) than the headscarf. So, in the sentence “*Yudnīna 'alayhinna min jalābībihinna*”, it is interpreted as removing (extending) over women (with the cloth) that can cover their faces and necks.⁵⁶ This means that in this verse, al-Zamakhsyari and Ibn Kaśir also recommend the use of face coverings to distinguish women from their social class (free or slave).⁵⁷

A review of these three sources shows that: *First*, Jusuf follows the same interpretation for Q 24:31, but not for Q 33:59. The narrative of the face covering is not found in Mahjiddin Jusuf's interpretation. Jusuf appears to be more consistent, as he sticks to one meaning, namely, head covering. This interpretation shows that although traditional interpretations are maintained, there is flexibility in citation. According to Saleh, this method of citing without having to choose is common in the genealogy of interpretation.⁵⁸

52 Muhammad bin Jarir Al-Tabarī, *Tafsīr al-Tabarī: Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wil Al-Qur'an*. Volume XVII. (Cairo: Hajar, 2001), 256-273.

53 Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiq al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta'wil*, Jilid IV. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-'Abaykān, 1998), 290-291.

54 Muhammad bin Jarir Al-Tabarī, *Tafsīr al-Tabarī: Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wil Al-Qur'an*, jilid XIX, 181-182.

55 Al-Tabarī, *Tafsīr Al-Tabarī*, jilid XIX, 182-183.

56 Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf*, Jilid V, 97-98.

57 Ibn Kaśir, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'an Al-'Azīm*, vol. VI, 481.

58 Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition*, 14.

Second, Jusuf's vernacularization of the Qur'an into the Acehnese language, related to the choice of the word "seulekom" for the word *jalābīb* in Q 33:59, shows that it was not easy to bring the concept of *jalābīb* into Acehnese society at that time, which did not widely use head coverings.

Analysis of several keywords in the two Acehnese interpretations above leads us to two main conclusions. First, the interpretations of both mufassir are based on references to Sunni traditional texts. *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, *Tafsīr al-Khāzin*, and *Tafsīr al-Baydāwī*, which are referenced by al-Singkili; and *Tafsīr Ibnu Kaśīr* and *Tafsīr al-Tabarī* which is referenced by Jusuf, are authoritative references among Sunnis.⁵⁹

What about *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf*, which is also referenced by Jusuf? Walid Saleh asserts that *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf* by al-Zamakhsyari is the first tafsir reference that was universally accepted by all theological schools, which was later replaced by *Tafsīr al-Baydāwī*.⁶⁰ This means that al-Zamakhsyari's background as a Mu'tazilah scholar was not a significant distinguishing factor, so he was also accepted by Sunni scholars.

In this context, al-Singkili's academic path is easier to trace because he studied in Hijaz -a region predominantly populated by Sunni scholars since the 16th century-⁶¹ for nineteen years. One of his famous teachers was Ibrahim al-Kurani, the greatest teacher in Medina, whose students came from all over the Islamic world.⁶² Naser Dumaireh notes that this model of knowledge transmission was common among Southeast Asians who had studied in Mecca and Medina. After returning to their homeland, they taught their communities the knowledge they had acquired in the holy lands.⁶³

Mahjiddin Jusuf, although he never studied in Arabia, had his reading sources dominated by Middle Eastern interpretations. It is assumed that this was influenced

59 This categorization of Sunni tafsir has been presented in several studies, such as Norman Calder, "Tafsīr from Tabari to Ibnu Kaśīr; Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham," in *Approaches to the Qur'an*, ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993), 102-103. See also Walid Ahmad Saleh, "Periodization in the Sunni Qur'an Commentary Tradition: A Chronological History of a Genre," *Practices of Commentary* 8, no. 2 (2023): 49-64, 51.

60 Saleh, Periodization in the Sunni Qur'an Commentary Tradition, 55.

61 The roots of the Sunni-Syi'i divide in the Hijaz can be traced back to the period of the death of the Prophet Muhammad. See Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad; A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1. Fadhli Lukman, *The Official Indonesian Qur'an Translation: The History and Politics of Al-Qur'an Dan Terjemahnya* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publisher, 2022), 28.

62 A. Ginanjar Sya'ban, *Islamic Masterpieces of the Archipelago; Books, Manuscripts, and Correspondence of Nusantara Scholars* (Tangerang: Pustaka Kompas, 2017), 23. See also Fadhli Lukman, *The Official Indonesian Qur'an Translation: The History and Politics of Al-Qur'an and Its Translation* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publisher, 2022), 25-31, quoted from Martin van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, dan Tarekat*, vol. 11 (Yogyakarta: Gading Publishing, 2012), 4-10.

63 Naser Dumaireh, *Intellectual Life in the Hijaz before Wahhabism; Ibrahim Al-Kurani's Theology of Sufism. In Islamicate Intellectual History; Studies and Texts in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods*. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2022), 48-49.

by his academic journey from various *Islamic* boarding schools in Aceh and the *Islamic Normal* School in Padang, West Sumatra. *Islamic Normal* School was the first school in Indonesia to implement a modern Islamic curriculum. It was founded by Haji Abdullah Ahmad, the primary founder, and Mahmud Yunus, an alumnus of Al-Azhar University in Cairo. Through this scholarly network, it is clear that Jusuf was also inspired by the reforms in Cairo, which was also a center of Sunni Islamic intellectual life at the time.⁶⁴

Second, by not providing fixed restrictions on women's head coverings, places al-Singkili in two positions at once, namely monovalence (mentioning one definitive meaning preference) and polyvalence (providing several possibilities without choosing one definitive meaning).⁶⁵ When interpreting only one verse, al-Singkili affirms monovalence, whereas when interpreting a single topic -head coverings for women in the Qur'an- al-Singkili tends to use the method of polyvalence, which was commonly used in pre-modern interpretations. Unlike Jusuf, he uses a monovalent reading without a face covering issue. I assume that Jusuf chose a more concise interpretation so that it would be easier to understand.⁶⁶

The Dialectics of Interpretation: Women in the Qur'an—Women in Tafsir

As discussed earlier, al-Singkili included the narrative of face coverings in his interpretation of Surah al-Ahzab [33]: 59 on the topic of distinguishing between free and slave women, while Jusuf did not. This is in accordance with the social context of each exegete at that time. Based on a geographical perspective, there is no style of clothing and head covering culture that is truly "authentic" to Acehnese women—or, more broadly, Indonesian women—because they are all dialectically intertwined.⁶⁷

When al-Singkili wrote his commentary, Aceh still legitimized the practice of slavery, even from before the 17th century until the 19th century.⁶⁸ During the reign of Iskandar Muda, slaves were often taken from prisoners of war or because of

64 Michael Laffan, "An Indonesian Community in Cairo: Continuity and Change in a Cosmopolitan Islamic Milieu," *Indonesia* 77, no. 77 (2004): 1-26.

65 See further discussion of monovalence-polivalence in Pieter Coppens, "Did Modernity End Polyvalence? Some Observations on Tolerance for Ambiguity in Sunni Tafsir," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 23, no. 1 (2021), 48.

66 Edwin P Wieringa, "An Unfaithful Translation for the Faithful: Indonesian Islamic Gatekeepers on the Free Poetic Acehnese Translation of the Qur'an by Teungku Haji Mahjiddin Jusuf (1918-1994)," in *Malay-Indonesian Islamic Studies; A Festschrift in Honor of Peter G. Riddell*, ed. Majid Daneshgar and Ervan Nurtawab, vol. 20 (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 134. See also in Pieter Coppens, Did Modernity End Polyvalence?, 48.

67 Henk Schulte Nordholt, "Introduction," in *Outward Appearances; Trend, Identity, Interest* (Yogyakarta, 2005), 14.

68 Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, *The Acehnese*, Vol. I, (Leiden: Brill, 1906), 19.

debt.⁶⁹ At that time, the slave trade was common in the Malay world, especially in Sumatra. In *Acehnese customs*, there was also a specific discussion regarding taxation on the slave trade.⁷⁰ In the VOC records, Pieter Willemzoon also mentioned that when Sultanah Safiatuddin gave the title of “rich man” to a British surgeon and gave him four slaves as a gift.⁷¹

Based on this context of slavery, it is assumed that al-Singkili wanted to establish a marker of social status, namely by encouraging free women to wear longer head coverings as a sign of freedom and honor. Meanwhile, slave women were allowed not to cover their heads. Indirectly, this interpretation sought to shape the identity of women based on social status in Acehnese society at that time, between free women and slaves.

Then, did the Sultanah also wear a face covering (veil) as stated by al-Singkili in his interpretation? From the 16th century to the early 19th century, the practice of covering the head was not yet popular among the Acehnese people. Information about women wearing more covered clothing, including head coverings, is mostly found among the elite, such as the wives of kings, the wives of Chinese Muslim traders,⁷² or rulers such as the four queens of the Kingdom of Aceh, namely Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah (reigned 1641-75), Sultanah Nur Alam Naqiatuddin Syah (reigned 1675-78), Sultanah Inayat Zakiatuddin Syah (reigned 1678-88), and Sultanah Kamalat Zainatuddin Syah (reigned 1688-99).⁷³

Sher Banu quotes the notes of a Muslim traveler, al-Mutawakkil, who said that during the reign of Sultanah Safiatuddin, the queen placed a curtain (hijab) between herself and her ministers when she was giving orders. When the queen was hunting or out walking, she only wore a head covering.⁷⁴ From the records that have been found, none explicitly mention that the queen wore a face covering.

If the Sultanah did not wear a face covering, why did al-Singkili {> mention the face covering in his interpretation? As discussed earlier regarding al-Singkili’s chain of knowledge. In the 17th century, indigenous Southeast Asians who had

69 Denys Lombard, *The Kingdom of Aceh in the Time of Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636)*, vol. 1 (South Jakarta: KPG (Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia), 2008), 77-78.

70 Denys Lombard, *The Kingdom of Aceh in the Reign of Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636)*, 78-79.

71 Sher Banu A.L. Khan, *Sovereign Women in a Muslim Kingdom: The Sultanahs of Aceh, 1641-1699* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017), 193-194.

72 Barbara Watson Andaya, *The Flaming Womb; Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Hon: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 85.

73 Sher Banu A.L. Khan, *Sovereign Women in A Muslim Kingdom*, 203 . Sher Banu A.L. Khan, “Response and Resilience: Aceh’s Trade in the Seventeenth Century,” *Indonesia* 11, no. 1 (2015): 27-30.

74 Sher Banu A.L. Khan, *Sovereign Women in A Muslim Kingdom*, 201, as quoted from The Hollanders in the Sirrah of Al-Mutawakkil, 124.

studied in the holy land played an important role in the Islamization of Indonesia.⁷⁵ Contact between the heart of Islam in Arabia not only led to the acceptance of scriptural elements of Islam in Indonesian Islamic culture, but also to the acceptance of various Arab customs and cultures⁷⁶ in considerable numbers, one of which was in the area of clothing.⁷⁷

Then, what about the culture of head coverings when Jusuf wrote his interpretation (1955-1994)? At that time, the head covering that had developed was in the form of a scarf, which in the culture of the Acehnese people at that time (early 19th century) was called *ija tob ulee*,⁷⁸ as seen in the following documentation;



Figure 1. Portrait of Teuku Panglima Polim's wife in Sigli, Aceh. Photo taken around 1903. (KITLV53406)

In the early 20th century, the majority of Indonesian women still wore head coverings that left part of their hair and neck exposed. One example can be seen on the cover of the first edition of *Panji Masyarakat* magazine, published in 1959,

75 Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, dan Tarekat*, 10 .

76 Some rulers, such as Sultan Baabullah of Ternate, demonstrated their piety by wearing Arab clothing. When Alexander of Rhodes arrived in Makassar in 1646, he reported that women there wore veils in public. See Barbara Watson Andaya and Yoneo Ishii, "Religious Developments in Southeast Asia c. 1500–1800," in *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, ed. Nicholas Tarling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 508–571. Other records even mention that there were also women with face coverings. However, at that time, face coverings were never a standard feature of women's clothing. Solange Hertz, a historian, emphasizes that face coverings were customary in the holy city of Mecca. See Andaya, *The Flaming Womb*, 85– 98, quoted from Solange Hertz, trans., *Rhodes of Vietnam* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1966), 117-118.

77 Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, dan Tarekat*, 68.

78 Hurgronje, *The Achehnese*, vol. I, 27-30.

below;⁷⁹



Figure 2. Front cover of the first edition of Panji Masyarakat magazine in 1959.

Taylor also mentions in his research that the photographs he found from around 1892, 1900, and 1925 show that the shawl was one of the everyday garments of the majority of Acehnese women. One of these photographs can be seen below;



Figure 3. People watching a street performance.

The image above shows female spectators wearing Javanese *kebaya*. Some wear head coverings, while others leave their heads uncovered. There is a woman on the far right wearing a head covering that covers everything except her eyes (KITLV 5268).⁸⁰ It cannot be confirmed whether this is the face covering previously mentioned by al-Singkili in his interpretation, because, as of the completion of this study, no other documentation has been found regarding female face coverings in the 16th to 19th centuries.

⁷⁹ See <https://kumparan.com/dipo-alam/ayahku-dan-majalah-panji-masyarakat-1u7vDSrybTE/2>, Accessed on November 12, 2024. At the time of writing, the author has not yet obtained direct access to or a copy of the 1959 edition.

⁸⁰ Taylor, Aceh Histories in the KITLV Images Archive, 230.

This data is consistent with my family photo documentation⁸¹, which shows that grandmothers, mothers, and Acehnese women at that time generally did not wear coverings, as is the case in modern Acehnese society. Head coverings were only worn on certain occasions, such as religious gatherings, and these were limited to scarves that still revealed the hair, neck, and part of the chest. This practice persisted until the enactment of the *Qanun* on Islamic clothing in 2002. After this regulation, Acehnese women began to wear more comprehensive head and body coverings. The Aceh government even conducted clothing raids at certain times and locations in urban areas.

Based on the discussion above, it allows us to understand that Jusuf's interpretation of women's head coverings reflects an effort to reaffirm appropriate female dress. This reflects an alignment between his interpretive sources and the social practices of Acehnese society at the time. The absence of face covering in his interpretation aligns with historical findings that it was never a dominant or continuous tradition from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Acehnese interpretations of women's head covering are shaped not only by the Qur'anic lexicon but also by the historical transmission of exegetical authority and the vernacularization of key terms. By comparing *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* ('Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkilī, d. 1693) and *Al-Qur'ān al-Karīm dan Terjemahan Bebas Bersajak dalam Bahasa Aceh* (Tengku Mahjiddin Jusuf, d. 1994), the analysis demonstrates how the meanings of *khumur/khimār*, *juyūb*, and *jalābib* are domesticated into local dress vocabularies (such as *telekung/sileukom* and *ija tob ule*) while retaining their normative function as markers of modesty derived from Q 24:31 and Q 33:59. In both exegetical works, women's modesty is framed through inherited Sunni interpretive horizons, yet the mode of articulation differs according to the socio-political setting in which each *tafsīr* operates.

A socio-historical comparison further indicates a shift in the function of vernacular *tafsīr* across time. Al-Singkilī's interpretation emerged within a political order still shaped by royal governance, where religious authority and social regulation were embedded in a court-centered religious culture; by contrast, Jusuf's interpretive project functions more as a reinforcing discourse within a later context beyond sultanate structures, where communal norms are maintained through different social institutions and public moral discourse. These findings suggest that Acehnese *tafsīr*

⁸¹ The author's observations of family photo documentation, on both paternal and maternal sides. The photos were predominantly taken in Sigli and Langsa, Aceh.

is not merely a translation of Arabic meanings into local language, but a mediating space in which Qur'anic guidance, inherited exegetical authority, and local social practice continuously negotiate one another.

This study is limited by its focus on two vernacular exegetical works and on the two primary Qur'anic loci most frequently mobilized in discussions of women's modesty. Future research could expand the corpus to include other Acehnese *tafsīr* traditions, fatwa discourses, and educational commentaries, as well as examine how vernacular interpretations interact with contemporary legal-regulatory frameworks and lived practices. Comparative work across regions in Indonesia may also clarify whether similar patterns of vernacularization and socio-political mediation occur in other local *tafsīr* traditions, thereby enriching our understanding of how Qur'anic interpretation travels, settles, and transforms within diverse Muslim societies.

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Author's Contribution

As the first author, Lenni Lestari was responsible for proposing the research title, writing and drafting the article, conducting the analysis, and carrying out revisions of the article. Moch. Nur Ichwan and Ahmad Rafiq, as the supervising authors, contributed by guiding the conceptual framework, evaluating the research results, and suggesting essential references that formed the scholarly foundation of this study.

Data availability statement

All data underlying the results are available as part of the article and no additional source data are required.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest related to the publication of this article.

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