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New Approaches to Qur'anic Hermeneutics in the Muslim World

Edited by
Ismail Albayrak and Hakan Coruh

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About the Editors

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Ismail Albayrak is a Professorial Fellow in Australian Catholic University. He taught and wrote on Qur'anic studies, interfaith dialogue, and orientalism. He is also interested in the place of Muslim communities and their activities in a globalizing world. His most recent research focuses on the Ibadi exegetical tradition, classical prison literature in Islamic societies, and the place of women in Islamic traditions.

Hakan Coruh

Dr. Hakan Coruh is a senior lecturer of Islamic Studies at CISAC, Charles Sturt University. He completed his PhD at Australian Catholic University in 2015. His PhD research is on early modern exegesis of the Qur'an (Said Nursi, Muhammad 'Abduh, and Sir Ahmad Khan). Moreover, Hakan's main research interests are the classical and modern Qur'an exegesis, contemporary Islamic thought, Islamic Legal Theories (usul al-fiqh) and Jurisprudence (fiqh), Islamic Ethics (akhlaq), Islamic theology (kalām), and Comparative Theology.

Preface to "New Approaches to Qur'anic Hermeneutics in the Muslim World"

The Qur'an, as the scripture of Islam, and its exegesis have a special place under the broad umbrella of Islamic studies disciplines. In Qur'anic studies, contemporary approaches to Qur'anic exegesis are an area that needs constant updating with the participation of new actors. This Special Issue of the journal *Religions*, titled "New approaches to Qur'anic hermeneutics in the Muslim world", discusses the approaches that play significant roles in modern Qur'anic interpretation in the Islamic world. It critically analyses the intellectual efforts to understand the Qur'an in modern times by contemporary Muslim thinkers from different linguistic and geographic backgrounds. The new Qur'an readings, initiated by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) and continued with the works of Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1905), have been further developed by important names such as the late Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988), Muhammad Arkoun (d. 2010) and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (d. 2010), along with contemporary approaches. It is also possible to find similar examples of these approaches based on linguistic and historical hermeneutics in the Shi'ite world. This Special Issue discusses to what extent these and other leading figures represent approaches to the Qur'an in the Muslim world.

This reprinted special issue contains eleven articles by authors from different backgrounds and locations. In his article, Joseph E. B. Lumbard focuses on the obstacles to which the coloniality of knowledge has given rise in Qur'anic Studies in the Euro-American academy and encourages the development of more inclusive approaches in which multiple modes of analysis, such as the analytical tools of the classical Islamic tradition, are incorporated, thereby arguing for decolonizing Qur'anic Studies. In the second article, Halim Calis, of Respect Graduate School, analyses contextualist approach in the modern period and seeks to trace its theoretical origins in the classical Islamic scholarship. He maintains that most of the Islamic theological schools, as well as the Akbarī School (the school of Ibn al-'Arabī) admitted the contextuality of the Qur'an by distinguishing between transcendent divine speech and its limited manifestation in human language. Then he discusses Shams al-Dīn al-Fanārī's (d. 1431) hermeneutical theory as a case study of the Akbarī School, highlighting that al-Fanārī's idea that the Qur'anic text can have multiple meanings, due to the multiplicity of perceptions in different human contexts.

Moreover, Gokhan Bacik's article focuses on Qur'an hermeneutics in contemporary Turkey, which is another important region for modern Qur'anic studies, particularly historicism (or contextualism in western context) among Turkish academia in the divinity faculties after the 1990s. Bacik selects and analyses Mustafa Öztürk, İlhami Güler, and Ömer Özsoy as case study. The article discusses the three historicists' views on the nature of the Quran, their hermeneutical approach in interpreting the Quran, and (iii) their application to the interpretation of the Quran by focusing on Qur'anic verses regarding corporal punishment/chopping and divorce. In his article, Salih Yucel examines *tafsir shuhudi* (transempirical exegesis) in Said Nursi's Risale-i Nur Collection and how this methodology allows re-reading of the Quran. Yucel examines *tafsir shuhudi* in Nursi's works and then analyses the sound heart, an essential part of *iman tahkiki* ((investigative belief), in light of Nursi's transempirical experience. Yucel maintains that Nursi injects rationalism into the *ishari tafsir* methodology and infuses *shuhudi* experience by making it not only an epistemic but also an existential understanding of modern tafsir methodology.

Furthermore, Abdul-Samad Abdullah evaluates Fādil al-Samarrā'ī's (b. 1933) contribution to literary and rhetorical Qur'anic exegesis, especially regarding the rhetorical inimitability of the Qur'an. The author puts a context for al-Samarrā'ī and highlights other prominent scholars in

the Arab world who contributed immensely to the existing rhetorical and literary studies of the Qur'an such as Mustapha Ṣādiq al-Rāfi'ī (1880–1937 AD), Amīn al-Khūlī (1896–1966), Sayyid Quṭb (1909–1966), and 'Ā'ishah 'Abd al-Raḥman (Bint al-Shāṭi') (1913–1998). The author emphasizes that Fādil al-Samarrā'ī should be considered within the methodological structure of the al-'Umana' School, which is led by its founder al-Shaykh Amīn al-Khūlī, who established its foundations and methodology, and his wife 'Ā'ishah 'Abd al-Raḥman (Bint al-Shāṭi'), who applies his method of rhetorical interpretation and promotes his innovative thoughts in this field though al-Samarrā'ī held different views on some of the intellectual and scientific principles that they embraced, such as their rejection of scientific miracles of the Qur'an. What is more, in his article, Ali Akbar examines Shia scholar Ayatollah Yusuf Sanei's (d.2020) broader jurisprudential approach and his application in analyzing and often challenging traditional Shia rulings related to gender issues. Akbar pays attention to Sanei's consideration of the Sunna as secondary to the Qur'ān, his rejection of the practice of using consensus as an independent basis of legal rulings, his idea that Sharia rulings may change over time, and his strong emphasis on the Qur'ān's messages of justice and human dignity.

In addition, Hakan Çoruh attempts to engage with Comparative Theology discipline seeking traces of its samples within the Islamic tradition (such as ethics, law, and sufism). Particularly, the article investigates the classical exegetical approach to such a comparative reading (*isrā'īliyyāt*, biblical materials) and a modern tendency of direct Bible citations in the Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*) in the context of the story of Prophet Yaḥyā (John the Baptist) in the Qur'an. Çoruh argues that such mutual close readings and interactions across religious traditions could be a good model for the Muslim world, instead of a fully rejectionist fundamentalist discourse against other traditions. Also, Michal Moch, in his article, investigates critique of the concept of *naskh* (abrogation) in contemporary Qur'ānic hermeneutics, focusing on Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's critique as a case study. Moch underlines that for Abū Zayd, *naskh* was connected with a set of juridical approaches reducing the discursive aspect of the Qur'ān and turning it into a normative book of law. *Naskh*, in Abū Zayd's view, would have been acceptable only when related to change and contextualisation of religious instructions, not when turned into unquestionable orthodoxy totally excluding other interpretations of the Qur'ānic verses. Next, Jauhar Azizy et al. discusses thematic interpretation (*tafsīr mawḍū'ī*) and focuses on this tendency in Indonesia in the 2000s. They highlight that thematic interpretation discourse in Egypt had a significant impact on the development of thematic interpretation in Indonesia, particularly interpretation literature published in the 1990s.

After, Galym Zhussipbek and Bakhytzhan Satershinov focus on inclusive religious interpretations within Islamic scholarly tradition with special reference to rationalistic Maturidite theological school. They argue that the dynamic rationalistic Maturidite theology (so-called Maturidite "software") can help to produce inclusive Islamic interpretations and to lay the grounds to develop inclusive Islamic interpretations. Finally, in his article, Ali Mostfa analyses the phenomena of violence and the concept of *jihad* in three parts: their emergence and trajectory in the Qur'anic text, their meanings, and their entanglement with the religious cause. The author aims to elucidate the links between *jihad* and violence while exposing the differences in their application and perception, also attempting to address the issue of the transition of Islam from a meta-narrative of emancipation and rationality to one of violence by examining the question of war in Islam, as well as its definition and legitimization Drawing on Ibn Khaldun's model for the political aspect of violence, Mostfa seeks to separate the strands of politics, violence, and power within the Islamic heritage.

The eleven articles in this special issue demonstrate the richness of resources in Qur'anic Hermeneutics in the Muslim World. The authors from different backgrounds and regions have made a great contribution to Qur'anic studies and hermeneutics in the modern period. As editors of this

special issue, we would like to express our sincere indebtedness and thanks to the authors of this special issue. Also, we are greatly indebted to *Religions* journal and its editors, particularly Kiki Zhang, for their invitation of this issue and support throughout this project.

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Article

Decolonizing Qur'anic Studies

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Abstract: The legacy of colonialism continues to influence the analysis of the Qurʾan in the Euro-American academy. While Muslim lands are no longer directly colonized, intellectual colonialism continues to prevail in the privileging of Eurocentric systems of knowledge production to the detriment and even exclusion of modes of analysis that developed in the Islamic world for over a thousand years. This form of intellectual hegemony often results in a multifaceted epistemological reductionism that denies efficacy to the analytical tools developed by the classical Islamic tradition. The presumed intellectual superiority of Euro-American analytical modes has become a constitutive and persistent feature of Qurʾanic Studies, influencing all aspects of the field. Its persistence prevents some scholars from encountering, let alone employing, the analytical tools of the classical Islamic tradition and presents obstacles to a broader discourse in the international community of Qurʾanic Studies scholars. Acknowledging the obstacles to which the coloniality of knowledge has given rise in Qurʾanic Studies can help us to develop more inclusive approaches in which multiple modes of analysis are incorporated and scholars from variegated intellectual backgrounds can engage in a more effective dialogue.

Keywords: Qur'an; decolonization; colonialism; Islam

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> "To control a people you must first control what they think about themselves and how they regard their history and culture. And when your conqueror makes you ashamed of your culture and your history, he needs no prison walls and no chains to hold you."
>
> —John Henrik Clarke

Over the past forty years there has been a growing body of literature that seeks to respond to and counter revisionist approaches to the Qurʾan that have arisen in the Euro-American academy. Multiple articles in English and French, as well as a growing library of books in Arabic and Persian criticize the perceived attack on the textual traditions of Islam and on the means by which Muslim scholars have worked with and analyzed the Qurʾanic text.[1] Many of these works express great distrust toward Western scholarship regarding the Qurʾan. This attitude is perhaps best expressed in Parvez Manzoor's (1987, p. 39) oft-cited article, "Method Against Truth: Orientalism and Qurʾanic Studies," which begins,

> The Orientalist enterprise of Qurʾanic studies, whatever its other merits and services, was a project born of spite, bred in frustration and nourished by vengeance: the spite of the powerful for the powerless, the frustration of the "rational" towards the "superstitious" and the vengeance of the "orthodox" against the "non-conformist."

Similar grievances were expressed more recently by Muzaffar Iqbal in his critical review of the *Encyclopaedia of The Qurʾān*, where he maintains that, when viewed as a whole, the approach taken in many articles of the *Encyclopaedia* "negates, ignores, or considers irrelevant the phenomenon of revelation (*waḥy*) as understood in Islam" (Iqbal 2008, p. 12). Likewise, in his analysis of the collection of the Qurʾan, *The History of the Qur'anic Text*, M. M. Al-Aʿzami writes, "Orientalist research transcends mere subjectivity to manifest itself as anti-Islamic dogma" (al-Aʿzami 2020, p. 373). Mansour, Iqbal, and al-Aʿzami

address the manner in which paradigms of thought in the Euro-American academy have led to a truncated presentation of the Qurʾan, the Qurʾanic sciences, and the *tafsīr*, or exegetical, tradition. In this article I seek to go beyond such responses by drawing upon aspects of postcolonial theory to develop an analytical framework within which to view the development of Qurʾanic Studies in the Euro-American academy and contextualize the grievances expressed by many Muslim scholars.

Much of the consternation expressed by scholars who critique approaches to the Qurʾan that have emerged from within the Euro-American academy arises from the fact that Qurʾanic scholarship in many parts of the Islamic world is often ignored in Euro-American Qurʾanic Studies. The extensive research in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Indonesian, and other languages is rarely cited in work written in European languages,[2] and many of the sources that have informed the Islamic tradition for some one thousand years continue to receive little to no regard in the Euro-American academic study of the Quʾran. As Behnam Sadeghi and Uwe Bergmann observe,

> The amount of work yet to be done is great, and the main paths of embarking on the tasks are clear. It is now equally clear that recent works in the genre of historical fiction are of no help. By "historical fiction" I am referring to the work of authors who, contentedly ensconced next to the mountain of material in the premodern Muslim primary and secondary literature bearing on Islamic origins, say that there are no heights to scale, nothing to learn from the literature, and who speak of the paucity of evidence. Liberated from the requirement to analyze the literature critically, they can dream up imaginative historical narratives rooted in meager cherry-picked or irrelevant evidence, or in some cases no evidence at all. They write off the mountain as the illusory product of religious dogma or of empire-wide conspiracies or mass amnesia or deception, not realizing that literary sources need not always be taken at face value to prove a point; or they simply pass over the mass of the evidence in silence. (Sadeghi and Bergmann 2010, p. 416)

The "silence" to which Sadeghi and Bergmann refer arises from the beginning of Euro-American scholarship on the Qurʾan with Abraham Geiger (d. 1874), Gustav Weil (d. 1889), Aloys Sprenger (d. 1893), and Theodore Nöldeke (d. 1930). Qurʾanic Studies within the Euro-American academy was built in large part upon a foundation that disregards many methodological and factual contributions from the Qurʾanic sciences and from the *tafsīr* traditions of classical Islam. Encapsulating this trend, Bruce Fudge (2006, p. 127) observes, "The earliest studies of Islam in the West were dominated by philological inquiry and an emphasis on origins that favoured a European interpretation of the Qur'ān over what Muslims themselves might have had to say."

Favoring Euro-American approaches and interpretations of the Qurʾan pervades the field to the extent that many of the revered studies of the Qurʾan in the Western academic tradition have failed to take account of the cumulative development of knowledge that lies at the heart of the academic enterprise. Even factual evidence that would complicate contemporary theories is all too often either explained away or willfully ignored. For example, Harald Motzki (2001, p. 21) has demonstrated that when John Wansbrough was confronted by hadith collections which complicated his theory that traditions regarding the compilation of the Qurʾan did not arise until the third Islamic century, Wansbrough chose to rewrite history by asserting that the collections in which these traditions occur "were not really compilations by their putative authors but by their pupils or by later generations," rather than to modify his own theories.[3] More recently, Christoph Luxenberg (2007) has provided a more audacious rereading of Islamic textual history, one which requires that the foundations of the Arabic language itself were not known to Arabs, but only discovered by Luxenberg (with help from Alphonse Mingana and Gunter Lulling before him) in the late 20th century. Luxenberg's reading leads him to declare that "the entire scholarly edifice of Islam, largely based on the reliability of oral tradition, is unfounded" (Neuwirth 2003, pp. 9–10). In both of these examples, the theory demands the exclusion and re-configuration

of large swathes of historical data in order to fit a preconceived narrative. A more recent example of such revisionist trends occurs in David Powers' (2011) *Muhammad is Not the Father of any of Your Men*, which in theorizing collective international linguistic amnesia to advance a theory of forgery in the Qurʾan requires that we ignore basic principles of paleography, linguistics, and historiography.[4] Each of these works exhibits an extreme example of a prevailing tendency in Euro-American scholarship to declare interpretive frameworks that arise from within the Islamic tradition invalid in order to arrogate to authors of the Euro-American tradition the primary or even sole authority for theoretical production.

Within the this structure of Qurʾanic Studies in the Euro-American academy, one is still required to subscribe to a universal epistemological hierarchy in which secular Eurocentric approaches to the text are given pride of place.[5] Such privileging ensures that indigenous Muslim approaches to the text are relegated to the status of "information supply." They are seen as efficacious when they serve the purposes of, and can be incorporated into, a Euro-American epistemological hierarchy, but in and of themselves they are not permitted to generate alternative epistemic discourses, much less call into question the ideological foundations of Euro-American scholars who selectively draw vittles from their larder. As Sajjad Rizvi (2021, p. 124) writes, "to put it rather starkly, the naïve native could not be trusted when it came to accounting for the historical formation of the tradition, or the linguistic frameworks needed to decipher it, or even the hermeneutical skill required to make sense of scripture." Under this configuration, the possibility of what Walter Mignolo (2012, p. ix) refers to as "diverse and legitimate theoretical loci of enunciation," wherein multiple epistemological frameworks from different cultural paradigms engage in productive dialogue, is rejected out of hand.[6]

In many cases, Euro-American approaches to the Qurʾan have taken disregard for the commentary tradition, the Qurʾanic sciences (*ʿulūm al-qurʾān*), ḥadīth literature, and *sīra* literature as a methodological principle.[7] The consistent assumption that "real" scholarship cannot and should not rely upon the classical commentary tradition for the study of the Qurʾan often claims to be grounded in the quest for "historical accuracy." To achieve this vaunted goal, many of the sources are discounted out of hand. As Andrew Rippin writes of the Islamic commentary tradition, "The actual history in the sense of 'what really happened' has become totally subsumed within the later interpretation and is virtually if not totally inextricable from it" (Rippin 2001, p. 156). Following Wansbrough's lead, Rippin claims that the material provided by *tafsīr* and *sīra* does not provide historical records, but simply "the existential records of the thought and faith of later generations" (Ibid). As Angelika Neuwirth observes regarding those who take this revisionist approach,

> Constrained by their revisionist preconception, these scholars assume that historical reality is so deeply warped that, today it is impossible to discover any exact information concerning the early history of the Islamic scripture. Thus, not only was the idea that an original community had emerged from the Hijaz assigned to the realm of pious legend but any attempt to undertake a microstructural review of the text and the history of its growth was branded meaningless, and was abandoned. (Neuwirth 2014, p. 10)

Such methodological jettisoning of the *tafsīr* tradition, Qurʾanic sciences, and the Islamic historiographical tradition has resulted in approaches to the Qurʾanic text that, as Feras Hamza observes, "almost completely dislodged the use of *tafsīr* for reconstructing the historical context of the Quranic text" (Hamza 2014, p. 21).

These observations apply equally to philological and etymological inquiries that often bypass primary sources from the Islamic tradition in an effort to retrieve the "original" meaning of a word from other Near Eastern languages. Such approaches to the material provided by the classical tradition are methodologically and ideologically problematic. As regards the methodological shortcomings of this form of etymological investigation for Qurʾanic Studies, Tohshihiko Izutsu (2002, p. 17) writes that "Etymology, even when we

are fortunate enough to know it, can only furnish us with a clue as to the 'basic' meaning of a word. And, we must remember, etymology remains in many cases a simple guess work and very often an insoluble mystery." The fractured approach of such etymological analysis leads to a fractured image of the Qurʾan. As Angelika Neuwirth (2014, p. 35) observes, "Ultimately, based upon the Western philological literature on the Qur'an, the Qur'anic corpus appears to the untrained eye to consist of an amorphous set of verses with no recognizable rationale of their own." Walid Saleh (2010b, p. 667) is more emphatic when he observes that, since serious academic study of Islam began in the Euro-American academy in the 19th century, many Western scholars have operated within a framework that presents the Qurʾan as a "disparate hodgepodge of a book, derivative at the lexeme level, chaotic at the compositional level, and ultimately fascinating only in so far as that we will never be able to explain its paradoxical power to hold the attention of the benighted Muslims." Incorporating other materials from the Near Eastern milieu of late antiquity is no doubt of value for understanding the milieu in which the Qurʾan took shape, but bypassing Islamic sources for etymological and philological analyses reveals ideological biases, as the classical *tafsīr* tradition has been from its outset been "profoundly invested in the recuperation of meaning at the basic level of the grammatical and lexicographical significance of the Quran" (Zadeh 2015, p. 39).

Methodological aversion to incorporating primary sources inevitably leads to the question, "If we cannot start at the beginning, then where should we begin?" Much Euro-American scholarship on the Qurʾan begins with the assumption that an historical, and indeed Arabian, context for the Qurʾan cannot be recovered from the primary sources, as they are too deeply tainted by pious lore and political embellishment. In this vein, Gabriel Said Reynolds (2010, p. 13) argues, "that the Qurʾān—from a critical perspective at least—should not be read in conversation with what came after it (*tafsīr*) but with what came before it (Biblical literature)." Reynolds derides the use of *tafsīr* by scholars such as Watt, Neuwirth, and Abdel Haleem. Then, based upon the hypotheses of Burton (1977, p. 228), who posited that if one can imagine a theological motivation for a report, the report cannot be historically true, Reynolds concludes that the historical accounts provided by the commentators

> can be a proper guide for a pious reading of the Qurʾān. But to the critical scholar they should suggest that *tafsīr* is a remarkable literary achievement to be appreciated on its own right. These *tafsīr* traditions do not preserve the Qurʾān's ancient meaning, and to insist otherwise does a disservice both to *tafsīr* and to the Qurʾān. (Reynolds 2010, p. 19)

One wonders how it can be a disservice to the scholars of the classical commentaries to claim that the history and philology they sought to ascertain and to preserve should be reduced to "literary achievements" that do not in fact serve to preserve and convey the Qurʾan's ancient or "original" meaning. Given more recent developments in the field, it is also surprising that one would cite Burton in such contexts. As Behnam Sadeghi and Uwe Bergmann have demonstrated, the manuscript tradition—the most objective material evidence we have—indicates that Burton's thesis regarding the collection of the Qurʾan during the Prophet's lifetime is not supported by the available material evidence:

> Manuscript evidence now corroborates pre-modern reports about the existence of Companion codices, their having different sūra orderings, and, to an extent, the nature of their verbal differences. Conclusively refuted is John Burton's theory that all such reports were post-ʿUtmānic fictions aimed at "countering, ellucidating, or even evading the ʿUtmān text". (Sadeghi and Bergmann 2010, p. 412)

Like Rippin, Wansbrough, Mingana, and others before him, Reynolds proposes that the authority to interpret the text no longer lies within the classical Islamic tradition and that it never really has, because that tradition remains putative at best, and its methodologies are epistemically inferior to the methodologies of the modern Euro-American scholar.

As Travis Zadeh observes for such revisionist historical critical methodologies, "The power of historical criticism is usually advanced in direct opposition to what is necessarily constituted as an interpretive tradition that is enfeebled intellectually and is theologically untrustworthy" (Zadeh 2015, p. 340).

This manner of discarding Islamic academic traditions past and present without having taken the time to assess them relies upon the epistemological cartography of the modern academy, a cartography that results from the particular definitions originating from Euro-American civilization. Founded upon the false universal of "Western man", this form of Eurocentric intellectual totalitarianism is assumed to have the right to define the manner in which all modes of knowledge are evaluated and subliminally charted in relation to one another. As Boaventura de Sousa Santos observes, this epistemological cartography first draws a visible line that separates the various epistemologies accepted by modern thought, with hard science placed at the top. Then there is an "abyssal invisible line that separates science, philosophy and theology on the one side, from on the other, knowledges rendered incommensurable and incomprehensible for meeting neither the scientific methods of truth nor their acknowledged contesters in the realm of philosophy and theology" (de Sousa Santos 2007, p. 47). All that lies on the other side of the line is not considered real knowledge, but relegated to the realm of "beliefs, opinions, intuitive or subjective understandings, which at most, may become objects or raw materials for scientific inquiry" (Ibid, 47), or in the case of Qurʾanic Studies, historical and philological inquiry. In the abyssal approach identified by Sousa Santos, *tafsīr* and the Qurʾanic sciences are considered an object worthy of historical and literary investigation, but are not considered to provide material that is useful for the actual study of the Qurʾanic text. The Eurocentric cartography of knowledge inherent in this approach produces a massive divide between the majority of those who research the text in the contemporary period while continuing to engage the Islamic scholastic tradition and the majority of those who study the Qurʾanic text in Western and Westernized universities dedicated to various approaches that remain informed by secular assumptions regarding the origins and nature of the text. To establish an authoritative voice, those invested in Euro-American approaches to the text engage in the "radical denial of [the] copresence" of other epistemological approaches (Ibid, 48).

In the eyes of those in other disciplines within the modern Euro-American academy, such denial appears logical, because it is grounded in assumptions to which we have been acculturated or in which we have been "educated." The result is that approaches that originate in the Euro-American academy are accepted as the "civilized" or "enlightened" approaches to the text, while the approaches employed in the classical commentary tradition, or that incorporate aspects of it, or even that maintain a creative connection with it, are viewed as inherently flawed, since they are grounded in alternative epistemologies whose legitimacy is denounced *a priori* because of the ingrained position that arises from what Boaventura de Sousa Santos refers to as the "realm of incomprehensible beliefs and behaviors which in no way can be considered knowledge, whether true or false" (Ibid, 51). In the case of Qurʾanic Studies, historiographical, lexicographical, philological, or archaeological evidence that has been cited to support creedal positions and theological arguments is discarded because it is assumed to have been created to support these positions and arguments. Theological positions are thereby rendered non-cognitive, that is, they cannot be the result of objective rational thought processes akin to those of the modern scholar. Any evidence used to support them is therefore deemed a fabrication, as in the example of Burton cited above. Here, the thought processes of classical Muslim scholars and their modern counterparts are portrayed as backwards; it is assumed that they did not know how to derive conclusions from evidence and that they therefore produced evidence to support their conclusions. From this perspective, any historiographical, lexicographical, philological, or archaeological evidence that has been cited to support a theological position cannot but have been created to support that theological position. As a result of this abyssal approach to Qurʾanic Studies, an academic tradition that has spanned over a thousand

years and continues into the contemporary period is written off as "pious readings" and presented as inherently uncritical.

One of the central means of supporting the premise of the relative uselessness and irrelevance of the Islamic scholarly tradition for critical scholarship is to present the lack of unanimity regarding certain aspects of the Qurʾan, such as the separated letters (*al-muqaṭṭaʿāt*) at the beginning of 29 *sūrah*s, or chapters, the occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), and various words of the Qurʾan, as evidence that "even the earliest *mufassirūn* [exegetes] are unable to understand basic elements of the Qurʾān" (Reynolds 2010, p. 19) and that "when the *mufassirūn* began their work, they were dealing with a text that was fundamentally unfamiliar to them" (Ibid, 21). Lawrence Conrad exemplifies this line of thinking when he writes:

> Even words that would have been of great and immediate importance in the days of Muḥammad himself are argued over and guessed at, sometimes at great length, and with no satisfactory result. We might expect that comparisons of the work that proceeded in different regions would show that scholars of the ʿijāz had a better record in arriving at likely or compelling solutions, since their own forefathers, the first Muslims, would have known the truth of the matter and passed it down through their descendants. But this is not the case. Confusion and uncertainty seems to be the rule, and at the centre of it all, is a written text in which textual anomalies could not be solved, and for which oral tradition offered no help, and for which clarifying context was unknown. (Conrad 2007, p. 13)

Arthur Jeffrey takes this epistemic bias back to the earliest days of Islam, proposing that Muhammad himself did not actually know what he was saying:

> It has been remarked not infrequently that the Prophet had a penchant for strange and mysterious sounding words, though frequently he himself had not grasped correctly their meaning, as one sees in such cases as *furqān*, and *sakīna*. Sometimes he seems even to have invented words, such as *ghassāq*, *tasnīm*, and *salsabīl*. (Jeffery 2007, p. 39)

The evidence for such conclusions is the debates among the *mufassirūn*. Differences of opinion that in Euro-American scholarship would be seen as evidence of a lively scholarly debate and a rich intellectual atmosphere are portrayed as evidence of confusion and uncertainty, and hence ignorance. As Talal Asad (2009, p. 22) observes, such characterizations are central to the Euro-American academic representation of "tradition," wherein "Argument is generally represented as a symptom of 'the tradition in crisis,' on the assumption that 'normal' tradition . . . excludes reasoning just as it requires unthinking conformity."

Based upon this abyssal epistemological cartography in which "tradition" is relegated to the realm of "unthinking conformity," only those who employ modes of analysis that originate in the modern Euro-American academy are deemed capable of informed disagreement. Some contemporary scholars go so far as to conclude that "scholars today might with some justification feel themselves better qualified than the *mufassirūn* to study the original meaning of Qurʾānic passages" (Reynolds 2010, p. 22). This represents a mode of scholarship wherein the Western scholar is, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith observes, presented as the knowing subject and the Eastern scholar is presented as the known object (Smith 2012). The former is given power to define the latter, and the latter is only admitted the ability to know itself through the categories determined by the former.[8]

What is proposed is not merely a process of dividing Qurʾanic Studies, *tafsīr* studies, and the study of the Qurʾanic sciences (*ʿulūm al-qurʾān*) into different disciplines. Rather it is a process of declaring *tafsīr* and the Qurʾanic sciences as ineffectual and illegitimate tools for the study of the Qurʾanic text.[9] This is a form of "epistemic colonization" wherein methodologies or forms of knowledge that pose viable alternatives to Eurocentric epistemologies are impoverished and marginalized, or even "ghettoized," while other forms of knowledge are obliterated or curtailed until any epistemic challenge they may present to dominant epistemologies can be comfortably confined to the condition of artifacts to be

displayed in museums as examples of so-called "traditional" knowledge (Nygren 1999, pp. 267–88). Those who then seek to reassert the primacy or even validity of modes of interpretation by which non-Western peoples understand themselves, their histories, and their texts, and through which they present themselves to others are said to be "naïve" and labeled as "apologists," "essentialists," "traditionalists," "romantics," or whatever the disparaging term of the day may be.

Such forms of epistemic colonization within Qurʾanic Studies have led to a line of inquiry wherein only theories of Euro-American origin, and many speculations that do not rise to the level of theory, are taken seriously, while indigenous approaches to the text are studied as cultural artifacts that no longer have the ability to generate understanding of the Qurʾanic text itself. They are assumed to have been displaced and replaced by "more sophisticated" critical approaches. Native epistemologies are here reduced to the category of historical artifacts, with no acknowledgement that modern academic approaches to the text are just as, if not more, historically and ideologically situated.[10]

Shades of the epistemic biases perpetuated by the inability and refusal to situate the foundational contributions of classical commentators in relation to paradigms originating from within the Euro-American academy can be found throughout the field of Qurʾanic Studies.[11] Even scholars who display great appreciation for the Qurʾanic text lament the use of *tafsīr* within the field. Discussing the propensity of some scholars to employ *tafsīr* within Qurʾanic Studies or to "combine the Qurʾanic text and Qurʾanic commentaries to form a single subject of study," Angelika Neuwirth writes, "The fact that an analogous approach in Biblical studies (e.g., reading the Hebrew Bible together with the Midrash or reading the New Testament through the lens of the early church fathers) would be frowned upon in academic contexts, shows clearly what exotic status has, until now, been assigned to the Qur'an" (Neuwirth 2014, p. 38). In another article, Neuwirth writes:

> Let me stress that a comparable marginalisation of the text itself in favor of its exegesis would be unconceivable in serious Biblical studies. Nowhere in the current academy does critical Biblical scholarship build on exegetical traditions. Neither are the texts of the Hebrew Bible read through the lens of the Midrashic discussions, nor is the New Testament read with reference to the treatises of the Church Fathers. In both fields of Biblical studies, individual units of the scriptural texts are contextualized with the writings and traditions current in the milieu that they emerged from. (Neuwirth 2007, p. 116)

Rather than building upon an analysis of the Qurʾanic textual and interpretive traditions to demonstrate why combining the two is problematic, this argument appeals to the Biblical studies tradition and posits it as the norm. Neuwirth's contention rests upon the premise that the textual traditions and the exegetical traditions of the Biblical tradition and the Qurʾanic tradition are similar. Yet very different methodologies *must* be employed to deal with different problem sets, and the exegetical and broader scholarly corpus of each tradition must be considered in its own right. Although both the Bible and the Qurʾan arise in the Near Eastern milieu, the history of the composition, compilation, reception, and transmission of the Bible and the Qurʾan differs significantly, as does the nature of the classical scholarship in the respective traditions. The Bible is a library of books by many different authors collected over centuries and its canonization process remains "only vaguely understood" (Brettler 2004, p. 2072). The earliest extant manuscripts of the Hebrew Scriptures are dated to over a thousand years after the time when tradition maintains they were first composed. In contrast, the most recent scholarship indicates that the Qurʾan is a single book that was compiled and canonized well within a hundred years of the time when its composition is said to have begun (610 CE).[12] Furthermore, the most extensive scientific textual analysis of the Qurʾan to date, an analysis wherein the text is subject to rigorous stylometric, stylistic and statistical computer analysis, reveals that the Qurʾan exhibits a high degree of concurrent smoothness, indicating that "*the style backs the hypothesis of one author*" (Sadeghi 2011, p. 288). Such findings demonstrate that while Euro-American

Qurʾanic Studies has engaged in extensive speculation regarding the origin and authorship of the Qurʾanic text, the classical Islamic tradition, in treating the Qurʾan as a coherent text by a single author, has been much closer to examining the text as it arose within its original historical context.

Derogatory attitudes toward modes of Qurʾanic analysis that draw from and incorporate the classical Islamic tradition derive from a long-standing perception of Qurʾanic Studies as an extension or subset of Biblical studies that must follow many of the same methodologies and principles. This approach assumes both that the histories of the Biblical and Qurʾanic texts are similar and that the relationship between the exegetical tradition and the scriptural text in the Islamic tradition must mirror that of the Jewish and Christian traditions. From one perspective, this contention is a secular variation of the polemical canard that Islam is mostly if not entirely derived from the preceding Abrahamic faiths. However, one of the fundamental differences among the Islamic, Christian, and Jewish traditions is that a central part of the Islamic exegetical tradition from its inception has been the historical provenance of the text. Thus, there is already a "historical critical" tradition that attempts to assess the context and provenance of the text. Muslim exegetes recognized from the beginning that "texts have contexts" and must be understood in accord with those contexts. As Emran El-Badawi observes, "The related genre of 'occasions of revelation' (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) supports the notion that early Muslims realized that revelation was mediated through historical context" (El-Badawi 2014, p. 44). Within the first centuries of Islam, Muslim scholars conducted detailed manuscript analysis in an effort to identify the original form of the Qurʾanic text.[13] This level of detailed historical consciousness is not manifest in the same way in the early Jewish and early Christian traditions. As a result, the argument that Qurʾanic Studies should not employ the tools of the Qurʾanic sciences and work with the Qurʾanic commentarial tradition and its attendant materials must be understood as being completely distinct from the argument that Biblical studies should not work with the Biblical commentarial tradition. As Zadeh observes, "We may also wish to question the extent to which Quranic Studies should emulate the methods and theories of Biblicists. For while the corpora overlap in important and obvious ways, there are meaningful differences in the actual histories surrounding the texts and their respective interpretive communities" (Zadeh 2015, p. 340).

This process of discounting the modes of scholarship that are native to the object, peoples, texts, or civilizations of study is not limited to Qurʾanic Studies. It is an underlying assumption of the modern Euro-American academy that non-Western epistemologies are fit to be the object of investigation or analysis, but that they are not fit to be the tools of analysis through which we might understand texts and the world, or through which we might even analyze the dominant Eurocentric epistemologies. Assumptions regarding the epistemic and heuristic inferiority of methodologies of non-Western origin are particularly problematic in the field of Qurʾanic Studies, since historically there are tens of thousands of studies that establish different epistemic approaches to the text and internationally there are far more scholars of the Qurʾan still employing methodologies grounded in or connected to the classical Islamic tradition than there are scholars employing methodologies that derive from Euro-American models.[14] Nonetheless, any epistemic orientation that does not derive from the orientation(s) of the Westerncentric model is declared by a large contingent of Euro-American scholarship, by which I refer to all scholarship that adopts its underlying premises regardless of geographical origin, to be inferior or even invalid.

Despite its variegated, polycentric nature, the *tafsīr* tradition is more often than not portrayed within the Euro-American academy as a monolithic tradition. But one could just as easily observe that the modes of self-proclaimed "higher criticism" advocated within the modern academy are based upon and perpetuate a narrow epistemological cannon. This trend toward epistemic stenosis in the Euro-American study of the Qurʾan reflects the overall process of limiting the cannon in Western academia. From the fifteenth century onward, the construction of the modern world-system has "rested upon multiple 'creative destructions,' often carried out on behalf of 'civilizing,' liberating, or emancipatory projects, which

aimed at reducing the understanding of the world to the logic of Western epistemology" (de Sousa et al. 2008, p. xxxiii). Qurʾanic Studies in Western and Westernized universities is, for the most part, an extension and continuation of this process. The non-divine origins of the text are posited as the only rational approach, and the methodologies of any analyses that do not incorporate this underlying assumption are too often discarded from the outset. In the process, as noted above, mountains of historical, philological, lexicographical, and literary analysis are pronounced a molehill. The sciences of the Qurʾan and all of their attendant methodologies are relegated to "local forms of knowledge" relevant only insofar as they provide information that can be employed by modern techniques of "higher criticism," which is perceived as the sole source of "objective knowledge."

This multifaceted epistemological reductionism represents a form of conceptual orthodoxy that is a constitutive and persistent feature of coloniality.[15] Non-western peoples are not taken seriously when they conceptualize and present their history, their traditions, or their texts in a manner that calls upon and evokes "local" or "native" epistemologies, and they are denied the right to evaluate Euro-American intellectual traditions with categories that derive from their own intellectual traditions. They are in effect rendered epistemologically non-existent until they learn to represent themselves, their texts, and their traditions through Euro-American modes of analysis.[16]

The inability to account for the situatedness and partiality of Euro-American academic approaches rests upon such epistemological reductions. It is so pervasive in the study of the Qurʾan in the Euro-American university that even scholars who are sympathetic to Islam and its interpretive traditions often remain unaware of the assumptions regarding the universal epistemic validity of secular approaches that inhere in their analyses. As Wael Hallaq observes when discussing the broader phenomena of Orientalism, although more recent approaches aspire "to a set of attitudes that show relatively more respect and tolerance than any preceding period," nonetheless,

> The common denominator of Orientalist academia undoubtedly remains one of epistemic superiority, which is to say that respect and tolerance come with a dose of epistemic self-confidence (and often arrogance) that still assumes—consciously or not—the validity of the Euro-American modern project, especially as it has been guided by the paradigmatic principles of the Enlightenment. (Hallaq 2018, pp. 238–39)

In this way, even many "sympathetic" approaches to the Qurʾanic text prolong the paradigmatic socio-epistemic structures that have given rise to more "critical" revisionist approaches. Such an approach is found in Carl Ernst's (2011) *How to Read the Qur'an*, from which, as Travis Zadeh (2015, p. 331) observes, "a reader may easily be left with the impression that the most important scholarship on the Quran today comes from outside the sphere of Islamic learning, however broadly construed."[17] Zadeh remarks that "Ernst explicitly aims to bracket out interpretations rooted in religious commitments as a means of advancing what he terms a non-theological reading accessible to a wide range of audiences" (Ibid). Here one is forced to ask why a theological reading would be inaccessible to a wide range of audiences. Given that the Qurʾan has been subject to theological readings that continue to impact Muslim civilizations from Indonesia to Africa and beyond, what is it that makes "theological" readings inaccessible? Do not those readers to whom theological readings have been "accessible" constitute "a wide range of audiences?" Through Ernst's assertion, those to whom theological readings would speak and those who have an interest in theological readings have in effect been rendered non-existent. One must also ask if one can indeed have a non-theological reading of a text whose central subject, even on a linguistic level, is God, and that has been read theologically for over a thousand years. Given the historical reception of the text, any attempt to avoid "theological readings" must already privilege a secular approach to the text that is alien to the faith communities for which the text has served as the central devotional document. Any effort to privilege readings that are not informed by theological commitments thus represents a significant epistemological

shift that is undergirded by the assumption of the epistemological sovereignty of secularism. Such studies can make contributions to the understanding of the text, but it must be acknowledged that, on the one hand, they begin with too many embedded assumptions to be theologically neutral, and on the other hand, they are usually written for a non-Muslim audience whose members remain a minority among those who engage the Qurʾan.

The secular reading proposed by Ernst would in fact have significant theological ramifications. In one instance, following upon the work of Nöldeke that was later followed up by Kevin van Bladel, Ernst (2011, p. 138) explains the Dhu'l-Qarnayn legend in the Qurʾan as the adoption of a Syriac legend into an earlier body of Meccan material during the Madinan period. This interpretation is itself questionable, as Travis Zadeh has pointed out, since it is "rather tenuous to attempt to historicize the Quranic account using material that may not have been a direct intertext for the Quran" (Zadeh 2015, p. 333). More importantly, such attempts to historicize the Qurʾanic account often entail a claim about the historical origins of the Qurʾanic text that cannot but have theological implications. Any attempt to replace theological explanations of the text with secular interpretations necessarily entails the assumption of an overarching metaphysic that is at odds with the overarching metaphysic that informs the worldviews of classical and post-classical Muslim conceptualizations of the Qurʾan. The theological questions cannot simply be "bracketed out," as Ernst suggests. The very belief that one can do so, though not overtly theological, is predicated upon beliefs, values, and assumptions embedded in a worldview which carries ideological and theological implications that have just as much impact on the reading of the text as do overt theological commitments. In privileging a secular approach, the scholar has already come to the text with as many embedded assumptions as has the devoted theologian. The fundamental difference may be that the secular scholar is less "confessional" regarding his or her views, though equally constrained by them.

Ernst's approach represents another aspect of the process whereby bodies of knowledge from within the Euro-American context are declared intelligible and authoritative, while bodies of knowledge that arise from without the Euro-American context are deemed unintelligible and thus have no authority. The Euro-American scholar, by which I mean any scholar who shares this epistemic outlook, whether advertently or inadvertently, is empowered to speak seriously about the Qurʾan, to determine the procedures by which the credibility of statements is assessed, and ultimately to determine which statements and conclusions are to be taken seriously and thus constitute the framework for dialogue.

Conclusions

Recent developments in the field of Qurʾanic Studies in the West demonstrate that the field remains mired in assumptions of the epistemic sovereignty of Euro-American thought and as such perpetuates the colonialist project of producing epistemologically domesticated and pacified subjects. In the current structure of Qurʾanic Studies in the Euro-American academy, the scholar is still required to adopt or subscribe to a single universal hierarchy in which secular Eurocentric approaches to the text are given pride of place and native Muslim approaches to the text are relegated to providing information which may then be incorporated into a Westerncentric epistemic hierarchy. Such approaches, be they contemporary or pre-modern, cannot be viewed as generating useful applications of knowledge on their own. Methodologies developed in the Euro-American academy are presented as the more "critical," "serious," or "rigorous" approaches to the text. In contrast, methodologies employed in the Qurʾanic sciences and in the classical commentary tradition, or those that incorporate aspects of it, are viewed as inherently flawed because they are grounded in alternative epistemologies whose legitimacy is denounced *a priori*, due to ingrained opposition to what is considered the "realm of incomprehensible beliefs and behaviors which in no way can be considered knowledge, whether true or false" (de Sousa Santos 2007, p. 51).

At present, when we speak of the relationship between Qurʾanic Studies methodologies grounded in the classical Islamic tradition and those that arise from the Euro-American

academy, there is more often than not a non-relationship, because most Euro-American scholars refuse to consider non-Western epistemologies as relevant epistemological alternatives.[18] Alternative epistemologies are in effect rendered "non-cognitive" unless they can be translated into dominant secular paradigm(s). But this very process of translation denatures and repurposes them so that they no longer fulfill the functions for which they were established and developed. They are, instead, rendered secondary to Euro-American paradigms and considered to be of value only insofar as they might contribute one or two observations to it, or insofar as they have at some point reached similar conclusions, in which case they are construed as validating the dominant paradigm.

To move beyond the assumptions of Euro-American epistemic privileging and epistemic sovereignty that pervade the field, we must be cognizant of the situatedness of Westerncentric thought and "unthink" the dominant criteria that have too often defined the field of Qurʾanic Studies in the Euro-American academy. This requires that we go to the roots of these criteria in order to examine and question "their cultural, epistemological, and even ontological presuppositions" (de Sousa Santos 2014, p. 237). Such a process can allow for "emancipatory transformations" that follow scripts outside those developed by Westerncentric critical theories.[19] The manner of bridging the divide between Euro-American scholars and scholars in other countries by translating "contemporary work" from multiple languages, as proposed by Rippin (2010) and others, too often becomes a tool for extending Euro-American epistemological hegemony when it functions to extend abyssal thinking by privileging any approach that favors epistemologies arising from within the dominant paradigms of the Euro-American academy. Under this proposal, if Muslims are to be included in the conversation of Euro-American Qurʾanic Studies, they are required to define their approach to the Qurʾanic text in relation to methodologies arising from the epistemological universe of their intellectual colonizers. This creates an epistemic universe similar to the world of which W. E. B. Du Bois speaks when he writes of the black man living in "a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" (Du Bois 2008, p. xiii).

For there to be a transmodern field of Qurʾanic Studies in which scholars from multiple backgrounds are in discourse across methodological and epistemological divides, the field of Qurʾanic Studies must be decolonized. Such decolonization can allow for new "ecologies of knowledge" that recognize the validity of multiple perspectives to develop. Recognizing diverse ecologies of knowledge would allow for a different hierarchy of validation that does not privilege one methodology over others due to little more than the legacy of intellectual colonization. Much more important than translation is the development of counter-hegemonic approaches that facilitate "equity between different ways of knowing and different kinds of knowledge" (de Sousa Santos 2014, p. 237). This would allow a much greater role in Qurʾanic Studies for *tafsīr* and the Qurʾanic sciences than what is currently afforded by most approaches in the Euro-American academy. When we are better able to integrate the methodologies of the Islamic tradition and those of the Euro-American academy, what are now regarded by many as "residues of the past" may in fact prove to be seeds for new intellectual paradigms in the future.

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Notes

[1] Dozens of books and articles have appeared in Arabic. Among the most notable are ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī (1997); Bamba (2015); ʿUmar b. Ibrāhīm Riḍwān (1992).

[2] For an example, see Nicolai Sinai (2017), whose bibliography includes extensive resources from many European languages, but excludes recent scholarship in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and other Islamicate languages, as well as scholarship written by Muslims outside of the Euro-American academy in English, such as the work of M. M. al-Aʿzami.

[3] Motzki's analysis of the traditions pertaining to the collection of the Qurʾan, traditions that Wansbrough and subsequent scholars have maintained did not arise until the third century, demonstrates that "it does seem safe to conclude that reports on the collection of the Qurʾān on Abū Bakr's behalf and on official edition made by the order of ʿUthmān were already in circulation toward the end of the 1st Islamic century and that al-Zuhrī possibly received some of them from the persons he indicated in his *isnāds*" (31).

[4] For a comprehensive critique of Powers' argument, see Walid Saleh's review (Saleh 2010a). Saleh writes: "As Powers' monograph shows, revisionism in Islamic Studies is a rhetorical artifice rather than a coherent analysis of evidence; it functions as an intellectual exercise that has little to do with the history it purports to explain. One starts with the axiomatic assumption that things are not what the tradition has been telling us (and by tradition here I mean mainstream Western scholarship); then one moves forward by means of presuppositions, plausible or implausible, that are sustainable only because they presuppose a different reality than the one attested by our sources, not because they are cogent in themselves. These presuppositions turn out to be conceivable only because of their value as counterclaims. The entire exercise is sustained rhetorically by a tone of condescension" (Saleh 2010a, p. 256).

[5] For a discussion of this same phenomena in relation to Islamic Law, see Lena Salaymeh (2021).

[6] For a broader analysis of the manner in which epistemic exclusion perpetuates epistemic injustice, see Miranda Fricker (2009).

[7] This tendency is all the more remarkable when one considers how little of the commentary or *tafsīr* tradition has in fact been read by scholars in the Euro-American academy, let alone analyzed. For a discussion of the parochial nature of *tafsīr* studies in the Euro-American academy, see Walid (Saleh 2010c).

[8] As Elliot Bazzano observes, [Reynolds] contends that classical Muslim exegetes have sullied a frank interpretation of the Qurʾan by relying on guesswork and theological agendas; he even refers to some of these exegetes as "totally incapable" (Reynolds 2010, p. 21). He asserts that scholars today may be better qualified than the classical exegetes to study the original meaning of Qurʾanic passages, because contemporary scholars enjoy greater freedom to speculate (Reynolds 2010, p. 22)" (Bazzano 2016, p. 89).

[9] In this approach, *tafsīr* comes to represent the inelastic and inflexible tradition presented as a straw man against which the representatives of "rationalism" can argue for the superiority of their approach to the text. This approach is dependent upon advancing the artificial dichotomy of "tradition" vs. rationality that was deconstructed by MacIntyre. As Ovanmir Anjum observes, "It is because of their failure to take note of or evaluate the reasoning employed by the subjects that they see all transformations of tradition as incomprehensible except in terms of manipulation" (Anjum 2007, p. 669).

[10] Research in the field of cultural hermeneutics demonstrates that cultural assumptions specific to the time and place in which particular academic methodologies develop must be accounted for when applying said methodologies. As de Sousa Santos observes, "The relevance of a given object of analysis lies not in the object itself but in the objective of the analysis. Different objectives produce different criteria of relevance" (de Sousa Santos 2014, p. 140).

[11] The attitude that one cannot rely upon the Islamic scholarly tradition is so pervasive in Islamic Studies in general that scholars such as Aaron Hughes will declare with little analysis or justification that "It is also important not to go to later interpretations of, for example, the Qur'an to try and shed light on it" (Hughes 2015, p. 111).

[12] The last twenty years have witnessed the most significant developments in the understanding of the development of the Qurʾanic text in the history of Western academia. Foremost among these studies are Déroche (2014); al-Aʿzami (2020); Motzki (2001). Other articles that touch upon the dating of early manuscripts are Dutton (2001, 2004, 2007); Rezvan (2000); Sinai (2014).

[13] Recent scholarship has demonstrated that the earliest attempts to identify the "umm" or "original source" of the written Qurʾanic text in Abū ʿAmr al-Dānī's (d. 444/1053) *al-Muqniʿ fī rasm maṣāḥif al-amṣār* indicate a genuine transmission of the Qurʾanic text from a single original source in the mid seventh century; see Cook (2004); van Putten (2019).

[14] For example, Bahāʾ al-Dīn Khurramshāhī and Ahmad Pakatchi in Iran and Fāḍil Ṣāliḥ al-Sāmirāʾī and Faḍl Ḥasan ʿAbbās are but a few of the contemporary scholars whose extensive scholarship draws upon methodologies from the classical commentary tradition to produce new and important observations regarding the language of the Qurʾan. Amin Ahsan Islahi (d. 1997) and his teacher Hamiduddin Farahi (d. 1930) in Pakistan have done groundbreaking work on coherence and order in the Qurʾan that is often ignored or occluded in Euro-American discussions of the order of the Quʾran. Nonetheless, many of these scholars are rarely, if ever, referenced in studies of the Qurʾan in the Euro-American academy.

[15] Coloniality refers to the manner in which colonialism persists after various forms of "settler colonialism" have been abandoned. The structures and paradigms that insure the continuation of imperial power remain. As Ramon Grosfoguel writes, "Coloniality refers to the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations. Coloniality of power refers to a crucial structuring process in the modern/colonial world-system that articulates peripheral locations in the international division of labor, subaltern group political strategies, and Third World migrants' inscription in the racial/ethnic hierarchy of metropolitan global cities" (Grosfoguel 2002, p. 205).

[16] For an analysis of the manner in which this leads to truncated analyses of the Qurʾanic text within the Islamic world, see Ta Ha ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (2006, pp. 175–206).

[17] This is similar to Rippin (2010, p. 7) proposing that to bridge the divide between Muslim and non-Muslim scholarship on the Qurʾan works should be translated from European languages into Islamicate languages.

[18] As de Sousa Santos (2014, p. 212) remarks, from within the paradigms of the Euro-American academy, one is not able "to consider non-Western cultures as relevant cultural alternatives in any conceivable sense."

[19] Any bridge between Qurʾanic studies in the Muslim world and the Euro-American academy that remains grounded in assumptions of the epistemic sovereignty and heuristic superiority of Euro-American thought will only serve to perpetuate the hermeneutical marginalization of Muslim scholars. All approaches to the text should be analyzed in relation to the epistemic contexts in which they have arisen.

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The Theoretical Foundations of Contextual Interpretation of the Qur'an in Islamic Theological Schools and Philosophical Sufism

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Abstract: Contextual interpretation of the Qur'an has grown in popularity with the rise of Islamic modernism, mostly because of the need to reform Islamic thought and institutions. Although Qur'anic contextualism is a modern concept, this study argues that its theoretical origins can be traced back to classical Islamic scholarship. Most of the Islamic theological schools, as well as the Akbarī School (the school of Ibn al-'Arabī), a prominent representative of philosophical Sufism, acknowledged the contextuality of the Qur'an by distinguishing between transcendent divine speech and its limited manifestation in human language. Furthermore, Shams al-Dīn al-Fanārī of the Akbarī School developed a hermeneutical theory in which he questioned the authority and the nature of Qur'anic exegesis and emphasized the idea that the Qur'anic text can have multiple meanings, due to the multiplicity of perceptions in different human contexts. I propose that, of the thinking in pre-modern Islamic scholarship, Akbarian scriptural hermeneutics best accommodates the modern practice of reading the Qur'an contextually.

Keywords: Qur'anic exegesis; Qur'anic contextualism; Islamic reformism; Islamic modernism; Islamic theology; philosophical Sufism

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1. Introduction

'Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī (d. 1075), a renowned medieval Qur'an commentator, is reported to have made the following statement about Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Sulamī (d. 1021), who compiled a collection of Sufi comments on the Qur'an:[1] "Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī compiled the *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr*. If he believed (*i'taqada*) that this was a commentary (*tafsīr*), he would be an infidel (*kafara*)" (Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ 1980, p. 35; Al-Zarkashī 1957–1958, vol. 2, p. 171). This criticism may sound odd to modern readers, who might not understand why personal comments on a text should make an author an infidel. I think al-Wāḥidī's opinion can be considered partly based on the belief that the function of exegesis is to reveal divine intention in the Scripture; therefore, *tafsīr* is undertaken to understand God's mind in the sacred text. Another premise should be also taken into consideration: the only legitimate source for the comments is knowledge transmitted from early generations, especially from the Prophet and the companions; no comment can be based on anything other than tradition. Thus, we can read al-Wāḥidī' s statement as "if al-Sulamī believed that these comments, not based on tradition, were the real meaning of God's words and meant by God, he would be an infidel".[2]

Al-Wāḥidī's opinion is, as a matter of fact, the standpoint that one of the major *tafsīr* schools, exegesis based on narration (*tafsīr bi al-riwāya*), has adopted. Reducing *tafsīr* to transmissions from earlier generations has never been accepted as the sole way to understand the Qur'an since the early centuries of Islam. Objections to traditionalism in exegesis became stronger during the time of Islamic reformism and Islamic modernism, when the perceptions of many Muslims underwent changes, and new quests emerged in the field of scriptural hermeneutics. Among the new ideas in this era of non-traditional,

modernist hermeneutical practices, "contextual reading" of the Qur'anic text stands out as one of the central notions.[3] *Qur'anic contextualism* can be defined as a principle-oriented approach to the scriptural text, unlike the literalist/textualist approach, which accepts only the literal meaning of the text as it was understood at the time of its emergence and takes this original meaning as binding for all times and places. The contextualist method takes into account the socio-historical context in which the text appeared, with the aim of determining the principles that were intended, not only what is understood in the historical context. In this sense, the meaning of the text is not considered binding for all times and places.

The most crucial task in establishing a contextual approach is to determine the Prophet's role in the revelatory process, since if the Prophet is solely acknowledged as the passive receiver of an immutable message, the contextuality of the message would be irrelevant. As a result, contextualism must highlight the Prophet's role in revelation to the point where the Prophet becomes an active agent that gives the divine message its final shape. Contemporary contextualists frequently refer to some concepts in Qur'anic Studies that have been discussed since the classical period, such as *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation), *naskh* (abrogation), *ta'wīl* (interpretation by reason), and *sab'at aḥruf* (seven readings);[4] however, they do not appear to be sufficiently interested in the classical theological discussions to seek theoretical support there for the Prophet's active role in the revelatory process. Some leading contexualist scholars, such as Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988), even criticize Orthodox Muslim theology in this respect. He states,

> Orthodoxy (indeed, all medieval thought) lacked the necessary intellectual tools to combine in its formulation of the dogma the otherness and verbal character of the revelation on the one hand, and its intimate connection with the work and religious personality of the Prophet on the other, i.e., it lacked the intellectual capacity to say both that the Qur'an is entirely the Word of God and, in an ordinary sense, also entirely the word of Muhammad. (Rahman 1979, p. 31)

Abdullah Saeed, who seems to agree with Fazlur Rahman on the difficulty of building contextual approach on the Orthodox theology, directs his gaze in another direction to justify contextualism. Pointing out that concepts of revelation and interpretation are not necessarily connected, Saeed believes that Qur'anic contextualism can be based on the fact that "the language of the Qur'an, Arabic, is a human language, deeply embedded in human life" (Saeed 2006, p. 28). He further emphasizes the status of the Qur'an as God's speech in human language, which means that revelation couched in human language is capable of being analyzed (Ibid., pp. 27–28).

In this study, I argue that the theoretical foundations of contextualism can be found in Orthodox Muslim theology and philosophical Sufism. Naturally, we do not expect to find, in the historical Islamic scholarship of centuries ago, modern rhetoric and arguments about contextualism, including a heavy emphasis on the Prophet's role in revelation; nevertheless, the scholars of the time did construct theories that may be seen as precursors of Islamic contextualism. In the following pages, I will first provide a brief outline of modern thought regarding the non-traditional approaches to the Qur'an developed by selected representatives of Islamic reformist and modernist movements, to show how the development of contextual interpretation of the Qur'an arose from the reactions of Muslim intellectuals to the decline of the Muslim world in the 18th and 19th centuries. Then, I will focus on early Islamic theological debates over divine speech (*kalām*) and its verbal form as sacred scripture in human language. In the subsequent section, I will explore the explanations put forth by Akbarī Sufis such as Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1240), Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 1271), and Shams al-Dīn al-Fanārī (d. 1431) regarding how divine speech manifests in human language. We will clearly see in these two sections that the Akbarī Sufis and the majority of Muslim theologians accepted sacred scripture as a contextualization of the divine speech. In the penultimate section, I will examine various viewpoints on the authority of *Tafsīr* (the Islamic discipline of Qur'anic exegesis) to identify divine intention in the Qur'an, i.e., the true meaning of the text intended by God. The major purpose of

accepting the contextuality of the text is to be able to propose readings as alternatives to traditional ones, which necessitates questioning the nature and boundaries of exegesis of the Qur'an, for, if a certain meaning is regarded as the expression of divine intention—i.e., as the only genuine meaning of the text—there would be no room for the idea of the contextuality of the text. In this section also, I place special emphasis on the ideas presented by the most outstanding representatives of philosophical Sufism, the Sufi writers of the Akbarī School. Overall, I believe that the Akbarī standpoint on Scriptural hermeneutics best accommodates the modern concept of contextual reading of the Qur'an.

2. The Rise of Islamic Modernism and Contextualist Method in Exegesis of the Qur'an

The primary motivation behind non-traditional readings of the Qur'an in the modern period is the need to reform Islamic institutions, especially the Islamic legal system. The idea of the "changeability of Shari'a rules with changing times", which has been discussed since the early days of Islamic reformism, inevitably brought the idea of alternative interpretations of the Qur'an to the table.[5] For example, Rifā'a Rāfi' al-Taḥṭāwī (d. 1873), one of the most important political thinkers of modern Egypt, who had a chance to study French thought and closely observe Europe during his education in Paris, expresses the idea that Shari'a law should be considered changeable and adaptable to changing circumstances. This requires a new and more flexible interpretation of Shari'a in the light of modern needs and a reexamination of the authoritative texts for this purpose. al-Taḥṭāwī does not object to new interpretations that are in line with modern developments, since he believes that Islamic principles are not that dissimilar from the modern natural sciences that the modern world is developing on.[6] Khayr al-Dīn Pasha of Tunisia (d. 1889), another early representative of Islamic reformism, also finds no problem with taking ideas and institutions from Europe but sees them as being in keeping with the spirit of Shari'a, rather than contradicting it. He defends the notion that laws and policies change as circumstances and societal needs change, and, therefore, Shari'a does not cover all aspects of human and governmental activity. He further emphasizes the Islamic idea of *maṣlaḥa* (public interest) as a crucial element to be upheld in the legislative process.[7]

Similar perspectives were articulated by succeeding reformist and modernist thinkers. For example, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1897), the great champion of pan-Islamism in the 19th century, equates the essence of Islam with modern rationalism, accepting that the type of knowledge received by the prophets through revelation can be acquired by philosophers through the use of reason. Human reason should be the major tool in interpreting the Qur'an. If the Qur'an and reason appear to contradict each other, the Qur'an should be interpreted symbolically. According to al-Afghānī, the Qur'an contains many hidden secrets that have remained unknown until now, a time when human reason has progressed to the point where it can uncover these truths (Hourani 1983, pp. 103–29)[8]. According to Mehmed Seyyid Bey (d. 1925), a scholar and a statesman from Ottoman Turkey who played a major role in the abolition of the caliphate in 1924, one of the bases of Shari'a law is human reason, which has the power to discern what is good and bad in this world. This concept is crucial to Seyyid Bey because it permits him to assign greater authority to reason in interpreting sacred texts and formulating laws. In the process of interpreting the sacred book, he places a great emphasis on the concept of *maqāṣid al-Shari'a* (the purposes of *Shari'a*) (Seyyid n.d., vol. 2, pp. 255–324)[9]. He prioritizes *maṣlaḥa* (public interest) when it conflicts with Qur'anic and Prophetic statements, claiming that this preference does not mean he is disregarding the sacred texts, but rather, embracing their spirit and objectives (Ibid., vol. 2, p. 311).

Initial reformist quests gave birth to later secularist trends in Muslim scholars, as secularist ideas also arose independently among westernized intellectuals. The emphasis was on the separation between state and religion more than on the changeability and adaptability of religious laws. For example, 'Alī 'Abd al-Rāziq (d. 1966), an Egyptian secularist, bases his views regarding the lack of need for a caliphate on the fact that both the Qur'an and hadith are silent on the subject. He questions if Islam suggests any

kind of government and whether political authority is a function of prophethood. He comes to conclusion that Prophet Muhammad's role was purely spiritual. He created a community not a state (Hourani 1983, pp. 182–89). Another Egyptian secularist, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (d. 1973), who has enormous admiration for Europe and European civilization, maintains that Egypt must be a part of Western civilization. As the modern world is built on the separation of religion and civilization, Egypt must do the same, and can do so more readily than Christianity because Islam, which has no clergy in the Christian sense, makes this separation simpler. Besides, the real Islam is a religion of science, knowledge, and progress. Ḥusayn believes that when religion educates mankind, it conveys its truths through symbols. These symbols should be retold anew as humans' understanding evolves over time (Ibid., pp. 324–40).

Many other names could be mentioned here of those who questioned the relevance of religious laws to today's world, but I believe it is enough to mention the ideas of these reformist and secularist representatives to demonstrate that their minds were preoccupied with the problem of conflict and reconciliation between the past and the present. Modern Qur'anic contextualism arose under such circumstances, and its proponents saw it as the only way to justify the idea of changeability of the laws with changing times.

Contemporary modernist scholars engage in more sophisticated theological debates on the nature of revelation when they attempt to rationalize contextualism. One of the most critical components of their understandings is the emphasis they place on the role of the human prophet in the revelatory process. According to Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988), for example, the Qur'an is the Word of God, but since it emerged in a human environment when received by the Prophet, it can also be accepted as the word of the Prophet. He states, "the Qur'an is thus pure divine Word, but, of course, it is equally intimately related to the inmost personality of the Prophet Muhammad whose relationship to it cannot be mechanically conceived like that of a record. The divine Word flowed through the Prophet's heart" (Rahman 1979, p. 33). Rahman criticizes the Islamic orthodoxy that emphasized the externality of the revelation "in order to safeguard its 'otherness,' objectivity and verbal character" (Ibid., p. 31) and, thus, failed to recognize the Prophet's revelatory experience as personal experience in his "deeper strata of consciousness" (pp. 13–14). According to him, the idea of the "otherness" of the revelation is maintained in the Qur'an; however, its "externality" to the Prophet is equally rejected (Ibid., p. 31).

Since the divine speech acquires a certain shape in and according to the Prophet, who lived in a certain socio-historical context, an understanding of that context is critical for Rahman to comprehend the message of the Qur'an thoroughly. Hence, he introduces his theory of what he calls "double movement" in the interpretation process (Rahman 1984, pp. 5–7). He states,

> The process of interpretation proposed here consists of a double movement, from the present situation to Qur'anic times, then back to the present. The Qur'an is the divine response, through the Prophet's mind, to the moral-social situation of the Prophet's Arabia, particularly to the problems of the commercial Meccan society of his day. (Ibid., p. 5)

In the first step of this "double movement", the principles that the Qur'an wishes to attain are explored through an examination of its socio-historical background. On the basis of these Qur'anic principles, fresh interpretations suitable with the modern period are provided in the second step.

Whereas Fazlur Rahman focuses on the theological aspect of contextualism, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (d. 2010), an Egyptian scholar of Qur'anic Studies, bases his contextual reading on historical and literary criticisms.[10] Abu Zayd embraces contextualization as his methodology to distinguish between historical and universal messages of the Qur'an and Islam. Concluding that the Qur'an is a cultural production, he tries to understand this text in its cultural and socio-historical contexts. He also treats the Qur'an as a linguistic text amenable to textual analysis, emphasizing that the Qur'an became a human text when it was transferred from the divine realm and revealed to the Prophet. Therefore,

he employs some other methods in addition to historical criticism, such as semantics and semiotics, to explore the human dimension in the text in addition to the historical and cultural dimensions. Abu Zayd introduces some concepts, such as the "direction of revelation" (*ittijāh al-naṣṣ*) and the "tacit or not mentioned (message of the text)" (*maskūt ʿanh*) to complete his hermeneutical methodology, which claims to establish the relevance of a historical text to today's context, or any other. When applied to the controversial issue of polygamy, for example, Abu Zayd's hermeneutical method leads to the conclusion that the direction of revelation in the Qur'an points to the tacit message of the text, which is the prohibition of polygamy (Abu Zayd 1999).

3. Debates on Divine Speech in Classical Islam

Since the first century of Islam, theological speculations made by various Islamic schools and sects have debated the nature of divine speech, that is, whether or not God's speech is an eternal divine attribute, and, if one considers it to be as such, how it manifests in the limited transient world. The problem of heavenly and earthly forms of the Qur'an, related to the problem of divine speech, was also discussed.[11] It is necessary to be aware of these discussions on divine speech and of the concept of revelation during the formation of Islamic theology, in order to determine whether the modern practice of contextual reading has a basis in Orthodox theology.

Among the theological Islamic sects, early disputes on the divine attribute of speech (*kalām*) centered on the question of whether or not the Qur'an was created. The Mu'tazilites denied the existence of an eternal attribute of speech subsisting in God and believed that God speaks by creating speech outside Himself.[12] Therefore, the Mu'tazilites' assertions regarding the createdness of the Qur'an were based on their primary doctrine of negation of the "eternal divine attributes of the Essence." (Gimaret n.d.). They insisted on denying such eternal attributes in order to rule out the conclusion that there are multiple eternal entities besides the essence of God, which would damage the most important Islamic teaching –the unity of God (*tawḥīd*). Mu'tazilite theologians tried to explain God's qualities and acts without approving the existence of any distinct attribute in Him; they said, "God is knowing, powerful, living through Himself (*bi-nafsihī*), and not through a knowledge, a power and a life."(Ibid.) This principle resulted in a denial of divine speech as an eternal attribute and in an acceptance of the view that the Qur'an was created.[13] According to al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 1025), the great Mu'tazilite theologian,[14] speech is one of God's acts, which He generates not in, but outside, Himself. Since it is generated and not subsisting with God, it is not eternal. Spoken words or written text are "not speech, but only a sign of speech once spoken" (Peters 1976, p. 417). Thus, God communicates through the speech He creates in an earthly substrate, such as occurred when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush (Ess 1996, p. 181).

Early traditionalist *'ulamā'* and traditionists (*muḥaddithūn*) were opposed to these ideas of the Mu'tazila. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 855), who rigorously refused the Mu'tazilite theses and wrote refutations against them, was the champion of the traditionalist opposition,[15] and, although the traditionalist view evolved over time,[16] Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal's followers became certain that the Prophet received "verbal inspiration"; namely, the exact words of God came down on him (Ibid., p. 183)[17]. They went even further, claiming that the pronunciation (*lafẓ*) of the Qur'an is uncreated (Ibid., p. 184). Thus, the Ḥanbalīs saw no problem maintaining that God's eternal speech is composite in nature, containing words and sound (Wolfson 1976, pp. 248–54). Later, the Ḥanbalī Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) argued that divine speech was directed by the divine will, so that God spoke whenever He wanted to speak and in whatever language He wanted to use. According to him, the Arabic expression of the Qur'an consists of the exact words of God when recited, but the voice belongs to the reciter and is created. It is heresy to deny that God speaks using words and sound. Ibn Taymiyya emphasized that affirming the uncreatedness of the Qur'an does not mean accepting its eternity. In other words, since God spoke the Qur'an, it is not created; however, it is not eternal either, as it was spoken in time (Madelung 1985). In regards to the

last detail, Ibn Taymiyya seems to have tried to solve the problem of accepting the eternity of composite things such as words or sounds, which was a target of widespread criticism raised against the Ḥanbalīs.[18]

Sunni Ash'arī and Māturīdī theologians generally positioned themselves between the Mu'tazila and the Ḥanbalīs by affirming two forms of God's speech: one eternal and the other the created expression of eternal speech. In this way, their position ran counter to that of the Mu'tazila, who disapproved of the existence of any eternal entity besides God's essence.[19] They also distinguished themselves from the Ḥanbalī standpoint by accepting the expression of the Qur'an as created.[20]

A Qur'anic concept known as *al-Lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ* (the Preserved Tablet) plays a significant role in the Muslim understanding of divine revelation.[21] The Preserved Tablet is believed to contain the pre-existing heavenly copy of the Qur'an and a record of all the divine predestinations. Some hadith reports describe the Tablet as created (Al-Ṭabarānī 1994, vol. 10, p. 260). There are differing opinions on whether the pre-existent heavenly copy of the Qur'an in the Tablet is created or uncreated. Generally, the Ḥanbalīs and their followers among the Sunni theologians believed in its uncreatedness. However, the belief that God created His speech itself on the Tablet seems to have been an idea prevalent among the Mu'tazilī theologians (Al-Ash'arī 1963, pp. 597–600; Wolfson 1976, pp. 274–78). Later prominent Mu'tazilite scholars, such as al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār[22] and Maḥmūd b. 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144),[23] adopted the idea, and later Sunni theologians agreed with them. For example, Abū al-Yusr al-Bazdawī (d. 1100), a renowned Māturīdī theologian, concluded that the text of the Qur'an is an expression of the eternal divine speech "created" by God on the Tablet, or in the Angel (Al-Bazdawī 2003, p. 68). Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209), the celebrated theologian of the Ash'ariyya, also accepted the idea that God communicates his will by creating "sound" in a locus outside Himself or by writing on the Tablet.[24] Thus, the Sunni theologians from the Ash'ariyya and Māturīdiyya came closer to the Mu'tazilite belief by accepting the idea that God creates something to express His speech outside of Himself, although they departed from it by affirming the existence of an eternal divine attribute of speech.

In addition to the nature of divine speech, Muslim theologians have also discussed how this divine speech came down to the Prophet as Qur'anic revelation. The Qur'an uses the terms *inzāl* and *tanzīl* in many verses to denote the descension of revelation.[25] Scholars have presented different opinions on how *inzāl* and *tanzīl* took place. Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (d. 1392) summarized the ideas in his famous *al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, according to which the majority of Sunni scholars believed that the Qur'an was first sent down whole from the Preserved Tablet to the worldly heaven (*samā' al-dunyā*) in the *Laylat al-Qadr* (the Night of Power), which is mentioned in verse Q. 97:1, and then its smaller portions were revealed to the Prophet during the twenty-odd years of his prophethood, as required by the occasion (Al-Zarkashī 1957–1958, vol. 1, pp. 228–29). What is clear from the Qur'anic exposition is that the Angel functioned as an intermediary who conveyed the divine revelation, and the whole Muslim *umma* accepted the agency of the Angel in the process. According to the Mu'tazila, the word that the Angel conveyed was "created in him during the act of revelation" (Ess 1996, p. 181). However, Sunni scholars held different opinions, which al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) summarized as follows (Al-Zarkashī 1957–1958, vol. 1, pp. 229–30; Al-Suyūṭī 1974, vol. 1, pp. 157–58): (1) the Angel Gabriel received both the *ma'nā* (pre-existent form of divine speech) and what it corresponded to as the actual words of the Qur'an from the Tablet and delivered them to the Prophet; (2) the Angel received only the *ma'nā*, and knowing its correspondences in the Arabic language, verbalized this meaning in Arabic and conveyed it to the Prophet; and (3) the Angel delivered only the *ma'nā*, and the Prophet verbalized it in Arabic. The first opinion, that what came into existence in the Tablet is identical to what the Prophet recited as the Qur'an, corresponds to the Ḥanbalī view that the Angel passed down God's exact words. In this case, the reciter pronounces exactly what God pronounced in eternity. Other opinions

were held by the Ash'arī and Māturīdī theologians.[26] Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 1142) from the Māturīdiyya, and his commentator, Mas'ūd b. 'Umar Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 1390) from the Ash'ariyya, agreed with the third view (Wolfson 1976), that the expressions of the Qur'an were created through their recital.[27]

This variety of theological discussions came from attempts to understand the ancient dilemma of how an eternal and transcendental phenomenon—that is, divine speech—manifested in an uneternal and limited context. Mu'tazilites and their affirmers tried to solve the problem by denying the eternality of divine speech and simply accepting God as speaking to a created world by creating speech in it. The Ḥanbalīs and their proponents saw no problem with accepting the words of the Qur'an as spoken by God in eternity as they are—with letters, words, and so forth. In an attempt to avoid falling into these two "extremes," Ash'arī and Māturīdī theologians made a distinction between eternal divine speech and its created form, holding that divine speech somehow was transformed to human language. When these points of view are considered in light of the object of this study, the Mu'tazila and the later Ash'ariyya and Māturīdiyya, who regarded the Qur'an as a created expression of divine speech, can be regarded as taking a contextual approach, for they understood divine speech to be substantiated into words in a context, whether it is the Prophet, the Angel, or the created *al-Lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*. The "classical" forms of contextualism, of course, do not address the changeability or universal bindingness of the ethico-legal teachings of the Qur'an; nevertheless, these theological schools presented ideas compatible with modern contextual interpretations of the Qur'an. As we will see in the following section, the perspectives offered by the Akbarī Sufis on this issue appear to fit the contextual approach far better.

4. Divine Speech and Revelation in the Akbarī School

Hermeneutical theories presented by the Akbarī school should be analyzed in relation with its ontological theories because it discusses both subjects through the same concepts and terminology. Akbarīs describe both the ontology of divine speech and ontology of existence as having hierarchical levels, extending down from the transcendental divine level to the physical level of creation. Detailed analysis of the ontological theories of the Akbariyya is beyond the scope of this study; nonetheless, to simplify, we may state that beginning from God, upper ontological levels transform into lower levels until they reach physical forms. In a sense, therefore, all these levels are manifestations of the same reality, namely, the divine essence. Another noteworthy point is that the divine essence transcends all qualifications and definitions, but as it continues to manifest at the lower ontological levels, these manifestations become bound by more and more restrictions.

In his writings, Ibn al-'Arabī discusses extensively the ontological levels of existence (*marātib al-wujūd*), but he does not offer a systematic theory. Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, Ibn al-'Arabī's foremost student and interpreter, is known as the first Akbarī thinker to systematize the ontological levels (Chittick 1982, p. 109). Al-Qūnawī names five ontological levels as "five divine presences" (*al-ḥaḍarāt al-ilahiyyāt al-khams*): divine, spiritual, imaginal, sensory, and all-comprehensive human levels (Ibid., p. 115). Consequently, the subject of the "ontological levels," has become one of the most famous teachings of the Akbarī school.

Al-Qūnawī theorizes that similar ontological levels pertain to divine speech, and he provides a lengthy discussion on it in his *I'jāz al-bayān*, a partial Qur'anic commentary on the *al-Fātiḥa* chapter. There, he explains how eternal and transcendent divine speech, as a divine attribute, manifests as the Qur'an in the last stage after passing through ontological levels. He writes,

> As one of the primary comprehensive divine attributes, which encapsulate all the levels of clarity (*marātib al-iḍāḥ wa-l-ifṣāḥ*), divine speech emanates (*ṣadara*) from the presence of the Real (*Ḥaqq*) and reaches us as colored (*munṣabighan*) by the effect (*ḥukm*) of the five essential presences (*al-ḥaḍarāt al-khams al-aṣliyya*) [i.e., it traverses the five ontological levels]. (Al-Qūnawī 1969, pp. 377–78)

When explaining these levels, al-Qūnawī cites a well-known hadith that reads, "the Qur'an was sent down in seven readings. Each letter of the Qur'an has an exterior (*ẓahr*) and an interior (*baṭn*). Each letter has a limit (*ḥadd*) and each limit has an observation point (*maṭla'/muṭṭala'*)."[28] Al-Qūnawī takes these four notions mentioned in the hadith as the names of the ontological levels of both divine speech and existence. Accordingly, *ẓahr* represents the physical manifestation of divine speech that we call the Qur'an. This also corresponds to sensible physical forms (*al-ṣuwar al-maḥsūsa*) in existence. *Baṭn* indicates the deeper form of divine speech and the spiritual level of existence where heavenly spirits (*al-arwāḥ al-qudsiyya*) reside. *Ḥadd* refers to the imaginal level of existence, which is the intervening realm (*'ālam al-mithāl*) in Akbarī ontology, the realm that constitutes a zone between each level and the next. *Maṭla'/muṭṭala'* is the name of the level of the divine names, which is the origin and the source of the other three levels, as the divine names are the essence of everything that exists (Al-Qūnawī 1969, p. 378). Al-Qūnawī completes the number of the levels by adding a fifth: *mā ba'da al-muṭṭala'* (that which is beyond transcendence) (Ibid., p. 498). This refers to the first ontological level, which is the primal manifestation of the divine essence anterior to the divine names and attributes (Al-Fanārī [1325] 1907, p. 10).

What is the meaning of all this? This is the Akbarī way of solving the problem of how divine speech transforms into human language, similar to the Akbarī explanation of how the "One" manifests as the "Many" in existence, which is the main concern of Akbarī ontology. Al-Qūnawī believes that the divine attribute of speech (*kalām*) and the divine name of the Speaker (*Mutakallim*) manifest in lower forms and finally emerge as the Qur'an, just as all existence unfolds from God's names and attributes. As a result, the words of the Qur'an we recite are just the manifestation of divine speech, i.e., its contextualization, at the level of the perceptible world (Al-Qūnawī 1969, pp. 104, 378).

Shams al-Din al-Fanārī, the first Ottoman shaykh al-Islam and the prominent commentator on al-Qūnawī, contributes to the subject by explaining how the Qur'an, which is uneternal because it is composite in nature, consisting of letters and sounds and being subject to change, can be considered compatible with God, to whom neither composite nature nor change can be assigned. He emphasizes different modes of divine speech (Al-Fanārī [1325] 1907, p. 45):

> This [revelation] is like the meanings taking the appearance of the imaginal images (*ṣuwar khayāliyya*) that contain parts (*ajzā'*) freed from chronological order (*min ghayr taqaddum wa-ta'akhkhur*).[29] Since the imaginal (*khayālī*) speech is not like the perceptible (*ḥissī*) one, it would also not be like the mental (*'aqlī*) or the spiritual (*ma'nawī*) speeches for sure.

All the stages of speech mentioned in this passage—perceptible (*ḥissī*), mental (*'aqlī*), imaginal (*khayālī*), and spiritual (*ma'nawī*)—are in fact the ontological levels of existence theorized by the Akbarī School. Al-Fanārī means to say that divine speech was transformed into the Qur'an in human language after passing through various stages, just as the divine names manifest as creation in the last stage of transformation.

Thus, the school of Akbariyya agrees with the Ash'arīs and Māturīdīs in distinguishing among different forms of divine speech. However, regarding the physical form of speech in human language, which is the recited Qur'an, Akbarīs go further by strongly emphasizing the Prophet's role in the revelatory process, or in the manifestation of the divine name of *Mutakallim*, as they express it in their terminology. Al-Qūnawī explains that divine speech, like every divine attribute, has two aspects: on one hand, it is possessed of absolute singularity (*aḥadiyya*) in respect to its relationship with the divine essence; on the other hand, it accommodates plurality because of its connection with existence. As a result, the compositeness in the physical form of divine speech is due to the multitude of connections it has with creation, just like an eye with a plurality of sight. The eye is one, but its connections with many objects cause a plurality of sight (Al-Fanārī [1325] 1907, p. 45). This means that the composite state of the divine revelation is caused by the receivers, i.e., the human prophets. The distinctive characteristics of divine revelation, such as its

language and content, are due to the "connection" between God and human prophets. In other words, God's speech is transformed into human language in human prophets, and scriptures, such as those in Syriac, Hebrew, or Arabic, differ from each other, due to the human factor (Ibid.). In short, all prophets are connected to the same reality when they receive revelation, namely, the divine attribute of speaking; however, the same divine attribute manifests differently in each of them according to their differences, as the final "verbal" form of speech takes on a certain shape, depending on the collocutor.

5. The Authority of *Tafsīr* to Deliberate God's Intention in the Text

The varied approaches to the nature of the Islamic discipline of Qur'anic exegesis (*Tafsīr*) and to its authority to identify the divine intention are an important component of the discussion about contextualism. Contextualists make comments that are manifestly distinct from what has been long held in the tradition. Acceptance of the assertion that interpretation of the Qur'an based on tradition yields the sole meaning intended by God will inevitably leave no room for contextual reading. Objections to traditionalism in Qur'anic exegesis, and alternative methodologies, are not a recent trend. There have been commentators who based their exegesis on sources other than narrations since the early years of Islam. As a matter of fact, the two exegetical traditions of *tafsīr bi al-dirāya* (exegesis based on intellect) and *tafsīr bi al-ishāra* (exegesis based on mystical knowledge) are the outcome of an attempt to explain the Qur'an based on frameworks other than tradition. Although the major focus of these non-traditional Qur'anic interpretations was not contextualist in the modern sense, these interpretations can, nevertheless, be regarded as part of the theoretical foundations of contextualism.

The authority of *Tafsīr* has been debated from two angles: (1) whether it can be regarded as an Islamic *'ilm* (systematic science), and (2) whether it has the authority to discover divine intention in the text. Two issues have dominated debates over whether *Tafsīr* should be considered *'ilm* in the sense of a systematic Islamic discipline. First, scholars questioned whether *Tafsīr* had principles that would allow it to be classified as a systematic science. Al-Fanārī emphasized that *Tafsīr* has neither methodology nor universal principles (*qawā'id*), except in a few cases; therefore, it cannot be defined as *'ilm*, unlike other Islamic sciences that are bound to syllogistic logic, such as Islamic theoretical jurisprudence (*Uṣūl al-Fiqh*) (Ibid., p. 5). The term "principle" here refers to a systematic method that always produces the same outcomes. For example, one of the exegetical principles discussed by commentators is this: every address in the Qur'an that begins with "*Yā ayyuhā al-nās!*" (O people!) is directed to Meccans, with "*Yā ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū!*" (O believers!) to Medinans, and with "*Yā ahl al-Kitāb!*" (O people of the Book!) to Jews and Christians (Ibid., p. 79). However, according to al-Fanārī, *Tafsīr* has only a few principles like this, and the scarcity of such principles prohibits it from being classified as *'ilm*. Therefore, he preferred to describe *Tafsīr* as "knowledge" (or "study") (*ma'rifa*) rather than *'ilm* (Ibid., pp. 5, 15). Al-Fanārī's pupil, Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Kāfiyajī (d. 1474), emphatically defended the claim that *Tafsīr* has principles (*qawā'id*) in a treatise he wrote in the field of *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, which won recognition as one of the early examples of its genre, to elucidate these exegetical principles (Al-Kāfiyajī 1998). However, it is hard to say that al-Kāfiyajī successfully defended the idea because his very brief work identified only a few principles regarding the topics of *muḥkam*/*mutashābih* (obvious/unclear verses) and *naskh* (abrogation in the Qur'an) (Ibid., pp. 51–72).[30]

A second issue regarding whether *Tafsīr* should be considered *'ilm* involved scholarly debate over whether it is about the comprehension of universals (*kulliyāt*) and is pertinent to assent (*taṣdīq*) or is about the comprehension of particulars (*juz'iyyāt*) and concerns conceptualization (*taṣawwur*). The former approach treats *Tafsīr* as *'ilm*, having principles by which it is able to produce decisive knowledge, and the latter as *ma'rifa*, which can be conceived of as indecisive knowledge.[31] For example, al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 1414), a prolific author and encyclopedic scholar who established himself in Central Asia in the Timurid period, viewed *Tafsīr* as an *'ilm* that produces assent, because it provides

meanings to the words of the text, and, therefore, it has the authority to make a judgement (*yataḍamman ḥukm*) on the text (Al-Zurqānī 1943, vol. 1, p. 471). On the other hand, 'Abd al-Ḥakīm al-Siyalkūtī (d. 1656), a well-known Mughal scholar, argued that *Tafsīr* is about concepts, because it has no function other than linguistic description (*al-ta'ārif al-lafẓiyya*) (Ibid.). According to al-Fanārī, who classified *Tafsīr* as *ma'rifa*, most of its outcomes are inconclusive (*ẓannī*), since most of the Qur'anic comments are conjectural, due to the fact that they are based on either reason or singular hadiths (*āḥād*), both of which, according to the Ḥanafī School, provide only conjectural knowledge. In addition, we have already seen that al-Fanārī denied that *Tafsīr* has principles, which, in his opinion, makes its outcomes inconclusive. The primary motive that led al-Fanārī to this conclusion was, of course, his desire to be able to justify Sufi exegesis by validating comments based on frameworks other than tradition, such as intellect or mystical knowledge. He meant to say that all these types of interpretation, including exegesis based on narrations, produce inconclusive conjectural knowledge; therefore, they are at the same level in terms of authority. Although al-Fanārī's main concern here was to justify Akbarī Sufi hermeneutics, he came to a very important conclusion concerning the authority of *Tafsīr* to determine God's intention in the words of the Qur'an. If all Qur'an commentaries based on conjectural knowledge are regarded as inconclusive, no commentary among them may be exclusively accepted as God's intention.

By characterizing *Tafsīr* as *ma'rifa* rather than as *'ilm*, al-Fanārī accepted the idea that multiple interpretations of the same text are valid. At the center of the discussion here lies the question "can we know God's intention with certainty?"[32] Al-Fanārī answered this question by embracing a partial relativism. He stated, "multiplicity [of the divine intention] is not in a generic truth (*al-ḥaqīqa al-naw'iyya*); rather, in its different particulars (*al-juz'iyyāt al-mukhtalifa*) due to diversity of perceptors (*qawābil*)" (Al-Fanārī [1325] 1907, p. 5). By "generic truths," he means the foundational principles of Islam, such as oneness of God, which do not change according to different perceptions. These universal truths are established by self-evidence or *mutawātir* reports (but not by *āḥād* hadiths). Aside from these universal principles, particulars might be interpreted in a variety of ways. As a result, al-Fanārī differentiated between God's "known" and "assumed" intentions in his definition of *Tafsīr*: "*Tafsīr* is the knowledge of the states of God's speech in terms of its Qur'anness and in terms of its indication to God's intention that is known or assumed according to the human capacity" (Al-Fanārī [1325] 1907, p. 5)[33]. While God's "known" intention refers to "generic truths," all other comments can be categorized as God's "assumed" intention, and they stand at the same level of authority. The most crucial point in the statement is that al-Fanārī accepted that God's intention in the text differs according to the "diversity of perceptors". This means that commentators play a major role in determining God's intention.

In reality, al-Fanārī, who certified every comment made on the Qur'an as God's intention, was following in the footsteps of his predecessors in the Akbarī School. It is well known that Ibn al-'Arabī, who grounded his esoteric Qur'anic comments in literalism by intensely adhering to etymology, generated unconventional interpretations based on the cognates of words. According to him, if the cognate of a word supports an interpretation, that interpretation must be acknowledged as valid. In an attempt to justify this method, he states,

> Every sense (*wajh*) which is supported (*iḥtimāl*) by any verse in God's Speech (*kalām*)–whether it is the Koran, the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospel, or the Scripture–in the view of anyone who knows that language (*lisān*) is intended (*maqṣūd*) by God in the case of that interpreter (*mutaawwil*). For His knowledge encompasses all senses . . . . Hence, every interpreter correctly grasps the intention of God in that word (*kalima*). This is the truth, "[a Mighty Book:] to which falsehood comes not from before it nor from behind it; a sending down from One Wise, Praiseworthy" (41:42) upon the heart of him whom He chooses from among His servants. Hence no man of knowledge can declare wrong an interpretation, which is supported by the words (*lafẓ*). He who does so is extremely deficient in

> knowledge. However, it is not necessary to uphold the interpretation nor to put it into practice, except in the case of the interpreter himself and those who follow his authority.[34] (Ibn al-'Arabī 2010, vol. 5, p. 22)

Two points stand out here. First, according to Ibn al-'Arabī, every etymologically possible interpretation is a meaning intended by God, which no one can refute. Second, this interpretation cannot be taken as the only truth nor be binding for everybody. It is binding only on those who choose to accept the interpreter's authority. In line with Ibn al-'Arabī's ideas, al-Qūnawī stated,

> Among the words of the Qur'an, there is no word that has many meanings in the language but all its meanings are meant by God. If a commentator comments on God's speech [i.e., the Qur'an] according to the requirement of its language and in a way that does not violate the indubitable religious principles (*al-uṣūl al-shar'iyya al-muḥaqqaqa*), this [comment] is true and God's intention. [The accuracy of the comment] is with respect to the commentator and those who share his state, taste, and understanding. (Al-Qūnawī 1969, p. 334)

Al-Fanārī paraphrased this statement by al-Qūnawī as follows: "all interpretations of the Qur'anic text based on either sound narration (*riwāya saḥīha*) or sound rational deduction (*dirāya ṣaḥīha*) are God's intention. But this is according to the levels (*marātib*) and receivers (*qawābil*), not [binding] for everyone" (Al-Fanārī [1325] 1907, p. 5). We see by this statement that if an interpretation is based on *ṣaḥīh* report or sound cognizance, it should be considered legitimate and true, according to al-Fanārī. However, this interpretation cannot claim to bind anyone other than the interpreter. The "assumed" intention al-Fanārī adds to the definition of *Tafsīr* implies that all the comments that meet the conditions are equally valid, even the opposing ones. These comments have varying degrees of preferability, however, depending on the various scholarly and spiritual capacities of the commentators. As a result, al-Fanārī adds to his definition of *Tafsīr* the phrase "human potential" (*al-ṭāqat al-insāniyya*) in relation to the ability to know God's intention. This phrase suggests gradations among exegetes and in the preferability of their exegesis. The comments of those with more scholarly and spiritual capacity are more acceptable because they come closer to grasping God's intention. Therefore, a commentator not only "assumes" God's intention, but also identifies its degree of preferability among other "assumed" intentions.

6. Concluding Remarks

One of the most intense debates among modern Muslim intellectuals concerns the changeability of Shari'a rules in keeping with changing times. Many modern scholars, some of whom are mentioned in this study, support this idea through contextual readings of the Qur'an, which highlight the principles of the scriptural text, rather than how the text was understood in a certain context. Even though it sounds reasonable to think that rules and laws ought to change over time, this idea has been rejected by many because the Shari'a rules expressed in the Qur'an are considered verbatim expressions of the eternal divine will, and admission of their changeability is seen to jeopardize a person's faith. However, as I argue in this paper, it is possible to find in classical Islam the theological and theoretical background for contextual reading of the scripture and, consequently, the changeability of the laws found in the scripture over time.

Mu'tazilite thinkers, Muslim philosophers (not mentioned in this study), philosophical Sufis (and other Sufis influenced by them), and the Sunni theological schools other than the Ḥanbalīs, distinguished between limitless divine speech and its limited manifestation in the human context, although they expressed this belief differently. According to the Ash'arīs and Māturīdīs, the speech of God and its expression in human language in the form of sacred scriptures are not the same thing. The former is an eternal, transcendent, and immutable divine attribute; the latter is "created" by God or "transformed" into something we understand in the angel or the prophet. These theologians did not approve of the idea that God speaks using created elements such as letters and sounds. In claiming that divine speech is different from its form in human language, these Islamic schools actually

acknowledged the contextuality of the scriptures, that is, the idea that they appear in a historical context. As a result, the unlimited, eternal and universal divine will becomes embroiled in contextual issues at the moment of its transfer to human language. In other words, the people we call prophets, who are believed to have been given the ability to communicate with God, receive messages concerning the specific environment in which they are situated during their communication with the Divine. Consequently, the divine will, which finds its expression in the scriptures, emerges within the boundaries of human language and comprehension and points, as a matter of fact, to specific issues. For example, it answers a question, it mentions an event, it addresses the situations of certain individuals, it reflects the characteristics of the time and place in which it appears, and so forth. The concept of "occasions of revelation" (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), which is an important subject in the Islamic discipline of Qur'anic interpretation, refers to the fact that the revelation of the Qur'an appeared at a certain time and place and has an undeniable connection with them.

Another aspect of the discussion concerns the authority of *Tafsīr* to explicate divine intention in the text of the Qur'an. As we have seen, some scholars do not recognize *Tafsīr* as one of the Islamic '*ulūm*, rendering most of its outcomes—i.e., Qur'anic comments based on reason or *āḥād* hadith reports—conjectural. Following Ibn al-'Arabī and al-Qūnawī, al-Fanārī thought that commentators merely "assume" God's intention in the text and held that no one can falsify another's comments, since, at the end of the day, all comments are assumptions and exist at the same level of authority. Some comments, however, may be favored by the Muslim community over others. This is a crucial conclusion because it brings public opinion to the forefront in discerning the divine intention in the text. It also implies that divine intention can be perceived differently in different contexts, or in other words, divine intention is neither static nor unilateral but takes shape in keeping with a certain context and is subject to change in another. This view, which finds its most sophisticated expression in al-Fanārī, supports what the modern contextualist approach seeks to achieve, by strongly emphasizing the role of context in understanding the divine message, as opposed to the traditionalist view, which, as we saw in al-Wāḥidī's statement, embalms one understanding as the only meaning of the Qur'an and ostracizes alternative meanings.

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Notes

1 When al-Sulamī's Sufi commentary appeared, many scholars met this commentary with resentment while many others exuberantly celebrated it. Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī (d. 1348), an eminent medieval historian and traditionist, records how scholars and rulers welcomed al-Sulamī's work with great admiration. He also records negative opinions about the work. Al-Dhahabī's following statement very well summarizes people's mixed feelings about the commentary: "Some leading scholars (*a'imma*) considered this (work) heresy (*zandaqa*) of the Bāṭiniyya, while some others considered it wisdom (*'irfān*) and truth (*ḥaqīqa*)" (Al-Dhahabī 1982–1983, vol. 17, p. 252).

2 For al-Wāḥidī's life and works and a discussion of the hermeneutical approaches adopted by him throughout his career, see (Saleh 2006, pp. 223–43).

3 In his *Interpreting the Qur'an*, Abdullah Saeed identifies three approaches regarding the interpretation of ethico-legal verses of the Qur'an—textualist, semi-textualist, and contextualist—and he explains at length the contextualist approach (Saeed 2006).

4 These concepts can be read together in Abdullah Saeed's *Interpreting the Qur'an*, in terms of their relationship with contextualism.

5 Reformist scholars, who are concerned with the regression of the Muslim world and try to find solutions for the problems of the Muslim community, have produced similar ideas, among which the following stand out: (a) the gate of *ijtihād* (process of making a legal decision by reason) is not closed, and Muslim scholars should produce *ijtihād*s as much as they can; (b) the changeability of Islamic rules with changes of context should be taken into consideration; (c) new methods of interpreting the sacred texts should be developed; (d) there are questions regarding the authenticity and authority of the hadith (prophetic tradition); and (e)

it is not necessary to adhere to only one legal school (*madhhab*) for every legal matter; it is possible to accept the judgments of other schools under certain circumstances (the principle of *talfīq*).

6 For al-Taḥtāwī's life, works and thoughts, see (Heyworth-Dunne 1939; Hourani 1983, pp. 69–83; Newman 2020).

7 For Khayr al-Dīn Pasha's thoughts, see (Hourani 1983, pp. 84–94).

8 For al-Afghānī's extensive biography, see (Keddie 1972).

9 For the life of Mehmed Seyyid Bey, see (Kara 1997).

10 Abu Zayd's Qur'anic hermeneutics can be seen in details in his *Naqd Khiṭāb*, *Mafhūm al-Naṣṣ*, and *Textuality*. For a brief summary of his hermeneutical ideas, see (Abu Zayd 2006, pp. 93–99).

11 For a summary of the opinions of the Islamic theological schools on divine speech, see (Gardet n.d.; Heemskerk n.d.). For a detailed analysis of the theological debates on divine speech and the Qur'an, see (Wolfson 1976, pp. 235–303).

12 Al-Ash'arī reports many opinions attributed to the Mu'tazilite theologians. According to these reports, all the theologians of this school agree on the createdness of divine speech but disagree on the details (Al-Ash'arī 1963, pp. 191–94).

13 This teaching became the official policy during the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 813–833) and was applied by his two successors. During this period, called the *Miḥna* (inquisition, trial or persecution), scholars were tested and forced to accept the doctrine of the "created Qur'an" (Hinds n.d.).

14 For an extensive survey and detailed analysis of 'Abd al-Jabbār's speculative theology, see (Peters 1976).

15 Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal is portrayed in the Sunni sources as one of the scholars who resisted the official order to accept the doctrine of the creation of the Qur'an during the *Miḥna* period. He was imprisoned due to his refusal (Laoust n.d.).

16 According to Madelung, the traditional standpoint turned, in time, into adoption of the doctrine of "eternal speech" and the "uncreated Qur'an." He states, "The traditional denial that the Koran was created, rather than spoken, by God thus was turned into a positive thesis, that of the eternity of the Koran." In addition, the traditionalist position regarding the eternity of the Qur'an during the pro-*Miḥna* period is ambiguous. Opinions both affirming and denying the eternity of the Qur'an are reported in the sources (Madelung 1985).

17 Wolfson calls this view the "*inlibration*" of pre-existent divine speech, drawing an analogy to the Christian controversy over the beliefs of Christ's incarnation and His two natures, human and divine (Wolfson 1976, p. 246).

18 For example, al-Taftāzānī (d. 1390), a renowned polymath who lived during the Timurid period, stated in his commentary on *al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafiyya*, " . . . It can be said that 'the Qur'an, speech of God, is uncreated.' Otherwise, it should not be said that 'the Qur'an [the book] is uncreated' in order not to call to mind that [the book] formed by sound and words is eternal, just as the Ḥanbalīs assert because of their ignorance or stubbornness" (Al-Taftāzānī 1974, p. 56).

19 'Abdullāh ibn Kullāb (d. 854), who is considered a forerunner of al-Ash'arī, described God's speech as His divine attribute, which inheres in Him, unitary, simple, and indivisible. Subsequent Sunni theologians agreed with him on this description of the speech as a divine attribute. For an analysis of the statements attributed to Ibn Kullāb, see (Wolfson 1976, pp. 248–51).

20 Ibn Kullāb taught that the text of the Qur'an is not uncreated like its heavenly prototype, "rather it is only an expression (*'ibāra*) of God's speech, its created phonetical form." (Ess 1996, p. 182). Like Ibn Kullāb, prominent Māturīdī and Ash'arī scholars such as Abū al-Yusr al-Bazdawī (d. 1100), Abū Muṭī' Makḥūl al-Nasafī (d. 930), and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d. 1111) did not affirm the uncreatedness of expression (*lafẓ*) (Ibid., p. 185). Wolfson shows that al-Ash'arī's opinion regarding the eternity of the expressions of the Qur'an is ambiguous. According to his statements in *al-Ibāna*, al-Ash'arī appears to have thought like Ibn Ḥanbal on this issue. However, according to the statements attributed to him by al-Shahrastānī, al-Ash'arī sounds just like Ibn Kullāb (Wolfson 1976, pp. 254–57).

21 See Q. 56:77–78, Q. 43:3–4, and Q. 85:21–22 (Ali 1983).

22 Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār uses the consensus among Muslims regarding the existence of the heavenly form of the Qur'an in the *Lawḥ* to justify the Mu'tazilī doctrine of the creation of the Qur'an (Al-Asadābādī 1965, pp. 324–25; see also Peters 1976, p. 394).

23 Al-Zamakhsharī states, "[God speaks] by creating the speech that sounds in some physical objects or He creates it as a writing in the *Lawḥ*" (Al-Zamakhsharī 1998, vol. 2, p. 501).

24 Al-Rāzī mentions three possibilities when he explains how the Angel seizes the eternal speech of God: (1) God creates the abilities of "hearing" (*sam'*) and "verbalizing" (*'ibāra*) in the Angel; (2) God creates writing that reflects His speech in the *Lawḥ*, so that the Angel reads and memorizes it; or (3) God creates a sound that manifests as speech in certain physical objects, so that the Angel grasps it (Al-Rāzī 2000, vol. 2, p. 30). In addition, see (Al-Rāzī [1328] 1910, p. 130). Goldziher, who argues that the Mu'tazila influenced al-Rāzī in certain respects, presents this as evidence for his argument (Goldziher 1912, p. 213).

25 For a semantic analysis of the terms *inzāl*, *nuzūl* and *tanzīl*, see (Wild 1996, pp. 137–53).

26 Both opinions were attributed to Ibn Kullāb and adopted by his followers from the Ash'ariyya and the Māturīdiyya (Wolfson 1976, p. 290).

27 The idea of "creation of the Qur'anic expressions through recital" is also attributed to Ibn Kullāb (Wolfson 1976, pp. 249–50).

[28] This hadith is not found in the nine major hadith collections (*al-kutub al-tis'ah*), but it was widely dispersed in later sources of hadith and *tafsīr*. For a version of the hadith, see (Al-Ṭabarī 2003, vol. 1, p. 22). For a comprehensive study of the hadith and its interpretations by Sufi and non-Sufi scholars over the course of time, see (Calis 2020, pp. 1–34).

[29] The phrase "without any chronological order" implies that these parts have not been actualized.

[30] Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, al-Kāfiyajī's pupil, does not seem satisfied with his teacher's work (Al-Suyūṭī 1974, vol. 1, pp. 16–17).

[31] For the differences between *'ilm* and *ma'rifa*, see (Bearman et al. n.d.; Arnaldez n.d.).

[32] This is actually an important debate in Islamic jurisprudence. Al-Fanārī is aware of this jurisprudential debate. See (Al-Fanārī [1325] 1907, p. 5).

[33] For an analysis of the definition, see (Calis 2018, pp. 165–73).

[34] The translation is Chittick's (1989, p. 244). For the similar passages, see (Ibn al-'Arabī 2010, vol. 6, p. 631 and vol. 10, p. 207).

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Hermeneutics in Contemporary Turkey: An Analysis of Turkish Historicists

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Abstract: The hermeneutical turn in Islamic studies has also affected Islamic scholarship in Turkey, a country where traditional Sunnism historically dominates. Historicism in Islamic studies became an influential intellectual and academic current in Turkey after the 1990s. This was mostly because the first generation of Turkish scholars, who associated themselves with historicism through complex engagement with Quranic hermeneutics in their studies, emerged in the 1990s. In this article, I analyze Mustafa Öztürk, İlhami Güler, and Ömer Özsoy, the architects of the historicist turn of the 1990s in Turkey who are still prominent. The article explains: (i) The Turkish historicists' views on the nature of the Quran; (ii) Their hermeneutical approach in interpreting the Quran; and (iii) Illustrates how they apply the hermeneutical approach to the interpretation of the Quran by presenting how they interpret the Quran's relevant verses on corporal punishment/chopping and divorce. The article aims to detail historicism in Turkey by studying its leading scholars.

Keywords: hermeneutics in Turkey; Turkish historicists

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1. Introduction

The hermeneutical turn in Islamic studies has also affected Islamic scholarship in Turkey, a country where traditional Sunnism historically dominates. In 1979, Fazlur Rahman, the pioneering name in historicism, visited Turkey and exchanged opinions with the academics of Ankara University's Faculty of Theology. However, historicism in Islamic studies became an influential intellectual and academic current in Turkey after the 1990s. This was mostly because the first generation of Turkish scholars, who associated themselves with historicism through complex engagement with Quranic hermeneutics in their studies, emerged in the 1990s. In this article, I analyze Mustafa Öztürk, İlhami Güler, and Ömer Özsoy (hereafter, the Turkish historicists, or the historicists), the architects of the historicist turn of the 1990s in Turkey who are still prominent.[1]

In what follows, I first explain the Turkish historicists' views on the nature of the Quran. Then, I analyse the Turkish historicists' hermeneutical approach in interpreting the Quran. To further deepen my analysis, and to illustrate how they apply the hermeneutical approach to the interpretation of the Quran, I study how the Turkish historicists interpret the Quran's relevant verses on corporal punishment/chopping and divorce. The article aims to detail historicism in Turkey by studying its leading scholars, a subject on which there is not much work in the global literature.

2. Turkish Historicists on the Nature of the Quran

Historicism is a method that insists on the prime importance of the historical context for the interpretation of texts of all kinds (Hamilton 1996). When applied to the study of the Quran, it is de rigueur to interpret the verses with reference to their historical context, the time of the Prophet Muhammad, and of the early Muslims. Historicism recognizes the authentic meaning of a verse (that is, how it was understood in its historical context) as the objective framework for understanding it now (Öztürk 2018a). That the historicist method

is at all possible is owed to a set of peculiar views on the nature of the Quran. I shall first summarize those views, then explain how the Turkish historicists interpret the Quran.

2.1. The Quran Has No Divine Nature

Turkish historicists reject the Quran's divine nature. Instead, it is created, and is, therefore, not eternal (Öztürk 2013; Güler 2017a). In *The Mu'tazili Interpretation of Quran*, which reminds us of various verses, such as 50/38, which reads as, "we created the heavens, the earth, and everything between", Öztürk (2015a, p. 35) deduces that God could have spoken so only after he had created the earth, which means that the Quran is not eternal. Any argument that proposes that certain verses existed before the creation of the earth is committed to the conclusion that God made a claim that something that happened did not, in fact, happen.[2] That, of course, is not in harmony with the nature of the deity.

The "createdness" thesis is the foundational principle of historicism that proposes the hermeneutical method for interpreting the Quran. Importantly, Turkish historicists depart from the Sunni view of the Quran's nature by embracing the thesis attributed to the Mu'tazila. Güler (2017b, p. 28) correctly asserts that Sunnis would brand them with the label "heretics". In Sunnism, the Quran is not created; it is divine and eternal. The Quran is the Word of God in meaning and style (Öztürk 2018b). The origin of the Sunni dogma is the theological opinion promoted by Ash'arism and Maturidism, the two major schools of Sunni theology. Accordingly, God's attributes, including his *kalam* (speech), are divine (al-Ash'ari 1940; al-Maturidi 2018). The logical conclusion is the Quran's divinity, since it is God's speech (Güler 2017c; Öztürk 2013). In contrast, the Mu'tazila School accepts the "created Quran" tenet, and rejects its divinity, and the "God's speech" canon (Öztürk 2014).

A soft version of the Sunni dogma emerged later, arguing that there is an eternal Quran in heaven (*kalam nafsi*), and another in this world (*kalam lafdzi*) (Larkin 1998). The soft theory was advanced by Ibn Kullab (d. 854) as a compromising formula during the *Mihna* (Melchert 1997). The *Mihna* was introduced by the Abbasid caliph, al-Ma'mun (d. 833), to enforce the doctrine of the createdness of the Quran. However, it eventually failed because of the resistance of traditional scholars. Caliph al-Mutawakkil (d. 861) abandoned it altogether (Nawas 1996). However, Turkish historicists see the soft theory as a tactical attempt to challenge the Mu'tazili view (Öztürk 2018a). Thus, they reject the heavenly Quran as well (Öztürk 2013; Güler 2017c). Öztürk (2016a) dismisses the soft theory as a theological metaphor that brought no real change. He observes that Muslims are still loyal to the traditional Sunni dogma of the divine Quran.

Attributing a divine nature to the Quran is, therefore, rigorously criticized by Turkish historicists. Lambasting Sunnis for proclaiming the Quran a God-like divinity, Güler (2017c) condemns it as an idolatry. Inspired by Naser Abu-Zayd, Öztürk (2016a) finds the uncreated Quran incompatible with Islam, where a major commandment is to reject the dual nature of Jesus. Beyond the theological reservations, the intellectual legacy of the divine Quran is also bothersome for Turkish historicists, who consider it a major obstacle, one that permanently undermines rationalism in Islamic thought (Güler 2017c). Öztürk (2016a) describes the uncreated Quran as a boundary within Islamic thought that is an *impasse*, which puts human reason out of reach. Likening it to the Sunni "end of history" thesis, Güler (2011, p. 37) holds that the Sunni dogma is responsible for the popular belief among Muslims in a divine resource with perfect solutions to everything. Therefore, historicists see the rejection of the divine Quran as the essential prerequisite of a rationalist turn in the Islamic tradition.

2.2. The Quran Is Historical

In Sunnism, the Quran is an ahistorical message sent to this world by divine intervention (al-Ghazali 1977; Karaman et al. 2012; Öztürk 2018a; Neuwirth 2010). Thus, no historical event affected the formation of the Quran; it does not belong to this world (Öztürk and Ünsal 2018; Güler 2018a). The opposite is true for the historicists: the Quran is historical and was determined by historical dynamics. The Quran belongs to this world

(Öztürk 2013; Güler 2017c). Özsoy (2004) summarizes the historicist principle: There is no ahistorical thing at the human level; everything is part of history, and everything is subject to natural causation, including the Quran.

For historicists, social and political developments in Mecca and Medina affected the Quran at all levels, including the content of its verses. Öztürk (2018a) illustrates this by analyzing the changing attitude towards Jews in the Quran. Accordingly, though earlier verses revealed in Mecca, such as 21/7, 10/94, and 16/43, cite Jews in amicable terms, later verses, revealed in Medina, view them bitterly because of the changing political *status quo*. For example, when Muslims, who were yet a small group, needed their support in Mecca, verse 10/94 mentions Jews affirmatively, as a reference group: "So if you are in doubt about what we have revealed to you, ask those who have been reading the scriptures before you." However, once the Muslims got a grip on power in Medina, the tone of the revelations towards the Jews changed, and turned into a humiliating depiction in "Surah al-Baqara". Verse 2/120 speaks against Christians and Jews, for they are never pleased unless Muslims follow their ways. Moreover, while the earlier verses identify Abraham as a Jew, the Medina verses portray him as a *hanif* (monotheist). Öztürk (2018a, p. 113) asserts that the impact of the tense political atmosphere between Muslims and Jews caused contradictions, even in the Quran's verses. He points out verse 9/29, which describes Jews as the People of the Book who do not believe in God, and reads it as an oxymoron, for Jews cannot not believe in God while they are the People of the Book. In another example, Öztürk (2018c, pp. 193–208) expounds upon how economic dynamics affected the revelation: when non-Muslims were prohibited from approaching Ka'ba (9/28), it sparked complaints among Muslims, for it caused them economic losses. Responding to them, verse 9/29 then introduced *jizyah*, a *per capita* yearly taxation levied on non-Muslims, and even asked Muslims to fight them "until they pay the taxes." Such cases, for Öztürk (2018a), prove how historical developments determined the revelations. Otherwise, the only explanation would be to accept that God changed his mind, a contradiction of His deity. In like manner, the revelations' responses to historical conjunctures also falsify the concept of an eternal fixed-content Quran.

The "Historical Quran" also requires key Islamic concepts, cited in the verses as determined in history by the surrounding milieu and culture. Thus, the meanings of the key terms, regarded as the foundation of Islamic faith, have no eternally set meanings. For example, Güler (2018a) presents God in the Quran as a heavily anthropomorphic conceptualization, reflecting the Arab mindset. Similarly, Özsoy (2004, p. 17) explains how various divine attributes, such as *muntaqim* (revenge taker), reflect the 7th-century Arab understanding of the deity. Having such facts in mind, Güler (2018a, p. 79) concludes that the Quranic God is a reflection of the Arab mentality, where He is imaged as a just King who has a master–slave relationship with people. Quoting R. E. Emerson's, "the god of warriors is a warrior, the god of tradesmen is a tradesman", Güler (2018a) deduces that the God of the Quran is a reflection of Arab culture. Güler (2018b, p. 181) does not then hesitate to warn that the Quranic God, having emerged in a specific social and historical context, might be unsatisfactory for later times or other cultures. In practice, this is to accept that the concept of God in the Quran is not a universal one. Historicists re-use this argument for other critical purposes. Öztürk (2013, p. 211) detects *shirk* (polytheism), a term used in the Quran in the context of an early Muslim society. That word does not speak for a universal perspective. It cannot be imagined to be referencing other practices, such as the Iranian worship of fire. In general, Güler (2017a) observes that the religious vocabulary of the Quran has no reference to distant religions, such as Hinduism or Shamanism. As a consequence, even key concepts of the Quran are historical in the sense that their meanings were determined by the social and political dynamics of their time and location. To illustrate the complicated interaction of the Quran and its historical context, Güler (2015a) likens it to the relationship of British pragmatism and the 18th century industrial revolution, and to how Immanuel Kant was linked to the politics of the Prussian Empire. As in those contexts, the Quran cannot be abstracted from 7th-century Arab life and culture. Similarly,

there is an Arab anthropological shadow on the Quran (Güler 2016a). This is normal for Öztürk (2018c), since the Quran was also exposed to the social, and other, dynamics of its society, such as any other historical phenomenon.

2.3. The Quran and Universalism

Not seeing the Quran as universal, historicists define it as having a local scope, limited by the Arab life around Mecca and Medina in the 7th century (Güler 2016a). Accordingly, the Quran addresses only those Arabs who were in conversation with Muhammad (Güler 2018a; Öztürk 2016b; Özsoy 2017). Therefore, the Quran gives its universal messages through local people and events in a 7th-century Arab context. Thus, the Quran is a local interpretation of the universal message for historicists (Özsoy 2004; Güler 2017a). Logically, for historicists, other people in different times and places are not addressed by the Quran (Özsoy 2004; Öztürk 2013). The Quran is, therefore, not in dialogue with all ages. Güler (2017b, p. 27) clarifies this by defining the Quran as a collection of speeches that happened only "in Arab society, and on the Arab street." Thus, it belongs to a specific time and geography (Öztürk 2013).

In this regard, expressions in the Quran, such as "O, you people", are not interpreted as addressing all humanity. Accordingly, such utterances are like the politician's opening words to his audience, even in a small village: "Dear citizens . . . ". That politician is not understood to be addressing all of the people in the country. In a similar fashion, the Quran speech is local; hence, it cannot be imagined to be, for example, addressing today's Turkish people. Thus, direct discourses in the Quran, such as "O, you . . . ", address only those who lived with Muhammad, including the polytheists, Muslims, and Christians (Öztürk 2016a; Özsoy 2017). Paul Ricoeur's approach might be helpful for a better view of the historicists. Ricoeur (1976, pp. 13, 31) categorizes pronouns in a conversation as having no objective or universal meaning. Thus, a pronoun—such as *they* or *you*—has "meaning each time it is used, and each time it refers to a singular subject. Thus, we need to know whom it addresses in each conversation. However, writing gives way to a "universalization of the audience." If we are not informed about the background, we tend to read a text as universal speech, addressing anyone who reads it. However, by not defining the Quran as a universal text, historicists interpret each *you* in the Quran in terms of its singular subject in its historical context, which is Mecca and Medina during the prophethood of Muhammad.

The locality of the Quran is not only a case of pronouns; the verses in the Quran are meaningful only in their local context for historicists (Öztürk 2013). In other words, they do not have universal meanings independent of their local contexts. The logical result of this reasoning is more important: Treating the Quran as if it was a universal book would inevitably lead to the wrong conclusions, such as recognizing the local elements in the Quran as universal norms. Özsoy (2004, p. 14) gives an example to demonstrate this problem: The literature is full of the virtues of breastfeeding a baby for two years. Yet this abstraction is the result of a false interpretation of verse (2/133), which reads as, "mothers suckle their children for two whole years." In reality, the verse informs us about an Arab tradition that has nothing to do with a universal health principle (Öztürk 2017a, p. 21). Similarly, many verses (such as 17/11, 18/54, and 80/17) that define "human" as a very negative property are read as if they are axiomatic statements about human nature. However, Öztürk (2017b, p. 81) warns that those verses address some people who lived during Muhammad's time. However, in missing the significance of that contextual element, those local verses are read as if the Quran presents a very negative view of human nature. As the misinterpretation of the above verse illustrates, Öztürk notes that reading all verses as if they have universal content leads to another big problem: recognizing every verse as being equally a source of Islamic law. In fact, the Quran has verses that cannot be thought to enunciate universal truths. As Öztürk (2018c, pp. 185, 270–71) believes, it is not logical to imagine God, "the creator of billions of galaxies", providing a universal message through person-specific verses, such as 33/53, where a group of companions are asked to not talk long at Muhammad's home during a wedding, or verse 33/51, which regulates

the nightly frequencies of Muhammad's being with his wives. Güler (2017c, p. 108; 2018a, p. 58) also sees those verses about Muhammad's private life as having only local content, not universal messages. Even for him, they could trigger faith problems among Muslims if not well-framed within a historicist logic.

For the historicists, any concepts in the Quran that are understood to have universal application are, in fact, collected from the local Arab environment (Güler 2016b). For instance, Muslims understand the Paradise of Quran to be a divinely designed portrait of the legitimate universal expectation of the deserving. However, Öztürk (2013, pp. 219–22) remarks on the Quranic Paradise, where rivers flow, as a portrait of desire for Arabs, whose life allotment is the desert. It does not work as a portrait for people who live in countries, such as Bangladesh, where there are frequent floods. Moreover, how the Quran presents a *houri*, the maiden who awaits Muslims in Paradise, is according to a typical Arabic concept of beauty, dating back to pre-Islamic poets, such as Imru' al-Qais (d. 540). Then there is *sidr*, the tree that the Quran describes in Paradise, which is also a theme of Arab poets, such as Umayyah ibn Abi Salt (d. 630), who composed similar depictions of Paradise that contain the same tree (Öztürk 2013, pp. 211–20). As a matter of fact, such discussions are known in various classics: Ibn Ishaq (1955, pp. 28–29)—an 8th-century historian—wrote that *kawthar*, a Quranic term that stands for the miraculous water of Paradise, was used by the poet, Labid (d. 661). Historicists frequently underline that, as the examples of classical authors' creations demonstrate, the Quran uses concepts familiar to the local Arab mind. Öztürk (2013) explains this as the normal pattern since the vocabulary of the Quran was determined by its local context. These authors remind us that the lists of the names of various things, such as fruits, foods, and many other things in the Quran, are only local examples. As a consequence, for historicists, the meaning of words in the Quran are also not universal. Thus, they are critical of the practice of seeking to understand such words as if they are universal terminologies.

2.4. The Quran Is Not a Book

Historicists are against imagining the Quran as a book (Özsoy 2017; Öztürk 2015b; Güler 2017a). Not designed or written as a book, the Quran, in the historicists' view, is a collection of speeches articulated as responses to various events during Muhammad's prophethood (Özsoy 2004). They are also of the opinion that Muhammad had no intention of compiling the revelations into a book format. His goal was to leave a sample community to inspire Muslims (Öztürk 2015c). Historicists opine that what made Muslims imagine the Quran as a book was the compilation of the revelations in book format *after* Muhammad (Güler 2018a). Imagining the Quran as a book had significant consequences that had a huge impact on the interpretation of Islam. Güler (2017d) observes that historicists are unhappy about the major consequence, which is the invitation to approach the Quran as if it originated as a systematic book on theology. Özsoy (2004, p. 54) says that historicists discern correctly that the "Quran is a book" belief nurtures the popular thinking that a revelation is an external message.

For historicists, the Quran is a collection of speech acts that early Muslims heard and adapted into their practice without imagining them as a systematic text (Öztürk and Ünsal 2018; Öztürk 2018c). Accordingly, the verses were not abstract sentences, but acted-out speeches. William A. Graham's definition (Graham 1977, p. 10), that a revelation is "an activity coextensive with the life of the bearer of revelation, the Prophet", might be explanatory. A revelation is interwoven with action. Inspired by Muhammad Arkoun, Güler (2017c) likewise writes that the Quran is a practical text, not a book of theory. To Güler, the Quran is not like Aristotle's *Metaphysics,* or Spinoza's *Ethica*,—books that construct their messages as abstractions and general principles—but is more like Marx's *Capital*, a book that gives its messages as practical solutions to the problems of society. Güler's comparison says that the message of the Quran is always delivered through contextual cases. Thus, early Muslims understood the revelations without a need for methodological explanations (Güler 2016c; Öztürk 2013). As proof that early Muslims

did not regard the revelations as a book, Öztürk (2018a) reminds us that they were never shocked when a new revelation introduced a command that was different from a previous one. He held that there was an ontological relationship between Muslims and the revelation, where the focus was on understanding and practicing, rather than on the search for an epistemic relationship that delivers systematic comprehension. Öztürk (2018c, p. 267) produces this example as a reminder that, despite the verse 9/36 prohibition to wage war during the four special months, Muslims did not interrupt their fights with their enemies. Öztürk (2014, p. 34) also gives an interesting example to demonstrate how the first Muslims were indifferent to the textual and stylistic aspects of the revelations. Accordingly, they were not even alarmed by some formal changes in the transmission of a revelation with changed words. We understand, from the historicist arguments, that the early Muslims did not imagine the revelation as a text. Instead, what mattered to them is what they were told.

For historicists, the Quran's verses are speech acts, the meanings of which are associated with the circumstances in which they were uttered. Güler (2016a) illustrates them as examples of informal communication in a given setting, where people already know the relevant contextual aspects of the speech, such as the emotions it displays. Therefore, as Öztürk (2015b) emphasizes, the meanings of the verses—given that they are speech acts—naturally have a limited connection to the noncontext. In other words, they are not axioms to be understood in a universal context as a modern text. To clarify, by "contextual or complimentary elements of meaning", historicists refer to the standard extralinguistic elements in a speech act, as we read in Searle (1979), that are all relevant to conveying the intentions of the communicator. Özsoy (2004) states that those extralinguistic elements are vital for the correct understanding of a speech act. Similarly, emphasizing that language is not a mechanical transmitter, Öztürk (2017a) defines the interaction of language and its milieu as an essential aspect of communication.

The most important problem for historicists is putting the verses, which were originally speech acts, into book format (*Mushaf*), despite the fact that they did not come into being as systematic texts. The unavoidable consequence is the various gaps between a speech act and its written form since the latter has no ability to incorporate all the complimentary aspects of the former. There is no perfect match between the meaning a speech act makes and its transcription. Paul Ricoeur (1976) explains this phenomenon as the disappearance of the human facts in "writing up" what someone said. Unlike a speech act, "marks"—words, letters, dots, etc.—convey the message of the text, but at the cost of detaching meaning from the event: "Discourse as event disappears", and we get only a text, which is no longer able to transmit the relationship between the speech and the human context. Thus, for Ricoeur, writing does not fix the event of speaking, but records only what was said of the speaking. This is what Graham (1977) explains as the verbal-noun revelation, which becomes a concrete noun, and refers primarily to a text rather than to a happening (the context). As a consequence, reading the transcription of a speech act is never satisfactory (Smith 2003). Almost repeating Ricoeur, Özsoy (2004) defines a text only as a note on the meaning of the speech act. Öztürk (2015b), too, repeats the perception that the transcription of a speech act is a picture that has lost the meaning-making power of its contextual elements. Özsoy (2004) reminds us that the transition from the speech act to the text may even distort the meaning of the former.

A second, but this time structural, consequence of making a book of the verses (which disturbs the historicists as well) is the Muslim habit of regarding the Quran as if it were sent as a systematic book on epistemology and other subjects (Özsoy 2004). For Öztürk (2014), the book format of the Quran wrongly became a reference in scholarly studies for interpreting the verses. The historicists' reservation here is about the recognition of the book format, which is a human artifact, as a substantial framework for explaining the verses (Öztürk 2015b). For the historicists, a format that was dictated by people after the revelations should not be taken as if it were the canonical framework for determining how the verses are understood. Özsoy (2004, p. 57) reminds us that the historical accounting of an event of the revelation does not even provide satisfactory information on the rationale

of the placement of the verses in the Quran. Similarly, for Öztürk (2016b), the purpose of the compilation of the verses was only to preserve them; hence, the existing format of the Quran cannot be a systematic reference in any way when one is interpreting the verses. As a consequence, reading the Quran as a text has no reasonable explanation, save that the verses were placed between book covers. Taking things one step further, Öztürk (2018a, p. 81) argues that the between-book-covers mistake caused Muslims to imagine the Quran as a "reference text", but not "a purpose and an intention of God." He is clear that the recognition of the Quran as a reference text by Muslims is the result of their historical practice, which is, nonetheless, in contradiction to God's purpose. In other words, apart from the troublesome effects of the book format for understanding the verses, it is also problematic to search for what is Islamic by looking at a reference book, even if it is the Quran. Özsoy (2004, pp. 46, 109–11) holds the same view: "I don't believe that God's intention is to send a reference book. Instead, his intention was to create a sample community that would inspire people."

To summarize: According to historicists, the compilation of the verses into book format created three major problems:

i. The obfuscating gap between the verses as speech acts, and the verses in written format;
ii. The recognition of the book format as the authoritative framework for explaining the verses;
iii. The recognizing of a book, i.e., the Quran, as the main framework for Islamic reasoning.

Alternatively, historicists suggest:

i. Interpreting the verses as speech acts;
ii. Not being bound by where the verses are located in the Quran while interpreting them;
iii. Not to accept that Islam recommends the Quran as the reference book in proposing solutions, but, instead, to know that the Quran recommends to Muslims the community model that the Prophet Muhamad and his friends developed by their practices.

If we return to the problems caused by *Mushaf*, we see that the verses are now read as if their places in the Quran were originally designed to generate a certain methodological importance. However, Öztürk (2015b) reminds us that each verse was revealed in a different context, so their locations in the Quran cannot be taken as the parameters for their understanding. If the verses are originally speech acts, their chronological order would indeed be important. However, historicists also find that information on the chronology of the verses is limited and contested. For example, Öztürk (2016a, pp. 95–100) reminds us that traditions in *Sahih*, where Aisha—the prophet's wife—gives contradictory information on which verses were revealed first. For historicists, the chronology problem proves that the Quran in book format no longer transmits extralinguistic conditions, such as the time aspects of the revelation (Özsoy 2017; Öztürk 2015b). Moreover, detached from their historical context, the verses appear as equally important passages in the Quran, with some sort of capacity to affect Islamic law (Özsoy 2004). On the other hand, for the historicists, these are not only theoretical discussions. Their negative impact is also observed among Muslims since they are intra-Muslim conflict makers. Reading the verses without reference to their historical context, which, for historicists, is a frameless interpretation, Muslims may find themselves justifying absurd or radical conclusions. Özsoy (2017) observes that, though it was easily understood by the early Muslims, the Quran became the source of disagreements among Muslims after its compilation in book format during the reign of Caliph Uthman. Simply, for historicists, embracing the revelations in book format triggered the chaos dynamic among Muslims. Öztürk (2018a) reflects that the compilation of the Quran into book format has historically increased conflicts among Muslims rather than decreased them.

For historicists, it is virtually impossible to generate a consistent text by compiling speech acts (Öztürk and Ünsal 2018; Güler 2018a; Özsoy 2004). Logically, they find a

number of problems in the Quranic text. Özsoy (2004, p. 47) lists several structural and stylistic problems in the Quran:

> "There are contradictions and redundancies in Quran. It is not possible to discern the logic in the composition of the text; it does not have a chronological or a topical order. The whole text lacks inner consistency, nor is there consistency among the verses: often, even the verses fail to articulate a coherent set of meanings."

Similarly, Öztürk (2016b) lists several problems, such as inconsistency, exaggeration, incoherence, repetition, and contradictions in the Quran, as examples of problems that were brought into being by collecting the verses into book format. According to Öztürk (2015b), there are even single verses that reflect several of these problems. Addressing similar issues, Güler (2016a) does not take the text of the Quran to be systematic in general.

Özsoy (2004) and Öztürk (Öztürk and Ünsal 2018) remind us that they were not the first to detect such problems; even the Sunni literature itself acknowledges many of them. As proof, they present *mushkilat al Quran*—the difficult issues in the Quran—for which the Sunni scholars provide explanations of the various verses that contain linguistic or other problems. Of course, for Sunni authors of such explanations, what might seem to us to be problems are, in fact, examples of the Quran's *i'jaz,* the inimitability of the Quran, which is its miraculous linguistic property (Larkin 1998; Saeh 2015). In addition, historicists present the Sunni theory of *nash* (the abrogation of a verse by a later verse), as more proof that the Sunni literature is aware of the structural problems in the Quran (Öztürk 2015a; Fatoohi 2013). *Nash* aims to solve the contradiction among the verses by proclaiming the older verse as abrogated, which is effectively to recognize, and admit to, the presence of contradiction in the text. Another perception of historicists is that *nash* also demonstrates how Sunni scholars fail to realize that what they are seeing as contradictory verses are, in fact, speech acts that belong to different social contexts (Öztürk 2018c). Accordingly, the verses in the Quran that appear to be contradictory might have had different meanings in their different historical contexts. However, once written, they took on an apparently contradictory property because they lost their contextual uniqueness. Logically, historicists reject as *nash* what appears to them as contradictory verses in the Quran when they are, in fact, about different subjects in their original contexts.

We encounter examples in the works of historicists of the structural problems in the Quran that have their origin in the compilation of the verses into a book. Typical examples can be read in Öztürk (2015c, p. 121). Accordingly, for example, verse 2/220 has word-order problems, creating serious obstacles to comprehension.[3] In another example, Öztürk (2015c, p. 121) points to several verses that contradict one another: while verse 55/39 says, "on that Day neither mankind nor jinn will be asked about their sins", verse 37/24 reads, as [God] "halted them for questioning". Moreover, verse 7/6 says, "We shall certainly question those to whom messengers were sent, and We shall question the messengers themselves." To Öztürk (2015b, pp. 19–20), there are also verses that give different information on the same subject: while verse 6/21 reads, "who fabricates a lie against God or denies His revelation" are doing the "greater wrong", verse 18/57 stresses that "who could be more wrong than the person who is reminded of his Lord's messages and turns his back on them." In addition, while verse 58/12 says, "when you come to speak privately with the Messenger, offer something in charity before your conversation", the very next verse, 58/13, declares that no such obligation is imposed (Öztürk and Ünsal 2018, p. 65). As an example of the wrong placement of verses, Öztürk (2015a, p. 107) points to 2/226–241, the divorce verses. Two verses in this paragraph, 2/238–239, are irrelevant, for they are about how to perform *salah* (five-times prayer) in dangerous situations. Verse 6/119 is another example of a misplacement in the Quran that illustrates how seriously incongruent with its historical-chronological context a misplacement can be. This verse: "God has already fully explained what He has forbidden you,"—is about why Muslims should not eat some animals. However, the crux of that prohibition comes 26 verses later, at verse 6/145 (Öztürk and Ünsal 2018, p. 195). From the historicist perspective, the chronological mislocation of verses 6/119 and 6/145 is a typical problem that the book form of the Quran created.

3. The Historicist Methodology for Interpreting the Quran

Having summarized the historicists' views on the nature of the Quran, I shall now analyze their ideas on how to interpret the Quran. In fact, the historicist methodology of interpreting the Quran is a reflection of the historicists' ideas on the nature of the Quran.

Basically, historicists ground their rationale on the historical fact that the verses are speech acts that deliver their messages in the language and life conditions of the 7th-century Arab mindset. This meaning-making mindset was lost when the Quran was given a book format (Güler 2015a; Öztürk 2018a; Özsoy 2004). The solution for historicists is to interpret the verses in reference to their authentic meaning. This entails acquiring a familiarity with how early Muslims understood the verses, in terms of their purpose, context, and social impact (Özsoy 2004; Güler 2017a). The reading of the verses in their authentic meaning is comparable with Searle's (1969, p. 35) formulation: "X counts as Y in context C". If X is the verse as written in the Quran, Y is the authentic meaning. As Güler (2015a) explains, this is done to salvage the nonlinguistic elements of the meanings that are now lost in the written form of the Quran. As we understand it, historicists expect their method to establish "authentic meaning" as the general norm for reading the Quran. This is confirmed by Öztürk (2013, p. 38), who defines "authentic meaning" as God's purpose in revealing a verse. Öztürk's (2018a, pp. 10–15) metaphorical explanation is that the authentic meanings of the verses are the "stem cells" of Islam.

Basically, historicists project the hermeneutics method onto the interpretation of the Quran. Historicists, inspired by various scholars, such as Fazlur Rahman, Nasser Abu-Zayd, Paul Ricoeur, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, and others, believe that it is possible to construct an imagined replica of the historical context in which the early Muslims understood the verses (Öztürk 2013; Güler 2017d). In a nutshell, what matters for them is the principle of hermeneutic analysis, which Ricoeur (1976) defines as the interpretation of a speech act with reference to the analysis of the relationship of the event and its meaning. Thus, as Searle (1979, p. 117) explains, a speech act is never a "zero context" that can be read literally. Instead, it must always be understood with reference to the "background," the historical context in which it was acted out. Similarly, given that the noninstitutional elements of meaning are left in the past, and we are no longer part of that social setting, historicists assert that the best available method is to read the verses in their historical context (Özsoy 2017; Öztürk 2013). The only solution is to employ historical and hermeneutic analyses when interpreting the verses. Özsoy (2004) recommends this as a reliable process for developing empathy with the first Muslims.

There is also another rationale in the historicist method: the historicist concern that interpreting the Quran without an objective framework could result in ultrasubjectivism (Özsoy 2004). Like Abu-Zayd (2010), they are concerned that transferring the verses into the present, thereby disregarding the relationship of the verses to their original contexts, can lead to incalculable misinterpretations. Thus, the historicist position amounts to rejecting the Islamic reasoning of the verses as they are read in the Quran (X). Öztürk (2018a, p. 86) complains that, without an objective framework, the inevitable method is a freewheeling process of reasoning that legitimates "frameless interpretation". And Güler (2016a, p. 247) likens the interpreting of the Quran without reference to the historical context to undisciplined phantasy. For historicists, the danger of frameless interpretation is in the unleashing of anachronic conclusions, or attitudes of fixated presentism (Özsoy 2004; Öztürk 2013). Thus, the historicist method is put to work to search for an objective framework for interpreting the Quran. Accordingly, if there is any context that we can assume to be an objective framework in interpreting the Quran, it is 7th-century Arab society (Güler 2017a; Öztürk 2018a). Özsoy (2004) thus holds that the historicist method is a realistic way of interpreting the Quran. For Öztürk (2018a) too, the historicist method provides a comparatively objective framework for interpreting the verses, and, as Özsoy (2004) notes, it contains the means of fixing the interpretation of the verses inside the boundaries of the historical context. Logically, as Güler (2017a) writes, this would mean that nobody has the authority to impose meanings on the Quran. That cannot be done when there is

an objective framework that determines the legitimate parameters for extrapolating the meanings of the verses.

When it comes to the practice of their method, historicists, inspired by Fazlur Rahman, suggest a two-level interpretation. On the first level, the authentic meaning of a verse is defined when it is gleaned from a scrutiny of its historical setting (Öztürk 2013). "Authentic meaning", according to Rahman (1982, p. 6), is in the general moral-social objectives of the verses, "distilled" in light of their sociohistorical background. In other words, the historicists take the sociohistorical context of the revelation as their framework, from which the ratio legis will emerge. On the next level, the task is to work out how the authentic meaning of the verse under scrutiny is relevant today (Öztürk 2018c; Rahman 2009). Having identified the general moral-social objective of the verse on the first level, reasoning on the second level pursues the terrain of its applicability in the present-day context. Thus, reasoning on the second level is expected to end with a new ruling. Accordingly, if a law—even when it is literarily prescribed in the Quran—fails to reveal its ratio legis, a new rule can be proposed. Logically, compared to the first level, the second level is more subjective (Öztürk 2018a). Reason is given strong autonomy at the second level in order to discover how the authentic meaning is relevant now. That is tantamount to the enacting of a new ruling (Güler 2015b). For Güler (2017c, pp. 200–1), the objective here is to find out "what God would say to us today", or to "introduce new laws like God". For Özsoy (2004), this is like being a contemporary of Muhammad.

Öztürk (2013) explains that this method does not treat a verse either as a finished or a dead text. Accordingly, when historicists look at a verse (X) in retrospect, they imagine it (Y) as a living phenomenon, still knitted together with events, emotions, and speeches (C). This is what historicists mean by arguing that the Quran is not a book. Instead, they imagine each verse as a living phenomenon in its historical context, along with all its contextual elements. The verse is then imagined similarly in the present, based on authentic meaning. As a consequence, the verse for historicists is not the written form in the Quran (X), but a speech act, along with all its contextual elements, past and present (C, C1). This is what Abu-Zayd (2004, p. 13) dubbed "humanistic hermeneutics", which treats the verses as living phenomena, and "stops reducing the Quran to the status of a text only". Moreover, this is what Fazlur Rahman (1982) saw as the abandoning of the traditional method of reading verses in isolation, without reference to the speech acts that they were upon delivery.

4. Case Study

In this part, I shall illustrate how the Turkish historicists interpret the Quranic verses through two cases: corporal punishment/chopping and divorce. This entails us observing their methods at the practical level, going beyond the theoretical discussions.

4.1. Corporal Punishment: Chopping

All the major schools of Islamic law, including those of the Shi'a, accept amputation as a punishment for theft (Kamali 2019). The chopping off of hands is practiced in several Muslim countries. The Brunei Penal Code, for example, stipulates the amputation of the right hand for a first offence, and the amputation of the left foot for the second offence.[4] Radical groups, such as ISIS, practice such methods. For example, Ansar al-Shari'a, in Yemen, chopped off the hands of those accused of stealing (Simcox 2012). In countries where such methods are not practiced, scholars do not rule out corporal punishment. In Turkey, *Tefsir*—a five-volume exegesis of the Quran prepared for the general public by the Directorate of Religious Affairs—recognizes the chopping off of hands as a legitimate method and provides information on the details, such as how the foot should be amputated (Karaman et al. 2012). Scholarly articles in Turkish that follow the Sunni law continue to report on the details of corporal punishment methods, including hand chopping (Akbulut 2003).

Corporal punishment in the form of hand chopping has its origin in Verse 5/38, which lays down that Muslims "cut off the hands of thieves, whether they are man or woman, as punishment for what they have done." Treating shari'a as a divine and universal form, Muslims practice what they literally understand from the verse. In *Risala*, al-Shafi'i (1997)—whose view set the Sunni standard—ruled that the punishment, as ordained in the Quran and practiced by the Prophet, is the final one.

Not regarding hand chopping as the cast-in-iron Islamic method, the historicists justify the advancement of alternate punishments. Accordingly, alternate punishments are legitimate if they achieve Islam's higher principles of social order and morality. The historicists rest their reasoning on the principle that Islam makes no higher norm of amputating people's hands, but it does make a norm of establishing a society where people are safe, and where those who would breach the law are deterred by effective rules. Criticizing Sunni scholars for reducing shari'a to a methodology of punishment, Güler (2018d) reminds us that the lesser norms, such as the shari'a rules, may change to realize higher norms. The historicists' stance on the subject reminds us of Fazlur Rahman's (1965, p. 239) approach, where the content of penal regulations is "variable," whereas "the universalized principles of good and bad are constant."

On this account, historicists see chopping as the best available practice in the context of 7th-century Arab society. However, chopping hands today proves that the classical methods of Islamic reasoning—satisfactory in the Medieval ages—are no longer effective. The historicists thus propose new methods by reference to the authentic meaning of Verse 5/38. For Öztürk, the punishment verses in the Quran are conjectural regulations that cannot be imagined as fixed principles of Islam to be applied today. They should be understood with reference to their sociological setting. Presenting hand chopping as an Arab cultural method, Öztürk (2018c) draws from Abu Yusuf (d. 767), the leading Hanafite jurist, who spoke of this method as an Arab custom. Similarly, Güler (2020) explains hand chopping as a constant in the economic infrastructure of tribal Arab society; theft was not primarily an economic crime in that tribal Arab society. It was first a crime against tribal honor. Regarding stealing as a direct attack on their tribal honor, the ancient Arabs developed radical punishments, such as chopping. For Güler (2020), theft today is, however, primarily an economic crime that therefore requires different penal responses.

4.2. Divorce

Divorce is an all-time controversial topic, as several verses appear to give sole authority to husbands to decide upon a separation. The Muslim practice of divorce in various countries is criticized for not giving equal rights in this matter to women (Subramanian 2008).

The historicists have a different method of justifying their reasoning on divorce. For them, the literal reading of the Quran gives more rights and privileges to men in divorce (Güler 1997). However, they see this as normal, given that the verses on divorce are historical, reflecting the social setting in which the revelation occurred. Admitting that the literal reading of the Quran yields an unequal approach to divorce, the historicists have only one option: to develop solutions by referencing the authentic meaning of the relevant verses. It is possible to analyze the historicist approach to divorce in various ways; however, I limit the discussion to *zihar*, for it alone is sufficient to demonstrate the gist of the historicist reasoning. *Zihar* is a pre-Islamic form of separation, whereby the woman is deprived of sexual intimacy, yet she remains a wife. This happened when a man likened his wife to the back of his mother (Nasir 1990; Alekhya 2019). Verse 58/3 rules on *zihar*:

> "Those of you who say such a thing to their wives, then go back on what they have said, must free a slave before the couple may touch one another again—-this is what you are commanded to do, and God is fully aware of what you do—-but anyone who does not have the means should fast continuously for two months before they touch each other, and anyone unable to do this should feed sixty needy people."

The practice is still part of Islamic law in various countries. The 168th article of Qatar family law provides that "*zihar* occurs when a husband compares his wife and/or her body parts to that of another woman forbidden to him to marry."[5] Though not recognized by state law, it is still part of Sunni law in Turkey, too, as *İlmihal*—the two-volume catechist book by the Directorate of Religious Affairs prepared for households, mosques, and schools that shapes the popular understanding of Sunni Islam—informs people of extrajudicial forms of divorce, including *zihar* and *talaq* (Karaman et al. 1998). As such cases display, Sunni law is adamant about continuing the extrajudicial forms of divorce. Thus, even in countries where the law does not recognize it, relevant rules on *zihar* are practiced by the customary methods.

The historicists contend that the *zihar* verses are meaningful only in their historical contexts. Accordingly, the Arabs had many forms of divorce before Islam, and *zihar* was the worst of them. Finding itself with the acute problems that stem from *zihar,* Islam was in a position to respond by introducing various rules to protect women. Özsoy (2017, p. 18) explains the regulations on *zihar* in the Quran as responses to severe problems that women faced in the Meccan society, where *zihar* was practiced excessively. Thus, the historical context of the verse was the urgent need to respond to problems that had their origins in *zihar* by introducing heavy penances, such as the freeing of a slave, or fasting for two consecutive months. Thus, the authentic connotation of the *zihar* verses was not to do with introduction or justification. It had to do with the laying out of strict rules to protect women from its negative consequences. This being the case, Öztürk (2017c) opines that the Quran abolished *zihar* as a legal form of divorce. Thus, today, a man who wants to divorce his wife should appeal only to the legal forms of the divorce procedure.

To justify their thesis, historicists remind us of the beginning of the Quran's passage, 58/1, on *zihar*: "God has heard the words of the woman who disputed with you about her husband." This refers to a woman who approaches Muhammad to complain about her husband for his practice of *zihar* (Öztürk 2017c, p. 51.) From the historicist view, the first Muslims understood those verses—i.e., in their authentic meaning—as new Islamic rules to end the previous practices, where husbands had near-absolute rights and practiced them at the expense of their wives. Reading those verses literally today, without reference to their historical context, however, misleads Muslims into thinking that the Quran recognizes *zihar* as a universal divorce model. For the historicists, therefore, the *zihar* case is a typical example that demonstrates how the formalization (i.e., writing) of a speech act is problematic and insufficient. The written form of the *zihar* verses in the Quran have no capacity to transmit the nontextual elements of the revelation. This gives way to the serious problem of approaching those verses as if they were universal rules. If we visualize the historicist approach to *zihar* according to Searle's framework (discussed above), we get the illustration in Table 1.

Table 1. The literal and the historicist readings of the *zihar* verses.

Literal meaning *(X)*	Quran justifies *zihar* as a form of divorce
Authentic meaning *(C)*	Quran attempted to stop *zihar*

The problem of Sunnism, according to the historicists, is that it treats the *zihar* verses as if they had introduced universal rules. Thus, as noted above with reference to various states, in Qatar and Turkey, *zihar* is today recognized by their Muslim societies as a universal Islamic regulation. For the historicists, such cases illustrate how a verse that was revealed to fight *zihar* became, ironically, a verse to justify it. The root of this problematic situation, according to the historicists, is the reading of these verses, revealed in the responses to various problems in the 7th century, as if they were abstract universal principles. As a consequence, the practice of *zihar* as a universal model in other cases, for example, in Turkey, where the social setting is completely different, is wrong to the historicists (Özsoy 2017).

The historicist approach to extrajudicial forms of divorce, such as *talaq*, is the same. Understanding them as historical practices, historicists justify their annulment, or propose

their displacement, by completely new forms, in terms of the needs of the various social contexts and their times. Thus, for the historicists, if the society has the relevant setting, such as the Western legal regime of divorce, then that might be the model for achieving the Islamic purpose. Öztürk (2018d) reminds us that the historicist principle is to consider the models in the Quran as the best historical practices derived from Arab customs. They are not universal regulations, but responses to local problems. Sharing that view, Güler (1997, p. 318) adds that the reason for the authority given to men in the Islamic divorce mode had to do with the social and economic dynamics that prevailed in early Muslim society. That is, the revelation searched for solutions within the realities of the contemporary society. Güler (1997) notes that egalitarian models would have had no effect in that society, where women had almost no economic independence. On that reasoning, the historicists justify new divorce rules that reflect the contemporary needs of women, so long as those rules pursue the authentic meanings of the verses.

5. Conclusions

The findings of this article suggest that Quranic hermeneutics, as applied by the Turkish historicists, yields the critical result of imagining shari'a as a historical and local interpretation of Islam (Güler 2018d; Özsoy 2004). The Turkish historicists see the content of shari'a as collected mostly from 7th-century Arab laws and rituals, not as a universal form. They explain the formation of Islamic shari'a from Arab culture as an example of natural law, where a legal system picks up from the various practices known to people. Thus, all Quranic legal regulations have a pre-Islamic origin. Therefore, Islamic methods, such as the chopping off of hands, or the condoning of polygamy, are not authentic, since they were collected from pre-Islamic Arab culture (Öztürk 2017a, 2017b, 2019). This is natural, as a universal religion necessarily conveys its message in the context of a culture and a society. It is illogical to imagine Muhammad as the Prophet who asked his community to practice a shari'a that is unknown to them (Güler 2016b, 2018a).

Thus, the historicists identify Islamic law, as formulated in the Quran, as a local temporary law. In other words, that law is not universally binding for all times and societies (Öztürk 2018b; Özsoy 2004). There are Quranic laws that clearly cannot be applied universally or literally (Öztürk 2018a). This is to perceive shari'a as only a collection of first samples, not as the final model. For the historicists, equating Islam and shari'a is, therefore, simply to treat the various practices of the Arab historical milieu as if they are universal norms (Güler 2018c; Öztürk 2014). Shari'a was an ideal law only for the Muslims who lived in the 7th century (Güler 2017a). In so doing, the Turkish historicists lead to a radical conclusion about shari'a, that is, to accept the right of succeeding generations to change shari'a rules according to their realities. If the existing shari'a rules are not achieving the high principles of Islam, such as justice, they can be changed.

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[1] Ömer Özsoy (born in 1963) received his doctorate from Ankara University, the Faculty of Theology, in 1991. Özsoy is now a professor of theology at Goethe University in Germany. Mustafa Öztürk (born in 1965) received his doctorate from Samsun Ondokuz Mayıs University, the Faculty of Theology. He is now a visiting scholar at Munster Wilhelm University in Germany. İlhami Güler (born in 1959) received his doctorate from Ankara University's Faculty of Theology in 1992. Güler continues his studies at the Ankara University Faculty of Theology.

[2] In the translations of Quranic verses, I use M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (2005).

[3] The verse: "On this world and the next. They ask you about [the property of] orphans . . . ", Öztürk here refers to the first short sentence.

[4] Brunei Sharia Penal Code Order 2013: http://www.agc.gov.bn/AGC%20Images/LAWS/GazettePDF/2013/EN/S069.pdf (accessed on: 5 November 2019).

[5] See: https://www.ius.uzh.ch/dam/jcr:00000000-74d3-1f02-ffff-ffff87068da3/Law2220062558.pdf (accessed on: 29 October 2019).

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Article

Rereading of the Quran in Light of Nursi's Risale-i Nur Collection: Shuhudi Exegesis

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Abstract: The concept of tafsiri şuhudi (transempirical exegesis) was coined for the first time by Said Nursi (d. 1960) and was reflected throughout his works. In his tafsiri şuhudi (pronounced shuhudi) methodology, Nursi views the Qur'an as an interpretation of the universe, that is Kitab al-Kabir (a big book). According to Nursi, such an exegesis is needed to reach the degree of iman tahkiki (investigative belief), also known as authentic faith. As part of his methodology, Nursi uses spiritual experience (kashf) and secular sciences as evidence for gaining true faith. Tafsiri şuhudi is an offshoot of ishari (inner meaning) tafsir but one that is injected with rationalism. This tafsir type also injects witnessing (şuhudi) into the dry body of scientific and modern tafsir that emerged in the Muslim world after European enlightenment. This article first examines the original hermeneutical concept of tafsir şuhudi in Nursi's works and then analyses the sound heart, an essential part of iman tahkiki, in light of Nursi's transempirical experience. The article argues that Nursi injects rationalism into the ishari tafsir methodology and infuses şuhudi experience by making it not only an epistemic but also an existential understanding of modern tafsir methodology.

Keywords: tafsir; Said Nursi; Quranic exegesis; tafsir şuhudi; modern tafsir; Qur'an

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1. Introduction

The Qur'an is the most important sacred text for Muslims. It is a guide and focuses on gaining eternal happiness without neglecting humans' worldly life. To understand the Qur'an, Muslim scholars have developed various types of tafsirs (Qur'anic exegeses). During the classical period of Qur'anic exegesis, narrative (*riwayah*) or tradition, opinion (*dirayah*), theological (*kalamic*), linguistic, juristic, *ishari* (inner meaning), and, finally, scientific tafsirs emerged. Each of these tafsirs responded to the spiritual, social, theological, and juristic needs of Muslim societies due to the expansion of Islam in different regions. Those who converted to Islam brought their theological and philosophical questions with them and sought to have them answered through their understanding of the Qur'an. During the formation period of Islamic sciences, there was a need for narrative based tafsir that depended heavily on the interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, then by prophetic traditions (hadith), or by the opinions of the companions and their successors (Çoruh 2019a).

From the tenth century onward, the influence of the Hellenistic philosophy in Muslim lands resulted in reason based and linguistic tafsirs that predominantly made rational arguments in their commentaries on the verses and different meanings of the words of Qur'anic verses. The emergence of various groups and sects caused the birth of theological tafsirs. Later, when *zuhd* (asceticism) and piety gradually declined, in response to a lack of spirituality, *ishari* tafsirs appeared. For a long time, these different perspectives lived in tafsirs side by side; sometimes they became independent genres. When Muslims faced the challenge and felt the influence of the European Enlightenment, Muslim scholars

developed a scientific or modern tafsir to mitigate the domination of this new development (Coruh 2019b).

Although Nursi's commentary can be considered a modern tafsir, it departs from typical methodology by infusing *şuhudi* (transempirical) interpretation in his exegetical works called Risale-i Nur. This type of tafsir is one of the methods of the interpretation of Qur'anic exegesis that was not mentioned as a term in any exegetical works before Nursi (Çoruh 2019a). The concept of *tafsiri şuhudi* was first coined by Nursi (Ozgel 2015). Coruh defines *tafsir şuhudi* as "clarification of comprehensive expressions of the Qur'an by visible and experiential phenomena" (Çoruh 2019a, p. 55). *Tafsiri şuhudi* can be considered a response to materialistic philosophy which argues that religions are products of humans and denies the supernatural world (Vasquez 2011).

For Nursi there are two types of Qur'anic commentaries:

> "The first is the well-known sort of commentary. Commentaries of this sort expound and elucidate the Qur'an's phraseology, words and sentences. The second sort explains, proves and elucidate with powerful arguments the Qur'an's truths related to belief. This sort has great importance. Sometimes the well-known, externalist commentaries include this sort in summary fashion. But the Risale-i Nur has made it its basis directly and is a commentary on the Qur'an's meanings." (Nursi 2010, p. 513)

Nursi identifies his works Risale-i Nur as *tafsiri ma'nawi* (spiritual tafsir). Many scholars view reasoning (*aql*) and spirituality as complementary (Nursi 2008). That is, they do not choose one type over another. This is the position of al-Ghazali (d. 1111), Imam Rabbani (d. 1624), and reinstated more recently by Nursi.

This paper argues that Nursi developed the *tafsiri şuhudi* to interpret some Quranic verses by injecting rationalism to the understanding of the Qur'an in response to attacks of materialistic philosophy in the 20th century. It is worth noting that Nursi experienced *zawqi shuhud* (the pleasurable spiritual state of witnessing) not only by soul but also with reason. He does not drown in *şuhudi istighraq* (state of ecstasy or absorption) like Ibn Arabi (d.1240) and Nursi's rationalism does not take precedence over spirituality like Ibn Sina (d.1037). Nursi is like Rumi, for whom "intellect and reason are necessary but not sufficient conditions for transformative action". However, he departs from Rumi who "sells reason and mind and buys excitement" (Yucel 2017, p. 548) to gain the level of *shuhud*. It can be said that Nursi brings *şuhudi ma'rifa* (transempirical knowledge) to a level that the lay person can comprehend.

2. The Concept of Shuhud

The concept of *shuhud/wahdat al-shuhud* has existed in Islamic literature in its tentative (or primitive form), particularly in Sufism, since the first century of Islam. Some companions of the Prophet, such as Abu Hurayra, used *shuhud* in their sayings (al-Qushayri 2007). Al-Qushayri elaborates on how *shuhud* was understood by great Sufi scholars in the first four centuries of Islam (p. 298). However, as a concept, first, *shuhud* was formulated by Ala'udawla Simnani (d.1336) (Weismann 2007). Al-Qushayri defines *shuhud* as "to be in the presence of the Absolute Truth" (al-Qushayri 2007, p. 98), namely God Himself. For Muhammad b. al-Husayn, reaching the level of witnessing "first requires knowledge (*ma'rifa*), second conformation (*tasdiq*), third sincerity (*ikhlas*) and then witnessing (*shuhud*)" (p. 194). Imam Rabbani defines *shuhud* as witnessing with the inward or inner realm (Imam Rabbani 2014) or "gaining experiential knowledge directly. It is often used synonymously with the unveiling, i.e., *kashf* or *mukashafa*" (Alam 2010, p. 62). *Shuhud* can be through reflecting, knowing, seeing, and conceiving (p. 79). According to Imam Rabbani, *shuhud* can be experienced at the spiritual state of ecstasy (Imam Rabbani 2014). *Shuhud* is the degree of "*haqqa'l-yaqin*", which means the final level of certainty by which someone can gain the truth through *kashf* (spiritual experience) (Imam Rabbani 2014, p. 50). Imam Rabbani employs *Tawhidi Şhuhudi* (Witnessing Ones of God) in response to Ibn Arabi's *Wahdat al-Wujud* (the Unity of Existence) (Faruque 2016).

Before analysing Nursi's *tafsiri şuhudi* methodology, it is essential to know the context of his writing. Nursi's commentary is not only the product of intellectualism but also suffering and devotion. Nursi witnessed the colonisation of the Muslim world, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the abolishment of the Caliphate, the closure of all religious educational institutions, Sufi orders and lodges, and the replacement of Islamic jurisprudence with European law by the leaders of the Republic of Turkey (Saritoprak 2008a, 2008b). The new republic was established on principles of Jacobin secularism and Turkish ultra-nationalism. Teaching the Qur'an and anything in Arabic script was banned. A law requiring the wearing of European hats was implemented. The people of the Rize region resisted the hat law and the region was bombed by warships (Yucel 2018). Many Christians and Jews fled or left Turkey due to a lack of freedom or an oppressive regime. The influential religious scholars and leading figures were seen as a threat to the new regime. Some of them were executed while others were imprisoned or sent into exile. Nursi was exiled to Barla, a small town where he could not travel to even a nearby village and was not allowed to have any visitors. He was under the surveillance of the intelligence service until he died. Many lawsuits were filed against him. The prosecutors asked for the death sentence, claiming that Nursi intended to bring *shari'a* law to Turkey, resulting him in being imprisoned for many years. It is indicated in his biography that he was poisoned eighteen times (Nursi 2007a). For such a tumultuous period, Nursi believed that he had no time to think of himself (Keskin 2019) and dedicated his life to writing books on faith.

3. Nursi's Methodology of Şuhudi Tafsir

Nursi's methodology of Qur'anic interpretation is not like narrative based *tafsir*, which explains verses by other verses or *hadiths* or scholarly points of view. Although to a certain extent it resembles reason based *tafsir*, Nursi includes *şuhudi* analysis in his exegetical works. His tafsir, unlike other tafsirs, focuses only on approximately 620 verses that are related to *tawhid* (unity of God), *nubuwwah* (prophethood), *hashr* (resurrection), *adalah* (justice), and *ibadah* (worship) (Ozgel 2015). Nursi employs reason, logic, and *şuhudi* experience for persuasion, with logical evidence. Instead of focusing on the literal meaning of the verses, he instead delves into the deep spiritual meaning of the verses (Ansari 2017). Nursi aims to respond to the doubts raised by materialistic philosophy about God, prophethood, resurrection, justice, and worship.

Furthermore, Nursi focuses on *tanasub* (thematic unity) between verses of the Qur'an and its words like Fakhr Din al-Razi (d.1210) did. He sometimes defines linguistic meanings of words of the Qur'an like Zimakhshari (d.1144) and extracts rulings from the verses and words similar to al-Qurtubi (d.1273) (Nursi 2007c). He comments on Surah al-Fatiha (Chapter of Opening) like al-Qushayri (d.1074), Najm al-Din Kubra (d.1221), and Ismail Haqqi Bursawi (d.1715) in his şuhudi exegetical work (Nursi 1996, 2007c).

In his works *Nur Aleminin bir Anahtari and Sozler*, Nursi employs *şuhudi* methodology for interpretating the verse (Qur'an, 17:1) related to Ascension of the Prophet by combining reason and spirituality. Unlike other tafsirs, he does not focus on the narrative detail of ascension but instead on its philosophical and inner meaning (Nursi n.d., 2005). First, Nursi discusses the ascension from reason perspective, after which he delves into his *şuhudi* experience.

In my view, one of the best examples of *tafsiri şuhudi* in his works is about the Chapter of Opening. In relation to this chapter, Nursi's experience is as follows: once, while he was praying in the congregation at Bayezid Mosque, he pondered over the use of the first person plural in the verse, "You alone do we worship and from You alone do we seek help" (Qur'an, 1:4). Nursi wanted to understand the wisdom behind the use of "we" instead of "I" in this verse. In response to this he explains how the mystery and virtues of performing the prayers in the congregation was unfolded to him and how the congregation which he was part of was separated into three circles.

The First Circle was the vast congregation of believers and those who affirm Divine Unity on the face of the earth (Nursi 2010, p. 585). Nursi observed the world of Islam

become like a huge mosque and Ka'ba was the mihrab (altar) (Nursi 2010, p. 586). All the congregations were repeating the above verse like him. Nursi continues:

> "The Second Circle: I looked and saw that I was part of a congregation consisting of all beings, all of which, performing prayers and glorification, were occupied with the benedictions and glorification particular to its group and species. Their worship consists of the activities we observe, called 'the duties of things.' Declaring: 'God is Most Great!' before this, I bowed my head in wonderment and looked at myself. Within a Third Circle, I saw an astonishing microcosm which was apparently and in quality small, but in reality, number, and duties, great. This, from the particles of my being to my external senses was a congregation in which every group was occupied with duties of worship and thanks . . . ". (Nursi 1996, pp. 461–62)

This was an experience Nursi had, an experience that helped him, and the reader of his works, understand why the Qur'an states, "You alone do we worship" instead of "You alone do I worship", making it a perfect example of being a *tafsiri şuhudi.*

It is interesting to note that Nursi employs logic in commenting on verses related to the resurrection (Qur'an, 30:50) and the afterlife (Nursi 2005) like al-Ghazali (d.1111) and Sa'ad al-Din al-Taftazani (d.1390). In explaining the miracles of the Prophet Muhammed, Nursi's work resembles narrative based tafsirs like Muhammed ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d.923). However, he comments on each narrative from spiritual, sociological, and logical perspectives.

Nursi departs from modern tafsirs despite giving a place to reason in his works. He uses secular sciences for commenting on some Quranic verses, but adds spirituality. However, he never claims that the scientific explanation is the absolute meaning of the verse. Nursi does not use reason for the sake of argument, but more for persuasion and intellectual satisfaction. In his *tafsiri şuhudi*, he astonishes the reason, heart, and soul with spiritually injected intellectual pleasure. Nursi sometimes even employs secular sciences in *tafsiri şuhudi* for persuasion of the mind and not imaginary things. To gain *şuhudi* knowledge through experience, he submits his minor will *(irada-i juziyya*) to the Absolute Will of God (*irada-i kulliyya*) (Nursi 2009). In his exegetical work, Nursi is critical of literalists. He also argues that some of the *Isra'iliyyat* narratives are from unreliable Christian and Jewish sources (Nursi 2008).

Nursi asserts openly that his works are the *şuhudi* commentary of the Qur'an (Nursi 2007b). It is important to note that Nursi uses two meanings with the concept of *shuhud*. The first is that *wahdat ash-shuhud* (the concept of the unity of vision) sees *tawhid* or Oneness of God at the degree of apparentism or witnessing in contrast to *wahdat al-wujud*, the Unity of Existence, which is a controversial point of view of Ibn Arabi. Secondly, Nursi interprets the Qur'an for witnessing the Oneness of God through everything in the universe. In the aspects of *tafsir şuhudi* that lead to acceptance of the articles of the faith, which is the realm of the world, with a belief close to consciousness (Ozgel 2015), Nursi's aim is to turn the reader from blind faith to true faith at the degree of *şuhudi*.

Although Nursi accepts the authority and the validity of tafsir traditions (Çoruh 2019a), he departs from others in *tafsiri şuhudi*. Other commentators, such as al-Qushayri and Bursawi, try to uplift the reader in *suluk* (spiritual journey) with heart and soul for experiencing and understanding the inner meaning of the verses of the Qur'an. Nursi brings *şuhudi* knowledge and experience to a level of reason that is much easier for all levels of society to understand. For Nursi, this method reduces the risk of deviation and misunderstanding. He asserts that "the Qur'an witnesses human nature "(Nursi 2010, p. 126). Nursi does not contradict the literal meaning but delves into understanding the verses' wisdom or deeper meaning by bringing the universe into the light of readers' perceptions.

Nursi is not the first one who commented on verses from a *şuhudi* perspective. However, he is the first to use this concept and establish it with the combination of mind and heart at the level of the lay person. Previous scholars' *şuhudi* interpretations address the spiritual elite and are highly difficult to comprehend by reason. Some of these interpreta-

tions are even considered a deviation from Islamic *aqida* (doctrine) by traditionalists and theologians.

For Nursi, everything in the universe is like perfect art and shows its Maker (*As-Sanii*). Everything in the universe is also an interpretation of the Qur'anic verses because the Qur'an is *Kitab al-Saghir* and the universe is *Kitab al-Kabir*. Therefore, he uses secular science as evidence of gaining true faith (*iman tahkiki*), contrary to some philosophers who use science against religion. Nursi argues that there are no conflicts between science or scientific discoveries and Islam. He states that "all sciences you study continuously speak of God and make known the Creator, each with its own particular tongue . . . " (Nursi 2010, p. 226).

In this section, the dynamics and characteristics of Nursi's understanding of *tafsiri şuhudi* will be analysed. Although there are different viewpoints, to the best of my knowledge, it is possible to summarise these features into seven parts.

The first one is a comprehensive *(mahruti)* outlook of the verses within the theological and *shari'a* principles by employing heart and mind to gain transempirical knowledge, unlike Ibn Arabi, who goes beyond Islamic doctrine to a degree of spiritual intoxication. Although Nursi does not reject Ibn Arabi's views altogether, he is cautious since Ibn Arabi's approach sometimes does not match the authentic perception of Islam.

Second, Nursi is insistent and consistent in his interpretation of the "verses by associating them with the visible events and experiments in the physical world "(Çoruh 2019a, p. 53). He interprets the Qur'anic verses with the "Book of the Universe" (*Kitab al-Kabir*). He views the signs of creation in the universe like evidence from the Qur'an. He continues, "Know, o friend, that just as the Qur'anic verses interpret each other, the parts of the Book of the Universe also interpret each other" (Nursi 2007b, p. 193). To Nursi, the signs of creation in the universe reflect the Qur'an and the Qur'an reflects the signs of the universe (Ozgel 2015). For Nursi, everything in the universe points to the Maker. He says, "The Qur'an is the pre-eternal translator of the mighty book of the universe; the post-eternal interpreter of the various tongues reciting the verses of creation..." (Nursi 2007c, p. 16). It can be said that Nursi views the Qur'an and the universe as two sides of one coin. Both explain the concept of Unity and Oneness of God, resurrection, prophethood, and justice. By examining the signs of the universe, on the one hand, he wants to refute materialistic philosophy. On the other hand, he aims to persuade believers logically to gain true faith. Thus, in his exegetical methodology, reason and spirituality go hand in hand.

Regarding *tafsir şuhudi*, there are hundreds of examples in his works. He uses many visible things in the universe. For example, Nursi says:

> Planting seeds in an arable land indicates that the land is controlled by the owner of the seeds, and that the seeds belong to the one who controls the land. All universal elements [like water, air, and soil, which imply an all-encompassing knowledge and wisdom] are at the disposal of a single Maker. Their simplicity, uniformity, and comprehensiveness, and all the things "planted" in them (i.e., fruits of Mercy, miracles of Power, and words of Wisdom), as well as their world-wide distribution for certain purposes, are evidence that the comprehensive and comprehended, as well as the "land" and the "seeds" planted in it, are controlled by God. (Nursi 2007b, p. 11)

Through such examples, it can be said that Nursi aims to prove that God's word does not contradict the works of God, as Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (d.1898) argues (Saeed 2008). Furthermore, he wants to guide the reader from the creation to the Creator through the signs in the universe at the degree of witnessing it to strengthen the faith. In addition, Nursi establishes a new methodology of Qur'anic exegesis where scientific development can be used to further understand the meaning of verses in depth at the level of witnessing.

Third, to comment on a verse from the *şuhudi* perspective, it is necessary to have a degree of spiritual life in witnessing. For Nursi there is a degree of spiritual life that can lead to *şuhudi* interpretation. He says, "abandon your animalistic and corporeal being, enter the metaphysical world of the heart and soul. There you will then find an enormous

realm of light, much superior to the materialistic world you assume to be vast . . . " (Nursi 2007d, p. 164). To reach this degree, Nursi argues that there is a need for constant struggle for purifying the carnal soul (*nafs*), gaining *marifa* (gnostic knowledge) through "beseeching Almighty God, showing deep humility before Him, offering thanks, through impotence and want, and through self-sufficiency before the people" (Nursi 2010, p. 553). *Mufassir* (exegete) is a scholar and the "one who searches for truth should be like a diver, freed of the effects of time, able to dive into the depths of the past, weigh ideas on the scales of reason, and discover the source of everything" (Nursi 2008, p. 24).

Nursi divides life into two aspects, animalistic or corporeal being and metaphysical life. He categorises metaphysical life as relating to the heart and soul. The notion of the metaphysical world is subjective and highly difficult to attain. It involves a constant struggle to gain through *ibadah* (worship) and *ubudiyyah* (servitude), a high degree of sincerity, servanthood, and witnessing alongside knowledge. He argues that those who search every truth in corporeality cannot comprehend the metaphysical life and are blind to spirituality (Nursi 2008). For *şuhudi* interpretation, it is essential to have the intellectual capacity and satisfaction and *zawq ruhani* (spiritual joy) at the degree of metaphysical life. In his works, *tafsiri şuhudi* is not just an intellectual pursuit, it is an act and a process to be gained by internalising the Qur'anic truths and reflecting them into life through faith and sincere actions. In other words, if there is not a sound faith and spiritual life, it is not possible for an individual to understand the Qur'an, even if they are highly fluent in Arabic. Therefore, according to Nursian theology, it is impossible to experience spiritual witnessing without a sound faith and regular sincere good deeds.

According to witnesses and his students, Nursi would allocate about eight hours per day, including the last third of the night, to worship, *dhikr* (remembrance of God), and *tafakkur* (contemplation) with tears of suffering (Sahiner 2018). He was not allowed to have any books and could not access any libraries. As a result, most of his works are a product of suffering as well as recitation of the Qur'an, *dua* and *dhikr* in tears, devotion and loneliness.

Fourth, *tafsiri şuhudi* can be considered an offshoot of *ishari tafsir* injected with rationalism by visible things and experiments in the physical world. It also infuses spiritual witnessing into the dry body of scientific and modern tafsir that emerged after European enlightenment in the Muslim world. Nursi discusses scientific matters similar to the scientific tafsir, but he does not neglect to add its spiritual aspect. For example, on commenting on the verse "and the mountains as masts" (Qur'an, 78:7) (Unal 2008), he states that ordinary people see the benefit of mountains and offer thanks to the Creator. Geographers view the Earth as a sailing ship and the mountains as masts that give balance. They are amazed by such a magnificent creation and glorify God. (Nursi 2005).

Fifth, Nursi's *tafsiri şuhudi* is a product of mediative thinking which correlates the heart, mind, and soul with secular sciences. *Tafsiri şuhudi* is the result of witnessing God through His arts. Islamic philosophers witness with reason while Sufis witness with heart and soul. In *tafsir şuhudi*, God is witnessed with the heart and soul from the perspective of reason. For example, Nursi says:

> Consider a fruit. It is a miniature of the whole tree, and its seed is like the page upon which the tree's life-history is inscribed. Also, it is connected with all members of its species as well as the whole Earth. Therefore, by virtue of the greatness of its art and meaning, the art of one fruit is as great as that of Earth. Thus, the One Who creates a fruit with all of its art and meaning can create and govern Earth. (Nursi 2007b, p. 48)

In *tafsiri şuhudi*, Nursi aims to prove the existence of the Creator by witnessing His creations at the degree of *haqqal yaqin* (the level of certainty) by employing reason without neglecting the heart and soul. Through *tafsiri şuhudi*, Nursi is not only addressing Muslims but also non-Muslims (Ozgel 2015). Having said that, Nursi also accepts the authority and validity of tafsir traditions (Çoruh 2019a), unlike other modernist mufassirs.

Sixth, in *tafsiri şuhudi*, he connects everything in the universe like pieces of a puzzle through Divine names. Thus, each piece is an interpreter of the connected piece. Nursi

connects humans to everything in the universe through Divine names. He argues that every living creature reflects at least twenty Divine names (Nursi 2005). A human can comprehend the names of God and their manifestation in the universe at the degree of their spiritual witnessing. Therefore, for Nursi, *tafsiri şuhudi* is the main instrument for one to know their Creator. His transempirical exegesis demonstrates that "there is a harmony between the revelation of the Qur'an and the truth in the (furthest) regions of the Earth and in our souls. In this context, it is noteworthy that Nursi highlights that there is a union between the Qur'an and the universe" (Çoruh 2019a, p. 54). Consequently, it can be said that Nursi's *şuhudi* exegesis has brought a new breath and dynamism to the stagnated structure of linguistic or narration-based commentaries in the contemporary period. Nursi says,

> "the Qur'an explains all such essential and important matters in a way befitting an All-Powerful One of Majesty, Who administers the universe like a palace, opens and closes the world and the Hereafter like two rooms, controls Earth like a garden and the heavens like a lamp-adorned dome, and in Whose sight the past and future are like day and night or two pages, and eternity like a point of present time". (Nursi 2005, p. 416)

Finally, one of the remarkable expressions in Nursi's works is the use of parables and allegories as a methodological principle of *tafsiri şuhudi*. He says, "I use metaphors and parables to ease comprehension and show how rational, proper, consistent, and coherent are the truths of Islam. The inner meanings are contained in the truths concluding them. Each story is like an allusion pointing to these truths. So, in this sense, they are not fictions but, rather, undoubted truths" (Nursi 2005, p. 67). However, he does not argue that his *şuhudi* interpretation is the absolute meaning of the verse that only God knows. Nursi believes each verse has a *kulli mana* (the absolute meaning that only God knows). He views his comment as a *juz'i mana* (a part of *kulli mana*) like capillaries of roots of a tree. It is not a full tree but part of a tree. Each scholar or *mufassir* explains a *juz* as part of the absolute meaning of the verse, not the whole meaning (Nursi 2010). On commenting on verse 31:27, he explains that the meaning (*kulli mana*) of God's words is inexhaustible.

In his *şuhudi* methodology, Nursi uses metaphors and parables to improve the comprehension of the verses. But some of his comments are still quite difficult to understand without having a background in Islamic knowledge. He also uses an eloquent Ottoman Turkish in his works, which is not easy to understand by the lay person and is difficult to translate into other languages. Although he addresses the heart, mind, and soul in his works, sometimes *zavki ruhani* or spiritual joys take over the reasoning. He departs from narrative based tafsirs in regard to *Israiliyyat*, which is a controversial issue among the Qur'anic exegetes (Albayrak 2000). He is critical of those who interpret the Qur'an according to *Israiliyyat* sources (Nursi 2008). Nursi views all tafsir books as a jewellery shop with pearls, gold, and silver but also believes there is wood, trash, and other worthless things amongst them (2008).

Nursi's tafsirs and the methodology can be considered an abstract of all types of tafsirs. He considers traditional tafsir methodology principles and does not depart from them totally. However, he does not repeat what other mufassirs wrote. As a bee collects pollen from different flowers and makes honey, Nursi benefited from all types of tafsirs, digested them, and then presented them into the *tafsiri şuhudi* according to the needs of the time. Although Nursi uses the term *shuhud*, which may not be objective rationality, he succeeds in rationalising it. Nursi's comments on verses appear philosophical compared with the traditional tafsirs. However, it should be considered *şuhudi* commentary due to its spiritual nature and philosophical construction (Çoruh 2019a). His tafsir constitutes the axis of the tafsir method he applies, which prioritises the meaning of the Qur'an rather than its wording. He described his tafsir as a spiritual tafsir, when referring to the exegetical methodology that he adopts (Ozgel 2015).

Nursi's commentary is more spiritual and rational-centric than literal. He summarises narratives, soul reason based, theological, and *ishari* tafsirs and presents them in his *şuhudi*

way. Coruh argues that in his *tafsiri şuhudi*, Nursi "interprets the verse by visible events and experimental of the psychical world" (Çoruh 2019a, p. 54). By employing this methodology, Nursi wants to address various contemporary theological issues and speak to all humankind (Çoruh 2019a). He aims to demonstrate that the universe interprets the Qur'an or vice versa. Nursi argues that since the Qur'an is "*Hutbe-i Ezeliyye*" (the everlasting speech) and the universe is a manifestation of God's power, there must be harmony between the two rather than conflict. Therefore, *tafsiri şuhudi* is the interpretation of the Qur'an, the manifestation of God's attribute of kalam by cosmic signs that surrounded all people in the universe" (Çoruh 2019a, p. 55).

Even though Nursi aims to address the lay person, the Ottoman Turkish language he uses is difficult to understand. The eloquence of his writings and long paragraphs make it difficult for the reader to comprehend. In addition, due to scientific developments in the last 80 years, some of his scientific discussions in the first half of the 20th century are outdated, but this is out of the scope of this article. For example, based on the scientific discoveries of his time, Nursi indicates that the temperature at the crust of the Earth is 200,000 centigrade degrees (Nursi 1996). According to the latest scientific data, the Earth's core is 5200 centigrade degrees.

4. Nursi's Şuhudi Interpretation of the Qalb Salim (Sound Heart)

The word heart is mentioned 132 times in the Qur'an (Abd al-Baqi 1945) and has been widely discussed in the Quranic exegesis, particularly in *ishari tafsirs*. The Qur'an places the sound heart before offspring and wealth in the life hereafter to show its importance (Qur'an, 26:87–88). Nursi's interpretation of *qalb salim* is broader than other exegetical works. In this section, firstly, Nursi's *şuhudi* methodology of interpreting the verses related to sound heart will be examined. Then, his *şuhudi* interpretations of the heart in his works will be analysed.

Nursi maintains a balance between heart and mind in understanding the sound heart. He connects human beings to the universe through the sound heart in explaining the Divine names. The heart has two aspects. The first looks to the spiritual world and the second to the material world. For Nursi, the first one is connected to most creatures in the universe (Nursi 2010). To Nursi, "The heart is like a seed or the nucleus [of a person], and the brightest mirror of the Maker of creation" (Nursi 2007b, p. 102). That is, a heart is contained in an immaterial body formed of mysteries or the seed of an immaterial tree (Nursi 2007b). God "encoded a fig tree's future life in its tiny seed, and made the human heart a small-scale copy of thousands of worlds as well as a window opening onto them" (Nursi 2007a, p. 5).

Like many great scholars, Nursi also focuses on the understanding of the heart. He uses thirty-three types of expressions of the heart in his works, which is more than most well-known exegetical works. For example, al-Ghazali (d.1111) mentions nineteen types of the heart in his Magnum Opus Ihya-i Ulum al-Din (al-Ghazali 1993). Al-Qushayri indicates twenty types of the heart in his commentary of the Qur'an, Lataif al-Isharat (Al-Qushayri n.d.) and ar-Risalat al-Qushayriyya (al-Qushayri 2007). Imam Rabbani mentions twenty-seven different types of expression for the heart (Imam Rabbani 2014). Nursi's use of different types of expressions for the heart more than the polymath scholars mentioned above highlights a remarkable difference of Nursi's *şuhudi* commentary. Nursi uses the following types of expressions in the context of commenting on the heart: sound and illumined heart, corrupted heart, soft heart, mirrorlike heart, private heart, collective hearts, weak hearts, pure-heart, unerring heart, troubled heart, wretched heart, outer heart, the most impotent heart, truth seeking heart, inner heart, blackened heart, skies of the heart, sealed heart, wounded heart, universal heart, common heart, wakeful heart, sincere heart, sick heart, eternity worshipping heart, easy heart, blessed heart, immaterial heart, weeping heart, and witnessing heart (Nursi 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2010).

According to the Risale-i Nur, the sound heart is illuminated with Divine revelation. The soundness of the heart is reflected in social and spiritual life as sound reasoning and

thinking, sound soul, sound emotion, sound idea, and fortress the sound nature. Therefore, a sound heart dominates a believer's perception, consciousness, reasoning, ethics, actions, and disposition (*hal*). This means that the limbs of a corporal body with a sound heart will act in righteousness, resembling the companion of the Prophet Muhammed. A sound heart with sincere good actions can lead to human perfection. A sound heart reflects its attributes in actions at the degree of Ihsan (excellence). At this degree, the sound heart is the window of the soul. The sound heart weeps with the eyes, travels with feet in the spiritual journey (Nursi 2005), hears with ears (Nursi 2010), and rules the desires of the carnal soul. Not only does the sound heart have a boundless capacity to love, but it can also contain the whole universe (Nursi 2009). Nursi relates the sound heart to sound reasoning (Nursi 2008). Such an illuminated heart is like a compass for guidance. He follows a spiritual path to detach the heart from anything that is an obstacle to gaining a sound heart. Nursi says, "the world is transitory, it is not worthy of the heart" (Nursi 2010, p. 104). The sound heart is in motion like everything in the universe and connected to everything from atoms to galaxies.

As the physical heart needs blood for life, the sound heart needs the light of revelation, reflection, and remembrance for satisfaction. Like al-Ghazali, Nursi correlates five external senses with the heart in regard to spiritual life. He argues that committing sins with any of the five external senses ruins the most subtle and inner faculties, including the heart (Nursi 2007b).

He uses comprehensive expressions and visible and experiential phenomena in regard to understanding the heart. When his works are examined, the place of the heart is more important than wealth and offspring. As mentioned above, he categorises human life into two levels, animalistic and corporal being, and the metaphysical, which is the world of the heart and soul. When the first one is abandoned, humankind will find an enormous realm of light, much superior to the materialistic world that is assumed to be vast.

In regard to spiritual aspects of the heart, including *qalbi salim*, Nursi was influenced by al-Ghazali in regard to connecting five external senses to the heart (al-Ghazali 2010). Seeing the heart as the place of knowledge and wisdom, he aligns with al-Qushayri (Al-Qushayri n.d.). For witnessing the heart, he was influenced by Imam Rabbani (Imam Rabbani 2014). However, he departed from these scholars by using more visible and physical things in light of reasoning. He also uses parables and contemporary science to elaborate spiritual aspects of the heart.

For the nourishment of the sound heart, Nursi asserts that reading the Qur'an will provide a sweet taste and satisfaction (Nursi 2007b). For Nursi, sincere actions, worship, contemplation, *dua* (supplication), *dhikr* (remembrance), and *istighfar* (asking forgiveness) are necessary for a sound heart. It can be said that a sound heart is in a state of contentment and peace.

Nursi's *şuhudi* interpretation of the heart is reflected in his life. Despite all oppressions, the tyranny of aggressive secularists, ultra nationalist, and some state assigned religious leaders' accusations, he never revolted and never asked his students or followers to revolt, but instead urged them to keep peace and security in the country (Sahiner 2018).

5. Conclusions

Scholars are called "*ibn Zaman*", the product of their times. Said Nursi witnessed the suffering of the Muslim world for different reasons. His works should be considered in such a context. Although his work Risale-i Nur is not a full tafsir, he responded to doubts created by materialistic philosophy about the existence of God, resurrection, prophethood, and justice. He developed a new methodology of tafsir, which he called "*tafsiri şuhudi*". This type of tafsir was coined for the first time by Nursi. He employed heart and mind with visible events and experiments in the physical world to gain transempirical knowledge. Although he validated traditional types of tafsirs and their methodologies, he added witnessing experience to the existing exegetical works with an infusion of rationalism. In addition, he used metaphors and parables to improve the comprehension of the verses. *Tafsiri şuhudi* is the result of witnessing God through His arts, beautiful names, and at-

tributes that leads to the knowledge of God with *aql*, *qalb*, and soul. It can be said that the *tafsiri şuhudi* is an abstract of different types of tafsirs; the reader can find traditional and modern tafsirs in it.

This paper explained seven principles of *tafsiri şuhudi*. These principles are within the boundaries of Islamic *aqidah* and law. The aim is that through *tafsiri şuhudi*, the reader can reach *tawhidi haqiqi*, true faith, at the degree of certainty by witnessing the arts of God and understanding the wisdom behind them in a rational way. *Şuhudi* commentary can be experienced by abandoning the animalistic life and reaching the degree of the metaphysical life. Furthermore, this article shed light on *tafsiri şuhudi*. It also elaborated on Nursi's understanding of the sound heart. The topic of *tafsiri şuhudi* is scattered in Nursi's exegetical works and needs further research.

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Fādil Al-Samarra'ī's Contribution to Literary and Rhetorical Exegesis of the Qur'an

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Abstract: This article explores and assesses Fādil al-Samarrā'ī's contribution to literary and rhetorical Qur'anic exegesis, especially regarding the rhetorical inimitability of the Qur'an. The article looks at how al-Samarrā'ī approaches the Qur'anic text to reveal its miraculous expressional secrets and its rhetorical inimitability with mere Arabic linguistic tools while giving contexts high priority in his analyses and interpretations. Al-Samarrā'ī was able to reach the semantics and purposes of the Qur'an based on the Qur'anic language itself, relying on its sentence structure and order, as well as on the structures, significance, and special meanings of words (which distinguish them from their synonyms), and how all of it relates to the purposes and objectives of the Qur'an. Al-Samarrā'ī sought to use morphology, semantics, and syntax to reach the purposes of the Holy Qur'an and discover its miraculous and inimitable eloquence. To achieve this, al-Samarrā'ī relied on the rich and vast literature on the subject. Guided by the intellectual language and empirical questions of his time, his tremendous effort and contribution to the literature has helped to demystify this complex subject.

Keywords: rhetorical exegesis of the Qur'an; literary interpretation of the Qur'an; Qur'anic eloquence; Qur'anic inimitability

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1. Introduction

1.1. Fādil Al-Samarrā'ī

Abū Muhammad Fādil bin Saleh bin Mahdi bin Khalil Al-Badri was part of the "Al-Badri" clan, one of the Samarrā clans. He was born in Samarrā in 1933 AD to a middle-class family with high social and religious status. At an early age, his father began taking him to Hassan Pasha Mosque to study the Holy Qur'an, which revealed his considerable intelligence.

Al-Samarrā'ī completed his primary, intermediate, and secondary education in Samarrā, then moved to Baghdad, where he studied to become a teacher. He excelled in all his courses and graduated in 1953. He was hired as a teacher in the city of Balad in 1953 AD, after which he continued and completed his studies at the Higher Teachers' House in the Arabic Language Department (at College of Education) in 1957 AD and graduated from it in 1960 AD. Al-Samarrā'ī obtained a (Bachelor's) degree, with distinction, and returned to teaching in a secondary school. He enrolled in a postgraduate scheme that was established for the first time in Iraq to offer master's degrees in the department of linguistics. He was the first to obtain a master's degree in the College of Arts. In the same year, he was appointed as a teaching assistant in the Department of Arabic Language at the College of Education at the University of Baghdad. He received his PhD in 1968 from Ain Shams University in the College of Arts in the Department of Arabic Language. (The summarized and translated extract is from what is published about Al-Samarrā'ī in the following Web address: https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B6%D9%84_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A, accessed on 8 January 2022).

1.2. Research Context

Fādil al-Samarrā'ī's work in the literary and rhetorical interpretation of the Qur'an is an extension of Muhammad Abdu's exploration of Qur'anic eloquence within the parameters of his procedural approaches to the Qur'an, namely his revivalist thoughts, intellectual activism, and renewal efforts in interpreting the Qur'an. This rhetorical endeavor has its roots in the works of scholars such as al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 225 AH), Ibn Qutybah (d. 276 AH), Abū al-Ḥasan al-Rummānī (d. 386 AH), Abū Sulymān Ḥamad bin Muḥammad al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 388 AH) and al-Qadī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 315 AH), Abū Bakr al-Bāqilanī (d. 403 AH), Imam Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471 AH), Abū al-Qāsim Jārullah al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538 AH), al-Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH) and Abū al-Iṣbu' al-Maṣrī (d. 654 AH), al-Imām Yaḥyā bin Ḥamzah al-'Alawī (d. 749 AH), al-Imām al-Biqā'ī (d. 885 AH), and al-Imām as-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH) (al-Bayumī 1971).

These rhetorical and literary studies of the Qur'an continued throughout history, according to the epistemological questions and intellectual challenges of each era. In the 19th century AD, 12th century AH, with the dawn of the intellectual revival movement, attention to the literary and rhetorical aspects of Qur'anic interpretation saw a remarkable renewal thanks to the works of Imam Muhammad Abdu and his student (a promotor and implementer of his exegetical and reformist thoughts), Sheikh Rashīd Riḍa. Other aspects of the regenerative and exegetical intellectual renewal were dominated by religious guidance and social reform. These efforts resulted in the emergence of a two-pronged literary and rhetorical interpretive school, represented by the al-Manār School and the al-'Umanā' School.

In the modern period, the following prominent scholars in the Arab world contributed immensely to the existing rhetorical and literary studies of the Qur'an, demonstrating excellence and originality in their works:

1. Mustapha Ṣādiq al-Rāfi'ī (1880–1937 AD) in his book *I'jāz al-al-Qur'ān wa al-Balāghah al-Nabawīyyah*.
2. Al-Shaykh Amīn al-Khūlī (1896–1966) in his book *Manāhij Tajdīd fi al-Naḥw wa al-Balāghah wa al-Tafsīr wa al-Adab*.
3. Sayyid Quṭb (1909–1966) in his books *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qur'ān*, *Mashāhid al-Qiyāmah fī al-Qur'ān*, and his prominent *Tafsīr Fi Dhilāl al-Qur'ān*.
4. 'Ā'ishah 'Abd al-Raḥman (Bint al-Shāṭi') (1913–1998) in her book *al- al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī lil al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*.
5. Fādil Ṣaliḥ al-Samarrā'ī (1933-) in his numerous books that I explore in this article.

It is worth mentioning that al-Samarrā'ī comes as the third most prominent modern scholar in the field of rhetorical exegesis in the Arab world after Amīn al-Khūlī and 'Ā'ishah 'Abd al-Raḥman (Bint al-Shāṭi'). His literary analysis is comparable to that of Sayyid Quṭb in some of artistic concepts and terminologies they both explored. A comparative study of Sayyid Quṭb and Fādil Ṣaliḥ al-Samarrā'ī in their exploration of artistic aspects of the Qur'anic expressions in its stylistic compositions will be interesting but will need a full-fledged article; thus, that cannot not be accommodated in the scope of this article. I hope to undertake that task in future by God willing.

We can include Fādil al-Samarrā'ī within the methodological structure of the al-'Umana' School, which is led by its founder al-Shaykh Amīn al-Khūlī, who established its foundations and methodology, and his wife 'Ā'ishah 'Abd al-Raḥman (Bint al-Shāṭi'), who applies his method of rhetorical interpretation and promotes his innovative thoughts in this field (Abd al-Raḥman n.d., pp. 7–9), and Dr. Shukrī 'Ayyād, among others. However, Fādil al-Samarrā'ī held different views on some of the intellectual and scientific principles that they embraced, such as their rejection of scientific miracles of the Qur'an, among others (al-Ghuryb 2018, see: pp. 99–190 and pp. 335–81). For a brief exploration of Shaykh Amīn al-Khūlī's methodology, and his wife 'Ā'ishah 'Abd al-Raḥman (Bint al-Shāṭi'), who summarized and applied his method of rhetorical interpretation, see: (Wald al-Nabiyyah 2020, pp. 23–26).

2. Fādil al-Samarrā'ī's Appreciation of the Qur'an's Literary and Rhetorical Inimitability

Fādil al-Samarrā'ī wholeheartedly engaged himself in studying the Qur'an to discover its stylistic and rhetorical inimitabilities. He did so after not being fully convinced of what he read and heard about the miraculous nature of the eloquence of the Qur'an, being the highest level of speech that can neither be matched nor be competed against by humans and invisible beings even if they combine their efforts to do as the Qur'an challenges (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a). He saw this concept of miraculousness and inimitability as an exaggerated claim because of religious enthusiasm and doctrinal intolerance.

He also considered claims about the manifestations of the transcendency and miraculous aspects of the Qur'anic expressions in its stylistic compositions to be unscientific and unusual. He thought that if the expressions claimed to be inimitable were otherwise, those who claim the Qur'an to be inimitable and miraculous would have found similar and justified explanations for describing the Qur'an as such a miracle. Nonetheless, after learning from books on the Arabic language, Qur'anic exegesis, Qur'anic inimitability, Arabic rhetoric, etc.—by virtue of his competence in linguistics—he began to agree with claims about the miraculous eloquence of the Qur'an and its inimitability, as he found that much of what had been written on the subject was characterized by a high scientific spirit; however, he still found much of it unconvincing. He therefore decided to read the Qur'anic text to see for himself whether claims about the credibility of this imitability of the Qur'an were true. He conducted comparative analyses between many Qur'anic verses in terms of similarities and differences in foregrounding (*al-Taqdīm*), backgrounding (*al-Ta'khīr*), mentioning (*al-Dhikr*), and omission (*al-Ḥathf*), as well as other syntactic and rhetorical features. He was impressed by the Qur'an's specific and very effective way of using language in its expressions and the level of the accuracy of those expressions in portraying Qur'anic concepts, objectives, and purposes with perfection in art and superiority in workmanship. He found a deliberate artistic expression according to each word that was well calculated, but also for each letter in the word. He was impressed by the accuracy of the expressions in terms of forms and contents, perfection in art and the height of workmanship, where he found a deliberate artistic expression according to each word that was well calculated and even for each letter in the word. This changed his opinion on the inimitability of the Qur'an, as the more carefully he considered, scrutinized, and compared, the more certain, understanding, and convinced he became, recognizing that the Qur'anic text could not be the words of human beings. Al-Samarrā'ī then asserted that humans and Jinn would not be able to produce something like the Qur'an or come close to, even if they came together with combined efforts (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, p. 5), which is an attestation of the verse 88 of Surah al-Isrā' 17 (Q: 17:88). Therefore, although he initially denied it, al-Samarrā'ī strongly acknowledged the Qur'an's inimitability.

Al-Samarrā'ī's belief in the Qur'an's miraculous nature and inimitability stems from experimental studies and research based on deconstruction and reconstruction, analysis, declaration, and explanation of the Qur'anic compositional structure order system or "Qur'anic expressions" as al-Samarrā'ī calls it. al-Samarrā'ī (2010a) conducted this research at the following levels:

(a) The word level of an expression, which is represented in the study of the eloquence of the Qur'anic word or the Qur'anic vocabulary and its perfect choice.
(b) The structure of the word, be it a verb or a noun. The mentioning or deleting of some of the word's radical letters in its original form or derived form. The role of all that in achieving the expressional purposes and objectives of the Qur'an in that context of the usage.
(c) The sentence structure and composition as represented in al-Samarrā'ī's study of a Qur'anic sentence and its role in different contexts of the surah in achieving its purposes, and in other contexts in other surahs in achieving the overall purposes of the Qur'an.

(d) The compositional construction (al-Naẓm), which reveals the secrets behind the Qur'anic expression, its rhetorical peculiarities as represented by similarities and differences in expressions, and the role of all that in achieving the purposes of the Qur'an.

(e) In his search for the secrets of the rhetorical features of the Qur'anic word, al-Samarrā'ī addressed the eloquence of the word in Qur'anic expressions in his book titled: *Balāgah al-Kalimah fī al-Ta'bīr al-Qur'ānī, The Eloquence of the Word in Qur'anic Phraseology* (2009). He studied the Qur'anic vocabulary and found that the significations of the Qur'anic word are multifaceted, and its subject matters are broad and complex. Many of these significations of the Qur'anic word had been addressed by researchers before him, but a lot of them remained untouched. He was fascinated and inspired by this untouched section of the Qur'anic word and chose to explore, for example, omissions of letters in the form of a word, such as (اسطاعوا) where the (التاء) is omitted, or stating or retaining that letter in the same word (استطاعوا), where the (التاء) is stated elsewhere in the Qur'anic vocabulary, and the conditions of mentioning the original letter or substituting that with another in the Qur'anic vocabulary, which, in al-Samarrā'ī's view, are relevant to the eloquence of the word and its response to the contextual requirement, as:

> "there is no doubt that each vocabulary has been deliberately formed and artistically placed to coherently conform with the situation by taking its appropriate place. Hence, the deletion in the vocabulary is intentional, that the mention is also intentional. Likewise, the replacement or substitution of a letter in the vocabulary is intentional and that using the original form is also intended, and every change in the vocabulary or recognition of the original form is intended for its purpose . . . ". (al-Samarrā'ī 2009, p. 6)

Al-Samarrā'ī was also driven to research Qur'anic vocabularies because he was not convinced by some of their explanations for the reasons behind the differences between different usages of a vocabulary. Many of their explanations seemed to him superficial. This prompted him to reconsider and reexamine them; however, he did not claim to have provided better explanations than those of his predecessors. He only discusses what he discovered in the Qur'anic vocabulary. Another pressing motive for his engagement in this kind of Qur'anic research was the lack of a dedicated comprehensive literature that discusses the vocabularies of the Qur'an with their different uses explained in detail. Al-Samarrā'ī acknowledges that there are indications as to why a word is chosen in a particular place in the Qur'an and not in other similar contexts places in some of the tafsir and mutashābih books, for example. There are also books in the vocabulary of the Qur'an that may discuss the difference between one word and another, which is like what is written in lexical differences. However, he did not find a book that examines the vocabularies in the Qur'an, categorizes that on thematic basis, explores similarities and studies those similarities. In writing his book, he endeavored to make a modest foray into the subject so that others could build upon his work (al-Samarrā'ī 2009, p. 7).

Al-Samarrā'ī also discusses topics related to the vocabulary in the Qur'an that he did not study in this book, which considers its subjects. He discusses, elsewhere, topics related to the Qur'anic vocabularies such as doubling one of the radicals by way of assimilation (al-Idgām) or opening the doubled radical (al-Fakk) and their semantic and rhetorical connotations. These kinds of morphological aspects of words or vocabularies, be they nouns, verbs, or the forms and meanings of verbal nouns or infinitives, have certain rhetorical meanings and connotations that are required by the different contexts in which they appear in the Qur'anic expressions.

These books include *al-Ta'bīr al-Qur'ānī, The Qur'anic Phraseology*, *Al-Jumlah al-'Arabīyah wal-Ma'nā* (*The Arabic Sentence and the Meaning*) and *Meanings of lexical forms in Arabic*. Al-Samarrā'ī acknowledges that there remain many topics related to the uniqueness of the words or vocabularies in the Qur'an that he did not study or discuss. In *The Qur'anic Phraseology*, al-Samarrā'ī writes:

"There is no dispute among scholars that the Qur'anic expression is unique in its exaltedness and eminence and that it is the highest and subtlest speech. The Qur'an dazzled the Arabs, and they were not able to approach it and come up with the like of it, even though the Qur'an challenged them more than once". He continues: "Qur'anic expression is a deliberate artistic expression, every word or even every letter in the Qur'an is formed with a deliberate artistic objective, and neither the verse alone in that place nor the surah alone was considered in that place, but the entire Qur'anic expression was considered in that place" (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, pp. 7, 9). Al-Samarrā'ī then provides examples of the uniqueness of Qur'anic expressions that the ancient scholars observed, including that it is the surahs that began with the single letters and repeated these letters in their words and compositions more than other letters. He discusses this and other fascinating discoveries and secrets they reached after conducting a statistical survey of the manifestations of these letters in the surah in question. Al-Samarrā'ī also presents the wondrous secrets of Qur'anic expression that were discovered after statistical studies that proved that Qur'anic words were not placed in vain or without calculation, but rather in precise positions with accurate calculation. As examples of some of the findings based on some of these statistics, he cites Abd al-Razzāq Nawfal in his book *al-I'jāz al-'adadī* (*The Numerical Inimitability of the Qur'an*); he refers to the repetition of the words "dunyā" (this life) and al-Ākhirah (the hereafter) in the Qur'an, both of which are repeated 115 times. Moreover, Al-Malā'ikah (the angels) and al-Shayāṭīn (the demons) are both repeated 88 times. These and other examples indicate that such precise usage and deliberate calculations of words was only the measuring of the Mighty, the Wise (See: al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, pp. 12–13). For a critical assessment of al-Samarrā'ī's elucidations of the Qur'anic vocabularies related to different Qur'anic recitations, see: (al-Lahwu 2020).

In his treatment and discussion of the manifestations of the miraculous inimitability of Qur'anic expressions, which was discovered by ancient 'ulamā', al-Samarrā'ī did not hide his fascination and belief based on experienced and self-sense of the inimitability of the Qur'anic expression and that the Qur'an in all these miraculous manifestations enacted the norms and the patterns of the Arabs in expression (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, p. 12). Al-Samarrā'ī reverberated this by talking about the specifics of the Qur'an in the use of words in what ancient scholars such as al-Jāḥiẓ and others discussed, where the Qur'an distinguishes many Arabic words with its own special usages, which indicates a clear intent in expression. He cites some examples of this, such as the use of the word al-Riyāḥ (the winds) in the plural form in the context of goodness and mercy, and al-Rīḥ (the wind) in singular form in the context of evil and punishment (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, pp. 12–13). After providing a few examples, al-Samarrā'ī concludes that "the peculiarities of Qur'anic use of words are many that we do not want to explore now, but we wanted to give examples of this to show (intent, purpose) and accuracy in the choice of the words of the Qur'an. With this mathematical statistical use of words, the Qur'anic expression is at the top of literary and artistic expressions. If you look at any form of expression in it (the Quran), you find it an integrated organic unit without being far off nor having disparity" (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, p. 10). Al-Samarrā'ī provides additional brief examples of the special characteristics of Qur'anic expression, stating that the style of emphasis (Asālīb al-Tawkīd) in the Qur'anic expression has integrated artistic unity consistent with the special contexts in which it was contained and coordinated with all other places in which the emphasis was mentioned. After citing some examples of the specificity of emphasis in Qur'anic expression, he concludes that the emphasis in the Qur'an is "a harmonious high artistic painting despite the capacity of the emphasis, the different types of emphasizing methods and the diversity of its tools" (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, p. 16). He describes the interrogative style (al-Istifhām), foregrounding (al-Taqdīm), and backgrounding (al-Ta'khīr) styles in Qur'anic expressions, how the Qur'an has all put in a very wonderful and beautiful artistic situation, and how the Qur'an "combines different types of words and composes them in an amazing concentration that does not leave anyone with expertise in philology and rhetoric without prostrating in reverence, exalting and glorifying the author of this speech".

Confirming his acknowledgement of the inimitability of the Qur'an, al-Samarrā'ī cites the Qur'anic verse that says "Allah hath (now) revealed the fairest of statements, a Scripture consistent, (wherein promises of reward are) paired (with threats of punishment), whereat doth creep the flesh of those who fear their Lord, so that their flesh and their hearts soften to Allah's reminder. Such is Allah's guidance, wherewith He guideth whom He will. And him whom Allah sendeth astray, for him there is no guide" (Q:39:23 as cited in al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, pp. 17–18).

At the end of *The Qur'anic Phraseology*, which represents a general prelude to what he would study in this book, which concerns the special characteristics of Qur'anic expression, such as the examples he provides and other peculiarities of Qur'anic expression, al-Samarrā'ī asserts that the subject of Qur'anic expression has been studied extensively and given more consideration than any other text in the world. He refers to examples of studies on Qur'anic expression such as the study of its artistic portrayal, the study of its structural composition and music, the study of its coherence ayah by ayah and surah by surah and the starts and ends of its surahs. It is one piece of art tightly tied together with magnificent threads. The Qur'an is also studied in terms of its miracles and miraculous aspects, which were innumerable. Al-Samarrā'ī states the following in a sequence of rhetorical questions about the Qur'an's inimitability:

> Is it in its style and expression, or is it in its legislation and its law, or in its dealing with the different aspects of life to the fullest and most beautiful picture, or is it in its narrations about past nations and perished nations, or is it in its telling of a what will happen, or is it in what it's established about scientific and cosmic facts that people discover only part of those facts over time, or is it in what it laid down from the rules and principles of education and its knowledge of the diseases of hearts and souls? Or is it in what it mentions of the laws of history and creation, or what it mentions of the principles of sociology, or in anything other than that? Or is it in all of that and other things on top of that? Is the Qur'an a language book, a book of literature, a book of legislation, a book of economics, a book of education, a book of history, a book of sociology, a book of politics, a book of beliefs, or is it all and above? (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, p. 18).

After posing these questions, al-Samarrā'ī shows his fascination with the Qur'an and its miraculous inimitability, confessing and acknowledging this inimitability with respect to all of those questions:

> The literary criticism scholar sees it (the Qur'an) as miraculous and the linguist sees it as miraculous, the Master of Law and Legislation see it as miraculous, economists see it as miraculous, educators see it as miraculous, psychologists and psychologists see it as miraculous, sociologists see it as miraculous, reformers see it as miraculous, and every firmly established in his discipline sees it as miraculous. The Qur'an revealed to them while they were searching for the manifestations of its inimitability, seas that have no coast, and they sank into depths that have no bottom, and each returned with a precious pearl or an elegant necklace, and there remained treasures beyond counting that were not penetrated by those who entered, and treasures that could not be counted, to which hands did not reach, the world perishes and it perishes not, and all new things wears out and it does not wear out. It is one of the wonders of God's making that if you look at it, you would not know how to make it, and you will be overwhelmed with endless wonder and dazzled with infinite admiration. The key to this discovery is constant reflection and contemplation. Hence, give the Qur'an some reflection, it will in turn give you of its wonders and secrets what you have never thought of and will give you multiple folds of what you have given. (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, pp. 18–19).

From al-Samarrā'ī's foregoing arguments and statements, as well as his acknowledgment and affirmation of the foundations of the discourse of the imitability of the Qur'an

and its miraculous nature as established by the earlier Muslim scholars, we can deduce that he has reproduced those fundamentals through the rhythms and epistemological questions of his time, adding to them some of the findings of his modern time regarding the miracle of the Qur'an. Al-Samarrā'ī's words also imply that studying the Qur'anic expression to discover its miraculousness in these different manifestations sometimes requires teams of specialists—one for each scientific specialization. Knowing the literary and rhetorical secrets of structures in the Qur'anic expression remains the cornerstone of realizing the miraculousness of the Qur'an in every aspect of its dazzling miraculousness. However, given his specialization, al-Samarrā'ī's exploration of the secrets of the inimitability of the Qur'an is limited to exploring the linguistic, literary, and rhetorical miraculousness of the Qur'anic expression.

After this general exploration, al-Samarrā'ī began to explore detailed manifestations of these expressive peculiarities of the Qur'anic phraseology to show how it outclassed other Arabic expression to the extent that it could neither be matched nor challenged, thus confirming its miraculous and inimitable nature. He then studied the structure of Qur'anic expression in terms of similarities and differences in foregrounding (al-Taqdīm), backgrounding (al-Ta'khīr), mentioning (al-Dhikr), and omission (al-Ḥathf), as well as forms of affirmation/emphasis (Asālīb al-Tawkīd), verse breaks (Fawā ṣil al-Āyāt), and the expressive feature of context. He further addressed what he called al-Ḥashd al-Fannī (artistic intensity), which is a kind of ascendancy in al-Samarrā'ī's exploration of the expressive peculiarities of Qur'anic phraseology. Al-Samarrā'ī limited the examples of rhetorical devices to only one point in the ayah in question to point out the expressive peculiarity. However, when exploring artistic intensity in Qur'anic expression, it was found that every word, as well as every letter, was placed in an artistically intended position, with precision, accuracy, and beauty, to develop a precise, beautiful, and intentional artistic situation. Al-Samarrā'ī's approach to choosing the Qur'anic expressions in his exploration of Qur'anic artistic intensity was to consider many matters, including the following:

- The surah in which the particular Qur'anic expression occurred.
- Other contexts in which a similar expression occurred.
- Other surahs in which similar or different expressive peculiarities occurred.
- All other surahs in the Holy Qur'an and their structures.

Al-Samarrā'i provides examples from the surah al-An'ām to illustrate some of the artistic relationships that the Qur'an takes into account in this surah itself and in other surahs. Here, al-Samarrā'ī does not directly address rhetorical and artistic aspects in his analysis of those examples. He then studies the artistic relationship between the opening of the surah and its closing, beginning with al-An'ām, al-Nisā', al-A'rāf, Hūd, al-Mu'minūn, Yūnus, Ṣād, and Qāf, clearly indicating the exquisite coherence between them. He concludes that "the coherence between the openings of the surahs and its conclusions or closings is not something accidental nor a passing conformity, but rather it is a prominent feature of this noble book and an intentional matter in this lofty speech" (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, p. 259). He then returns to al-An'ām again to further elucidate those artistic relations in Qur'anic expressions that have similarities with other ayahs in different surahs, where coherence and the specificities of different contexts in the ayahs and surahs were considered in a manner that makes it impossible to be identical or interchangeable. He mentions other examples of this unique expressive and rhetorical feature (al-Ḥashd al-Fannī), mentioning an ayah from surah al-An'ām similar to that of an ayah in surahs al-Nisā' and al-Zumar to infer and confirm that each expression was chosen based on the consideration of the context in which the ayah was mentioned, as well as the frequency of a specific word in each of the surahs al-An'ām, al-Nisā', al-A'rāf, and al-Zumar (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, p. 260).

He then returns to al-An'ām again for further elaboration of these artistic relations in similar Qur'anic expressions, in which coherence and the specificities of different contexts in the ayahs and surahs were considered. He mentions other examples of this expressive and rhetorical feature, which al-Samarrā'ī terms as artistic intensity, mentioning a verse or an ayah from surah al-An'ām similar to that of the verse/ayah in the al-Nisā' and al-Zumar

to infer the expression that was chosen based on the consideration of the context in which the ayah/verse was mentioned, as well as the frequency of a specific word in each of the surahs al-An'ām, al-Nisā', al-A'rāf, and al-Zumar (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, p. 260).

Al-Samarrā'ī was dissatisfied with the number of representations and analyses of the artistic intensity in Qur'anic expression he offered, so he further provided more examples of artistic intensity from other surahs. He benefited from some of the analytical tools and approaches of his predecessors and their efforts, studying Mutashābih al-Nazm al-Qur'ānī (similar Qur'anic compositions) such as al-Iskāfī, al-Gharnāṭī, and Abu Ḥayyān al-Andalusī, (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, pp. 260–87). He further extends his exploration of artistic intensity (al-Ḥashd al-Fannī) to include the Qur'anic stories, addressing what might be thought at first glance to be a repetition of the same story when it is narrated in more than one place in the Qur'an. He proves that these stories are not really a repetition because what is presented from the story in each surah is an aspect of the story that is required by the context, called upon by the requirements of the situation and brought in by the specific purpose that requires detailing of the story or summarizing it, mentioning some of its particular aspects or omitting them, or making a variation in expressions as appropriate and purposeful and making all of that in great artistic intensity (al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, pp. 261–87).

He then addresses the story of Ādam (A.S.) in its various manifestations in al-Baqarah and al-A'rāf and in al-A'rāf and Ṣād. He also deals with the story of Musa (Moses) (A.S.) in the same way in al-Baqarah and al-A'rāf and in al-A'rāf and al-Shu'ara'. He then concludes the book with an interpretation of the short surah al-Tīn in which he elaborates on some of its artistic features (see al-Samarrā'ī 2010a, pp. 344–57). Al-Samarrā'ī's efforts in dealing with this issue of assumed repetition in the Qur'anic stories need and deserve to be explored further in a full-fledged article.

It should be noted that, in his quest to illustrate the literary and rhetorical inimitability of the Qur'an, al-Samarrā'ī did not directly claim to offer the literary, rhetorical, and linguistic miracles of the Qur'an; however, to anyone familiar with the characteristics and classes of Arab literary and rhetorical compositions, from the literary and rhetorical styles of the Qur'an he explores, he clearly shows what is truly beyond human capabilities. It is as though he follows the examples of his predecessors, the previous researchers or 'Ulamlā' in this field, when studying the inimitability of the Qur'an such as what Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī did when he studied the indicators and evidences of the miraculous Qur'anic inimitability instead of pointing directly at what is inimitable (for more on Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī's approach, (see: al-Jurjānī 1989, pp. 38–328) and beyond). In his book, *Lamasāt Bayānīyah fī Nuṣūṣ mina al-Tanzīl*, al-Samarrā'ī even mentions that some readers of his book *al-Ta'bīr al-Qur'ānī* suggested that it should have been called *al-I'jāz al-Qur'ānī* (*The Qur'anic Inimitability*), to which he replies that the title is too great for him and that he could not assume the power of explaining the Qur'an's inimitability or something of that. He explains that he has merely conducted a study explaining some of the secrets of the great Qur'anic expressions whose wonders do not end, which is not equivalent to explaining the Qur'an's inimitability, but rather a step on the path that leads one to discovering this inimitability (al-Samarrā'ī 2010b, p. 5):

> The inimitability of the Qur'an is multifaceted, and it is impossible for a single person, not even a group, to rise to explain the Qur'an's inimitability in an era, regardless of the breadth of their knowledge, their intelligence and the multiplicity of their specializations. Rather, they can explain some of the secrets of the Qur'an in various ways up to their own time, and the Qur'an remains open to those who search after us in the future and to find things that will appear for the first time. In it, future generations will find features and signs of inimitability that we had not thought of. (al-Samarrā'ī 2010b, pp. 5–6).

Al-Samarrā'ī gives numerous examples of the Qur'an's inimitability whose diversity and complexity make it impossible for a person or group to illustrate that inimitability and limit its manifestations and aspects. He further claims that the most that can be done is to explain the manifestations of the inimitability of the Qur'an, so the linguist can explain

its linguistic inimitability in terms of its expressive peculiarities, the medical doctor can explain it from the point of view of medicine, and so on. Perhaps this is what inspired Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī to title his unique and remarkable book in this field *Dalā'l al-I'jāz* (*Directions/Evidence of [the Qur'anic] Inimitability*); indeed, his influence on al-Samarrā'ī's work is clear. Perhaps the clearest evidence of this can be traced to his search for the rhetorical miracles or inimitability of the Holy Qur'an, where he deals with the stylistics of foregrounding (al-Taqdīm), backgrounding (al-Ta'khīr), mentioning (al-Dhikr), omission (al-Ḥathf), and emphasis (al-Tawkīd), as well as other syntactic and rhetorical devices in the Qur'anic expression and their peculiarities in the Qur'an. These are the same rhetorical devices that Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī adopted, along with other rhetorical devices, to study the signs of the Qur'anic inimitability in his study of high artistic expressions in Arabic poetry (for more details on this, (see: al-Jurjānī 1989, pp. 5–26). It is also no secret that al-Samarrā'ī was significantly influenced by al-Zamakhsharī, which is evident in many of his linguistic and rhetorical analyses of the verses of the Qur'an that he studied while investigating the specifics and secrets of Qur'anic artistic expression. However, al-Samarrā'ī discusses the limits of exploring the linguistic, literary, and rhetorical aspects of the inimitability of the Qur'an in the following passage:

> We are demonstrating some of the elements of art and beauty in this high artistic expression, and we are putting our hands on some of the transcendences of this expression, and we show that this expression cannot be matched by human being, even not by all human beings.

However, we do not say: these are the inimitable spots, but they are features and signs, that lead, and lights placed in the way, indicating that this Qur'an is a deliberate artistic speech, tailored in a precise manner and woven together in a unique and tight texture, that no speech resembles it nor rises to its status. {Let them come up with a hadith like that if they are honest}. (Phase 34). As for the matter of miraculous inimitability, it is far from the mark! For it is greater than all that we say, more eloquent than all that we describe, and more amazing than all that we stand upon of the reasons for wonder. (al-Samarrā'ī 2010b, pp. 5–6).

Like those previously discussed, the following books by Al-Samarrā'ī also discuss the Qur'an's miraculous eloquence and use the same explanatory and analytical methods and literary and linguistic approaches:

- *As'ilah Bayānīyah fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*;
- *Bayan al-Qur'ani fi al-Ay al-Mutashabih*;
- *Min Asrār al-Bayān al-Qur'ani*;
- *Muraāt al-Maqām fī al-Ta'bīr al-Qur'ānī*;
- *Shadharāt min al-Qaḍā' wa al-Jazā'*;
- *al-Tanāsub byna al-Suwar*;
- *Fi al-Muftataḥ wa al-Khawātīm*;
- *'Alā Ṭarīq al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī* (three volumes).

He also wrote many more books on philology, syntax, and morphology. With his in-depth knowledge of Arabic philology and linguistics, al-Samarrā'ī is well placed to explore the inimitable aspects of the Qur'anic eloquence. His book *'Alā Ṭarīq al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī* (*On the Path of Rhetorical Exegesis*), which is in three volumes, is the broadest book he wrote on the study of miraculous Qur'anic eloquence. The title of this book indicates that the book is intended to develop a method of rhetorical or literary exegesis/interpretation, rather than to make the desired rhetorical or literary interpretation itself. In the introduction to this book, al-Samarrā'ī writes:

> This is a book in my series of Qur'anic expression books that I chose to call: 'Alā Ṭarīq al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī (On the Path of Rhetorical Exegesis), and I did not want to call it al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī (Rhetorical Exegesis) because it is not really a rhetorical interpretation of the Qur'an, but it may be a step or a step along the

> path of rhetorical interpretation or a point in which it may be useful to those who want to follow this path. (al-Samarrā'ī 2011, p. 5).

This work represents the quintessence of al-Samarrā'ī's reflections and thoughts on Qur'anic expression and the maturity of his methodological approach to exploring its miraculous nature and inimitable eloquence, the fundamentals and nuances of which he laid down in his previous works on Qur'anic vocabulary and composition. We can safely say that al-Samarrā'ī's work in this book should be regarded as a rhetorical/literary exegesis of the Qur'an; however, I believe that out of modesty and humility, he refuses to call or regard it as such. He begins the book with what it usually began with in the books of al-Tafsir, the exegesis of the Qur'an, which is the definition of al-Tafsir. He defines tafsir as "the science by which the understanding of the Book of Allah revealed to His Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, is known, and to clarify its meanings and extract its rulings and wisdoms" (al-Samarrā'ī 2011, p. 5), conveying this definition from al-Zarkashī (d. 1392) in his al-Burhan. He then defines rhetorical interpretation as follows:

> "As for the rhetorical exegesis/interpretation, it is the one that shows the secrets of composition in the Qur'anic expression. It is part of the general interpretation in which attention is focused on clarifying the secrets of expression from the artistic point of view, such as foregrounding, backgrounding, mentioning, omission/ellipsis, the choice of one word over another, and so on, which is related to the conditions of expression". (al-Samarrā'ī 2011, p. 6)

He then mentions the fundamental needs of every exegete who wants to explore rhetorical interpretation, or more precisely, the terms and conditions for engaging in rhetorical interpretation of the Qur'an:

The one who addresses the rhetorical interpretation (of the Qur'an) needs what the one who addresses the Qur'anic interpretation in the general needs, but he has more need for the following:

1. Thorough knowledge of Arabic philology.
2. Thorough knowledge of the science of morphology.
3. Thorough knowledge of the science of grammar.
4. Thorough knowledge of the science of rhetoric.
5. Knowledge of the science of the Qur'anic readings
6. Knowledge of the occasions of revelation.
7. Considering the context.
8. Revising the Qur'anic contexts in which there are examples of the Qur'anic expression that is intended to be interpreted to derive the intended meaning.
9. Reviewing the different Qur'anic contexts in which the Qur'anic vocabulary that is intended to be interpreted occurred, as well as its uses, meanings, and connotations.
10. To know that there are peculiarities in Qur'anic usages of some words, such as the use of wind (al-Rīḥ) in singular form for evil and in plural form winds (al-Riyāḥ) for good, shower (al-Gayth) for good, rain (al-Maṭar) for evil, (al-'Uyūn) in plural form for water springs, fasting (al-Ṣaum) for silence, (al-Ṣiyām) fasting for known worship, and so on.
11. To look at the pausing and the resuming and the effect of that on the semantics and expansion of the meaning or the restriction in it and so on.
12. To draw his attention to any change in the vocabulary and the expression, even if it seems to him insignificant, then it is significant. If he finds an explanation for it, then that is the case. Otherwise, Allah will bring someone to whom He facilitates the explanation and interpretation of that, such as replacing the (التاء) of the vocabulary (يتطهّر) "he purifies" with (الطاء) in (يطّهّر) "he purifies" . . .
13. Constant contemplation and reflection are among the most important aspects that open secrets to a person and guide him to new meanings.

14. He should have read a volume of what was written by famous commentators/exegetes and looked at books on the sciences of the Qur'an, books on the inimitability of the Qur'an, books on similar expression compositions in the Qur'an, and books on the coherence of verses and surahs of the Qur'an, etc., and other books which were written about the secrets of the Qur'anic expression, as they contain rhetorical and artistic secrets of great superiority.
15. The basis of all of that is talent, for talent is the basis of all science, art, and craftsmanship. To the extent that an individual is endowed with talent, for talent is the basis of all science, art, and craftsmanship. To the extent that an individual is endowed with talent, will be the extent of his importance in science and art practices provided that he does not depend on talent alone, but rather, he must develop and refine it with a lot of insight, consideration, scrutiny and contemplation. (al-Samarrā'ī 2011, pp. 5–13).

In setting these conditions for anyone who endeavors to engage in Qur'anic exegesis in general and rhetorical exegesis of the Qur'an in particular, al-Samarrā'ī is not unique, as his predecessors also set such conditions. Al-Samarrā'ī cites them to support what he suggests and sees as mandatory requirements, especially for rhetorical exegete. He justifies the pressing need to meet the conditions with rigorous explanation and reasoning, especially regarding the need to know these matters in-depth. However, among the fifteen conditions, only the first six, in my view, represent direct conditional requirements. In my humble opinion, the other nine conditions constitute procedural and methodological matters in reflecting on and contemplating, studying, and analyzing the Qur'anic expression to extract its eloquence and rhetorical secrets and derive the knowledge of its miraculous eloquence and rhetorical inimitability. It goes without saying that the Arabic language and its various sciences and analytical tools are the main reliable tool force in this descriptive, analytical, and explanatory approach that is based on exploring the expressive peculiarities of the Qur'an.

3. Conclusions

Al-Samarrā'ī's approach to rhetorical interpretation can be deduced from his conditions of Qur'anic interpretation in general and rhetorical interpretation in particular. In this approach, al-Samarrā'ī relies on the sciences of the Arabic language to proceed from it to the language of the Qur'an, which was revealed in a clear Arabic tongue. He explores the peculiarities of the Qur'anic eloquence or the Qur'anic expressions, as he calls it, utilizing Arabic linguistic tools such as syntax, morphology, and rhetoric, and relying on context in his explanations, analysis, and justifications for the discovered secrets of Qur'anic expressions/inimitable eloquence and how all Qur'anic phraseology and expressions, in its uniqueness, respond to the contextual needs, purposes, and objectives of the Qur'an. This has earned al-Samarrā'ī a prominent place among contemporary literary and rhetorical exegetes, though he refuses to call his work rhetorical interpretation/exegesis. It is worth noting that what distinguishes al-Samarrā'ī's work in rhetorical interpretation/exegesis is his intense interest in al-Mutashābih al-naẓm fī al-Qur'ān (the similarities of verbal compositions in the Qur'an). In studying these aspects of Qur'anic miraculous eloquence, al-Samarrā'ī relies heavily on the works of previous scholars in the field, such as al-Iskāfī (d. 420 AH), al-Gharnāṭī (d. 708 AH), al-Karmānī (d. 975/983 AH), and others. He added some original explanatory interpretations to the literature, for which he has been commended by most scholars and criticized by some. In my view, it suffices that al-Samarrā'ī is a great scholar and contributor to this complex and sophisticated domain, and he has made a tremendous effort contemplating, reflecting on, and analyzing the inimitability of the Qur'anic miraculous eloquence. He toiled mentally where the trigger of thought struck, and his pick hit the land of the expression of the Qur'an, and the spring from it was a tumultuous and loud flow. Al-Samarrā'ī's work so far represents the peak of the current literary and rhetorical exegesis research in the field of the rhetorical inimitability of the Qur'an.

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Ayatollah Yusuf Sanei's Contribution to the Discourse of Women's Rights

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Abstract: Ayatollah Yusef Sanei was a prominent contemporary Shia scholar whose particular methodological approach led him to issue some of the most progressive Shia fatwas on the subject of women's rights. However, the ideas he expressed in the last decades of his life have scarcely been addressed in the English language scholarship. This article explores Sanei's broader jurisprudential approach and how he applied it to analyzing and often challenging traditional Shia rulings related to gender issues. The article first differentiates Sanei's approach towards jurisprudence from established methodologies, particularly in relation to his consideration of the Sunna as secondary to the Qur'ān, his rejection of the practice of using consensus as an independent basis of legal rulings, his idea that Sharia rulings may change over time, and his strong emphasis on the Qur'ān's messages of justice and human dignity. The article illuminates how this combination led Sanei to challenge traditional ideas about men's authority over women, a fixed socio-political role for women, and men's superiority in the areas of divorce rights, testimony and worth in blood money (*dīya*), while concurring with earlier scholars on the unequal division of inheritance. Notwithstanding this latter exception, the article demonstrates that Sanei drew upon jurisprudential approaches in arguing in favor of equality between men and women in many areas.

Keywords: Qur'ān; Shia jurisprudence; Ayatollah Yusuf Sanei; women's rights

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1. Introduction

Ayatollah Yusuf Sanei (d.2020) was a pro-reform Iranian cleric and a source of emulation (*marjaʿ taqlīd*). He started lecturing in the Qom seminary in 1975 and served on the Guardian Council after the Iranian revolution of 1979. However, after a few years, he retired from his official political positions and devoted his time to teaching in the Qom seminary and writing books. Sanei taught *dars-e khārej*, which is the most advanced level of classes to be offered at a Shia seminary. Some of the religious ideas he expressed in the last two decades of his life—especially those pertaining to women's rights, the rights of non-Muslims, and freedom of religion—stand in sharp contrast to those of many Shia clerics.

Sanei became well known to the Iranian public following the controversial 2009 presidential election. After the official announcement of that year's election result, the two reformist candidates, Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karoubi, joined by many of their supporters, asserted that the election was fraudulent and its result was engineered by the state to ensure the then president Ahmadinejad's reelection. As a result, various types of demonstrations took shape in Tehran and some other major cities of Iran and persisted for almost nine months. Sanei defended the protesters, stating that the government should respond to their legitimate demands. He proclaimed that violating citizens' rights to engage in peaceful demonstrations was a "sin" (Rahimi 2012, p. 59). Sanei also objected to the house arrest of Mousavi and Karoubi, warning hardliners several times against the violation of their rights. In 2013, Sanei supported the moderate candidate Hassan Rouhani in the presidential election. From that time until his death in 2020, he intermittently spoke out against traditionalist camps. In the last decade of his life, Sanei was often seen as politically suspect by the state (Takim 2019, p. 82).

Sanei's ideas are not well-covered in the English academic literature. Aside from passing references to him in a number of works analyzing Iran's reformist thinkers (Siavoshi 2017, pp. 241–42), contemporary Islamic thought (Kamali 2015, pp. 197–98), and contemporary Shia ideas (Takim 2014, pp. 102–3, 113; Takim 2018, pp. 488–89), there are not many scholarly articles in English that investigate his religious ideas (for exceptions see Mavani 2009; Takim 2019). Further, Ziba Mir-Hosseini interviewed Sanei, and some aspects of his ideas about women's rights are reflected in her piece (Mir-Hosseini 1999, pp. 144–69). Drawing on a rich array of primary source material in Persian, including Sanei's books, articles, and interviews, this article explores his ideas about women's rights. Like other Shia clerics, Sanei wrote extensively on jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and methods of deriving legal rulings from the primary sources of Islam, i.e., the Qurʾān and the Sunna. The main focus of this article is the extent to which Sanei draws on these jurisprudential approaches to argue in favor of gender equality. Throughout the article, I will occasionally compare Sanei's ideas pertaining to women's rights to those of classical Shia scholars as well as selected contemporary traditionalist Shia clerics such as Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi and Ayatollah Gerami to demonstrate how Sanei, as a reformist Shia scholar, distanced himself from their rulings.

This article first explores Sanei's broader jurisprudential approaches. It then turns to an investigation of Sanei's ideas about women's rights. I will specifically focus on five main issues: (1) men's authority over women and women's socio-political roles, (2) women's right to divorce, (3) women's testimony, (4) the blood money (*dīya*) payable for men and women, and (5) women's right of inheritance. The article demonstrates that Sanei used jurisprudential approaches to argue in favor of equality between men and women in all these areas except inheritance. It is important to indicate from the outset that my approach to Ayatollah Sanei's ideas is theological and hermeneutical rather than being based on feminist theories. Therefore, while some Iranian feminist scholars such as Haideh Moghissi and Farideh Farhi may find aspects of Sanei's ideas—such as those pertaining to hijab and segregation between men and women as well as rulings on inheritance—problematic, Sanei's ideas, as this article demonstrates, are progressive, especially when considered in comparison to traditionalist Shia clerics.[1]

2. Sanei's Jurisprudential Approaches

Sanei's legal rulings are based on theoretical ideas that appear throughout his writings. These ideas give him a certain flexibility to challenge some of the dominant rulings found in classical and contemporary Shia texts. One fundamental notion Sanei emphasizes in his writings is that the Sunna should always be considered secondary to the Qurʾān. He cites a hadith from the Prophet according to which the Prophet stated that, "O people! Whatever has been narrated from me, if it is consistent to God's Book, I have narrated as such, and whatever has been narrated from me and is inconsistent with God's Book, I have not said it" (Sanei 2006, p. 37). For Sanei, a *faqīh* should evaluate rulings found in *fiqh* literature based on the Qurʾān, and if he or she finds them contrary to the Qurʾān, they should be considered inauthentic (Sanei 2015, p. 22).

Sanei (2005, p. 11) also emphasizes that "a distinction between the opinion of jurists and the real Sharia is a necessity without which any change in the jurisprudential system and the legal system based on it is not possible". This means that we should distinguish between Sharia itself and our understanding of it. For Sanei, the former includes a set of sacred and unchanging principles, whereas the latter comprises our human approach to the Sharia, which is inherently colored by our personal experiences, meaning that it reflects the state of our knowledge and understanding of Sharia. Sanei insists that as long as we do not distinguish between the Sharia and our understanding of it, no genuine reform or change to inherited jurisprudence is possible (Sanei 2005, p. 11).

In traditional Sunni jurisprudence, there are four principal sources of law: the Qurʾān, the Sunna, analogical reasoning (*qīyās*), and consensus (*ijmāʿ*). Unlike Sunni jurisprudence, in Twelver Shiism, *ijmāʿ* is not often considered a fundamental source of law, but as Clarke

(2018, p. 56) notes, it has been "in practice widely respected". Indeed, many jurists have endorsed rulings based on the notion of consensus, even though their own research took them in another direction. Sanei opposes this approach, arguing that consensus should never be used as an independent source of legislation. For him, although *ijmāʿ* has been applied by Shia scholars in practice as one of the reasons for endorsing a religious ruling, consensus is a valid source only if we are sure that it has its roots in the authentic narrations of Shia Imams (Sanei 2018a, p. 575). According to Sanei, given that in Shia tradition, the door of *ijtihād* always remains open, we should not simply imitate the ideas of scholars of previous centuries (Sanei 2015, pp. 24–25; see also Sanei 2008, p. 54). Indeed, "the understanding (*fahm*) of previous scholars does not necessarily represent a more precise understanding, and the passage of time and [further] research into the writings and ideas of previous scholars help us to achieve a more precise and deeper understanding of religious sources" (Sanei 2015, p. 27).

Sanei refers to the term "dynamic *ijtihād*", arguing that *fiqh* rulings require change based on the conditions of the modern period: "The conditions prevailing in the modern period and new developments [in human societies] require a form of *ijtihād* which takes two factors—i.e., time (*zamān*) and place (*makān*)—into serious account" (Sanei 2005, p. 12). This requires the jurist to be familiar with changing circumstances. The jurist should also take into account the effect of his opinion and fatwa on society. That is, a jurist should always be mindful of the situation of his or her society when making a ruling. The *faqīh* should be aware that if he or she endorses a ruling or passes a fatwa, that fatwa has certain consequences: the fatwa should be implementable (*qābel-e ejrā*) in the time and place it is issued (Sanei 2005, p. 44). For Sanei, as socio-political conditions change, the juridical rulings issued by jurists should reflect the new circumstances; otherwise, *fiqh* becomes ossified and loses its ability to respond to new circumstances. More importantly, if the rulings of the religion do not cohere well with the existing conditions, Islam could become isolated in today's world (Sanei 2005, p. 31). This means that jurists should continue to revise traditional laws in keeping with the changing circumstances, and it is through this process that they are able to bring about the progression of Islamic laws, making dynamic *ijtihād* possible.

Sanei also emphasizes the importance of justice in religious rulings. What constitutes the spirit of Sharia is justice. According to Sanei, when it is said that the rulings of *fiqh* are fixed and unchangeable, the referent is the rulings' spirit, i.e., their emphasis on the concept of justice (Sanei 2015, p. 15). Therefore, when a *faqīh* seeks to issue a religious ruling, he or she should always consider justice as the fundamental principle based on which all law-making processes should be conducted (Sanei 2015, p. 20). Based on the Qurʾānic verse which states that "God is never unjust to [His] creation" (Q 41:46), Sanei argues that all rulings of Islam should be just and there should be no oppression or injustice (*ẓulm*) in rulings (Sanei 2015, p. 22).

The final feature of Sanei's approach to legal rulings is his emphasis on human dignity. Sanei argues that in any legal ruling, what should be taken into serious consideration is that humans have been given dignity: "Islam and the Qurʾān dignify mankind . . . and none of [the attributes of] race, religion, nationality or geography play a role in Islamic human rights" (Sanei 2015, p. 51). Referring to the Qurʾānic verse which reads "People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman" (Q 49:13; see also Q 4:1), Sanei argues that the Qurʾān prioritizes human dignity over a person's religion or gender (Sanei 2006, p. 19; see also Sanei 2015, pp. 55–56). The Prophet stated that the children of Adam are all of the same origin and are as such brethren in humanity: "O People, your Creator is one . . . All of you are from Adam, and Adam was created from earth . . . An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab" (Sanei 2006, p. 20). This means that piety and good conduct are the only things that distinguish people from each other. For Sanei, emphasis on the concept of human dignity and its priority over attributes such as race and religion is an important tool that jurists should employ in their legal rulings.

The remainder of this article explores the extent to which the aforementioned jurisprudential approaches appearing throughout Sanei's work are used by him to argue in favor of gender equality.

3. Men's Authority over Women and Women's Socio-Political Role

Traditionalist Shia clerics often emphasize the "domestic" role of women. According to Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi, women have sensitive, delicate, and emotional characters and personalities, and this has prompted them be more occupied by matters concerning the household. That is, they have much less responsibility in the social arena than men. Women, according to Makarem, are given "a stronger capacity for tender emotions and feelings, and this superiority in feeling necessitates that we . . . entrust men with all of the duties of society, which require, more than other things, strength of thought and distancing from the tender emotions and personal sensitivities" (Interview with Bauer 2015, p. 223). In addition, governing the family and providing for its members' well-being remains one of the duties of men: "It is necessary that the responsibility of governing, judging, and guiding the family falls on the shoulders of the man, and that in these matters, the man has been made superior" (Interview with Bauer 2015, p. 223). Therefore, men, Makarem concludes, should have the final say in any dispute over household matters.

The idea that a woman should not occupy a position of rulership or judgment is a tradition with deep roots in Islam, and ideas that endorse this can be seen in classical Shia texts. According to classical Shia scholar Muḥammad b. Ḥasan Ṭūsī (d. 470/1067), "it is not permissible for a woman to be a judge in any matter related to [Sharia] rulings" (*lā yajūz an takūn al-mara*ʾ *ghādiya fī shay*ʾ *min al-aḥkām*) (Ṭūsī 1986, vol. 6, p. 213). Another classical Shia scholar, Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī (d. 676/1277), confirms this idea, stating that "a woman is not permitted to become a judge, even if she gains all the relevant qualifications" (Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī 1987, vol. 4, p. 860). According to a hadith referred to in the classical Shia collection of hadith *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿa* (Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī 1988, vol. 27, p. 13), one must "avoid referring to the rulers and judges of the oppressive government, but refer to a man who is aware of the rules and teachings of the religion and consider him your judge and arbitrator among yourselves". Women's exclusion from certain social and political activities was not confined to the arena of judgeship. Classical texts usually dictate that women not become *mujtahid* or sources of emulation and prevent them from leading prayer (see for example Ṣadūq 1993, vol. 4, p. 364). According to the contemporary traditionalist Shia scholar Ayatollah Gerami, there is no doubt that some women throughout the course of Islamic history have been superior to and nobler than many men, examples being Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, and Zaynab, the daughter of Fatima. Despite Fatima's nobility, Gerami stresses, the Prophet never made her—or any other woman—a judge, the commander of the army or the governor of a city; when he occasionally left the city, the Prophet appointed a man as his deputy—an example which Gerami uses to challenge the legitimacy of women serving in roles such as judge or ruler (Interview with Bauer 2015, pp. 224–45).

Sanei's approach stands in sharp contrast to the ideas of traditionalist scholars and jurists. When it comes to issues related to domestic affairs and the notion of men's authority of women, Sanei argues that the relationship between men and women should be established based on cooperation and mutual understanding rather than on the authority of one partner over another: "Our religious belief is that neither man nor woman is the servant of the other and marriage is not a matter of 'employment' (*estekhdām*), but cohabitation" (Sanei 2003a). For Sanei, a man cannot "impose his will, act capriciously, and put pressure on his wife . . . As far as possible family matters must be based on consultation and understanding (Mir-Hosseini 1999, p. 150). Therefore, when it comes to matters such as a woman seeking permission from her husband to leave the house, Sanei states:

> Men and women can go out of the house and do not require each other's permission . . . [However] if a woman's going out prevents her from fulfilling her obligatory duties and matters related to their married life, or [her going out] damages the husband's reputation, she needs to seek permission from him, in the same way that if the man wants to go out and his going out creates injustice for his wife, the man should get permission from his wife. Therefore, in order to protect each other's rights, in matters in which the woman requires permission [from her husband], a man should also seek his wife's permission. (Sanei 2003a)

With regard to a woman seeking permission from her husband to leave the house, Sanei also stated that the wife "can stipulate from the very beginning of her marriage, as part of the marriage contract, that she can leave the house whenever she wants to without permission" (Mir-Hosseini 1999, p. 149). Sanei has also defended the social rights of women, arguing that Muslim women are allowed to engage in all social and political activities in society. Indeed, there is no difference between men and women in matters pertaining to participation in social and political affairs as long as women observe all their religious obligations such as wearing hijab. For Sanei, although the Islamic Republic saw it as a *maṣlaḥa* (ruling based on the preservation of the public interest) to prevent women from entering stadiums to watch, for instance, football matches, there is no problem with their admission to such venues, and women should be permitted to enter stadiums to watch matches alongside men (Sanei 2003e). According to Sanei, women are eligible to hold the positions of judge, president, and even leader of the country. The condition of "manhood" is not a necessary condition for becoming a judge, and there is no valid reason to limit the position of judgeship to men exclusively. The main criterion for becoming a judge, according to Shia sources, as Sanei states, is the acquisition of relevant knowledge and being just (*ʿadel*)—a criterion that women can acquire too:

> Being a man is not a condition for judgeship, the criterion for judging is the moderation (*eʿtedāl*) of the judge and being just in the judiciary, [and] acquiring knowledge with regard to Islamic principles of jurisprudence and laws, and we have no valid reason for [applying] the condition of manhood [to someone becoming a judge]. (Sanei 2018b, p. 259)

To exclude women from becoming judges, as Sanei claims, goes against reason (*ʿaql*), customary standards (*ʿurf*), and justice (*ʿedālat*) (Sanei 2018b, p. 259). He also maintains that there is no limitation for women in terms of serving in certain religious positions, such as becoming a *marjaʿ* or source of emulation. Here, Sanei refers to two hadiths found in classical Shia literature, which give certain authority to *fuqahā*, considering them the deputies of prophets and Imams during the era of the major occultation—the hadiths that are often used to justify the theory of the "Guardianship of Jurist" (*velayat-e faqīh*) (for such hadiths see Kazemi Moussavi 1996, pp. 29–30). These hadiths state, "the *fuqahā* are trustees of prophets" and "the *ʿulama* are the heirs of prophets". Sanei does not use these hadiths to support the theory of the "Guardianship of Jurist" but uses them to argue that the institution of *marjaʿiyyat* is not exclusive to men, since the verses do not indicate a particular gender when referring to the *fuqahā* or *ʿulama*. This means that both men and women are able to become *marajaʿ* (sources of emulation) and both are able to pass fatwas if they acquire the necessary knowledge (Sanei 2018b, p. 333). Sanei argues that if the term "man" (*rajul*) is employed in *fiqh* literature in connection to matters related to *marjaʿiyyat*, this only reflects the language conventions of the time of writing, in the same way that sixth-century Arabic conventions led several passages of the Qurʾān to be addressed to men alone (Sanei 2018b, p. 259). Finally, Sanei reasons that nowhere in the Qurʾān or reliable traditions from the Prophet or Shia Imams are men alone encouraged to acquire scientific knowledge. In Islam, all humans are encouraged to acquire knowledge, and if we exclude women from acquiring the highest level of religious knowledge—the knowledge that is required for one to become a *marajaʿ*—we have actually acted against Islam's message (Sanei 2018b, p. 333).

4. Women's Right to Instigate a Divorce

Traditionally, the right to divorce a partner belongs to men in Islam, and the vast majority of classical Sunni and Shia scholars ruled that only men have the right to instigate a divorce. During the past few decades, some Iranian Shia clerics have argued in favor of giving women the right to instigate a divorce under certain circumstances. For example, Ayatollah Ibrahim Jannati argues that although the right to divorce is among the rights granted to a married man, women can apply for divorce under certain conditions: "Although divorce is [a right] held by the man, there are certain circumstances in which woman can acquire the right to divorce. Of those circumstances, one is stipulation of the right in the contract itself, another is (unbearable) hardship" (Jannati n.d.a).[2] Hardship encompasses situations in which the husband mistreats the wife in a way that she cannot continue living with him and when the husband does not fulfil the fundamental rights granted to the wife through the marriage (Jannati n.d.b). The idea that women can include the right to divorce their husbands in the marriage contract was expressed by Ayatollah Khomeini in the early years after the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran. In response to an *estefta* posed by some women, Khomeini responded:

> For honorable women, the holy Sharia has deemed an easy way for them to take the lead in divorce. This means that when marrying, if they specify that they want the right to divorce in absolute terms or that the woman herself has the right to divorce in certain circumstances, for example, if the man mistreats her or takes another wife, then there would be no problem for women anymore since they themselves can [instigate a] divorce [under such conditions]. (Khomeini 2010, vol. 10, p. 78)

Sanei takes a different position in relation to women's right to divorce. His ideas are more flexible about a woman's right to divorce her husband compared to those of Jannati and Khomeini, since he believes that even without a specified term in the marriage contract, women are able to annul the relationship under certain conditions. Sanei acknowledges that Islam's position, giving the right of divorce to men, is unquestionable. His point of departure in addressing whether women have the right to initiate divorce is his view that the position of Islam vis-à-vis divorce is not an injustice to women, given that the man has the right to divorce in exchange for his obligation to pay a dowry to his wife (see Sanei 2003d). Here, Sanei refers to the concept of *ṭalāq khulʿ*. *Ṭalāq khulʿ* occurs under circumstances in which a woman declares her extreme hatred towards her husband and reluctance (*ikrāh* or *kerāha*) to stay with him. Indeed, her hatred has reached a point where she is neither able nor willing to continue living with her husband. According to Sanei, when a relationship between spouses deteriorates to the degree that the wife severely detests her husband, the man is obliged to divorce her (Sanei 2007, p. 23). In such a case, the wife should return the dowry (*mahr*) that had been given to her by the husband at the time of marriage, and if the husband has not yet given the dowry to his wife, she must abandon her claim to it (Sanei 2007, p. 30). Under such circumstances, the man should divorce his wife, and if he refuses to do so, the court, according to Sanei, should intervene and endorse the woman's decision and her right to annul the marriage. Sanei argues that this is a just decision for both partners; indeed, an injustice would be incurred in the case of a woman returning her dowry and the man retaining the sole authority to divorce (Sanei 2018b, p. 265; Sanei 2007, pp. 44–45).[3]

Sanei also employs Qurʾānic principles of justice in his juridical ruling about women's right to divorce. According to him, it goes against the principle of justice and the principle of human dignity if we ignore women's right to divorce under the circumstances explained above. The human dignity of the wife is not met if she is forced to live with a husband she detests entirely (Sanei 2018b, p. 265). Sanei also argues that, in annulling the marriage, a woman is not obliged to give back anything more than her dowry. To strengthen his argument, Sanei quotes a Qurʾānic verse that reads "And your Lord is never unjust to [His] servants" (Q 41:46). This verse means that God promises to be just to all human beings,

regardless of their gender; the husband violates the right of his partner if he requires more than the *mahr* in exchange for granting the right to divorce to his wife (Takim 2019, p. 93).

It should be noted that the notion of *ṭalāq khulʿ* has been mentioned in classical Islamic sources; however, as Haifa Jawad (1998, p. 81) notes, "the husband has to agree to free his [wife]", meaning that the husband has the final say in the matter of divorce. In addition, women seeking to initiate a divorce in the form of *ṭalāq khulʿ* often lost some of their rights; for example, the wife "may lose her right to maintenance during the waiting period" (Jawad 1998, p. 81). Many contemporary Shia *fuqahā*, unlike Sanei, argue that even if a woman's hatred of her husband reaches a level whereby she cannot continue her married life, it is still the man who should agree to divorce his wife. For example, Ayatollah Khoi, while acknowledging the notion of *ṭalāq khulʿ*, argues that the man should have the final say in divorce; if he does not agree to divorce his wife, even if the wife hates the husband, the marriage should not be annulled (Khoi 1989, pp. 304–5). Ayatollah Sistani states that a wife has the right to *ṭalāq khulʿ* only if "her hatred has reached the extent that she no longer allows [her husband] conjugal rights" (cited in Takim 2019, p. 85).[4] As demonstrated, Sanei's approach is different since he believes that a woman has an unconditional right to a divorce if she hates her husband and gives up her dowry, and in such circumstances, the court is obliged to defend this right and annul the marriage.

5. Testimony

The Qurʾān considers the testimony of two women worth that of one single man: "Call in two men as witnesses. If two men are not there, then call one man and two women out of those you approve as witnesses, so that if one of the two women should forget the other can remind her" (Q 2:228). Based on this verse, some contemporary Shia jurists believe that when there are two men giving evidence in court, they can express their ideas independently, but when there is a man and two women as witnesses, the women should appear together, and their testimony considered one. Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi states that in such a case both women should attend together, and if one of them finds errors in the evidence of the other, the former can remind the latter. According to him, "since women may be affected by their strong emotions, and may not follow the right path in testifying because of forgetfulness or other things, one can correct the other" (Makarem Shirazi n.d.a). He stresses that there is a possibility of forgetfulness on the part of men too, but is quick to emphasize that the probability of this occurring is lower in men's than women's evidence (Makarem Shirazi n.d.a). Ayatollah Gerami presents a somewhat similar argument, stating that:

> When it comes to the matter of testimony, God considers the possibility of a woman's error, mistake or deviation from the truth as greater than that of a man. This really is a fact. Women are more emotional than men; the presence of this strong sense of emotion increases the likelihood of error. Since in judgment and testimony, the key and important issue is to discover the truth, God considers two women [should attend] for if one of them errs, the other can correct her . . . [But] God has not totally ignored the testimony of women. (Khabar Online 2013)

Gerami grounds his argument in what he considers a biological distinction between men and women, i.e., women's inclination towards forgetfulness and emotionality. Further, Gerami states that the Qurʾānic ruling about testimony is eternal and unchangeable and thus applicable to all times and all places. According to him, in the first part of Q 2:282, the expression "O you who believe" is mentioned—an expression which confirms for Gerami that the verse is not limited to a particular time and place: "When God uses such an expression, this demonstrates that the command stands beyond time and place (*farā-makānī va farā-zamānī*). This is similar to the commands we find in rulings pertaining to prayer and other legislative rulings in the Qurʾān" (Khabar Online 2013).

Sanei opposes this approach. He acknowledges that many *fuqahā* in the course of Islamic history up until today have considered the testimony a woman worth half of that of a man. Leaning on his idea that the *ijmāʿ* of previous generations of *fuqahā* should not be

considered as a basis for endorsing a ruling and his conviction that the door of *ijtihād* in Shiism is not closed, Sanei challenges the ideas put forward by scholars such as Makarem and Gerami. He argues that Q 2:228 was revealed in relation to commercial affairs and pertained to a time when women were not familiar with financial matters. Sanei cites the context of revelation, suggesting that since women were unfamiliar with commercial affairs at that time, a woman may not have recalled details of financial dealings and a second woman should have been there to remind her. Therefore, Sanei argues that Q 2:228 is only relevant to the time of Qurʾānic revelation when women were not normally knowledgeable about commercial matters such as debt and business contracts. This means that no "inherent" forgetfulness of women is inferred in the Qurʾān (Sanei 2003b). Based on his idea that religious rulings should be consistent with the spirit of the age (*ruh-e zamāneh*), Sanei goes on to state that this Qurʾānic ruling is not applicable in our time:

> This ruling is related to past ages, when they [women] were constantly living in ignorance and forgetfulness, were deprived of scientific learning and did not consider themselves to have any role in society. However, in the present age when women are engaged in the study of various sciences and [are knowledgeable] in various disciplines and fields of science, and have open minds, and critical thoughts and ideas, and many of them are scientists and researchers in different fields, it cannot be stated that the testimony of two of them is equal to that of one man. (Sanei 2003b)

In a conversation with Liyakat Takim, Sanei states that Q 2:228 does not make a general ruling about the testimony of men and women that should be implemented in all times and under all circumstances. The criterion for giving testimony, according to Sanei, is "knowledge and awareness", and thus men and women can "be of equal number when they have equal knowledge" (Takim 2019, p. 80; see also Sanei 2003b).

6. Blood Money

With regard to the ruling on blood money (*dīya*), the vast majority of Shia *fuqahā* including those of both the classical and contemporary periods believe that the blood money payable in compensation for the murder of a woman should be half of that payable for the murder of a man. Prominent classical Shia scholars rule that the *dīya* of a woman is worth half of that of a man, stating that this ruling is among the matters of consensus among scholars (see for example Ṭūsī 1986, vol. 5, p. 254).[5] In the contemporary period, Ayatollahs Khomeini (1970, vol. 2, p. 558) and Khoi (1990, vol. 2, p. 205) confirmed this ruling. Makarem Shirazi also defends the position that the blood money of a woman should be half of that of a man, connecting it to the idea that the man is the breadwinner of the family, and thus when a man is murdered, the family often encounters a financial crisis that should be compensated for with a larger amount of blood money. Therefore, if the murdered party is a man and his family accept *dīya* instead of *qiṣāṣ* (retribution), the killer should pay double the amount payable when the murdered party is a woman (Makarem Shirazi n.d.b; see also Etemad Online 2019). According to Makarem, the reason for women's *dīya* being half of that of men is not related to women's being inferior to men but is driven by economic considerations (Makarem Shirazi n.d.b).

Sanei's ideas about blood money stand in sharp contrast to those of many Shia clerics. His point of departure in challenging the ideas of many classical and contemporary scholars is his view that the *ijmāʿ* of scholars cannot be considered an independent reason for the endorsement of the prevailing ruling on *dīya*.[6] Instead, Sanei refers to the Qurʾān to question this consensus. He cites Q 4:92, which reads, "If anyone kills a believer by mistake he must free one Muslim slave and pay compensation to the victim's relatives". Sanei argues that in this verse, no distinction between the blood money of a man and a woman is indicated. Another verse, Q 5:45, reads, "We prescribed for them a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, an equal wound for a wound", and no distinction between men and women is mentioned there either (Sanei 2018a, p. 578).

Sanei also reasons that the lives of men and women have equal worth from a Qurʾānic perspective. The Qurʾān considers humans ontologically similar inasmuch as both women and men are created from the same soul and have been endowed with the same natures, although they are biologically different: "O humanity! Be mindful of your Lord Who created you from a single soul" (Q 4:1 and Q 49:13; for other similar verses see Q 6:98 and Q 7:189) (Sanei 2018a, p. 580). Based on these verses, Sanei questions the consensus on blood money: "Men and women are both human. Why would we consider the blood money of one human half of that of another human?" (Sanei 2003c) That is, blood money is connected to the worth of human life, and if we consider any difference between the blood money of men and women, we have done an injustice to the Qurʾān's message that men and women are ontologically similar. Sanei also challenges the proposition linking the greater value of men's blood money to their breadwinning role in the family. According to him, the economic role of men and women is not fixed but has differed throughout the ages:

> The difference between the economic role of men and women is not a fixed matter and is different in different societies and cultures. If we attribute the difference between the blood money of men and women to the lesser role of women in economic affairs, we should also accept that with a change of situation, this ruling should be changed as well. For example, when the economic role of men in a society or in a particular circumstance is less than that of women, we should consider men's blood money as half of that of women's. (Sanei 2018a, p. 580)

Sanei acknowledges that there are some traditions narrated from the Prophet and the Shia Imams ruling that the blood money of women should be worth half of that of a man. As explained above, Sanei argues that these traditions should be evaluated in light of Qurʾānic verses such as Q 4:92 and 5:45. In addition, even if those traditions are authentic, they have to be understood in the context of the time in which Islam emerged. In pre-Islamic Arabian society, some new-born girls were buried alive (Q 16:58–59); women were not respected and did not receive any share in inheritance. Under such conditions, where men and women were not equal in the way we understand the notion of equality today, the only practical approach was to determine the blood money of men to be double that of women. Sanei even maintains that this Islamic ruling was "progressive" for the society to which Qurʾān was revealed (Sanei 2018a, p. 585). He concludes that even if we confirm the classical ruling on blood money by tracing its source to authentic traditions, this does not mean that the ruling is fixed and unchangeable (Sanei 2018a, p. 586). The classical ruling on blood money was relevant to the specific circumstances of its issuance; if we consider that rulings should be altered in response to changes in time (*zamān*) and place (*makān*), this ruling should undergo substantial revision (Sanei 2018a, p. 588).

7. Inheritance

The Qurʾān considers a woman's share of inheritance to be half of that of a man: "Concerning your children, God commands you that a son should have the equivalent share of two daughters" (Q 4:11; see also Q 4:176). In the traditions narrated in Shia sources, women's lesser share in inheritance is attributed to men having more responsibilities: a man should pay dowry to his wife, provide for the well-being of the family including financially supporting his wife and children, engage in military jihad and be responsible for paying blood money (Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī 1988, vol. 17, pp. 436–39; see also Osman 2015, pp. 159–60). During the past few decades, some modernist Muslim scholars have contextualized Qurʾānic verses about inheritance, arguing that the classical ruling of inheritance should undergo substantial change in the light of the significant financial contributions that many women make to the family today.[7]

Sanei does not apply his idea of equality between men and women—which he applies to many gender issues—to inheritance, adhering instead to the traditional Islamic ruling that a man's share of inheritance should be double that of a woman. For Sanei, the classical law of inheritance is one key area related to women's rights that is not subject to change in the contemporary period. Indeed, this is an area in which men should retain more rights

than women. Sanei's argument is based on the idea that men still have more economic responsibilities to the family and are the main breadwinners. He also reasons that men should pay women *nafaqah* (maintenance) as well as dowry (Sanei 2003d). Having more economic responsibilities necessitates that men receive a larger share of inheritance. Sanei also reasons that a man's greater share of inheritance can be invested in his business, leading in turn to an increase in the total household income (Fararu 2010).

It remains unclear why Sanei does not apply the same reasoning he uses for the equality of men's and women's blood money to the matter of inheritance. When it comes to the rule of blood money, as already demonstrated, Sanei reasons that the economic roles of men and women differ in different time periods, and that it is not unusual in some situations for women to contribute even more than men to the family's financial position. It is unclear whether Sanei considers the classical ruling of inheritance in Islam as something fixed and unchangeable or a ruling which could undergo substantial revision in light of new circumstances, i.e., women's significant financial contribution to the welfare of the family. Having said this, it seems that Sanei views blood money as more than a matter of family finances, attributing the issue, as I explained, to the value of human life, which he believes should be considered equal between men and women. It should be noted that with regard to a woman's inheritance from her husband, Sanei states that the woman can inherit all her husband's property if the latter has no other inheritor. This stands in conflict with the ideas of many Shia jurists who believe that in such circumstances, a woman would gain only her specified share of inheritance and the rest should be given to the government (see Sanei 2005; Tabnak 2020).

8. Other Differences between Men and Women

In addition to rulings on inheritance, Sanei explains that there are other differences between men and women. In his interview with Mir-Hosseini, Sanei defended the segregation between men and women in Islamic society. According to him, "we have a principle [in Islam] that men and women are forbidden to each other, that is, they must keep their distance in gaze and touch" (Mir-Hosseini 1999, p. 155). The principle of segregation should be extended in an Islamic society to matters such as health services. For Sanei, although men can assist in cases of emergency, such as there being no female gynecologist available when a woman goes into labor, "it's a tragedy if we need men for women's childbirth" in an Islamic society (Mir-Hosseini 1999, p. 158). Far from being "discrimination", Sanei insists that this Islamic rule naturally becomes "the motor for women's progress in the sense that it encourages them to achieve all those things that men achieve in society" (Mir-Hosseini 1999, p. 157). This means that the full implementation of the idea that "women should deal with women's affairs" serves as a driving force for women to participate in every aspect of society (Mir-Hosseini 1999, p. 156).

Sanei's ideas about hijab are close to the vast majority of Shia scholars, and like them, he defends the classical rulings on hijab. Sanei considers hijab one of the essentials of Islam, which all Muslim women should follow. According to him, women should cover all parts of their body except their face, palms and ankles (Sanei n.d.). For Sanei, women should avoid using make up outside the home or in the company of unrelated men; they can, however, use make up at home amongst their family members including their husband (Sanei n.d.).

9. Conclusions

This article demonstrated that Sanei uses certain theoretical approaches such as the consideration of the Sunna as secondary to the Qurʾān, the rejection of the practice of using consensus as an independent basis of legal rulings, the idea that rulings may change over time, and a strong emphasis on the Qurʾānic messages of justice and human dignity to argue for the equality between men and women. Sanei never critiques Qurʾānic precepts or rulings in the classical *fiqh* literature, arguing that they were appropriate in their own times. As demonstrated, on occasion, he defends the rulings of Islam in the era of revelation,

comparing them to pre-Islamic practices to argue that while some Qurʾānic laws were progressive at that time, they should not be applied under today's circumstances. For example, he attributes the Qurʾān's approach to testimony to women's inexperience in commercial affairs at the time of revelation and argues that this ruling is not applicable today given the change of context. In another instance, Sanei states that the classical Islamic approach to blood money was relevant to and even progressive for the societal conditions of Arabia when the Qurʾān was revealed—when women were considered worthless creatures without any rights (Sanei 2018a, p. 585). Further, in his interview with Mir-Hosseini, Sanei stated that the Prophet and Shia imams, unlike the "erroneous culture of the time which didn't honor daughters", stressed "their [maternal] descent" (Mir-Hosseini 1999, p. 149). This means that the Qurʾān issued these rulings at a time when societal conditions were very different to those of our own time. Therefore, Sanei's approach is based on the idea that the legal rulings of the Qurʾān, and by extension those found in *fiqh* literature, are not fixed and unchangeable and could undergo substantial revision in light of new circumstances.

As demonstrated, Sanei did not extend this approach to the classical Islamic ruling on inheritance. His reasoning for the inequality between men's and women's shares of inheritance is rooted in their unequal financial contributions to the well-being of the family and the greater financial responsibilities of men. Therefore, the question that remains unanswered in his work concerning inheritance is whether women's shares of inheritance would be equal to men's under circumstances in which both contributed equally to the well-being of the family. In addition, he strongly favored the classical rulings on hijab and supported the notion of gender segregation. Despite his adherence to the classical Islamic laws in these areas, Sanei, as demonstrated, contributed significantly to extending women's rights by reinterpreting relevant verses of the Qurʾān and classical *fiqh* rulings.

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Notes

1 For Haideh Moghissi's criticism of Islamic feminism, see (Moghissi 2002, pp. 125–48). While Moghissi does not argue that "reading and rereading Islamic texts from a feminist perspective is not a worthwhile project", such a project has its own limits: "one could reasonably expect that the reading of the Sharia and other holy texts from a secular feminist perspective should aim at demonstrating the limits which the Islamic Sharia provides as a chosen vehicle for changing the gender role" (Moghissi 2002, pp. 144–45). For another critique of the ideas of Iranian religious intellectuals on women's rights, see (Farhi 2001).

2 Translation is slightly modified.

3 In his interview with Mir-Hosseini, Sanei noted that in the condition when the marriage causes the woman harm, "she can annul the [marriage] contract and go to her father's house, if she wants" (Mir-Hosseini 1999, p. 162). Mir-Hosseini herself finds Sanei's idea about women's right to divorce a progressive approach that would be welcomed by "all feminists" (Mir-Hosseini 1999, p. 168).

4 Translation is slightly modified. Jannati mentions this form of divorce in his treatise, but does not explain it in detail. When considering the conditions under which a woman has the right to divorce, he does not mention the notion of *ṭalāq khulʿ* (See Jannati n.d.b).

5 Sanei himself acknowledges that most classical Shia scholars endorsed such as ruling (Sanei 2018a, p. 569).

6 He cites Sahib Jawahir, who states that this ruling is among the *ijmāʿ* of *fuqahā* (Sanei 2018a, p. 575). Sanei also refers to Muqaddas Ardibili, who argues against the dominant ruling on blood money (Sanei 2018a, p. 583).

7 Fazlur Rahman, for example, argues that this ruling reflects "the function of their [men's and women's] actual role in traditional society", noting that "changes in shares must . . . undergo radical changes" due to the social changes that have occurred in human society (Rahman 1982, p. 297). For the ideas of some modenist scholars and religious intellectuals about women's rights see: (Akbar 2020; Akbar and Saeed 2020).

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Article

A New Hermeneutical Approach to the Qur'an with Special Reference to the Narrative of Prophet Yaḥyā (John the Baptist) in the Qur'an and the Bible

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Abstract: Prophet Yaḥyā (John the Baptist) is considered to be a bridge between Islam and Christianity. Both traditions emphasize that he is a 'rightly-guided' figure and among the company of 'the righteous' such as Abraham and Moses. The story of Yaḥyā is included in two chapters (Q. 3: 39 and Q. 19: 12–14) in the Qur'an. Canonical Gospels also provide various aspects of John the Baptist. Muslim commentators have used biblical and other sources in their interpretation of the Qur'an, elaborating some aspects of his life within the Qur'anic theological framework. Whereas various similarities may be seen in narratives of Islamic sources and the biblical sources regarding Prophet Yaḥyā, some differences are present. Therefore, this article seeks to provide an analysis on the story of Prophet Yaḥyā through Qur'anic narratives. It also investigates the classical exegetical approach to such a comparative reading (*isrā'īliyyāt*, biblical materials) and a modern tendency of direct citations from the Bible. Relying on the framework of comparative theology, considered as "welcoming wisdom wherever it exists" and "faith seeking understanding" in light of truth seen deeply in other religious tradition, such mutual close readings and interactions across religious traditions could be a good model for the Muslim world, instead of a fully rejectionist fundamentalist discourse against other traditions. Such a pluralist approach emphasizes a global raising of awareness and mutual understanding.

Keywords: Prophet Yaḥyā; John the Baptist; the Qur'an; Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*); *isrā'īliyyāt*; canonical gospels; comparative theology

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1. Introduction

Francis X. Clooney SJ describes contemporary comparative theology as an original response to twenty-first century religious diversity. It involves "finding God in all things" and "welcoming wisdom where it exists". It is "faith seeking understanding" in light of truth(s) embedded deeply in other traditions. In his view, the aim of the attempt is "to know God better" (Ray et al. 2013, p. 99). Clooney highlights the following:

> Comparative theology marks acts of faith as seeking understanding, which are rooted in a particular faith tradition but which, from that foundation, venture into learning from one or more faith traditions. This learning is sought for the sake of fresh theological insights that are indebted to the newly encountered tradition(s) as well as the home tradition (Clooney 2010, p. 10).

Clooney adds that *Comparison* is a reflective and contemplative attempt by which we see the other in the light of our own and our own in light of the other. This comparison ordinarily starts with the intuition of an interesting similarity that assists us to place two realities—texts, images, practices, doctrines, and persons—near one another, so that they may be seen over and again, side by side. We understand each differently in this necessarily random and intuitive practice since the other is near, and through increasing insight also begin to comprehend related matters differently too. Ultimately, in his view, we see ourselves differently, intuitively revealing dimensions of ourselves. Otherwise, we

could not grasp them through a non-comparative logic. Clooney underlines that it is a theological discipline that one is confident about being intelligently faithful to his tradition even while looking for fresh understanding outside his tradition (Clooney 2010, pp. 10–11).

Clooney indicates that there are several distinctive features of the comparative initiative. First of all, comparativists should have a commitment to the truth of their home tradition before they journey into another tradition. In Clooney's project, one moves from a commitment base through involving intellectual inquiries to a renewed and transformed reappropriation of confessional ideas. The second feature of contemporary comparative theology is its strong textual part. He states that religious texts have a way of bringing to life the truths they seek to tell. The words in religious texts are like windows allowing the comparativist to see into the text. Moreover, Clooney advocates comparative theologians not to make a priori judgements, but to internalize the materials and address theological challenges after reading, reflection, and dialogue. The reason for this is that he does not intend to force his own ideas upon the texts but prefers to wait and see what the texts might provide. Furthermore, it is recommended that the discipline must not remain theoretical, but must have a practical aspect. Clooney maintains that in ideal circumstances, one sees, hears, visits, tastes, smells, and touches the "reality" of the other tradition. In addition, the comparative enterprise ends where it began—in a return home. The comparativist travels full circle and reallocates their original commitment position (Ray 2014, pp. 54–59).

In her book, Catherine Cornille indicates various types of approaches to comparative theology such as postcolonial, confessional, trans-religious and interreligious. In interreligious comparative theology, theologians focus on commonalities and what they can learn from each other by examining the common ground between religious traditions to achieve mutual illuminations (Cornille 2019). However, it is worth mentioning here that the purpose for such comparison of sacred texts is a deep theological learning across religious traditions and not to harmonize conflicting interpretations, emphasizes the distinct nuances of meaning understood by the other even when broad concepts are shared (Albayrak 2012).

Although a religious tradition keeps its originality and major sources, it is a reality that interactions and exchange between religious traditions and knowledge among cultures took place in the past. Any religious tradition can benefit from accumulated human knowledge. In the context of Islamic intellectual tradition, there had been interreligious learning in several fields of Islamic studies such as mysticism (sufism, *taṣawwuf*) and ethics. For example, Sayyid Hussain Nasr says that today, Muslims' engagement with other religions relies on rich foundations laid by Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273) and Ibn Al-ʿArabī (d. 1240). He also points out that "the Sufis spoke about universality of the truth and of revelation. It was figures such as Ibn Al-ʿArabī and Rumi who had a vision of the Formless which allowed them to see the truth in forms other than those of their own religion" (Nasr and Jahanbegloo 2010, p. 290). Moreover, there are examples from some Muslim mystics who were intelligently faithful to tradition even while seeking a fresh understanding from outside that tradition. For instance, Muslim mystic Ibrāhīm Ibn Adham (d. 778) "fell in with Christian anchorites", who instructed him in their "inner wisdom", or "gnosis" (*maʿrifa*), which gives its possessor power over his fellow believers (Knysh 2000). Further, Muslim mystic Shaqīq al-Balkhī (d. 810) had a curious encounter with a Buddhist monk who taught Shaqīq the meaning of trust in God *(tawakkul)* and challenged him to demonstrate his trust in God as the sole provider of men (Knysh 2000).

This article focuses on John/Yaḥyā in the Qur'an in the light of the exegetical tradition and certain Qur'an commentaries. Using *isrā'īliyyāt* reports (related to biblical materials) in the interpretation of the Qur'an along with modern tendency of direct citations from the Bible will also be examined. The main argument of this article is that, as examples of learning across religious borders in the Islamic tradition are present, such as using *isrā'īliyyāt* in Qur'anic exegesis and 'the laws preceding Islam' (*shar'u man qablanā*)[1] in Islamic law, and certain Muslim mystics' engagement with others, openness to mutual, closer readings of scriptural texts, deeper learning, and thereby mutual illuminations could be a good model for the Muslim world in today's world.

2. John the Baptist/Yaḥyā as a Common Figure

The origin of John is Yôhânân in Hebrew, meaning Jehovah bestowed (Aydin 2020). In the Qur'an and Islamic sources, his name is Yaḥyā. The word Yaḥyā is derived from the word *hayya*, meaning "to make alive" or "to quicken". Qur'an commentators interpret this word as referring to "his miraculous birth and his mission to renew faith" (Hillier 2006, p. 700).

Prophet Yaḥyā (John the Baptist) is prominently a great figure as a bridge between Islam and Christianity[2]. Both traditions accept him to be "rightly-guided" and among the company of "the righteous" such as Abraham and Moses. Both traditions perceive his mission as intrinsically related to the life of Jesus (Hillier 2006). However, in the Bible his mission was a preparation for the coming of Jesus and he is not independent from Jesus. In Islamic tradition, his birth, identity, and his prophetic mission is as one of the prophets for the sons of Israil (Bani Israel) (Aydin 2020).

3. Prophet Yaḥyā in the Qur'an and Exegesis

The Qur'an indicates Prophet Yaḥyā's miraculous birth, identity, and his prophetic mission as one of the prophets for the sons of Jacob. It should be noted that Prophet Yaḥyā appears five times in the Qur'an. However, the bulk of John's story takes place within two nativity chapters (3 and 19), *Āl ʿImrān* (House of ʿImran) and *Maryam* (Mary), which is similar to the nativity narrative in the Gospel of Luke (Hillier 2006). This section will briefly analyze Q. 3: 39–41 and Q. 19: 2–15 through selected Qur'an commentators and a few selected modern studies.

Q. 3: 39 highlights the following:

> The angels called out to him (Zachariah), while he stood praying in the sanctuary, 'God gives you (Zachariah) news of John, confirming a Word from God. He will be noble and chaste, a prophet, one of the righteous'. (Q: 3:39) (Abdel Haleem 2004)

The story of Zachariah and John is given in fuller detail in 19:2–15, and *sūra Maryam*'s narrative indicates Zachariah's fear of what his existing heirs might do after his death due to his own and his wife's advanced age (Nasr et al. 2015). According to the exegete al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), "*confirming a Word from God*" indicates John will confirm Jesus, son of Mary, who is described as a word from God (Al-Ṭabarī 2022a; Al-Rāzī 2022). "Noble" (*sayyid*) is interpreted as learned, devout, wise, generous, reverent of God, clement, and temperate (Nasr et al. 2015; Al-Ṭabarī 2022b). "Chaste" in the verse, according to some, refers to someone who abstains from sexual relations with women or vice versa, though many commentators believe that this means abstention only from illicit sexual relations (Nasr et al. 2015; Ibn Kathīr 2022).

Q. 3:40 and 41 continues to state Zachariah's story as follows:

> He said, 'My Lord, how can I have a son when I am so old and my wife is barren?' [An angel] said, 'It will be so: God does whatever He will'. He said, 'My Lord, give me a sign'. 'Your sign', [the angel] said, 'is that you will not communicate with anyone for three days, except by gestures. Remember your Lord often; celebrate His glory in the evening and at dawn'.

Gabriel Said Reynolds (2018) holds the view that the passage of Q. 3:38–40 alludes to Luke's account of the annunciation of John to Zechariah, who was serving as a priest in the tabernacle of the Temple (Luke 1:5–13). The statement "you will not communicate with anyone" for Zechariah in the verse is understood to mean that he was temporarily unable to speak even if his wits were still intact (Nasr et al. 2015; Al-Ṭabarī 2022b). His momentary speechlessness reminds us of Mary's directive to maintain a fast of silence following the birth of Jesus. (Q. 19:26). After these supernatural occurrences, Zachariah and Mary were instructed to keep silent, indicating the spiritual significance of quietness (Nasr et al. 2015).

In line with the passage above, Q. 19: 2–15 (*sūra* Maryam) elaborates the story. The stories of Mary, Zachariah, John the Baptist, and Jesus are linked in the passages of verses 2–35 of *sūra* Maryam (Mary). The two stories also have relations with Q. 21: 89–91 as

well as in the biblical account found in Luke 1: 5–80. The parallel between the miraculous birth of Jesus to the young virgin Mary and the miraculous birth of John to the elderly and previously infertile wife of Zachariah serves to illustrate how age and human limitations have no bearing on the way in which God's will has been carried out in sacred history (Nasr et al. 2015).

Regarding the story of Zachariah and John the Baptist in *sūra* Maryam, Reynolds maintains that passage of Q. 19: 2–6 might be read in light of Luke 1. Both texts notably have Zechariah refer to the "House of Jacob" (Q. 19: 6 and Luk 1: 33). Only the Qur'an, however, has Zechariah pray to God for an heir (cf. 3: 38–40; 21: 89; Zechariah is also referred to in 6: 85) (Reynolds 2018, p. 473). About verses 7–11 of the same *sūra*, Reynolds believes that the Qur'an is developing Luke 1 while indicating few differences such as it has God speak directly to Zechariah (unlike Luke, where it is the angel Gabriel, and unlike 3: 39, where it is instead "angels"). He also highlights that "Verses 8–9 should be compared to Luke 1: 18–19" (Reynolds 2018, p. 474). In this context, Reynolds highlights one difference between the narratives of the Qur'an and the Bible: Zechariah loses his speech in Luke as a result of rejecting the angel's message, whereas in the Qur'an (verses 9–10), this is the response to Zechariah's plea for a sign (Reynolds 2018).

However, in another study, Wonjoo Hwang (2022) argues that the Qur'an uses biblical figures within its own theological framework. Hwang also maintains that a comparison of the Islamic narratives on Zakariyyā and Yaḥyā with the biblical accounts indicate not only similarities but also significant differences that cause significant theological breaches between the Qur'an and the Bible. Awareness of such differences will result in a better understanding of their roles in their respectful narratives. For example, Zachariah's being not able to communicate is a sign in the Qur'an, but it is a punishment in according to Luke's Gospel. This took 3 days according to the Qur'an, but, In Luke's Gospel, Zachariah did not communicate until the eighth day after the birth of John (Yaḥyā) (Hwang 2022). Hwang, in general, takes the polemical nature of the two chapters (Āl ʿImrān and Maryam) into account, arguing that the Islamic narratives of Zakariyyā and Yaḥyā should be taken "as a counter-biblical or anti-Christological assertion" (Hwang 2022, p. 176). In another work, Kaltner and Mirza (2017) briefly summarize the Qur'anic narrative of John the Baptist/Yaḥyā, making few comparisons between the Qur'an and the Bible.

3.1. Intertextual Reading from the Classical Notion of Isrā'īliyyāt to the Modern Trend of Direct Biblical Citations in the Qur'anic Exegesis

This section aims to discuss the classical exegetical approach to *isrā'īliyyāt* (using biblical materials in Qur'anic exegesis) and a modern tendency of direct citations from the Bible, thereby providing a framework for the next section, where selected annotated translations of the Qur'an from the modern period are analyzed in relation to the Qur'anic narrative of Yaḥyā/John the Baptist.

It is worth mentioning that *isrāīliyyāt* reports (biblical materials) were used by the earliest Muslims in order to interpret the Qur'an (Saeed 2005, p. 96). *Isrāīliyyāt* narrations are used as available historical sources mostly for interpreting the stories of earlier prophets (Paçacı 2007, p. 7). Interpreting the Qur'an in the light of *isrā'īliyyāt* reports is considered under tradition-based exegesis (*tafsīr bi-al-ma'thūr*) (Çoruh 2017). Exegetes used biblical materials to fill some gabs in prophetic narratives. The use of *isrā'īliyyāt* to provide narrative detail to stories shared by the Qur'an and the Bible. There is the very widespread reliance on *isrā'īliyyāt* traditions in classical Qur'an an exegesis such as al-Ṭabarī's commentary. For example, Prophet Abraham saw in his dream to sacrifice his son (Q. 37: 102). The Qur'an does not give a name. Some commentators say Ishmael, other commentators, such as Al-Ṭabarī (2022b), state that he was Isaac (Isḥāq) based on the Bible. It should be noted here that in Al-Ṭabarī's Qur'an commentary, the first 2.5 centuries of Muslim interpretation were collected and organised methodically (McAuliffe 2007). Therefore, Al-Ṭabarī's Qur'an commentary also contained many *isrā'īliyyāt* reports, particularly related to Qur'anic stories, from the early period of Islam. Many Muslim historians and interpreters had no trouble

adopting biblical sources in the early phases of Islamic history, but from the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries onward, resistance started to take hold (Saeed 2005, p. 96). Saeed (2005, pp. 96–97) argues for several factors for this resistance such as the maturing of Islam and the establishment of Islamic disciplines (such as *kalām*), Muslims' confidence of their theological positions and of their own distinctive scripture. Ibn al-Kathīr (d. 774/1373) put some limitations on these reports, explaining that *isrā'īliyyāt* are reported *li al-istishhād* (for supplementary attestation) not *li al-i'tidād* (for full support and reliance or *i'tiqad*, belief) (Çoruh 2019).

Moreover, in the *tafsīr* literature, the most narrations of *isrā'īliyyāt* are cited as reports from certain converts such as Wahb ibn Munabbih (654–737 CE) and Ka'b al-Ahbar (d. 653 CE) in the earliest period of Islam, and most classical exegetes do not seem to cite directly from the Bible's text. As Albayrak (2000) highlights, the classical commentators do not provide any textual proof that they were familiar with the Jewish and Christian sources though al-Biqā'ī's Qur'an commentary (809–885/1407–1480) is considered an exception (Saleh 2007). Mesut Kaya (2013) lists the followings as reasons why the classical exegetes relied on *isrā'īliyyāt* reports rather than direct citations from the Bible: the peculiar structure of classical *tafsīr* and narration of knowledge by *isnad* (chain of transmission), the legitimacy of quoting the Bible, and Muslim self-confidence and dominant attitudes. In general, it could be said that classical Muslim scholars' relationship with the Bible did not go beyond passages that they believed foretold the Prophet's prophecy, nor transmitting some of the texts they used for polemical purposes (Kaya 2013).

However, with the emergence of modernity, a new method of direct citations from the Bible in the interpretation of the Qur'an or using the Bible as a source of *tafsīr* has developed by certain influential exegetes in parallel with a critical approach to *isrā'īliyyāt* reports. Engagement with modernity and Western thought provided great opportunities for Muslim exegetes to compare and to crosscheck classical *isrā'īliyyāt* reports with the Bible and Talmud. They thought that there was a need for learning their religions and books from their own sources as classical scholars had no sufficient knowledge of the religion and books of the People of the Book (Kaya 2013).

In the beginning of Islamic modernism, Muḥammad 'Abduh's highly critical approach to *isrā'īliyyāt* has become a turning point and a starting for a new tendency in Qur'anic exegesis and influencing other exegetes. As Tottoli (1999, 2002) notes, 'Abduh and his student M. Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935) are usually considered the departure point for a new approach, and the complete denial of the traditions passed down by the first generations of Muslim converts, also known as *isrā'īliyyāt*,. In his *muqaddima* to his commentary, 'Abduh underlines the following:

"(Of the methods followed in the *tafsīr*) the third is that the stories (*qiṣas*) to be investigated. Many people have adopted this method, and they have added what they want from historical and *isrā'īliyyāt* sources (*kutub al-tārīkh wa'l-isrā'īliyyāt*) to the stories of the Qur'an. Meanwhile, they did not rely on books that were valid according to the People of the Book such as the Torah and the Gospel and other valid religious books according to other religious followers; on the contrary, they took *isrā'īliyyāt* stories without distinguishing whatever they heard from them, and without checking if they are compatible with Shari'ah and reason (*walā tanqīḥ limā yukhālif al-shar walā yuṭābiq al-'aql*)." ('Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā 1947, p. 18).

As can be seen in the above, 'Abduh is highly critical of *isrā'īliyyāt* reports, the style of their transmissions (oral) and their contents. However, although he thinks superstitious stories of Jewish and Christian origin are unreliable in *tafsīr*, he does not include the Bible itself in this category (Pink 2015). 'Abduh says above that it needs to be relied on their own resources during the interpretation of the relevant parts of the Qur'an.

'Abduh's this new method has an impact on certain exegetes, and various other scholars have also adopted this method in the modern period. After him, Rashīd Riḍā has developed it further, providing the entire passages of the Torah in *tafsīr al-Manār*. Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) and then intellectuals who studied in *tafsīr* in India such as Hamiduddin Farāhī (d. 1930), Thanāullāh Amritsârî (d. 1948), Abu'l-Kalām Āzād

(d. 1958), Mawdūdī (d. 1979), Ghulam Aḥmad Parviz (d. 1985), and Amin Aḥsan Islāhī (d. 1997) seriously engaged with the Bible in their works though their views and schools were different. Moreover, certain annotated Qur'an translations also included Qur'an–Bible comparisons in relevant parts such as Muhammed Ali's (d. 1951) *The Holy Kur'ân*, Ömer Rıza Doğrul's (d. 1952) *Tanrı Buyruğu*, Muhammed Asad's (d. 1992) *The Message of The Qur'an*, Muhammad Hamidullah's (d. 2002) *Le Saint Coran*, and Suat Yıldırım's (b. 1941) *Kur'ân-ı Hakîm ve Açıklamalı Meali* (The Wise Qur'an and Annotated Translation). Ṭāhir b. Āshūr (d. 1973), M. Izzat Darwaza (d. 1984), and Süleyman Ateş (b. 1933) are also among the commentators who use this method in their commentaries in a prominent way (Kaya 2013). Kaya discusses criticisms against this new method of intertextual conversations while he analyses in detail on which contexts and purposes the Bible citations are used in modern Qur'an commentaries such as history of religions and polemics, cross-text comparisons between the Qur'an, the Bible and Talmud, and the Bible as the modern source of *tafsīr* (Kaya 2013).

3.2. Case Study of Selected Modern Approaches to the Narrative of Yaḥyā/John the Baptist in the Qur'an

This section will analyze ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā's Qur'an commentary, and three annotated translations of the Qur'an, namely Muhammed Asad, Muhammad Hamidullah, and Suat Yıldırım, about Q. 3: 39–41 and Q. 19: 2–15 and evaluate their approaches to the story of Yaḥyā/John the Baptist in the Qur'an. The reason for why these names are selected is that they applied for the modern tendency of direct citations from the Bible in their respective works though their distinctive methods may have some differences. As highlighted above, ʿAbduh is a key figure for this new tendency in Qur'anic exegesis. How he applied it in his Qur'an commentary on the story of Yaḥyā will provide us some insights into this tendency. The other three annotated Qur'an translators have also showed an interest in this tendency, and analyzing their perspectives/applications of direct citations from the Bible will be helpful to see a modern method in Qur'an translation genre though they have different backgrounds.

When we analyze ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā's Qur'an commentary on Q. 3: 39–41, we see that they aim to provide some lessons via the verses in question. Further, it seems that they avoid narrating some miraculous extraordinary events reported as additional information to the story of the Qur'an (for ʿAbduh and demythologisation see, Shareea 2019). For example, regarding Mary's provisions from Allah on Q. 3: 37, "Whenever Zachariah went in to see her in her sanctuary, he found her supplied with provisions. He said, 'Mary, how is it you have these provisions?' and she said, 'They are from God: God provides limitlessly for whoever He will'". Rashīd Riḍā commented that "there is no evidence in the verse that sustenance came down as an extraordinary supernatural event (*min khawāriq al-ʿādāt*), and the attribution of the believers' command to God in this regard is customary in ancient and modern times" (ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā 2022, p. 54). Riḍā cites from his teacher the following:

The Qur'an was revealed plain and easy for everyone to understand without the need for trouble or going to defend something other than the apparent meaning (*ẓāhir*). We must not deviate from its way and do not add to it (Qur'anic stories) *isrā'īliyyāt* or non-*isrā'īliyyāt* tales to make this story an extraordinary supernatural event (*min khawāriq al-ʿādāt*). To search for that sustenance as what it is and where it did come from is superfluous, and such things do not need to understand the meaning (of the Qur'an) or need further lessons. If God knew that his statement is good for us, he would have made it clear (ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā 2022, p. 54).

As another example, on Q.3: 41, "He said, 'My Lord, give me a sign'. 'Your sign', [the angel] said, 'is that you will not communicate with anyone for three days, except by gestures'". Rashīd Riḍā emphasizes one narration about Zakariyyā's speechlessness which is indicated by the classical exegetes. Then he directly cites from Luke Gospel: "In the Gospel of Luke, it is said: Gabriel said to Zechariah: He said: "Right now your tongue

will be held and you will not be able to speak at all until these things happen. Because you have not confirmed my promise that will come when the time comes" (Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā 2022, p. 55). He uses this biblical citation as part of *tafsīr* on this verse while not commenting on it. However, it is interesting to note that Rashīd Riḍā does not mention or comment on one difference between the Qur'an and the biblical narrative: Zakariyyā's speechlessness took 3 days according to the Qur'an, but, in Luke's Gospel, Zachariah did not communicate until the birth of John (Yaḥyā/John the Baptist) (Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā 2022, p. 55). Riḍā may not see that these two narratives in the Qur'an and the Bible are a great difference that disputes each other and so disregards to provide any comments on it. As noticed, ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā's Qur'an commentary applies for the modern tendency of direct citations from the Bible.

In *The Message of the Qur'ān*, it is interesting to note that Muhammed Asad (1984) makes similar comments with ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā regarding Mary's provisions from God on Q. 3: 37, highlighting that there is absolutely no indication in the Qur'an or in any authentic tradition that these provisions had a supernatural origin, notwithstanding all the legends that most commentators have cited in this context. It seems that Asad's source in his comments is *Tafsīr al-Manār*, and Asad also considers some *isrā'īliyyāt* reports as legendary and not reliable. However, on Q.3: 41, " . . . 'Your sign', [the angel] said, 'is that you will not communicate with anyone for three days, except by gestures'". Asad cites Muʿtazilī exegete Abu Muslim's (d. 934) opinion that Zachariah was not rendered speechless as in the New Testament story (Luke i, 20–22); rather, he was simply instructed not to speak to anyone for the next three days, underlying that Zachariah had to completely give himself over to prayer and reflection as the "sign" which was only to be a spiritual manifestation (Asad 1984). It could be derived from here that Asad interprets Zakariyyā's speechlessness spiritually in line with the Muʿtazilī exegete, meaning that Zakariyyā refrained from talking to people by his own will and devoted himself to prayer and contemplation even though other interpretation is more preferred and common, which is that although Zakariyyā has the power to remember God and pray to Him, he will not be able to talk to people, but that he can only communicate through signs. In this context, Asad makes a comment against Luke's narrative, which looks similar with the majority of the Qur'anic exegetes' interpretation.

Regarding Asad's critical approach to *isrā'īliyyāt* reports above, it is worth mentioning here that the modernist and rationalist orientation of Asad's commentary on the Qurʾān should be understood within the early Muslim modernist trend. Therefore, it is significant to highlight ʿAbduh's intellectual influence on Asad's work (Dango 2018). Asad attempts to rationalize miraculous extraordinary events in the Qur'an as can be seen regarding the case of Mary's provisions above.

Muhammed Asad makes some comments on Q. 19: 7–16. He provides the meaning of the name Yaḥyā (John the Baptist). He also makes a connection between the story of Yaḥyā and the story of Maryam, pointing out that John's birth story is followed by that of Jesus in these both *sūra*s, Maryam and Āl ʿImran, for two reasons: first, because John (also known as "the Baptist" in the Bible) was to be a forerunner of Jesus, and second, because there is a clear connection between the birth announcements of these two children (Asad 1984). In his short notes, Asad indicates Yaḥyā's biblical description and his role as the forerunner of Jesus.

In *Le Saint Coran*, Muhammad Hamidullah (2000) provides some explanatory notes on Q. 3: 37–40. On Q. 3: 37, he states that "Zechariah" is the father of John the Baptist. He had nothing to do with the prophet, who had a chapter with his name in the Old Testament. Regarding Q. 3: 38, Hamidullah (2000) recommends comparing this story through the Gospel of Luke (1, 5–25), highlighting that the Qur'an only reminds us of the previously known story and is content with making certain points. Regarding "ews of John, confirming *a Word from God*" on Q.3:39, he remarks that the "word" here means both God's command and Jesus himself (Hamidullah 2000). As the above shows, Hamidullah has not any hesitation to make a reference to Gospel of Luke in his notes, interestingly noting that the Qur'an only reminds us of the previously known story. As Hamidullah lived in the

West for a long time, it seems that he aimed to address the Western people as an audience and adopted a comparative approach by comparing certain topics of the Qur'an with other religions and cultures. However, his detailed approach to other religions or Bible references are beyond the scope of this article. In addition, he does not look to rationalize miraculous extraordinary events in the story like Asad did.

In the introduction to his annotated translation of the Qur'an, Suat Yıldırım (2006) provides some major characteristics of his Qur'an translation. In this context, he emphasizes that at times he touched on parallels with existing Torah and biblical texts merely for the purpose of comparison and for demonstration of the places other scriptures have on the same topics rather than interpretation. He also refers to other exegetes who adopted a similar method of citing other scriptures for the purpose of comparison such as Rashīd Riḍā, Ibn Āshūr, and Muhammad Hamidullah. On Q. 3: 41, Yıldırım makes a reference to Luke, 1, 20. Regarding Q. 19: 2–15, he provides some biblical references to certain verses. He refers to Luke, 1, 5–25 for Q. 19: 2; 1 Chronicles, 23 for Q. 19: 5–6; Luke, 1, 5–22 for Q. 19: 7; Luke, 1, 5–22 for Q. 19: 15. Finally, at the end of the story of Prophet Yaḥyā, Yıldırım (2006) makes a brief comparison between the Qur'anic and biblical narratives, stressing that there are just two differences between the stories of the Qur'an and Gospel: 1. Zachariah's being not able to communicate is a sign in the Qur'an, but it is a type of punishment in according to Luke's Gospel. 2. This took 3 days according to the Qur'an, however, in Luke's Gospel, Zachariah did not communicate until the birth of John (Yaḥyā). Yıldırım (2006) makes it clear in his introduction that references to the Bible and other scriptures are made for the purpose of comparison and to be aware of the information and contents of other scriptures as the Qur'an makes references to Torah, Gospel, and Palms in many places. Yıldırım's Qur'an translation adopts a unique style. In many cases, the translation just provides references to the Bible in the relevant parts without citing them, and examination and comparison are left to readers. In his translation, Yıldırım applies for the modern tendency of direct citations from the Bible. However, he follows the mainstream traditional line without attempting to rationalize and demythologize miraculous extraordinary events.

From a comparative theology perspective, it could be concluded that our selected authors above attempt to perform interreligious learning by direct citations from the Bible in their respective works. They believe the importance of intertextual readings and interreligious learning in the contemporary context and globalized, pluralist world. However, their level of engagement with the others' scriptures seems different. At this point, as Kaya (2013) highlights, the crucial question is that on which contexts and purposes the Bible is cited/referenced in modern Qur'an commentaries? If the biblical texts are cited merely for the purpose of comparison and what do other scriptures have on the same topics, this could be considered as more intertextual dialogue or a history of religions because comparative theology is considered as broader advancing of theological understanding and advancing religious truth, not only just understanding (Cornille 2019). The level of understanding could be more related to Scriptural Reasoning. Moreover, in ʿAbduh's case, if the purpose is citing the Bible as the modern source of *tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegesis), this could be a closer engagement and deeper reading as ʿAbduh believes that it needs to be relied on others' own books/scriptures during the interpretation of the relevant parts of the Qur'an (ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā 1947, p. 18). In addition, it could be highlighted that the context of our selected authors affected their level of engagement with the others' scriptures in their works.

Finally, as indicated in the introduction, samples of interreligious learning took place in several fields of Islamic studies. Besides certain examples of mysticism (sufism) and ethics in the classical period, it should be noted that knowledge in some *isrā'īliyyāt* reports is considered reliable and acceptable in the history of Qur'anic exegesis and the genre of stories of prophets (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā*). Though Ibn al-Kathīr was critical of using *isrā'īliyyāt* in his Qur'an commentary, he included some biblical narratives about Yaḥyā (John the Baptist) in his stories of prophets collection. The field of Islamic jurisprudence could be

another example as the laws preceding Islam (*shar'u man qablanā*) are considered one of the secondary sources of Islamic Jurisprudence. The previous laws can be used as evidence if the laws are mentioned in the Qur'ān and Sunnah without being identifiably rejected or abrogated (Kamali 2003).

4. Conclusions

This article has analyzed Prophet Yaḥyā (John the Baptist) in the Qur'an in the light of the exegetical tradition and certain Qur'an commentaries. A brief historical overview of using *isrā'īliyyāt* reports (related to biblical materials) in the interpretation of the Qur'an, along with a modern tendency of direct citations from the Bible were also examined. As a case study, this article also focused on ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā's Qur'an commentary, and three annotated translations of the Qur'an, namely Muhammed Asad, Muhammad Hamidullah, and Suat Yıldırım, regarding two chapters (Q. 3: 39–41 and Q. 19: 2–15) and evaluated their approaches to the story of Yaḥyā/John the Baptist in the Qur'an.

This article has emphasized that the narrative of Yaḥyā (John the Baptist) indicated a similar story between Islamic and Christian Scriptures, and commonalities should be seen as a bridge between Islam and Christianity while being aware of the fact that some distinct differences are also present. This article has also highlighted that there have been examples of learning across religious borders in the Islamic tradition. Closer intertextual readings, deeper learning from each other, and mutual illuminations could be a good model for the Muslim world in today's globalized world as home tradition could be better understood through looking at other traditions. Narratives on common figures or teachings on common themes of humanity in different traditions may provide different perspectives and insights.

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Notes

[1] The Laws preceding Islam (*shar'u man qablanā*) is considered one of the secondary sources of Islamic Jurisprudence. There are some previous rulings which are valid and binding onto Muslims as well. One example is Q. 2: 183: "O you who believe! Prescribed for you is the Fast, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may deserve God's protection". The previous laws can be used as evidence if the laws are mentioned in the Qur'ān and Sunnah without being identifiably rejected or abrogated. This is the majority of Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali, and some Shafi'i jurists. Also, as another example, Hanafīs validated the execution of a Muslim for murdering a non-Muslim due to 'life for life' (Q. 5: 45: "In the Torah We prescribed for them a life for a life . . . ") (Kamali 2003).

[2] The figure of John in the Bible is enigmatic, and there have been numerous studies on him. As some examples, see; Josephine Wilkinson's *John the Baptist: His Life and Afterlife* (2022), Frederick Brotherton Meyer's *John the Baptist* (2022), Wonjoo Hwang's "A Comparative Study of Zakariya/Zachariah and Yahya/John the Baptist in the Islamic and the Biblical Narratives" (2022), Małgorzata Grzegorzewska's "The forerunners St. John the Baptist and Lazarus in the poetry of T. S. Eliot" (2020), Joel Marcus's *John the Baptist in History and Theology* (2018), Dorothy A. Lee's "Witness in the Fourth Gospel: John the Baptist and the Belowed Discipline as the Counterparts" (2013), Jaroslav Rindoš's *He of Whom it is Written: John the Baptist and Elijah in Luke* (2010), Rivka Nir's "Josephus' Account of John the Baptist: A Christian Interpolation?" (2012), Francois P. Viljoen's "The righteousness of Jesus and John the Baptist as depicted by Matthew" (2013).

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Article

Critique of *Nasḫ* in Contemporary Qur'ānic Hermeneutics Using the Example of Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's Works

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Abstract: This article highlights the importance of the issue of *nasḫ* in the context of the thought and works of the acclaimed Egyptian thinker Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd (1943–2010) who, while often perceived as a liberal intellectual, was at the same time deeply embedded in classical and modern Islamic thought and a hermeneutical approach to the Qur'ān. The practice of *nasḫ* is usually translated as "abrogation" and seems to be one of the most important procedures conducted by Muslim jurists within the frame of the Qur'ānic sciences. It is one of the deciding features of Islamic law as subsequently created and codified following the time of the Prophet Muḥammad and the Righteous Caliphs. For Abū Zayd, *nasḫ* was linked to a set of juridical approaches reducing the discursive aspect of the Qur'ān and turning it into a normative book of law. This article includes examples of Abū Zayd's critique and analysis of the classical cases of *nasḫ* as contained in his most important books, *Mafhūm an-naṣṣ* and *Naqd al-ḫiṭāb ad-dīnī*, as well his English works published in the Netherlands after the so-called "Case of Abū Zayd" and his forced emigration to Europe. In the last part, the outcome of Abū Zayd's approach will be assessed and his location among past and present Egyptian and Arab thinkers discussed and problematized.

Keywords: *nasḫ*; abrogation; Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd; Qur'ānic hermeneutics; Islamic jurisprudence

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Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd (1943–2010), an acclaimed Egyptian intellectual, was deeply embedded in classical and modern Islamic thought and hermeneutical approaches to the Qur'ān. A graduate and longstanding researcher at the University of Cairo, he was forced to leave Egypt in 1995 and later had a period of academic work in the Netherlands. After working at Leiden University, the scholar obtained the Ibn Rushd Chair of Humanism and Islam at the University of Humanistics, Utrecht. Abū Zayd's research was shaped by the "Egyptian school" of literary approach to the study of Qur'ān as well as by his openness towards different cultures and international schools of thought, which resulted in his travelling across the globe to wherever he could find common ground with researchers and academic audience, including such different places as the United States, Japan, and Indonesia. Despite the versatility of his scientific oeuvre, it could be said that modern reinterpretation of the Qur'ān was the most important topic of his output. Among his masters and inspirations were major personages and movements of Arab classical thought, from the Mu'tazila group via Aš-Šāfi'ī to Ibn 'Arabī, and modern Arabic literary studies, such as Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, Amīn al-Ḫūlī, and Muḥammad Aḥmad Ḫalaf Allāh. He made extensive study of Western thought, and assimilated into Arabic notions and theories taken from European semiotics and hermeneutics (e.g., Ferdinand de Saussure, Yuri Lotman, Roman Jakobson, Hans-Georg Gadamer, E.D. Hirsch), sometimes melding it with local Arab hermeneutical traditions, especially the tradition of *ta'wīl*. In the period of time between the years 1985 and 1990, he created two of his most important works: *Mafhūm an-naṣṣ* ("Concept of the Text"; 1st ed. 1990), presenting his hermeneutical method of reading the Qur'ān, and *Naqd al-ḫiṭāb ad-Dīnī* ("Critique of Religious Discourse"; 1st ed. 1990 or 1992), which made his views a focus of violent public debate in Egypt. Even after the so-called Case of Abu Zayd (1992–1995), when the scholar decided to leave Egypt and

go into exile in the Netherlands, he remained a prolific author and a participant of many intellectual discussions within the environment of Islamic reformist thought and the Arab liberal and democratic milieus.

This paper aims to develop a dimension that has been, as far as I am concerned, not frequently raised by researchers of Abū Zayd's heritage. The practice of *nasḫ*, which became one of the most important sub-disciplines of Islamic jurisprudence and the Qur'ānic sciences, is an important context and point of reference in several of the Egyptian scholar's books in both Arabic and English. I would like to trace the way in which the question of abrogation is linked to the main hermeneutical issues raised by Abū Zayd. It is of special interest when we take into account that *nasḫ*, usually translated into English in a somewhat simplified way as 'abrogation', has both legal (juridical) and hermeneutical aspects in addition to a connection with the problematic issue of Islamic revelation (*waḥy*). Before presenting examples from Abū Zayd's works, an introduction regarding the notion and usage of *nasḫ* must be provided that takes into account its ambiguous and historically changing character.

1. *Nasḫ*: A Key Procedure in Islamic Jurisprudence Between Law and Hermeneutics

I focus on utilizing the Arabic original term *nasḫ* because it is very rich in meanings and can be translated in differing Islamic contexts, mainly as "abrogation", though sometimes as "cancellation", "omission", or "substitution"; interestingly, the Wehr Dictionary adds the meanings of "copying" and "translation" (Wehr, 5th ed., p. 961) to it as well. However, it can be said that "abrogation" has become the main equivalent for the juridical practices of *nasḫ*. John Burton, the author of the in-depth chapters on abrogation in both Brill's *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* and *Encyclopaedia of Islam* and the more detailed monograph *The Sources of Islamic Law: Islamic Theories of Abrogation*, published in 1990, defined it as "a prominent concept in the fields of Qur'ānic commentary and Islamic law which allowed the harmonization of apparent contradictions in legal rulings" (Burton [2003] 2021, Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān Online, 1st paragraph). This definition seems to be very "Western" from the Islamic or Arab point of view. It can be said that in Western Arabic and Islamic studies the entire concept of *nasḫ* was, while obviously noticed, not researched very extensively. Burton discovers a huge discrepancy between "the voluminous literature Muslims have produced on this topic over the centuries" and the relatively slight interest of Western scholars in the details of abrogation (Burton [2003] 2021, Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān Online, 1st paragraph). What is crucial is that the distinction between two dimensions of the holy book of Islam must be introduced: the Qur'ān as text and the Qur'ān as source. In the second case. it will be defined in relation to verses removed (or omitted) from the text such that while they may not be included in the written form (*Muṣḥaf*), they can nevertheless be treated as a substantial part of an Islamic doctrine. Of great importance is the distinction between *the nāsiḫ* (that which is abrogating) and *mansūḫ* (that which is abrogated); as Roslan Abdul-Rahim argues, "the *nāsiḫ* is what is regarded as the Qur'ānic imperative" (Abdul-Rahim 2017, p. 57). It is not a wonder that in the early Qur'ānic sciences one of its sub-branches which focused on *nasḫ* was called *'ilm an-nāsiḫ wa-al-mansūḫ*. Using the abovementioned terminology, R. Abdul-Rahim formulated one of the most interesting contemporary definitions of *nasḫ*:

> "the abrogation or suppression of a ruling that had previously been established and acted on (the *mansūḫ*) by a new established ruling that requires a new enactment (the *nāsiḫ*)". (Abdul-Rahim 2017, p. 58)

Before we briefly inform the way this concept has been developed over the course of the history of the Arab-Islamic civilisation, there is a need to refer to two passages of Qur'ān that inspired and justified the very phenomenon of *nasḫ*. The first of these is 2:106 (cited after *The Noble Qur'ān* published in Saudi Arabia with both Arabic text and English "translation of the meanings"):

Whatever a Verse (revelation) do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring a better one or similar to it. Know you not that Allāh is able to do all things?

The first phrase in Arabic is: *Ma-nansaḫ min āya aw-nunsihā na'ti bi-ḫayr minhā aw-miṯlihā*; thus, the first verb really comes from the root *n-s-ḫ*. In the view of most orthodox jurists, this *āyah* justifies the existence of the two main types of *nasḫ*: (1) *nasḫ al-ḥukm dūna at-tilāwa* (abrogation of a ruling without deleting wording, sometimes called *ibdāl*, 'supersession' or 'suspension'), (2) *nasḫ al-ḥukm wa-at-tilāwa* (the full nullification of the old verse from the *muṣḥaf*, sometimes called *ibtāl*, 'suppression' or 'elimination'). However, there is a strong feeling, especially among some contemporary scholars, that the abovementioned *āya* is not linked to the technical meaning of *nasḫ* developed by Muslim scholars over the course of history (compare Fatoohi 2013, pp. 47–54).

The second verse is Q 16:101:

> When We change a verse in place of another—and Allah knows best what He sends down—they [the disbelievers] say, "You (O Muḥammad) are but a *Muftar* [forger, liar]." Nay, but most of them do not know.

Here, the root *n-s-ḫ* is not utilised and the original phrase is *wa-iḏā badalnā āyah makān āyah*; thus, the meaning of changing or replacing is expressed by the verb *badala* (*badalnā* in the first person the plural). This ambiguous verse played an important part in the subsequent development of the concept of *nasḫ*. The importance of Q 16:101 was underlined by Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Idrīs aš-Šāfi'ī (768–820), one of the four great Sunni Imams, inspirer of one of the *maḏāhib* (Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence), and without doubt a leading scholar and writer during the formative phase of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. As Aš-Šāfi'ī focused on the idea of limiting Sunna to words and actions attributed to the Prophet Muhammad alone, and tried to systematically describe the development of the prophetic mission over the course of twenty years, identifying the will of the prophet with the divine will (Burton [2003] 2021, Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān Online, paragraph on Aš-Šāfi'ī's theory of abrogation). Part of this process involved the replacement of some rulings by the others, with the characteristic case being the replacement of the direction of worship from Jerusalem to Mecca. In Aš-Šāfi'ī's eyes, each case of abandoning or substituting a given rule can be justified by Qur'ānic verses or *ḥadīṯs*, and the scholar gathered such examples in his works: *Contradictory ḥadīṯ* (*Iḫtilāf al-ḥadīṯ*) and *Treatise* [on Jurisprudence] (*Ar-Risāla*). Thus, as Burton argues, the main understanding of *nasḫ* by Aš-Šāfi'ī is related to "abandoning" (Arabic: *taraka*) of a given rule, or more precisely, to the "substitution", as "no ruling is abrogated without a replacement ruling being promulgated in its stead" (Burton [2003] 2021, Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān Online, paragraph on Aš-Šāfi'ī's theory of abrogation).

Actually, despite of the fact that *nasḫ* has become a part of Sunni and Shia orthodoxy, it has been constantly criticised, discussed and negotiated. It is widely assumed (e.g., by Burton) that such a critique started with Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī (868–934); however, the latter's oeuvre regarding this topic is not well known today and seems to be a sort of semi-legendary narration (cf. Abdul-Rahim 2017, p. 60). A paper by a Malaysian scholar, Roslan Abdul-Rahim, that was published in 2017 clarifies such ambiguous aspects in the history of *nasḫ* and provides several very interesting clues on the character of this phenomenon. Abdul-Rahim's approach is more hermeneutical than juridical; in his view, *nasḫ* was an inherent part of revelation (*waḥy*) in Islam. The sending down (*tanzīl*) of the Text, that is, the Qur'ān, is the moment when it becomes historic and begins to appeal to the condition of man in the given time. Thus, as the researcher plainly suggests, "in the historical process of Qur'ānic *tanzīl*, changes in revelation unmistakably took place" (Abdul-Rahim 2017, p. 60). These changes can be deduced from the Qur'ān, and in Abdul-Rahim's terminology can be rendered as (he spells it in italics) cases of *re-revelation*, or *revelatory revision* or *realignment of waḥy* (Abdul-Rahim 2017, p. 60). In his view, *nasḫ* had been something valid and "real for the first generation of Muslims", an actual experience felt in a context of unfolding revelation; however, in the course of time it was reduced to something more "theoretical" and "interpretive", purely juridical (Abdul-Rahim 2017, p. 72). Even if *nasḫ* can be a lively procedure, Abdul-Rahim (2017, p. 75) points out that today it has become a "dead

theory" utilised only for past legal challenges (Abdul-Rahim 2017, p. 75), and freezes the current reformist thinking on Islamic jurisprudence. What is a way out, to incorporate the experience of *nasḫ* in the contemporary times? One clue is provided in the final part of his text.

"We should therefore take the hint from naskh (*nasḫ*) and look at the law according to the more viable transformative model. This is an irony, but it is an irony that essentially prepares the Muslims intellectually and philosophically to embrace the idea of *contextualization*. In this sense, Islam notwithstanding, the law must be viewed and understood according to its context. There is always a danger and risk when someone *decontextualizes* the law. Hence, what we need is not *decontextualization*. What we need is the *demythologization* of the law, and hence, the text itself" (Abdul-Rahim 2017, p. 75; italics in original).

Even if the idea of demythologization of the law is not clarified by Abdul-Rahim with any examples, it is an important point that will be developed to some extent in the subsequent chapter of this paper. In particular, his underlining of the significance of the contextualization and rethinking of Qur'ānic hermeneutics seems to be a common point with Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's thought.

The other complex and well-documented contemporary analysis of *nasḫ* is provided by Louay Fatoohi in his monograph *Abrogation in the Qur'an and Islamic Law* (2013), which is very different from Abdul-Rahim. The former carried out an extensive work analysing many Arabic historical sources which defined *nasḫ*, including the oldest Arabic lexicon *Al-'Ayn* (ca. 173 Hijri/789) by Al-ḫalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, in which one of the meanings of *nasḫ* is "replacing a practice with another" (after: Fatoohi 2013, p. 12). Fatoohi named and defined three modes of abrogation: legal, legal–textual, and textual, underlining the fact that the first has historically been dominant. Of great importance is his assertion that *nasḫ* "is unique in its implications for the history and transmission of the Qur'ānic text as well as its meanings and objectives" (Fatoohi 2013, p. 3); thus, it becomes an intellectual process on the verge of hermeneutics, law, and historical discourse. Fatoohi exposed inconsistencies in Aš-Šāfi'ī's interpretations of *nasḫ*, e.g., argumentation on the change of *qibla* (cf. Q 2:142, 2:144; 2: 149–150) to the Meccan Al-Masǧid al-Ḥarām, which is one of the pivotal examples of *nasḫ*. In Fatoohi's opinion, the *qibla* issue is actually a case in which Sunna was abrogated by the Qur'ān, which is incompatible with the usual position of the author of *Risāla*, who suggests that a Qur'ānic ruling can be abrogated only by a Qur'ānic ruling and, analogously, only *sunna* can be abrogated by other *sunna* (Fatoohi 2013, pp. 19–22). These rather obvious flaws in Aš-Šāfi'ī's argumentation did not prevent him from establishing authority over the majority of Islamic scholars. The reasoning behind the procedures of *nasḫ* was widely criticized and problematized in the 19th Century when Muslim modernists came to the fore in Egypt and other Arab territories, which is the history that strongly shaped the critical thinking of Naṣr Abū Zayd.

2. Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, Hermeneutics, and *Nasḫ*

How can we locate Abū Zayd regarding the aforementioned definitions of *nasḫ* and its usage and critique over the course of many centuries? The Egyptian scholar was strongly indebted to the rationalist current of Muḥammad 'Abduh (1849–1905), whom Abū Zayd considered as the "father of modern Islamic thought" (Abu Zaid and Nelson 2004, p. 52). For the latter, it was 'Abduh who initiated thinking about Qur'ānic stories as allegories spoken and written in a narrative style in order to "convey spiritual and ethical truths" (Abu Zaid and Nelson 2004, p. 52). In the mature phase of his academic research Abū Zayd turned to modern literary approaches to the Qur'ān, taking Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1889–1973), Muḥammad Aḥmad Ḫalaf Allāh (1916–1991), and Amīn al-Ḫūlī (1895–1966) as his intellectual masters. This is very significant for all of Abū Zayd's oeuvre, as for him the tools of literary critique were more important than a strictly juridical or judicial approach to the Koran and Sunna. In the latter's words, 'Abduh "wrote in the staid language of a classic, religious scholar" (Abu Zaid and Nelson 2004, p. 32), which was only the point of entry to more critical research. For Abū Zayd, a literary approach enriched

by both Western and Islamic traditions of hermeneutics would provide a good basis for rethinking Islamic sources.

Returning to the initial question of this sub-chapter, the basis of the hermeneutical approach of the Egyptian scholar must be defined. His approach to revelation (*waḥy*), which as a fundamental Islamic notion was mentioned in the previous chapter in the context of R. Abdul-Rahim's ideas, has to be underlined. Abū Zayd enriches his understanding of revelation using the semiotic approach of Yuri Lotman and Ferdinand de Saussure. One of the results of this approach is the definition of *waḥy* in one of the passages of *Mafhūm an-naṣṣ*:

> The Qur'ān describes itself as a message (*risāla*). The message represents (*tumaṯṯil*) an act of communication (*'alāqat al-ittiṣāl*) between sender (*mursil*) and the recipient (*mustaqbil*), transmitted via a code or a linguistic system (*min ḫilāl šifra aw niẓām lughawī*). In the case of the Qur'ān it is not possible to treat the sender as a matter of scientific inquiry. So, it is natural that the scientific researching of the Qur'ān begins with the researching of reality and culture. (Abū Zaid 1990, p. 27; see also: Moch 2017, p. 65–66).

In this historiographic vision, Abū Zayd focuses on the revealing or sending (*tanzīl*) of the Text, that is, the Qur'ān, by the first sender (*mursil*), God, to the first recipient (*al-mustaqbil al-awwal*), who is Muḥammad (God's Messenger, *rasūl Allāh*). The message is transmitted via an intermediary, the archangel Ǧibrīl. Abū Zayd describes this event as the act of communication or relation of communication (*'alāqat ittiṣāl*). Communication between God and man, as in the title of one of the most important lectures given by Abū Zayd in the Netherlands, is in the centre of his thought. Such an act is possible thanks to the role of the code or linguistic system (*šifra/niẓām luġawī*), and takes place "in a specific reality and cultural context" (*siyāq wāqi' wa-ṯaqāfī*). While the Qur'ān in the Egyptian's approach is divine, as God's message, it has an earthly, textual form as well, which is man-made. Thus, the message (*risāla*) or Text (*naṣṣ*), especially at the moment of codification into written form, becomes a historical cultural product (*muntaǧ ṯaqāfī*), creating and transforming the culture of daily life. Muḥammad, from being the first recipient, evolves into the role of the sender of the Text, which itself begins to change in time and history. The sender–recipient relation in the form of *mursil–mustaqbil/muḫāṭab* communication is established and repeated in every moment when the Qur'ān is recited, read, and interpreted.

We have to remember this semiotic and hermeneutic basis in Abū Zayd's thought, because he sees *waḥy* in precisely this way. In this context, we can return to the earlier idea that *tanzīl* is a process in which revelation has been constantly changed; however, as we will see later, in this regard Abū Zayd's approach is rather traditional.

Returning to the main topic of the article, one of the clearest definitions of *nasḫ* is contained in Abū Zayd's *Reformation of Islamic Thought*, where *nasḫ* (abrogation) is defined as a doctrine "according to which they [the jurists] considered the historically later revelation to be the final rule, while the earlier one was considered abrogated" (Abū Zayd 2006, p. 94). The Egyptian scholar sees the beginnings of the procedure in the fact that it was very difficult to discern any valid methodology of verification when the jurists became overwhelmed by "the occasional diversity and contradictoriness of the Quranic legal stipulation regarding such issues as women, marriage, divorce and custody, dietary issues, etc." (Abū Zayd 2006, p. 94). Despite that the "abrogation" doctrine was based on Quranic *āyāt* (16:101; 2:106), it was quite vague and, in Abū Zayd's opinion, "(. . .) the jurists achieved no consensus on what was abrogated, simply because the actual chronological order of the Quran had always been, and still is, disputed and debated" (Abū Zayd 2006, p. 94).

The Muslim jurists specified four categories of Qur'ānic texts in the context of *nasḫ*; this classification is cited after Abū Zayd, who based it on both the Arabic authors and John Burton's encyclopaedic entries:

1. Verses and passages that are entirely deleted from the present Closed Corpus, i.e., while they once belonged to the Qur'ān, they now no longer belong to the Qur'ān.
2. Verses and passages containing rules and stipulations that, while no longer valid, exist in the Qur'ān to be recited; although their legal power is deleted, their divine status as God's speech remains.
3. Verses and passages whereby their rules and stipulations are valid even though they are deleted from the Qur'ān; the stoning penalty for fornication committed by married people belongs to this category.
4. Of course, the verses and passages that were not subject to abrogation. (after Abū Zayd 2004, p. 16).

The second mentioned category is the most "classical", and can be rendered in the original Arabic form as *nasḫ al-ḥukm dūna at-tilāwa* (abrogation of the ruling without deleting wording), sometimes called *ibdāl* "supersession" or "suspension". As the Canadian scholar Yusuf Rahman suggests, such an understanding of *nasḫ* is probably the only one considered by Abū Zayd (Rahman 2001, p. 142), thus the author of *Mafhūm an-naṣṣ* demonstrates a lack of confidence towards the broader theories of abrogation. This approach to *nasḫ* can be identified with a "legal mode" described by, for example, L. Fatoohi. That Abū Zayd takes such a position can be deduced from the chapter of *Mafhūm an-naṣṣ* (Abū Zaid 1990, pp. 131–51), where he analyses the meaning, function (*waẓīfa*), and modes (*anmāṭ*) of *nasḫ*, adding to it rich analyses of the relations between divine ruling (*ḥukm*) and its wording (*tilāwa*). Probably the most important fact is that Abū Zayd almost always approaches the concept of abrogation as a confirmation of "necessary connection between revelation—*waḥy* and reality—*wāqi'*" (Abū Zaid 1990, p. 131). From this point of view, both *'ilm an-nāsiḫ wa-mansūḫ* and other Qur'ānic disciplines, *asbāb an-nuzūl*, can work as classical arguments proving the historicity of the Qur'ān and its functioning as a historic and linguistic text, which was postulated by Abū Zayd from the very beginning of his academic activities. Of great importance is his remark that the yet-abrogated rulings (*mansūḫ*) reflected in the Qur'ānic verses, can be revived when reality imposes it (*ḥukm al-mansūḫ yumkin an yafriḍahu al-wāqi' marratan uḫrà*; Abū Zaid 1990, p. 137). This is a very revealing statement, because Abū Zayd suggests that procedures of *nasḫ* should be treated as cases of contextualization of the Qur'ān, and as such this contextualization should be done equally in contemporary times regarding the challenges of current reality, as well as that abrogated verses could be more instructive than *āyāt* that were formerly seen as abrogating ones (*nāsiḫ*) by the classical jurists. Thus, we have to agree with Yusuf Rahman's view that "Abū Zayd sees the main goal of *nasḫ* as being to introduce an element of contextuality into the law" (Rahman 2001, p. 142). In my opinion, this does not mean that the author of *Mafhūm an-naṣṣ* rejects the traditional Sunni concept of *nasḫ* in its legal sense; rather, he shifts the focus to its contextual aspects, bringing it closer to his hermeneutical interests.

This is well-suited to another semiotic conception of the Egyptian thinker, that is, the meaning–significance relation. In his second magnum opus, *Naqd al-ḫiṭāb ad-dīnī*, Abū Zayd presented one of the most fully-developed definitions of the Islamic hermeneutical method, *ta'wīl*, understanding it as an interpretation: "an action that repeatedly moves between a starting point and endpoint, or between the meaning and significance, rather like the movement of a pendulum, and not movement in one direction" (Abū Zayd 2018, p. 145, translated by Jonathan Wright). In this passage, the aforementioned translator rendered the Arabic *dalāla* as "meaning" and *maġzà* as "significance". In other places, Abū Zayd had used the form *ma'nà* in a similar way to the aforementioned *dalāla*: a historical, established meaning, understood directly from the wording of the text. *Maġzà*, "significance", would be of a more transient, changeable character depending on the context (*siyāq*) and reality (*wāqi'*). Abū Zayd's position here is both semiotic and hermeneutical, referring to de Saussure's theory of a linguistic sign (reinterpreted by E.D. Hirsch), and to the figure of the hermeneutical circle (Moch 2020, p. 56). I think that the semiotic relation of meaning and significance in the form proposed by Abū Zayd can be utilised regarding *nasḫ*: when it operates as established legal interpretation created in the given period of time, it works as

ma'nà or *dalāla*, the fixed meaning. When the current context is taken into account, however, such a legal interpretation could be closer to *maġzà*, that is, transient, dynamic significance. Such a distinction is not really present in most of Islamic approaches to *nasḫ*, and this could therefore be seen as an individual contribution of Abū Zayd to the subject.

Returning to the details of *nasḫ*, one of the most interesting examples used by Abū Zayd is the case of intermarriage, to which he refers in his book *Rethinking the Qur'àn. Towards the Humanistic Hermeneutics*. The usual legal interpretation in this regard is that the *āyah* 2:221[1] is *nāsiḫ* in relation to the verse 5:5[2], which is *mansūḫ*. In Abū Zayd's words, the latter says that Muslims are allowed to marry non-Muslim females, while the former revokes such permission (Abū Zayd 2004, p. 25). The Egyptian scholar suggests that utilising *nasḫ* in such a situation seems to be a purely juridical outlook "motivated by law formulation that needs a certain mode of fixation" (Abū Zayd 2004, p. 25). If we treat both *āyāt* as independent discourses, then Q 2:221 would be presenting the general, the preference to marry a Muslim female by Muslim man, while Q 5:5 would be presenting a particularization of the general rule, based on the notion of social "togetherness". Such an approach includes a more dialogical or discursive way of reading the Qur'ān, which is characteristic of Abū Zayd and other Muslim reformists. The Egyptian writer refers to Ibn Rušd, who was critical of using abrogation with respect to the aforementioned verses on intermarriage, at least excluding marriage between Muslims and *kitābiyyāt* (Christian and Jewish "women of the Book") from the general prohibition on such marriages (Abū Zayd 2004, p. 25f.). Adding to this, Abū Zayd poses a question related to the contemporary contextualization of women's rights, wondering whether permission for intermarriage should be guaranteed only to male Muslims or if it should be extended to females as well (Abū Zayd 2004, p. 25). Here, as is often the case with examples of *nasḫ*, the legal question becomes a real issue of contemporary daily life, "because the issue at stake is not so much intermarriage; it is rather the individual freedom that entails freedom of religion and belief" (Abū Zayd 2004, p. 27). The author of *Mafhūm an-naṣṣ* clearly supports the rethinking here of judicial traditions in Islam in order to break with some patriarchal and anachronistic elements present both in pre-Islamic times and in classical *uṣūl al-fiqh* that have survived until today.

Another case of Abū Zayd's interest in abrogation is when he discusses the ideas of other reformist thinkers regarding Islamic law, including their positions on the validity and applicability of historic '*ilm an-nāsiḫ wa-al-mansūḫ*. For example, in *Reformation of Islamic Thought* he delves into the theories of the Sudanese thinkers Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭāhā (1909–1985) and former Ṭāhā's student, 'Abd Allāh an-Na'īm (born 1946). The former coined the idea of a so-called "Second Message" of Islam which would be well suited to the challenges of contemporary situations. As Abū Zayd sums it up, "the Mecca message, which is basically spiritualistic, accommodating justice, freedom, and equality, was replaced by the Medina message emphasizing law, order and obedience" (Abū Zayd 2006, p. 87). Additionally, according to Ṭāhā and an-Na'īm, "it is both possible and indeed imperative to return to the Mecca message [the Second Message] and abrogate the Medina message that was designed to fit in with the social and cultural confines experienced by the Arabs in the 7th century" (Abū Zayd 2006, p. 87). Thus, we can note that this is an idea similar to a reversed *nasḫ*; what was formerly abrogated should now be abrogating. It seems that Abū Zayd might have been somewhat sympathetic to these ideas, as he too often pointed to the excessive prioritisation of "Medina material" in Islamic law. Despite this, the Egyptian thinker was critical of Ṭāhā and Na'īm's ideas, recognising their arbitrariness in replacing one tradition with another. According to Abū Zayd, what is crucial for an-Na'īm is that "the project of reforming Islamic law or reconstructing sharia, is limited to rethinking the sources and reinterpreting these in a modern context", as "he is clearly unaware that the Muslim World's modern context is simultaneously determined and constructed by an even wider, general, modern world context" (Abū Zayd 2006, p. 88). This would be true for Abū Zayd's wider assessment of Islamic jurisprudence, including the practice of abrogation, as well. For him, it is not enough to replace one ruling with another better suited to current

reality; it is more about recognizing the Qur'ān's polyphonic discourses and discussing it without the need to freeze it into particular legal requirements.

3. Conclusions

The concept of *nasḫ* seems to be a very tricky and complicated topic. While the Arabic literature on the subject is rich it offers no possibility of reaching clear conclusions, as jurists and scholars have constantly argued over their understanding of abrogation and whether it can be of a textual character apart from its main legal meaning (e.g., discussion on the so-called "stoning verse"). L. Fatoohi even says that "abrogation represents a major crisis in Islamic scholarship" (Fatoohi 2013, p. 238). The Western literature, by contrast, is very modest (only Burton's monograph) and only in recent years has the English-language scientific discourse on *nasḫ* been enriched with important critical texts by Fatoohi and Abdul-Rahim. For the Western non-Muslim scholar, such as the author of this paper, the whole discussion on abrogation is deeply paradoxical and often against one's initial presuppositions, according to which strict obedience to traditional judicial procedures should nowadays be on par with contemporary Islamic integralism and the concept of the return to the golden era of Arab–Islamic civilisation. Contrastingly, an intellectual from Ḥasan al-Bannā's milieu, Abd al-Muta'āl al-Ǧabrī (1906–1949), was very dismissive towards the very concept of *nasḫ* (Fatoohi 2013, p. 29).

Taking these aspects into account, the analysed material proves that Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's views on *nasḫ* represented a continuation of the reformist line initiated by Muḥammad 'Abduh (1849–1905), who "did not reject abrogation but proposed alternative interpretations for the verses that are seen as mentioning abrogation" (Fatoohi 2013, p. 29). However, the approach taken by Abū Zayd was different than his predecessor's in focusing on the idea of open democratic hermeneutics, which perceive the Qur'ān as inclusive in its nature and "bringing together", not separating and dividing (Abū Zayd 2004, p. 16). Several liberal Arab and Egyptian thinkers have radicalized such an approach in the secular direction. An example of this is an Egyptian intellectual born in 1947, Sayyid al-Qimnī, who strongly opposed the category of *nasḫ* in referring to Abū Zayd's *Mafhūm an-naṣṣ* (Abu-'Uksa 2015, p. 109). Al-Qimnī agreed with both Abū Zayd and Muḥammad Arkūn on "the complexity created as a result on the non-chronological order of the verses in in 'Uṯman's compilation of the Qur'ān" (Abu-'Uksa 2015, p. 110), which led him to a total dismissal of the existence of rationality in Islam.

In the case of Abū Zayd's thought, despite of the fact that he was totally conscious of the chronological ambiguity of the Qur'ān (for example, the unclear division of the Meccan and Medinan verses) his critique of Islam and Islamic jurisprudence is not so total and radical. In his view, the main value of *nasḫ* is its relation to the historicity and contextuality of the Text, that is, the holy book of Islam revealed in a given period of time and in distinct cultural conditions. Thus, Abū Zayd's attitude is consistent with the point made by Roslam Abdul-Rahim that "what Muslims today could and should do is to not simply acquire the knowledge of the theory, but, and more importantly, also learn from the spirit and cues of *naskh* (Abdul-Rahim 2017, p. 75). The spirit of *nasḫ* in the sense of a consciousness of how Muslim revelation was made accustomed to its reality and context seems to be an important element of open democratic hermeneutics, and an aid in discovering the diversity of religious meaning. It is an antidote to what Abū Zayd called "the most exclusive and isolating type of discourse in contemporary Islamic thought", often portrayed as an ideology of resistance towards colonialism or neocolonialism (Abū Zayd 2004, p. 63).

Actually, for Abū Zayd the hermeneutical aspect in Qur'ānic studies was almost always more important than the judicial. It let him, most likely in his own opinion, to avoid the pitfalls of inter-Islamic quarrels regarding the nature of *nasḫ*. In my opinion, while Abū Zayd had accepted the importance of *nasḫ* in Islamic jurisprudence he was critical of its legal usage, especially in recent times. I think he would have agreed with the more jurist and critical point of Fatoohi, who suggested that "the foundations of abrogation are

not to be found in history but in the creative imagination of Muslim scholars" (Fatoohi 2013, p. 243). If *nasḫ* would be a sort of a juridical "invented tradition" (to borrow the term coined by Benedict Anderson), its creation would be a result of the dominating dogmatic importance of Ḥadīṯ narratives. This led Fatoohi to the somewhat radical conclusion that "misinterpretation of Qur'ānic verses is the real source of legal abrogation" (Fatoohi 2013, p. 239), and can blur the interrelation between divine religious law (*šarī'a*) and human forms of jurisprudence (*fiqh*). For Abu Zayd, *nasḫ* would have been acceptable only when related to change and contextualisation of religious instructions, not when turned into unquestionable orthodoxy totally excluding other interpretations of the Qur'ānic *āyāt*.

To conclude, *nasḫ* is relevant for the author of *Mafhūm an-naṣṣ* both as a legal practice and as a mirror of how the Qur'ān has become a historic text capable of dynamically changing its meaning in given era while at the same time not losing its divinity for Muslims. This research can be expanded in the future by comparing Abū Zayd's approach with those of such other Islamic reformist thinkers as Muḥammad Šaḥrūr (1938–2019) and Abdolkarim Soroush (born 1945), who have contributed to the discussion on rational interpretation and historicity of the Qur'ān as well.

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Notes

1 And to not marry al-Mušrikāt till they believe.

2 [Lawful to you in marriage] are chaste women from the believers and chaste women from those who were given *Scriptures* (Jews and Christians) (. . .).

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Article

Thematic Presentations in Indonesian Qur'anic Commentaries

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Abstract: The study of thematic interpretation (*tafsīr mawḍū'ī*) in Indonesia focuses primarily on the products of interpretations written in the 2000s, with little attention paid to the origins of thematic interpretations in Indonesia. This article will look at different ways of presenting thematic interpretations in the Indonesian commentary literature prior to the 2000s. This article will also investigate whether the development of the form of interpretation in the Middle East, particularly Egypt, has had any impact on the form of Indonesian thematic interpretation. The methodology used in this study is a literature review based on thematic interpretations (mawḍū'ī) of several Egyptian commentators, including Amīn al-Khūlī (d. 1966), Mahmūd Shaltut (d. 1963), Bint Shāti' (d. 1998), 'Abd al-Hayy al-Farmawī (d. 2017), Hassan Hanafī (d. 2021), and Mustafā Muslim (d. 2021). The authors also use content analysis to examine some of the Indonesian commentary literature. The conclusion of this article demonstrates that thematic interpretation discourse in Egypt had a significant influence on the development of thematic interpretation in Indonesia, particularly interpretation literature published in the 1990s. This influence can be seen in the presence of a glossary and an index of discussion topics, complete with Qur'anic verses and arranged alphabetically or chronologically. This is in keeping with the spirit of Amīn al-Khūlī (d. 1966), who emphasized the importance of thematic discussions in determining the Qur'anic viewpoint on specific issues.

Keywords: methods of interpretation; thematic interpretation; thematic indexes

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1. Introduction

The methods of Qur'anic interpretation had dealt with humanity's complex problems, which brought forth various methods of interpretation. Muslim scholars have used a variety of methods to interpret the Qur'an. They believe that the Qur'an serves as guidance (*hudan*), and thus it is always relevant. It has been stated that the Qur'an is always in accordance with the circumstances (*ṣālih li kulli zamān wa makān*). 'Abd al-Hayy al-Farmāwī (d. 2017) explored thematic methods of Qur'anic interpretation in his work *Al-Bidayah fī al-Tafsir al-Mawḍū'ī: Dirāsah Manhajiyyah Mawḍū'iyyah* (al-Farmāwī 1977). In addition to the global (*ijmalī*), comprehensive (*tahlīlī*), and comparative (*muqāran*) methods, the thematic method (*Mawḍū'ī*) is defined as a method of interpreting Qur'anic verses according to related themes or subject matters, which connects the purpose of the verse and its thorough comprehension, as well as compiling verses of the Qur'an which have related themes or common direction to gain a general conclusion (al-Farmāwī 1977, pp. 51–52).

If the other methods of interpretation are applied to the chronological interpretation of Qur'anic verses from the beginning to the end of the scripture, the thematic method of interpretation collects Qur'anic verses on the basis of their similarly related themes, in order to discuss their relationship to the others on the basis of the synoptic term (Wielandt 2004). Thematic interpretation is used to (1) interpret a Qur'anic surah by dividing its content into shared specific themes/concerns, and (2) interpret Qur'anic verses on certain predetermined themes and complete discussions by referring the verses to the predetermined themes.

2. Result

Thematic interpretation, as emphasized by al-Farmāwī, had been widely used in the Middle East for about a decade prior to the publication of his book. Amīn al-Khūlī (1895–1966) pioneered thematic interpretation in his "study on the surrounding of the Qur'an" (*Dirāsah mā haula al-Qur'ān*) by emphasizing the extrinsic elements of the Qur'an alongside his "study of the Qur'an" (*Dirāsah mā fī al-Qur'ān*) by emphasizing the extrinsic elements of the Qur'an alongside his "study of the Qur'an" (al-Khūlī 1961, pp. 229–39). In fact, he had not organized his studies in a systematic manner, but he emphasized the importance of thematic discussion in order to understand Qur'anic perspectives on specific cases.

Mahmūd Shaltūt (1893–1963) expanded on al-Khūlī's idea in 1960 with his *Tafsīr al-Qurān al-Karim: Al-'Ajza' al-'Ashrah al-Ūllā* ("The Interpretation of the Qur'an: The First Ten Divisions") (Shaltūt 1960). Shaltūt was a professor at the Faculty of Theology, al-Azhar University. By focusing forms of interpretation on key ideas, he provided a middle ground between the chronological and thematic approaches (Jansen 1974, p. 14 in Wielandt 2004, p. 62). Shaltūt, like al-Khūlī, had not comprehensively formulated steps of thematic interpretations. In fact, al-Khūlī's idea was also proposed by his wife, 'Aisha 'Abd al-Rahmān, best known by her pen name Bint al-Shāti' (1913–1998). She wrote *Al-Tafsīr al-Bayānī li al-Qur'ān*, which translates as "the stylistic interpretation of the Qur'an" (Shāti' 1962). She compiled Qur'anic verses based on specific keywords. Bint al-Shāti' (d. 1998) clearly applied al-Khūlī's theory in practice to certain surahs of the Qur'an. He used surahs or parts of surahs from the Qur'an as well as the occasion of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzul*) in her analyses (Wielandt 2004, p. 75). However, such a collection of verses could not be considered a thematic study at this time.

Around a decade later, Ahmad Sayyid al-Kūmī (b. 1912) attempted to introduce thematic interpretation as one of the subjects taught at al-Azhar University. Al-Farmāwī (d. 2017), one of al-Kūmī's disciples, developed the methodological approaches to thematic interpretation in his book *al-Bidāyah fī al-Tafsīr al- mawḍū'ī: Dirasāh Manhajiyyah mawḍū'īyyah*, "The Beginning of Thematic Interpretation: A Methodologically Thematic Study" (al-Farmāwī 1977). Al-Farmāwī's methodological formula was then completed by his colleague 'Abd al-Sattar Fath Allāh in his book *Al-Madkhal ilā al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī*, "The Introduction to Thematic Interpretation" (Fath Allāh 1991). Fath Allāh emphasizes that the exegete's predetermined themes must have been indicated within the redaction of the Qur'anic text.

Mustafā Muslim introduced a form of inter-surah or inter-verses discussion on thematic method of interpretation in his *Mabāhith fī al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī*, "Studies on Thematic Interpretation" (Muslim 1989). At the same time, Hassan Hanafī (d. 2021) emphasizes the importance of dialog between the exegete (who scrutinizes problems he encounters), the text, and the context of the Qur'anic verses in his book *al-Dīn wa al-Thawrah*, "Religion and Revolution" (Hanafī 1989). An interpretation, according to him, is a manifested form of the exegete's social position within his social structure. As a result, an interpretation must be applied in practice rather than theoretically. Salāh 'Abd al-Fattāh al-Khālidī (b. 1947) continued a similar idea in his book *Al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī baina al-Naẓariyyah wa al-Tatbīq*, "Thematic Interpretation in between Theory and Practice" (Khālidī 1997).

The trend of thematic interpretation did not emerge solely in Egypt. It is spreading throughout the Islamic world. Muhammad Quraish Shihab was a pivotal figure in the introduction of al-Farmāwī's thematic method of interpretation in South-East Asia prior to the millennium's turn. Shihab has always referred to al-Farmāwī in his thematic discussions. Prior to the publication of *Membumikan al-Qur'an*, "Grounding the Qur'an," in 1992 (Shihab 1992) and *Wawasan al-Qur'an: Tafsir Maudhu'i atas Pelbagai Persoalan umat*, "The Qur'an's Insights: Maudhu'i's of Various People's Problems," in 1996 (Shihab 1996), there had been several studies on the Qur'an based on thematic discussion, such as Bahroem Rangkuti (Rangkuti 1960); M. Said (Said 1960); Mustafa Baisa (Baisa 1960); Hasri (Hasri 1969); Bey Arifin (Arifin 1972); and Harifudin Cawidu (Cawidu 1989). According to these studies, thematic interpretation discourse was quite popular in Indonesia at the time. Since the 1960s, there have been several widespread patterns of thematic interpretation, namely (1) interpreting one or a collection

of surahs to be assigned themes and (2) determining predestined themes and then collecting the related Qur'anic verses dealing with those themes (Federspiel 1996a; Gusmian 2003; Baidan 2003).

In Indonesia, there is still a scarcity of research on early forms of thematic interpretation. This essay investigates discourses on several models of thematic interpretation developed in the Middle East, particularly Egypt, to the emergence of such an awareness applied in forms of ways of presenting thematic discussion in tafsir literature. Some examples include presenting table of contents and thematic indexes of Qur'anic verses within chronological commentaries of the Qur'an. Such methods have been used in several new tafsir publications, as well as previous tafsir works to be reprinted in new editions, along with the revised spelling of Bahasa Indonesia. The appearance of such new tafsir editions leads to the conclusion that the introduction of thematic interpretation in the Middle East has significantly influenced the growing interest among Indonesian exegetes to make some types of adaptation at the earliest level by presenting thematic indexes to their renewed tafsirs.

Various changes are being made in the process of republishing those commentaries. Among the considerations is that their books should meet the new expectations of their readers in order for them to easily access the contents of the commentaries. By including some forms of thematic indexes in the new publication of certain brief tafsirs such as *al-Furqān* (by Hassan 2010) and *al-Bayan* (by Ash-Shiddieqy 2012), readers of those tafsirs can still have faster access to the contents of the tafsir. The readers are not required to read the entire text of the books, which have a minimum of a thousand pages. With the introduction of the thematic method of interpretation to the Qur'an, accessing tafsir literature without the table of contents or thematic indexes was deemed difficult for their readers in quickly finding any information they required. As a result, if the authors had not changed the way they presented their books, works of chronological tafsir might have been discarded because people considered those tafsirs to be out of date. Thus, even in its early stages, the introduction of thematic interpretation has undoubtedly aided the rise of a new pattern of writing Qur'anic commentaries.

There are some forms of thematic presentations that can be accommodated within the attempts to republish some tafsir books. The addition of titles or themes that were the subject matters for the series of interpreted verses was an early effort that was noticed. Readers can simply read the essence of the collective verses via a detailed sub-title indicating the verses' generic content. Since the early arrangements of *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya* by the Team of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, such an effort has been made (1965). Because of this, in fact, it is a book of translation of the Qur'an; however, it will be difficult to classify this book as *tafsīr* because the same team has begun to write a more comprehensive project of *al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*. As a result, the following discussion does not include this translation book.

However, such a pioneering effort was imitated in a far more innovative form by exegetes in subsequent periods. The introduction of thematic interpretation in Egypt had a significant impact on the rise of a somewhat similar concern within the development of Indonesian tafsir literature, namely the addition of tables of contents, thematic indexes, glossaries, and references to Qur'anic verses. Furthermore, they provided page numbers where the verses or explanations were found in their books. The following tafsirs have tables of contents and thematic indexes:

1. *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* by Mahmud Yunus, first published in the 1950s and reprinted in 1973 with the advanced spelling of Indonesian.
2. Bachtiar Surin's Terjemah dan Tafsir al-Qur'an 30 Juz Huruf Arab dan Latin, published in 1976.
3. *Tafsir Rahmat* by Oemar Bakry, who first published his works in 1981.
4. *Tafsir al-Furqan* by Ahmad Hassan, which was first published in 1956 and was reprinted in 2005, with a new edition published in 2010.

5. *Tafsir al-Bayan* by Hasbi ash-Siddieqy, first published in 1966 (Ash-Shiddieqy 1966), republished in 2002, and reprinted in 2012.

3. Discussion

3.1. Tafsir Qur'an Karim by Mahmud Yunus (1899–1982)

Mahmud Yunus spearheaded the first Qur'anic translation into Indonesian. His translation of the Qur'an sparked the creation of similar works, including some extensive commentaries in the 1960s. His book's thematic index of Qur'anic scientific verses had become the standard reference for other tafsirs. Mahmud Yunus was born on 10 February 1899, in Batusangkar, West Sumatra. His father, Yunus bin Incek, was a village imam. His mother was a granddaughter of Sheikh Muhammad Ali, known as Tuanku Kolok, and his maternal uncle, H. Ibrahim Dt. Sinaro Sati, was a wealthy trader who played an important role in supporting Yunus' higher education in Egypt (Rina 2011, pp. 170–71). Yunus grew up in an Islamic education system known as surau. First, he learned Qur'an recitation from Muhammad Tahir bin Muhammad Ali, also known as Engku Gadang. He attended the Elementary School until grade three, when he transferred to the Madras School in Tanjung Pauh, which was run by HM Thaib Umar. In addition to being a student, he taught his junior fellow there for about 8 years. He was finally appointed as the school's headmaster in 1917.

His introduction to the reform movement of Muhammad 'Abduh (d. 1905) and Rashīd Ridā (d. 1935) came via the *al-Manar* magazine, which fueled his desire to continue his studies in Egypt. Following the failure of his first attempt in 1920, he received a visa from the British Colonial Government in 1923, allowing him to travel from Penang to Saudi Arabia and then to Egypt. He was admitted to al-Azhar University in Cairo in 1924, where he studied Islamic Jurisprudence, Tafsīr, and the Hanafi School of Islamic Law. In 1925, he received his diploma from al-Azhar. He then continued his education at Madrasah Dār al-'Ulūm 'Ulyā, where he earned a diploma in Islamic education in 1930. He went back to Batusangkar, his hometown. His appointment as the first rector of ADIA Djakarta in 1957, then as the dean of the faculty of Islamic education at IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, was among his major achievements in his academic career in 1960.

Tafsir Qur'an Karim was first published in 1950. *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* is the culmination of Yunus' lifetime efforts in translating and interpreting the Qur'an from 1922 to 1973, as well as the growing development of the Indonesian language. Mahmud Yunus' commentary is divided into two parts. On the right side, he wrote the verses of the Qur'an in Arabic script, and on the left, he wrote the translation. In some cases, he included annotated commentary in the form of additional explanations for verses that needed more information. This commentary was placed at the bottom of the page, similar to footnotes. The translation does not take up more than a half-page. In the case of a lengthy commentary, he would prefer to continue his explanation on the following pages in a chronological order. In short, Yunus presented the Mushaf in chronological order, verse by verse and surah by surah. Yusuf's commentary is brief in nature, or we can say that Yunus used the global (*ijmalī*) method of interpretation. These brief commentaries, on the other hand, include narrations of the times of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*). Mahmud Yunus's pattern of interpretation combined traditional (*bi al-ma'thūr*) and rational (*bi al-ra'y*) interpretations

Concerning the sources of his interpretation, Yunus did not provide a list of tafsīr he had referred to for his interpretation, but he agreed with fellow Muslim exegetes such as Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Qāsimī that the core hermeneutical procedures of Qur'anic interpretation are primarily based on *Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān* explication. In this context, the interpretation of a Qur'anic verse should essentially refer to any explanation mentioned in other parts of the Qur'an. If such an inter-Qur'an explanation cannot be found, one must refer to sound prophetic hadiths. If there are no traditional explanations originating from the Prophet, one can take sequential accounts of the Prophet's companions (*ṣahāba*), as well as their followers (*tābi'ūn*). Yunus, on the other hand, limited himself to taking companions' accounts only on occasions of revelation, not their personal views on tafsīr. According to

him, followers' accounts can be used as a source of tafsir as long as their statements are in accordance with Muslim convention *(ijmā')*. He added several other principles to the above-mentioned bases of hermeneutical procedures: (1) an interpretation based on general comprehension of the Arabic lexicon, (2) an interpretation based on personal examination (*ijtihād*) by jurists, and (3) a rational interpretation by the Mu'tazilites (Yunus 1983, p. vii).

Yunus has not given any titles to his translations or commentaries on specific verses. He only provided a marker, such as "description of the verse . . . page . . . " Yunus, on the other hand, provided a table of contents that listed the names of the surahs as well as the contents of the given commentary. There is no mention of verse numbers, as there are only the titles or conclusions of the given interpretation, as well as the page numbers. Each title generally represents an interpretation of a single verse. If there are many verses to be interpreted on a single page, the page will be referred to with many headings based on the contents of the interpreted verses. As a result, there are several types of tables of contents, which discontinue the page number in favor of separated numbers in roman numerals at the top center.

In the 1973 reprint edition, Mahmud Yunus appears to add some new things to the *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* in terms of thematic presentation, concerning not only the contents of his comprised commentary but also what he refers to as the "Conclusion of the Qur'an". The page numbers are given in roman numerals at the bottom center. As a result, the page number differs from the table of contents, which was previously mentioned. This section serves as an additional thematic index, presenting major themes of the Qur'an as well as references to related verses, complete with page numbers in the book. When dealing with the theme "Faith in God", for example, Mahmud Yunus provided comprehension of the theme through references to verse numbers, surah numbers, and the page number of the text in his book.

The titles in the *Tafsir Qur'an Karim's* thematic index include not only related themes on Islamic teachings, such as theological and legal aspects of Islam, but also related themes on economy, the relationship of the Qur'an with sciences, history, and social problems. Even though the trend of thematic commentary was not thriving when the book was reprinted in 1973, it appears that Yunus was heavily influenced by the ideas of Egyptian thinkers emphasizing the need for thematic commentary expressed by Amīn al-Khūlī (d. 1966) and Bint al-Shāti' (d. 1998) by the end of the 1960s. It appears that Yunus's status as an al-Azhar alumnus provided him with strong access to the introduction of thematic commentary within the development of Qur'anic studies. The thematic index presented by Mahmud Yunus is not a new model of thematic commentary, but it can be viewed as an embryo highlighting the ongoing current of thematic interpretation methods for the coming decades.

3.2. Terjemah & Tafsir al-Qur'an by Bachtiar Surin

Bachtiar Surin's Qur'anic translation and commentary were published in the mid-1970s, shortly after Mahmud Yunus re-published his exegesis in 1973. In his introduction, he states that the tafsir was completed on 11 September 1976. Nonetheless, the year of publication of this commentary was 1978, as it followed the issuance of a letter of correction (*taṣḥīh*) categorized as "special edition of *muṣḥaf* with Latin transliteration" from the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs' Lajnah Pentashhih Mushaf al-Qur'an. There are some prefaces for the publication requested from various personages that would have made this new form of tafsir be published almost two years after its completion.

Everyone seems to agree that this interpretation is an essential work of Qur'anic translation and tafsir. Hamka, the chairman of MUI (the Indonesian Ulama Assembly), emphasized that the book of the Qur'an with Latin transliteration would benefit those who want to understand the content of the Qur'an but find it difficult to read the Qur'an in Arabic. Meanwhile, the concurrent Minister of Religious Affairs, Alamsjah Ratu Perwiranegara, agreed that efforts to publish translations of the Qur'an as well as interpretations in

both Arabic and Latin scripts had made it easier for those who wanted to understand the Qur'an's language. As a result, he believes that such an attempt deserves to be recognized.

In his preface, Minister of Home Affairs Amir Machmud agreed with the benefits derived from the publication, which was expected to increase worship activities in Indonesia and build national insight. For him, the tafsir writer's efforts are far-reaching endeavors, allowing for an easier and deeper understanding for those who still struggle to read the Qur'an in its original letter and language. He hoped that by making such an effort, more people would be able to find the spirit of Islam in order to anticipate the destructive effects of development through the guide of divine light. Based on the preceding statements, it is reasonable to conclude that the effort of translating the Qur'an, as well as its interpretation, is part of the larger effort to develop spirituality. In his remarks, Bachtiar Surin, the director of Firma Sumatra, insisted that if the teachings of the Qur'an can be carried out purely and earnestly through this translation, the effort can be the seeds of rapid advancement as well as embody spiritual development within the surrounding regions (Surin 1978, pp. vii–xv).

The translation is the result of a collaborative effort led by Bachtiar Surin and two members, M. Said and Zainuddin Sulaiman, on the order of Firma Sumatra (often abbreviated as Fa Sumatra), led by H. Bahar Surin. Fa Sumatra is a publishing company based in Bandung. The dedication of the book for the sake of "Our deceased parent H. Surin, who died in West Sumatra in 1926" would indicate that H. Bahar Surin was a sibling of Bahtiar Surin, according to a note on the book's cover. According to the statement, both H. Bahar Surin and Bachtiar Surin are West Sumatran natives who settled in Bandung and built the publishing industry there.

Terjemah & Tafsir al-Qur'an 30 Juz Huruf Arab dan Latin was the first edition of this book. This work is comprised of 1462 pages in one volume, plus 52 pages of introduction. It was published by Fa Sumatra, a Bandung-based publisher. As a writer, only Bachtiar Surin's name appears on both the front and inside covers. According to the book's introduction, he was the chairman and person in charge of a team called Lembaga Penerjemah Kitab Suci al-Qur'an. H. Bahar Surin, the director of the Fa Sumatra, had established the working standards in the introduction. Among them is the requirement to display "clear pictures" in Qur'anic verse translations.

A literal translation is permitted and preferred if it is capable of presenting the clarity of the verse's intent. If there is an irregularity in its literal interpretation, the translation effort is carried out through an explanation by adding several additional words, so that the understanding can be directed toward more clarity, and thus the resultant translation can be more prominent. In other words, in addition to attempting literal translation, this work offers a rather meaningful translation for verses that were too enigmatic to be understood by its literal meaning.

The debate will be loaded, if necessary, in terms of explanatory sentences that form a meaningful translation of the Qur'anic verses among various types of controversies. However, the book will only display the strongest opinion with a convincing proposition based on the most powerful meaning. Furthermore, if there are differences in rules in both Arabic and Indonesian, the team was asked to avoid linguistic abnormalities, as reader boredom would be contrary to the Prophet's advice (Surin 1978, pp. xvii–xviii). Concerning the reasons for this new effort to provide a method of reciting the Qur'an in both Arabic and Latin scripts, it was clearly stated that the included Latin script is not a replacement for the original Arabic letters. It is simply part of the effort to assist those who do not know Arabic letters in continuing to read the Qur'an.

One of the principles held by this institution is that it is preferable to read the Qur'an by adjusting one's possessed ability, even by reading its Latin script, rather than not reading the Qur'an at all (Surin 1978, p. xviii). Meanwhile, the standard transcription used in this book appears to follow Ministry of Religious Affairs guidelines that apply the proximate sound of the Arabic origin to its Latin equivalent. For letters that cannot be matched to their respective counterparts, a double consonant transliteration pattern with an underscore will be used, such as dh, th, zh, gh, sy, sh, ts, kh, and dz. Because there is no other option, the

letters hā' and hā 'are all written without divergent diacritical marks in this transliteration system, highlighting the underlying weakness of this early transliteration form. Long vowel letters, on the other hand, are only written with the same vowel letter doubled to indicate the reading of two harakat. Longer tones are denoted by a diacritical mark in the double vowel, as in *waladh̲ dh̲āal-liin*.

This book's sources of interpretation range from classical to medieval to modern commentaries. Only the Tafsir at-abar is mentioned among the classical tafsirs, while medieval commentaries include interpretations from Ibn Kathīr, al-Baiḍāwī, Zamakhshari, Nasafi, Jalal al-Din al-Suyutī, and Abu Sa'ūd. Finally, among the modern tafsirs used in this book are the the Tafsirs *al-Manar, Jawāhir*, *al-Maraghī, fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'an*, and the English translation *The Holy Qur'an* by Abdullah Yusuf Ali. Meanwhile, almost all Nusantara tafsirs published before the last quarter of the twentieth century are used as references and interpretation sources for this book. In addition to exegesis books, this work also refers to books in the fields of Islamic jurisprudence, Arabic language, and other general literature (Surin 1978, pp. xxiii–xxiv). Based on the sources used, it is possible to conclude that the authors' approach brings a mixed style of interpretation between the traditional approach and the rational approach of interpretations.

In the back of the book, there are several tables of contents. The first is a list of the parts (juz'), which describes which surah and verse numbers the juz' begins with and which surah and verse numbers it ends with, as well as the subsequent page numbers in the book. The list is organized chronologically, beginning at the top and ending at the bottom. In addition, this book includes a list of the *surahs*. The names of the surah are sorted according to their order in the Qur'an and are accompanied by the translations/meanings of the surah, the total number of its verses, and the page on which it is located in the book. The list concludes with a prayer recited after finishing the Qur'an (Surin 1978, pp. xxvii–xxix).

The translation of surah names is completed both literally and metaphorically. According to the standard principle of translation established by the publisher, the literal translation of surah names is seen as the main reference, whereas meaningful translation is seen in several cases, such as when translating the meaning of the surah *al-Taubah*, which was interpreted as "termination of relations" (*pemutusan hubungan*), *al-Muzammil* was translated as "orang berkelumun" (being covered), and *al-Muddaththir* was translated as "orang yang berselimut" (a person covered with a blanket). Differences in the last two-surah meanings may be necessary to avoid confusion, given that the names of the two surahs are similar in meaning and are located sequentially. Meanwhile, events that mark the events of the doomsday are referred to by various terms.

The meaning of "Judgment Day" is given only to the surahs of *al-Hāqqah* and *al-Qiyāmah*, whereas other similar terms are defined according to their literal comprehension, so that the name *al-Wāqi'ah* is interpreted as "a terrible event" (Kejadian yang dahsyat) and *al-Qāri'ah* is interpreted as "a thrilling catastrophe" (malapetaka yang mendebarkan hati). The last two actions appear to be taken to avoid confusion. While the preference for literal translation also appears in interpreting some surah names that mark the phenomenon of destruction during the course of the apocalypse, such as *al-Takwīr* was interpreted "to roll", *al-Infitār* means "falling apart" (gugur berantakan), *al-Inshiqāq* means "ruined" (porak poranda), *al-Gāshiyah* as "the day of the catastrophe" (hari selubung malapetaka), al-*Zalzalah* (goncangan yang dahsyat).

The second list is of titles that are made up of a verse or a collection of verses. This list denotes thematic titles of the translated content of a verse or several groups of verses, and it was also made alphabetically by the first letter of its sentence or phrase, rather than by the theme. In contrast to the titles listed in *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya* by the Ministry of Religious Affairs team, which were arranged according to the titles or themes along the chronology of the Mushaf, the motivation for listing the thematic indexes in alphabetical order may be similar to avoid confusion. This table of contents is less useful at first glance because not all title-marker-initials are keywords in the presented theme, so the title *Bila datangnya hari kiamat* (lit. when does the doomsday happen) is classified into the letter *B* for

"bila" rather than the letter *K* for "kiamat". Such would have been pointless because *bila* is not a unique keyword.

Thematic presentations of the table of contents, as well as thematic titles arranged by Bachtiar Surin in his commentary, demonstrate the influence of the development of thematic method of interpretation of the Qur'an. It is similar to the indexing found in previous tafsir and translation of the Qur'an publications, such as *al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya* by the Ministry of Religious Affairs team (1965) and *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* by Mahmud Yunus (1983). The table of contents and thematic indexes were designed to make it easy for readers to explore the meaning of the Qur'an within the book. Indeed, the table of contents and thematic indexes that reflect the contents of the Qur'an verses are not similar to those of Mahmud Yunus, because the list and thematic indexes compiled by Bachtiar Surin are more similar to the composition of the list of titles of the Ministry of Religious Affairs translation (1965).

Bachtiar Surin, on the other hand, went a step further by not presenting the index chronologically, as the Kemenag Team had, but by sorting the titles alphabetically. Nonetheless, it is less meaningful because the index was still based on the first letter of the sentences or phrases, rather than the first letters of the formulated keywords. After all, such an effort is still a form of innovation that should be lauded. Such flaws may have prompted corrections and reprinting for the book's next publication. Similarly, it may spark new approaches to publishing similar tafsir books in the near future.

3.3. Tafsir Rahmat by Oemar Bakry

Tafsir Rahmat by Oemar Bakry was written in the early 1980s, when ideas about thematic interpretation were becoming quite common, particularly in Egypt and the Middle East in general. This can be considered the formative period of thematic interpretation. Through communication networks intertwined among the alumni of Middle Eastern universities, particularly the Azhar, the new theory began to spread more evenly throughout the Islamic lands. The dissemination of ideas on thematic interpretation would have been more vibrant in the early 1980s compared to a decade earlier when Mahmud Yunus republished *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* in 1973. As a result of this, more development and systematic indexing have begun to appear in tafsir literature, such as Oemar Bakry's *Tafsir Rahmat*.

Oemar Bakry was born on 26 June 1916 in a small village called Kacang on the outskirts of Lake Singkarak, Solok, West Sumatra (Bakry 1983). Bakry attended Sekolah Sambungan in Singkarak after finishing elementary school in his village. Following that, he enrolled at the Diniyah Putra in Padang Panjang and graduated in 1931. The following year, in 1932, he graduated from Thawalib School. Bakry continued his scientific journey to Padang from Padang Panjang. He enrolled in the Kuliyatul Mu'alimin al-Islamiyah and graduated in 1936. In 1954, eighteen years after graduating from Kuliyatul Mu'alimin in Padang, he tried his luck in Jakarta by enrolling at the Faculty of Letters University of Indonesia. His higher education at the University of Indonesia, on the other hand, was never completed. There was no explanation for the causes and business that prevented him from finishing his college studies at University of Indonesia. Because of his publishing business, which took up most of his time, he was unable to complete his studies at the Faculty of Letters, University of Indonesia.

His educational career began when he began working as an active teacher in various schools. From 1933 to 1936, he taught at Thawalib School in Padang Panjang. He was appointed director of the Muhammadiyah School of Padang Sidempuan, North Sumatra, a year later, in 1937. After only a year in Padang Sidempuan, he returned to Padang Panjang and taught at Thawalib School until the Japanese occupation forces arrived in 1938. Simultaneously, he was appointed director of The Public Typewriting School, which was established on 21 January 1938 in Padang Panjang. This latter school was renamed The Garden of Progress (*Taman Kemajuan*) and is still in operation today.

A career in typing school, presumably, is what propelled him into the publishing world, as he travels to Java and manages several publishing houses in Jakarta and Bandung.

In addition to teaching during his stay in Padang Panjang, he is also politically active. He became a member of several social and political organizations, including Permi in the 1930s and the Masyumi Party of Central Sumatra, which encompassed West Sumatra, Riau, and Jambi. After relocating to Jakarta, Bakry served as the chairman of the Indonesian Publishers Association (IKAPI) for the Greater Jakarta area for several years. In Jakarta, he is also the chairman of the Al-Falah Foundation, the Nobel Qur'an Preservation Foundation (Yayasan Pemelihara al-Qur'anul Karim), and the Thawalib Foundation

Bakry was a successful entrepreneur in the printing and publishing industry as well as a former teacher who was active in various social organizations. He is the founder and President Director of "Mutiara" Offset Publishing and Printing in Jakarta, as well as "Angkasa" Publisher in Bandung. On 1 November 1951, he established "Mutiara" in Bukittinggi, and in 1972, he established the same offset printing in Jakarta. Meanwhile, the Angkasa publishing house was established in Bandung on 13 January 1966. Because of his perseverance in the printing and publishing business, he was able to collaborate with overseas publishers, and he was frequently able to attend meetings at both the national and international levels.

He attended the International Publisher Association (IPA) congress in Kyoto, Japan, in 1976, and the same event in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1980. In addition, he was active in the Islamic propagation movement (*da'wah*), which took him to many parts of the archipelago, including Egypt, where he was invited to give a lecture at al-Azhar University in Cairo in 1983. He also lectured and lectured at various religious universities in his homeland, including IAIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya (11 February 1984), University of Bung Hatta Padang (28 March 1984), and IAIN Imam Bonjol Padang (26 March 1986).

Tafsir Rahmat was first published in 1981 in Jakarta. The date was derived from the preface to H. Oemar Bakry's first printed publication (Bakry 1983, p. xvii). This commentary is published in a single volume. Because the compilation method employs the global method of interpretation, it is both concise and dense. This book was printed in a single volume for a variety of reasons. It simply mimics the publication of Tafsir *al-Muṣḥaf al-Mufassar* by Egyptian exegete Muhammad Farīd Wajdī (d. 1954). One of the reasons is to make it easier for readers who do not have a lot of free time to read the Qur'an to follow its guidance without having to open lengthy interpretations. Furthermore, the description is "solid" and "proper," as it is free of controversial issues or israiliyyat stories. It is expected that readers will be able to decipher the meanings of the Qur'anic verses as life guidelines (Bakry 1983, p. xvi).

His interpretation is based on reference books of reputed exegesis such as *Tafsīr al-Manār*, *Tafsīr al-Marāghī*, *al-Tafsīr al-Farīd fī al-Qur'ān al-Majīd* by Muhammad 'Abd al-Mu'īn al-Jamāl, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, *Tafsīr Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān,* and some previous works by Indonesian exegetes like the translations of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, Mahmud Yunus, Zainuddin Hamidi, and Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy (Bakry 1983, pp. xiv–xv). Based on the book's references, we can conclude that this Qur'an commentary is a hybrid of traditional (*naqli*) and rational (*ra'y*) interpretations.

"The Source of Da'wah" is the title of a thematic index that serves as an additional supplement to *Tafsir Rahmat's* book. Bakry compiled approximately 145 themes that he referred to as "Islamic propagation mottos," which he believes preachers can use in carrying out their duties. He classified 145 mottos into 10 major categories: (1) al-Qur'an, (2) Faith, (3) Worship, (4) Marriage, (5) Science and Technology, (6) Health, (7) Economics, (8) Society and State, (9) Noble Characters, and (10) History. The author creates smaller sub-themes from each of these major themes, and each sub-theme is then provided with the related verses of the Qur'an by mentioning surah names, verse numbers, surah numbers, and the numbers of referential pages within the book (Bakry 1983, pp. 1273–311).

Such a claim reminds us of the same index developed around a decade ago by Mahmud Yunus. The index contains nearly identical composite themes, with a few tweaks for the latter. This brings to mind Bakry's use of the *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* in the composition of his tafsir. Unfortunately, because this index is not alphabetical, the classification is based

solely on the ten major themes. Some examples of the contents of this thematic index are: *Firstly* (1) the Qur'an becomes a grace and guidance for men in QS. 17: 82; 17: 9; 27: 1–2; 17: 89; and 20: 2. (2) In Arabic, the Qur'an is descended in QS. 20: 113; 12: 2; 39: 28; 41: 3; 42: 7; 43: 3; 26: 195. (3) The contents of the Qur'an, which is derived in Arabic, should be understood in QS. 47: 24; 12: 2; 4: 82; 39: 27; 43: 3. (4) The Qur'an provides guidance and mercy to believers in QS. 52, 7: 203, 10: 57, 12: 111, 16: 64, 16: 89, 17: 82, and 27: 77 (Bakry 1983, p. 1275). According to the examples above, the index is still arranged randomly, as is the reference to Qur'anic verses. The reference of Qur'anic verses from each sub-theme is largely not compiled entirely in chronological order based on the order of the number of surahs in the mushaf. In fact, the titles of the sub-themes appear to be repetitive, despite references to slightly different Qur'anic verses.

Bakry compiled an index of prayers, orders, and prohibitions in addition to the thematic index. The titles of the themes of the prayers/orders/prohibitions are then given their reference of the names and numbers of both the surahs and verses, as well as the page location in the book. The classification order is sorted according to the mushaf's chronology, beginning with the prayer in Surah al-Fātihah, then the orders, prohibitions, and prayers in Surah al-Baqarah, and so on until the end of the Qur'an. Oemar Bakry lists two types of tables of contents at the end of his book, one based on the chronological order of the mushaf and the other on an alphabetic index of surah names. The thematic index and tables of contents of the surah, including the list of prohibitions and orders contained in the Qur'an that are listed on the back of the book, can be regarded as an attempt to adopt the development of thematic method of interpretation, despite being compiled in a very simple form of presentation.

3.4. Tafsir Al-Bayan by Hasbi Ash Shiddieqy (1904–1975)

Muhammad Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy was born on 10 March 1904 in Lhokseumawe, North Aceh. He was sent to Tengku Chik in Piyeung to study Arabic for a year when he was 12 years old. He then relocated to Blukbayu to Tengku Chik's dayah. After a year, he relocated to Tengku Chik in Blangkabu Geudong. After only a year, he moved to the dayah of Tengku Chik in Blang Manyak Samakurok. In 1916, he went on to Tengku Chik in Tanjung Barat, i.e., Idris Samalanga, the owner of the greatest dayah in North Aceh for the study of Islamic jurisprudence. Hasbi studied here for two years before transferring to Tengku Chik Hasan in Kruengkale. Tengku Hasbi then obtained a diploma (*shahadah*) as proof of his knowledge, which had reached sufficient levels for him to open his own dayah. He then went back to Lhokseumawe (Nouruzzaman 1977, pp. 13–14). When Hasbi returned to his hometown, he met Sheikh al-Kalali, who advised him to go to Surabaya to study at the al-Irsyad College, which Ahmad Surkati founded in 1926. Hasbi was escorted by Shaykh al-Kalali and was able to enter the specialist level (*takhaṣuṣ*) for a year and a half in order to deepen his Arabic. Hasbi's *takhassus* education at al-Irsyad was his last formal education; since then, he had only read books (Nouruzzaman 1977, pp. 15–16).

After attending the 15th Indonesian Muslim Congress in Yogyakarta in 1949, Minister of Religious Affairs KH Wahid Hasyim offered Hasbi a position as a lecturer at PTAIN, promoting hadith subjects. His expertise in hadith did not dampen his interest in Islamic law from the start, and he was promoted to professor with an inaugural lecture titled "Islamic Sharia Responding to the Challenges of the Age". This inaugural speech commemorated the anniversary of the transition of PTAIN to IAIN on 2 Rabiul Awwal 1381/1961 in Yogyakarta. Hasbi died on 9 December 1975, and his works were read by Malay-speaking Muslims living not only in Indonesia but also in Malaysia and Singapore.

Tafsir al-Bayan was first published in 1966, after Hasbi finished a translation of an-Nur in 1961. Hasbi's interpretation of an-Nur is one of the first commentaries he completed since his arrival in Yogyakarta in 1951. *Tafsir al-Bayan* himself completed it in 1966 as a global interpretive work that differs methodologically from the interpretation of *an-Nur*. He finished the eight-volume *Mutiara Hadith* in 1968, and the text of the Collection of the Hadith of the Law in 1971 (11 volumes, but only 6 volumes were published)

(Nouruzzaman 1977, pp. 2765–81). This section goes over Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy's life and his exegetical work *Tafsir al-Bayan*.

Tafsir al-Bayan is a commentary that is organized globally. The verses of the Qur'an are written in Arabic in the Madinan muṣhaf chronological order, with each end of the page ending with verse end. This commentary is organized globally because, in addition to presenting the translated text around its Arabic text, the exegete's additional explanation is brief and very succinct. Hasbi's annotated translation took up only a quarter of a page. The unfilled columns are intentionally left empty on some pages where he did not provide any additional information due to the clarity of the verse. In his commentary, there is no title for any additional explanation. The titles are arranged chronologically, not alphabetically, based on the chronology of the book. By looking at the contents, the reader will be able to identify the contents based on the presented theme. In contrast to Mahmud Yunus' *Tafsir Qur'an Karim*, which places all of the contents and indexes at the back of the book, the tables of contents are placed in the front.

Tafsir al-Bayan accommodates the development of thematic method interpretation by including an additional thematic index called "glossary" with a series of pages that merge and intertwine with the tafsir's text. This glossary is based on Arabic terms that do not distinguish the letters *alif* from *'ain*. In the glossary, definitions of terms are provided, as well as references to the number of verses related to similar discussions in the Qur'an. However, it excludes the reference to the related discussion in the book in this book. An example of the displayed contents of the book's thematic index concerning the term *khalq* was interpreted in several ways, among them: (1) forming the form, as stated in QS. 5: 110, (2) predicting, as stated in several verses (QS. 29: 17, (3) creating something and starting its creation (QS. 7: 18; (4) predestination, and (5) religion of Allah, character, and nature (QS. 30: 40) (Ash-Shiddieqy 2012, p. 610). Although some surahs are included in its comprehensive thematic index, some terms are only presented by their meaning, with no references to Qur'anic verses. *Tafsir Bayan* by Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy was republished in a new form in 2002 and 2012 as a result of Hasbi's son, the H.Z. Fuad Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy edition. Because thematic presentation of the book was so simple, it developed only slightly.

3.5. Al-Furqan Tafsir Qur'an by Ahmad Hassan (1887–1958)

Ahmad Hassan was born in 1887 in Singapore. At the age of seven, he began studying the Qur'an and then enrolled in a Malay school. His father was eager for Hassan to learn a variety of languages, including Arabic, English, Malay, and Tamil (Hassan 2001, p. ii). He spent about three years learning from Sa'īd 'Abdullah al-Musāwī, then Sheikh Hassan al-Malābarī and Sheikh Ibrāhīm al-Hindī. It was finished around 1910. Hassan studied Arabic until he was 23 years old because it helped him understand other sciences such as tafsir, fiqh, farā'id, and mantiq (Mughni 1984, p. 13). In 1911, Hassan married Maryam, a Malay-Tamil girl, in Singapore. Hassan was a member of the editorial board of the Singapore Press's newspaper *Utusan Melayu* from 1912 to 1913 (Mughni 1984, p. 12). During this time, Hassan wrote extensively on religious topics. He wrote a lot of moral advice, mostly in the form of poetry, encouraging people to do good and stay away from crime. At the same time, the influence of Islamic renewal ideas he read from *al-Manār* magazine published by Muhammad Rashid Riḍā in Egypt and *al-Imām* magazine published by young Minangkabau scholars is one of the reasons Hassan also criticized the decline of the Muslim world.

Hassan's involvement in Indonesia began around 1921, when he moved to Surabaya to trade and manage his uncle, Abdul Latif's, shop. The uncle recognized that Hassan's harsh criticism had frightened the government. During his stay in Surabaya, his uncle warned him not to associate with Faqih Hasyim. Hassan, on the other hand, was a friend of his, as well as a frequent hangout for several figures from the Islamic movements, including Ahmad Syurkatiy, H.O.S. Cokroaminoto, H. Agus Salim, Mas Mansur, H. Munawar Chalil, Soekarno, Muhammad Maksum, Mahmud Aziz, and many others.

After three years in Surabaya, Hassan relocated to Bandung in 1924. He initially went to Bandung to pursue the textile business but instead became acquainted with the founding figures of the Persatuan Islam organization (Federspiel 1996b, p. 24). His political experience led him to become Sukarno's spiritual teacher while the latter was in exile in Flores (Jamil 2008, p. 200). It is clear that reading materials such as *al-Kafā'ah* by Ahmad al-Syurkati, *Bidāyah al-Mujtahid* by Ibnu Rushd, *Zād al-Ma'ād* by Ibnu Qayyim, *Nayl al-Awtar* by Muhammad 'Alī al-Shawkānī, and *Subul al-Salām* by al-Ṣan'ānī influenced his progressive ideas (Mughni 1984, p. 20). Finally, Hassan chose to live in Bangil beginning in 1940. He established Pesantren Persis there. Hassan was active in writing articles *for Himayat al-Islam* magazine, which he published until his death on 10 November 1958. Hassan was laid to rest in Sengok Cemetery, Bangil.

Ahmad Hassan was a productive thinker who published his ideas in magazines and books. *The al-Furqan Tafsir Qur'an* was the result of a lengthy writing process. The first part of Tafsir was actually published in 1928. The second part of this commentary was only published in 1941. This second issue also does not cover the entire Qur'an because Ahmad Hassan only finished the translation until surah Maryam. It is unclear what caused this commentary to be halted for so long, as Ahmad Hassan was able to continue writing his tafsir work in 1953, when a businessman named Saad Nabhan was willing to pay the cost of publishing his tafsir.

Three years later, in 1956, *al-Furqan* was then completely written 30 juz'. It was an annotated translation of the Qur'an comprising additional information of tafsir in the form of footnotes. In translating the verses Hassan generally used the literal translation method, i.e., word-by-word translation, except for some vocabularies that are not permitted to be exposed in literal translations. Thus, *al-Furqan*'s interpretive characteristic is actually a composite element of both translation and interpretation at once, but with a smaller portion of tafsir.

Changes in the development of the Indonesian language concerning spelling improvements through the adoption of the Enhanced Spelling (EYD) in 1972 had been one of the motivations for translating and interpreting the Qur'an that continued until the mid-1980s. It was also a compelling reason for Hassan's extended family to reconsider the book's use of the Indonesian language. It is necessary to make some changes to the exposed language in order to keep up with the changes and improvements in the development of the Indonesian language. As a result, the book can be easily read by the current generation of Muslims, thanks to the use of modern linguistic spellings. The *al-Furqan Tafsir Qur'an* 2010 edition is a single volume with 1100 pages plus 90 pages of introductory remarks. This book is a global commentary (*ijmalī*) methodologically, and even without the commentary on the front-page cover, this commentary is similar to the Arabic text of the verses and the most widely circulated tafsir at the moment. This interpretation differs from others in that it identifies the author/compiler who is responsible for the translation process.

Ahmad Hassan is the only name on the book's front cover. The title is *al-Furqan Tafsir Qur'an*, and the ISBN number is 978-602-95064-0-2 (Hassan 2010). In contrast to the style of translation and spelling used in the initial 1956 publication, which still uses Malay, albeit with the old Latin scripts, the new edition of *al-Furqan* is in modern Indonesian, as the team reorganized its translations using new spelling and lingual style. The team in charge of rewriting the book is called The Center Team for Language and Cultural Development (Tim Pusat Pengembangan Bahasa dan Budaya), Al-Azhar University Indonesia (UAI).

The current authors are using the 2010 edition, which is the second reprinting. This new edition's first edition appears to have been published in 2005. In addition to language editing guidelines that preserve the author's original nuance, editing is only completed for a few words that have a slightly different meaning than the prevailing notion of the current Indonesian language (Hassan 2010, p. viii). The publisher also mentioned the writer's testimony in the introductory section that both theme titles and sub-themes mentioned in the verses or groups of verses refer to the Medina edition of *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya* by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Thus, it appears that the table of contents, which

mentions themes from pages lxx to xc, was arranged according to the chronology of the mushaf, which refers to the same work.

Meanwhile, the new 2010 edition includes a glossary that not only refers to the original Arabic terms, such as *Asbāb an-Nuzul*, *ittaqā*, *mufaṣṣal*, *sā'ah*, and *tafṣīl*, but also Indonesian terms such as arrogant (*sombong*), worldly demeanors (*perhiasan dunia*), and others (Hassan 2010, pp. xxxi–xxxv). The subject is divided into two indexes that are alphabetical in order. *First*, an index titled "Searching Guides of Qur'anic Words" (see "Petunjuk Pencarian Kata dalam Qur'an" by Abdul Qadir Hassan). Because there is no dating for this index, it is unknown when it was compiled. In general, this index is thematic but still very simple, and the compiler testified that the composition refers to Muhammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī's *Tafsīl Āyāt al-Qur'an al-Hakīm* (Hassan 2010, pp. xxxvi–xl). In short, the index appears to be an Indonesian translation of the work, as represented by terms such as fairness (*adil*), mandate (*amanat*), wine and gambling (*arak dan judi*), happiness (*bahagia*), good deed (*berbuat baik*), cleanliness (*bersih*), stars (bintang-bintang), wasteful (*boros*), earth and sky (*bumi dan langit*), suicide (*bunuh diri*), and so on.

Second, in addition to the simple thematic index by Abdul Qadir Hassan, the book includes a more comprehensive thematic index by Zuhal Abdul Qadir titled "The Pursuit of the Qur'anic Teachings" ("Penelusuran Pokok-pokok Ajaran Qur'an"). This index was created on 5 February 2005, in Jakarta. In his introduction, Zuhal emphasized the significance of the thematic index for non-religious readers of the Qur'an, such as himself. Zuhal emphasized that the indexes that divided the grouping of themes into six main aspects—(1) the principles of faith and deity, (2) Muslims and their worship, (3) sciences, (4) moral principles, (5) societal and economic aspects, and (6) legal and state aspects—are a very useful contribution because it aids many people in understanding the contents of the Qur'an (Hassan 2010, p. xli).

According to the above classification, the index is not arranged alphabetically, as previously completed by Abdul Qadir Hasan, but rather by categorizing themes under aspects of discussion. The first theme presented is "Qur'an, Faith, and God-head", which is then divided into five sections with some sub-derivative themes in each. The five main themes are (1) to know the Qur'an, (2) the principles of faith, with some sub themes such as Faith to the Prophet, Angels, and Book; Faith to the Qada', Qadar, The Unseen, and the Resurrection; and Faith to the Qada', Qadar, The Unseen, and the Resurrection, (3) God's Power and Its Main Characteristics, (4) The Life of the World–The Hereafter, and (5) Man's Relationship with His Lord (Hassan 2010, pp. xlii–xlvi). The index is described in three columns, each of which contains a reference to the names and numbers of the surahs of the Koran, the verse numbers, and a brief description of the verses.

4. Conclusions

Based on the foregoing explanation, it is possible to conclude that the discourse on thematic interpretation in the Middle East, particularly Egypt, has had a significant influence on the development of thematic interpretation in Indonesia. The re-publication of certain exegetical works by Indonesian exegetes, who used various forms of thematic approach, such as the addition of tables of contents and the arrangement of thematic indexes of Qur'anic verses, is an observable form of development. It is related to Amīn al-Khūlī's (d. 1966) thought, who was an initiator of thematic interpretation. He underlined the importance of thematic discussion in comprehending Qur'anic perspectives on specific cases. Thematic indexes presented by Mahmud Yunus in the back pages of his *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* in the 1950s contain some embryos of Indonesian thematic interpretation. Along with the improvement of the new Indonesian spellings in the 1973 edition, the attempts at re-editing and renewal of the spelling of the book also include some types of indexing the contents of interpretation.

Thematic indexes display not only religious topics but also economic, scientific, historical, and social issues. A similar reshaping of the *Tafsir al-Bayan* written by Hasbie Ash Shiddieqy (first published in 1966) and *al-Furqan Tafsir Qur'an* written by Ahmad

Hassan has been promulgated by Mahmud Yunus in his republishing of the *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* (first published in 1956). When they republished the books in the early 2000s, they improved the Indonesian spelling of both the brief and global styles of *tafsīr*. In order to accommodate the new thematic trend, both *tafsīr* have added a thematic table of contents and a glossarium of thematic indexes. Furthermore, such an influence has influenced the writing of new tafsir, such as Bachtiar Surin's *Terjemah & Tafsiral-Qur'an 30 Juz Huruf Arab dan Latin* and Oemar Bakry's *Tafsir Rahmat*. Thematic indexes have been presented in both tafsirs in the form of chronological and alphabetical tables of contents and thematic indexes, as shown in the Table 1 below:

Table 1. Forms of thematic presentations in Indonesian tafsirs.

First Published	Re-Printed	Book Titles in Indonesian	Author	Table of *Surah*/Theme	Thematic Index	Additional Indexes
1950	1973	*Tafsir Qur'an Karim*	Mahmud Yunus	Chronological	Thematic–Random	-
1976	1976	*Terjemah dan Tafsir al-Qur'an 30 Juz huruf arab dan latin*	Bachtiar Surin	Chronological/Alphabetical	-	-
1981	1981	*Tafsir Rahmat*	Oemar Bakry	Alphabetical Chronological	Thematic–Random	Chronological
1966	2002	*Tafsir al-Bayan*	Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy	Chronological	Alphabetical Glossary	-
1956	2005	*Al-Furqan Tafsir Qur'an*	Ahmad Hassan	Chronological	Thematic–Random	Alphabetical Glossary

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Article

Search for the Theological Grounds to Develop Inclusive Islamic Interpretations: Some Insights from Rationalistic Islamic Maturidite Theology

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Abstract: Inclusive religious interpretations accept that a salvation beyond their teachings can be found. Whether Islam accepts inclusive religious interpretations or not, constitutes one of the most debated issues related to Islam in our days. In this paper it is argued that, although al-Maturidi's views can hardly be described as inclusive, the dynamic rationalistic Maturidite theology (so-called Maturidite "software") may help produce inclusive Islamic interpretations. In addition to the key two principles of rationalistic Maturidite theology, especially the Maturidite understanding of the fate of people not exposed to divine mission, may be understood as accepting that the people may reach faith which is similar to valid through their reason, and they may be saved hereafter, although they do not believe in Islamic teachings in a strict sense. This Maturidite position can also be used to justify the inclusive understanding of Quranic verses. By and large, Maturidite theological views analyzed in this article can be seen as factors laying the grounds to develop inclusive Islamic interpretations.

Keywords: Islam; rationalistic Islam; Maturidite theology; inclusivity; exclusivity; inclusive religious interpretations; Bigiev

1. Introduction: Exclusivity–Inclusivity Debate and Islam

Although exclusivity and inclusivity in religious traditions have been interpreted in different ways (Bakar 2009, p. 6), the most popular interpretation of exclusivity and inclusivity pertains to the issue of the possibility of post-humus salvation outside one's own belief and faith system. While an inclusive religious doctrine accepts a possibility to enter Heaven for non-believers in its teachings, an exclusive religious belief denies such a possibility (Bakar 2009, p. 6). In other words, inclusivism accepts that there are more than one way to salvation; therefore, inclusive religious doctrine accepts the opportunity of salvation beyond its teachings. In contrary, exclusive religious doctrine denies the opportunity of such salvation (Kamali 2011, p. 715).

Exclusivity or inclusivity are not specific to any particular religion. Both the adherents of exclusive and inclusive interpretations can be found among the followers of any religion. As such, any religion claims that only its followers can be saved, and it is natural that in any religion exclusivists tend to outnumber believers in inclusivity. By and large, religious inclusivism is not welcomed by many believers, since they tend to believe that they would be in danger of losing their own faith, if they were to admit the opportunity of salvation beyond their own religious traditions (Bakar 2009, p. 6). That being said, religious inclusivism is one of the most controversial, even taboo, issues in many religions.

Mohammad H. Khalil (2012), in his comprehensive analysis of the views of different Muslim scholars, challenges the dominant perception about Islam's attitude to exclusivity–inclusivity debate,

which assumes that there is a particular, tended to be exclusivist, Islamic orthodoxy in the issue of the soteriological fate of others. Khalil explores the variety of inclusive and exclusive perspectives developed throughout Islamic history by different scholars, such as Al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyya, Al-Jawziyya, Ibn Arabi, and Rashid Rida.

Nonetheless, in our days, Islam is generally accepted as an extremely exclusivist, moreover intolerant, religion. Islam's intolerance of others is explained as stemming from its exclusivist interpretations (Bakar 2009, p. 6). Exclusivist understandings of the primary Islamic source, Quranic verses, became dominant in traditionalist Muslim scholarship and society. For example, the Muslims tend to narrowly interpret and literally understand the following Quranic verses, where the message of universality and inclusivity can also be inferred, "True religion before Allah is I/islam (submission to His will)" (3:19); "If anyone seeks a religion other than (I/islam) complete devotion to God, it will not be accepted from him . . . " (3:85); and "this day I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour to you, and chose I/islam to be your faith" (5:3).

We think that underdevelopment of Islamic discourses on religious inclusivism is not a problem of Islam as such, basically, it is improper to view Islam and any other religion as monolithic and static. In essence, any religion is a social phenomenon, theology is a human construct, and religious views of the believers are formed and transformed by their environments, education, and the information they are exposed to.

We argue that rationalistic Islamic theology, by which in this article we denote Maturidism, may have a potential to produce inclusive Islamic interpretations. One of the paradoxes of Islamic theology and history is that, despite Maturidism being nominally accepted as one of the two Sunni-Islamic schools in creed and theology, in fact, it has been overshadowed for many centuries by Asharism (Abdallah 1974, p. 7) and dynamic rationalistic Maturidite epistemology was largely lost. However, it is a matter of fact that al-Maturidi's views per se about other religions can hardly be categorized as inclusive.

In this article we argue that it is needed to move from exclusivism-inclined al-Maturidi views to inclusivism-inclined Maturidite rationalistic principles. In other words, while the limits of al-Maturidi's inclusiveness need to be acknowledged, the rationalistic Maturidite theology, specifically its two principles, which are briefly touched in this article, can be used to produce inclusive Islamic understandings. Additionally, the other Maturidite theological views discussed in this paper, such as the Maturidite understanding of the fate of people who did not hear of Prophetic mission, Maturidite interpretations of the foundation of faith and the idea of subjectivity of faith, Maturidite position on predestination, and, finally, the acceptance of the notion of irja as a rationalistic method of understanding religion, can be seen as factors laying the grounds to develop inclusive Islamic interpretations.

2. From Exclusivism-Inclined Al-Maturidi Views (Maturidite "Hardware") to Inclusivism-Inclined Maturidite Rationalistic Principles (Maturidite "Software") to Produce Inclusive Islamic Interpretations

In general, the concepts of rationalistic and rationalism in Islam are mostly associated with the Mutazilate school (Zhussipbek and Nagayeva 2019, p. 348), which, in fact, in some key theological issues, accepted irrational, even extremist views. For example, similar to some radical teachings, the Mutazilate school assumes that actions are acts of faith (Haj 2009, p. 222). Though Maturidism has been conventionally acknowledged along with Asharism as one of the two Sunni-Islamic schools in creed and "kalam" (dialectical theology), in practice its epistemology turned out to be lost for centuries. In other words, while the creed developed by al-Maturidi (the eponym of Maturidite theology) was not lost, furthermore, it became a strictly dogmatic and ossified teaching, the rationalistic Maturidite theology was put into oblivion. As such, al-Maturidi was a thorough dialectician and his main endeavor was to find out the philosophical bases for his theological interpretations (Ali 1963, pp. 245–46). Moreover, al-Maturidi can be depicted as an academic scholar trained in many

disciplines related to complex theological debates but not as a traditional religious author in narrow sense. Regretfully, most of his works were lost, only two books survived (Rudolph 2016, p. 87).

We argue that it is necessary to differentiate between theologically rationalistic and dynamic Maturidite theology, which we tentatively call "software", on the one hand, and Maturidite creed, which is accepted by mainstream-traditionalist Hanafi Muslims as ossified, even dogmatic teaching, which we tentatively depict as "hardware", on the other (Zhussipbek and Nagayeva 2019, p. 354).

Al-Maturidi's views about other religions can be placed under the category of "hardware". The analysis of al-Maturidi's "magnum opus", Kitab at-Tawhid (Book of Oneness of God) can show the exclusivity of al-Maturidi's views, for example, Rifat Atay (1999, pp. 28–32), in his comparative research, showed that the writings of al-Maturidi ought to be categorized as religiously exclusivist.

As such, the focal-point of "kalam" science (al-Maturidi was a scholar of "kalam") is the refutation of heretical Islamic sects (Haydar 2016, p. 54) and other religions deviated from monotheism. Rudolph reminds that, after analyzing al-Maturidi's "Kitab at-Tawhid", it appears that the list of his theological opponents is long, and it contains several religions beyond Islam, as well as a number of Islamic sects and thinkers (Rudolph 2015, p. 149). Al-Maturidi extensively refuted the beliefs, and defended the correct conception, of monotheism ("tawhid") against Mutazilates (al-Maturidi 1970, pp. 86–92, 215–16, 236–56), Ismailis (al-Maturidi 1970, pp. 93–100), and other heretical Muslim groups such as the Karramites, Kharijits, and the followers of Jabriya and Qadariya (al-Maturidi 1970, pp. 225–28).

Al-Maturidi attacked the views of dualists of different groups such as the Zoroastrians, Marcionites, and Manichaeans (al-Maturidi 1970, pp. 157–72). As Rudolph indicates al-Maturidi's critique of dualists was not based on a general goal, as other comparable Islamic polemics, but rather had a multi-layered structure (Rudolph 2015, p. 178). The significant presence of Manichaeans and Zoroastrians in Transoxania, where al-Maturidi lived and worked, could induce him to dwell on these religions more than others to claim supremacy for Islamic theology (Rudolph 2015, p. 178). He also refuted the Ancient Greek philosophical legacy which he conceptualized as "Dahriya", which included Aristotle, the determinists ("ashab al-tabai") (al-Maturidi 1970, pp. 113–18, 121–23).

While Al-Maturidi was willing to employ the agreement of Muslims with other monotheists, such as Jews and Christians[1], he criticized and refuted the Christian and Jewish religious views. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that al-Maturidi placed his refutations of the Christian positions in the section of his book dealing with Prophethood, but not in the section about God (al-Maturidi 1970, pp. 210–15). Additionally, al-Maturidi's rebuttal of the Christian views in the "Kitab at-Tawhid" was not put forward in the manner of a participation in some independent, ongoing tradition of Islamic polemic against the Christians (Griffith 2011, p. 639).

As such, al-Maturidi's views per se about other religions, for example, Christianity and Judaism, can hardly be described as inclusive (nonetheless, the Turkish researcher of al-Maturidi's legacy, Hanifi Ozcan, suggested that al-Maturidi provided a good example of inclusivist religion between Abrahamic religions (Ozcan 1995; Atay 1999, p. 29)). Nonetheless, despite the exclusivism-inclined al-Maturidi views (Maturidite "hardware"), we argue that using a broader perspective, dwelling on the rationalistic Maturidite theology, specifically on its two principles, may lead the Muslims to produce inclusive Islamic understandings.

In our view the rationalistic Maturidite epistemology is premised upon two main principles. The first principle is the belief that reason can find what is good and what is bad independently from revelation (al-Maturidi 1970, pp. 9–10). As such, reason and revelation both occupy a prominent place in the theological system of al-Maturidi (Ali 1963, p. 263). Nonetheless, al-Maturidi assumed that in many cases only reason can reveal the truth (Ali 1963, p. 263). As such al-Maturidi accepted the rationality of ethical norms, although not in absolute terms (al-Maturidi 1970, pp. 9–10). Therefore, we

[1] As an anonymous reviewer reminded.

conceptualize the second principle as the belief that God does not order to do what is known by reason as bad or evil.

Maturidite theology teaches that human rational knowledge extends over various domains and, in distinction to the Ashari school, human rational knowledge encompasses ethical norms (Rudolph 2015, p. 300). Therefore, contrary to the Asharite theology, which accepts what is good and what is bad based only on God's will, Maturidites and Mutazilates accept that the basis of God's commands are objective standards (Deen 2016). In essence, al-Maturidi built his theological system on the notion of "hikmah", divine wisdom (Ali 1963, p. 265).

Because of his rationalist epistemology, al-Maturidi on some crucial issues is close to the Mutazilate school (Rahman 2000, p. 62; Ali 1963, p. 273). The assumptions holding that, in the Maturidite theology, reason is subservient to scripture are not true. It is a result of a fundamental misunderstanding of Maturidism (Deen 2016). As such, the above-mentioned two principles show the Maturidite pivotal principle, which accepts that if the real purport of revelation is correctly understood, there can be no conflict between reason and revelation (Ali 1963, p. 264).

By the tenth century, the Hanafi school, which originally was one of the most reason-based Islamic schools and exemplified the "ray" school (reason-based jurisprudence), as a result of strong influence of conservative Asharite teachings and the Ahl al-Hadith school, submitted to the forms of "hadith" (Melchert 1997, p. 31). Although it is claimed by many traditionalist Islamic scholars that Asharism has its own doctrine of rationalism, in fact, it appears that this school espoused a theological position which was critical, if not detrimental, to rationalism (Zhussipbek and Nagayeva 2019, p. 348). Submission of Hanafisim to the forms of "hadith" became the eventual victory of traditionalists. Subsequently a role for reason in mainstream Sunni Islam turned out to be confined within strict limits, mostly in relation to secondary issues of jurisprudence (Hunter 2009, p. 25).

The lack of rationalism in contemporary Hanafite Islamic tradition can also be attributed to the influence of the theological legacy of Hanafite scholars, who introduced traditionalistic Asharite epistemology to Hanafism, such as al-Tahawi, the Hanafi scholar from current-day Egypt. The difference between theological methods of al-Maturidi and al-Tahawi is quite evident. While al-Maturidi was a thorough dialectician who employed rationalistic methods to find out a philosophical basis for his views, al-Tahawi was a true traditionist, who did not favor any rational discussion or speculative thinking on the pillars of faith, accepting them without any questioning. As such al-Tahawi's system may be conceptualized as dogmatic, while that of al-Maturidi as critical. Although both scholars belong to the same Hanafi school, they considerably differ in epistemology and trends of thought (Ali 1963, pp. 245–46).

In the early twentieth century, a prominent reformist, Musa Jarullah Bigiev, who was a Hanafite-Maturidite scholar[2] (Bigiev indicated this fact in his letters, he also performed a pilgrimage and did "itikaf", spiritual retreat, at Abu Hanifa's tomb in Baghdad (Bigi 1975, p. 13)), developed his inclusive interpretation based on the above-mentioned rationalistic Maturidite principles. Rationalistically interpreting Quranic verses (foremost the verses 39:53, 7:156, 20:5), he eloquently advocated religious inclusivism (Bigiif 1911, pp. 47–53). Specifically, the rationalistic principles of compatibility of reason and faith induced him to formulate inclusive Islamic discourse in the book entitled "Rahmat Ilahiyya Burhanlari" (Evidences of God's Mercy).

By employing Maturidite rationalistic principle, Bigiev argued that the belief in eternal punishment of non-Muslims contradicts reason, but in Maturidism reason and faith should not be mutually exclusive. Similarly, to believe that non-Muslims will be sent to Hell forever for their sins committed in this temporary life means the non-acceptance, even denial, of the unlimited mercy of God, which also contradicts human reason (Bigiev 2005, pp. 78, 90–91; Bigiif 1911). On the other hand, from assumption

[2] Although Bigiev was an un-compromised opponent of "madhab" fanaticism and, on some issues, formulated non-orthodox, nuanced interpretations which may differ from the views of "mainstream" Hanafi-Maturidi scholars.

that belief in eternal punishment for non-Muslims contradicts reason, the argument based on "ethical objectivism" can be inferred. To put it differently, it is ugly and miserable to punish a person forever for the sins committed in this temporary life; however, according to Maturidite theology, God does not order to believe and do what is accepted by reason as bad and evil.

3. Analysis of the Theological Principles of Rationalistic Maturidism and Inclusive Religious Interpretations

In our view, in addition to the key rationalistic epistemological principles discussed above, the other Maturidite theological views, such as the Maturidite understanding of the fate of people who did not hear of Prophetic mission, Maturidite interpretations of the foundation of faith and the idea of subjectivity of faith, as well the Maturidite position on predestination, can be seen as the factors to prepare the theological grounds to develop inclusive Islamic interpretations.

(a) Maturidite views on the fate of people who did not hear of Prophetic mission

There is a difference between Maturidite and Asharite theologies in the issue of the fate of people who did not hear of Prophetic mission. Asharite theology holds that no valid faith can be established among people to whom the Divine mission through Prophets did not reach (in parallel the Asharite theology teaches that only divine revelation can determine what is good and evil, or what is truth and what is not (Hourani 2007, p. 8)). However, based on his emphasis on human reason and intellect, al-Maturidi believed that each human is expected rationally to find her or his Creator (al-Maturidi 1970, pp. 6–11). At the first glance, it may seem that the Maturidite school adopts a stricter stance on issue of the salvation of people who did not hear of Prophetic mission. However, Maturidite school argues that a human being is obliged to have faith in the "Maker". The Maturidite school deliberately uses the concept "Maker" ("sani" in Arabic), but not "Allah". The faith in the "Maker" cannot be the same to the "faith in Allah", as it is conceptualized by Islamic scholars (Matsuyama 2013, p. 4).

As Matsuyama explains, it seems likely that Maturidi scholars deliberately employed in their theology a very general concept "sani" (Maker), but not "khaliq" (Creator), to refer to the One—the belief to whom is to be found rationally by the people who did not hear of Prophetic mission. Moreover, Maturidi scholars intentionally refrained from explaining the reasons why they named God "Maker" (Matsuyama 2013, pp. 4–5). This means that, faith the people who did not hear of Prophetic mission are supposed to have, as such, is not the exclusive faith in "Allah", whom the specific attributes are ascribed to, but inclusive faith in a vaguely conceptualized entity that can be called "Maker" (Matsuyama 2013, p. 5). It is a vital but generally neglected issue in Maturidite theology.

By and large, if to analyze Maturidite theology through a broader perspective, it can be argued that rationalistic Maturidism allows a human being "who is ignorant of Islam" to rationally find faith in one "Maker" and to be saved, although her/his faith is not based on strict Islamic doctrinal formulations (Matsuyama 2013, p. 5). To put it differently, a person without exposure to Prophetic mission in the so-called "Land of Infidelity" can be regarded as a "believer", only if she or he believes in the "Maker" without believing in the specific pillars of the Islamic teachings and without performing any prescribed Islamic obligations. Therefore, in the "Land of Infidelity", it seems not to make sense to distinguish between exclusively-defined Muslims who embrace the concrete teachings of "Islam" (denoting the name of specific religion), and non-Muslims (Matsuyama 2013, p. 7). Hence, the Maturidi position can be interpreted to mean that where Islamic teachings are not known and cannot be known, those who rationalistically came to the belief in one "Maker" ("sani") are to be saved.

Based upon the above-mentioned, we argue that the Maturidite theology may produce the Islamic interpretations which can positively obscure the boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims, especially between Muslims and adherents of other monotheistic religions not only (Matsuyama 2013, p. 2) in the "Land of Infidelity" (this concept today should be considered "anachronistic"), but also in all places where people have not encountered the mission of "properly-presented Islam" as an exemplary life of a community of believers and the individuals. In this respect, as Matsuyama reminds, it is

undeniable that, despite the backdrop of global revitalization and liberalization of the religious market and diversification of religious discourses, general people in non-Muslim countries have difficulties in having a correct understanding of various aspects of Islamic teachings (Matsuyama 2013, p. 7).

The Maturidite view on the fate of people who did not hear of Prophetic mission can be used to justify the inclusive understanding of Quranic verses (primarily the verses 3:19, 3:85, 5:3) by accepting the lower-case "islam" (denoting the submission to "Maker") instead of upper-case "Islam". The word "islam" (lower case) in these Quranic verses may mean the concept "submission", but not exactly the name of a particular religion ("Islam"). In other words, inclusive reading of the verses: "True religion before Allah is I/islam (submission to His will)" (3:19); "If anyone seeks a religion other than (I/islam) complete devotion to God, it will not be accepted from him . . . " (3:85); and "this day I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour to you, and chose I/islam to be your faith" (5:3) allows the word "islam" to be conceptualized as lower-case (not upper-case "Islam"), implying submission or devotion to "Maker" but not exactly the name of the specific religion ("Islam"). The general meaning of the scripture does not impede this kind of inclusive reading (Kamali 2011, p. 714).

Toshihiko Izutsu also argues that the concept "islam" in essence means determined self-surrender and self-submission to the Divine Will (Izutsu 2002, p. 217). The concept "islam" (and the related verb "aslama") basically means that a person puts her/his trust totally in God fully and voluntarily surrenders oneself to the Divine Will, which after all is a kind of unconditional self-surrender (Izutsu 2002, p. 217).

It can be argued that the Asharite theology, despite the fact that it accepts that people who did not hear of Prophetic mission are not responsible to have belief, in fact, is less inclined to religious inclusivism. Moreover, in our days, the proponents of this Asharite principle may argue that in view of the global spread of information about Islam, there is no one left in the world to whom the message of Prophet Muhammad has not yet reached. However, Maturidite theology, by arguing that any human being, as a rational creature, is obliged to rationally find faith in the "Maker", does not confer the obligation to specify the details of this belief and attributes of the "Maker". As such, it only refers to the "Maker" as the "Creator of the World" and never calls "Maker" "Allah" (Matsuyama 2013, p. 5). On the whole, from Maturidite theology it can be inferred that people who do not know Islam may have valid faith which is not characterized by strict Islamic doctrinal formulations, and, accordingly, they will be saved. Furthermore, in line with al-Maturidi's logic (derived from his belief in the necessity of rational belief in the "Maker"), the concept "islam" can be understood primarily as submission (lower case "islam") but not as the exact name of a particular religion. Hence, we argue that the Maturidite logic may be interpreted as meaning that people who believe only in the "Maker" are accepted to be "believers", even if they do not believe in Islamic teachings in a strict sense.

In other words, we argue that, from rationalistic Maturidite theology, it can be inferred that anyone who rationally comes to the belief in the "Maker" (which can be conceptualized as "a mostly correct sense of the nature of the world"[3] is as good as Muslim in God's eyes (as we understand the Maturidite logic, "a mostly correct sense of the nature of the world" is to accept the oneness of the Creator). According to Maturidite theology, "true religion" is the religion of Oneness of God (called "islam") and it never changes, which is distinct from the institutionalized religion associated with the name of Muhammad.

To conclude, first, by recognizing the primary role of human reason in having faith and not confining faith to specific attributes (accepting that the people may reach faith which is similar to valid through their reason, and they may be saved hereafter, although they do not believe in Islamic teachings in a strict sense), it can be argued that Maturidite logic accepts that the religious beliefs that incompatible (lower-case "islam") with narrowly-defined "Islam" (upper-case) may lead to salvation.

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[3] We thank an anonymous reviewer who suggested this expression.

Therefore, in this sense, this Maturidite understanding may be seen as laying the foundations to develop an inclusive perspective in Islamic teachings.

(b) The foundation of faith and subjectivity of faith

Maturidite theological views on faith can also be used to justify our arguments about the possibilities to develop religious inclusivism based upon rationalistic Maturidite theology.

Al-Maturidi advocated the idea of subjectivity of faith according to which faith is purely an individual assent to God (Basaran 2011, p. 48). The Maturidite position accepts that belief consists only in conviction in the heart (al-Maturidi 1970, pp. 57, 373), whereas Abu Hanifa, whose views al-Maturidi systematized, conceptualized that the foundation of belief consists in conviction in the heart and affirmation by the tongue. However, three other Sunni-Islamic schools and their respective scholars led by Malik, al-Shafii, and Ibn Hanbal accepted that faith also consists of "practice with the limbs" (Haddad 2015, p. 141). As such, al-Maturidi regarded faith as an act of heart and reason, but in its essence, it is affirmation and, in a certain degree, is knowledge (al-Maturidi 1970, pp. 380–81).

Regarding how to come to faith, al-Maturidi advocated an assent that is provided rationally and carried out by the heart ("act of heart"); therefore, faith can be seen as a process rather than a destination (Basaran 2011, p. 54). By emphasizing that belief is an "act of heart", al-Maturidi argued that belief cannot be possible in the presence of force (al-Maturidi 1970, pp. 380–81). Additionally, Al-Maturidi discussed whether belief may be called an act of knowledge ("al-marifa").

The idea of subjectivity of faith was eloquently expressed by Ibrahim Haqqi Erzurumi in the following statement "the fact of various beliefs of various persons is evidence for the greatness of the Creator, because He shows Himself different to all of His servants" (Basaran 2011, p. 54). Moreover, in contradiction to other Islamic schools of doctrine, Maturidis accept that belief does not increase or decrease (al-Maturidi 1970, p. 119), only the degrees of certainty and affirmation may increase or decrease (en-Nesefi 2010, pp. 65–66). Maturidite theology, accepting that actions are not part of belief, maintains that belief is not decreased through sins. Therefore faith can survive sin; consequently, even the worst sinner cannot be treated as an unbeliever (Leaman 2008, p. 86). As Leaman highlights, Maturidite theology, assuming a clear division between faith and human actions, tolerates a serious backsliding and offers rather lenient and relaxed criterion for membership to the religious community (Leaman 2008, pp. 86, 89).

In view of above mentioned theological views on faith, in Maturidite theology, "Islam" (religion) is not indispensable to "iman" (belief), the deeds are not part of the faith. However, not only radical Muslims, but also the conservative traditionalist Sunni Muslims (who strictly follow Asharite theology), adhere to the opposite view and they may accept a believer not performing obligatory deeds, at worst, as an apostate, the view which deeply contradicts rationalistic Maturidite theology.

Furthermore, the Maturidite theological principles assuming that faith in general terms ("bi al-jumlah"), without knowledge about its specific teachings, are principally acceptable seem to be important to develop inclusive Islamic interpretations. As well, according to the Hanafi-Maturidi school, even believers in polytheism are accepted as becoming Muslims simply as a result of their confirmation that "I believe in Allah" (Matsuyama 2013, p. 6).

(c) Maturidite view on predestination

We argue that the Maturidite view on predestination seems to be important to infer the foundations of the phenomenon, which can be tentatively called "Islamic individualism", the notion which is vital to develop a pluralistic culture.

Although both Asharite and Maturidite doctrines maintain that human beings are responsible for their own actions, the pivotal notions developed by these schools, ("kasb" (acquisition) by the former school and "ikhtiyar" (choice) by the latter (Lucas 2006, p. 809)), in fact, lead to substantial differences in understanding of free will and predestination, which affect individual and social life.

Al-Ashari taught that human responsibility for her/his own acts depended on acquisition, but he did not accept that a human being is a real actor (Stefon 2010, p. 138). The radical Asharism maintains that God not only creates the actual act but also the individual's will and power (Lucas 2006, p. 809). Asharite theologians, by emphasizing the divine omnipotence at the expense of freedom of will of a human being, developed the theological position which, in substance, is excessively deterministic (Shah 2006, p. 640). Although, to satisfy believers in an intelligible divine justice, al-Ashari developed his theory of justice through the notion of "iktisab" (acquisition), the problem of divine justice was only dismissed but not solved. Since, in his doctrine, it appears that ultimately God predestines what act a man chooses (Hourani 2007, p. 8).

The Maturidite main principle is the idea of cooperation between the Creator and His creation. God creates ("khalq") human actions and human beings do them ("fiil") (Rudolph 2015, p. 305). In other words, al-Maturidi's view on predestination holds that God is the Creator of human acts, although a human being possesses her/his own capacity and free will to commit this act. A human being can; therefore, be seen as the true author of her/his acts; however, in the case of evil acts, they do not occur with the pleasure of the Creator (Shah 2006, p. 640). It can be argued that al-Maturidi developed a doctrine which accepts that a human being is a real actor, though God is the sole Creator of everything. Specifically, some later Maturidi scholars taught that while God creates the act, human beings add specifics, which are uncreated qualifications, to it (Lucas 2006, p. 809). In other words, acting and creating are distinct types of activity pertaining to different aspects of the same human act (Stefon 2010, pp. 138–39).

To conclude, concerning free will and predestination, in comparison with Asharism, the Maturidite theology, by developing the doctrine of "kasb", allots human beings the power of real actor and responsibility for her or his choices. In essence, in Maturidite doctrine, the initial choice is of a human, whereas in al-Ashari teaching it is of God (Halverson 2010, p. 27). As such, Asharite position on free will makes inconceivable the idea that a human being is individually responsible for her or his acts (Thiele 2016, p. 228). Bigiev heavily criticized the excessively deterministic views on predestination inspired by traditionalistic scholarship and argued that the not properly understood notion of fate and interpretations of predestination led the Muslims to poverty, underdevelopment, and depression (Bigi 1975, p. vii).

To conclude, the Maturidite view on predestination may provide a ground to develop "Islamic individualism". Individualism is a key factor in developing pluralism and pluralistic culture, which lays the foundations of inclusive religious interpretations. In general, respect for individual freedom is one of the core liberal values and fundamentals of democratic culture.

(d) Acceptance of irja

On the other hand, that al-Maturidi accepted and defended the notion of "irja" (literally means "pushing back of judgment", the acceptance that all faiths are to be judged by God on the Day of Judgement)[4] can also be used to discuss the potential of Maturidite theology to produce inclusive Islamic understandings. As Rudolph emphasizes, although al-Maturidi did not accept being called "Murjiite", he rehabilitated the "Murjiites" as long as the term was understood to refer to the adherents of the "true understanding" of "irja" (al-Maturidi explained that "God alone knows people's hearts and knows who believes and disbelieves. People and even angels are not capable of judging. Whoever claims to do so despite this, is committing disbelief". The angels first "pushed back" their judgment ("irja") and were a role model for everyone through this (see in Rudolph 2015, p. 51)), thereby he finds a way, despite his probable unease, to acknowledge this characteristic in his own tradition (Rudolph 2015, p. 155).

[4] We are grateful for an anonymous reviewer who draws attention to al-Maturidi's discussion of "irja" in our conceptualization of the potential of inclusiveness of Maturidite principles.

We argue that al-Maturidi, like Abu Hanifa, accepted and defended the notion of "irja" as a concept derived from Quran to be used as a rationalistic method of understanding religion (Erdem 2012, pp. 145–46). For example, al-Maturidi emphasized that "Even if a hadith says that a sinner is no longer a believer, this is not correct. The hadith must be wrong, since it contradicts the Quran, and its transmitter is blameworthy" (see in Rudolph 2015, p. 51).

4. Conclusions

In this paper we aim to search for the theological grounds to produce inclusive Islamic interpretations in largely-lost-for-centuries Islamic rationalistic tradition, by which we depict a religious school named Maturidism. While the views of al-Maturidi per se cannot be categorized as inclusive (the limits of al-Maturidi's inclusiveness should be acknowledged), Maturidite epistemology and some key Maturidite views can be used to lay the grounds to develop inclusive Islamic discourses. As such, it is necessary to differentiate between Maturidite "software" and "Maturidite" hardware, where the former means dynamic rationalistic Maturidite theology, the latter denotes traditional Maturidite creed and static, even "ossified", Maturidite "kalam" (Zhussipbek and Nagayeva 2019, p. 354).

By and large, there ought to be an incentive to go from exclusivist al-Maturidi views to inclusivism-inclined Maturidite rationalistic principles. Overall, there is a nexus between the theologically rationalistic approach to Islamic sources and the development of inclusive religious interpretations. Specifically, the rationalistic principle of compatibility of reason and faith can be used to develop inclusive Islamic discourse. The reformist Maturidite scholar, Musa Bigiev, by arguing that the belief in eternal punishment of non-Muslims contradicts reason, unambiguously employed this principle to develop his inclusive Islamic theory in the early twentieth century.

Furthermore, the Maturidite view on the fate of people who did not hear of Prophetic mission may be understood as accepting that the people may reach faith, which is similar to valid through their reason, and they may be saved hereafter, although they do not believe in Islamic teachings in a strict sense and do not necessarily live in the "Lands of Infidelity" per se, but in all places where they have not been exposed to the mission of "properly-presented Islam" as exemplary life of a community of believers and the individuals. In other words, the religious beliefs of many people (if not of all non-Muslims) in today's world that are incompatible with the narrowly defined "Islam" (upper-case) may lead to salvation; therefore, this Maturidite understanding may be seen as laying the foundations to develop inclusive discourse.

On the other hand, the Maturidite logic can also be used to substantiate the arguments to interpret and read the Quranic verses inclusively, to accept lower-case "islam" as denoting the submission to "Maker", instead of upper-case "Islam". In other words, inclusive reading of the Quranic verses (3:19, 3:85, 5:3), which may be inferred from Maturidite view on people not exposed to Prophetic mission, closes the door of religious exclusivism.

On the whole, by invoking the principles of rationalistic Maturidite theology and Maturidite theological views on the fate of people who did not hear of Prophetic mission, foundation of faith, and predestination, it is possible to develop inclusive Islamic discourses by using internal Islamic dynamics.

To summarize, we argue that from rationalistic Maturidite theology it can be inferred that anyone who rationally comes to belief in the "Maker" is as good as Muslim in God's eyes. In other words, the logic assuming the rationalistic position that God is knowable by natural means, as it was conceptualized by al-Maturidi, can be used to justify inclusive Islamic interpretations in our days. In other words, in view of the fact that the rationalistic position assuming that God is knowable by natural means is the cornerstone of al-Maturidi's entire intellectual edifice, and the acceptance of a human's rational capacity occupies a central position in his definition of the human being (Rudolph 2015, p. 300), we can argue that, if to follow this logic, ascribing to human reason such capacity, the development of inclusive interpretations of Islam in our days is possible.

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Article

Violence and *Jihad* in Islam: From the War of Words to the Clashes of Definitions

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Abstract: This article explores the phenomena of violence and *jihad* in three parts: their emergence and trajectory in the *Qur'anic* text, their meanings, and their entanglement with the religious cause. The objective was to examine the interactions between violence and *jihad*, highlighting the variations in their usage and interpretation. Based on intensive literal interpretations of the *jihad* verses, radical Islamist movements have distorted their historical memory by sanctifying and reducing them to an argument of war (*harb*, *qital*) and combat, thus seeking a military solution to their political agendas. This article also aimed to address the issue of the transition of Islam from a meta-narrative of emancipation and rationality to one of violence by examining the question of war in Islam, as well as its definition and legitimisation. In this rather complex transition, we draw in some sections on Ibn Khaldun's modelling to highlight the political component related to violence. The aim was to attempt to disentangle the threads of violence, politics, and power within the Islamic tradition. This study will allow assessment of the tension—in the context of the *Qur'an*—between order (*islah*) and disorder/injustice (*fasad*). The transition from one to the other implies a legitimisation of violence; its appropriateness must, therefore, be studied.

Keywords: *fasad*; *jihad*; power; *islah*; violence; war; *da'wa*

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1. Introduction

In Arabic, the term *jihad* is based on the ideas of 'effort', 'striving', or 'exerting oneself'. Out of 6236 verses in the *Qur'an*, approximately 41 mention *jihad* and its derivatives, thus accentuating its polysemy and multiple uses. It should be pointed out that the most occurrences of the word *jihad* appear in surah 9, which the *jihadist* movements largely use in support of their violent actions. We found the general sense of a lifelong discipline to be adopted much more in the 14 verses revealed according to Islamic tradition in Mecca. In the other Medina verses, however, the sense of fighting is more marked. The textual meanings of *jihad* in the *Qur'an* include various efforts that Muslims are expected to perform throughout their lives, ranging from physical *jihad*, which aims to drive back an enemy when Muslims feel threatened, to the spread of the word of God in foreign territories. A closer reading of the verses reveals *jihad* as a vision that structures the world into categories of human beings: believers—the followers of God—and non-believers—the enemies of God and his messenger. In this way, *jihad* has been imposed on a community of Muslims whose religious affiliations are renewed through the various nuances and acts, thus *jihad* is named accordingly: 'The believers are only the ones who have believed in Allah and His Messenger and then doubt not but strive with their properties and their lives in the cause of Allah. It is those who are the truthful' (*Qur'an*, 49:15).

Although the term *jihad* does not dominate the *Qur'anic* text[1], it has been the subject of several studies and research regarding its definitions and norms. Over the last twenty years, the notion has gained the attention of many researchers—mainly in the West—who have devoted a great deal of work to explaining its rules and sections and to clarifying its meanings and benefits, making it the most sensitive Islamic religious rite. However, in

opposition to the Western-held discourse, a minority of Sunni scholars consider it to be the sixth pillar of Islam and one of the best works after the belief in God[2].

The majority of the verses of *jihad* are not clearly related to the issue of war and violence. The technical word used for fighting is *qital*[3].

This observation contradicts the spreading and popular conception of *jihad* in the West, where the term has crystallised to mean military offenses against 'unbelievers' and is almost exclusively identified as such. The prevalence of this concept is not due to Western imagination. It is largely due to Islamist movements that proclaim *jihad* as a legitimate war against all who do not share their worldview, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The word itself appeared in the 1980s, during the Afghanistan War, and gained momentum at the turn of the 21st century, after the September 11 attacks, to denote various forms of Islamist acts of violence. In short, the term has become more of an identity vector than a value of self-discipline and rigour.

The warfare-related concept of *jihad* that has spread throughout the 20th century conflates political and religious issues, though the religious value of *jihad* is somewhat independent of its political weight (Mirbagheri 2012). These two, almost opposite, interpretations of *jihad*—the military approach and the self-building and discipline approach—are rooted in Islamic jurisprudential tradition. The approach to *jihad* of Shafii jurist, Sulayman ibn Muhammad al-Bujayrimi (d. 1221/1806), was *qital fi-sabillillah* (fighting in the path of God). On the other hand, the Hanafite, Abu Bakr 'Ala' al-Din al-Kasani (d. 587/1191), defined it as *jihad* as *jihad fi sabil allah* (striving in the way or path of God), emphasising a more general notion of *jihad* rather than physical combat, but without explaining against whom and under what circumstances (al-Kasani 1972, p. 97).

For the proponents of militant *jihadism*, the ideological foundations lend legitimacy to *jihad* as a struggle. The famous Sunni theologian, Ibn Tahir al-Baghdadi (d. 429/1037), interpreted *jihad* as 'the struggle against the enemies of Islam until they convert to Islam' (Babadžanov 2007). This interpretation is widespread among Islamist militia groups who advocate military action against non-Muslims, and, occasionally, against some Muslims. Is religion present in these interpretations? Are they not ideologically built to promote a fanatically subjective view of the world? We should, however, be clear that in this study, our aim was not to define religion in terms of what is believed by the religious, but in terms of how they believe. What is relevant is how some Muslims interpret their representation of Islam and its teachings. The concept of *jihad*—constructed over the last century—has been driven away from its original meaning to now be regarded as an arbitrary symbol of sacred actions to be performed against others. The way *jihad* functions nowadays reinforces indiscriminately a system of literal interpretation of those *Qur'anic* verses focused on war and *qital*. Nevertheless, the idea that religion tends to promote violence is part of the conventional wisdom of Western societies (Cavanaugh 2009). Violence functions in different contexts of power struggles, thus not belonging exclusively to religious fields. The myth of religious violence tends to construct the figure of the religious 'other' and to persistently contrast *jihadism* and the rational, peace-making subject (Cavanaugh 2009).

2. *Jihad*: From Polysemy to Semantic Indeterminacy and Overinterpretation

The post-Islamic period of the Nahdah was dominated by an unprecedented confusion about the nature of some terms, particularly their meaning and their relationship to Islam. We noticed that the intellectual production of our time is increasingly stirring up the spectrum of ambiguity as the embodiment of today's universal spirit. For example, the term *jihad*, which has been closely associated to military actions for the past 20 years, needs to be reassessed in the light of an era marked by disenchantment and a crisis of values.

The multiplication of terms to ambiguously describe the Islamic subject and its relation to violence spontaneously marks the end of the Islamic matrix as a meta-narrative for the rational believer. In this sense, meta-narrative means Islamic norms—the set of values and feelings whose meanings are sensitive to contextual variations. They are, in fact, indeterminate or 'floating' meanings that the human mind helps to construct or reconstruct

into significations that reflect processes of hybridisation, interpretation, and adaptation[4]. *Jihad* is an example of these indeterminate concepts, and is now an obscure term at the heart of Arab-Muslim reality and tradition.

2.1. Jihad in the Qur'an and the Islamic Tradition

If the multiple meanings of *jihad* are to be clarified, we must return to the *Qur'anic* text as the primary source from which the various interpretations have been drawn over the centuries.

The term *jihad* holds an interesting place in the *Qur'an*, particularly in Medinan Surahs. The creation of *jihad* as a concept implies the realisation of the objectives of *sharīʿa* in terms of the creation and preservation of the young Islamic state. The term *jihad* is mentioned in 41 instances in the *Qur'an*. Most occurrences are linguistically related to the exercise of effort, *juhd* (al-Kasani 1972), and the deployment of energy (on ten occasions), in relation to the path of God (on 13 occasions), or in the context of combat.

Besides the four kinds of *jihad* (See DeLong-Bas 2004)[5] presented in the 41 verses, the general use of the term is divided into three categories: *jihad* by words, *jihad* by power, and *jihad* by good deeds. These categories have given way to various interpretations over the centuries as they have been extracted from the *Qur'an* and distorted into violent and legitimate acts. Furthermore, the *Qur'an* articulates the notions of *jihad* and patience (*ṣabr*) as the two values that build the believer's life on earth. In the *Qur'an*, *ṣabr* is, thus, inevitably tied to *jihad*, and this is broadly construed as the ongoing human struggle on earth (Afsaruddin 2013). In addition to the notion of *ṣabr*, *al-jihad* also articulates the notion of *islah*. The duty of *al-jihad* is to purify what has been made corrupt (*fasad*).

This deadly opposition between the pure and the impure is at the heart of radical Islamist thought. Its enactment does not allow for adaptability or coexistence, but rather a *jihadist* commitment that can end in death. The latter is even desired because the death of a *jihadist* would be made sacred (*shahid*). Death is the pendant to militant and warlike *jihad*. In his famous public law treatise, entitled *al-Siyāsa al-šarʿiyya fī iṣlāḥ al-rāʿī wa-l-raʿiyya*'[6], Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) defined *jihad* as involving all kinds of cults, in all its internal and external forms. For him, the individual or community participating in *jihad* is caught between two pleasant consequences: either victory and triumph, or martyrdom and paradise. The death of the martyr is not considered a common death; it is instead a passage to eternal life where they remain 'alive with their Lord' (*Qur'an*, 3:169).

Al-jihad, as a philosophy of action, a permanent and continuous struggle, at all levels—body, soul, mind—and as a behaviour and discipline, can be seen as opposed to inertia, idleness, and absence of energy. It is supposed to be a permanent battle that may result in a state of martyrdom. It is, according to Euben (2002), an action linked to death because the importance of continuing to exert oneself until the end is underlined. This conception of *jihad* contradicts the ideas of al-Hallâj (d. 309/922), Suhrawardî (d. 586/1191), ibn al-'Arabî (d. 638/1240), Jalâl al-Dîn al-Rûmî (d. 672/1273), and other Sufis who opted for the struggle against the ego to reach out (*fanaʾ*), for the disappearance into God, to join the 'Supreme Being'. This spiritual or mystical interpretation of *jihad* is relatively recent, only emerging after the period of great conquests and the stability of the empire, where the individual's effort to deepen their religion was required.

In the *Qur'anic* text, it is very clear that *jihad* has several distinct levels and qualities. The word is associated with the soul *(jihad al-nafs*), or to be purified with money (*al-jihad bi al-mal*), to fight one's desires (*jihad al-shahwat*) to better control them, etc. The words for war—*harb* and *qital*—are devoid of these meanings and their associations. Only the idea of confronting an enemy is put forward but again, under conditions that the *Qur'an* specifies in the verses concerned with the conflict with the enemy. Generally speaking, in the majority of the 41 verses where the word *jihad* appears, the meaning relates to lifestyle ethics, while the actual confrontation with the enemy, the techniques of fighting, bravery, and courage are rather associated with the notion of war. The latter revives in the Arab imagination a daily life that they had always known in the pre-Islamic period. By

reactivating this imagery, Islam displaces the meaning of the word *harb* to one that now goes beyond the selfish interests of one tribe or clan to the broad interest of an Islamic community.

Semantically, the primary meaning of the term in the Arabic language derives from the idea of the effort to be deployed to cope with internal and external difficulties or to resist something. Whether it be inner *jihad*, referring to the *jihad* of the soul, or outer *jihad*, referring to that of an enemy, this primary meaning emphasises, above all, the deployment of an inner energy to guard against any harm or threat that could be apprehended as corrupting the body and the soul.

In Ibn Manz'ûr's dictionary, *Lisân al-'Arab*, *jihad* is defined as the use of one's power and strength, both verbally and physically, against the enemy and for God. While jihad is about saying and doing, al-Jurjānī saw in *jihad* 'the act of inviting the other to follow True Religion' (Al-Jurjani 1994, p. 159). As for A-Isfahani (2002), *jihad* falls into three categories: the fight against the external enemy, the fight against Satan, and the fight against oneself (p. 30). These three aspects of *al-jihad* form one meaning, as presented in verse 78 of surah *al-haj* and verse 41 of surah At-Tawbah.

In the Islamic tradition, all of these meanings relate to the idea of *al-jihad* al-akbar—the great *jihad*—which, even though it appears in the *Qur'an* only once, opens up various possibilities of interpretation. The *al-jihad al-Asghar* (the lesser *jihad*), which some interpretations have described as the meaning of war against the unbelievers, is not reflected as such in the *Qur'an*. Indeed, the *Qur'an* does not use the term *jihad* for war, but instead uses *qital* or *harb* (*Qur'an*, 2:190). Meanwhile, the International Islamic Fiqh Academy highlighted the meaning of *al-jihad* in its general sense: to make every legitimate effort to uphold the word of God, to communicate the message of Islam by all means, and to spread justice, security, and mercy in human societies.

2.2. Jihad: From Manipulations to Instrumentalizations and Excessive Interpretations

Beyond the semantic shifts taking place in the discursive field related to the concept of *al-jihad*, the notion and its meanings are intertwined with the circumstances related to space and the development of Islamic predication. From Mecca to Medina, the notion of *al-jihad* did not have the same conceptions. From this point of view, Asma Afsaruddin's work highlighted the dynamic dimension of the notion to infer the meanings that the aforementioned periods specifically thrust upon it. Before permission to fight against the unbelievers was given (*Qur'an*, 22:39), the verses containing an injunction for *al-jihad* rather assumed the meaning of a spiritual *jihad* in which war and its violence against the other are not formally encouraged. While *al-jihad* at the time of the Prophet intensified self-connection for the purpose of spiritual and moral elevation, it later led to a counterbalance in the absence of the prophetic charisma, and the caliphs made *al-jihad* a legitimate principle of warfare motivation.

In the year AH 2, the Prophet and his companions were authorized to take up arms after being driven from their homes and having all their property confiscated. The divine authorization to fight the aggressors is expressed through the noun *qiṭal* (fighting). However, this verse marks a historical prerequisite and leaves the field open for possible instrumentalization of weapons through *al-jihad*. Thus, Islam allows war, but only under certain conditions and according to certain rules.

The verse 'Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed. Allah does not like transgressors'[7] (*Qur'an*, 2:190) forms the basis of *al-jihad*, which binds the required ethical attitude and determination in the war action so as not to leave the aggressor the choice of winning the war. However, this verse is not a declaration of war against the unbelievers, but against the aggressors. It is a moral stance against the oppressors—whether Muslims or unbelievers—and against injustice. From this perspective, the mechanism of *al-jihad* does not seem to involve the question of faith, hence the obligatory nature of *al-jihad* to repel oppression (*ẓulm*) by the means available to Muslims. Consequently, commanding what is right and forbidding what is wrong (*al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-n-nahy ʿani-l-munkar*) is

both an individual (*farḍ al-'ayn*) and collective (*farḍ kifāya*) duty and is a form of *al-jihad* in Islamic jurisprudence.

The transformation of the notion of *jihad* into solely the instrument of war in the name of God has certainly required doctrinal efforts and political support. Although beyond its polysemy, its doctrinal content has always been subject to political circumstances. The jurisprudential effort has been based on the conversion of so-called fighting verses (*Qur'an*, 9:5) into legal justifications for *al-jihad*, while political support has ensured that these jurisprudential choices have been transformed into legitimate violence to wage, far more often, intra-Muslim community wars on the grounds that their faith would not be in conformity with the pseudo-Islamic *sharia*.

The historical dimension of the term *jihad* highlights the excessive interpretations, displacements, and manipulations that legal reasoning and political implication endeavoured to use to shape the meaning of the notion according to low temporal and selfish wish fulfilment. Furthermore, since the disappearance of its great ideologists (See Maududi 2017; Qutb 2005), the concept has been an empty shell and no doctrinal renewal has been proposed. The concept of *jihad* been in a state of permanent drift for some 20 years, subject to dangerous and extravagant manipulations.

3. Islam and Violence: A War of Words and Definitions

Several types of violence have been identified. Their definitions are often contradictory, elusive, and subject to different contexts and times. It is very difficult to measure violence, since its perception depends largely on the cultural, political, and economic contexts where it takes place. The link between Islam and violence, however, is nowadays seen in some Western circles as self-evident (See Lewis 2003). For the last 20 years, *jihad* in the Western imagination has represented the brutal nature of the morality of some Muslims, aimed at bloodshed. Some argue that there is a culture in Islam that permanently opposes democracy and the West (See Cousin and Vitale 2014). These perceptions are often established through swift readings of *Qur'anic* verses and Islamic tradition, which are perceived as incentives for a holy *jihad* against non-Muslims.

Among Muslims themselves, the opposition crystallizes an irremediable gap between a traditionalist view that considers the *Qur'anic* text a timeless reference for all Muslims, and a modernist vision that considers the *Qur'anic* phenomenon to be a historical event whose content corresponds to the political, social, and economic situations of the time. The war among Muslims belonging to each point of view is not expected to end, since, in terms of discourse, we are now witnessing the resurgence of words such as apostasy, expiation, and *jihad,* which stigmatize the modernist camp.

3.1. Violence and Islam, What Does the Islamic Tradition Say?

Islam's real or supposed link to violence is a subject that is intertwined more than ever in ideological circles where two essentialist discourses confront each other in a continuous and unproductive dialogue. For some, Islam is fundamentally violent, aggressive, or even totalitarian, and the proponents of this vision ground their arguments on the recent terrorist attacks targeted at both Muslim and non-Muslim citizens in various parts of the world. The proponents of the *jihadist* ideology advocate armed *jihad* to fight the polytheists until they say, 'there is no god but Allah'[8]. Armed *jihad* is to be carried out until all lands are liberated from unbelievers and when all unbelievers submit to the rule of Islam (Khadduri and Liebesny 1955, pp. 16–17, as cited in Simbar 2008, p. 58). By contrast, for others, it is a form of spirituality and a message of peace. From the latter perspective, the reasons for violence in Islam may be exogenous: political (e.g., the Israeli–Arab conflict), cultural (e.g., rebellion against Western cultural colonialism) (Hentsch 1988)[9], or even social (e.g., globalization, alienation, and poverty) (Bar 2004). However, the difficult question to be addressed is whether the Islamic tradition carries within it the seeds of violence and a narrative of extremism.

> Whoever maintains that it is not Islam as such that justifies violence must know that he or she stands in direct opposition to the prevailing reading of the founding texts, a reading which objectively had its reasons in the first centuries of the history of Islam, but which continues to have followers until today, despite the radical changes and even upheavals in the position and impact of Muslims in the world. (Charfi 2003, p. 10)

The theme of violence in the *Qur'an* is an interesting case study since many studies raise this issue through lexicons that convey extremely wide, yet specific, semantic fields. The different situations that involve violence are specified in the *Qur'anic* text with precise terminology and refer to situations that imply violence as self-defence against acts of aggression (*Qur'an*, 22:39–40, 42:39–43, 5:2, 5:8). The latter are described in the *Qur'an* though words such as *ẓulm*, (injustice, tyranny), *tuğyan*, (outrage), *batsh* (physical violence), and '*tidā*' (legal abuse). They refer to illegitimate actions and provide very precise information on the nature and the degree of the act of violence that is committed. Those categories that refer to violence as '*unf*—whether in the meaning of *qital*, *ḥarb, jihad,* or *nafar*[10]—have been defined in the *Qur'an* and the *ḥadīṯ*[11] and conceptualized by theologians and Muslim philosophers from medieval times through to the present day. If *harb* and *qital* allude to what is commonly known as war, then *jihad* describes a much wider precept, only one component of which points in the direction of violence (Mirbagheri 2012). *Jihad*—as we will see in the next section—generally involves all aspects of an individual's effort and life in society in its various aspects: intellectual, social, political, and economic.

From Al-Farabi (d. 339/950) to Averroes (d. 595/1198) and Ibn Khaldun (d. 808/1406), wars and conflicts have been distinguished from the phenomenon of violence because they were considered to be political power struggles. In this context, *jihad*, which is often loosely used to translate all these nuances related to violence, has two meanings: the first is moral—equivalent to self-perfection. The second is physical, as it is related to a defensive action directed against the invader or the occupier. However, both meanings are based on the lifelong effort, energy, and self-discipline that Muslims must deploy, either to purify themselves or to defend their faith and religion in the event of a threat. It is very important, however, to stress that the second meaning—whether directly or indirectly related to the notion of war—does not put forward the act of fighting or killing as much as self-discipline, with the aim of generating—through effort—the good deed. It is a perspective that clearly distinguishes *jihad* from war in the Arabic and the *Qur'anic* meanings of *harb* and *qital*, as Islam permits only *jihad* and not *harb* (Mohammad 1985, p. 4). An approach to warfare regulated by the *Qur'an* has been instituted through a variety of verses that impose rules and limitation to *jihad*[12]. As peace and *sulh* are regarded as the general rule, the *Qur'an* surrounds the action of war with a form of exceptionality. Specific laws and rules to safeguard against acts of indiscriminate violence and "war crimes" have progressively reinforced the exceptionality of war[13]. It is precisely in this sense that the notion of *jihad* in the *Qur'an* develops a meaning that would reflect the defensive action of Muslim fighters and their exemplary attitude during the war. Accordingly, *jihad* goes beyond the action of violent and material warfare; the notion also aims to completely change the purpose of war and its ultimate perspective. From this point of view, the war in the *Qur'an* is proclaimed for non-religious reasons, meaning that it is not intended to impose conversions to Islam, 'Let there be no compulsion in religion, for the truth stands out clearly from falsehood' (*Qur'an* 2:256). Paradoxically, the verse 'Kill them where you arrest them, and drive them out from where they drove you out' (*Qur'an* 2:191) shifts the violent and gratuitous act of war on the defensive line to sustain the survival of the young Muslim community of the time.

In the Islamic context, the theologians of the Middle Ages considered the issue of violence within a specific paradigm that interrelated a community spirituality, a political project, and a military strategy. The objective was to determine whether it was possible to organize the exercise of a central power in order to guarantee peaceful coexistence (*ṣalaḥ*)[14] within the Islamic community, without transforming power into illegitimate violence (*'unf*).

In this context, the concept of legitimate violence emerges out of rules and regulations[15]. The goals of the actions are directly linked to two dogmas: order and reconciliation (*islah*) in conformity with Islamic law[16]. In other words, an ethical framework must accompany an act of power to counter illegitimate violence and corruption (*fasad*). The *Qur'anic* vision is, thus, held between these two poles of tension—*islah* and *fasad*—and any exaggeration on one side can tip the life of the community on the other side to cause disorder or discord (*fitna*). Discord leads to strife and violence, from which Muslims must seek protection.

3.2. Authority and Legitimate Violence

Obedience to authority is an act that establishes stability in society. The state can, therefore, exist only on the basis that those who are dominated must submit to the authority asserted by the rulers. Without detailing the nature of this obedience, Ibn Khaldun[17] found the legitimacy of the ruler's authority on political norms to be accepted by the masses, who will submit to these laws. A dynasty that does not establish its policy on such norms will not be able to successfully entrench its power (Ibn Khaldun 1958). The force of an army can be misdirected when a sovereign's authority is no longer respected[18]. This is a situation that reflects the fragile equilibrium between power, legitimate violence, and order. Al-Ghazâlî (d. 505/1111) proposed the idea that there must be a laudable hierarchy (*tasalsul al-harami*) (Al-Ghazâlî 1964) involving the king, his army, and his subjects—a hierarchy in which the king is clear-sighted and dominant, the army is strong and obedient, and the subjects are weak and docile. Should this hierarchy be disrupted—particularly in a case where the prince suffers the heaviest political defeats—voices of protest would use religious legitimacy to wage a war against the ruling power (Al-Jubūrī 2011, p. 220). Al-Ghazali's concept of social stability stemmed from his ultimate concern of worldly order (*isalh*) and security[19]. This concept is in line with the Khaldunian analysis of the strength shift from the prince to the rebels—mainly when the latter uses religious faith and the *fasad* argument[20] to unite and gain support among the population[21]. Violence, in Ibn Khaldun's analysis, is a reaction against the central power when 'laws are (enforced) by means of punishment, they completely destroy fortitude, because the use of punishment against someone who cannot defend himself generates in that person a feeling of humiliation that, no doubt, must break his fortitude' (Ibn Khaldun 1958, p. 29).

Authority does not mean despotism. Through his analysis, Ibn Khaldun advised rulers to avoid excess and injustice, which are religious aspects of *zulm* and *fasad* that the *Qur'an* denounces in various verses. Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun considered tyranny to lead to the inexorable breakdown of the civilized world ('*umran*). The falling apart of '*umran*—the stage that comes after the birth of the civilization and its consolidation—is a degeneration that, through a new *da'wa*, gives to the peripheral minority the opportunity to promote unity, discipline, equality, and justice. Ibn Khaldun was very much aware of the influential role that religious personalities (*wali*) could play in rallying tribesmen around original Islamic values and qualities that would enable them eventually to establish a new state and kingship. This solidarity, which Ibn Khaldun named '*asabiyya*, is fundamentally based on religious ties, forcefully bringing about tribal cohesion, organization, and capacity to rule out the now old, central power.

> When people (who have a religious coloring) come to have the (right) insight into their affairs, nothing can withstand them, because their outlook is one and their object one of common accord . . . (On the other hand,) the members of the dynasty they attack may be many times as numerous as they. But their purposes differ, in as much as they are false purposes, and (the people of the worldly dynasty) come to abandon each other, since they are afraid of death. Therefore, they do not offer resistance to (the people with a religious coloring), even if they themselves are more numerous. They are overpowered by them and quickly wiped out, as a result of the luxury and humbleness existing among them, as we have mentioned before. (Ibn Khaldun 1958, p. 22)

From a tyrannous and zealous group, the promoters of the new *da'wa* turn into legitimate conquerors and advocates of a new order, *islah*. Religious faith, which is the basis of the new *da'wa*, emerges as a potent factor, capable of stimulating the unification of a large group that may usher, through violence, the birth of a new civilization. From violence to politics but, this time, the illegitimate violence is transformed into legitimate force and justice[22].

3.3. The Da'wa: From Proselytism to Coercion

Ibn Khaldun showed the politico-religious nexus as properly constitutive of the revolutionary founding act of a new sovereignty (*mulk*). The latter takes place at the crossroads, on the one hand, of the esprit de corps, of the organic solidarity of antagonistic groups ('*asabiyya*), and, on the other hand, of the religious call (*da'wa*), which designates and objectivises the 'internalized forms of belief' (Labica 1965, p. 199). When *da'wa* is deliberately constructed upon religious content and confused with military *jihad* and *qital*, it becomes a deadly and effective weapon. From 'upon you is only the [duty of] notification, and upon Us is the account' (*Qur'an*, 13:40), a peaceful invitation to join the path of God, the *da'wa* becomes a coercive force capable of structuring the spirit of solidarity ('*asabiyya*) of the community receiving the invitation. In this respect, the instrumentalisation of religion helps to shape, structure, and legitimise violence, even rendering it necessary. In other words, the encounter and interaction between religion and violence is a source of theocratic aberrations. We may say that the political pattern developed by Ibn Khaldun is inevitably limited to his place and time, however, the concept of the *da'wa* used by some groups in today's Arab-Muslim societies is an efficient means to bring forth the wrongdoings and immorality that characterize the 'urbanites'. People in these areas are depicted by the promoters of the new *da'wa* as having abandoned their faith to indulge in improper manners, pleasures which—in Ibn Khaldun's philosophy—are the result of reprehensible luxury. Luxury and the undeniable decline of morality in the highest social ranks call forth the revenge of history (Weber 1950). There is a paradox in the Khaldunian theory of the decline of civilizations that, as their peak is reached, they become more fragile and weakened. When civilizations leave behind the violence that provided the basis for their establishment in the past, they break down to the point that they collapse into the hands of a marginalized minority (See Bozarslan 2014). The effectiveness of the power takeover lies in the success of a new *da'wa* that pleads for a just cause that becomes legitimate in the eyes of the majority. One explanation for this paradox lies in the fact that the '*asabiyya*—the foundation on which power (*mulk*) rests and rises—withers away because, according to the cyclical vision of Ibn Khaldun, the luxurious lifestyle of the dominant tribes becomes more urbanized and, consequently, moves further away from natural life and faith. In this case, the *da'wa* stands as legitimate and lawful.

The *da'wa* is undoubtedly the Khaldunian concept most closely linked to today's claim of some *jihad*ist movements, when they justify their violent actions via religious legitimacy as a way to counter evil—which could, in this case, be luxury that weakens faith and drives a civilization to its decline. It would seem that Ibn Khaldun wanted to use the religious connotation of the term *da'wa* to turn it into an analytical tool for the various power legitimation mechanisms and conquests. *Da'wa*, which derives from the verb *da'a*, means 'to invite' and 'to join'. It is an Islamic concept and a *Qur'anic* term that literally means urging people to do good to eschew bad and warning of *shari'a* violations[23].

Being an instrument of a power conquest, *da'wa* acts as a contract, a symbolic resource, and a central element in calling Muslims to the way of God, hence its misleading connection with the notion of *jihad*. In Islam, the concept of *da'wa* is based on good behaviour and avoidance of violence, rudeness, and provocation: 'Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best' (*Qur'an*, 16:125). Beyond the meaning of 'invitation', the Arabic word underlines the 'invitation to join the path of God or to spread the good word'[24]. In this perspective, the preacher, *da'ia*, is not a *mujahid*, as there is no requirement to achieve results. Islamic movements have confused

the realization of *da'wa's* mission, by connecting its success to the achievement of a concrete result, which could be the establishment of a new dynasty.

When *da'wa* is deliberately constructed upon religious content and confused with military *jihad* and *qital*, it becomes a deadly and effective weapon. From 'upon you is only the [duty of] notification, and upon Us is the account' (*Qur'an*, 13:40), a peaceful invitation to join the path of God, the da'wa becomes a coercive force capable of structuring the spirit of solidarity ('*asabiyya*) of the community receiving the invitation. In this respect, the instrumentalisation of religion helps to shape, structure, and legitimise violence, even rendering it necessary.

'*Da'wa al wahhabiyya*' is a historically recent example that illustrates the effectiveness of a pact sealed between a *da'ya*—Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab—and Mohammed Ibn Saud, the forerunner of the Saudi dynasty between 1744 and 1745. Besides being a movement claiming to be part of the Sunni Hanbali Islam, the Wahhabi *da'wa* invites people to restore the real meaning of '*tawhid*' (oneness of God or monotheism) and to disregard and deconstruct so-called traditional disciplines and practices that evolved in Islamic history, such as theology and jurisprudence, and the traditions of visiting tombs and shrines of venerated individuals. Though the *da'wa* claims to be non-political[25], its proponents could easily provide the foundation for political *jihadi* action when *tawhid* is violated (Moussalli 2009).

Several *Qur'anic* verses insist on the fact that the *da'wa* concerns the position of the one who invites without injunction or violence[26]. However, the articulation of *da'wa* and *jihad* results in violence in the name of Islam for some criminal groups[27] that have made it the ideal goal for which to strive. As for those who receive the *da'wa*, we may say that a kind of coercion is cast upon them. The violence, in this case, is a soft violence: invisible, unrecognized as such, and chosen as much as it is subdued. It is the violence of trust, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gift, debt, gratitude, and piety—all the virtues in a word that dignifies the morality of honour (Bourdieu 1980).

As a symbolic power, the *da'wa* is at the heart of a disciplinary approach that establishes the intimate link between religious beliefs, political cause, and self-sacrifice. From this perspective, the violence that may result from this articulation can be measured in terms of the influence that the *da'wa* may have on the believers. When it is based purely on religious faith, it stands as a symbolic coercion, capable of hiding the face of violence since it stands as a legitimate call for a just—and, possibly, a holy—cause.

However, on the basis of his observations, Ibn Khaldun's analysis of power shifts the concept of *da'wa* from its usual illocutionary force organized around a religious content to confer on it a symbolic load and a force endowed with an unprecedented utopian projection (Garrush 2017). The symbolic force of the *da'wa* consists of mobilizing the values and beliefs of people while urging them to appropriate the cause. *Da'wa* turns into a powerful cause from which the believer cannot escape. However, its strength and its legitimacy need a universal cause that erects its proponents as sacrificial actors of a historical or divine mission (Bozarslan 2016, as cited in Garrush 2017). It is, without doubt, a symbolic violence, which consists of transforming an illusion into an effective mobilizing reality. Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, a contemporary theorist of the Salafist *jihadist* movement, positioned *jihad* alongside *da'wa*, and *islah*. In an idealistic, radical and ambiguous vision[28], al-Maqdisi aimed at establishing a pure Islamic state whose laws can only be those set forth by God in the *Qur'an*. The author thus theorized a 'liberating' conception of *jihad* to free Muslims from the tyranny and oppression of some Arab political regimes.

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) looked at the conceptual meanings of symbolic violence, which, according to him, is founded on the loyalty that the dominated concede to the dominant. The relationship of domination enforces a coercive basis which raises the loyalty of the dominated by transforming it into a faith (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

However, faith in this context does not necessarily have a religious foundation. Ibn Khaldun adopted the same approach to *da'wa,* from which he removed the religious rhetoric to emphasize the principle of legitimate symbolic coercion (Garrush 2017). Symbolic power,

in Bourdieu's analysis, has a form of violence "as it is accomplished in and through a defined relationship that creates belief in the legitimacy of words and the people who utter them, and it operates only to the extent that those who are subjected to it recognize those who exercise it"(Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 123). Being authentically rationalist, Ibn Khaldun defined *da'wa* as a secular concept, thus operating a displacement that clearly delineated the boundary between God and the human world. This clearly shows that there are other *da'wa* than religious ones and that the religious foundations are neither the only source of power nor of violence (Garrush 2017).

4. The Narrative of War in Islam

In Arabic, the term war is expressed by two words: *harb* and *qital*. Both words appear in the *Qur'an*, with nuances that make *harb* an aspect of fight closer to the one we find in war. In *qital*, the idea of killing is overemphasized as the verb *qatala*, which clearly means killing and slaying. The phrase '*qotila fi al-harb*' means 'he was killed in a war'. In comparison with *jihad*, *harb* and *qital* do not necessarily put forward the idea of a war for God, as only the *jihad* is carried out in the path of God (*fi sabil allah*). To some extent, *jihad* carries out the idea of a legitimate war ordered by God under specific rules, restrictions, and responsibilities.

The paradigm of war in the *Qur'an* operates a break with the pre-Islamic practice of war. Other objectives are now established for the Muslim fighter, who now must fight for a different objective from the one to which he was accustomed. The war in the *Qur'an* is not about material benefits, it is a means to reach God. The transformation establishes, in the psychology of the *mujaheddin*, a discipline for self-edification, so that the word of God is propagated and heard by all humankind.

The word *harb* played an esteemed role in everyday Bedouin life, while Arab poetry followed the rhythm of wars to the extent that poets had a role in battles no less important than that of the knights and warriors of *Muharibun*.

Ayyâm al-ʿArab (Days of the Arabs) (Chams Eddin 2002), are narratives taken from classical works and Arabic poetry that account for wars and battles that were fought in the pre-Islamic period among Arabian tribes and that are remembered through oral tradition. The word *al-harb* appears in the narratives as a pre-Islamic term used by Bedouins in their daily lives and culture.

At the time, poetry could provoke and ignite war on many occasions, so much so that tribes that did not experience war cannot claim to have a true poetic tradition. Amr bin Ma'adi Yakrib (d. 40–41/642), Dorayd bin Al Summah (c. 6th), Abdullah ibn Rawaha ibn Tha'labah (d.8/629), Amir ibn al-Tufayl (d. 9/630), Hassan ibn Thabit (d. 35–40/660), and many others were knights and poets of war who lived in the pre-Islamic period, but some of them embraced Islam and became the poets who accompanied the Prophet and his companions to battles. The poetry of Antarah ibn Shaddad (d. 608 AD) was almost entirely turned towards the event of war, the value of courage, and chaste love (Sharf Addin 1997)[29].

4.1. No War without Peace

The Arabs in pre-Islamic times had the habit and reputation of being warlike people. Before Islam, their battles were centred on the material and fleeting aspects of this world, sometimes waging wars over sheep and camel pastures or clashing over water resources and wells. Conflicts could easily arise between two members of rival tribes and last for several generations. *Qur'anic* verses focusing on the category of war brought about important transformations in the issue of war, both in terms of its objectives and means, as well as its strategies and tactics. Far from thinking of the *Qur'an* as a textbook of war, the verses focusing on war in general (*jihad*, *qital*, etc.) institute a new and binding paradigm regarding the legitimacy of war and its necessity. Similarly, the *Qur'an* introduces the category of peace and reconciliation to end conflicts that were considered unnecessary. A single cause of war and struggle was established with universal values. War is made

legitimate to support the word of God and of his messenger, to protect the weak, and to resist against those who drive Muslims out of their territories and homes. It is a new paradigm of warfare that Arabs did not know previously. Nevertheless, the paradigm of peace (*sulh* and *ṣalaḥ*), in all its aspects, plays a pivotal role in the *Qur'anic* text as they bring under tension the opposite axis, that of *fasad*[30].

When the war intensified and the combatants became exhausted, the warring parties would aspire to a truce that could be transformed into peace. Again, the ancient Arabic narrative recorded *sulh,* or reconciliation between tribes, as a major event, as it sometimes brought an end to a long conflict that may have lasted many years. Tribal chiefs played a significant role in all steps involved in declaring war against another tribe or declaring peace and reconciliation. The Arabs had their customs to signify and propose the truce to the other side. Likewise, poetry could play an essential role in terms of advice for peace and reconciliation. There were no poets, on the one hand, pushing for war, while those on the other side called for peace. The same poets would have an influence on both situations through very sophisticated poetic styles and compositions, such as *madh*, *hija'*, *nasab,* and *ritha'*[31]. The *mu'allaqa*[32] of Zuhayr Ibn Abî Sulmâ (d. 609) is a praise addressed to the two chiefs of the Banû Murra, who paid blood money to the 'Abs to end the War of Dâhis and Ghabra between 'Abs and Dhubyân Tarafa (d. 569).

Ṣalaḥ and its derivatives, such as *sulh* (peace), *salih* (benevolence), and *islah* (reconciliation)[33], are notions that result in a war settlement between Muslims and non-believers and peace between Muslims and non-believers: 'There is no good in much of their private counsels, except for him who advocates charity, or kindness, or reconciliation between people. Whoever does that, seeking God's approval, We will give him a great compensation' (*Qur'an*, 4:114). The issue of reconciliation (*Qur'an*, 2:220; 2: 224; 2:277; 4:35; 49:9) is used in three contexts: reconciliation between two groups of believers (*Qur'an*, 41:9–10), reconciliation between two believers (*Qur'an*, 4:14; 4:128), and reconciliation between an individual and a group of believers (*Qur'an*, 24:28). Peace, reconciliation, and doing good in the *Qur'an* aim at a holistic state of order concerning all aspects of life and conduct. Holistic peace 'would be born out of a tranquil order that pervades all dimensions in life: social, economic, cultural and political, domestically as well as internationally' (Mirbagheri 2012, p. 87).

With the emergence of the legal tradition in the eighth century, and the intense activity of exegesis and interpretation, warfare was strongly codified and theorized (Abbès 2014). From this point of view, Islam manifests no moral reluctance to use weapons on behalf of the Muslim community, not to convert by force the unbelievers, but to extend the territory of '*dar al-Islam*'[34]. The conception of the army that permeates the theoretical and narrative sources of the Arabs is first understood lexically as a gathering of warriors whose purpose is to wage war, a destructive phenomenon without equal that seeks to destroy the established corrupted order. It is, therefore, not surprising that the three main terms used by Arab authors to describe an army have negative connotations[35].

Qur'anic verses advocating *qiṯal* (war) become progressively more important as the *da'wa* progresses. Muhammad, as the leader of a community that had been chased from its original territory and home, must lead several battles under divine injunctions (*Qur'an*, 9:5, 2:216, 12:78). Obviously, unless Muslims are still under the threat of being chased from their homes, then these passages have no contemporary relevance and only take on meaning in the light of the particular context in which they were revealed.

Surah 2, verse 216, 'Fighting has been enjoined upon you while it is hateful to you. But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah knows, while you know not', imposes *qital* on Muslims in a tone that suggests the exceptional nature of the act of war. In addition, when a war does not take place,— as in the Battle of the Trench (627), which was not very bloody because the fighting did not take place, the *Qur'an* expresses a form of satisfaction at the fact that the *qital* did not take place: 'And Allah repelled those who disbelieved, in their rage, not having obtained any good. And sufficient was Allah for the believers in battle, and ever is Allah Powerful and Exalted in Might' (*Qur'an*, 33:25).

4.2. Justification of War in Islam

Generally speaking, the conditions of warfare in the *Qur'an* are explained in verses that reveal three broad reasons to impose war on Muslims. The first reason is to fight back the aggression of those who attack them, and the *Qur'an* says, 'Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed. Allah does not like transgressors' (2:190). For those who do not surrender, Surah 4, verse 91 states that it is the duty of Muslims to pursue the *qital*:

> You will find others who wish to obtain security from you and [to] obtain security from their people. Every time they are returned to [the influence of] disbelief, they fall back into it. So if they do not withdraw from you or offer you peace or restrain their hands, then seize them and kill them wherever you overtake them. And those–We have made for you against them a clear authorization. (*Qur'an*, 4:91)

The second reason is to protect the most vulnerable through *qital*; according to the *Qur'an* (4:75), fighting to save the life of the most vulnerable people is an obligation.

> And what is [the matter] with you that you fight not in the cause of Allah and [for] the oppressed among men, women, and children who say, 'Our Lord, take us out of this city of oppressive people and appoint for us from Yourself a protector and appoint for us from Yourself a helper?'. (*Qur'an*, 4:75)

The third reason is to prevent sedition and discord (*fitna*): 'And fight them until there is no fitnah and [until] the religion, all of it, is for Allah. And if they cease–then indeed, Allah is Seeing of what they do' (*Qur'an*, 8:39).

Over the centuries, *fitna* and the need to preserve the unity of the Muslim religion and community has become even more important because the Muslim memory remains deeply marked by the schism between Sunnis and Shiites. At the very beginning of Islam, discord divided the *al ummah al Islamiya* (the Islamic community), provoking deep trauma that has led jurists to confirm the principle of the use of weapons to preserve the unity of Muslims as being just and authorized. It then became very easy to proclaim any war aimed at ending dissension in the Muslim community to be legitimate. Legal theory offers an absolutist vision of power and any form of rebellion and political opposition potentially opens the way to armed repression. Jurists invoke a *Qur'anic* passage that condemns all forms of sedition:

> And if two factions among the believers should fight, then make settlement between the two. But if one of them oppresses the other, then fight against the one that oppresses until it returns to the ordinance of Allah. And if it returns, then make settlement between them in justice and act justly. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly. (*Qur'an*, 49:9)

In the 10th and 11th centuries, when a change in the meaning of *jihad* was revealed to be concerned more with the struggle against one's ego, even if the criteria for a just war were met, war did not seem to be desirable. In the tradition of the Mirrors for Princes, war was described as a disease and it was emphasized that political means were preferable[36]. However, diplomacy did not prohibit the use of cunning and ploys—anything that contributes to the achievement of political goals without the use of violence is a positive thing. This approach is based, in particular, on Kalila wa Dimna's tales, which were translated into Arabic huby Ibn Muqaffa' (d. 142/759) in the eighth century. The main principle is illustrated in the tale 'Owls and Crows', the moral of which is that the saving of human lives must always be targeted[37]. However, while in the Mirrors for Princes, war must, therefore, remain a state of exception in relation to peace and security, the legal tradition, on the other hand, is much less explicit on the subject and appears to have a much more straightforward relationship with the use of force. In this conception, just war is equally defensive and offensive. Founded during the glorious era of conquests, the legal framework of the *jihad* includes an assumed belligerent dimension.

5. Conclusions

Reflecting on violence—its components, instruments, and faces—allows us to examine its evolution from illegitimate violence to legitimate power and authority. Violence is a form of support that may allow some religious claims to take power before transforming themselves into institutionalized and sustainable regimes. The question is how to make this power permanent and legitimate. Ibn Khaldun's analysis of the cyclical life of governments suggests that peripheral movements can take over the centre of power and become legitimate authorities. They may even grant another actor the right to use violence without losing its monopoly. The monopoly on violence can also be jeopardized by peripheral movements, unless the established regime wields violence both legitimately and centrally. It would be too easy to deal with religion as a matrix to generate violence without dissecting the paradoxical links between power and violence. The question of power is truly at the heart of the economy of violence. There is a primary violence that arises as a legitimate power, against which a counter-power organizes with the objective of taking the place of the established power. This cyclical dialectic condemns us to a life with and of violence. The Khaldunian model that we have insisted on does not separate the political and religious issues. In other words, the model establishes a continuity between these two registers that are at the centre of the question of power and its takeover. For Ibn Khaldun, the institution of a state displaces violence from the peripheral sphere to the centre, thus making violence legitimate. The mechanism of this displacement is not religious, but it relies on religious concepts to achieve entirely secular ends.

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Notes

1 In comparison with the 181 verses where the words *sulh* (peace and reconciliation), *ṣalaḥ* (goodness), *al-salihin* (virtuous), and their derivatives appear. This point will be dealt with in the third section of this article.

2 Ibn Baz (d. 1999) considered jihad as the sixth pillar of Islam. On his official website, we can read the following opinion: 'And the most beloved thing of God is to get close to Him through the obligatory prayers, zakat, fasting, Hajj and jihad'. https://binbaz.org.sa/search?q=%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF%20%D9%87%D9%88%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B3%20%D9%85%D9%86%20%D8%A3%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85&type=fatwa&page=3&operator=OR&filters[]=title&filters[]=question&filters[]=description (accessed on 23 October 2019).

3 *Qital* does not incorporate the range of meanings found in *jihad*. Linguistically, it is less extensive as it is specifically reserved for war in the *Qur'an*. We counted 171 verses in which the word *qital* appears. We counted approximately 10 verses where the word *harb* means war.

4 In the Pakistani context, the former president of the republic, General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, promoted an increased Islamization of the army, which was expressed in the ideological training of officers, in the adoption of a new army motto: "*Iman, Taqwa, Jihad-fi-Sabilillah*: Faith, piety and fighting in the path of God". Zia foreworded the book written by brigadier general S. K. Malik, published in 1979 on *The Quranic Concept of War*. According to S.K. Malik, the *Qur'an* places the doctrine of war and its theory on the side of God. In matters of fighting, the principles and commandments are directly dictated by God. See Malik ([1979] 1986).

5 Besides these four types of *jihad*, Natana J. Delong-Bas *Jihad* evoked, in her study, other types, including educational jihad (*jihad al-tarbiyyah*; educational jihad can be attributed in general terms to the actions of various movements of Islamic tendency whose action focuses on schools and education.

6 *The book of governance according to the shari'a.*

7 This verse was revealed as the circumstances of the 'Peace of Hudaibiyah' in 628, between the Prophet and Quraysh.

8 Abu Musab al-Suri's influential book, Call for Global Islamic Resistance, is nevertheless an exceptional example. In 1600 pages, the author analysed his intellectual achievements and theories of jihad in the light of his personal experience and influences. The theory of jihad adopts the method of renewal in the work of jihadism and 'the ideology of the Islamic awakening movement'

(p. 881). The book is widely disseminated in the jihadist milieu for its analytical value. Abu Musab al-Suri theorised the strategies of individual jihadism by developing, in page 1356, the three schools of jihadism:

- School of Movement Organisations.
- School of open confrontation.
- School of Individual *Jihad* and Small Cell Terrorism.

According to Brynjar Lia, Abu Musab al-Suri's work is the first to offer teachings on the non-central global *jihad*. His is the best point of view among '*jihad*' ideologues and strategists, as his work and analyses are both systematic and comprehensive. According to Brynjar Lia, his honesty and self-criticism are typical of *jihadist* circles. See Lia (2008).

9 In *L'Orient Imaginaire,* Thierry Hentsch analyses the paradigmatic change that occurred 200 years before 2001, with Bonaparte's 1798 expedition to Egypt marking a major turning point in East–West relations in the Mediterranean. This expedition was an abrupt manifestation of a long-term process of change. It was a military and cultural shock, injecting Western history and science into the heart of Mediterranean Islam (Hentsch 1988).

10 These four words have appeared in the *Qur'an* in different proportions and in different contexts to refer to war situations, with linguistic nuances that we did not choose to include in this work exhaustively. *Jihad* appears in 41 verses, in the sense of *jihad* with weapons (*Qur'an*, 4:95), *jihad* with words (*Qur'an*, 25:52), and *jihad* in the sense of work and effort (*Qur'an*, 29:6). The word *qital* appears in 171 verses, in the sense of killing and war (*Qur'an*, 2:191) and swearing (*Qur'an*, 74:21). *Harb* appears in 10 verses, in the sense of war (*Qur'an*, 47:4), violation of *Sariah* and corruption, *fasad*, on earth (*Qur'an*, 5:33). *Nafr*, appears in 18 verses, with several meanings, including preparing for *jihad* (*Qur'an*, 9:38). The difference between these four terms also lies in the motivations, aims, means, and objectives of war.

11 This is a collection of traditions containing sayings of the prophet Muhammad which, with accounts of his daily practice (the Sunna), constitute the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the *Qur'an*.

12 Though, according to Majid Khadduri, throughout the history of Islam, fighting between Muslim rulers and contending parties was as continuous as between Islam and its external enemies (Khadduri 1955, pp. 65–66. Cited by Mirbagheri 2012, p. 133).

13 'Fight in the cause of Allah ⌜only⌝ against those who wage war against you, but do not exceed the limits. Allah does not like transgressors' (*Qur'an*, 2: 190); 'If you retaliate, then let it be equivalent to what you have suffered. But if you patiently endure, it is certainly best for those who are patient' (*Qur'an*, 16:126).

14 *ṣalaḥ* means goodness and righteousness. *iṣ'laḥiha* comes from the same root, meaning reformation and betterment, and it has also the meaning of restoration and improvement. 'So fulfil the measure and weight and do not deprive people of their due and cause not corruption upon the earth after its reformation. That is better for you, if you should be believers' (*Qur'an* 7:85).

15 'in Islam war is waged to establish supremacy of the Lord only when every other argument has failed to convince those who reject His will and work against the very purpose of the creation of mankind'.

16 'And cause not corruption (*fasad*) upon the earth after its reformation (*iṣ'laḥiha).* And invoke Him in fear and aspiration. Indeed, the mercy of Allah is near to the doers of good' (*Qur'an*, 7:56).

17 'In relation to the catastrophe that the Arab and Islamic world is experiencing today, we discover that the analyses of the famous 14th century historian Ibn Khaldun are not entirely behind us. They cast light on our present. The medieval historian, certainly existentially pessimistic, tells us about states that last for a maximum of three human generations. Yet we see, before our eyes, the collapse of states built in the 1950s. Such is the case of Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya. The historian invents a notion of 'the sharp edge' to signal the tyrannical reign that must be avoided. He calls on the prince to reign in the right measure, to avoid excess, not to reign by brandishing the sharp sword. In short, Ibn Khaldun advises the prince to avoid tyranny because it is tyranny that generates irreparable evils leading to the destruction of states'. Abdelwahab Meddeb, Cultures d'Islam, https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/cultures-dislam/ibn-khaldoun-et-la-violence (accessed on 13 December 2020).

18 'Quoting Aristotle's *Book on Politics*, on the theme of authority, Ibn Khaldun comments that the author 'arranged his statement in a remarkable circle that he discussed at length. It runs as follows: "The world is a garden the fence of which is the dynasty. The dynasty is an authority through which life is given to proper behaviour. Proper behaviour is a policy directed by the ruler. The ruler is an institution supported by the soldiers. The soldiers are helpers who are maintained by money. Money is sustenance brought together by the subjects. The subjects are servants who are protected by justice. Justice is something familiar, and through it, the world persists. The world is a garden . . . ", and then it begins again from the beginning. These are eight sentences of political wisdom. They are connected, the end of each one leading into the beginning of the next. They are held together in a circle with no definite beginning or end. (The author) was proud of what he had hit upon and made much of the significance of the sentences'. Ibn Khaldun 1958 https://delong.typepad.com/files/muquaddimah.pdf (accessed on 2 March 2021).

19 'The imam is necessary because religious order is necessary, and because religious order involves worldly order, that is to say, security of life, livelihood, dwelling, and so on' (Hourani 1983).

20 The argument of *fasad* has gone through the epochs and centuries as a *Qur'anic* notion transformed into a political argument.

21 In medieval Arab-Muslim thought, the term political Islam has no existence. Political reason, however, was considered and analysed in order to establish the matrix of political power and its constituents.

[22] In consideration with Hobbes' philosophy, the concept of *da'wa* is a form of justice that must be obeyed, as justice is defined by obedience. After the settlement of the state, those elements that constitute the *da'wa* turn to laws that need to be obeyed. 'It is once a Republic is established (and not before) that they are indeed laws, as they are then the commandments of the Republic, and that consequently they are also the civil laws: it is in effect the sovereign power that compels men to obey them' (Hobbes 1999).

[23] *Qur'an*, 3:159, 41:33, 3:110, 3:104, 16:125.

[24] See Al Banna (1974), *Mudhakirat al-daw'a wa dayia* (Memoirs of the Preaching and the Preacher), Beirut, Al-Maktab al-Islami, 3rd edition. This book is considered as the key to getting to the heart of Al Banna's sensibility, his message, and his movement. See Maréchal (2009).

[25] This type of *jihad* can be compared to the one explained by Natana J. Delong-Bas as missionary *jihad* (*jihad al da'wah*). Delong-Bas added, 'Rather than proclaiming the responsibility of Muslims to fight permanently and continuously against ungodliness and evil in this world and consider all non-Wahhabis as unbelievers, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's writings reveal a worldview in which education and dialogue play a more important role in winning converts and establishing justice than does violence' (DeLong-Bas 2004).

[26] *Qur'an*, 88:22, 13:40, 2:172.

[27] The Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat or Islamic State's West Africa Province, formerly known as Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-*Da'wah wa'l-Jihad*, have completely amalgamated *da'wa* and militant *jihad* in their constitution.

[28] See Al-Maqdissi (1970). Al-Maqdisi distanced himself from DAECH following the burning to death of the Jordanian soldier Muath al-Kasasbeh in 2015. He considers their legal *jihad* as being violent and murderous. See his interview given to the *Roya* channel on YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFh6gMKSGmA (accessed on 2 March 2021).

[29] An example from a poem of Antarah ibn Shaddad:*'And surely I recollected you, even when the lances were drinking my blood, and bright swords of Indian make were dripping with my blood.I wished to kiss the swords, for verily they shone as bright as the flash of the foretooth of your smiling mouth.If you lower your veil over yourself in front of me, of what use will it be? for, verily, I am expert in capturing the mailed horseman.Praise me for the qualities which you know I possess, for, verily, when I am not ill-treated, I am gentle to associate with.*And if I am ill-treated, then, verily, my tyranny is severe, very bitter is the taste of it, as the taste of the colocynth'. (Sharf Addin 1997).

[30] 'and Allah knows the corrupter from the amender' (*Qur'an*, 2:220).

[31] Panegyric, invective, love elegy, and lamentation. See Meisami (2003).

[32] The suspended poems are odes where Arab life, before Muhammad, is portrayed with great charm and precision. The odes are said at the Ukaz fair, a literary and commercial gathering near Mecca, where poets from the various tribes would publicly perform their verses, and the most valuable were inscribed with gold letters and hung on the walls of the Ka'ba.

[33] The term 'peace' and its derivatives are mentioned in the *Qur'an* more than 200 times.

[34] *dar al-Islam*, the house/zone of Islam has been.

[35] In Arabic, *Jund* refers to the idea of harshness and doughtiness, while *jayš* refers to the idea of agitation and hurricane and *'askar'* refers to violence. See Buresi and Zouache (2014).

[36] The Islamic tradition, in both classical and contemporary manifestations, suggests that the idea of religion as a *causus belli* provides a way to limit the occasion and the damage of war. In short, the Islamic tradition suggests that 'holy war' is not the equivalent of 'total war', any more than 'just war' always means 'limited war' (Kelsay 2007).

[37] According to the philosopher Al-Fârâbî (872–950), who lived at a time when the central power, the caliphate, was divided into emirates and states that were claiming to be independent, armed violence must not be an end in itself—it is only justified as long as injustice and persecution continue. Maintaining war for war is the supreme vice according to the philosopher (Mahdi 2000, p. 193).

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