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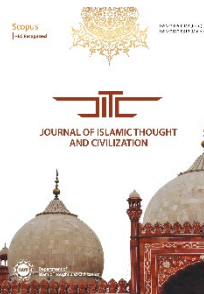
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Renaissance of Islam: A Content Analysis of Muhammad Rashīd Riḍā's Exegesis

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Abstract

The current study aimed to investigate the concepts of Islamic Revival in the light of Rashīd Riḍā's interpretation. This study was guided by a single research question. The research question focused on the exegesis of the Islamic Renaissance according to the teachings of Rashīd Riḍā. The current study comprised library research that employed text documents as its data sources. The primary sources of the data included two monumental works by Rashīd Riḍā namely *Tafsīr al-Manār* and *Majallah al-Manār (al-Manār Magazine)*. In the meantime, pertinent journal articles and scientific books provided the secondary data for the current study. Content analysis was used as an analytical approach. The words, sentences, and paragraphs related to the theme of the current study were examined in depth. Moreover, the study also demonstrated that Rashīd Riḍā's exegesis of the Islamic Renaissance has five dimensions. Firstly, the emphasis on the purity of Islam; secondly, the prohibition of blind imitation (*taqlīd*); thirdly, the emphasis on a rational approach to the interpretation of the Qur'ān; fourthly, the emphasis on *ijtihād*; and fifthly, the incorporation of modern knowledge. This study contributes to the dissemination of valuable insights in order to address the complex problems encountered by Muslim societies and the world as a whole in the modern age.

Keywords: al-Manār, exegesis, Islam, Rashīd Riḍā, renaissance

Introduction

The East (Islam) versus West (Europe) problem culminated in the 11th century crusades. The desire of the Europeans to dominate Islam triggered a prolonged war. It was a war that involved two major religions in the world.¹ The European troops were fully supported by the clergy and the Islamic troops were fully supported by the religious people (ulama). Both parties argued in favour of their respective religions to justify other's turbulent actions. Each of them believed that the way to heaven is to kill the opponents whom they classify as infidels.²

The events of the crusades made Europe aware of the wealth of scientific treasures belonging to Islam. Europe was completely overwhelmed pertaining to multiple refusals from the Muslims. Moreover, Muslims were starting to awaken again to the emergence of a new power that was capable to match the superiority of Islam. In the 17th century, Europe with its colonialism was able to control the world economy and politics, especially in the Middle East. On the other hand, the Eastern nations

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¹Tijani Boulaouali, "Portraying Islam and the West: sIn Tzvetan Todorov's The Fear of Barbarians: Beyond the Clash of Civilizations," *International Journal of Islamic Khazanah* 13, no. 2 (2023): 1–3.

²Ḥamid Zayyān Ghanīm, *Dirāsāt Tārīkh al-'Alām Al-Islāmī fī al-'Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* [Studies in the history of the Islamic world in the Middle Ages] (Cairo: al-Ma'had al-'Āli li al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah, 2008), 293.

under Mamalik and the Ottoman Turkish experienced extraordinary upheaval. This upheaval stemmed from the desire to live better just like the Western nations. Two main problems were faced by the Eastern people at that time, (1) efforts to fortify themselves from the influence of Western nations and (2) efforts to break away from stagnation and backwardness.

In the midst of this growing upheaval, Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935 AD) was born who later offered important solutions for the benefit and progress of Muslims. He produced various works and among his most monumental was the interpretation of al-Manār.³ This interpretation of *al-Manār* became a sign and symbol of the Islamic Renaissance era. It was an era that demanded change and development so that Islam would rise again as a force to be reckoned with in the world at large.

It would not be an exaggeration if the interpretation of *al-Manār* is categorized as an interpretation of the Islamic Renaissance. This is because the interpretation of *al-Manār* gives a new face to the interpretation discourse. A new method that combines *turāth* and contemporary thought gave rise to a new understanding that is in accordance with the conditions and developments of society in the Rashīd Riḍā era.⁴

The existence of the interpretation of *al-Manār* cannot be separated from the presence of another renaissance Islamic reformer, Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905). Muhammad Abduh's role in the process of writing al-Manār's commentary is evident in each interpretation of the verse.⁵ This is because *al-Manār* was originally Muhammad Abduh's own interpretation which was recorded by Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935). For Muhammad Abduh, interpretation is an attempt to understand the Qur'ān from a religious perspective as a guide for humans to achieve happiness in this world and the hereafter.⁶

The influence of Muhammad Abduh's spirit in revitalizing Islamic interpretations deeply impacted Rashīd Riḍā as he sought to provide contemporary solutions for Muslims grappling with the consequences of colonization, both physical and mental. Examining Rashīd Riḍā and his interpretations becomes imperative to assess the extent of the Muslim Ummah's decline under foreign domination and their subsequent attempts at resurgence.⁷ This investigation has gained urgency as Islamic society is facing complex political, social, and economic challenges today. Understanding the intellectual and cultural achievements of the Islamic renaissance can provide solutions and foster progress within Islamic civilizations. Moreover, it may also instill cultural pride and a forward-thinking perspective on the Islamic faith among contemporary Muslim communities. Therefore, Rashīd Riḍā's approach to address these issues through the Islamic revival concepts is of paramount importance.

³Tāmir Muḥammad Maḥmūd Mutawallī, *Manhaj Al-Sheykh Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā fī al-'Aqīdah* [Sheikh Muhammad Rashid Riḍā's Method of Faith] (Jeddah: Dār Majīd 'Asira, 2004), 61–62.

⁴Ibrāhīm Aḥmad al-'Adawī, *Rashīd Riḍā al-Imām Al-Mujāhid* [Rashīd Riḍā: The Reformer Imām] (Mesir: Al-Muassasah Al-Miṣriah Al-'Amah, 2001), 20.

⁵Abd al-Ghaffār Abd al-Raḥīm, *al-Imām Muḥammad Abduh wa Manhajahu fī al-Tafsīr* [Imam Muhammad Abduh and his Approach to Interpretation] (Kairo: Dar Al-Anṣār, 1980), 323.

⁶Muḥammad Abduh, *al-A'māl al-Kāmilah li al-Imām Al-Sheykh Muḥammad 'Abduh* [Complete works of Imām Sheikh Muḥammad Abduh] (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1993), 7.

⁷Naufel Berlian, Andi Malia Fadilah Bahari, Jidan Ramdani, Rico Candra, Intan Permata Sari, and Maulana Aditya, "Welfare Classification of Muslim Majority Communities Using Decision Tree Algorithm," *Khazanah Journal of Religion and Technology* 1, no. 1 (2023): 1-4.

2. Literature Review

Numerous academics and experts have undertaken investigations pertaining to the views put forth by Rashīd Riḍā. Junaid Bin Junaid and Eka Nurfiqra for instance, examined Muhammad Abduh and Muhammad Rashīd Riḍā's collaboration in creating the Book of *Tafsīr* with the ethics nuance of *al-ijtimā'*.⁸ Nurmansyah also considered the intertextuality study of Muhammad Basiuni Imran's interpretation of the verses of al-Shiyam and Muhammad Rashīd Riḍā's interpretation of *al-Manār*.⁹ Badrul Jihad also attempted to redefine polygamy law based on Rashīd Riḍā's interpretation of Surah al-Nisa' verse three.¹⁰ Ulumuddin, meanwhile attempted to compare the interpretations of Sayyid Qutub (1906-1966) and Rashīd Riḍā of the *Surah al-Tawba* (Sword Verse).¹¹ Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the authors encountered a lack of scholarly literature explicitly discussing the notion of the Islamic renaissance as defined by Rashīd Riḍā in his works.

A comprehensive review of existing literature was conducted by utilising the Google Scholar on August 15, 2023. The search query comprising the terms "Rashīd Riḍā, Islamic Renaissance" and "Rashīd Riḍā, Islamic Revival" did not return any pertinent search outcomes. Resultantly, a scarcity of scholarly literature was found including journal articles and books that expressly examine the subject of the Islamic renaissance as exemplified by Rashīd Riḍā. This observation indicates that the present investigation can be characterised as innovative along with presenting originality as well.

3. Method

The study in question employed a qualitative library research methodology, which entails the collection, analysis, and synthesis of information from diverse literary sources.¹² Despite its limitations, library research offers distinct advantage to access the existing knowledge, providing an in-depth understanding of the topic under research. The current study focused to examine the Islamic Renaissance through the lens of Rashīd Riḍā's exegesis in *Tafsīr al-Manār* and *Majallah al-Manār*. This comprehensive literature review aimed to shed light on this critical aspect of Islamic thought.

⁸Junaid Bin Junaid Eka Nurfiqra, "Kolaborasi Antara Muhammad Abduh Dan Muhammad Rasyid Ridha' Dalam Menciptakan Kitab *Tafsīr* Bernuansa Adab Al-Ijtima'i [Collaboration Between Muḥammad Abduh and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā' in Creating the Book of Tafsīr with the *Adab Al-Ijtima'i* Nuance]," *Al-Wajid: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsīr* [Al-Wajid: Journal of Al-Qur'an Science and Tafsīr] 2, no. 2 (2021): 449–67.

⁹Ihsan Nurmansyah, "Kajian Intertekstualitas *Tafsīr* Ayat Ash-Shiyam Karya Muhammad Basiuni Imran Dan *Tafsīr* Al-Manar Karya Muhammad Rasyid Ridha [Intertextuality Study of Tafsīr Ayat al-Shiyam by Muḥammad Basiuni Imrān and Tafsīr Al-Manār by Muhammad Rashīd Riḍā]," *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsīr* [Al-Bayan: Journal of Al-Qur'an and Tafsīr Science Studies] 4, no. 1 (2019): 1–14, <http://journal.uinsgd.ac.id/index.php/Al-Bayan/article/view/4792>.

¹⁰Badrul Jihad, "Memaknai Ulang Hukum Poligami: Telaah Pandangan Rasyid Ridha Mengenai Surat Al-Nisa' Ayat 3' [Reinterpreting the Law of Polygamy: A Study of Rashīd Riḍā's Views on Surah Al-Nisā' Verse 3], *Jurnal Ilmiah Al-Jauhari: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Interdisipliner [Al-Jauhari Scientific Journal: Journal of Islamic and Interdisciplinary Studies]* 7, no. 1 (2022): 39–51.

¹¹Ulumuddin, "*Tafsīr* Ayat Pedang Q.s Al-Taubah (9): 5: Studi Komparatif Penafsiran Sayyid Qutub Dan Rashid Ridha' [Intrepretation of the sword verse Q.s al-Tawbah (9): 5: A comparative study of the interpretations of Sayyid Qutub and Rashīd Riḍā]," *Al-Tadabbur: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsīr [Al-Tadabbur: Journal of Qur'an and Tafsīr Science]* 7, no. 2 (2022): 229–46.

¹²Nursapia Harahap, "Penelitian Kepustakaan' [Library Research], *Jurnal Iqra' [Iqra' Journal]* 8, no. 1 (2014): 68.

The data sources for the current investigation encompassed both traditional print materials and digital resources available in modern libraries. The primary data sources included *Tafsīr al-Manār* and *Majallat al-Manār*, while secondary sources consisted of journal articles and scientific books discussing the Islamic Renaissance from Rashīd Riḍā's perspective. This multi-faceted approach ensured a holistic exploration of the subject matter.

Content analysis was chosen as an analysis approach which is a robust research technique to derive replicable and valid insights from textual data. It seeks to capture the meaning, emphasis, and themes within texts, understand their organization, and extract valuable insights. A systematic process was outlined meticulously to conduct content analysis from source identification to report composition.¹³ This methodological rigor guarantees a thorough examination of Rashīd Riḍā's interpretation of the Islamic Renaissance as articulated in *Tafsīr al-Manār* and *Majallah al-Manār*, enriching the understanding of this critical aspect of Islamic thought.

4. Islamic Renaissance Discourse

The Islamic Renaissance is the revival or reawakening of Islamic thought, culture, and values. This process requires a reexamination and reinterpretation of Islamic teachings and principles within the context of a contemporary society. The literature review of the current research sought to investigate various perspectives and facets of the concept of the Islamic Renaissance.

A component of the concept of the Islamic Renaissance represents the struggle for political space between Islamism and Islamic groups. Lubis argued that political struggles over space are permissible in a democratic context, however, must be conducted within constitutional constraints. This emphasizes the significance of striking a balance between political ambitions and adherence to constitutional principles.¹⁴ The concept of Islamic Renaissance intersects with media and communication disciplines as well. Moll investigated the theology of mediation in Egypt's Islamic Renaissance, concentrating on the role of television. The current study examined the divergent interpretations of Salafi teachings and their compatibility with Islamic principles within the religious movement.¹⁵

There is also a historical and cultural aspect related to the concept of the Islamic Renaissance. BaHammam, Almeneessier, and Pandi-Perumal discussed the contributions of mediaeval Islamic scholars to sleep and dream about research. They contended that Islamic civilization made significant contributions to the development of science and medicine, which established the foundation for the European Renaissance. However, they observed that these contributions have not been sufficiently represented in modern scholarship.¹⁶

Another aspect of Islamic Renaissance is the influence of Islamic knowledge and erudition on European Renaissance. According to Nawi et al., the development of science in the Islamic world was recognized as a catalyst for Renaissance in Europe, which resulted in the emergence of a

¹³D. L. Altheide, *Qualitative Media Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1996), 35.

¹⁴Ali Akhbar Abaib Mas Rabbani Lubis, "Contestation on Political Space Between Islamism and Islamic Group in Presidential Election 2019," *Al-Tahrīr: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam [Al-Tahrīr: Journal of Islamic Thought]* 20, no. 2 (2020): 205–29, <https://doi.org/10.21154/altahrir.v20i2.1932>.

¹⁵Yasmin Moll, "Television Is Not Radio: Theologies of Mediation in the Egyptian Islamic Revival," *Cultural Anthropology* 33, no. 2 (2018): 233–265.

¹⁶Ahmed S BaHammam, Aljohara S Almeneessier, and Seithikurippu R Pandi-Perumal, "Medieval Islamic Scholarship and Writings on Sleep and Dreams," *Annals of Thoracic Medicine* 13 (2018): 72–5.

magnificent civilization. They emphasized the significance to re-establish the collaboration between Muslim scientists and specialists in order to advance the field.¹⁷

The decolonization of knowledge and the development of independent thought are discussed in relation with the concept of Islamic Renaissance as well. Since, the European Renaissance, according to Mignolo, the world has witnessed a process of “Westernisation of knowledge” in which Western languages and institutions have colonised the diversity of knowledge and methods of knowing. In dialogue with Western epistemic hegemony, he proposed that new knowledge formations emerge from non-European experiences and memories.¹⁸ The contribution of Muslim scholars to the discourse of Muslim Renaissance was also investigated by him. Bilal Ahmad Malik highlighted the contributions of Mālek Bennabī (1905-1973) and Syed Abul A'la Mawdūdī (1903-1979) to the Muslim revival discourse, emphasising their efforts to recapture the function of Islamic civilization.¹⁹

Overall, the literature review underlined the multifaceted character of the concept of Islamic Renaissance. It encompasses political, cultural, educational, and historical aspects. The concept entails reevaluating and reinterpreting the Islamic teachings and principles in diverse contexts, such as politics, media, and education. Additionally, the topics for a literature review on the concept of Islamic Renaissance include religious transformation, the impact of Islamic knowledge on Renaissance, depictions of Islam in Renaissance England, the decolonization of knowledge, and the contributions of Muslim scholars to Renaissance discourse. These studies offer valuable insights into the multifaceted character of the Islamic Renaissance concept and its implications in a variety of domains.

5. Rashīd Riḍā and the Science of Interpretation

During a visit to Muhammad Abduh's residence, Rashīd Riḍā expressed hope for a new Qur'ānic interpretation to address the contemporary issues after Abduh passionately refuted a critical French article about the Qur'ān. However, Abduh did not respond positively to Riḍā's idea, leaving the hope for a fresh interpretation unfulfilled.

Verily, books (kitab) have no useful value for people whose hearts are closed”. The book would never be meaningful unless it meets the heart of someone who knows and has the interest and desire to spread it. When the book reaches those who only know part of it, they would criticize it, and if they accept it, they would change the content of the book, as has happened to the Al-Qur'ān and Hadīth. In fact, words that sound more effective rather than written words, because seeing directly the face of the person speaking, his behavior, gestures, and accent will make it easier for the listener to understand it, and even make it possible for the listener to ask questions directly.²⁰

Rashīd Riḍā implemented his proposal after two years. He attended and summarized Sheikh Abduh's interpretations and published them in *al-Manār* magazine. These summaries, spanning twelve years, always received Abduh's approval, even surprising him with their accuracy.²¹ Muhammad Abduh gave an interpretation only up to verse 125 of Surah An-Nisa (Volume III of *Tafsīr al-Manār*) and what followed was the interpretation of his own students.

¹⁷Aliff Nawi et al., "A Preliminary Survey of Muslim Experts' Views on Artificial Intelligence," *Islamiyyat* 43, no. 2 (2021): 3–16, <https://doi.org/10.17576/islamiyyat-2021-4302-01>.

¹⁸Walter D Mignolo, "Spirit Out of Bounds Returns to the East: The Closing of the Social Sciences and the Opening of Independent Thoughts," *Current Sociology* 62, no. 4 (2014): 584–602.

¹⁹Bilal Ahmad Malik, "Civilizational Problem or Political Crisis? Comparative Analysis of Mālek Bennabi and Syed Mawdūdī's Approach to Renaissance," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 12, no. 1 (2022): 297–308, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.121.18>.

²⁰Al-Sayyid Yūsuf, *Al-Imām Muḥammad Abduh* (Mesir: Maktabah Al-Ussrah, 2007), 198-199.

²¹Yūsuf, 12:199–200.

In fact, the name of the book of commentaries is *Tafsīr Al-Qur`ān al-Hakīm*. However, this book is better known as *Tafsīr al-Manār* because originally the commentary was published in *al-Manār* magazine. Unfortunately, this interpretation is not complete and only reaches up to surah Yusuf, verse 101. Thirty chapters of this interpretation which consists of several thick volumes are incomplete. Rashīd Riḍā had only finished about a third of the thirteenth chapter when death approached him. The interpretation of this surah was then completed by Bahjat al-Baithar and then published while still using the name Rashīd Riḍā.²²

6. Method of Interpretation of al-Manār

Rashīd Riḍā, while echoing Muhammad Abduh's perspective, emphasized that contemporary Qur`ānic interpretation must be drawn directly from the Qur`ān, aligning with the original Arab understanding while adapting to contemporary societal contexts. This approach requires proficiency in Arabic, knowledge of Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*'s) history, and comprehension of the Qur`ān's socio-cultural context. Riḍā integrated classical and modern interpretations, prioritizing the latter, while still respecting human intuition and sensibilities. His focus predominantly centered around addressing the 19th-century social issues. He employed Hadīth, Arabic grammar, and scholars' opinions to interpret the Qur`ānic verses, employing an approach termed as al-Iqtiran or al-Izdiwaj, blending the narrated and reasoned interpretations. This method, termed as *Ṣaḥīḥ al-manqūl wa sharāḥ al-ma`qūl* (*Legitimate Narrative and Logical Law*) by Riḍā, is also known as the interpretation of *ishārī* according to Prof. Imam Muchlas.²³

Generally, the explanatory method in the interpretation is divided into two parts, namely the *bayānī* and *muqārīn* methods.²⁴ *Tafsīr al-Manār* focuses more on the *muqārīn* method, that is, interpreting the verses of the Qur`ān by presenting ḥadīth, the opinions of the scholars are then assessed (*tarjīh*) according to the author's tendency. The systematics of the *muqārīn* method in the interpretation of *al-Manār* can be concluded as follows:

1. Mention the verses of the Qur`ān that would be interpreted and then interpret the words of the verse according to the rules of the Arabic language.
2. After writing Muhammad Abduh's interpretation (from the beginning of sura al-Fātiḥah to sura al-Nisā' verse 125), Rashīd Riḍā explained the meaning of the verse by presenting several opinions of scholars and looking for the opinion that is considered the most appropriate or popular.
3. Mention *munāsabah* between verses if any. *Munāsabah* is a concept in '*Ulūm al-Qur`ān* which discusses understanding the meaning of a verse comprehensively by connecting the verses before and after it, between the opening verse and the closing verse, and between the verse and the name of the surah which is the central theme.
4. Interpreting verses with other verses, then interpreting verses based on ḥadīth and then conclusion.
5. Quoting some of the opinions of previous interpreters, then taking the opinion that is in accordance with the author.

²²Suara Muhammadiyah, "Muhammad Rashīd Riḍā: Pencetus Tafsīr Yang Mencerahkan [Muhammad Rashīd Riḍā: The Originator of Enlightening Tafsīr]," *Suara Muhammadiyah [Muhammadiyah Voice]* (Yogyakarta, 2016).

²³Ridwan Nasir, *Memahami Al-Qur`an Perspektif Baru Metodologi Tafsīr Muqārīn [Understanding the Qur`an: A New Perspective on the Methodology of Tafsīr Muqārīn]* (Surabaya: Indra Media, 2003), 15.

²⁴Nasir, *Memahami Al-Qur`ān*, 15.

In terms of the goals and order of the verses being interpreted, the interpretation method used by Rashīd Riḍā is the *tahlīlī* interpretation method.²⁵ The *tahlīlī* method is a method of interpreting the Qur'ān which seeks to explain the Qur'ān by describing its various aspects and explaining what the Qur'ān means. Based on the progressive approach to interpretation advocated by Muhammad Abduh and carried on by Rashīd Riḍā, scholars classify al-Manār's interpretation as having a social inclination. In other words, it is an interpretation that takes into account the social reality and development of society. This approach is also referred to as *Tafsīr Adabi Ijtima'i*.²⁶

7. Islamic Renaissance within Muhammad Rashīd Riḍā's Exegesis

Rashīd Riḍā's renowned literary piece, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, clearly embodies the fundamental idea of the Islamic Renaissance ideology that he espoused. The writers have successfully identified five key facets of Rashīd Riḍā's interpretation of Islamic Renaissance thought. These characteristics are encompassed in the following headings:

7.1 The Prioritisation of the Purity of Islam (*salafism*)

Rashīd Riḍā believes that the Islamic revival is a return to unadulterated Islam. Pure Islam originates from the Qur'ān and Sunnah. The movement and philosophy of purifying Islamic teachings is known as salafism. The term "*Salafī*" is derived from the *al-salaf al-sālih* (the devout predecessors), the first three generations of Islam who are revered as the ideals of Islamic practice and belief.²⁷ For Rashīd Riḍā, the Qur'ān is the main source of the Islamic creed.²⁸ Learning and practicing the Islamic creed can only be obtained from the Qur'ān, not from theologians, philosophies, and so on. Islamic *aqidah* and law must be based on the Al-Qur'ān and not the result of someone's *ijtihād* who relies on the truth of the Qur'ān. It is not surprising that in the interpretation of *al-Manār* several issues were found that contradicted the opinions of previous scholars, both in law and faith.

Rashīd Riḍā explained that Al-Qur'ān must be prioritized over all forms of understanding or *ijtihād* of theologians and jurists, so that all forms of opinions concerning religious matters must be returned to the Al-Qur'ān and not introduced to interpret the pronunciation of the Qur'ān to suit one's opinion. This shows the firmness of Rashīd Riḍā in positioning the Qur'ān as the main guideline before justifying or blaming the results of the opinions of the scholars.²⁹ The Qur'ān is a holy book that has truth across time, while the opinions of the scholars are in two possibilities between right and wrong.

According to Riḍā, as was the opinion of his two mentors Afghani and 'Abduh, returning to the origins of Islam is an affirmation of the inherent values of rationalism and freedom and a necessity

²⁵Nasir, *Memahami Al-Qur'ān*, 15.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 19.

²⁷Emil Souleimanov, and Maya Ehrmann, "The Rise of Militant Salafism in Azerbaijan and Its Regional Implications," *Middle East Policy* xx, no. 3 (2013): 112; Read also "The Triumph of the Second Leaders: Ahmad Khatib and Rashīd Riḍā in Islamic Reform in Indonesia," *Jurnal Afkaruna* 17, no. 2 (2021): 170–210; Burhanudin, 172.

²⁸Nawawi Rif'at Sya'uqi, *Rasionalitas Tafsīr Muhammad Abduh: Kajian Masalah Akidah dan Ibadah [Rationality of Tafsīr Muhammad Abduh: Study of the Problem of Faith and Worship]* (Jakarta Selatan: Paramadina, 2002), 100.

²⁹Ahmad Mahmud Subhi, *Fi 'Ilm Al-Kalām: Dirāsah Falsafiah Li Ārā' Al-Firq Al-Islāmiyah Fī Uṣūl Al-Dīn Al-Ash'arīyah [In Theology - a Philosophical Study of the Opinions of Islamic Sects on the Principles of Religion - the Ash'aris]* (Cairo: Muassasah al-Thaqafah Al-Jami'iyyah Alexander, 1992), 8-9.

for the faith's renewal.³⁰ Riḍā issued a challenge to Muslims, stating that the only way for them to rekindle the spirit of achievement and prosperity is to revert to authentic Islam. The ummah is in dire need of science, craftsmanship, and modern industry, the benefits of which cannot be realized unless they are practised in accordance with the Qur'ān and Sunnah. There is absolutely no contradiction between the two. The Islamic ummah will never be able to stand on its own unless it combines the interests of this world with religious guidance.³¹

7.2 The Rejection of Blind Imitation (*Taqīd*)

Rashid Riḍā, in *Tafsīr al-Manār*, argues that the act of imitating (*taqīd*) is inherently erroneous. He authored a dedicated piece in *al-Manār* addressing the fallacy of *taqīd*.³² Rashīd Riḍā asserted that *taqīd*, the practice of blind imitation, was a fabricated creation (*bid'ah*) and attributed it as a contributing factor to the disintegration among the *ummah*.³³ Rashid Riḍā, in *Majallah al-Manār*, highlighted the significance placed by earlier scholars (*salaf*) and their subsequent generations on the practice of *ijtihād*, while actively discouraging *taqīd*. They rejected *taqīd* and expressed their disapproval of it.³⁴

In order to substantiate these assertions, Riḍā referenced a multitude of opinions from the ulema. In the works, that is, *Tafsīr al-Manār* and *Majallah al-Manār*, Rashid Riḍā cites Ibn Hazm's perspective on the matter, asserting that the four Imams, namely Mālik (711-795 AD), Ḥanafī (699–767 AD), Aḥmad (780-855 AD), and Shāfi'ī (767-820 AD), are in opposition to the practise of *taqīd*. Riḍā cited the viewpoint of al-Muzannī, a follower of Imam Shafi'ī, who asserted that Imam Shafi'ī placed significant emphasis on the prohibition of imitation of any individual.³⁵ According to Rashīd Riḍā, the act of *taqīd* is not religiously encouraged due to the absence of a reliable hadith that establishes its roots in the tradition of the Prophet (*SAW*).³⁶ According to Rashīd Riḍā, as cited in *Majallah al-Manār*, the following statement was asserted: "It is imperative for a devout individual to consistently refer to their sacred texts, namely the Qur'ān and Hadith, in order to prevent any potential confusion and to ensure the integrity of the laws within. This implies that individuals are instructed to completely relinquish the practise of imitation (*taqīd*) and instead turn to the Qur'ān and *As-Sunnah*, while refraining from placing reliance on the opinions of *mujtahid* jurists and religious authorities."³⁷

Authors view Rashīd Riḍā as advocating resistance to blind loyalty to imams and clerics, urging the Muslims to follow the Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*'s) teachings, hadith, and the conduct of early ulema (*salaf*). Islam's revival, according to him, is centered on the Qur'ān and Sunnah, countering ill-informed fatwas.³⁸ Hence, Rashid Riḍā cautioned people against being misled by certain

³⁰Ahmad Nabil Amir, "Muhammad Abduh and His Epistemology of Reform: Its Essential Impact on Rashid Rida," *Hermeneutik: Jurnal Ilmu Al Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 15, no. 1 (2021): 31; Read also, Ryuichi Funatsu, "Al-Kawākibi's Thesis and Its Echoes in the Arab World Today," *Havard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 7 (2006): 1–40.

³¹Assad N. Busool, "Rashid Rida's Struggle to Establish a Modern Islamic State," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 1, no. 1 (1984): 83–99.

³²Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manār*, volume 10 (Cairo: Dar al-Manar, 1947), 236.

³³Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Majallah Al-Manar*, 1354.

³⁴Rida, *Majallah al-Manar*, Vol. 35, 186.

³⁵Riḍā, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, 173; Rida, *Majallah Al-Manār*, Vol. 28, 776.

³⁶Burhanudin, "The Triumph of the Second Leaders: Ahmad Khatib and Rashīd Riḍā in Islamic Reform in Indonesia," 193.

³⁷Riḍā, *Majallah Al-Manār*, Vol. 4, 521.

³⁸Riḍā, *Tafsir Al-Manār*, Vol. 11, 345.

individuals or collectives purporting to represent "Islam."³⁹ Rashīd Riḍā emphasized authentic adherence to Islam, rooted in the Qur'ān and the Prophet's (*SAW*) *Sunnah*, not influenced by false visions or dreams. Such adherence is foundational for civilization, revealing a clear link between moral and material progress.⁴⁰

7.3 A Focus on a Rational Approach to Interpreting the Qur'ān

The authors suggest that Rashīd Riḍā's endeavour for an Islamic renaissance represents a rational methodology to interpret the Qur'ān. The preface of *Tafsīr al-Manār* highlights a significant element of Riḍā's reformist methodology in exegesis, which involves a critical evaluation of the prevailing corpus of exegesis.⁴¹ Riḍā claims that the majority of commentary books created tend to distract the readers from pursuing noble objectives and adopting virtuous paths. Certain individuals divert their attention away from the Qur'ān by engaging in discussions pertaining to syntax, grammatical regulations, semantic interpretations, terminologies, and linguistic expressions.⁴²

Moreover, according to Riḍā, the polemical discourse among theologians, the definitive assertions made by fundamentalists, the legal deductions made by imitating jurists, the interpretations offered by Sufis, and the zealous adherence to specific schools of thought have all contributed to divert the individuals from the primary objective of the book of interpretations.⁴³ Numerous *Isrā'īliyat* narrations and anecdotes, which often give rise to superstitious beliefs, also serve to distract the individuals from the intended objective of interpretation. Riḍā and his master, Muhammad Abduh, encountered various challenges in accepting *isrā'īliyat* narrations without proper verification, as many accounts within these narratives appear to violate established Islamic principles and teachings.⁴⁴ *Tafsīr al-Manār* may be perceived as an endeavour to cleanse the interpretations of *isrā'īliyat* narrations, fabricated hadith (*hadīth mawḍū'*), innovations in Islamic practises (*bid'ah*), speculative theological discourse (*kalām*), and grammatical aberrations. The intention behind this effort is to establish a model for future interpretations, as suggested by Fahd bin 'Abd al-Rahmān bin Sulaymān Al-Rūmi.⁴⁵

Riḍā, influenced by the rational principles of 'Abduh and contemporary thinking, espoused a rational approach to the interpretation of the Qur'ān in *Tafsīr al-Manār*.⁴⁶ The rational methodology employed in this approach is rooted in the utilization of reason (*'aql*) for the interpretation of the Qur'ān. This perspective has been extensively examined and deliberated upon by Islamic scholars over the course of history.⁴⁷ According to Husain al-Dhahabī, there exists a correspondence between the interpretive approach and stylistic choices employed by Rashīd Riḍā and those utilised by Abduh. These approaches are predicated on the exercise of rationality within the framework of comprehensive and profound cognizance. In his interpretation, it is evident that he consistently

³⁹Riḍā, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, Vol. 11, 345.

⁴⁰Riḍā, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, Vol. 7, 435.

⁴¹Riḍā, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, Vol. 1, 8–9.

⁴²Riḍā, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, Vol. 1, 8.

⁴³Riḍā, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, Vol. 11, 368.

⁴⁴Norbani B. Ismail, "The Quranic Exegesis, Reformism, and Women in Twentieth Century Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 24, no. 3 (2017): 469–501.

⁴⁵Fahd bin 'Abd al-Rahmān bin Sulaymān Al-Rūmi, *Manhaj Al-Madrasah Al-'Aqlīyah Al-Ḥadīth fī Al-Tafsīr* [The Modern Rational School Approach to Interpretation] (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1981), 143.

⁴⁶Amir, "Muhammad Abduh and His Epistemology of Reform: Its Essential Impact on Rashid Rida," 62.

⁴⁷Kusmana, "Epistemologi *Tafsīr* Maqāsidī, [Epistemology of *Tafsīr* Maqasidi]" *Mutawatir* 6, no. 2 (2018): 206, <https://doi.org/10.15642/mutawatir.2016.6.2.206-231>.

cites references, while also making a deliberate effort to disassociate himself from *isrā'iliyyat* (narrations with a Jewish or Christian origin) and fabricated ḥadīths.⁴⁸ Riḍā demonstrates a discerning approach while incorporating isrā'iliyat narratives in the interpretation of the Qur'ān.

Rashīd Riḍā questioned certain Hadiths, including Abu Hurairah's narration about the creation of the world. He deemed it problematic, tracing its source to isrā'īliyat stories from Kaab bin al-Ahbār, despite its inclusion in *Sahih Muslim*.⁴⁹ Ka'b bin Ahbār, a Jew who claimed conversion to Islam, was suspected of using Islam as a guide to promote Jewish teachings. Caliph Hazrat Umar bin Khattab (RA) forbade him from spreading isrā'īliyat and warned against believing his ḥadīth. Later, Kaab formed a movement, possibly linked to the assassination of Umar.

Tafsīr *al-Manār* has been widely recognized within the academic circles as a rational approach to interpret the Qur'ān, particularly with regards to its methodology. Nevertheless, Riḍā's interpretation has faced criticism from scholars who argue that it deviates from the obvious meaning of the Qur'ān and contradicts the interpretations put out by other commentators.⁵⁰ The interpretation of the Qur'ān in *Tafsīr al-Manār* by Riḍā is indicative of his rational methodology in comprehending the textual content.⁵¹ The author has examined the significance of the intellect, also known as *'aql*, in the process of reading the Qur'ān. Furthermore, logical justifications have been offered by authors for different elements found within the scriptures. For instance, the history of Imam al-Suyuti who stated that one day the Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*) received a revelation in the morning and forgot in the afternoon. Riḍā agrees with Abduh's opinion which criticizes the history. Abduh criticized the opinion of the *mufasssirs* who interpreted the word al-Insa' as the loss of verses from the Qur'ān from the memory of the Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*). Although, this opinion was strengthened by a history, Abduh considered that the history was full of lies. This is because it contradicts the Al-Qur'ān which guarantees the infallibility of Rasulullah (*SAW*) and preserves the Al-Qur'ān from various forms of errors, deficiencies and so on.⁵² Therefore, *Tafsīr al-Manār* is classified as a careful interpretation in making history as a support for the interpretation of the Qur'ān. Most often, the narrations that seem problematic get special attention in this interpretation.

7.4 Emphasis on *Ijtihād*

According to Rashid Riḍā in Majallah al-Manār, *ijtihād* can be understood as the diligent and laborious effort put forth in the pursuit of acquiring something. The question posed is whether an individual's independence is contingent upon their personal endeavour and labour, or if it relies on the assistance of others when exerting their efforts.⁵³

Within the framework of the resurgence of Islam, Riḍā stressed the significance of the notion of the best *ummah* (*khayra ummah*), which was constructed upon the fundamental principles of human liberty in accordance with one's age and cognitive advancement.⁵⁴ Riḍā puts significant stress on the concept of *ijtihād* within the realm of Islamic law.⁵⁵ Riḍā asserted that *ijtihād* and independent

⁴⁸Muhammad Husen Al-Dhahabi, *Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Mufasssirun* [Interpretation and Interpreters] (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1976), 42.

⁴⁹Rida, *Tafsīr Al-Manar*, Vol. 9, 449.

⁵⁰Hamidreza Fazeli, Alireza Fazeli, and Shokrollah Fararooeic, "Critical Study of *Tafsīr Al-Manar* (Interpretation of the Holy Qur'ān) Regarding the Miracles of Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) and Prophet Moses (PBUH)," *International Journal of Health Sciences* 6, no. 2 (2022): 6977, <https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6ns2.6678>.

⁵¹Fazeli, Fazeli, and Fararooeic, "Critical Study of *Tafsīr Al-Manar*", 6978.

⁵²Rida, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, Vol. 1, 414–15.

⁵³Rida, *Majallah Al-Manār*, Vol. 17, 740.

⁵⁴Rida, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, Vol. 7, 553.

⁵⁵Rida, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, Vol. 7, 134.

reasoning are unacceptable in matters of faith which are enduring and immutable. *Sharī'ah* comprises religious and worldly aspects; the former is conclusive, derived from the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*, with transgressors facing consequences, while adherents receive commendation.⁵⁶

Riḍā advocated for the resurgence of *ijtihād*, which refers to the practise of autonomous legal reasoning, within the community of modern scholars. A viewpoint was held that the Islamic legal system must not remain stagnant, rather it should undergo development through scientific endeavours in order to effectively apply the Islamic principles to unusual circumstances. Riḍā's contributions in the areas of *ijtihād*, education, and politics were found to be highly beneficial.⁵⁷ Riḍā's intellectual pursuits extend beyond the realm of *ijtihād* to encompass several domains, including education.⁵⁸

The teachings of Riḍā, in conjunction with those of other prominent thinkers, for instance, Jamaluddin al-Afghani (1838-1897 AD) and Muhammad Abduh, disseminated a reformist ideology that integrated conventional approaches with contemporary and non-religious knowledge.⁵⁹ The belief held by individuals is that reason and intellectualism play a crucial role in maintaining the accessibility of *ijtihād* for the purpose of interpretation and ongoing comprehension. The notion of *ijtihād* was attempted to be restored which pertains to the exercise of independent judgement in religious affairs. Both, Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā employed a method of interpreting the Qur'ān known as *ijtihād* to challenge the *muqallidīn*, who were individuals practicing blind obedience, within the 'ulama community.⁶⁰

As a reformed Salafī, Riḍā calls for a return to the true roots of Islam and a focus on individual interpretation (*ijtihād*) of the sources of Islamic law.⁶¹ According to Riḍā, *ijtihād* is needed to adapt Islamic teachings to the demands of modern times.⁶² By exercising *ijtihād*, Muslims can reinterpret and apply Islamic principles in ways that are relevant to contemporary circumstances. The authors perceive *ijtihād* as a solution to the problem of fatalism among Muslims. Through *ijtihād*, every Muslim can use their individual reasoning and take the initiative in shaping their own destiny.

Furthermore, according to Riḍā, the emergence of *ijtihād* requires promotion and development of the Arabic language.⁶³ According to Riḍā, the fluency in the Arabic language is considered as a prerequisite for the caliphate, as established by scholarly consensus. For instance, it is widely acknowledged among the four prominent schools of thought that the use of Arabic language is necessary for the execution of religious ceremonies, regardless of whether it is the individual's native tongue or not. In an attempt to counter the accusation that he was promoting a policy of 'ethnic

⁵⁶Rida, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, Vol. 6. 337.

⁵⁷Muhammad Ahmad Abulazeez, "Idealizing a Dichotomy between Islam and Sharī 'ah: The Orientalist and Missiological Stereotype," *International Journal of Islamic Khazanah* 12, no. 2 (2022): 103–13.

⁵⁸Nur Fauziah et al., "Islamic Modernism and the Development of Islamic Intellectualism," in *ICIIS* (Jakarta, 2021), 1.

⁵⁹Wan S W Jan, "Islamism in Malaysian Politics: The Splintering of the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) and the Spread of Progressive Ideas," *Icr Journal* 9, no. 4 (2018): 132.

⁶⁰Busool, "Rashid Rida's Struggle to Establish a Modern Islamic State," 83–84.

⁶¹Souleimanov and Ehrmann, "The Rise of Militant Salafism in Azerbaijan and Its Regional Implications," 112.

⁶²Susilawati Susilawati, "Pandangan Modernisme Muhammad Abduh dan Rasyid Ridha [Views of Modernism Muhammad Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā]," *Jurnal Al-Aqidah [Journal of al-Aqidah]* 14, no. 2 (2022): 168.

⁶³Rida, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, Vol. 1, 25.

partiality' (*ta'assub jins*)⁶⁴, the individual in question asserted that Arabic was not exclusive to Arabs, rather it served as the language of all Muslims, irrespective of their heritage.⁶⁵

7.5 The Integration of Contemporary Knowledge

An integral component of Rashīd Riḍā's Renaissance concepts lies in his emphasis on the integration of contemporary knowledge and scientific progress into the framework of Islamic philosophy. The individual believed that Islam and science could prevail in a state of harmonious coexistence and advocated for Muslims to accept scientific advancements while maintaining fidelity to their Islamic principles. The incorporation of contemporary knowledge serves as an indicator of the ascendance of Islam. According to Riḍā, in *Majallah al-Manār*, he (1343) expressed his admiration for al-Azhar University. Moreover, he also acknowledged its role in facilitating the advancement of both religious and scientific knowledge. Riḍā addressed the importance of integrating religious knowledge and science by stating the following: "We are delighted by the consistent success of the recent reforms implemented in Al-Azhar University. This success is particularly evident in the academic achievements of students specializing in the newly introduced disciplines, including mathematics and geography, in addition to the traditional subjects taught at Al-Azhar. It is evident that individuals engrossed in emerging scientific disciplines are predominantly accomplished students of religious sciences, languages, and logic methodologies."⁶⁶

Riḍā's intellectual framework was significantly shaped by the doctrines espoused by prominent figures, namely Jamaluddin al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, renowned proponents of Islamic modernity and reformist ideologies.⁶⁷ Riḍā espoused the significance of rationality, intellectual pursuits, and the integration of conventional approaches with contemporary and non-religious knowledge.⁶⁸ Riḍā's perspectives on the concepts of renewal and rejuvenation are mostly centred on education. The recognition of the necessity for educational reforms emerged as a response to the imperative of aligning with contemporary knowledge and surmounting the obstacles presented by Western imperialism.⁶⁹ Consequently, the confluence of profound comprehension of religious doctrines and worldly knowledge played a pivotal role in the genesis of a significant Islamic Renaissance. During this period, religious wisdom served as a moral and ethical compass, while knowledge served as a catalyst for scientific advancement and ongoing societal growth within Muslim communities.

8. Conclusion

Muhammad Rashīd Riḍā, a prominent scholar in the field of Qur'ānic interpretation, exhibits a profound intellectual connection to the ideas of Muhammad Abduh and Jamaluddin al-Afghani. He played a significant role as a reformer within the Islamic tradition throughout the Renaissance period. The current study demonstrated that Rashīd Riḍā's exegesis reflects the Islamic Renaissance through five primary dimensions. Firstly, the prioritization of the purity of Islam; secondly, the rejection of

⁶⁴Babayo Sule. "The Evolution of Religious Influence on Policy: A Review of Historical and Contemporary Studies," *Religion and Policy Journal* 1, no. 1 (2023): 24

⁶⁵John Willis, "Debating the Caliphate: Islam and Nation in the Work of Rashid Rida and Abul Kalam Azad," *The International History Review* 32, no. 4 (2010): 719.

⁶⁶Riḍā, *Majallah Al-Manār*, Vol. 3, 57.

⁶⁷Jan, "Islamism in Malaysian Politics: The Splintering of the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) and the Spread of Progressive Ideas," 131; Yoyo, "Neo-Patriarchy and the Problem of the Arab Crisis: A Critical Study on Hisham Sharabi's Works," *QJIS: Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 2 (2018): 252.

⁶⁸Jan, "Islamism in Malaysian Politics: The Splintering of the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) and the Spread of Progressive Ideas," 132.

⁶⁹Fauziah et al., "Islamic Modernism and the Development of Islamic Intellectualism," 1.

uncritical belief; thirdly, focus on a rational approach to interpret the Qur'ān; fourthly, an emphasis on ijtihad; and finally, the integration of contemporary knowledge.

Conflict of Interest

Author(s) declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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