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DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO SUNNI-SHI‘I EXEGETICAL DIFFERENCES: AL-ṬABĀṬABĀ’Ī, HAMKA, AND SHIHAB ON AHL AL-BAYT

Izza Rohman*

Abstract: Exploring how Qur’ān exegetes deal with differences helps reveal the many ways Muslims approach their internal diversity. This study examines the approaches of three modern exegetes incorporating Sunni and Shi‘i literature in their works – al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī (1904-1981), Hamka (1908-1981) and Quraish Shihab (1944-) – when addressing exegetical differences around *Ahl al-Bayt* (People of the House) mentioned in *sūrat* al-Aḥzab verse 33. Taking inspiration from conflict resolution strategies to notice the three scholars’ concern for Sunnism and Shi’ism, this study finds they demonstrate different levels of concern: al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī is ‘fully competing,’ Hamka is ‘partially avoiding’ and Shihab is ‘partially compromising.’ Their unique interpretive strategies can explain this difference: al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī employs an objectivist approach of ‘interpretation of the Qur’ān in light of the Qur’ān,’ Hamka focuses on a lucid style of Qur’ān interpretation accessible to a broader audience and Shihab prefers a multi-subjective approach. This study implies there is still a lack of *tafsīr* having equally serious concern for Sunni and Shi‘a.

Keywords: *Ahl al-Bayt*, *Sunni-Shi‘i tafsīr*, *al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī*, *Hamka*, *Quraish Shihab*

INTRODUCTION

How interpreters of the Qur’ān have dealt with exegetical differences remains a question that deserves more scholarly attention. Exegetical differences across sectarian lines, in particular, are of tremendous significance given the Muslim world’s challenges. The threat and rise of Sunni-Shi‘i tensions in some parts of the Muslim world’s contemporary history provide an additional reason for an academic discussion around how differences in exegetical opinion are treated in Qur’ānic exegeses by scholars having different theological backgrounds, particularly from the two primary Muslim theological schools, Sunni and Shi‘a. Exploring how Sunni and Shi‘i scholars handle intra-Muslim exegetical pluralism can help recognise how different attitudes toward diversity are expressed in *tafsīrs*. Further, it can show how interpretive strategies applied to explain Qur’ānic verses disputed among Muslims have been

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shaped by the interpreters' theological schools and their attitudes toward differences in opinion. This recognition will help develop better practices for dealing with those differences.

This study portrays how some modern exegetes of the Qur'ān, renowned for incorporating Sunni and Shi'i literature in their works, have approached Sunni-Shi'i exegetical differences. This study focuses on how the issue of *Ahl al-Bayt* (People of the House), which remains one of the most contentious theological issues between Sunni and Shi'a, is addressed by Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1904-1981) in his *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* [The Balance in Interpretation of the Qur'ān] (20 vols.), Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, better known as Hamka, (1908-1981) in his *Tafsir Al-Azhar* (10 vols.) and Muhammad Quraish Shihab (1944-) in his *Tafsir al-Mishbah* [The Lamp] (15 vols.). Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī is a Shi'i Iranian exegete who pursued advanced studies in Najaf (Iraq) and wrote his *tafsīr* (from 1954 to 1972) in Arabic with strong emphasis on the centrality of interpretation of the Qur'ān in light of the Qur'ān (*tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān*). Hamka is a (reformist) Sunni Indonesian exegete who was generally a talented autodidact and wrote his *tafsīr* (from 1958 to 1978, but mostly 1964-1966) in Indonesian with emphasis on providing a lucid style of exegesis, which balances citation of previous works and exploration of contemporary contexts. Quraish Shihab is another Sunni Indonesian exegete who earned degrees from al-Azhar (Egypt) and wrote his *tafsīr* (from 1999 to 2003) in Indonesian with noticeable emphasis on linguistic analysis (mainly around semantics) and highlighting various opinions among scholars.

Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's *al-Mizān* is one of the greatest Shi'i *tafsīrs*, which frequently cites Sunni sources and is often cited by Sunni scholars. In *al-Mizān*, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī often quotes Sunni exegetes, such as al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1108) (*al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān* [Difficult Vocabularies of the Qur'ān]), al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) (*Jāmi' al-Bayān* [Comprehensive Clarification]), al-Suyūfī (d. 1505) (*al-Durr al-Manthūr* [Scattered Pearls]) and al-Bayḍāwī (d. 1286) (*Anwār al-Tanzīl* [The Lights of Revelation]). In addition, he often mentions the opinions of al-Rāzī (d. 1210) (*Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* [Keys to the Unseen]), al-Alūsī (d. 1854) (*Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī* [The Spirit of Meanings]) as well as 'Abduh (d. 1905) and Riḍā (d. 1935) (*Tafsīr al-Manār* [The Light-stand]), even though he quotes their opinions mostly to be criticised. The list of non-Sunni *tafsīrs* al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī frequently cites is even shorter: al-Ṭabarsī (d. 1153) (*Majma' al-Bayān* [The Confluence of the Clarification]), al-Baḥrānī (d. 1696) (*al-Burhān* [The Demonstration]) and the Mu'tazili al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144) (*al-Kashshāf* [The Unveiler]).¹

Hamka's *Tafsir Al-Azhar* and Shihab's *Tafsir al-Mishbah* are two of the greatest Indonesian *tafsīrs* to date and among few non-Iranian post-*al-Mizan* *tafsīrs* that cite al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's *al-Mizān*. While citations of *al-Mizān* in *Tafsir Al-Azhar* are limited in number, the fact it is available in *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, although both were written in the same general period, already indicates the importance of including this *tafsīr* in the discussion. Although his works reflect a Sunni milieu, it can be argued that Hamka, as a prolific writer, wrote about Shi'a much more

¹ 'Alī al-Awsī, *al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī wa Manhajuhu fī Tafsīrihi al-Mizān* [al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī and his Methodology in his *Tafsir al-Mizān*] (Tehran: Mu'awanīyat al-Ri'āṣah li al-'Alāqāt al-Duwalīyah fī Munazzamat al-I'lām al-Islāmī, 1985), 59-75.

than any other prominent Indonesian Muslim scholar of his time and before. Remarks on Shi'i history and doctrines mark some of Hamka's works, most notably *Di Tepi Sungai Dajlah* (first published as early as 1952),² *Pelajaran Agama Islam* (first published in 1956)³ and *Sejarah Umat Islam* (4 vols., completed in 1961).⁴ Moreover, *Al-Azhar* and Hamka's other works are characterised by a strong inclination to go beyond the existing Islamic schools of thought, theology and jurisprudence.

Shihab's *Tafsir al-Mishbah* contains abundant citations of al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's *al-Mīzān*. Being one among few Indonesian Muslim scholars who publicly promotes Sunni-Shi'i rapprochement,⁵ Shihab often cites al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī and sometimes stresses the latter's Shi'i background. In commentary on certain suras, Shihab's citation of al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī is more frequent than his citation of al-Biqā'ī (d. 1480), Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966), Ibn Āshūr (d. 1973), al-Sha'rāwī (d. 1998) or Sayyid Ṭanṭāwī (d. 2010) – Sunni exegetes Shihab often cites.⁶

It is safe to assume that al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Hamka and Shihab are familiar with exegetical differences among Sunni and Shi'i scholars. This fact allows researchers to examine their respective approach to differences resulting from the Sunni-Shi'i debate surrounding traditionally contested Qur'ānic verses.

Among highly contentious issues frequently debated among Sunni and Shi'i scholars that often involve particular interpretations of Qur'ānic verses are: *Ahl al-Bayt*, imamate, *Ṣaḥābah* (the Companions) and *mut'ah* (temporary marriage).⁷ This study will take a closer look at the issue of *Ahl al-Bayt* in an attempt to highlight an example of how different approaches to Sunni-Shi'i exegetical differences have existed among Muslim scholars and even among the exegetes of the Qur'ān known for their open attitude toward internal Muslim diversity. Previous studies on comparative Shi'i and Sunni commentators' views on *Ahl al-Bayt* have not brought such a perspective.⁸

² Hamka, *Di Tepi Sungai Dajlah* [On the Banks of the Dajlah River] (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2019).

³ Hamka, *Pelajaran Agama Islam* [Islamic Lessons] (Jakarta: Republika, 2018).

⁴ Hamka, *Sejarah Umat Islam* [The Muslim History] (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2020).

⁵ Shihab's post-*al-Mishbah* work, *Sunnah-Syiah Bergandengan Tangan! Mungkinkah?* [Sunni and Shi'a Being Hand in Hand! Is it Possible?], developed from an essay he wrote in (as early as) 1980, represents his effort to help harmonious relationships among Sunnis and Shi'is. He acknowledges the influence he got during his study in al-Azhar University from scholars supporting the idea of *taqrīb bayna al-madhāhib* [rapprochement of the Islamic schools], such as Maḥmūd Shaltūt and 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd among others. While denying the truth of some people's claim identifying him as a Shi'i scholar, he clearly states in the book that he would not consider the Ja'fari Shi'i group prevalent in Iran and Iraq as those who are misled and mislead others. See M. Quraish Shihab, *Sunnah-Syiah Bergandengan Tangan! Mungkinkah? Kajian atas Konsep Ajaran dan Pemikiran* [Sunni and Shi'a Being Hand in Hand! Is it Possible? A Study of Their Doctrines and Thought] (Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2007).

⁶ See for instance Shihab's interpretation of surahs Hūd, Yāsīn, al-Shūrā and al-Raḥmān. In addition to quoting al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's opinions and *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān*, Shihab might have been sometimes inspired by the way al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī groups verses of a surah. For example the grouping of verses of Luqmān, al-Naba' or 'Abasa in *Tafsīr al-Mishbah*, which is identical to that in *al-Mīzān*. His grouping of verses of al-'Ankabūt, Yāsīn and al-Shūrā is also almost identical with al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's.

⁷ Izza Rohman, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān: Sectarian Tendencies in al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's al-Mīzān and al-Shanqīti's Adwā' al-Bayān* (Tangerang Selatan: Al-Wasat, 2016), 22-9.

⁸ See for instance Musolli, "Ahlul Bayt Perspektif Syiah dan Sunni: Studi Tafsir *al-Mīzān* dan Tafsir *Tahrīr wa al-Tanwīr*," [Ahl al-Bayt in Shi'i and Sunni Perspectives: A Study of Tafsīrs of *al-Mīzān* and *al-Tahrīr*

CLASSIFYING RESPONSES TO EXEGETICAL DIFFERENCES

To be clear, this study is not about how different approaches to the Qur’ān have been introduced by Qur’ān exegetes. It is, rather, a study on how responses to differences in opinion have been given in Qur’ān commentaries. It does not focus on how al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Hamka and Quraish Shihab approach the *Ahl al-Bayt* verse, rather on how they respond to Shi’i-Sunni differences in understanding the verse.

One can easily find varying attitudes among Qur’ān interpreters toward differences in opinion. Just read some sections in *al-Nukat wa al-‘Uyūn* by al-Māwardī (d. 1058),⁹ *al-Kashshāf* by al-Zamakhsharī¹⁰ and *Aysar al-Tafāsīr* by al-Jazā’irī (d. 1999)¹¹ to recognise how they express varying attitudes toward exegetical differences. However, scholars have paid more attention to the diversity of exegetes’ approaches to the Qur’ān, rather than to their responses to exegetical differences. It is not surprising that there is still a lack of theoretical frameworks that are relevant to this topic.

In searching for a theoretical framework, one can be inspired by how conflict approaches are distinguished – generally built on the well-known Thomas-Kilmann conflict management model. In conflict resolution and negotiation literature, approaches to conflict are usually distinguished by whether concern for Self (assertiveness) and concern for Other (cooperativeness) is high or low into five different styles (see Figure 1). The first style, variously named ‘competing,’ ‘dominating’ or ‘contending,’ is when concern for Self is high and concern for Other is low. The second style, variously called ‘accommodating,’ ‘obliging’ or ‘yielding,’ is when there is more concern for the interests of Other than Self. The third, differently named ‘avoiding’ or ‘withdrawing,’ is when concern for Self and Other is low. The fourth, called ‘compromising,’ is when concern for the interests of Self and Other is balanced (moderate). The fifth, called ‘collaborating,’ ‘integrating’ or ‘problem-solving,’ is when there is high regard for the interests of Self and Other.¹²

wa al-Tanwīr] *At-Turas* 4, no. 1 (2017); Fatemeh Dastranj and Mansoreh Arab, “The Discourse Analysis of the Al-Taḥīr Verse in Shia and Sunni Interpretations,” *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 6, no. 3 (2019).

⁹ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī al-Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa al-‘Uyūn* [Wells and Springs] (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmīyah & Mu’assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyah, n.d.).

¹⁰ Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ‘an Ḥaqā’iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl wa ‘Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta’wīl* [The Unveiler of the Realities of the Hidden Matters of Revelation and the Choicest Statements on Aspects of its Interpretation] (Cairo: al-Maṭba’ah al-‘Āmirah al-Sharqīyah, 1307 AH/1986-1987).

¹¹ Abū Bakr al-Jazā’irī, *Aysar al-Tafāsīr li Kalām al-‘Alīy al-Kabīr* [The Easiest Interpretation of the Word of the Most High the Most Great] (Madinah: Maktabat al-‘Ulūm wa al-Ḥikam, 2003).

¹² See for instance Michael Ryan and Stephanie L. Castro, “Conflict within Organizations,” in *Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology: A-E Volume 1*, ed. Charles Donald Spielberger (Academic Press, 2004), 449-50; Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse and Hugh Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 13-5; Sandra Harris and Steve Jenkins, *Conflicts in Culture: Strategies to Understand and Resolve the Issues* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 27-8; William R. Cupach, Daniel J. Canary, Brian H. Spitzberg, *Competence in Interpersonal Conflict*, 2nd ed. (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 2009), 152-4; Allan Edward Barsky, *Conflict Resolution for the Helping Professions: Negotiation, Mediation, Advocacy, Facilitation, and Restorative Justice*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 37-42.

This fact allows one to see whether concern for Sunnism and Shi'ism is high or low in the *tafsīr* under scrutiny.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SUNNI AND SHI'I EXEGETES ON AHL AL-BAYT

With regard to the issue of *Ahl al-Bayt*, Shi'i and Sunni scholars generally differ in identifying them and understanding the implication of their state of purity. The relevant Qur'ānic section most often contested on this issue is the last part of *sūrat al-Aḥzāb* (chapter 33) verse 33, known as the *āyat al-taḥhīr* (purification verse), which reads: *innamā yurīd Allāh li yudhhibā 'ankum al-rijs ahl al-bayt wa yutahhirakum taḥhīrā*, translated by 'Alī Qulī Qarā'ī (a Shi'i Qur'ān translator) as "Indeed, Allah desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification"¹³ and by al-Hilālī and Khān (Sunni Qur'ān translators) as "Allah wishes only to remove *ArRijs* (evil deeds and sins, etc.) from you, O members of the family (of the Prophet SAW), and to purify you with a thorough purification."¹⁴

Shi'i exegetes, such as al-Ḥibarī (d. 899),¹⁵ al-Qummī (d. 919),¹⁶ Furāt al-Kūfī (d. 964),¹⁷ al-Ṭūsī (d. 1068),¹⁸ al-Ṭabarsī,¹⁹ al-Kāshānī (d. 1680),²⁰ al-Sabziwārī (d. 1988)²¹ and al-Ṣādiqī (d. 2011),²² have a relatively unified view that the term *Ahl al-Bayt* refers exclusively to the so-called *Ahl al-Kisā'* (People of the Cloak), namely Prophet Muḥammad, Imam 'Alī, Fāṭimah al-Zahrā', Imam al-Ḥasan and Imam al-Ḥusayn, and their purity means their infallibility. A few Shi'i exegetes, such as al-Janābadhī,²³ extend the scope to include all Infallible Imams. Thus, they unanimously believe *Ahl al-Bayt* does not include the wives of the Prophet (those being addressed in surrounding verses).²⁴

¹³ 'Alī Qulī Qarā'ī, trans., *The Qur'ān: With a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation* (London: ICAS, 2005), 590.

¹⁴ Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, trans., *The Noble Qur'ān: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (Madinah: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'ān, n.d.), 565.

¹⁵ Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥibarī, *Tafsīr al-Ḥibarī* (Mu'assasat al-Bayt li Ḥyā' al-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1405 AH/1984-1985), 297-311.

¹⁶ 'Alī al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī* (Qum: Mu'assasat Dār al-Kitāb, 1404 AH/1983-1984), II, 192.

¹⁷ Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī* (Tehran: Vizārat Farhāng va Irshād Islāmī, 1995), 332-41.

¹⁸ Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* [The Explanation on Qur'ānic Commentary] (Beirut: Dār Ḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, n.d.), VIII, 340.

¹⁹ Al-Faḍl al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* [The Confluence of Clarification on Qur'ānic Commentary] (Beirut: Dār al-'Ulūm, 2005), VIII, 120.

²⁰ Muḥsin al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfi* [The Clear] (Tehran: Manshūrāt Maktabat al-Ṣadr, 1415 AH/1994-1995), IV, 188.

²¹ Muḥammad al-Sabziwārī, *al-Jadīd fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Majīd* [The New in the Interpretation of the Noble Qur'ān] (Beirut: Dār al-Ta'āraf li al-Maṭbū'āt, 1985), V, 436.

²² Muḥammad al-Ṣādiqī, *al-Furqān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān wa al-Sunnah* [The Criterion on Qur'ān Interpretation in Light of the Qur'ān and the Sunna] (Tehran: Intishārāt Farhāng Islāmī, 1406 AH/1985-1986), XXIV, 113.

²³ Sulṭān Muḥammad al-Janābadhī, *Tafsīr Bayān al-Sa'ādah fī Maqāmāt al-'Ibādah* [Happy Clarification on the Stations of Worship] (Beirut: Manshūrāt Mu'assasat al-'Alamī li al-Maṭbū'āt, n.d.).

²⁴ Rohman, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān*, 142, 144.

On the other hand, Sunni exegetes – despite noticeable internal diversity – have a unified view that the Prophet’s wives are included. Sunni exegetes mostly believe *Ahl al-Bayt* refers to *Ahl al-Kisā’* and the Prophet’s wives and their purity does not imply their infallibility. This view is asserted by al-Bayḍāwī,²⁵ Abū Ḥayyān (d. 1344),²⁶ Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373),²⁷ al-Tha’ālibī (d. 1479),²⁸ Ibn ‘Ajībah (d. 1809),²⁹ al-Shawkānī (d. 1834),³⁰ al-Alūsī (d. 1854),³¹ al-Qāsimī (d. 1914),³² Ibn ‘Āshūr (d. 1973)³³ and al-Shanqīṭī (d. 1973)³⁴ among others. A significant number of Sunni exegetes choose only to list existing opinions regarding the scope of *Ahl al-Bayt*, to limit the scope of the verse to the Prophet’s wives or extend it to include other relatives of the Prophet.³⁵

Thus, the typical Shi‘i view is that *Ahl al-Bayt* mentioned in the verse refers exclusively to five persons (Prophet Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn) and their purity means their infallibility. On the other hand, the typical Sunni view is that *Ahl al-Bayt* of the verse includes the wives of the Prophet and their purity does not imply their infallibility.

Any argument an exegete gives for one view and against the opposite can be considered a “competing” approach. Any discussion of both views without mentioning any argument of each can be counted as a “compromising” approach. Any mention of both views and presenting each argument can be regarded as an “integrating” approach. Not mentioning both views can be counted as an “avoiding” approach. Mentioning the other’s view without the view of the exegete’s theological school is regarded as an “accommodating” approach. Other than these, it would be considered between the previously mentioned approaches or partially included in one of them.

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- ²⁵ Abū Sa’īd ‘Abd Allāh al-Bayḍāwī, *Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī al-Musammā Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta’wīl* [Al-Bayḍāwī’s Commentary Titled the Lights of Revelation and the Secrets of Interpretation] (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 2008), II, 245.
- ²⁶ Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī, *Tafsīr al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* [The Encircling Ocean] (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 2001), VII, 224.
- ²⁷ Abū al-Fidā’ Ismā’īl ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm* [Interpretation of the Glorious Qur’ān] (Cairo: Mu’assasah Qurṭubah & Maktabat Awlād al-Shaykh li al-Turāth, 2000), XI, 153.
- ²⁸ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Tha’ālibī, *Tafsīr al-Tha’ālibī al-Musammā bi Jawāhīr al-Ḥisān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān* [al-Tha’ālibī’s Commentary Titled the Gems of the Splendid Ones on the Interpretation of the Qur’ān] (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī & Mu’assasat al-Tārīkh al-‘Arabī, 1997), IV, 346.
- ²⁹ Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad ibn ‘Ajībah, *al-Baḥr al-Madīd fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Majīd* [The Immense Ocean on the Interpretation of the Noble Qur’ān] (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 2005), VI, 25.
- ³⁰ Muḥammad al-Shawkānī, *Faṭḥ al-Qadīr al-Jāmi’ bayna Fanīy al-Riwāyah wa al-Dirāyah min ‘Ilm al-Tafsīr* [The Inspiration of the All-powerful: The Combination between Narration-based and Reason-based Approaches in the Science of Qur’ān Interpretation] (Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifah, 2007), 1169.
- ³¹ Maḥmūd al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma’ānī fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm wa al-Sab’ al-Mathānī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 2001), VIII, 199.
- ³² Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsīn al-Ta’wīl* [The Beauties of Qur’ān Interpretation] (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 1997), VIII, 70.
- ³³ Muḥammad al-Ṭāhīr ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Tahrīr wa al-Tanwīr* [The Liberation and the Enlightenment] (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisīyah li al-Nashr, 1984), XXII, 17.
- ³⁴ Muḥammad al-Amīn al-Shanqīṭī, *Aḍwā’ al-Bayān fī Ḍāḥ al-Qur’ān bi al-Qur’ān* [The Lights of Clarification on Explaining the Qur’ān in Light of the Qur’ān] (Mecca: Dār ‘Ālam al-Fawā’id, 1426 AH/2005-2006), VI, 635-9.
- ³⁵ Rohman, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān bi al-Qur’ān*, 142-4. See also Izza Rohman, “Intra-Quranic Connections in Sunni and Shi‘i Tafsirs: A Meeting Point or Another Area of Contestation?” *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 3, no. 1 (2013): 85-7.

AL-ṬABĀṬABĀ'Ī'S, HAMKA'S AND SHIHAB'S REMARKS ON AHL AL-BAYT

Among the three exegetes, Hamka gives the shortest commentary on the *taḥhīr* verse, while al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī gives the longest. Hamka gives only a one paragraph commentary that mainly suggests the impact of obedience to Allah on the purity of hearts and noble characters in daily life. Hamka writes:

The continuing part of the verse explains why Allah reminds them of such a code of conduct related to clothing [as mentioned before], because: *God desires to remove all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and to purify you thoroughly*. It is because any act of worship of Allah, including prayer, almsgiving and fasting, resulting from one's devotion to Allah and His Messenger, would surely impact daily behaviors, including how Muslims dress. So Allah gives a relevant instruction to all of the Prophet's wives and family members, called in that verse *Ahl al-Bayt*, the People of the Household. The house meant here is the house of the Prophet, so they were members of the Prophet's family, i.e. those who were closely living day and night with the Prophet. They were supposed to serve as role models of clean life. Do not be dirty, living without norms, mixing the lawful with the unlawful. "*Purify thoroughly*" particularly means the purity of heart, which is free from associating anyone with Allah [*shirk*], clean from any arrogance to others, clean from any greed due to being enslaved to wealth, so envying others when getting less, and clean from ridiculing others.³⁶

Hamka hints that the term *Ahl al-Bayt* in the verse refers to the Prophet's wives and whole family living in his house and does not hint at their infallibility – a view common among Sunni scholars. Hamka merely mentions the common Sunni understanding of *Ahl al-Bayt* and what their purity implies, but neither gives the argument of that understanding nor mentions the differing Shi'i understanding. Therefore, Hamka's approach can be regarded as "partially avoiding" or "between avoiding and competing." It can be argued that Hamka shows moderate concern for Sunnism (by briefly mentioning a Sunni view) and low concern for Shi'ism (by not mentioning the Shi'i view).

On the contrary, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī discusses the verse at great length, mainly to explain the implication of the limitation (implied in the verse by the word *innamā*), the scope of *Ahl al-Bayt* and the meaning of *al-rijs* and *taḥhīr*. He argues the *taḥhīr* verse (i.e. the second part of chapter 33 verse 33) is an independent part that, unlike the surrounding verses, addresses the *Ahl al-Bayt* and not the wives of the Prophet. He argues the shift of addressee is nothing strange in the Qur'ān. The use of a masculine plural pronoun (*kum*) – placed in a series of verses that repeatedly use a feminine plural pronoun (*kunna*) – is a clue that the term *Ahl al-Bayt* in the verse cannot have been applied exclusively to the Prophet's wives, but applying the term *Ahl al-Bayt* to mean the wives as well as the Prophet would not match with the context of the surrounding verses. In addition, considering the removal of impurity and purification as applied to the wives would not match the context of the surrounding verses.

³⁶ Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar* (Singapore: Pustaka Nasional, 2001), VIII, 5711.

According to al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Ahl al-Bayt* is a term exclusively referring to *Ahl al-Kisā'* (five personalities including the Prophet, 'Alī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn) based on numerous narrated Prophetic traditions regarding the occasion of revelation (*sabab nuzūl*) of the verse. More than 70 *hadīths* – more narrated by Sunni than Shi'i narrators – indicate the verse exclusively addresses those five persons. Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī then asserts:

If it is argued that these traditions only show the inclusion of 'Alī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, and does not negate the inclusion of the Prophet's wives as indicated by the placement of the [*taḥhīr*] verse inside a set of verses that address them, we would answer, "Indeed most of these narrated traditions, particularly the ones transmitted from Umm Salamah – and the verse was revealed to the Prophet in her home – clearly suggest that the verse exclusively address them [the five personalities], and do not include the wives of the Prophet... There is no any single narration of the [*taḥhīr*] verse's occasion of revelation that includes the verses on the Prophet's wives."³⁷

That the term is used only for those five personalities, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī argues, is also indicated by the use of the words of *rijs* (uncleanness) and *taḥhīr* (purification) in the verse, which could only imply their infallibility.³⁸ Thus, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī has placed an asserted argument in favour of the typical Shi'i view and against the typical Sunni view. His approach can therefore be counted as "fully competing," having high concern for Shi'ism (by arguing for it) and low concern for Sunnism (by arguing against it).

Shihab spends two pages commenting on the last part of al-Aḥzāb [33]:33. After explaining the meaning of *al-rijs* and *al-bayt*, Shihab states there are various opinions among scholars regarding the scope of *Ahl al-Bayt*. Based on the verse's context, *Ahl al-Bayt* should include the wives of the Prophet. After citing an opinion that *al-bayt* means *Bayt Allāh*, which he disagrees with, Shihab argues that *Ahl al-Bayt* cannot be understood as referring only to the Prophet's wives. In his view, this is indicated by the use of the pronoun *kum* (plural *you*) and the narrated traditions, which refers to People of the Cloak (i.e. 'Alī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn) as *Ahl al-Bayt*. However, some of these traditions imply, when the Prophet wrapped 'Alī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn in a cloak (to pray for them), he did not invite Umm Salamah, who saw the event, despite her will to join. In response to this, Shihab then writes:

It seems that the Prophet refused to include Umm Salamah in the cloak not because she was not part of *Ahl al-Bayt*, but rather because the Prophet wanted to make a specific prayer for those in the cloak, while Umm Salamah had been part of *Ahl al-Bayt* as indicated by the context of the [*taḥhīr*] verse. For this reason, classical scholars are of the opinion that *Ahl al-Bayt* consists of all of the Prophet's wives as well as 'Alī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn. A renowned Shi'i scholar, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī limits the definition of *Ahl al-Bayt* in this verse to the five persons wrapped in the cloak, namely the Prophet Muhammad, 'Alī,

³⁷ Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān* [The Balance in Qur'ān Interpretation] (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī li al-Maṭbū'āt, 1997), XVI, 317-8.

³⁸ Ibid., XVI, 316-9.

Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn. Further, he understands their cleansing from sin and their purification as divine protection (*'iṣmah*), that they are protected from wrongdoings.³⁹

Shihab sums up that “classical (*salaf*) scholars” believe *Ahl al-Bayt* includes all the Prophet’s wives as well as ‘Alī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn – as if the previous argument is not Shihab’s, rather that of (unidentified) classical scholars. Subsequently, Shihab briefly mentions the opinion of al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī that *Ahl al-Bayt* refers to the five persons (*Ahl al-Kisā'*) and their purification implies their infallibility. Lastly, Shihab mentions the opinion of Mālik ibn Anas and Abū Ḥanīfah that *Ahl al-Bayt* refers to all the Prophet’s relatives who were the descendants of Hāshim (the father of the Prophet’s grandfather). Regarding these last cited opinions, Shihab does not indicate whether their opinions are incorrect. Also, he does not discuss whether the purification of *Ahl al-Bayt* does not mean their infallibility.⁴⁰ Shihab suggests an argument for the typical Sunni view, but he also mentions the typical Shi’i view without presenting any argument in favour of or against it. Therefore, his approach can be considered “partially compromising” or “between compromising, competing and integrating.” Shihab demonstrates high concern for Sunnism (as he quotes arguments for the Sunni view) and moderate concern for Shi’ism (as he mentions the Shi’i view).

AL-ṬABĀṬABĀ’Ī’S, HAMKA’S AND SHIHAB’S APPROACHES TO SHI’I-SUNNI EXEGETICAL DIFFERENCES

Al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, regarded as “a defender of ‘objectivism,’”⁴¹ is noted for stressing the possibility of achieving true, objective and fixed understanding of the Qur’ān and objecting to any approach to the Qur’ān that lets a reader’s voice (preconceived views or the results of academic/philosophic arguments) overwhelm the Qur’ān. His way of approaching the Qur’ān authentically, as demonstrated in *al-Mizān*, is through a methodology of interpreting the Qur’ān with the Qur’ān through *tadabbur* (deep reflection) and *istinṭāq* (allowing the Qur’ān to speak).

It is in such a commitment to *tadabbur* and objectivity that al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī seeks to arrive at what he considers to be the best understanding of Qur’ānic verses. The way he explains the *tahhīr* verse reflects a sort of challenge to any reader of the Qur’ān to be faithful to *tadabbur*. Al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī devotes much space to convincing the readers on how *tadabbur* of the Qur’ān would lead to his preferred conclusion, which is in line with the Shi’i view.

In this regard, al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī tends to approach Shi’i-Sunni exegetical differences in a way that is mostly ‘competing.’ His conclusion is in line with the typical Shi’i view and he achieves the conclusion mainly by arguing against existing views commonly found among Sunni scholars. Making an argument against the typical Sunni view seems to be his focus. While interpreting al-Aḥzāb [33]:33, al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s focus is to show the inaccuracy of the view that

³⁹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian al-Qur’ān* [The Lamp: The Messages, Impressions, and Coherence of the Qur’ān] (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, Perpustakaan Umum Islam Iman Jama’ and Paguyuban Yayasan Ikhlas, 2011), X, 467.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, X, 466-7.

⁴¹ Mohammad Hossein Mokhtari, “The Exegesis of Tabatabaei and the Hermeneutics of Hirsch: A Comparative Study” (PhD diss., Durham University, 2007), 215.

Ahl al-Bayt in the verse encompasses only the wives of the Prophet, then the inaccuracy of another view that *Ahl al-Bayt* refers to the wives of the Prophet and the five personalities of *Ahl al-Kisā'*.⁴² Even though al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī does not name the group or scholars having such views (a style common in *al-Mizān*, particularly when the author wants to give criticism), both views are commonly found in Sunni exegeses. While the first opinion is endorsed by few Sunni exegetes (such as al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī in their *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*⁴³), the second one is supported by many Sunni exegetes, as mentioned earlier.

The interpretive strategy by al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī to argue against Sunni scholars' exegetical views involves resorting to historical facts (such as times and occasions of revelation) as found in narrated traditions (*riwāyāt*) or the consensus of scholars. It is when he resorts to narrated traditions that al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī incorporates Sunni and Shi'i sources to support his conclusion. Based on narrated traditions commonly found in Sunni and Shi'i sources, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī concludes that the term *Ahl al-Bayt* refers to *Ahl al-Kisā'* and the *taḥīr* verse is independent of surrounding verses.

Unlike al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, who in *al-Mizān* divides his interpretation into sections, namely *bayān* (exposition), which consistently appears after a set of verses, *baḥṭh riwā'ī* (discussion on traditions), which often appears and other discussions on various topics, which only sometimes appear, Quraish Shihab in *Tafsīr al-Mishbah* does not provide separate sections, but his reader could still notice the general pattern of his interpretation. Shihab generally pursues Qur'ān interpretation in five steps: translation (into Indonesian), a brief note on the coherence (*munāsabah*), concise general commentary (in a way that is similar to so-called *tafsīr ijmālī* [concise interpretation]), analysis on vocabularies and reference to or discussion of some exegetical opinions in previous commentaries or other texts. The last two parts, however, occupy a larger space.

Shihab has relied on linguistic objectivism, paying much attention to the lexical meaning of Qur'ānic words and harmony in the relationship between Qur'ānic parts. He is consistent in applying this approach throughout his *Tafsīr al-Mishbah*. However, Shihab's approach oscillates between linguistic objectivism and multi-subjectivism as he often complements his linguistic approach by quoting selected exegetical opinions. Often, Shihab, after explaining the linguistic meaning of words in a verse, cites several exegetical opinions – either from classical or contemporary scholars – usually without giving any (substantial) comment or (clearly) expressing his opinion. Shihab sometimes quotes conflicting opinions without clarifying the one with which he agrees. This style is common in Sunni exegeses – though not exclusively. However, Shihab's approach is obviously unlike that of al-Māwardī (*al-Nukat wa al-'Uyūn*),⁴⁴

⁴² al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, XVI, 316-9.

⁴³ Aḥmad al-Ṣāwī, *Hāshiyah 'alā Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* [Annotation of the Qur'ānic Commentary of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī] (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Azharīyah, 1926), III, 231.

⁴⁴ al-Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa al-'Uyūn*.

Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1201) (*Zād al-Masīr*)⁴⁵ and al-Suyūṭī (*al-Durr al-Manthūr*),⁴⁶ as Shihab may sometimes indicate the dominant view pertaining to an issue or in a tacit way hint at the view he prefers or even clearly state his favoured argument.

Understandably, Shihab differs significantly from al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī in approaching Sunni-Shi'i exegetical differences in understanding the *tathīr* verse. Shihab does not posit himself in a direct argument with the typical Shi'i view or seek to explicitly compete or argue against Shi'i doctrines relevant to *Ahl al-Bayt*, even though he gives a dominant Sunni view more space.

Shihab lets the voices of various scholars across schools of thought appear in his *Tafsir al-Mishbah*. Even the exegetical opinions of al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī can often appear in *al-Mishbah* – including when he interprets some of the Qur'ānic verses understood differently by Sunnis and Shi'is. However, as far as Shihab's interpretation of the *tathīr* verse is concerned, al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī's view is cited only as a minor part of Shihab's interpretation, being mentioned as one of the existing views. Shihab gives more space to a dominant Sunni view that *Ahl al-Bayt* encompasses the wives of the Prophet and *Ahl al-Kisā'*.⁴⁷

Hamka's approach to Qur'ān interpretation greatly differs from that of al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Shihab. He neither focuses on achieving the true meaning of the words mentioned in Qur'ānic verses, for instance through linguistic analysis or cross-referential method, nor does he focus on listing different opinions regarding the meaning and message of Qur'ānic verses. Instead, Hamka's style of interpretation is to some extent closer to that of Sayyid Quṭb in *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*⁴⁸ and Rashīd Riḍā in *Tafsīr al-Manār*,⁴⁹ though he sometimes mentions various citations from classical and modern exegeses.⁵⁰ He often brings a fresh, direct and rational approach to the Qur'ānic text and puts it in contemporary contexts in a way that is accessible to a broader audience. While his style is more lucid than the others, Hamka's work is not a brief *tafsīr*. However, he does not provide a lengthy discussion on the *tathīr* verse – such a verse of great importance for Shi'i and Sunni theology.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Shihab, as well as Hamka to a lesser extent, represent modern interpreters of the Qur'ān who seek to bring together Sunni and Shi'i sources and views to shed light on Qur'ānic verses. However, in this effort, Qur'ānic verses disputed between Sunni and Shi'a seem crucial and pose a significant challenge. Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī might be more occupied by the

⁴⁵ 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Jawzī, *Zād al-Masīr fī 'Ilm al-Tafsīr* [Provisions for the Journey on the Science of Qur'ān Interpretation] (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1984).

⁴⁶ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr bi al-Ma'thūr* [Scattered Pearls on Narration-based Qur'ān Interpretation] (Cairo: Markaz Hajr li al-Buḥūth wa al-Dirāsāt al-'Arabīyah wa al-Islāmīyah, 2003).

⁴⁷ Shihab, *Tafsīr al-Mishbah*, X, 466-7.

⁴⁸ Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* [In the Shade of the Qur'ān] (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2003).

⁴⁹ Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Ḥakīm al-Mashhūr bi Ism Tafsīr al-Manār* [The Interpretation of the Wise Qur'ān Popularly Known under the Title of Tafsīr *al-Manār*] (Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1947).

⁵⁰ See also Hamka's explanation of his methodology and approaches in Hamka, *Tafsīr Al-Azhar*, I, 40-2.

need for searching the truth or the best meaning of the Qur'ān; Shihab is sometimes apparently motivated to meet the need for respecting differences, while Hamka tries to make Qur'ānic exegesis more contextualised and readable for a contemporary audience. Nevertheless, their way of addressing or avoiding Sunni-Shi'i exegetical differences might provide a good reflection for future interpreters that are conscious of the need for Sunni-Shi'i rapprochement.

This study clarifies that Sunni-Shi'i differences are approached differently among Qur'ān interpreters – even among those exegetes using Shi'i and Sunni sources. Al-Ṭabāṭabā'i's approach is more “fully competing,” Hamka's approach tends to be “partially avoiding” while Shihab's approach is closer to “partially compromising.” Their interpretative strategies may have explained why these different approaches exist. In a lucid *tafsīr* written for a wider audience, exegetical differences on contentious issues may have tended to be avoided or not given weight – this is the case with Hamka's *Al-Azhar*. In a multi-subjective *tafsīr* like Shihab's *al-Mishbah*, such exegetical differences may have tended to be given space. In a *tafsīr* with an objectivist methodology like al-Ṭabāṭabā'i's *al-Mizān*, exegetical differences may have tended to be rigorously weighed.

While this study has not clarified how other factors shape different approaches to Shi'i-Sunni exegetical differences, it has implied there is still a lack of *tafsīr* having equally high concern for Sunni and Shi'a. To initiate such a *tafsīr*, being open to literature or exegeses from different theological schools is not enough and would require greater openness toward the religious others.

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