



THE CONCEPT OF THE EXPERTS OF THE BOOK IN QS. AL-BAQARAH AND AL-MA'IDAH: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE INTERPRETATIONS OF AL-MANAR AND AL-AZHAR

Fikri Faza Rohman¹, Masruchin², Beko Hendro³

^{1, 2, 3} Al-Quran and Tafsir Study Program, UIN Raden Intan Lampung, Indonesia

¹ fikrifaza123@gmail.com, ² masruchin@radenintan.ac.id,

³ bekohendro@radenintan.ac.id

Abstract

This study analyzes the concept of Ahl al-Kitab in Tafsir Al-Manar and Tafsir Al-Azhar through a comparative examination of Qur'an 2:75 and Qur'an 5:5. It employs a qualitative library-based method using a thematic-comparative (muqāran) exegetical approach. The primary sources are Tafsir Al-Manar by Muhammad Rasyid Ridha and Tafsir Al-Azhar by Buya Hamka, supported by books, scholarly articles, theses, and previous studies. The findings show that both commentaries reject sweeping generalizations about Ahl al-Kitab and emphasize evaluating communities according to their conduct and moral orientation. Al-Manar adopts a more rational-reformist tendency, criticizing the misuse of religious authority and emphasizing openness in social relations, whereas Al-Azhar offers a more contextual-cultural reading that stresses morality, prudence, and the realities of plural society. Both interpretations also recognize forms of social interaction with Ahl al-Kitab while maintaining the boundaries of Islamic faith and ethics. The study demonstrates that different intellectual and socio-cultural backgrounds produce distinct yet complementary interpretive emphases, contributing to a more proportional and contextually relevant understanding of Ahl al-Kitab in contemporary Muslim discourse.

Keywords: Ahl al-Kitab; Tafsir Al-Manar; Tafsir Al-Azhar; Comparative Exegesis; Interreligious Relations

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis konsep Ahl al-Kitab dalam Tafsir Al-Manar dan Tafsir Al-Azhar melalui kajian komparatif terhadap QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:75 dan QS. Al-Ma'idah [5]:5. Penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan dengan pendekatan tafsir tematik-komparatif (muqāran). Sumber utama penelitian adalah Tafsir Al-Manar karya Muhammad Rasyid Ridha dan Tafsir Al-Azhar karya Buya Hamka, sedangkan data sekunder berasal dari buku, artikel ilmiah, tesis, dan penelitian terkait. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kedua tafsir sama-sama menolak generalisasi terhadap Ahl al-Kitab dan menekankan penilaian berdasarkan sikap serta perilaku. Al-Manar cenderung rasional-reformis dengan kritik terhadap penyalahgunaan otoritas keagamaan dan penekanan pada keterbukaan sosial, sedangkan Al-Azhar lebih kontekstual-kultural dengan perhatian pada moralitas, kehati-hatian, dan realitas masyarakat plural. Kedua tafsir juga menegaskan kebolehan interaksi sosial tertentu dengan Ahl al-Kitab sepanjang tidak mengaburkan prinsip akidah dan etika Islam. Temuan ini memperlihatkan bahwa perbedaan latar intelektual dan sosial menghasilkan penekanan interpretatif yang berbeda namun saling melengkapi dalam membangun pemahaman Ahl al-Kitab yang proporsional dan kontekstual.

Kata Kunci: Ahl al-Kitab; Tafsir Al-Manar; Tafsir Al-Azhar; Tafsir Muqāran; Relasi Antaragama



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INTRODUCTION

One of the phenomena that is often discussed in the Qur'an is the guidance that discusses the People of the Book. In general, the groups referred to in the Qur'an regarding the People of the Book are the Jews and Christians, these two groups are explained as having a connection with the beliefs of Muslims.¹ The term "People of the Book" (Ahl al-Kitab) is an important term in Islamic discourse, which primarily refers to adherents of holy books other than the Koran, especially Jews and Christians.² According to the renowned Islamic scholar Imam Shafi'i, this group is considered the descendants of the Children of Israel, emphasizing historical and genealogical ties rooted in biblical tradition. However, interpretations of this term vary among scholars and communities; some hold that the term applies exclusively to the Children of Israel, emphasizing a specific ancestral lineage, while others adopt a broader perspective, including all followers of the recognized scriptures of the Abrahamic religions. This difference influences theological discussions and interfaith relations within Islamic thought.³

The term "People of the Book" appears thirty-one times in nine chapters of the Qur'an, reflecting its significant theological and socio-historical role in the discourse of the Islamic scriptures.⁴ The term "People of the Book" in the Qur'an refers to the communities who have been entrusted with the holy book, particularly the Jews and Christians.⁵ This term has considerable historical, legal and social importance in the Islamic tradition, shaping interfaith relations and legal frameworks.⁶ Historically, this provided certain protections to these communities and recognized their religious practices. In contemporary discourse, this concept continues to influence discussions about religious tolerance, coexistence, and legal rights. It influences laws on dietary permissibility, religious freedom, and social integration, thus underscoring its enduring relevance in shaping Muslim attitudes toward non-Muslim communities in diverse societies, as explained in Surah Al-Maidah, verse 5:

¹ Sam'ani Sya'roni, "The Debate About The People Of The Book," RELIGION 13 (October 3, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.28918/religia.v13i1.175>.

² Nurul Hakim and Ali Fauzi, "The Concept Of Ahl Al-Kitab: Recognition Adherents Of Ahl Al-Kitab," Dialogia 19, no. 1 (June 28, 2021): 191–212, <https://doi.org/10.21154/dialogia.v19i1.2575>.

³ Muhammad Arsad Nasution, "Radicalism or Tasamuh: An Analysis of the Verses of the Qur'an Regarding the People of the Book," Jurnal AL-MAQASID: Jurnal Ilmu Keshariahan Dan Keperdataan 5, no. 2 (2019): 172–85, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24952/almaqasid.v5i2.2070>.

⁴ Muhammad Luqman Hakim Hakim and Mohamad Maulidin Alif Utama, "Ahlul Kitab In Islamic Perspective," JIQT: Journal of Qur'anic Science and Interpretation 1, no. 2 (December 27, 2022): 110–26, <https://doi.org/10.36769/jiqta.v1i2.287>.

⁵ Habieb Bullah, "Interpretation of the Meaning of the People of the Book in the View of the Qur'an," Journal Of Qur'anic Science And Tafsiri Nurul Islam Sumenep, no. Vol. 6 No. 1 (2021): Journal of Quranic Science and Tafsir (2021): 70–85, <https://ejournal.kopertais4.or.id/madura/index.php/alqorni/article/view/5433/3475>.

⁶ Nidaan Khafiyya Yusbar Yusbar and Dzulkifli Hadi Imawan, "The Relief Of Non-Muslim Purchasing: A Study Based On The Qur'an And Hadith," At-Thullab: Islamic Studies Student Journal 7, no. 1 (January 31, 2025): 70–87, <https://doi.org/10.20885/tullab.vol7.iss1.art5>.

Meaning: This day all good things are made lawful for you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful for you, and your food is lawful for them. (It is lawful for you to marry...

As time goes by, the term *Ahl al-Kitab* has shifted in meaning, particularly in contemporary life. Many Muslim communities use the term *Ahl al-Kitab* to refer to certain religious groups, such as Christianity and Catholicism. This data is used without reviewing the suitability of the meaning with the basis of the text of the Qur'an and the understanding of previous scholars. The use of this term is often done without considering whether the community is still within the pure line of faith as taught by the holy books they previously received.⁷

People of the Book are people who obey and follow the sacred books revealed to them, such as the Torah, Zabur, and Gospel, and recognize the divine origin of these texts. their commitment signifies a shared spiritual heritage rooted in divine revelation.⁸ In the Qur'an, the mention of the People of the Book is found in various contexts, both in terms of faith, social interactions, and certain laws relating to them.⁹ Meanwhile, other scholars such as Ibnu Qayyim Al-Jauziyyah argue that the status of the People of the Book also depends on the extent to which their teachings are still pure and do not deviate from monotheism.¹⁰

The problem of using the term *Ahl al-Kitab* still has differences among Islamic scholars. Some believe that *Ahl al-Kitab* are Jews and Christians who still adhere to their original teachings, while others extend the term to include other religions that have holy books and monotheistic teachings, such as the Sabians.¹¹ This requires a comprehensive, comprehensive explanation, utilizing the perspectives of several scholars. In response, researchers used two interpretations, Al-Azhar and Al-Manar, as guidelines for their interpretation.

The study of the meaning of People of the Book in the Qur'an has been the focus of attention for many researchers and academics, using both descriptive and comparative approaches. Several previous studies have shown that the interpretation of the term People of the Book is not a single concept, but rather depends heavily on the historical context, methodology, and socio-intellectual background of the interpreters referred to.

⁷ Hakim and Alif Utama, "The People Of The Book From An Islamic Perspective."

⁸ Luluk Khusnul Wahidah, Nina Nurrohmah, and Wahdah Farhati, "Food Given By The People Of The Book," *Al Muhafidz: Journal of Qur'anic Science and Interpretation* 3, no. 2 (September 4, 2023): 149–63, <https://doi.org/10.57163/almuhafidz.v3i2.80>.

⁹ Mujiburrahman Mujiburrahman, "People of the Book and the Political Context in Indonesia," *Jurnal Ushuluddin: Media for Dialogue of Islamic Thought* 20, no. 1 (2017): 104–120, <https://doi.org/10.24252/jumdpi.v20i1.2313>.

¹⁰ Muslim Djuned and Nazla Mufidah, "The Meaning Of The People Of The Book In The Tafsiri Of Al-Manar," *TAFSE: Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 1, no. 1 (June 30, 2017): 1, <https://doi.org/10.22373/tafse.v1i1.8065>.

¹¹ Heru Mustakim, "The Expert Of The Book According To Sayyid Quthb In The Interpretation Of Fi Zilal Al-Qur'an," *Prophetika: Journal of Islamic Studies* 17, no. 02 (October 3, 2017): 72–81, <https://doi.org/10.23917/profetika.v17i02.5299>.

One relevant study was conducted by Mahmud Rifanudin in his thesis, which discussed the concept of the People of the Book in the Tafsir Al-Manar by Muhammad Abduh and Muhammad Rasyid Ridha. This study focused on how the two figures understood the meaning, class, and status of the People of the Book in a religious and social context. Rifanudin revealed that both Muhammad Abduh and Rasyid Ridha had their own thoughts on the People of the Book. The similarities between this study and the research conducted by the author lie in the object of study and the interpretation approach. However, the author's research is broader because it involves two interpretations with different geographical backgrounds and intellectual orientations, namely the Tafsir Al-Manar and the Tafsir Al-Azhar, using a comparative analysis method.

Meanwhile, another study conducted by Muslim Djuned and Nayla Mufidah, published in a scientific article, also highlighted the meaning of the People of the Book in the Tafsir Al-Manar. They found that according to Rasyid Ridha, the term "People of the Book" encompasses not only Jews and Christians, but also Zoroastrians, Sabians, and pagans from India, China, and other regions. This interpretation is based on the view that all religions were originally based on the concept of monotheism.¹² This study has an intersection with the author's research in terms of interpretive references and main themes, but this research takes a further step by combining the interpretations of Al-Manar and Al-Azhar comparatively in order to obtain a broader and more balanced picture.

Another study that deserves careful consideration is the work of Arif Firdausi Nur Ramadhan, who examines the People of the Book in the Tafsir Al-Azhar by Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (Hamka). Ramadhan points out that the People of the Book in this commentary encompasses various groups who have received revelations and books, including Jews, Christians, Sabians, and Zoroastrians. This commentary also emphasizes that their salvation is guaranteed by God, provided they have sincere faith. Furthermore, the Tafsir Al-Azhar provides a critical view of the behavior of some of the People of the Book who deny and deviate.¹³ This research has similarities in terms of sources of interpretation, but the author's research goes beyond a single approach and examines the comparison with Tafsir Al-Manar to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning of the People of the Book.

In the context of a comparative approach, Muflihun's research entitled *The Meaning of Ahl al-Kitab in the Perspective of the Qur'an (A Comparative Study of the Tafsir Al-Manar and Tafsir Al-Misbah)* serves as an important reference. Muflihun compares the views of Rasyid Ridha with Quraish Shihab in interpreting the People of the Book. He found that if Ridha is more

¹² Djuned and Mufidah, "The Meaning Of Scriptural Experts in the Interpretation of Al-Manar."

¹³ Arif Firdausi Nur Romadlon, "Interpretation of the People of the Book in Al-Azhar Tafsir," *Al Karima: Journal of Quranic Studies and Tafsir* 1, no. 1 (April 18, 2018): 83, <https://doi.org/10.58438/alkarima.v1i1.67>.

inclusive, then Quraish Shihab limits the meaning of the People of the Book only to the Jewish and Christian groups as mentioned in the Qur'an. This research shows the dynamics of interpretation and the diversity of approaches in understanding the term People of the Book. However, the author's research offers a new nuance by comparing two interpretations from different geographical and cultural backgrounds: the Tafsir Al-Manar from the Middle East and the Tafsir Al-Azhar from Southeast Asia, both of which lived in the era of Islamic modernism.

Equally important, Muhammad Daffa's thesis also contributes to this discourse. In his research, he explored Rasyid Ridha's thoughts in Tafsir Al-Manar and found that the People of the Book encompassed various groups with books and prophets, including major religions other than Judaism and Christianity. Ridha even distinguished them from the Arab polytheists who lacked books and prophets, and permitted social interactions such as marriage and the consumption of food within the People of the Book.¹⁴ This research is descriptive and in-depth on one source of interpretation, while the author's research combines descriptive and comparative approaches which highlight two major types of interpretation simultaneously.

From this diverse literature, it can be concluded that although numerous studies have been conducted on the People of the Book from an exegetical perspective, the majority still focus on a single type of interpretation or comparisons within the same geographical context. This study aims to add new color to the body of knowledge by comparing two interpretations from two different contexts, both born in the spirit of Islamic modernism. With this approach, it is hoped that the meaning of the People of the Book can be understood more contextually, comprehensively, and relevantly to the discourse of diversity and interfaith dialogue in the contemporary era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term "People of the Book" (Ahl al-Kitab) is a significant conceptual category in the discourse of the Qur'an which has historical, theological and sociological dimensions.¹⁵ Literally, the word "ahl" in Arabic means "family" or "owner," while "kitab" refers to the holy book, namely God's revelation that was revealed in written form. Therefore, etymologically, the term Ahl al-Kitab can be understood as "owners of the holy book." Within the framework of Qur'anic discourse, this term is usually directed to Jews and Christians, who historically received divine revelation through the Torah revealed to Prophet Moses, and the Gospel revealed to Prophet Jesus. In some interpretations, including those of classical and modern commentators, the People of the

¹⁴ Muhammad Daffa, "Expert of the Book in the Al-Quran (Perspective of Muhammad Rasyid Ridha in Tafsir Al-Manar)" (PTIQ JAKARTA INSTITUTE, 2922).

¹⁵ Arif Firdausi and Nur Romadlon, "Interpretation of Ahl Al-Kitab in Tafsir Al-Azhar," *Al Karima* 1, no. 1 (2017): 48–59, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.56832/edu.v5i1.758>.

Book can also include the Sabiin group mentioned in several verses (QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:62 and QS. Al-Hajj [22]:17).

Theologically, the mention of the People of the Book in the Qur'an encompasses a very broad spectrum of evaluations, ranging from praise to harsh rebukes. For example, in Surah Al-Baqarah [2]:62, Allah states that those People of the Book who truly believe and do good deeds will receive a reward from Him, indicating the possibility of salvation for them if they adhere to the principles of pure faith.¹⁶ However, on the other hand, in QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:75 and QS. An-Nisa' [4]:46, the Qur'an also criticizes the People of the Book for distorting their holy books, hiding the truth, and even twisting revelation with their tongues. This criticism is not comprehensive of all individuals in the group, but rather directed at the deviant behavior of some of them.

This difference in the way of mentioning shows that the Qur'an does not generalize the People of the Book as a group that is completely misguided or, conversely, completely correct.¹⁷ On the contrary, the Qur'an is proportional and fair, recognizing that among them are honest, just, and pious people, as mentioned in QS. Ali Imran [3]:113-115. This verse gives appreciation to some of the People of the Book who read the verses of Allah at night and prostrate themselves in worship, indicating that this group is not monolithic and can be spiritual partners in the values of monotheism and humanity.

Understanding the meaning of the People of the Book is also crucial in addressing contemporary challenges. In a multicultural and pluralistic society, interfaith relations are a crucial aspect in building social cohesion and world peace.¹⁸ When the Quran refers to the People of the Book by various characteristics, it is actually guiding Muslims to be wise, proportional, and prudent in assessing other religious communities. This attitude aligns with the principle of Islam as a mercy for all the worlds, which builds relationships not on hostility but on justice and compassion. This study will focus on just a few verses, namely Surah Al-Baqarah and Surah Ali Imran, to focus the discussion and make it unique compared to other similar studies.

¹⁶ Salehuddin Mattawang, Achmad Abubakar, and Muhsin Mahfudz, "Relevance and Significance of Methodology (Book: Ahl Al-Kitab, Its Meaning and Scope in the Qur'an by Muhammad Galib M)," *Risalah Journal of Islamic Education and Studies* 8, no. 4 SE-Articles (November 25, 2022): 1237–48, https://doi.org/10.31943/jurnal_risalah.v8i4.349.

¹⁷ Andi Eka Putra, "The Concept of Ahlul Al-Kitab in the Qur'an According to the Interpretation of Muhammed Arkoun and Nurcholish Madjid (A Comparative Study)," *Al-Dzikra* X, no. 1 (2016): 44–65, <http://ejournal.radenintan.ac.id/index.php/al-dzikra/article/view/1821/1493>.

¹⁸ Muhammad Luqman Hakim Hakim and Mohamad Maulidin Alif Utama, "People of the Book in Islamic Perspective," *JIQTA: Journal of Qur'anic Science and Interpretation* 1, no. 2 (2022): 110–26, <https://doi.org/10.36769/jiqta.v1i2.287>.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a qualitative study based on library research that focuses on the analysis of the texts of the interpretation of the Qur'an. The approach used is the thematic-comparative interpretation approach (*muqāran*), namely comparing the interpretations of two modern commentators on the same theme to find similarities, differences, and conceptual implications. The material objects of this research are the verses of the Qur'an that discuss the concept of the People of the Book, with a focus on QS. Al-Baqarah and QS. Al-Ma'idah, especially verses related to the theological attitudes and social relations between Muslims and the People of the Book. The formal object of this research is the interpretation of Muhammad Rasyid Ridha in *Tafsir Al-Manar* and Buya Hamka in *Tafsir Al-Azhar* on these verses. The data sources of this research consist of primary data and secondary data. Primary data includes the main works of interpretation, namely *Tafsir Al-Manar* by Muhammad Rasyid Ridha and *Tafsir Al-Azhar* by Buya Hamka. Meanwhile, secondary data includes books, scientific journal articles, theses, and previous research relevant to the theme of the People of the Book, the *muqāran* method of interpretation, and studies on modern interpretation. Data collection techniques were carried out through documentation, namely by inventorying, critically reading, and noting parts of the interpretations related to the concept of the People of the Book in both interpretations. The collected data were then classified based on the theme, context of the verses, and the interpretive tendencies of each interpreter.¹⁹

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The meaning of the People of the Book in *Tafsir Al-Manar* and *Tafsir Al-Azhar* (Study of Surah Al-Baqarah and Al-Ma'idah)

The Qur'an explicitly mentions the People of the Book in numerous surahs, including two crucial chapters in shaping theological and social relations between Muslims and earlier religious groups: Surah Al-Baqarah and Surah Al-Ma'idah. In these two chapters, the People of the Book receive special attention as a group with a history of prophethood, revelation, and divine laws, but they are also criticized for their deviation, arrogance, and manipulation of God's teachings. The interpretations of Al-Manar and Al-Azhar present distinctive approaches to understanding this meaning, both from a scholarly perspective, historical context, and social implications.

1. Interpretation of Al-Manar's Tafsir of the People of the Book in Surah Al-Baqarah

In Surah Al-Baqarah, the People of the Book are mentioned a lot in the historical context of the Children of Israel, namely the people who accepted the Torah and prophethood. QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:75 for example states:

¹⁹ Sumarno Sumarno, "Content Analysis in Language and Literature Learning Research," *Lingua Sastra Education* 18, no. 2 (September 29, 2020): 36–55, <https://doi.org/10.47637/elsa.v18i2.299>.

"Do you still hope that they will believe in you, when in fact a group of them heard the word of Allah, then they changed it after they understood it, while they knew?"

Rasyid Ridha in Tafsir Al-Manar explains that this verse is a form of disappointment with the attitude of some of the People of the Book, especially the scholars of the Children of Israel, who have consciously changed Allah's revelation for personal or group interests.²⁰ In the Al-Manar interpretation, it is explained that initially it was hoped that the Jews, as adherents of monotheism who believed in the revelation and resurrection of the Prophet Jesus, would convert to Islam in droves, but then they themselves actually twisted the teachings of monotheism by changing the verses in their book according to their desires or wishes.²¹

Furthermore, in QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:120 which states that "The Jews and Christians will not be pleased with you until you follow their religion", Ridha interprets this verse as a warning against the pressure of ideological and social assimilation from the People of the Book on Muslims.²² However, he argues, the command to adhere to God's guidance does not mean rejecting all forms of dialogue or social interaction. This interpretation emphasizes the importance of maintaining one's faith identity, but does not sever human ties with other communities. This interpretation explains the similarities between the People of the Book and the polytheists: they both deny and oppose the truth. In the Al-Manar commentary, Jews and Christians are mentioned as being expected to convert to Islam, but due to their stubbornness, opposition, and denial, they ultimately cannot accept the truth of Islam.²³ Jews and Christians, although they started from the same path of monotheism, are too fanatical about their own religion that they cannot accept things other than what they believe.

Ridha also views the criticism of the People of the Book in Surah Al-Baqarah as part of a corrective narrative, not an act of hatred. He emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between the truth of the prophets' teachings and the errors committed by their followers. Therefore, Al-Manar's commentary encourages its readers to be fair and avoid falling into negative fanaticism toward other religious groups.

2. Al-Azhar's interpretation of the People of the Book in Surah Al-Baqarah

²⁰ Mahmud Rifaannudin and Syamsul Hadi Untung, "Social Relations Between the People of the Book and Muslims (A Study of the Book of Tafsir Al-Mannâr by Muhammad Rasyid Ridha)," *Studia Quranika* 4, no. 1 (August 17, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.21111/studiquran.v4i1.3253>.

²¹ Muhammad Abduh and Rasyid Ridla, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Juz 1 (Cairo: Dar al-Manar, 1947), 354.

²² Naila Parah, "The Concept Of Ahl Al-Kitab According To Rasyid Ridha's Thoughts In The Tafsirs Of Al-Manar," *Rausyan Fikr: Journal of Ushuluddin and Philosophy Studies* 12, no. 2 (February 5, 2018): 221–49, <https://doi.org/10.24239/rsy.v12i2.83>.

²³ Muhammad Abduh and Rasyid Ridla, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Juz 1, 443.

Buya Hamka, in his Tafsir Al-Azhar, provides a rich and contextual explanation of the verses about the People of the Book in Surah Al-Baqarah. In his interpretation of Surah Al-Baqarah [2]:75, Hamka highlights the behavior of the Jews who had received revelation but still deviated. He describes their actions as a form of betrayal of the prophetic mandate. However, Hamka also emphasizes that not all of them behaved in this way. Carrying out da'wah to the Jews is an obligation. However, it should be noted that one should not expect the people to convert to Islam as a whole. Hamka reiterates that although based on a similar foundation of monotheism, there are characteristics and factors that prevent the Jews from converting to Islam, one of which is their basic dishonesty.²⁴ According to Hamka, from the beginning, the Jews had a bad habit of changing and interpreting their own books or violating the original books even though they knew about it or did this consciously.

In interpreting QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:120, Hamka uses a sociological and cultural approach. He explains that the statement "they will not be pleased" does not mean that all Jews and Christians will be hostile to Islam, but that there is indeed an element of ideological power and religious mission that sometimes pressures Muslims to abandon their authenticity. According to Hamka, the Jews and Christians want the Prophet Muhammad to be on their side, meaning to be part of the Jewish and Christian community. However, the religion brought by the Prophet Muhammad SAW is Islam, so they are not pleased with that. In fact, the teachings and guidance of the Prophet are true and if the Jews and Christians still hold fast to the original guidance of Allah, they will automatically adapt and convert to Islam. However, Hamka strongly emphasizes the importance of living side by side peacefully and upholding the value of justice.²⁵ For Hamka, Muslims must be firm in their beliefs, but gentle in social interactions.

He also added that there are many lessons to be learned from the history of the Children of Israel's deviations for Muslims themselves, preventing them from repeating the same mistakes, such as sectarian fanaticism, manipulation of religion for power, and denial of truth out of arrogance. Therefore, Al-Azhar's interpretation not only defines the People of the Book as an outside group, but also as a mirror for introspection for Muslims.

3. Interpretation of Al-Manar's Tafsir of the People of the Book in Surah Al-Ma'idah

In Surah Al-Ma'idah, the People of the Book are mentioned in several important contexts, including regarding the permissibility of eating their food and marrying their women (QS. Al-Ma'idah [5]:5). Surah al-Mā'idah verse 5 provides takhṣīṣ (narrowing of the

²⁴ Hamka, Tafsir Al-Azhar Juz 1 (Jakarta: Pustaka Panji Mas, 1982), 226.

²⁵ Hamdi Al-Haq and Ihwan Amalih, "Social Justice In The Qur'an (Review Of Buya Hamka's Interpretation In Al-Azhār's Tafsir)," *El-Waroqoh: Jurnal Ushuluddin Dan Filsafat* 5, no. 2 (December 18, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.28944/el-warqoh.v5i2.315>.

meaning) of the prohibition in al-Baqarah 221, so that the People of the Book are not classified as polytheists and are allowed to marry. According to Rasyid Ridha, the term *ahl al-kitāb* does not only refer to Jews and Christians, but includes 'all religions and beliefs that have holy books. This verse contains many dimensions of explanation, Rasyid Ridha explained that at the beginning of the verse there is an explanation regarding the perfection of the teachings of the Islamic religion, but for relevance and ease in religion there are hadith and opinions of ulama. Then regarding the concept of good and bad, according to Rasyid Ridha, initially everything (aside from worship) was halal until a verse was revealed that forbade it. However, humans tend to go beyond their limits, which can endanger them. So that Allah SWT explains what is halal (good) and haram (bad).²⁶

According to Rasyid Ridha, food or offerings offered by the People of the Book are permissible, as they are not polytheists who slaughter animals in the name of their idols. Furthermore, the true People of the Book adhere to the same monotheistic principles as Islam. Likewise, the law of marrying a woman from the People of the Book is permissible. The actions of those who indulge in changing their holy book are not related to this verse, as the Quran and Hadith do not explicitly prohibit such food or marriage to the People of the Book. Ridha rejects the exclusive approach that forbids all relationships with non-Muslims, as long as they do not conflict with the principles of Islamic faith and ethics.

However, in QS. Al-Ma'idah [5]:13, which states that "they like to change the words (of Allah) from their places...", Ridha emphasized that this refers to the religious elite who have power and manipulate religious teachings for worldly interests. In this case, Ridha provides strong criticism, but still distinguishes between the original teachings of the holy book and the behavior of religious leaders who abuse it.

4. Al-Azhar's interpretation of the People of the Book in Surah Al-Ma'idah

In Tafsir Al-Azhar, Hamka interprets QS. Al-Ma'idah [5]:5 with a spirit of tolerance and humanity. He explains that Islam permits marriage and the consumption of food from the People of the Book because of the shared foundation of monotheism.²⁷ However, Hamka reminded that such marriages must still consider the social context, such as the potential impact on the household and the education of children. According to Hamka, this verse also indicates human nature, known as *Iltizam*, which means that if something is explained as forbidden, humans will ask which ones are permissible. This verse explains that what is forbidden by Allah is that which is not good or *Rijsun*. This includes things that are dirty,

²⁶ Muhammad Abduh and Rasyid Ridla, Tafsir Al-Manar, Juz 1, 168.

²⁷ Meliyani Sidiqah, "Women of the People of the Book and the Law of Marriage in Indonesia," USM LAW REVIEW JOURNAL 6, no. 3 (December 4, 2023): 1150–69, <https://doi.org/10.26623/julr.v6i3.7823>.

vile, and not in accordance with the concept of humanity. Meanwhile, the permissible food that is considered good is Bahimatul an'am, namely livestock (except those that are clearly forbidden). In addition, there are also forest or wild animals as long as they are not ferocious. Regarding slaughtering by the People of the Book, Hamka explained that the law is halal.²⁸ Reciting Bismillah (the word "bismillah") when slaughtering an animal is said to be a khilafiyah (religious practice). Hamka stated that marriage is permissible, but not recommended due to the frequent deviation from the faith and apostasy. In his further explanation, Hamka advised that every Muslim should cultivate a spirit of tasamuh (compassion), or tolerance, regarding this permissibility.

Regarding QS. Al-Ma'idah [5]:13, Hamka emphasized the importance of honesty and trustworthiness in conveying religion. He highlighted that the deviation of the People of the Book occurred because they prioritized power and worldly interests over truth. Hamka divided the interpretation of this verse into two parts, the first concerning the conditions of promises and the second, namely breaking promises. This study will focus on the breaking of promises which, according to Hamka, is associated with the breaking of promises by the Children of Israel to Allah SWT. They promised to obey the five promises and Allah SWT responded with the promise that they would always be with them, their evil would be protected and the blessings of Paradise would be granted. However, suddenly they broke this promise themselves even though they still claimed to adhere to the teachings of the Prophet Moses. In fact, according to Hamka, they changed the sentences or texts of their books so that they could follow their lusts. And this happened not only to Jews, but also Christians and Nasrani who had changed their books, namely the Gospel, Torah and Psalms. This change then gave rise to hostility and disputes between them and according to the Qur'an as explained by Hamka, this will continue to happen until the Day of Judgment as long as they do not return to the original teachings that have not been changed.

This interpretation is not merely a critique of outside groups, but a stern warning to anyone, including Muslims themselves, who could potentially betray the religious mandate. Hamka also interprets these verses by emphasizing the spirit of Islamic inclusivity, which respects differences while remaining steadfast in principle. He views the People of the Book as social and spiritual partners who can collaborate in creating a just and civilized society, not as absolute enemies.

²⁸ Hamka, Tafsir Al-Azhar Juz 1, 1630.

Comparison of the interpretations of Tafsir Al-Manar and Tafsir Al-Azhar regarding the meaning of the People of the Book in the QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:75 and QS. Al-Ma'idah [5]:5

The meaning of the People of the Book in the Qur'an is a serious concern in the study of interpretation because it concerns the historical and theological position of the Jewish and Christian communities in Islamic discourse. Two verses that are quite representative in framing this meaning are QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:75 and QS. Al-Ma'idah [5]:5. Each highlights a different but complementary aspect: the first verse emphasizes the People of the Book's deviation from revelation, while the second verse highlights a more inclusive socio-religious dimension. The interpretations of Al-Manar and Al-Azhar, two modernist exegetical works from different social and geographical backgrounds, present a unique and influential approach in understanding the meaning of the People of the Book contextually.

Tafsir Al-Manar defines the People of the Book as a religious elite—such as the monks and jurists of the Children of Israel who abused their religious authority. Rasyid Ridha emphasizes that the meaning of the People of the Book here is limited to those who deviated, not the entire Jewish or Christian community. From this perspective, the People of the Book are a group that held a historically important position, but some of them have distorted divine teachings for worldly gain.

Al-Azhar's interpretation of the term *Ahl al-Kitab* takes a more moral and characterological perspective. Hamka interprets them as a group with the potential to deviate due to the dominance of lust, arrogance, and political interests. The term "*Ahlu Kitab*" here encompasses individuals who lose moral integrity in carrying out the mandate of revelation, despite still being recognized as the recipients of the book. Hamka also emphasized that this deviation should serve as a warning to Muslims against similar behavior.

"Do you still hope that they will believe in you, when in fact a group of them heard the word of Allah, then they changed it after they understood it, while they knew?"

In Tafsir Al-Manar, Muhammad Rasyid Ridha interprets this verse as a criticism of a handful of elite People of the Book, especially monks and jurists (*ulama*) from the Bani Israel, who deliberately distorted the meaning of revelation after understanding it for political and power interests. Ridha emphasizes that the target of this verse's criticism is not the entire Jewish or Christian community, but rather certain individuals who abuse religious authority. According to Ridha, this verse also serves as a warning to Muslims not to repeat similar mistakes, namely manipulating religious teachings for worldly interests. Thus, Ridha's interpretation is corrective and pedagogical, not a discriminatory generalization.²⁹

²⁹ Muhammad Abduh and Rasyid Ridha, Tafsir Al-Manar, Juz 1, 294.

In contrast, Buya Hamka's Tafsir Al-Azhar places a broader emphasis on the moral and personal dimensions of the People of the Book, as reflected in their attitudes toward revelation. Hamka stated that changing God's word is not only a form of intellectual denial but also moral corruption. He believes this deviation stems from lust, arrogance, and political dominance in the religious life of the People of the Book. However, like Ridha, Hamka does not generalize all People of the Book. He maintains that there are honest and just groups among them.

The differences in approach are evident in their respective interpretations. Ridha, with his background in modern Islamic rationalism and spirit of religious reform, emphasizes systemic criticism of religious institutions. Meanwhile, Hamka, with his down-to-earth and cultural approach, emphasizes morality and humanity as the root of deviations from revelation. Both agree that the People of the Book are not a single, homogeneous entity, but rather diverse, and should be judged based on their actions, not merely their identity.

"On this day it is permissible for those of you who are good. The food (sacrifice) of the People of the Book is halal for you, and the food is halal (also) for them. (And it is permissible to marry) women who maintain honor among believing women and women who maintain honor among the People of the Book before you..."

This verse permits two important forms of interaction with the People of the Book: consuming their food and marrying their women. The Al-Manar commentary views this as a concrete form of social interaction that is possible between religious communities, as long as the boundaries of faith are maintained. Rasyid Ridha explains that this verse demonstrates a spiritual and cultural meeting point between Islam and the previous monotheistic religions. He even considers this type of interaction to be a form of trust and respect for humanity, not a threat to faith. However, Ridha continues to warn of the potential negative impacts of interfaith marriage, making it important to consider the spiritual sustainability and education of children.

Meanwhile, Tafsir Al-Azhar also emphasized the aspect of tolerance in this verse. Buya Hamka explained that food and women from the People of the Book are permissible because they still adhere to the recognized tradition of monotheism. However, he also issued a firm warning that this tolerance does not mean a mixture of beliefs. Hamka believes that marriage to a woman from the People of the Book, although permissible, can pose significant challenges in the household and in the education of children, especially in a Muslim-majority society like Indonesia. Therefore, he emphasized the aspect of wisdom in implementing this law in social practice.

A comparison of the two shows that both Al-Manar and Al-Azhar view this verse as a manifestation of Islam's openness to other religious communities. However, Ridha prioritizes rational and universal principles in interfaith relations, while Hamka focuses more on the social and moral integrity of Muslim communities. Ridha views this verse within the framework of

building peace and civilization, while Hamka emphasizes that this principle should not be misused and should maintain family harmony and Islamic identity.

Both interpretations reject exclusive views of the People of the Book and avoid overgeneralization. Both acknowledge the diversity of attitudes and moral qualities among the People of the Book and encourage fairness, openness, and critical thinking. Both also consider social interaction with the People of the Book permissible, even encouraged under certain circumstances, while maintaining the principles of Islamic faith and morality.

The striking differences lie in their ideological backgrounds and interpretive approaches. The Al-Manar interpretation arose from the spirit of Islamic renewal and Arab modernism, thus tending toward a philosophical, rational, and reformist perspective. Meanwhile, the Al-Azhar interpretation is rooted in the pluralistic and peaceful cultural experience of Indonesian Islam, making it more contextual, moderate, and down-to-earth. These differences are not contradictory, but rather complementary. The Al-Manar interpretation helps Muslims understand the universal and rational context of the Qur'anic teachings about the People of the Book, while the Al-Azhar interpretation provides practical guidance for applying them in a culturally and socially pluralistic Muslim society. There is no standard recipe for presenting research findings. Therefore, we will first consider general guidelines and then turn our attention to options for reporting descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing results.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the concept of Ahl al-Kitab in Tafsir Al-Manar and Tafsir Al-Azhar cannot be reduced to a monolithic theological category. Through their interpretations of Qur'an 2:75 and Qur'an 5:5, both Muhammad Rasyid Ridha and Buya Hamka distinguish between the historical-religious identity of Ahl al-Kitab and the moral conduct of particular groups or individuals within these communities. Consequently, Qur'anic criticism of distortion, denial, or misuse of revelation is not interpreted as a justification for indiscriminate judgment of all Jews and Christians, but as a corrective evaluation of specific attitudes and actions.

In interpreting Qur'an 2:75, Al-Manar emphasizes the misuse of religious authority by particular religious elites who consciously distort revelation for political, social, or worldly interests. Ridha's interpretation therefore reflects his rational-reformist orientation and concern with institutional religious corruption. Al-Azhar, meanwhile, gives greater attention to the moral roots of such deviation, including dishonesty, arrogance, desire, and the instrumentalization of religion. Despite these different emphases, both interpretations transform the verse into a broader ethical warning for Muslims themselves not to repeat similar forms of religious manipulation.

The interpretation of Qur'an 5:5 reveals another important dimension of the two commentaries. Both Ridha and Hamka understand the permissibility of consuming the food of Ahl al-Kitab and marrying their women as evidence that Islam recognizes possibilities for meaningful social relations across religious boundaries. Al-Manar places stronger emphasis on the rational and universal dimensions of interreligious interaction and regards such relations as compatible with peaceful social coexistence. Al-Azhar similarly acknowledges this openness but places greater emphasis on prudence, household stability, the religious education of children, and the preservation of Muslim identity.

The comparison therefore reveals that the differences between the two commentaries are primarily differences of interpretive emphasis rather than fundamental contradiction. Al-Manar, shaped by the intellectual climate of Arab Islamic reformism, tends to approach Ahl al-Kitab through rational, reformist, and institutional analysis. Al-Azhar, emerging from the socio-cultural experience of Indonesian Islam, offers a more culturally contextual, moral, and socially pragmatic interpretation. These distinct perspectives complement one another by combining universal principles of interreligious openness with sensitivity to concrete social consequences.

Overall, this study affirms that a contextual understanding of Ahl al-Kitab requires a balanced approach that simultaneously preserves theological principles, rejects unjust generalization, and recognizes the possibility of constructive social relations. The comparative reading of Al-Manar and Al-Azhar provides an interpretive foundation for developing religious attitudes characterized by firmness in faith, fairness in judgment, and openness in social interaction. Nevertheless, because this research is limited to selected verses and two modern commentaries, further studies should expand the comparison to other verses, exegetical traditions, and contemporary contexts in order to assess more comprehensively the development of Ahl al-Kitab discourse in modern Qur'anic interpretation.

Research Novelty

The novelty of this study lies in its comparative examination of Ahl al-Kitab through two modern Qur'anic commentaries originating from different geographical, intellectual, and socio-cultural environments. Previous studies have frequently examined Tafsir Al-Manar or Tafsir Al-Azhar independently, or compared Al-Manar with other contemporary commentaries. This study instead places Muhammad Rasyid Ridha and Buya Hamka within a direct thematic-comparative framework, thereby revealing how Arab reformist modernism and Indonesian contextual Islamic thought produce distinctive yet complementary interpretations of the same Qur'anic category.

A further contribution lies in the study's focused comparison of two different dimensions of Ahl al-Kitab discourse represented by Qur'an 2:75 and Qur'an 5:5. The first verse exposes

questions of revelation, religious authority, and moral deviation, whereas the second addresses social openness and practical interreligious relations. Reading these verses together enables the study to demonstrate that both commentaries construct a multidimensional understanding of Ahl al-Kitab: theological criticism does not necessarily eliminate social recognition, while social openness does not require the dissolution of theological boundaries. This provides a more nuanced interpretive framework than approaches that position Qur'anic discourse on Ahl al-Kitab solely within categories of either exclusivism or inclusivism.

The study also contributes to contemporary Qur'anic studies by showing how interpretive background influences the practical orientation of exegesis. Ridha's rational-reformist framework produces stronger emphasis on religious institutions, authority, and universal principles of social interaction, whereas Hamka's Indonesian socio-cultural setting generates greater attention to morality, social harmony, family considerations, and contextual prudence. The resulting comparative framework demonstrates that modern tafsir can remain faithful to Qur'anic theological boundaries while simultaneously providing resources for justice, tolerance, and constructive interreligious engagement in plural societies.

Research Implications

Theoretically, the findings imply that studies of Ahl al-Kitab should avoid treating Qur'anic references to these communities as uniform or detached from their textual and historical contexts. The interpretations of Al-Manar and Al-Azhar demonstrate the importance of distinguishing between religious identity, particular moral conduct, and specific forms of Qur'anic criticism. This distinction provides a more precise framework for contemporary tafsir studies and helps prevent interpretations that generalize particular criticisms into absolute judgments toward entire religious communities.

In the context of religious education and interfaith discourse, the findings imply that Qur'anic teachings concerning Ahl al-Kitab can support an approach combining theological commitment with social justice and respectful coexistence. Students and religious communities should be encouraged to understand that firmness in Islamic belief does not necessarily require social hostility, while tolerance does not require theological relativism. The complementary perspectives of Ridha and Hamka may therefore be used to develop religious literacy that is critical toward theological differences yet proportional, ethical, and fair in assessing followers of other religions.

Practically, the findings are particularly relevant to Indonesia as a religiously plural society. Hamka's contextual sensitivity, complemented by Ridha's rational-reformist approach, offers an interpretive basis for strengthening interreligious dialogue, social cooperation, and

peaceful coexistence while maintaining Islamic theological principles. Such an approach may inform Islamic educational materials, religious preaching, and interfaith engagement by emphasizing justice, avoidance of sweeping generalizations, respect for social relations, and critical awareness of religious manipulation. In this way, comparative tafsir can contribute not merely to exegetical scholarship but also to the development of mature and responsible religious attitudes in plural social environments.

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