

Differing Responses to an Ahmadi Translation and Exegesis. The Holy Qur'ân in Egypt and Indonesia

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Résumé

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Cet article analyse la controverse suscitée dans les années 1920 par la publication d'une traduction et exégèse du Coran en anglais. En Indonésie et au Caire, les arguments avancés concernaient les positions supposées hérétiques de l'auteur de cette traduction, le leader de la confrérie Ahmadiyya, Muhammad Ali, ainsi que le principe même de traductibilité du Livre révélé. L'auteur explore le débat par référence au contexte indonésien, où le leader nationaliste Tjokroaminoto préparait une version indonésienne de l'ouvrage de Muhammad Ali, et à celui du Caire, où l'opposition au mouvement Ahmadiyyah était exprimée avec force par le leader réformiste Rashid Rida. De cette manière sont mis en valeur à la fois les liens qui reliaient deux régions éloignées du monde islamique et leurs dissensions par rapport au texte même qui les unissait en tant que croyants.

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Differing Responses to an Ahmadi Translation and Exegesis

The Holy Qur'ân in Egypt and Indonesia *

There were two main external channels of Islamic reform in Indonesia between the 1920s and the 1960s. The first was the Egyptian link transmitted by those who had studied in the Hijaz and Cairo, and by the circulation of *al-Manâr*, an Egyptian journal chaired by Muhammad Rashîd Ridâ (1865-1936) under the inspiration of his late master Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849–1905).⁽¹⁾ *Al-Manâr* was reasonably well circulated in Indonesia, being allegedly smuggled in through the port of Tuban in East-Java where there was no customs supervision. Otherwise personal copies obtained by students returning from al-Azhar and Mecca, or by the “hajis” returning from the pilgrimage, were to be found (see Bluhm-Warn 1997 : 297 ; Ali 1964 : 9).⁽²⁾ Although its readership was confined largely to those who knew Arabic, ‘Abduh's ideas of Islamic reform were translated into Malay and featured in Southeast Asian periodicals like *al-Imam* (Singapore, 1906–08) and *al-Munir* (Padang, 1911–19).

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1. On Ridâ's biography and *al-Manâr*, see Ende 1995 : 446 ; al-Sharabasi 1970 ; and al-Marrakûshî 1985. For a study of both Ridâ and ‘Abduh, see Hourani 1962 : 130ff.

2. On the wider impact of the pilgrimage, see Snouck Hurgronje 1909 and Vredembregt 1962.

The second, and later, link of Islamic reform was the Indian (Indo-Pakistani) link introduced into Indonesia, then the Netherlands Indies, by missionaries from the Lahore-based Ahmadiyyah movement, and by the circulation of the works of other non-Ahmadi reformers, such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), Ameer Ali (1849-1928), and Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938). The Lahori Ahmadiyyah, which attracted a number of Indonesian intellectuals, promulgated the ideas of Muhammad Ali (1874-1951) and Khwajah Kamal-ud-Din (d. 1935) (see below) by spreading their works in English, Dutch, Indonesian and Javanese versions. This paper is concerned with the proposed translation of Muhammad Ali's English exegesis of the Qur'ân by the leader of Sarekat Islam Hadji Oesman Said Tjokroaminoto (1882-1935).

In the mid-1920s, both the Egyptian and Indian strands of Islamic reformism were represented in Indonesia's religious organizations. The Egyptian link was embodied by such organizations as al-Irsyad, Persatuan Islam (PERSIS), and Muhammadiyah.⁽³⁾ The Indian form came to be taken up in the 1920s by the leadership of Sarekat Islam, Jong Islamieten Bond (JIB), and Studenten Islam Studieclub (SIS). Although both strands shared the same ideals for Islamic reform in principle, they were soon divided over the doctrinal soundness of Ahmadi scholarship. Hence when Tjokroaminoto's project to translate an Ahmadi exegesis became known, it was opposed strongly by the Egyptian-oriented reformist organizations led by Muhammadiyah, despite its leaders having previously given Tjokroaminoto a green light to proceed (see below). The initial uncertainty is also reflected in a request for a legal opinion (*fatwâ*) sent to Rashîd Ridâ by his former student Shaykh Muhammad Basyuni Imran (1893-1981), the *Maharaja Imam* of the Sultanate of Sambas, West Borneo.

The present article thus focuses on the response of the Sunnite (non-Ahmadi) reformers to Muhammad Ali's book with Rashîd Ridâ's *fatwâ* as an entry point. Some important questions shall be dealt with here, namely : Why did the translation of the Qur'ân remain a sensitive issue for Muslims, even until comparatively recent times ? How did Rashîd Ridâ view the problem, especially in his *fatwâ* on Muhammad Ali's translation (and commentary) which he formulated in response to a question from Indonesia ? What were the debates on translation of the Qur'ân in Egypt and Indonesia ?

3. On the influence of the Egyptian reform on their leaders, respectively Shaykh Ahmad Soorkattie, A. Hassan, and K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, see Noer 1973 : 64, 76, 87.

The Issues of Translating the Qur'ân

Debates regarding the possibility of translating the Qur'ân into other languages emerge from both theological and literary considerations. These considerations have their roots in the Qur'ânic text itself which states that the Qur'ân is the "Word of God" (9 : 6) revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by Gabriel, the "Trusted Spirit" (26 : 192-94). It also says that it was revealed as an "Arabic Qur'ân" (12 : 2, 20 : 113, 39 : 28, 41 : 3, 43 : 3), and in a "clear Arabic tongue" (16 : 103, 26 : 195). Moreover, the Qur'ân declares itself to be unique and inimitable (2 : 23-24, 17 : 88). Indeed, the theory of the inimitability of the Qur'ân (*I'jâz al-Qur'ân*) maintains that this holy book is unsurpassable; not only in its composition and style, but also in its meaning and content. Islamic orthodoxy thus maintains that its translation is not possible and indeed forbidden, even into other "Islamic" languages (Poonawala 1991 : 198).⁽⁴⁾

Debates concerning the translatability of the Qur'ân were clearly evident in Indonesia in 1909, when the Dutch-allied Muftî of Batavia composed a pamphlet on the subject as a response to a proposed Javanese translation (°Uthmân 1909). And in the 1920s, intense interest was focussed on moves in Turkey, where Atatürk's government had established a committee to translate the Qur'ân into Turkish. In Cairo this effort was conceived as an effort to create a Turkish Qur'ân although the debate was overshadowed, in 1925, by the controversial attempt to circulate Muhammad Ali's English version – *The Holy Qur'an* – throughout Egypt. In that year, the Egyptian Customs Office asked the Professoriate (*Mashaykhah*) of al-Azhar – then under Abû al-Fadl al-Jîzâwî (d. 1346) – whether it was permissible to circulate Qur'âns accompanied by Muhammad Ali's translation.⁽⁵⁾ The *Mashaykhah* then published a *fatwâ* prohibiting its circulation, and urged that the book should be seized, and further that Muslims should burn it wherever they found it. This led to a debate at the modern college Dâr al-°Ulûm, during which al-Jîzâwî quoted a Prophetic tradition that it was not allowed to travel with a copy of the Qur'ân to non-Muslim lands (*dâr al-harb*), lest it fall into the hands of unbelievers. Further, by translating the Qur'ân into other languages, unbelievers might be able to touch the holy text (*mushaf*), which was forbidden (See Wieggers

4. For further discussion on translation of the Qur'ân in the classical period, see Tibawi 1962 : 4-16.

5. A traditionalist scholar, al-Jîzâwî was *Shaykh* of al-Azhar from 1335AH until his death on 15 Muharram 1346 (al-Sa'îdî n.d. : 85, 112).

1995 : 317).⁽⁶⁾ This controversy soon spread from Egypt into other parts of the Muslim world, and *The Holy Qur'an* earned a similar condemnation from the Muftî of Beirut (Ridâ 1926 : 24; Shâkir 1925 : 3; Shahâtah n.d. : 31). Both rejections were made known to Muslims in Indonesia through the pages of *al-Manâr*.⁽⁷⁾

Muhammad Ali and His Book *The Holy Qur'ân*

Maulvi Muhammad Ali – who is not to be confused with his contemporary, the leader of the Khilâfat movement – was one of the most prominent Ahmadi scholars. Together with Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, he was the editor of the *Review of Religions*, a periodical published by Ahmadiyyah between 1902 and 1914. After the death, in 1908, of the movement's founder and spiritual leader, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (b. 1835), and a dispute with the latter's son, Basir al-Din Mahmud Ahmad (1889-1965), Ali separated from the Qadiyan-based movement in 1914 and founded a separate chapter in Lahore, called Ahmadiyyah Anjuman-i-Ishaat-i-Islam.⁽⁸⁾ Unlike the Qadiyanis, with their use of the title “Khalifah al-Masih” (The Messiah-Caliph) for their leader, and their *de facto* insistence on the continuance of the Caliphate of Ghulam Ahmad and his descendants, the Lahoris use the title “president” and thereby express different theological perspectives regarding the Messiah and religious leadership. I shall return to this issue again below.

Muhammad Ali commenced work on his translation and exegesis in 1909 and saw its publication when he was president of his own Lahore-based faction. Its full title reads “*The Holy Qur'ân* Containing the Arabic Text with English Translation and Commentary”. Muhammad Ali's preface summarises the Qur'ânic teachings, its collection and arrangement, and the chief features of the work. Most *sûras* are preceded by an introduction – consisting of an abstract, title and subject matter, connection, and date of revelation – whilst the last thirty-five (from ‘Abasa until al-Nâs) are preceded merely by a “general remark” reflecting their simplicity and brevity.⁽⁹⁾

6. See also *al-Manâr*, vol. 25, no. 10, (1343/1925), pp. 794-796. Another factor was the establishment of a joint committee of scholars from al-Azhar and the Ministry of Education for the purpose of launching a standardised edition of the Qur'ân. See also Shahâtah n.d. : 31; and Wiegiers 1995 : 317.

7. See, in particular, the article “Tarjamat al-Qur'ân wa Tahrîf Tarjamah lahu wa al-Tashkîk fîhi”, in *al-Manâr*, vol. 20, no. 10, (1343/1925), pp. 794-6.

8. For further information about the split, see Spencer 1974 : 92-121; Cantwell-Smith 1946 : 298-302; and Friedmann 1989 : 147-62.

9. But the combination is not always similar. In some cases, there are “title and connection”, and in some others “title and subject matter”. In the case of al-Fâtihah, there is only an abstract and general description.

Each “abstract” in turn comprises sub-topics of the related chapter (*sûra*). For example, Ali ‘Imrân contains twenty sub-topics, whilst al-Qiyâmah contains only two sub-topics. The “title” explains the name of the chapter : why the chapter is called Ali ‘Imrân, or al-Baqarah, and so forth. The “subject matter” then gives a summary of the chapter and the “connection” relates the chapter with its predecessor.

Each page is divided into two main parts. The upper part is divided into three columns with the Arabic text, its translation, and a narrow margin, giving simple notes on the translation where necessary. The commentary is located in the bottom half of the page.

In his translation, Muhammad Ali claims that he tries to be “more truthful to the words of the Holy Writ” than other English translations. In some cases Muhammad Ali feels obliged to translate some words literally, but he usually adds an explanation in the margin to illustrate the sense of the original. Occasionally, the alternative significance of words is also noted in the margin and the use of italics in the translation points to any other significance. Necessary explanations and commentaries are given in footnotes in running numbers, and generally authorities are quoted or reasons given for the opinion expressed.

Tjokroaminoto and His Project

As I have noted in my introduction, in Indonesia, Muhammad Ali’s *The Holy Qur’ân* was being translated by Tjokroaminoto, then president of the nationalist Islamic movement, Sarekat Islam (SI), into Malay (Bahasa Melayu). Shortly after its founding in 1912, this mass organization became an umbrella organisation for associations, groups, and individuals working for Indonesian independence. At the height of its strength, around 1920, Sarekat Islam’s membership was about 400,000, and it had the ability to mobilise several million people (Federspiel 1994 : 11). As its leader, Tjokroaminoto thereby possessed strong religious, as well as political, influence over the Indonesian people and any translation by him could have been expected to have been widely received.

Tjokroaminoto began work on his version of the Ahmadi *tafsîr* in 1925 with the approval of the then head of the Cairo-leaning Muhammadiyah movement Haji Fakhrudin (1890-1929). His colleague and fellow Muhammadiyah leader, K.H. Mas Mansur was also acquainted with it (see *Fadjar Asia*, 4 February 1928 ; Noer 1973 : 150, fn. 207). This approval was due to the initial acceptance of the Lahori Ahmadiyah by Muhammadiyah, or perhaps even ignorance of the precise nature of their teachings due to the

fact that they promulgated their message among Indonesians in English. For this reason, at the time of its founding in Yogyakarta in 1925 by Mirza Wali Beig, Ahmadiyah had received assistance from Muhammadiyah.⁽¹⁰⁾ However, after a public debate between Mirza Wali Beig and the radical Sumatran reformist leader, and devotee of Rashîd Ridâ, Haji Rasul (Abd al-Karim Amr Allah, 1879-1949), Muhammadiyah turned to fight against the Ahmadiyah.⁽¹¹⁾ And, as a further consequence, Muhammadiyah vetoed Tjokroaminoto's translation project, and protested in large numbers at the 1927 annual Sarekat Islam congress (Noer 1973 : 150, fn. 207). Moreover, Muhammadiyah even refused to participate in the following congress in Yogyakarta, their mutual hometown.⁽¹²⁾ Despite this fact, the Sarekat Islam executive only discussed Tjokroaminoto's project briefly on that occasion and no decision was made. Further discussion on this matter was held at a sitting of its religious council of Sarekat Islam in Kediri, East Java, in September 1928. This body allowed Tjokroaminoto to continue, but then only under their supervision (Noer 1973 : 150; Gonggong 1985 : 62-3).

To defend his project, Tjokroaminoto argued that it had been previously approved by Hadji Fakhruddin and Kiyai Mas Mansur in 1925. He then accused the Muhammadiyah of intentionally preventing the publication of his translation in order to monopolise the market for Muhammadiyah's own commentaries of the Qur'ân (Noer 1973 : 150). Whatever the case, it was in 1928 that the first three parts of Tjokroaminoto's Malay version did appear, and, as we shall see, by then it was not alone as a translation of the Qur'ân available to Indonesians.⁽¹³⁾

***Al-Manâr* and Rashîd Ridâ's Indonesian Disciple Basyuni Imran**

As I have mentioned above, some Muhammadiyah members had strong links with Rashîd Ridâ and his journal *al-Manâr*. The influence of Rashîd Ridâ on Indonesian Islamic reform is clearly seen from the letters sent by Indonesian Muslims requesting *fatwâs* on certain problems related to Islamic

10. On the Ahmadiyah movement in Indonesia, see : Pijper 1950; Blood 1974; Yasim 1981.

11. At this time Muhammadiyah was seeking Rasul's support to expand into Sumatra. See Hamka 1957 : 109-13.

12. "Koloniaal Archief, Uitvoerig Verslag van het Islamcongres te Djokjakarta, 26-29 Januari, 1928, Geheim Mailrapport, 332x/28" in Penders 1977 : 257-8.

13. Maulvi Muhammad Ali, *Qoer'an Soetji, disertai Salinan dan Keterangan dalam Bahasa Melajoe*, Bahagian I-III. Translated by Hadji Oemar Said Tjokroaminoto, Weltevreden 1928, as pointed out by Pijper 1950 : 253-4. It is surprising, however, that Noer (1973 : 150) – writing in the early 1970s – ignored the existence of this publication. Feener mentioned its existence, but with incorrect reference to Bahrûn's translation (1979).

belief and practice in their country. Indeed, during the period of its publication (1898-1936), *al-Manâr* published 26 articles and some 135 requests for legal opinions from the Malay-speaking world (Bluhm-Warn 1997 : 297).

Ridâ delivered *fatwâs* on an extremely wide variety of legal, social, and political topics that confronted the Muslims of the day.⁽¹⁴⁾ These can be sorted broadly into five categories. First, there were general theological issues related to the ideology of the Islamic reform movement, such as *ijtihâd* and *taqlîd*; second, issues related to the new economic environment, such as mortgaging real estate, life insurance and bank interest; third, issues related to technological advances, such as the use of the telegraph, photography and listening to the Qur'ân on the phonograph; fourth, issues related to patriotism and nationalism; and fifth, controversial issues such as the principle of parity of birth (*kafâ'a*) (Bluhm-Warn 1997 : 298). In his *fatwâs*, Ridâ also responded to questions about traditionalist, secularist and allegedly heretical views or groups, including the Ahmadiyyah movement.

Given the debate over Tjokroaminoto's project, some Indonesians were eager to obtain Ridâ's opinion on the matter. Thus, Shaykh Muhammad Basyuni Imran (*Muhammad Basyûnî 'Imrân*) of Sambas wrote to his former teacher, to which the latter responded with a *fatwâ* entitled "Tarjamat Muhammad Ali al-Hindî li al-Qur'ân" (The Translation of the Qur'ân by Muhammad Ali of India; *al-Manâr*, vol. 29 (1928), pp. 268-9).

Shaykh Muhammad Basyuni Imran (1885-1981) was born on 16 October 1885 in Sambas West Borneo (Kalimantan).⁽¹⁵⁾ He grew up in a religious, educated family. His father and grand-father were the "Maharaja Imams" (Great Imâm) of the Sambas Sultanate. After the death of his father, Basyuni Imran was appointed by Sultan Muhammad Safiuddin as the "Maharaja Imam advisor Agama Islam" (Great Imâm and Adviser of Islamic Affairs) on 9 November 1913 (10 Dhû al-Hijja 1331). Basyuni Imran was the student of Rashîd Ridâ for about three years at the latter's training college in Cairo, the Dâr al-Da'wa wa al-Irshâd (House for Islamic Propagation and Guidance) (Pijper 1984 : 142-49). It was also his question as to why the Muslim people tend to be weak and in state of decadence that was answered by Shakîb Arslân (1869-1946) in *al-Manâr* and then published as a famous book, *Li-mâdhâ Ta'akhhara al-Muslimûn wa Taqaddama*

14. The collection of his *fatwâs* was edited by Salâh al-Dîn al-Munajjid and Yûsuf Q. Khauri as a book, *Fatâwâ al-Imâm Muhammad Rashîd Ridâ*, (Beirut 1970) 6 volumes.

15. It is stated in his *al-Nusûs wa al-Barâhîn* that his complete name is "Maharaja Imâm Muhammad Basyûnî bin Maharaja Imâm Muhammad 'Imrân bin Maharaja Imâm Muhammad 'Arif bin al-Imâm Nûr al-Dîn bin al-Imâm Mustafâ."

Ghayruhum ("Why Are the Muslims in Decline While Others Progress?") Cairo : Matba'at al-Manâr, 2nd edition, 1301).⁽¹⁶⁾

Basyuni Imran was also a writer on Islamic issues himself. He composed treatises on Islamic law, theology, Muhammad's biography (*sîra*), and Qur'anic sciences, such as *Risâlat al-Nusûs wa al-Barâhîn 'alâ Iqâmah al-Jumu'ah bi-mâ dûna al-Arba'an* (Cairo : Matba'at al-Manâr, 1344/1925); *Tazkîr "Sabîl al-Najâh" fî Târik al-Salâh* (Singapore : Matba'at al-Ahmadiyya, 1349/1931); *Husn al-Jawâb an Ithbât al-Ahilla bi al-Hisâb* (*Molek Djawaban, pada Mentâbitkan Awal Bulan dengan Kira'an*); *Bidâyat al-Tawhîd*; *Durûs al-Tawhîd*; *Khulâsat al-Sîra al-Muhammadiyya*; *Nûr al-Sirâj fî Qissat al-Isrâ' wa al-Mî'râj*; *Irshâd al-Ghilmân fî Adab Tilâwat al-Qur'ân*. Despite their Arabic titles, the last six works are in Malay with Arabic script. Some treatises include Rashîd Ridâ's *fatwâs* on the issues related to the titles.

Rashîd Ridâ's *fatwâ* with Reference to the Egyptian Context

It is worthwhile here to quote Rashîd Ridâ's *fatwâ* on Muhammad Ali's *The Holy Qur'ân* in full, so that we can analyse it comprehensively. As with most formal *fatwâs*, the original request by the plaintiff is cited.

Translation of the Qur'ân by Muhammad Ali of India (Question 16). From the undersigned [Muhammad Basyuni Imran] of Sambas, Borneo (Jâwa).⁽¹⁷⁾

In the name of Allâh the Compassionate, the Merciful.

His Excellency, my lord, the noble scholar, Mr. Muhammad Rashîd Ridâ, the honourable editor of *al-Manâr*. May Allâh benefit me and the Muslims by his knowledge. Amen.

Peace and God's blessing and mercy be upon you. Allow me please to ask you, due to your kindness towards the Islamic community, to answer this question : Is it permissible to apply the commentary of Maulvi Muhammad Ali of India who interpreted the Qur'ân in the English language, or not? Hadji Oesman Tjokroaminoto⁽¹⁸⁾ has been translating it into the Malay language. A controversy arose among the Jâwiyyûn (Southeast Asians) in relation to this commentary. Most of them disagree with it. Nevertheless, the translator argues that he has not known anyone who can prove the invalidity of this commentary. Therefore, I hope that you could give your opinion about it. It has already come to my knowledge that the Muftîs of Egypt and Beirut prohibited this English commentary from circulation in their countries. However, the absence of permission of these two Muftîs is not enough to convince people that it is not permissible to apply it.

16. Arslan's answer was first published in three parts in *al-Manâr*, 31, no. 5 (1939), pp. 355-70; 31, no. 6, (1931), pp. 449-464; 31, no. 7, (1931), pp. 529-539. See also Bluhm-Warn 1997 : 294-5. The book was translated into Indonesian by the famous Egyptian-inclined reformist H. Moenawar Chalil, Al-Amir Syakib Arsalan, *Mengapa Kaum Muslimin Mundur dan Mengapa Kaum Selain Mereka Maju* (Jakarta : Bulan Bintang, 1967).

17. The *Fatâwâ al-Imâm* reads : "Min sâhib al-Imdâ' Muhammad Basyûnî 'Imrân fî Sambas Burniyû (Jâwa)," (from the undersigned, Muhammad Basyuni Imran of Sambas, Borneo (Jâwa). "(Question 26)" is omitted. The term Jâwa signifies Southeast Asia as a whole.

18. Both *Al-Manâr* and *Fatâwâ al-Imâm* read mistakenly "Ijokroaminoto".

Please receive my own thanks and the ummah's gratitude in advance for your expected satisfactory answer. I hope that you are always safe and a shelter for seekers of guidance.

Muhammad Basyuni Imran

[Answer] It is obvious that what you meant by applying this commentary depends on what the meanings of the revealed Text mentioned therein are concerning the precepts of *'ibadât* (worship) and *mu'âmalât* (legal transactions), or, in a more general sense than this, concerning the religious creeds. It is impossible for anyone to give such a *fatwâ* on this matter, unless he has read this commentary or interpretative translation in full, and found that the writer does not deviate from the definitive matters (*qat' iyyât*) on which the [unanimity of] Muslims concur, or which were followed by the majority of the venerable forefathers (*al-salaf al-sâlih*),⁽¹⁹⁾ and does not give odd implications to the Arabic words indicating undecided matters. It is widely known, however, that the writer, Muhammad Ali, is a Qadiyani, and that he distorts some verses related to the Messiah (*al-Masîh*) in order that he could argue, based on these verses, that Mirza Ghulâm Ahmad of Qadiyan is the expected Messiah (*al-Masîh al-Muntazar*). This is the reason why the Shaykh of al-Azhar and the Muftî of Beirut banned the Holy Book, to which this English translation is attached, from entering Egypt and Syria, preventing the Muslims from being led astray by this distortion. I have mentioned this in the ninth volume of the *Manâr* commentary. The Qadiyani sect deviated from Islam by their claim that revelation comes down to their swindler Messiah and his successors. In their distorting the Qur'ân, they committed corruption (*mafâsid*) unprecedented by the Persian heretics who were preaching Batini doctrines, and others. One of their corruptions is that the opening chapter (*sûrat al-Fâtihah*) suggests the continuity of the revelation until the end of the time. We have refuted their swindler[*'s* claims] during his life, and have frequently demonstrated their error also after his death in the numerous volumes of *al-Manâr*.

In my opinion, Muslims should not rely on this translation, nor on any other, when they want to understand the Qur'ân and apply it [practically]. These translations could only be used to invite non-Muslims, who do not know Arabic but know the language of the translation, to [embrace] Islam. Please refer to my book *Tarjamat al-Qur'ân* on this topic so as to avoid elaboration of this issue here.

As we can see, in his request, Imran did not ask, in fact, about whether it was permissible to translate the Qur'ân, but rather whether it was possible to use Muhammad Ali's "commentary" as the basis of religious belief and practice.⁽²⁰⁾ Nevertheless Ridâ, in his *fatwâ*, stressed the problem of translation of the Qur'ân, rather than that of commentary. To understand better Rashîd Ridâ's *fatwâ*, it is therefore important to contextualise the discussion of translation of the Qur'ân in Egypt before the publication of the *fatwâ* on 17 July 1928.

Two cases should again be mentioned here. First, was the initiative of the Kemalist government, in the early 1920s, to translate the Qur'ân into Turkish. This was alleged by most of the Shaykhs of al-Azhar, and Rashîd Ridâ, as an attempt to create a "Turkish Qur'ân", subverting the Arabic one.

19. The *Fatâwâ al-Imâm* reads erroneously *al-salaf al-sulh*.

20. It should be noted that in Indonesian convention, a book containing both translation and commentary is usually called "commentary" (*tafsîr*) ; translation is included. Indonesian commentaries such as *Tafsîr al-Nûr* and *al-Bayan* by Hasbi Ashshidqi, *Tafsîr al-Azhar* by Hamka, and *Tafsîr al-Furqan* by A. Hassan also include translation.

Rashîd Ridâ had condemned this initiative in some articles, a *fatwâ* in *al-Manâr* and again in the exegesis, the *Tafsîr al-Manâr* in which he published a treatise against this translation. It is the latter treatise, entitled *Tarjamat al-Qur'ân wa mâ fihâ min al-Mafâsid wa Munâfât al-Islâm* (1926), to which Ridâ refers Basyuni and his readers. Second, the Lahori Ahmadiyyah had tried to circulate Muhammad 'Alî's work in Egypt in 1925 which had resulted in the refutation from *al-Azhar*. It is not clear, however, whether this *fatwâ* was written, or simply announced orally. Neither Muhammad Shâkir (1925), Rashîd Ridâ (1926), or Shahâtah (n.d.) quote the text or argument of the original *fatwâ*, although they all mention its existence.⁽²¹⁾

These two cases influenced very much Rashîd Ridâ's *fatwâ* for Basyuni. When some people protested that the *Mashaykhah* of al-Azhar – which Ridâ often opposed – prohibited the spread of the *Holy Qur'ân*, and restricted the freedom of understanding and interpreting it, Ridâ stood behind the *Mashaykhah*.⁽²²⁾ He stated that it is not the *Mashaykhah* which prohibits circulating a “deviant” translation of the Qur'ân but the Holy Law (*Sharî'ah*). He judged that the distributors of this translation intended to call people to a new heresy (*bid'a jadîda*) in conflict with the principles of Islamic belief (see *al-Manâr*, no. 10, vol. 25, 25 March 1925, pp. 795-796).

Other scholars also supported this position. Shaykh Muhammad Shâkir, a former Wakîl of al-Azhar, for instance, wrote a long article in *al-Muqattam*,⁽²³⁾ which was then published as *al-Qawl al-Fasl fî Tarjamat al-Qur'ân al-Karîm ilâ al-Lugha al-A'jamiyya* (*The Final Decision on Translating the Holy Qur'ân into Other Languages*, Cairo : Matba'at al-Nahda, 1343/1925). Muhammad Shâkir called this event “The Defence of the Qur'ân Affair” (*Qadiyyat al-Difâ'an al-Qur'ân al-Karîm*) and he imagined the translation as an attempt to destroy Islam from within.

The Logic of the *Fatwâ*

It is clear that Rashîd Ridâ was as interested in attacking the Ahmadiyyah movement than the work itself. He condemned Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of Ahmadiyyah, as *Dajjâl* (anti-Christ) or *al-Masîh al-Dajjâl* (“The

21. See also Moreno 1925 : 533. According to Rashîd Ridâ, Ahmadiyyah had been trying to circulate this translation of the Qur'ân in the Middle Eastern countries since 1923. See *al-Manâr*, vol. 25, no. 10, (1925), p. 795.

22. One of the protestors was Abû al-Nasr al-Sayyid Ahmad al-Hindî. See *al-Akhbar* newspaper, 22 Ramadan 1343/16 April 1925, as pointed out by Shâkir 1925 : 3-5.

23. This article was published in four parts (10 April 1925, 19 April 1925, 2 May 1925, 22 May 1925). The first part was translated by T.W. Arnold into English and published in *The Muslim World*, vol. 16 (1926), pp. 161-6.

false Messiah”).⁽²⁴⁾ It is also interesting that the book was wrongly attributed as the work of a Qadiyani, and Rashîd Ridâ further showed his ignorance of the movement when he stated that it was “widely known that the writer, Muhammad Ali, is a Qadiyani.”

In his *fatwâ*, Ridâ propounds two doctrines by which he considers that Muhammad Ali was being led astray, viz., (1) the doctrine of the “Messiah”, and (2) that of “revelation”. According to Rashîd Ridâ, Muhammad Ali had distorted some verses related to the Messiah to justify that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908) was the promised Messiah who received revelation (*wahy*) from God, and that the opening chapter of the Qur'ân, al-Fâtihah, indicates the continuation of divine revelation until the end of worldly time. This allegation is to some extent justified. It is right that Muhammad Ali believed in the doctrine of Messiah, or that Ghulam Ahmad was the Promised Messiah, and that revelation was not limited as regards time. Nevertheless, it needs elucidation based on Muhammad Ali's own opinion on these doctrines, as he states that :

[T]here may also be a reference here to the Divine promise to raise reformers among Muslims as prophets were raised among the Israelites. Such a clear promise is contained in a saying of the Holy Prophet : “Surely Allah will raise up for this people (i.e. the Muslims) in the beginning of every century one who shall reform their religion.” The promise given in the verse [al-Nûr : 55] may therefore refer not only to the temporal successors of the Holy Prophet, but also to his spiritual successors or reformers. The analogy of the Israelites, to which the verse refers, points to the appearance of a Messiah among Muslims as a Messiah was raised among the Israelites, and it was on this verse that the claim of the late Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadiyan, the founder of the Ahmad[i]yyah movement, was based. He claimed to be a reformer for the fourteenth century of the Hijra and the Muslim Messiah.⁽²⁵⁾

In *The Holy Qur'ân*, the Messiah is simply a religious reformer, and Ghulam Ahmad was thus a Muslim reformer of the fourteenth century of the Hijra, not the Prophet as the Qadiyani Ahmadiyyah believed.⁽²⁶⁾ Nevertheless, Muhammad Ali had not always been consistent. During the life of Ghulam Ahmad, Muhammad Ali did not dispute his claim to prophethood. And at the time of the split, Muhammad Ali still spoke of Ghulam Ahmad as a “partial” and “shadowy” prophet. However, he used the word “prophet” in its general sense, and not in its legal sense (Friedmann 1989 : 147-151). By 1916 though, Muhammad Ali had revised his opinions, claim-

24. See also *al-Manâr*, vol. 5 (1315), pp. 317-320, 398-399, 789-791 and vol. 6 (1315), pp. 597, 607-608.

25. *The Holy Qur'ân*, fn. 1763 (as a comment on verse 55 of chapter al-Nûr), p. 708.

26. For further explanation, see Mukti Ali 1951, 1957.

ing that Ghulam Ahmad was merely a *mujaddid* (reformer [of Islam]) and the Muslim Messiah, but not the prophet. It was this view which he expounded in his *Holy Qur'ân*.

For Muhammad Ali, divine revelation is one of the fundamental principles of faith; not only a belief in the truth of the revealed Word of God, but a belief in the truth of divine revelation of all ages and all nations of the earth (*The Holy Qur'ân*, fns. 9, 1379, 2235, 598, 2208, 2235). To him, all people have at one time or another received divine revelation. Without the assistance of revelation from God, no people ever could attain to communion with God. Although no prophet is needed after Muhammad, the door of revelation is still open, and a true Muslim can have access to it (*The Holy Qur'ân*, p.ix., fns. 9, 598). Therefore, the problem lies, in fact, on interpretation and commentary (*tafsîr*), and not on distortion (*tahrîf*) of the Qur'ânic text.

In his *fatwâ*, Rashîd Ridâ calls Muhammad Ali's work both “commentary or interpretative translation” and “translation”. It appears that he uses the word commentary following Imran's usage of the term. But he then uses “interpretative translation”, and in the last paragraph he stresses “literal translation”. This demonstrates his inconsistency in dealing with Muhammad Ali's work because these three categories have different connotations. For Ridâ, commentary and interpretative translation are permissible, but literal translation is not so.

Rashîd Ridâ does not talk much, however, about interpretative translation. He mentions his opinion about it in some of his writings with very little explanation. Unlike literal translation, interpretative translation is possible and permissible, due to its nature as a just manifestation of the translator's understanding of the Qur'ân; it is not the Qur'ân itself. It could be right or wrong (Ridâ 1926 : 13). “Interpretative translation is equivalent to the interpretation of words which need to be interpreted using other languages.” This kind of translation, he states, has benefit for religious purposes (*al-maslaha al-shariyya*) (Ridâ 1926 : 18). However, what he means by interpretative translation is not quite clear. It is important to quote that last paragraph of his *Tarjamat al-Qur'ân* – to which Ridâ referred Basyuni – when, after rejecting the translation of the Qur'ân in almost all pages of the treatise, he states :

I am coming to the end of my discussion. It is undoubted that the [existence of] translations of the Qur'ân in all languages leads a number of their readers into believing in it [the Qur'ân]. This is undeniable fact. But, these translations should be interpretative (*tarjama ma'nawiyya*) accompanied by an explanation (*sharh*), at least in the margin, to explain certain meanings of the Qur'ân. It is because the literal translation is impossible. In addition, this translation should not be named al-Qur'ân, al-Furqân, nor be regarded as the Word of God, but it must be called the translation of the Qur'ân and its commentary as far as possible.

Therefore, the translation of the Qur'ân is possible when it meets three-fold requirements : (1) it must be an interpretative translation ; (2) it should be accompanied by an explanation (*sharh*), although limited ; and (3) it must not be called “the Qur'ân” or any other name of the Qur'ân. Nonetheless, in many cases Rashîd Ridâ rejected not only the literal translation of the Qur'ân, but also the interpretative translation of it (cf. Skovgaard-Petersen 1997 : 164). This is indicated in his *fatwâ* on Muhammad Ali's work.

Rashîd Ridâ's opinion about “literal translation” is found in his other *fatwâ* responding to the Turkish translation of the Qur'ân entitled “Fatwâ al-Manâr fî Hazri Tarjamat al-Qur'ân” (*al-Manâr* 's Fatwâ on the Prohibition of Translating the Qur'ân). Here Rashîd Ridâ (1926 : 13–16) proposes fifteen reasons why literal translation of the Qur'ân is forbidden :

1. The literal translation is forbidden because it aims at replacing the original Qur'ân.
2. The Qur'ân is a foundation of the religion (Islam), even the whole religion itself. If someone uses the translation of the Qur'ân, he or she takes his or her religion from the understanding of the translator, and not from the Qur'ân itself.
3. The Qur'ân forbids imitation in religion (*taqlîd fî al-dîn*) and denounces the imitators. Taking religion from the translation of the Qur'ân means imitating the translator. It means avoiding the guidance of the Qur'ân itself.
4. Hence, the prohibition of depending upon the translation is because Allah says that Muslims are men of reason (12 : 108), “Say : It is my way ; I call to Allah with knowledge, I and those who follow me”. This necessitates the use of reason to understand God's revelation. Allah also states, “Follow what has been revealed to you from your Lord and do not follow, apart from Him, other patrons. How little you heed the warning”. What has been revealed to you from your Lord is the Qur'ân in Arabic. Following the translation means deviating from the imperative and prohibition of this verse.
5. Therefore, due to the higher degree of Muslims as men of reason, it is forbidden in their *ijtihâd* (independent reasoning) and *istinbât* (legal inference) to depend on the words of the translators.
6. Muslims who know Arabic and meet the requirements to understand the Qur'ân should practise what they understand from the Qur'ân itself, although this might not be the correct understanding of it.
7. The Qur'ân is the source of guidance (*al-hidâyah*) and divine knowledge. The translation does not deserve this superiority.
8. Al-Ghazâlî states in *Iljâm al-'Awâm 'an 'Ilm al-Kalâm* that it is forbidden to translate the attributes of God.⁽²⁷⁾
9. Al-Ghazâlî states that some Arabic words do not have precise synonyms in other languages. The reader of the translation may fall into a belief which is different from what is meant by the Qur'ân.
10. Al-Ghazâlî also says that there might be synonyms for certain Arabic words. Yet what is used in Arabic as metaphor is probably not so in other languages, and vice versa.
11. Al-Ghazâlî also states that some words of the Qur'ân are *mushtarak* [words which have two or more meanings] but they are probably not so in other languages. The translator possibly chooses the wrong meaning of two or more meanings.

27. For al-Ghazâlî, as for other Sunnite scholars, the Qur'ân is Kalâm Allâh (the Word of God), one of His attributes.

12. It is common for the scholars that when there is a conclusive evidence (*dalil qaf'i*) which seems to contradict the literal meaning of the text, they interpret it. Interpretation of the Qur'ân and translation of it are two different things.

13. The composition and the style of the Qur'ân have certain impacts on the soul of the listeners. This composition and style are impossible to be transformed into [other languages] through translation.

14. In the translations of the Qur'ân into Turkish, Persian, Indian, Chinese, and other languages there must be contradictions between one and another, like what has been the case in the Old and the New Testaments. This will even be more dangerous, because of the incapability of all men to translate the Qur'ân.

15. The Qur'ân is the greatest sign of Muhammad's prophecy. It has been preserved from any change, deviation, and reduction, and was written as God revealed it. The translation is an other case.

In his second ruling on the subject of translation of the Qur'ân, Rashîd Ridâ does not answer satisfactorily the question of whether it is permissible to use Muhammad Ali's commentary as the basis of religious belief and practice. In general, he allows the use of a commentary, for it is a product of a commentator's understanding of the Qur'ân, not the Qur'ân itself. A commentary is the *ijtihâd* of the commentator based on the original Arabic Qur'ân and Prophetic traditions (Ridâ 1926 : 13–14). Nevertheless not all commentary is permissible. Rashîd Ridâ rejected any commentary that violated the orthodox tenets, as indeed had Muhammad Ali's commentary. In this regard, the problem was, in fact, not the nature of Muhammad Ali's work of being a “commentary”, but rather his allegedly “deviated” faith. Thus Ridâ advised Muslims not to rely on this, as he put it, “translation”, alleging that Muhammad Ali distorted some verses of the Qur'ân.

The Impact of Rashîd Ridâ's *fatwâ* on Islamic Reform in Indonesia

Rashîd Ridâ's *fatwâ* in response to Basyuni Imran's question points to the link between some Indonesian and Egyptian reformers. It does not necessarily indicate, however, that Rashîd Ridâ's *fatwâs* had a strong influence over Muslims in Indonesia.

As we have seen from Tjokroaminoto's interest in an Ahmadi translation and commentary, Islamic reform in the Indonesian context did not come solely from the Middle East, and especially Egypt, but also from the Indian sub-continent. A number of Indonesian Muslim leaders were supporters of Indo-Pakistani Islamic reform, such as Tjokroaminoto, Soekarno (the first President of Indonesia), and Hadji Agus Salim (1885-1954), regarded by Nurcholish Madjid as the “father of Islamic Renewal of Indonesia”. Some Indo-Pakistani Muslim intellectuals, both Ahmadi and Sunni, also influenced the young intellectuals of the Jong Islamieten Bond (JIB) and the Studenten

Islam Studieclub (SIS), for which Agus Salim was an adviser (Saidi 1990). The thoughts of Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Amir Ali, Muhammad Iqbal, Muhammad Ali and Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din were famous in Indonesia well into the 1960s (Mukti Ali 1964). And some Indonesian intellectuals referred to Muhammad Ali's or Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din's works, although they did not necessarily associate themselves with the Ahmadiyah movement publicly (Saidi 1990 : 41–45; Gonggong 1985 : 62–63). It is important to note also that Aligarh University, which produced such famous non-Ahmadi reformists as Muhammad Iqbal, has also inspired Islamic educational reform in Indonesia. Gontor, the first modern Islamic boarding school in Indonesia, for example, took Aligarh as one of its ideal educational institutions. And Gontor in turn inspired the foundation of more than seventy other modern Islamic boarding schools in the country (see Fananie 1997; As'ad 1996 : 165-93). Another wing of the Indo-Pakistan style of reformation pioneered by the Pakistani neo-modernist, Fazlur Rahman, has even inspired the "Movement for the Renewal of Islamic Thought" (*Gerakan Pembaruan Pemikiran Islam*) led by Nurcholish Madjid, Djohan Effendi, Abdurrahman Wahid – now Indonesia's president – and other intellectuals since the 1970s (Barton 1995). The influence of the Pakistani feminist thinker, Rifaat Hassan, since the late 1980s has been also undeniable.

On the other hand, the influence of Egyptian reform in Indonesia preceded this current and came through at least four paths : first, through publication of periodicals and books ; second, through Muslims who studied or taught at al-Azhar and Mecca ; third, through Muslims who performed the Hajj ; and fourth, through Muslim scholars who taught in Indonesia. Such channels led to the foundation of reformist organisations, like Muhammadiyah, al-Irsyad and Persatuan Islam (Persis). With this in mind, Rashîd Ridâ's views might be expected to have a strong impact on these organizations.

Although most of Ridâ's *fatwâs* had a strong influence on Islamic reform in Indonesia (Bluhm-Warn 1983 : 35–42), the *fatwâ* on Muhammad Ali's translation and commentary of the Qur'ân was, in the long run, a marked exception. There is some evidence bespeaking this condition. First, although it might be recalled that the Majelis Ulama of Sarekat Islam gave Tjokroaminoto permission to continue his project before the publication of Rashîd Ridâ's *fatwâ* on July 17, 1928, and whilst it may have strengthened Muhammadiyah's rejection of this project, their decisions on the matter seem to have been made without explicit reference to it.

Second, Muhammad Ali's work was translated by other writers and made available in Indonesia. Apart from Tjokroaminoto's Malay translation

(1928), these versions include ones in Dutch by Soedewo in 1934,⁽²⁸⁾ in Javanese by R. Ng. Djajasugita and M. Mufti Sharif in 1958,⁽²⁹⁾ and in Indonesian by H.M. Bachrun in 1979.⁽³⁰⁾ The Javanese and Indonesian translations were even approved and certified by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia.⁽³¹⁾ To a certain extent, this legislation is an indication of the continuing support for the translation of Muhammad Ali's work on the one hand, and of the insignificant influence of Rashîd Ridâ's *fatwâ* on the other.

Third, Muhammad Ali's work has even been used by Indonesian Muslim intellectuals as a reference work. Among them were Prof. Dr. Hazairin (1974 : 115), a prominent reformer of Islamic law. President Soekarno frequently quoted Soedewo's Dutch translation, or the original English version in many of his speeches,⁽³²⁾ while A.A. Navis' famous polemical novel *Kemarau* ("Drought") talks about a Muslim reformer living in a village who always read "Soedewo's Qur'ânic Commentary", and uses it as a basis of Islamic reform in the village. Such figures, like Tjokroaminoto and Hadji Agus Salim, who supported Tjokroaminoto's translation,⁽³³⁾ were, in fact, Sunnite reformers and never claimed, openly at least, to be members of the Ahmadiyah movement. Nonetheless they sourced much Ahmadi material for their own journals, such as *Doenia Islam* (Weltevreden, 1922–23), *Bintang Islam* (Surakarta, 1923–32), and *Het Licht* (Semarang, 1925–40).

28. *De Heilige Qoer-an : vervattende den Arabischen tekst*, by Maulvi Muhammad Ali, translated by Soedewo, (Batavia : Visscher, 1934).

29. *Qur'ân Sutji Djarwa Djawi Dalah Tafsiripun*, jasanipun Maulvi Muhammad 'Alî, translated by R.Ng. Djajasugita and M. Mufti Sharif, (Jogjakarta : Gerakan Ahmadiyah Indonesia Aliran Lahore, 1958, 1963, 1966). It was published in three parts. The first part consists of al-Fâtihah through to al-Hijr (1958); the second part contains of al-Nahl until al-Najm (1963); and the third part comprises al-Qamar until al-Nâs (1966).

30. Muhammad Ali, *Qur'an Suci : Teks Arab, Terjemah, dan Tafsir Bahasa Indonesia*, translated by H.M. Bachrun. Jakarta : Darul Kutubil Islamiyah, 1979.

31. The Javanese version was approved and certified by the Ministry of religious Affairs in 1958 (No. D 26/Q.I.3 October 1958) and by the Committee of Verification of Qur'an Texts (*Lajnah Pentashih Mushaf al-Qur'an*) of this ministry in 1959 (No. A/O/IV/3602, 13 March 1959), and the Indonesian version was approved and certified by the same ministry on 2 July 1971 (No. Sd/Lega/II-d/82/71).

32. See, for example, Soekarno's addresses at Nuzûl al-Qur'ân celebrations in 1961 and 1964 in : Soekarno 1961 and 1964 : 15. See also Soekarno, 1964 : 345-46.

33. In his preface to Tjokroaminoto's Malay version, Salim said : "After more than one year I have known and been studying this Commentary intensively, I found that it is the best one ; lots of invaluable ideas are given here. And it elucidates how to understand Islam and its teaching better. It explains, educates and advices. Here I did not find any mistakes which mislead the readers at all. This Commentary goes with the knowledge and understanding of the intellectuals of this age. Various misconceptions, insults, disdains and rejections from non-Muslims, especially from the West and Europeans, are refuted by strong arguments here. And it uncovered the narrowmindedness of the accusers". See Bachrun, 1979 : i-ii).

More than anything else, Rashîd Ridâ's *fatwâ* on Muhammad Ali's work represents one of the attitudes of Arabic-speaking Muslims towards non-Arabic-speaking Muslims in the 1920s. In Arabic-speaking Egypt, there were strong objections to translations of the Qur'ân made by Western and Turkish scholars. So, when Muhammad Ali's work appeared, it aggravated the existing debate on the translation of the Qur'ân. By comparison, the relative absence of the problem of translation in Indonesia – when viewed with hindsight – was mainly caused by the fact that most Indonesian Muslims did not speak Arabic. There was naturally a market for such a book, as there continues to be. For Indonesian Muslims the nature of the content was far more at stake than the issue of translation of itself.

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