

The Quran and Muslim Minority Scholar's Perspective: A Comparative Study of Abdullah Saeed and Farid Esack

Al-Quran dan Perspektif Sarjana Muslim Minoritas: Studi Komparatif Abdullah Saeed dan Farid Esack

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Abstract

This article discusses an alternative perspective in understanding the content of the Qur'an i.e., the perspective of minority Muslim scholars. The object of this study is the thought of tafsir Abdullah Saeed and Farid Esack who are positioned as Muslim scholars of Western institutions living as a minority, how their views of the Qur'an and how they develop interpretive methodologies according to the context of the environment in which they live. This article shows that the construction of the thought of Abdullah Saeed and Farid Esack positioned as minority scholars can represent its own contemporary model of interpretation. Abdullah Saeed with the idea of contextual interpretation laid out three bases of interpretive methodology: hierarchical values, contextual meaning, and systematic contextual interpretation. The three bases of the methodology are used to see the extent to which verses on ethical law can be understood and practiced in contemporary contexts while remaining grounded in the substance of the values carried when they are derived. While Farid Esack with his idea of liberative exegesis tried to break conservatism in South Africa with three methodological foundations: progressive revelation, reception hermeneutics, and the liberation theology of the Qur'an. The foundation of this methodology was used as a basis for value and legitimacy in supporting the agenda of popular solidarity between Muslims and non-Muslims in South Africa to overthrow the apartheid regime.

Keywords: Minority Muslim Scholars; Contextual Exegesis; Liberation Exegesis; Hermeneutics

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas perspektif alternatif dalam memahami kandungan Al-Qur'an yaitu perspektif sarjana Muslim minoritas. Objek kajian ini adalah pemikiran tafsir Abdullah Saeed dan Farid Esack yang diposisikan sebagai sarjana Muslim produk institusi Barat yang hidup sebagai minoritas, bagaimana pandangan mereka terhadap Al-Qur'an dan bagaimana mereka mengembangkan metodologi penafsiran sesuai dengan konteks lingkungan tempat mereka tinggal. Artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa konstruksi pemikiran tafsir Abdullah Saeed dan Farid Esack yang diposisikan sebagai sarjana minoritas dapat merepresentasikan model tafsir kontemporer tersendiri. Abdullah Saeed dengan gagasan tafsir kontekstual menyusun tiga basis metodologi penafsiran: nilai-nilai hirarkis, makna kontekstual, dan sistematika penafsiran kontekstual. Ketiga basis metodologi tersebut digunakan untuk melihat sejauh mana ayat-ayat tentang etika-hukum dapat dipahami dan dipraktikkan dalam konteks kontemporer dengan tetap berpijak pada substansi nilai yang diusung ketika ayat-ayat tersebut diturunkan. Sementara Farid Esack dengan gagasan tafsir liberasinya mencoba untuk mendobrak konservatisme di Afrika Selatan dengan tiga landasan metodologi: wahyu progresif, hermeneutika resepsi, dan teologi pembebasan al-Qur'an. Landasan metodologi ini dijadikan basis nilai dan



legitimasi dalam mendukung agenda solidaritas rakyat antara Muslim dan non-Muslim di Afrika Selatan untuk menggulingkan rezim apartheid.

Kata Kunci: Sarjana Muslim Minoritas; Tafsir Kontektual; Tafsir Liberasi; Hermeneutika

Introduction

When it comes to Muslim minorities, the relationship with Islamic studies has always been associated with Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh al-aqalliyat*).¹ The emergence of *fiqh* for minority discourse is a response to the growing number of minority Muslim communities in various regions, especially in Western countries such as the United States and Europe. The need for religious practice in public spaces for Muslim minorities is inversely proportional to the reality of secular Western society. On this reality, *fiqh al-aqalliyat* is subject to the flexible universal value of Islam and to the influence of pluralism in the West.²

Imam Mawardi mentioned that there are at least three factors that cause differences between the daily practice of Islam in a majority country and a Muslim minority country. First, in Muslim-majority countries *fiqh* emerges and develops along with the development of society so that it can be said that *fiqh* continues to transform naturally because it answers the real situation and conditions of society. Second, Muslims in Muslim-majority countries share the same view of sharia so ethical and cultural conflicts are virtually non-existent. Third, the possibility of vertical clashes between Muslim communities and governments and horizontal clashes between fellow Muslims and non-Muslims is relatively small. According to Mawardi, the three factors above are inversely proportional to the reality of the daily practices of Muslim people living as a minority. Although individual freedom has gained its rightful place, muslim minorities often still have psychological, social and political barriers that are completely different formats with muslim communities that live and live as the majority.³

However, *fiqh* for minority still sees minority Muslims as objects of study. The position of Muslims in non-Muslim territory is still seen as an object, not as a self-defining subject. This view has not addressed other problems facing minority Muslims when faced with a wave of Islamophobia including Western doubts about Muslim commitment to Western values such as democracy, pluralism and secularism. Some Western people consider that Muslims are a threat to the sustainability of

1 al-Markaz al-Tamayyuz al-Bahts, *al-Mausu'ah al-Muyassarah fi Fiqh al-Qadaya al-Mu'asirah: Qasm al-Fiqh al-Aqalliyat al-Muslimah* (Riyad: Maktabat al-Malik al-Fahd, 2014), 12.

2 Iyad Zahalka, *Sharia in The Modern Era: Muslim Minority Jurisprudence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 108.

3 Ahmad Imam Mawardi, *Fiqh Minoritas: Fiqh Al-Aqalliyat dan Evolusi Maqashid al-Syariah dari Konsep ke Pendekatan* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2010), 3.

their socio-cultural values because they carry their own exclusive and rigid values.⁴ This assumption arises due to perceptions that generalize the existence of Muslims in the West as a homogeneous entity. Such perceptions become a problem in social life in the West and sometimes trigger conflicts.

This article introduces Quran and minority scholar's perspective as a perspective alternative to how Muslim scholars living as a minority explain the Quran and Islam to a secular society that is predominantly non-Muslim. They are faced with a reality that is certainly different from muslim scholars living in Muslim-majority countries. In a global climate with the growth of Muslim communities in the West, Muslim scholars living there had to struggle with the pressures of Islamphobia which was also increasingly rife after 9/11.⁵ to present this minority perspective, researchers chose the thoughts of Abdullah Saeed and Farid Esack as the focus of the study. It's based on several reasons. First, Saeed and Esack's expertise in the international academic world in the field of Qur'anic studies is not in doubt. Second, both Abdullah Saeed and Farid Esack have contributed to the international arena regarding relations and dialogue between religious people. we want to present two different sides of the Muslim minority reality that Abdullah Saeed and Farid Esack can represent. First, Maldives-born Abdullah Saeed was a Muslim-populated neighborhood whose growth in the religious environment and then moved domicile to Australia, while Farid Esack was born a black Muslim oppressed by apartheid political policies in South Africa. Second, Abdullah Saeed departed from the discipline of Law in approaching the Qur'an, while Farid Esack was based on religious anthropology. Third, Farid Esack is an activist, while Abdullah Saeed is purely an academic.

Minority Groups as Social Fact

As a concept on the level of socio-political life, minorities have been an important topic since the declaration of human rights was passed by the United Nations on 10 December 1948 in the Paris declaration. Four decades later the protection of vulnerable minorities was reaffirmed through the declaration on the right of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities on December 18, 1992. This latest declaration indicates that the issue of minorities is highly regarded on a global scale as part of human rights enforcement efforts.

In 1937 Donald Young with his book *Research Memorandum on Minority People in the Depression* said minorities are those population groups distinguished

4 Christopher Allen, *Islamophobia* (Birmingham: Ashgate, 2010), 83.

5 Ali S. Asani, "Pluralism, Intolerance and Quran," *The American Scholar* Vol. 71, No. 1 (2002), 52-60; Christopher Allen, "Justifying Islamophobia: A Post-9/11 Consideration of the European Union and British Context," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* Vol. 21, No. 3 (2004), 1-25.

from the dominant element by differentiating biological features of racial origin or by alien cultural traits, or a combination of both.⁶ From the definition proposed by Young, minorities are still seen from biological and cultural factors. In 1945 Louis Wirth wrote an article entitled *The Problem of Minority Groups*, in which the definition of a minority is a group of people who, due to physical or cultural characteristics, are deviated from others in the society in which they live for different treatment, and therefore they consider themselves to be discriminatory objects.⁷ The definitions described by Young and Wirth above still focus on ethnic and cultural keywords. Other Marxian sociologists look at minorities in terms of economics, resource allocation, class structure, and social systems. Barnes-McConnell sees the concept of minorities being a necessary component of socio-economic systems based on differences in resource allocation. As an important component of the system, the concept of minorities is a tool for maintaining the system and to control it.⁸ In contrast to the previous concept of minorities in terms of numbers, Barnes-McConnell sees minorities as more of a political status by emphasizing the concept of privilege introduced by Peter Berger: having access to material/capital, having political power, and prestige among society.

As an inherent identity of individuals and groups, religion becomes part of a social structure that can also be seen from a majority-minority perspective. Discrimination against religious minorities is a phenomenon that still occurs today. Persecution of Muslim minorities in Southern Thailand, the Southern Philippines, and Myanmar is an unresolved problem.⁹ In the Middle East, Saba Mahmood's research says that the use of the term minority is used for the benefit of certain missions.¹⁰ In Indonesia persecution and exclusion of heresy minority groups such as Ahmadis and Shias is still an unresolved problem.¹¹

On the basis of social reality as above, we want to put a minority perspective to see the extent to which this consciousness was formed and used by Abdullah Saeed and Farid Esack in their respective contexts. According to Amin Nurdin's

6 Donald Young, *Research Memorandum on Minority People in the Depression* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1937), 1.

7 Louis Wirth, "The Problem of Minority Group," dalam R. Linton, *The Science of Man in the World Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), 347.

8 Patricia W. Barnes-McConnell, "The Concept of Minority and the Organization of Social Control," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 72, No. 2 (1989): 551.

9 Ahmad Suaedy, Islam, *Minorities and Identity in Southeast Asia* (Depok: Inklusif, 2018), 1-17.

10 Saba Mahmood, "Minorities in Middle East: Ethnicity, Religion, and Support for Authoritarianism," *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (Juni, 2015): 280-292.

11 Ahmad Najib Burhani, *Menemani Minoritas: Paradigma Islam tentang Keberpihakan dan Pembelaan Kepada yang Lemah* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka, 2019), 73.

research, The Muslim minority in Australia based on his stance on the government's multiculturalism policy, can be classified into two groups: scripturalist and substantialist. This sorting is based on loyalty, social relationships, and mentality. The basis of scripturalist loyalty is based on religion, while substantialist to the new state, but still oriented to culture, religion, and country of their origin. Then the scripturalist has an exclusive, while the substantialist is inclusive.¹²

Another challenge in South Africa, the Muslim community as part of the oppressed group due to apartheid policies uses the issue of pluralism to strengthen its position shoulder to shoulder with other religious groups to fight the apartheid regime. Farid Esack was one of the leading pioneering scholars of anti-apartheid fighters by founding the Call of Islam in 1984. His position clearly encouraged the Muslim community of less than 2% to play a significant role in the liberation of the South African people from oppressive apartheid policies. Despite internal frictions among Muslims, Esack managed to narrow the space of intolerance by carrying out an agenda of pluralism based on the Qur'an.¹³

On Methodological Thought of Quranic Exegesis

Abdullah Saeed's Thought

There are three key concepts as the basis of Abdullah Saeed's interpretive methodology: hierarchy values as ontological foundations, contextual meaning as a hermeneutic basis, and contextual interpretation as the practical steps of interpretation. According to Abdullah Saeed Qur'an is a holy book with ethical and moral values as its basis as the concept of pious charity is introduced in it repeatedly. This idea is in line with what Muhammad Abduh said that the Qur'an should be positioned as a moral guide that always goes hand in hand with the development of human rationality.¹⁴ As Abduh, Abdullah Saeed wants to assert that the Qur'an does not restrain humans from using their reason in understanding and practicing religious teachings.

Before dividing the Qur'an based on values to find out the extent to which contextual interpretations can be applied, Abdullah Saeed first made a classification of the Qur'an based on its content. According to Saeed, the Qur'an can be divided into four categories: talking about transcendent things (ghayb); oriented to the historical record; relating to parables; and oriented to beliefs, values, and practices in everyday

12 M. Amin Nurdin, *Pergulatan Kaum Muslim Minoritas Australia: Islam Versus Multikulturalisme dan Sekularisme* (Jakarta: Ushul Press, 2009), 225.

13 Matthew Patombo, "The Emergence of Islamic Liberation Theology in South Africa," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2014): 28-61.

14 Muhammad Abduh, *Risalat al-Taub* (Beirut: Dar al-Syuruq, 1994), 119.

life (practice-oriented texts). Of these four content categories, it is the latter category that is the focus of hierarchical values to be interpreted with a contextual approach.¹⁵

With regard to hierarchy values, Abdullah Saeed emphasized that the value here is not limited to right or wrong, good or bad and the like, but everything that Muslims follow and practice or vice versa (rejected and avoided) on the basis of beliefs, ideas, and practices and rituals. There are five hierarchical values that Saeed compiled to determine the extent to which verses of legal ethics can be interpreted based on a contextual approach. First, obligatory values which means the values that must be implemented by a Muslim include the six pillars of faith (fundamental beliefs), five pillars of Islam (fundamental devotional practices), and halal-haram (permissible and prohibition) that have been clearly stated in the Qur'an.¹⁶ Second, fundamental values, which are values related to basic rights for humans that are associated with the five basic needs (daruriyyat al-khams) of maqasid shari'a. The five basic needs are protection of religion (hifz al-din), protection of the soul (hifz al-nafs), protection of property (hifz al-mal), protection of offspring (hifz al-nasl), and protection of reason (hifz al-'aql).¹⁷ Third, protectional values related to legal support for fundamental values. If the fundamental value has not touched the legal aspects related to the protection of basic rights, then this protection value is what embody the law that needs to be applied.¹⁸ Fourth, implementational values are specific steps taken to implement protection values that are adapted to the development of society.¹⁹ Fifth, instructional values. This value refers to the verses of commandments, prohibitions, advice relating to specific issues and situations.²⁰

15 Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Quran: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (London: Routledge, 2006), 91 – 94.

16 Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Quran in Twenty-first Century: A Contextualist Approach* (London: Routledge, 2014), 65.

17 Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Quran in Twenty-first Century: A Contextualist Approach* (London: Routledge, 2014), 66.

18 Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Quran in Twenty-first Century: A Contextualist Approach* (London: Routledge, 2014), 67.

19 Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Quran in Twenty-first Century: A Contextualist Approach* (London: Routledge, 2014), 68.

20 Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Quran in Twenty-first Century: A Contextualist Approach* (London: Routledge, 2014), 70.

Context Independent (Universal)	Context Dependent (Particular)
<p>Obligatory values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fundamental beliefs - Fundamental devotional practices - Clearly spelt out halal and haram <p>Fundamental values</p> <p>Protectional values</p> <p>Instructional values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Frequent - Salience - Relevant 	<p>Implementational values</p> <p>Instructional values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Infrequent - Non-salience - Less relevant

Abdullah Saeed said that these hierarchical values could help efforts to reinterpret the Qur'an. Values in context-free corridors represent a fixed, irreversible, and universally applicable value significance. Whereas context dependent values can help an interpreter to consider the extent to which they may change by looking at emphasis, and shifting meaning, it is even possible to eliminate a number of values and practices that may already be irrelevant. In the case of slavery for example, although some verses acknowledge the existence of slavery, the change in the context of values in society is abolished. Likewise with the institution of marriage, although the Qur'an details the mechanisms of marriage and divorce, but as reforms in the field of family law develop, various rules in the Muslim world today strengthen the position of women so that relations between husband and wife become equal.²¹

Turning to the discussion of hermeneutic bases, Abdullah Saeed has the concept of contextual meaning to determine what kind of meaning an interpreter should understand in relation to the possibility of shifting meaning as mentioned above. A contextualist interpreter, for Saeed, sought to understand the meaning of the Qur'anic text as understood by the first recipients to then be associated with the context born in the aftermath (subsequent context) to the contemporary context at

21 Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Quran in Twenty-first Century: A Contextualist Approach* (London: Routledge, 2014), 71 – 72.

this time. Linking this meaning is a historical consequence of the long journey of Muslim practice from generation to generation. According to Saeed, an interpreter in addition to having to pay attention to macro context 1 (the recipient of the first revelation) and macro context 2 (the current receiver), also looks at the connector context. In other words, the range of historical records from the macro period context 1 to macro context 2 is noteworthy.²²

The question is what should be able to understand the shift in meaning based on macro context? Saeed explained that taking the meaning of the Qur'an is not enough just by linguistic analysis alone. According to him, understanding of linguistic aspects like this can reduce the meaning contained in it. He asserts that meaning is not outside the text nor in the thoughts of the author or reader of the text, but in the complex relationship between them. For Saeed, there are four elements related to the meaning of a text: the speaker (God), the message, the recipient, and the context when the message is conveyed to the recipient.²³ Unfortunately, Saeed did not elaborate further on the four elements he mentioned.

Abdullah Saeed devised practical systematics to implement interpretive measures with a contextual approach. Saeed mentions four steps in the short version. First, an interpreter must understand the world of Qur'anic texts relating to their nature and position to Muslims while reflecting on his own world such as his life experiences and environment. Second, an interpreter must understand the history of the development of the Qur'an including those related to the difference in the way of reading (*qiraat*) and its relation to other texts such as hadith and the prophet's *sirah*. Third, an interpreter delves into the principles of text meaning including linguistic aspects, historical aspects, and attempts to reconstruct the text of the Qur'an when it was revealed in the 7th century AD. Fourth, an interpreter focuses on how the meaning that has been produced in the previous step can be relevant to Muslims today.

Abdullah Saeed argued that the Qur'an as Kalam Allah is unattainable to mankind. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was a passive recipient of revelation and had no hand whatsoever. It was only after being received and delivered by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in Arabic that man could play a role in understanding it.²⁴ Then when it has been codified as a mushaf or in the

22 Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Quran in Twenty-first Century: A Contextualist Approach* (London: Routledge, 2014), 86.

23 Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Quran in Twenty-first Century: A Contextualist Approach* (London: Routledge, 2014), 87 – 88.

24 Abdullah Saeed, "Rethinking Revelation as Precondition for Reinterpreting the Quran: A Quranic Perspective", *Journal of Quranic Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1999): 93 – 114.

position of the Qur'an as a text, Saeed sees the Qur'an in its function as a book of ethics compared to the book of law. This means that the verses of the Qur'an when speaking anything can be understood in the shade of ethical values.²⁵

Saeed then mentioned the verses that exist in the level of implementation values as verses of legal ethics (ethico-legal context). Abdullah Saeed's view of the Qur'an later resulted in an interpretive methodology that emphasized text and socio-historical approaches. Researchers can briefly describe Abdullah Saeed's interpretive construction in the following chart.

Farid Esack's Thought

Throughout our research into Farid Esack's works, we found at least three key concepts on which Farid Esack's interpretive methodology is based: Progressive revelation, reception hermeneutics, and Qur'anic theology of liberation. These three concepts are related to each other. Progressive revelation is an ontological term that Esack uses when looking at the Qur'an, hermeneutic reception is a tool for reading and understanding the Qur'an epistemologically, while liberation theology of the Qur'an is positioned as an axiological guide to practicing the Qur'an in the South African context.

Ontologically the Qur'an according to Farid Esack is a progressive revelation. To understand this Esack invites the reader back to the time when the Qur'an was revealed gradually to the Prophet Muhammad. According to him, during the time of revelation to the Prophet, the Qur'an was never formulated in a composed book format. The Qur'an comes down in response to social problems and demands for actual problems. He was recited by the Prophet, then digested in the memory of the companions, and became a praxis of Muslims in the face of the situation and conditions of society at that time. Esack therefore asserts that as a progressive revelation, the Qur'an has an impact on social change due to its responsive disposition.²⁶

Shah Waliyullah al-Dihlawi referred to Esack in this regard. According to Esack, al-Dihlawi was an early Muslim scholar who introduced the concept of interrelationship between revelation and context. Al-Dihlawi's idea of the unity of being, emphasizes that everything (cosmic, terrestrial, and human) is very tightly integrated and whatever happens will always have a intertwined impact. Therefore, the message conveyed by God through revelation can certainly not be in a vacuum situation. For this revelatory scheme, according to al-Dihlawi, God deals with humans

25 Abdullah Saeed, *The Quran: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2008), 13.

26 Farid Esack, *Quran, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 54.

like a doctor who prescribes patients according to the disease he suffers from.²⁷

The fact that today Muslims only view the Qur'an as a religious dogma, not as a progressive revelation as Esack revealed, Mohammad Arkoun termed it with an official closed corpus. This means that the Qur'an as its revelatory process is no longer imagined as an open and responsive dialectical revelation. Arkoun stated that there are consequences of this closed official corpus assumption. First, all approaches and methods of analysis of the Qur'an are restricted so that it is considered haram to be able to go beyond the dogmatic enclosure. Second, interpretations that are considered authoritative are orthodox interpretations.²⁸

The strictest restrictions on the understanding and interpretation of the Qur'an, for Esack, did not preclude the concept of progressive revelation that He carried out. This is because according to him the basic principle of progressive revelation has been manifested in *Asbab Nuzul* and *Naskh*, two concepts contained in the Qur'an. Although in reality these two concepts have not been the basic principles for the practice of interpreting the Qur'an.²⁹

The results of Andrew Rippin's 19 bibliographical survey of asbab nuzul, and his research related to the function of asbab nuzul in various books of commentary, corroborate Farid Esack's conclusion that the history of the cause of the fall of the Qur'an is merely listed by the mufasir without continuing to be the subject of analysis.³⁰ Rippin argues that instead of wanting to prove the presence and attachment of God in human life, the mufasir reduced the history of the descent of revelation only as a record.³¹ Long before Rippin reviewed this matter, actually Muslim scholars and mufasir, Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, have revealed that one of the functions of asbab nuzul is a form of God's presence, although it is not tracked in practice as intended Esack and Rippin.³² It should also be understood that at that time the paradigm of science still adheres to the history system. In other words, history becomes a valid measure of knowledge.

As for the concept of nasakh although there is debate among Muslim scholars,

27 Sha>h Waliyulla>h al-Dihla>wi>, *H{ujjat Alla>h al-Ba>lighab* (Kairo: Da>r al-Ji>l, Juz. 1 2005), 187.

28 Mohammed Arkoun, "Contemporary Critical Practices and the Quran," in Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Quran* (Leiden: Brill, Vol. 1, 2001), 412-431.

29 Farid Esack, *Quran, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 55.

30 Andrew Rippin, "The Exegetical Genre of Asbab Nuzul: A Bibliographical and Terminological Survey," *Bulletin of School of Oriental and African Studies* Vol. 48 No. 1 (1985): 1-15.

31 Andrew Rippin, "The Function of Asbab Nuzul in Quranic Exegesis," *Bulletin of School of Oriental and African Studies* Vol. 51, No. 1 (1988): 1 - 20.

32 Jalal al-Din al-Suyuthi, *al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Muassasat al-Risalah, 2008), 71.

between accepting and rejecting and the debate about the number of verses of the Qur'an that is preached, Farid Esack chose to interpret it as a situational character of the Qur'an. Esack believes that both the whole revelation and the specific verse remain derived in the context of intact social conditions, relatable to each other. He argued that the case for banning khamr in the Qur'an is the best example of this.³³

Progressive revelation, as evidenced by the above two concepts, reflects the idea of the presence of a divine entity that manifests His will in line with the situation of His people. Thus, according to Farid Esack, Muslims have a duty to always find God's will for the present reality. Farid Esack says:³⁴

“The challenge for every generation of believers is to discover their own moment of revelation, their own intermission in revelation, their own frustration with God, joy with His consoling grace, and their own guidance by the principle of progressive revelation.”

The above concept of progressive revelation is in line with the reception hermeneutics that Farid Esack used to understand the Qur'an. Hermeneutic reception focuses on the process of interpretation and describes differences in understanding both from the individual and group side of the text in accordance with its interests. If traced further, this understanding arises from the view of David Kelsey who explained that the meaning of Scripture serves to shape new human identities.³⁵

According to Farid Esack, the product of interpretation of one community or individual may be different from another because of the differences in circumstances and conditions surrounding it. On the basis of these differences, Esack believes that a person or group does not need to force each other's truth of interpretation on others. What Farid Esack put forward is called “reader – centered hermeneutics” in the category that Osborne made.³⁶ We see that in this category Stanley Fish became the most relevant philosopher in Farid Esack's perspective. In understanding the text, Fish is of the view that the text has potential meanings which of these potentials the reader / interpreter chooses one of them. Fish further said an interpreter is a representation (spokesman / agent) for the understanding of his community.³⁷

Farid Esack's last concept was Qur'anic liberation theology. With this concept

33 Farid Esack, *Quran, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 59.

34 Farid Esack, *Quran, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 60.

35 David Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 83.

36 Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1991), 368.

37 Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 11 – 14.

Esack wants to emphasize that the moral value of the Qur'an essentially frees man from oppression. Mindful that religion has great potential to inflame the spirit of the struggle of the ummah, especially in the situation and conditions of South Africa, Farid Esack made the best use of the Qur'an to fight the apartheid regime. It was in this context that Farid Esack conceived the praxis of the Qur'an's liberation theology as the basis for his struggle.

There are six key words from Esack's exploration of the Qur'an to strengthen the basis of his struggle. First, *taqwa* (awareness of presence of God). *Taqwa* defined as a form of one's responsibility to God and mankind at once. Esack emphasized how important the value of piety is to a Muslim. Second, *tawhid* (unity of God). Based on the experience of his praxis, Esack interprets *tawhid* as an orthopraxis that emphasizes the unity of non-discriminatory society.³⁸ Third, *al-nas* (people). The researcher's keyword *al-nas* translates with humans and people, looking at Farid Esack's explanation when it is associated with the Qur'an and with the South African context.³⁹ Fourth, *mustadafun* (the oppressed and marginalized). According to Farid Esack, the spirit of the Qur'an is to defend the weak and oppressed.⁴⁰ Fifth, *al-adl* (justice). Farid Esack explains that this word is represented by two terms in the Qur'an: *qist* and *'adl* whose meaning and use of the two alternately.⁴¹ Sixth, *Jihad* (struggle and praxis). In Farid Esack's view *jihad* in the South African context is praxis and a struggle to eliminate injustice, not to replace the political system let alone establish an Islamic political system.⁴²

These six keywords, according to Farid Esack, emerged from the intersection of anti-apartheid activists with the Qur'an. The fruits of the challenge came from all directions, both from Muslims who supported the status quo of the apartheid regime and from its own political elites. Esack asserts that the position of these six concepts to the struggle of the South African people is as an indispensable tool for understanding the Qur'an in a oppressed society and in the context of the interfaith struggle for freedom and justice. The two early keywords, *taqwa* and *tawhid*, served Farid Esack as theological spectacles that South African Muslims used to see the

38 Farid Esack, *Quran, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 94.

39 Farid Esack, *Quran, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 97.

40 Farid Esack, *Quran, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 98 – 102.

41 Farid Esack, *Quran, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 103 – 106.

42 Farid Esack, *Quran, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 107 – 109.

realities of pluralistic societies. The next keywords, *al-nas* and *mustad'afin*, represent the situation and conditions of society that are being fought against oppressive political regimes. As for the word of fairness and *jihad*, it reflects the purpose and ethos of struggle as a basis of universal values representing oppressed societies.

Farid Esack tends to see revelation as a progressive revelation that is responsive to problems. Esack positioned the Prophet Muhammad as an active recipient. This means that the environment and challenges faced by the Prophet (peace be upon him) have an impact on the process of revelatory *Qur'an*. In his terms, the Prophet Muhammad was as an instrument of revelation.⁴³ With this view, Esack argues that the *Qur'an* is a dynamic text and always relevant as it was when it was revealed. On both of these grounds, Esack chose to use the method of interpretation of functional hermeneutics by emphasizing the plurality of meaning and the role of interpreters in society. The construction of Farid Esack's interpretation can be described as follows:

Muslim Minority Scholar's Perspective on the Quran

Abdullah Saeed's Perspective

After living for approximately 15 years in Australia, at the end of 2001 Abdullah Saeed felt a serious threat from the Australian public who began to question the existence of Islam and Muslim groups in the country. Saeed mentioned that there was a debate in the public sphere between groups that argued for taking strong action against the existence of Muslims by positioning it as a potential threat and who rejected the notion by arguing that generalizing all Muslims as terrorists was a rash act. In such a situation, Saeed said, Muslims in Australia are able to maintain their existence by understanding Islam to the Australian people. Abdullah Saeed wrote a book called *Islam in Australia* as a preventive effort to explain Islam to Australian society.⁴⁴

Abdullah Saeed did not act as if only Muslims were wronged by the actions of people outside Islam. According to Saeed, the biggest factor causing Australians to suffer from Islamophobia is the lack of interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims. Saeed realized that life in Australia and in other Western countries is generally considered contrary by some Muslims.⁴⁵ As well as the response from some non-Muslims, also stated the same thing by considering that Islamic and Muslim

43 Farid Esack, *Quran, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 49.

44 Abdullah Saeed, *Islam in Australia* (New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 2003), v.

45 Abdullah Saeed, *Islam in Australia* (New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 2003), vii.

cultures are not in line with Western culture.⁴⁶

Abdullah Saeed sought to take a proportionate stance on the issue. He then made the classification of Muslims living in Australia and those living in the 'West' in general into four categories based on their relationship to the country of origin (national dimension), how to read the text and tradition (traditional dimension), the disobedience of certain ideologies (ideological dimension), and attitudes towards the West (approach to the West dimension). The first is the category of Muslim immigrants who have recently moved from regions such as the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and other regions. According to Saeed, the group still holds fast to the traditions of the country of origin because imagination and feelings are still quite strong. Second is the group of Muslim youth from educated circles influenced by transnational ideologies such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Jamaat. This group is more organized and has targets and agendas of Islamic activism and da'wah. Third, Muslim groups influenced by Salafi-Wahabi ideology that strengthened in the 1980s with the disbursement of funds from the Gulf States. This group tends to ignore differences of opinion and the diversity of Islamic thought traditions because it emphasizes the 'pure' teachings of Islam which directly refer to the Qur'an and the Prophet's hadith. Fourth, mostly Muslim groups living in the West that are the product of fusion between Western and Islamic cultures, the environment and culture held are Western.⁴⁷

As a method of understanding the Qur'an, contextual interpretation is very important in addressing modernity, especially for Muslims living as a minority in secular countries. Contextual interpretation is the result of Saeed's efforts to continue the idea of modern interpretation so that Muslims are not constrained by the text so that they are unable to answer actual challenges with the times. Saeed argues that on the one hand the Qur'an is a specific book that came down and applied in the 7th century AD to the Arabian Peninsula and its surroundings. On the other hand, it is also a universal book that is used as a guide to cross the boundaries of space and time. To reach the second side, it takes certain methods of interpretation so that the principles and values contained therein can be taken and practiced in various contexts. With contextual interpretation Saeed wants that when Muslims read the Qur'an, he becomes part of the problem solver in answering the challenges of the times, not even a new problem for the life of modern society.

46 John L. Esposito, "Foreword." in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad (ed), *Muslim in the West: from Sojourners to Citizens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), vii.

47 Abdullah Saeed, "Muslim in the West and Their Attitudes to Full Participation in Western Societies: Some Reflection." in Geoffrey Brahm dan Tariq Modood (ed), *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 207 – 210.

In his article, Abdullah Saeed acknowledged that some Muslims who misguidedly read the Qur'an will make the Qur'an a means of justification for his actions despite being in conflict with Islamic law and teachings. ISIS, Saeed said, justified its practice of slavery against non-Muslim female captives with the Qur'anic verse surat al-Mu'minun [23]: verses 1 – 6. This is evident from the pamphlet that ISIS once distributed in a document titled *su'al wa jawab fi al-sabi wa al-riqab*.⁴⁸

Although the challenge is severe enough to popularize contextual interpretation for society at large due to the rejection of some Muslims who expressly state only textualism as the most correct method, Abdullah Saeed is optimistic that contextual interpretation as a systematic method will be accepted as both theory and practice. In the Muslim world, the practice of freedom of access to public spaces for women has been in place for a long time. Family law with an equality perspective has been enacted by various countries including Indonesia.⁴⁹ This indicates that what Saeed wrote theoretically, in the same spirit has been practiced by public institutions in the Islamic World.

Farid Esack's Perspective

As someone who was born and lived in South Africa during the apartheid regime, the life problems faced by Farid Esack were much different from Abdullah Saeed's. The experience of living in colonization and oppression led to a difference in perspective between Esack and Saeed. In looking at the case of 9/11 for example, Farid Esack assumed that Muslims should not be responsible for explaining anything about the Qur'an to Western society. According to him, people who in his mind are already stored suspicious (polemicist) will find what they want. Among Muslims, for those who in their minds are already embedded hatred (fundamentalist) will gain legitimacy for his actions from the Qur'an. Then for those who are principled non-violence (commitment to non-violence) will easily look for verses on peace. Esack mentioned that the Qur'an in this context is a contested scripture.⁵⁰

The foundation of Farid Esack's interpretation is not in the construct between textualists and contextualists as Abdullah Saeed. Esack had no tendency or effort whatsoever so that the understanding of the Qur'an could be in harmony with modernity or relevant to the times. Especially when associated with the events of 9/11 that cause symptoms of Islamophobia in many parts of the world, especially

48 Abdullah Saeed, "Reading the Quran Contextually: Approaches and Challenges." in Mun'im Sirry (ed.), *New Trends in Quranic Studies: Text, Context, and Interpretation* (Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2019), 151.

49 Euis Nurlaelawati, *Modernization, Tradition, and Identity: the Kompilasi Hukum Islam and Legal Practice in the Indonesian Religious Courts* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 217.

50 Farid Esack, *The Quran: A User's Guide* (Oneworld Publication, 2005), 191.

in the Western world. Although both use contextual terms, Farid Esack has its own meaning. Esack uses the word contextual as the actualization of God's words in oppressed situations and conditions to realize God's will for all mankind, namely equality and justice. Moreover, the contextuality of the Qur'an for Esack does not lie in the objective meaning that is in the text but corresponds to the praxis and goals to be achieved in order to liberate mankind.⁵¹

During apartheid in South Africa, Farid Esack sought to contextualize the Qur'an in the situation and conditions of oppressed people due to apartheid policies. Esack sought to convince South African Muslims that the Qur'an was aligned with their struggle for equality while also being an opposition to conservative Muslim groups that also used the Koran to ban the attempted overthrow of the apartheid regime.⁵²

After decades of South Africans fighting for equality and justice, Farid Esack said that a bright spot was seen in the 1970s when the oppressed consciousness movement labeled Black Consciousness (BC) began to gain a place in society. In previous years organizations that echoed equality, such as the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) were banned by the apartheid government. The movement eventually gave rise to an organization called the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983. The organization then overshadowed various movements under it including the Call of Islam on the part of Muslims who wanted to break down apartheid.⁵³

At the same time there are challenges from the media of the period who play a role in the accompaniment of public opinion. One of the media that followed the flow of the apartheid regime's policies was Muslim News, a mass media founded in critical but slowly but surely conservative Islam and chose silence theology in apartheid. According to Haron's account, the mass media helped herd the opinion of south African Muslims not to participate in the wave of resistance against the apartheid regime with the theology of silence earlier.⁵⁴ In one edition Muslim News provided an important editorial to illustrate this:

“Has the government forbidden the worship of Allah? Has the government closed down or ordered the demolition of any mosque in a declared white area? If our

51 Farid Esack, *Quran, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 255.

52 Farid Esack, *Quran, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 42.

53 Farid Esack, *Quran, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 35.

54 Muhammad Haron, “The Alternative South African Muslim Press: Muslim News & Al-Qalam,” *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (2004): 461 – 462.

government has ordered our Muslims to desert the faith of our forefathers, then our ulama would have been the first to urge us to resist, even to death.”

The accumulation of Farid Esack's experience and struggle is what is then reflected into an idea of methods as well as the practice of interpretation of the Qur'an. Many terms are used to refer to the idea of Farid Esack. In his own book, at least Esack proposed several terms such as hermeneutic of liberation, Quranic theology of liberation, and called his movement progressive Islamist. These three terms are inseparable and related to each other. The first term (hermeneutic of liberation) can be defined as the process and way of finding the meaning of an interpreter that goes hand in hand with dialectics and activism. The second term (quranic theology of liberation) is a specific form of liberation theology taken from the universal teachings of the Qur'an. For more details about this has been explained in the previous sub chapter. The term progressive Islamist is the term farid esack used to refer to his movement along with the Call of Islam and all the South African Muslim activists who helped overthrow the apartheid regime.⁵⁵

Associated with progressive terms, Farid Esack had special experience when he served as professor of contemporary Islamic studies al-Walid bin Talal at Harvard University. Esack recalled that in 2003 when the United States invaded Iraq, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice during George W. Bush contacted Secretary Farid Esack asking for time to meet. Esack said his secretary, who knew full well that he was strongly opposed to all forms of imperialism and opposed U.S. foreign and domestic policy, suggested that Esack avoid meeting with Rice. Knowing that Esack refused the meeting, Rice wondered, “isn't Farid Esack a progressive Muslim?”

Farid Esack spoke at the “Critical Muslim Studies: Decolonial Struggle and Liberation Theology” held by the Center of Study and Investigation for Decolonial Dialogue in 2013. Farid Esack then explains that his progressive version is not in the sense of being critical of the authority of tradition and dogma as opposed to modernity as Condoleezza Rice suspected. For Farid Esack the progressive is consistency in the resistance movement against all forms of oppression and inequality. While telling the audience, Farid Esack laughed at Rice's question from his secretary and was followed by a boisterous audient laugh. Esack acknowledged that his rejection was the right decision. He believes that politicians like Condoleezza Rice are not looking for friends for dialogue but are just seeking recognition from intellectuals who are considered to be invited to cooperate.⁵⁶

55 Farid Esack, “Progressive Islam – A Rose by Any Name? American Soft Power in the War for the Hearts and Minds of Muslims,” *ReOrient* Vol. 4, No. 1 (2018): 78 – 106.

56 Speech at Summer School Granada bertajuk “Critical Muslim Studies: Decolonial Struggles, Theology of Liberation and Islamic Revival,” Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYIV0Y4MH-M&t=6s>

At the event, Farid Esack said that after 9/11 the Muslim community including its academics was unconsciously busy building arguments to convince the Western world that they were not the same as the barbarians who attacked the WTC building and represented themselves as good friends to the Western world. Esack lamented that there was no outspoken voice criticizing Western hegemony that directly or indirectly led to the emergence of terrorism.

Seen in the eyes of minority theory, it can be said that Farid Esack during apartheid was a representation of the double minority. First, minorities in the sense of being oppressed from the social and economic side due to the prevailing political system distinguishing social structures based on skin color. Although the population of dark-skinned people is much more than white people, but in theory Viviane Seyranian this group is referred to as a population without power (powerless populace).⁵⁷ Both minorities as Muslims whose population in South Africa only ranges from 2% of the total population of the majority Protestant Christian population as much as 79.8%.

The Quran and Characters of Muslim Minority Scholars

After explaining the thoughts of Abdullah Saeed and Farid Esack and their position as a minority, in this section we will elaborate on the character of minority interpretation in view of their thoughts. We identified at least four things to underline when discussing the character of minority interpretations based on Abdullah Saeed and Farid Esack. First, it deals with the meaning and purpose of revelation of the Qur'an, who and what determines both. We call this the category 'meaning dimension'. Second, an understanding of the contextuality of the Qur'an. The extent to which it is understood according to minority Muslim scholars and the difference according to the horizon behind their attitudes. We call this the term 'contextual dimension'. Third, it is connected to previous generations of Muslim traditions that were considered more authoritative. We call this the 'dimension of traditional authority'. Fourth, views on international politics represented by the media towards Muslim communities include terrorism and extremism. We call this in the category of 'dimensions of view towards international politics'.

Based on the four categories above and referring to the research researchers' analysis of the thoughts of Abdullah Saeed and Farid Esack, the character of minority Muslim scholars can be divided into two categories.

accessed February 25th 2020.

57 Viviane Seyranian dkk, "Dimensions of Majority and Minority Groups," *Group Process & Intergroup Relation* Vol. 11, No. 1 (2008): 32.

Objectivist-universal/theoretical/accommodate/non-political

This category represents the character of minority interpretation Abdullah Saeed. In the dimension of meaning related to the determining factor of meaning over the understanding of the Qur'an, we refer to Saeed's character as objectivist-universal. The term objectivist, the first diction in the universal objectivist-combined does not refer to any of the categories in the hermeneutic school that emphasize the importance of the meaning of the text based on the author's intent or known as 'author-centered hermeneutics'.⁵⁸ Such understanding refers to the systematic 'contextual approach' devised by Abdullah Saeed to understand and/or interpret the Qur'an contextually. This approach is aimed at understanding the Muslim community towards the Qur'an that its values are substantially aligned with the development of the modern world. The point is objectivist-universal based on Abdullah Saeed's belief that the meaning of the Qur'an can be understood in an objective framework for all its readers as well as universal value because it is relevant to every time and place. With the record of the meaning of the Qur'an, it still pays attention to the hierarchical value that Saeed has made.

Abdullah Saeed's contextual dimension is an understanding of the Qur'an that considers socio-historical aspects of the descent of revelation to take its universal values and then applied to the present context.⁵⁹ We call it theoretical because in Saeed's perspective with his contextual approach, it can understand Muslims who are still shackled by textual reading in order to understand the values of the substance of the Qur'an and its relevance to the times. For Saeed, the context of the Qur'an is part of an effort to address the challenges facing an increasingly complex ummah. So that the ummah is not shackled to the sound of the text of the Qur'an because of a narrow understanding, contextual methods and approaches are arranged that are in line with the struggle of the Prophet.

In this regard, Abdullah Saeed emphasized that his interpretation approach was not uprooted from the roots of the Muslim tradition. This affirmation is to dismiss accusations from textual groups who consider that contextual approaches come from outside the Islamic tradition or accused as anti-Islam. Saeed uses the example of Umar ibn Khattab's understanding and application approach to some Qur'anic verses that he said had practiced contextual approaches as he did. Saeed termed Umar ibn Khattab's practice proto-contextualist.⁶⁰ We call this step by accommodative terms.

58 Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika dan Pengembangan Ulumul Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Nawasea Press, 2017), 45.

59 Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Quran in Twenty-first Century: A Contextualist Approach* (London: Routledge, 2014), 94.

60 Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Quran: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (London: Routledge, 2006),

This means that Abdullah Saeed's attitude and views towards Islamic tradition are accommodative.

On the growing issues in the Western world, especially those relating to Muslims, Abdullah Saeed sought to respond in preventive ways. After 9/11 when the Western public was busy questioning the teachings of Islam and various accusations emerged from both right-leaning politicians and the media with the bombardment of war news for example, Abdullah Saeed made several books to respond to the symptoms in his position as an academic. Saeed's efforts to explain Islam to the Western public are purely from an academic perspective, not associated with global political contestation and such. This is where we put Abdullah Saeed in the non-political category.

Definitively, when reading the ideas and characters of Abdullah Saeed's thoughts from his efforts to reconcile Islamic teachings and modern values, reflect the values of the Qur'an with contemporary conditions, believe the universality of the Qur'an can be applied in a secular state, and use a new *ijtihad*, we can include Saeed in the category of modernist thinkers. In a more specific category, Saeed continued Fazlur Rahman's efforts in reinterpreting the Qur'an which Jasser Auda called a reformist reinterpretation or contextual interpretation thinker.⁶¹

Subjectivist-segmented/praxis/liberative/political

The second category represents the characteristics of Farid Esack-style minority interpretations. We term it subjectivist-segmental because its emphasis on determining the meaning of the Qur'an lies in its specific and situational interests and segmentation. Farid Esack believed that the most important thing in determining the meaning of the Qur'an is the need for Muslims to answer the challenges at hand. In Esack's case, progressive Muslim groups fighting to bring down the apartheid regime had an interest in creating a counter-narrative that supported his struggle against apartheid-supporting Islamist groups that maintained the status quo.⁶² Farid Esack acknowledged himself that these liberative methods and praxis of exegesis were only suitable for being applied in South Africa in the context of the apartheid regime and under certain conditions. For this reason, we term esack's meaning subjectivist-segmental. This means that Esack prefers the subjective meaning of *mufasir* to fight for the value of justice and equality of the Qur'an in South African conditions.

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61 Jasser Auda, *Maqashid al-Shari'ah as Philosophy of Islamic Law A System Approach* (London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2007), 173.

62 Farid Esack, *Quran, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 43.

In line with the meaning of the Qur'an, Farid Esack chose a contextual definition in a specific sense. He stressed the importance of contextualizing the Qur'an in societies that are victims of the exploitation of oppressive systems, as happened in South Africa during apartheid. We call praxis in the contextual dimension of Esack, inseparable from his understanding of the contextualization of the Qur'an. The praxis we are referring to are not far from the praxis meaning that Esack himself uses. In his book, Esack says that praxis are a combination and integration between intellectual reflection and liberative struggle that both go hand in hand.⁶³

For Farid Esack, belief in the alignment of Qur'anic values with what is fought for is more than enough to focus on realizing its goals. He refused to dismiss questions that doubted the authenticity and originality of his ideas and movements. He said that he did not feel the need to consider concepts or ideas derived from the tradition of Islamic thought that were irrelevant and ineffective in his struggle. When talking about the originality of ideas and movements, Esack emphasized that a concept however he considered most correct must be the product of an ideology, history, and politics. Even the text of the Qur'an itself, according to Esack, in its history has been used as a political weapon for the fight for power. Esack emphasizes that marginalized people who have the determination to determine their own authenticity.⁶⁴ From this, we call Farid Esack's model of interpretation liberative because he thinks the most important thing is partiality, not the continuity of tradition.

Farid Esack's consistency in carrying out his ideas is evident when he talks about growing issues in the West. Esack firmly positioned himself to always be critical of the West. In the aftermath of 9/11, when Muslim scholars were busy clarifying and explaining that terrorism was not in line with Islamic teachings for example, Esack preferred to be critical by arguing that what appeared to be a case of terror could be the result of Western hegemony, imperialism and injustice, especially the United States, against Muslim countries.⁶⁵ Farid Esack's opinions and ideas like this are a form of critical attitude towards the West, He does not at all justify the perpetrators of terror. He questioned the west's post-colonialism position that perpetuated economic and even military colonization. Israel's occupation of Palestine, the U.S. military's invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, the economic shackles of foreign debt are a record to Farid Esack that imperialism still exists. For this reason, we call Farid Esack has a political perspective on the West.

63 Farid Esack, *Quran, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 85.

64 Farid Esack, *Quran, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998), 256.

65 Farid Esack, *The Quran: A User's Guide* (Oneworld Publication, 2005), 192.

Looking at Farid Esack's character above, especially in his criticism of the West and modernism, we can say that he falls into the category of post-modernist thinkers. Just as Jacques Derrida brought the idea of deconstruction, Farid Esack rejected the truth that had been believed to be in a logocentric and perspectival position of binary opposition. Esack rejected a truth fixated on a single authority, especially of the West, which then marginalized weak and marginalized groups of society. More specifically, Farid Esack has a post-colonial point of view by voicing groups marginalized by Western colonialism and rejecting the assumptions and truths voiced by the West in the name of globalization behind which there are hegemony interests.⁶⁶

Conclusion

This article reviews the thoughts of Abdullah Saeed and Farid Esack who are positioned as a minority. For some Muslims, especially those living in a homogeneous environment as the majority, there is relatively no significant challenge in understanding and practicing the Quran. Unlike Muslims living as a minority, their understanding and practice of the Quran is limited by a majority of people who do not believe the Quran to be the Holy Book. The study showed that minority Muslim scholars have their own interpretive character in accordance with the environmental challenges in which they live.

Abdullah Saeed, who lives in Australia in an open and democratic environment, accommodates the values of Australian society by seeking to explain that the Quran is a Scripture that is contextual and relevant to modernity. Saeed uses a contextual approach to assert that an understanding of the Qur'an can be in keeping with the times. Farid Esack, who lived in South Africa during apartheid, used the Quran as a tool to encourage Muslims to cooperate with all South Africans in bringing down the apartheid government. Esack opposed some Muslims in South Africa who used the Quran to support the apartheid government. In the context of Minority Muslims, contextual understanding becomes a necessity. On the contrary, rigid and textual understanding is increasingly irrelevant. The Qur'an for minority Muslim scholars, must remain actual and able to answer the challenges of the times. The Quran does not become a shackle for Muslims especially when it comes to their position as a minority.

Supplementary Materials

66 Jasser Auda, *Maqashid al-Shari'ah as Philosophy of Islamic Law A System Approach* (London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2007), 191.

The data presented in this study are available in [insert article or supplementary material here] (Usually the datasets were analyzed from library research can be found in the whole data references).

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Authors' contributions

All listed authors contribute to this article. W.M. wrote the original draft, reviewed and edited it, conceptualised the study and managed the project administration, responsible for the methodology and validation. Y.R wrote the formal analysis, compiled the resources, and visualisation and supervised the project.

Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Conflicts of Interest

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Counter Discourse on the Idea of Islamic State and Formalization of Religion in the Qur'anic Exegesis of KH. Abdurahman Wahid

Kontra Wacana terhadap Gagasan Negara Islam dan Formalisasi Agama dalam Tafsir KH Abdurahman Wahid

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Abstract

This research discusses KH Abdurahman Wahid's Qur'anic interpretation written in his articles around the 2002–2003 period. Initial studies of the text show that Gus Dur was only active in elaborating the Qur'anic verses in his articles after he stepped down from the president and Chairman of the PBNU. This initial observation then raised questions regarding his lack of interpretation during Orde Baru (New Order), primarily when he served as Chairman of PBNU. Thus, what context finally made Gus Dur want to include the interpretation of the Qur'an in his article? This paper answers these questions using a descriptive-interpretive method. The theory used is the critical discourse analysis by Teun A. Van Dijk, which contains three steps, namely text analysis, personal and social cognition, and context. Furthermore, the results reveal that: (1) there is a discourse contest in the democratic transition period between those who are pro with an Islamic state and those against it; (2) Gus Dur positioned himself as a party against the idea of an Islamic state. It happened when Gus Dur used the verses of the Qur'an to strengthen his argument; (3) Gus Dur's interpretation which prioritizes the principle of humanity and can reach a wider audience, has implications indirectly for the development of the interpretation of the Qur'an in Indonesia.

Keywords: Gus Dur; tafsir; article; discourse analysis; Islamic state

Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas penafsiran KH. Abdurahman Wahid yang tertuang di dalam artikel-artikel yang ia tulis dalam rentang waktu 2002-2003. Studi awal atas teks menunjukkan bahwa Gus Dur baru aktif mengelaborasi ayat al-Qur'an setelah ia tak lagi menjabat sebagai presiden dan Ketua Umum PBNU. Pengamatan awal tersebut kemudian memunculkan pertanyaan terkait ketiadaan penafsirannya semasa Orde Baru, khususnya ketika ia menjabat sebagai Ketua Umum PBNU. Dengan demikian, konteks apa yang akhirnya membuat Gus Dur ingin memasukkan penafsiran al-Qur'an di dalam artikelnya? Tulisan ini menjawab pertanyaan tersebut menggunakan metode deskriptif-interpretatif. Teori yang dipakai adalah analisis wacana kritis Teun A. Van Dijk, yang terdiri dari tiga langkah, yakni analisis teks, kognisi personal dan sosial serta konteks. Hasil penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa: (1) terdapat pertarungan wacana di masa transisi demokrasi, antara yang pro dengan negara Islam dengan yang kontra terhadapnya; (2) Gus Dur memosisikan diri sebagai pihak yang kontra terhadap gagasan negara Islam. Di sinilah Gus Dur menggunakan ayat al-Qur'an sebagai penguat argumennya; (3) penafsiran Gus Dur yang lebih mengedepankan prinsip kemanusiaan serta mampu menggapai pembaca yang lebih luas, secara tidak langsung memberi implikasi bagi perkembangan tafsir al-Qur'an di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Gus Dur; tafsir; artikel; analisis wacana; negara islam



Introduction

Abdurrahman Wahid, commonly called Gus Dur (this paper will use this designation), is a religious, humanist, thinker, and pro-democracy figure who has carried out religious experiments to realize the fundamental values of religion in the social sphere.¹ To date, Gus Dur's writings and speeches have been studied seriously by young people along with the works of other progressive thinkers, such as Nurcholish Madjid and Djohan Effendi.² The productivity of Gus Dur in expressing his ideas and thoughts is why this paper chooses Gus Dur as the object of research. The second reason is the lack of interest of researchers, particularly in the field of Qur'anic studies, in examining Gus Dur's thoughts on the Qur'an and his commentary.

There are several reasons why this aspect is 'invisible.' Firstly, Gus Dur is commonly known as a thinker, political and democracy activist, and humanist. Consequently, Gus Dur's thoughts and commentary on the Qur'an were drowned out by conventional researches. Meanwhile, other figures such as Nurcholish Madjid, who does not have an academic background in Qur'anic studies, have been examined his main ideas on the Qur'an by several scholars. Among these, the most comprehensive are those written by AH. Johns and Abdullah Saeed. They demonstrated how the contextualization of the Qur'an by Cak Nur was heavily influenced by his teacher, Fazlur Rahman.³

Secondly, Gus Dur never wrote a complete book of commentary. Nevertheless, Gus Dur employs many verses of the Qur'an that he interprets to support the arguments in his article. Therefore, what Gus Dur did is an interesting phenomenon to be researched further. In addition, because the material object in this study is a collection of articles containing the commentary of the Qur'an, this paper will return the concept of interpretation to its base meaning in Arabic. Namely, *al-idah wa al-tabyin*. Linguistically, it is rooted in the word *al-fasr* (*fa sa ra*), which explains and reveals.⁴ In *Lisan al-'Arab*, the word *al-fasru* means revealing something closed, while the word *al-tafsir* means revealing the meaning of an abstruse expression.⁵ This perspective assumes that any attempt to explain or interpret the Qur'an can be

1 Ahmad Salehudin, *Abdurrahman Wahid* (Yogyakarta: Basabasi, 2019), p. 33.

2 G Barton, *Biografi Gus Dur: The Authorized Biography of Abdurrahman Wahid*, trans. Lie Hua (LKIS Pelangi Aksara, 2002), p. 183.

3 AH. Johns and Abdullah Saeed, 'Nurcholish Majid and the Interpretation of the Qur'an: Religious Pluralism and Tolerance', in *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an*, ed. by Suha Taji-Farouki (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 79.

4 Muhammad Husain al- Zahabi, *Al-Tafsir Wa Al-Mufasssirun*, vol. 1 (Kairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 2000), p. 12.

5 Imam ibn Manzur, *Lisān Al-'Arab*, vol.6 (Kerajaan Arab Saudi: Kementerian Urusan Islam, Wakaf, Dakwah dan Penyuluhan, n.d), p. 361.