THE CONCEPTS OF CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION OF THE QUR'AN ABDULLAH SAEED

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Abstract: *Along with the demands of modern and contemporary times, Muslim thinkers and scientists are starting to try, to respond, and find solutions to the crisis of how religious traditions are still able to relate to modernity and changing times in general. This article discusses one of the approaches used by contemporary scholars in understanding the Qur'an, one of whom is Abdullah Saeed, a professor of Islamic studies in Australia, who initiated the method of contextualizing the Qur'an. In particular, the author tries to explain methodological aspects from Abdullah Saeed's point of view in contextualizing the Qur'an. To be able to find answers to these problems, the author tries to collect data from various sources, both primary sources, namely from Abdullah Saeed's writings, and secondary sources, namely writings related to the main focus. To conclude, the writer tries to analyze the data that has been collected using the theory of character studies by analyzing the environment around the characters and the arguments that are built. The author concludes that the contextual interpretation initiated by Abdullah Saeed is a method of interpreting the text of the verses of the Qur'an which is related to the context of life and conditions society to answer various problems experienced by contemporary society today. Apart from that, in his thinking, Abdullah Saeed has the advantage of the double movement method initiated by Fazlur Rahman, namely he can provide systematic and operational steps in contextualizing the Qur'an.*

Keywords: *Abdullah Saeed, Contextual, Interpretation.*

Abstrak: Seiring dengan adanya tuntutan zaman modern dan kontemporer saat ini, para pemikir dan ilmuan Muslim mulai berusaha memberikan respon dan mencari solusi terhadap krisis bagaimana tradisi-tradisi agama tetap mampu berhubungan dengan modernitas dan perubahan zaman secara umum. Artikel ini membahas tentang salah satu pendekatan yang digunakan beberapa ulama kontemporer dalam memahami Al-Qur'an, salah satunya adalah Abdullah Saeed seorang guru besar bidang studi Islam di Australia, yang menggagas metode kontekstualisasi Al-Qur'an. Secara khusus penulis berusaha memaparkan aspek-aspek metodologis dari pandangan Abdullah Saeed dalam melakukan kontekstualisasi Al-Qur'an. Untuk dapat menemukan jawaban dari permasalahan tersebut, penulis berusaha megumpulkan data-data dari berbagai sumber, baik

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dari sumber primer yakni dari tulisan-tulisan Abdullah Saeed maupun dari sumber sekunder yakni tulisan-tulisan yang berkaitan dengan fokus utama. Guna mendapat kesimpulan, penulis berusaha menganalisis data-data yang telah terkumpul menggunakan teori studi tokoh dengan menganalisa lingkungan sekitar tokoh serta argumentasi-argumentasi yang dibangun. Penulis berkesimpulan bahwa penafsiran kontekstual yang digagas Abdullah Saeed merupakan metode interpretasi teks ayat Al-Quran yang dikaitkan dengan konteks kehidupan dan kondisi masyarakat guna menjawab berbagai persoalan yang dialami masyarakat kontemporer saat ini. Selain itu, dalam pemikirannya Abdullah Saeed memiliki keunggulan dari metode double movement yang digagas oleh Fazlur Rahman, yakni ia mampu memberi sistematika dan langkah-langkah operasional dalam melakukan kontektualisasi Al-Qur'an.

Kata-kata Kunci: *Abdullah Saeed, Interpretasi, Kontekstual.*

Introduction

Today's Islamic society has experienced many problems, ranging from anxiety about being in various fields, to authoritarianism and a literal understanding of the scriptures, which are even considered by some to be contrary to universal values that are believed to be related to justice, upholding human dignity, gender quality, and so on. Regarding the assumptions of modern society regarding the interpretation of the Qur'an, Asghar Ali Engineer emphasized that there are only two choices for Muslims, whether the Qur'an will be abandoned, or the Qur'an be interpreted to suit modern conditions. So, in this case, there is no other choice for Muslims but to strive for the Qur'an to continue to show its existence amid considerable social change at this time. [1]

With the demands of modern and contemporary times, Muslim thinkers and scientists are starting to try, respond, and find solutions to the crisis of how religious traditions can still relate to modernity and changing times in general.[2] They begin to realize the importance of the relationship between texts, interpreters, and new realities, that they do not only focus on the literal meaning of texts, interpretations can also be applied in different ways, accentuations, and perspectives. This is what contemporary scholars have implemented, such as Hasan Hanafi, Fazlur Rahman, Arkoun, Farid Esack, Amina Wadud, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd.

In the movement of this big project also appeared a name, Abdullah Saeed, a professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Melbourne University, who offered an interpretation that can be found in his work interpreting the Qur'an, which was only published in 2006. In his work, he firmly focused only on legal verses.[3] Reinterpretation of these verses is considered important because these verses are the ones that according to him are "most unprepared" when faced with reality, whereas indirectly these verses fill most of the daily lives of the majority of Muslims. Besides that, Saeed has also stated several times that this idea is a form of counter to the

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1　Asghar Ali Engineer, *Hak-Hak Perempuan dalam Islam*, trans. Farid Wajdi and Cici Fakhra Assegaf (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 1994), 3.

2　Suha Taji-Farouki, *Modern Muslim Intellectuals & the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1.

3　Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting The Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1.

textual interpretation model. It cannot be denied that he lives in a contemporary world where the issue of Islamic fundamentalism and textual interpretation is very widespread. So, he hopes to provide a basis for understanding that can be practiced by them without having to injure and betray what the scriptures convey. Saeed finally offers a "contextual" interpretation, and he refers to himself and those he agrees with as contextualists.[4]

The concept of contextualization of the Qur'an has been confirmed by Fazlur Rahman with the double movement hermeneutic method, but Fazlur Rahman's concept still leaves some deficiencies. Does not associate the problem of contextualization with the development of several sciences. Then later, Abdullah Saeed addressed these deficiencies intelligently, so that a complete Al-Qur'an contextualization method appeared. Before initiating the framework for his method of interpretation, the first thing Saeed did was try to build arguments that could show that contextual interpretation was possible and even had to be done by considering and criticizing the traditions of the Muslim community at that time.[5] This effort was made to be able to find differences between universal and particular meanings.

In this paper, Abdullah Saeed's idea of contextualizing the interpretation of the Qur'an will be explained, as well as the steps the takes in carrying out a contextual interpretation of the Qur'an. In the interpretation methodology initiated by Abdullah Saeed, several important things have been conveyed to find the spirit behind a verse, and some of these things the author will try to apply in interpreting Surah Al-Mā'idah:51 which some time ago was popular in debating the issue of appointing a leader from a non-Muslim. It is hoped that this method can give birth to a new understanding that is by the context of the current era.

Biography of Abdulla Saeed

Abdullah Saeed is a professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Melbourne, Australia. Saeed was born in the Maldives, on September 25, 1964. In 1977, he moved to Saudi Arabia to study. In Saudi Arabia, he studied Arabic and entered several formal educational institutions including the Basic Arabic Language Institute (1977–1979) and Intermediate Arabic Language Institute (1972–1982), and the Saudi Arabian Islamic University in Medina (1992–1986).[6] And the next year Saeed left Saudi Arabia to study in Australia. In there, Saeed completed his studies from a bachelor's degree to his doctoral program. He earned a bachelor's degree in Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Melbourne, Australia (1987). His master's in Applied Linguistics (1988–1992), and his doctorate in Islamic

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4 Abdullah Saeed, 'Some Reflections on the Contextualist Approach to Ethico-Legal Texts of the Quran', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 71, no. 2 (2008): 232–36, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X08000517.

5 Saeed, *Interpreting The Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, 105.

6 Agus Muliadi, 'Penafsiran Al-Qur'an di Era Modern: Studi Model Penafsiran Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed', *Maqosid: Jurnal Studi Keislaman dan Hukum Ekonomi Syariah* 9, no. 2 (Agustus-Desember 2021): 47, https://doi.org/10.37216/maqosid.v9i02.518.

Studies (1992–1994) were also completed at the same University.[7]

As for Abdullah Saeed's work history, from 1988–1992 as a tutor and part-time lecturer in Languages, Arabic Literature, and Middle Eastern Studies courses at the University of Melbourne. From 1991–1992 as coordinator of Arabic Language and Islamic Studies courses at King Khaliq Victoria Islamic High School. In 1993–1995 he served as a consultant for Arabic and Islamic Studies at King Khaliq Victoria Islamic High School as well as an assistant lecturer in Arabic Studies courses in the Department of Asian Language and Anthropology, Faculty of Languages, University of Melbourne. In 1996–1997 as deputy chair in the implementation of the Language Studies Department at the University of Melbourne, and in 1996–1999 as a senior lecturer in Arabic and Islamic Studies courses at the Language Department at the University of Melbourne. In 1999 he was also a Scholar for Eastern and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London. From 1998–2003 as deputy director of the Asia Institute (Institute of Asian Language and Societies) at the University of Melbourne. And in 2003–2004 as managing director of the Asia Institute (Institute of Asian Language and Societies) at the University of Melbourne. And is currently active as director of the National Center of Excellence for Islamic Studies, University of Melbourne.[8]

Abdullah Saeed also has a lot of activity in the scientific field, starting from the world of teaching, writing, research, and community service. At the University of Melbourne, he was entrusted with teaching and designing courses in his field of expertise. Before 2006, he was entrusted with teaching courses in Arabic and Islamic Studies at the undergraduate and postgraduate programs as well as Asian Studies. Meanwhile, in 2006 he taught courses in Fundamentals of Islamic Law, Introduction to the Qur'an, and Great Empires in Islamic Civilization. Furthermore, in 2007 he taught Islamic Law, Banking, Islamic Finance, and Human Rights in the Law Faculty's Master of International Law program. Saeed is also active in several social organizations whose basis is providing service to the wider community.[9]

He is active as a member of several Islamic-Christian and Muslim-Jewish interfaith dialogue groups. In addition, Saeed also joined the Association of Asia Institute professors at the University of Melbourne and the United States Academy. He is also a member of the editors of international scale journals such as in England, Pakistan, and the Middle East Australia. Saeed also often makes trips and visits to various regions, such as Europe, North America, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.[10]

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7 Muhammad Faishal Haq and Miatul Qudsia, 'Revitalisasi Hermeneutika Sebagai Pendekatan Tafsir (Kajian Hermeneutika Abdullah Saeed)', *MIYAH: Jurnal Studi Islam* 16, no. 1 (Januari 2020): 4, https://doi.org/10.33754/miyah.v16i1.241.

8 Muliadi, 'Penafsiran Al-Qur'an di Era Modern: Studi Model Penafsiran Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed', 47.

9 Eka Suriansyah and Suherman Suherman, 'Melacak Pemikiran Al-Qur'an Abdullah Saeed," *Jurnal Kajian Islam* 3, no. 1 (April 2011): 47.

10 Muhammad Nasrullah, 'Pandangan Abdullah Saeed pada Konsep Naskh Mansukh

Saeed is a productive intellectual. Apart from being busy in education, he also conducts various kinds of research focused on the negotiation between text and context, as well as jihad and interpretation. Apart from that, he has also produced many works for intellectuals and the general public, both works in the form of books or published articles. Following are some of Saeed's works in books related to Al-Qur'an Studies: 1. *The Qur'an: An Introduction* (2008); 2. *Islamic Thought: An Introduction* (2006); 3. *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (2006); 4. *Contemporary Approaches to Qur'an in Indonesia*, as editor (Oxford University Press, 2005). Saeed has also completed several books on the issue of freedom of religion, politics, and Islam in Australia: 1. *Freedom of Religion, Apostasy, and Islam*, written with H. Saeed (Ashgate Publishing, 2004); 2. *Muslim Australians: Their Beliefs, Practices, and Institutions* (Commonwealth Government, 2004); 3. *Islam and Political Legitimacy*, as editor with S. Akbarzadeh (Curzon, 2003); 4. *Islam in Australia* (Allen & Unwin, 2002); 5. *Muslim Communities in Australia*, became editor with S. Akbarzadeh (University of New South Wales Press, 2002).[11]

In addition, Abdullah Saeed is also very active in various seminars, both national and international. The following are some of these works that have been presented in several seminars, including: 1. *Towards a More Inclusive View of the Religious 'other': a Muslim Perspective,* in a peace lecturer at the University of Otago Dunedin New Zealand in 2007; 2. *Development of the Concept of Jihad in Islam,* in a seminar on international humanitarian law and Islamic law at the Queensland Red Cross in Brisbane in 2007; 3. *How to Bridge the Information Gap Between Islam and the West?,* in the International Conference on Islam and the West at the Kuala Lumpur Malaysia in 2007; 4. *Muslims in the West between Participants and Isolationist,* at Sultan Qaboos University Oman in 2004; 5. *Religious Reconciliation in Indonesia: Inclusivist versus Exclusivist,* in the 2000 Australian Academy of Humanities Seminar. In addition, there are many other articles and papers in Abdullah Saeed's seminar which can be browsed directly on the official website.[12]

The Foundation of Contextual

Interpretation Abdullah Saeed Etymologically, the word contextual comes from English, namely context which, if absorbed in Indonesian, becomes "contexts". In the Big Indonesian Dictionary, this word has two meanings, 1) part of a description or sentence that can support or add clarity to its meaning, and 2) a situation that

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(Analisis Surah An-Nur Ayat 2)", *Al-Munir: Jurnal Ilmu al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 2, no. 2 (Juli 2020): 117, https://doi.org/10.24239/al-munir.v2i02.66.

    11 Lien Iffah Naf'atu Fina, "Interpretasi Kontekstual Studi Pemikiran Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an Abdullah Saeed," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 12, no. 1 (January 22, 2011): 164, https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v12i1.707.

    12 Annas Rolli Muchlisin, 'Penafsiran Kontekstual: Studi Atas Konsep Hierarki Nilai Abdullah Saeed', *Maghza: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 1, no. 1 (Juni 2016): 21–22, https://doi.org/10.24090/maghza.v1i1.693.

has something to do with an event or event. [13]

Abdullah Saeed's main foundation in initiating this method of interpretation is that the Qur'an *ṣāliḥ li kulli zamān wa makān*, and it is this basis that requires that the Qur'an is by the times, so if we are in the contemporary era then the Qur'an also needs to be seen from a contemporary perspective as well. The phenomenon of changing situations and conditions that are increasingly developing and expanding along with the development of this era is sufficient to become the main basis for reinterpreting the interpretation of the Qur'an. This is what Abdullah Saeed calls contextual interpretation. This means that every effort or method of interpretation carried out by the Mufassir must still be returned to the conditions and needs of the era so that society can also adapt to the events found around it.[14]

As Abdullah Saeed has explained, contextualists are Muslim scholars who believe that the teachings contained in the Qur'an must be applied in different ways according to the context surrounding them. For them, the Qur'an is a source of practical guidelines that must be implemented by the circumstances that occur and not a set of rigid laws. Therefore, Muslim scientists who apply this contextual method argue that a Mufassir must be able to understand the social, political, and cultural context, both when the revelation was revealed and the context that is happening today.[15] This is of course different from the textualist group which bases interpretation solely on language analysis alone,[16] the contextualist group carries out a broader exploration by embracing modern scientific disciplines, such as literary theory, hermeneutics, and other scientific disciplines.[17]

Abdullah Saeed argues that contextualization is one of the needs of the times. This is because, for approximately 150 years, the world has encountered many extraordinary phenomena and events, which have had a significant impact on the changes that have occurred in society, starting from the perspectives and religious ways of the world's population, Muslims, or non-Muslims. These phenomena include globalization, migration, technological, and scientific revolutions, space exploration, archaeological discoveries, evolution and genetics, education, writing, and so on.[18] So this concept of contextualization seems to want to convey that it is a religion that must keep up with the times, and not the times that have to follow the Qur'an. The idea of contextualizing the Qur'an has long been coined by Fazlur Rahman, an intellectual from Pakistan with his theory of double movement.[19]

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13   Tim Penyusun Kamus Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1989), 485.

14   Saeed, *Interpreting The Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, 5–6.

15   Abdullah Saeed, *The Qur'an: an Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 214.

16   Abdullah Saeed, *Reading The Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 19.

17   Saeed, *Interpreting The Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, 4.

18   Saeed, 2.

19   Hatib Rachmawan, 'Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an Kontekstual: Metode Menafsirkan Al-Qur'an Abdullah Saeed', *Afkaruna: Indonesian Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Studies* 9, no. 2 (Juli 2013): 154, https://doi.org/10.18196/aiijis.2013.0025.148–61.

In several of his works, Abdullah Saeed has emphatically mentioned that the interpretation projects initiated by him were heavily influenced by Fazlur Rahman with his theory of the double movement. Double movement is an interpretive process that looks at the reality that is happening now and then looks at the time when the revelation was revealed to be able to take its messages so that these messages can then be applied in the present life (from the present situation to Qur'anic times, then back to the present).[20]

Even Saeed also stated that Rahman had sparked the core of the interpretation method he was offering. Saeed fully acknowledges Rahman's original contribution in providing an alternative methodology for interpreting ethical-legal verses, namely by associating and connecting the text with the good context when the verse was revealed to the lives of today's Muslims. Saeed's influence by Rahman's thoughts is very strong in the structure of these thoughts. For this season, apart from being a Rahmanian, Saeed is also considered to be continuing and perfecting the project of the interpretation methodology initiated by Rahman.[21]

However, on the other hand, Abdullah Saeed also has a difference of opinion with Rahman. As is known, Rahman in initiating his method of interpretation departed from his anxiety towards Muslims in facing modernity, Rahman also rejected attempts to interpret using traditional methods both in the *Uṣūl Fiqh* tradition and the tradition of exegesis, because according to him the Mufassirs used the method they have treated the Qur'an automictically and have done nothing in understanding the Qur'an. So based on this, he tries to initiate a holistic methodology, namely understanding the Qur'an as a whole, which also takes into account the background of Arab society with the world views, values, and culture they apply (the context of revelation).[22]

Whereas Abdullah Saeed in initiating his method of interpretation departed from his anxiety over the rise of textual interpretation models by textualist Mufassir who interpreted the Qur'an literally. According to Saeed, the application of this method has ignored the context, both the context at the time of revelation and during the process of interpretation. So, to overcome this anxiety Saeed tried to initiate a method of interpretation that was sensitive to context, and Saeed's method seemed to have advantages over Rahman's method because he was able to explain the systematic and operational steps to contextualize the Qur'an and he succeeded in building a theoretical basis as well as the epistemological principles of this contextual method.

Several things underlie Abdullah Saeed's thought in initiating his method of interpretation of the Qur'an. First, the concept of revelation, according to Abdullah Saeed, revelation is not enough if it is only seen as the world of God and is always seen from the external side of the prophet Muhammad. Apart from

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20 Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 5.

21 Suriansyah and Suherman, 'Melacak Pemikiran Al-Qur'an Abdullah Saeed', 49.

22 Fazlur Rahman, *Islam dan Modernitas: Tentang Transformasi Intelektual*, trans. Ahsin Muhammad (Bandung: Pustaka, 1985), 2–5.

that, Saeed disagreed with the opinion that there was a human element in the process of revelation. However, to be understood, the revelation must interact with the human, because it is acknowledged or not that in reality, the Qur'an has used human language (Arabic), so with this reality, the Qur'an from a language perspective is considered a cultural product. Even so, Abdullah Saeed still believes that the Qur'an is a holy book whose authenticity is unquestionable both in terms of the language used and in terms of writing.[23]

This concept does not want to claim that revelation is the words or words of the Prophet Muhammad. Rather, it wants to show that there is a very close relationship between revelation, the Prophet, and his da'wah mission with the socio-historical context of the revelation of the Qur'an. That is, the Qur'an was not sent down by Allah in a cultural vacuum.[24] So through such a concept of revelation, the socio-historical context becomes one of the important elements in the process of revelation. Abdullah Saeed then emphasized that such a concept of revelation is the basis for his arguments in initiating his method of interpretation, that interpretation must be based on the reality in which the revelation was revealed.[25]

Second, regarding the issue of flexibility, Abdullah Saeed in this case reflects on the concepts of *nāsikh-mansūkh* and *amthāl al-Qur'ān*. This concept illustrates the existence of developments and adjustments in the Qur'an to the Arabic context at that time. For example, the concept of the revelation of the Qur'an with *sab'ah aḥrūf* from this concept, resulting in flexibility in reading when the Qur'an was revealed, which flexibility began to be limited when the Qur'an underwent codification during the time of Uthman However, the worry is whether the manuscripts copied at that time were able to accommodate all the dialects used in reading the Qur'an, while in reality these dialects are still used in reading the Qur'an even today. The fact of this flexibility is very inspiring to modern intellectuals. They see the concept of this flexibility as the Prophet's way of accommodating the interests of the needs of society at that time.[26] The Prophet allowed flexibility to adapt the Qur'an to the needs of society at that time. Therefore, flexibility can also be drawn in understanding the text of the Qur'an to accommodate the needs of today's society.

The next phenomenon is regarding the concept of *naskh*, according to Saeed, although some scholars have discussed the concept of *naskh* a lot, they have not come to a logical conclusion that if society has changed, then there should have been demands for reinterpretation of the Qur'an and sunnah regarding related laws or at most not aspects related to its application. According to Saeed, a law can apply if it has a strong rationalist basis, that the law functions for society. Vice

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23 Muliadi, 'Penafsiran Al-Qur'an di Era Modern: Studi Model Penafsiran Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed', 48.

24 Saeed, *The Qur'an: an Introduction*, 31.

25 Saeed, *Interpreting The Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, 41.

26 Muliadi, 'Penafsiran Al-Qur'an di Era Modern: Studi Model Penafsiran Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed', 49.

versa, if the law does not fulfil its role, it must be open to change.

The concept of such a text can be used as a basis for the importance of reinterpreting the Qur'an, especially towards ethical-legal verses. From the concept of the text, a conclusion can be drawn that it has protected the function of the Qur'an so that it remains alive and relevant when dealing with all different conditions. And this concept must be maintained even though the revelation has stopped, and the text has been fixed.[27] So if you look at the facts of this flexibility, then it is also possible for us to be able to accommodate the needs of the Muslim community in this contemporary era, and of the many possibilities surrounding the Qur'an, we can choose one that is relevant to the needs of society at this today's contemporary era.

Method of Contextual Interpretation of the Qur'an Abdullah Saeed

Abdullah Saeed has never been completely separated from classical interpretations, he still uses references from classical interpretations in understanding a verse, because after all, the method developed by Saeed is nothing, but a refinement of the methods developed by classical scientists previously.[28]

Before carrying out the interpretation of the Qur'an, it is necessary to look at the context at the time when the Qur'an was revealed because this is very helpful in understanding the message contained therein. That is the tendency of contemporary scientists who propose a method to dismantle the paradigm that was built in the classical period. After looking at the context, it is also necessary to see how the status of the verse is by using the discourses of the Qur'anic sciences, such as *muḥkām-mutashābih, 'āmm-khās*, and *makkiyah-madāniyyah*. By knowing the position of the verse, an interpreter can see how far the flexibility of the verse, or the content of its meaning is, to be able to adjust to the principles of contemporary values.

Abdullah Saeed divides the texts of the Qur'an into four types, *firstly* texts that discuss theological or supernatural matters such as matters of heaven, hell, and the last hour, in which verses of this type do not require interpretation and it is sufficient to return them to their literal ones; *Second*, historical-oriented texts; *Third*, texts related to examples and stories, in the second and third types, are texts that still need additional data and facts regarding other historical information; *Fourth*, texts that discuss legal issues, verses of this type can be interpreted and reviewed by referring to the conditions of Mecca and Medina at that time.[29] Scholars according to him divide the text of the Qur'an into two forms, namely *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt. Muḥkamāt* verses are verses that are clear and do not contain ambiguous meanings. While *mutashābihāt* are verses that still need reinterpretation.[30]

After classifying the text of the Qur'an into its sections, the interpreter begins

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27 Suriansyah and Suherman, 'Melacak Pemikiran Al-Qur'an Abdullah Saeed', 59.

28 Saeed, *Interpreting The Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, 138.

29 Saeed, 91–100.

30 Saeed, 188–89.

to interpret the verse, Abdullah Saeed in interpreting the Qur'an is more inclined towards contextual interpretation methods based on reason. For him, contextual interpretation is very much needed because the issue of distance and time is so great between contemporary times and the time when the Qur'an was revealed, so interpretation must continue to be dynamic along with the development of the times. If reviewed more deeply, interpretation based on reason tends to prioritize individual interests too much. However, this is not a problem because every interpretation process cannot possibly be separated from an interest, both negative and positive. Abdullah Saeed still believes that every Mufassir still has rules that can create certain limits to prevent the Mufassir from being over-subjective in interpreting. These rules are like the Prophet, the situation when the text was revealed, the role of the interpreter, the nature of a text, and the cultural context at that time.[31]

Abdullah Saeed has also initiated several stages that must be passed by a Mufassir to be able to apply the concept of textualization in interpreting the Qur'an, namely: *First*, the interpreter must be able to trace what the text wants to convey, the intent of the text can be seen through several aspects relating to the text. This stage can also be passed with an analysis of language, literary form, analysis of literary context, analysis of intertext, and analysis of contextual relations. *Second*, exploring the relationship between texts with the socio-historical context when the text was written. This analysis can be started with contextual analysis, namely by looking at the issues that are developing around the text, for example, issues of politics, law, culture, and others. On the other hand, this analysis can also be seen from the point of view of the nature of the message of the text, whether it includes legal texts, theology, or other texts. Furthermore, you can also explore the more specific main messages desired by a text to consider the main messages of certain verses and bring them into a broader realm.[32]

Third, provide a portion of the withdrawal of the meaning of the text from the present context. In this third stage, an interpreter is required to be able to determine the problems or needs that exist in the present (contemporary era) that seem relevant to a text being interpreted. Then next, it begins to explore the values and norms that support the interpretation of the text and contextualize it with today's contemporary world. In the end, the finishing stage is to evaluate whether the value or message of a text is by the current context or not.

Application of the Contextual Interpretation Method of Surah Al-Mā'idah: 51

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالنَّصَٰرَىٰٓ أَوْلِيَآءَ ۘ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَآءُ بَعْضٍ ۚ وَمَن يَتَوَلَّهُم مِّنكُمْ فَإِنَّهُۥ مِنْهُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللّٰهَ لَا يَهْدِى الْقَوْمَ الظَّٰلِمِينَ

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31 Muliadi, 'Penafsiran Al-Qur'an di Era Modern: Studi Model Penafsiran Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed', 51.

32 Saeed, *Interpreting The Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, 152.

"O you who believe, do not You make Jews and Christians as Friend loyal (-mu). Some of them become Friend loyal for some others. Who among you make they Friend loyal , then indeed he including class them. Indeed Allah is not give instruction to unjust people".

This verse refers to the subject "believers", that is, the believers who were in Medina. *Madāniyah* verses talk a lot about conflict situations because, at that time, Muslim society was often involved in wars.[33] If observed more deeply, this verse discusses the issue of prohibition in making Jews and Christians *awliyā'*, where the meaning of *awliyā'* itself is still much debated.

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī interprets the verse, that the meaning of "do not make them as *awliyā'*, namely "all of you (people of Seasons), do not support and love them. "Because, if Muslims support and love them, it means being part of them". Namely, Muslims who approach Jews and Christians, including tyrannical people.[34] Syekh Nawāwī al-Bantanī also stated that what is meant by "*lā tattakhidzū al-yahūd…*" is "do not rely on Muslims or depend on the help and support of Jewish Christians! And don't hang out with them in a friendly manner".[35] According to Zamakhsyarī, the reason which states that anyone who supports and helps Jews and Christians means part of them, shows a strict prohibition on the obligation to stay away from their religion.[36]

After knowing the literal meaning of the verse, and then linking it with the context of the revelation, that since the Prophet entered Medina, the first thing the Prophet wanted to address was an acute problem concerning the problem of social and political order that could overshadow all groups in Medina, and to overcome the problem an agreement was made which is called the Medina charter. The agreement stated the rights and responsibilities of various groups (Islam, Judaism, and Yathrib) in maintaining the solidarity and integrity of the state and the permissibility of practicing their respective religions. At first, the agreement was obeyed by all parties, but over time, their adherence to the agreement began to decrease. Some of the Jews even conspired with the Meccan Quraysh to weaken the political order they had agreed upon.[37]

While related to the micro context of Surah Al-Mā'idah 51, namely based on *asbāb al-nuzūl* delivered by Ibn Kathīr concerning the history of Imam Suddiy, that the verse was revealed regarding two men after the war Uhud who has a Jewish Christian friend. And one man said, *"I will go with my Jewish friend, hopefully,*

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33 Ingrid Matson, *Ulumul Qur'an Zaman Kita: Pengantar Untuk Memahami Konteks, Kisah dan Sejarah Al-Qur'an*, trans. R. Cecep Lukman Yasin (Jakarta: Zaman, 2013), 105.

34 Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad bin Aḥmad al-Mahallī and Jalāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān bin Abī Bakar al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* (Kairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, n.d.), 146.

35 Muḥammad bin ʿUmar Nawawī, *Marāḥ Labīd li Kashf Maʿna al-Qur'ān al-Majīd* (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1996), 274.

36 Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashāf ʿan Ḥaqā'iq Gaqamiḍ al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1 (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabī, 1986), 642.

37 Matson, *Ulumul Qur'an Zaman Kita: Pengantar Untuk Memahami Konteks, Kisah dan Sejarah Al-Qur'an*, 107.

there will be benefits for me when an affair or incident occurs". Then one friend said, *"I will also go with my Christian friend to Syria, and I will also live with him, then I will convert to Christianity"*. After this incident, the Qur'an Surah Al-Mā'idah 51 came down.[38]

The next step is to try to relate it to the core problems that are currently rife in this era. Some time ago, this verse suddenly became very busy being discussed after the case that a public official (Ahok) was considered to have insulted this verse while conducting socialization of his program on the Thousand Islands. He said several words that the Muslim community considered "harassment", and this incident also coincided with the implementation of the regional elections for DKI and many Muslims who believe that they should not elect infidel leaders based on this verse because they understand that the word *awliyā'* is interpreted as leaders.[39]

The understanding of the community is based on the translation issued by the Ministry of Religion Team, in which they interpret the word *awliyā'* as leaders. Meanwhile, according to M. Quraish Shihab translating the word thus is not entirely correct. The word *awliyā'* is the plural form of the word wali which has the basic meaning of "close". And then from here, new meanings develop, such as "supporter, defender, protector, who loves, is more important, and others", all of which are tied by a common thread of "proximity". Therefore, the father is the most important person in being the guardian of his daughter because he is the closest to her. Just as a person who is very devout and diligent in worship is called a saint because he fears Allah, a pair of friends are always together and share secrets because of their closeness, and because of that closeness they are the first to come to their aid. From these things, it can be seen that all the meanings stated above can be covered by the word *awliyā'*.[40]

Apart from that, this verse is often used as legitimacy to "suspiciously" Jews and Christians. Moreover, accompanied by a political moment, there will be some parties who take advantage of this verse as an absolute prohibition in electing non-Muslim leaders, so that their party can gain an advantage. When viewed from the context in which the verse was revealed, in fact, the verse talks about the situation of two men after the Uhud war who had Jewish and Christian friends and had nothing to do with the political moment. Thus, if this verse continues to be used for political legitimacy, then the rights of minorities in Indonesia will disappear and the spirit of "Unity in Diversity" will also collapse. When viewed from the context of the verse's saying, then we should be able to take another meaning from the word *awliyā'* and try to contextualize it in today's modern life, meaning that someone may not believe in Jews and Christians when they have betrayed the agreement that was agreed upon.[41]

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38 Matson, 105.

39 Muliadi, 'Penafsiran Al-Qur'an di Era Modern: Studi Model Penafsiran Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed', 56.

40 M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan dan Keserasian al-Qur'an*, vol. 3 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 124.

41 Muliadi, 'Penafsiran Al-Qur'an di Era Modern: Studi Model Penafsiran Kontekstual

Criticism of Abdullah Saeed's Method of Interpretation

Huge appreciation for Abdullah Saeed must be given because indirectly he has given birth to works and contributions that are not small in the world of contemporary interpretation. However, apart from that there are still some criticisms that must be conveyed, including that Abdullah Saeed did not author a complete book of interpretation from the results of the method he initiated, but he only offered a method that must be used by a Mufassir in interpreting the Qur'an in the contemporary era when Based on this, Abdullah Saeed is categorized as a Mufassir with a methodical or theoretical hermeneutics school who only emphasizes the methods used in interpreting and contextualizing the verses of the Qur'an in the present. In addition, Abdullah Saeed's footing appears to be shaky, because if it is said that he is an interpreter who is contextualist, in some cases he still uses text analysis as a starting point, and he does not provide clear boundaries between textualists and contextualists, confusing when viewing where Abdullah Saeed stood. On the other hand, to apply his method, an interpreter must also refer to classical interpretations, because there is no clear foundation proposed by Abdullah Saeed.

Conclusion

From the explanation and presentation above, it can be concluded that the contextual interpretation initiated by Abdullah Saeed is a method of interpreting the text of the verses of the Qur'an which is related to the context of life and conditions of today's society to answer various problems experienced by contemporary society today. Abdullah Saeed also mentioned that the interpretation project initiated by him was heavily influenced by Fazlur Rahman. However, the advantage of Saeed's thinking is that he can provide systematics and operational steps in contextualizing the Qur'an.

Abdullah Saeed has initiated several stages that must be passed by a Mufassir to be able to apply the concept of textualization in interpreting the Qur'an, namely: First, the interpreter must be able to trace what the text wants to convey. Second, exploring the relationship between texts with the socio-historical context. Third, provide a portion of the withdrawal of the meaning of the text from the present context. Finally, the finishing stage is to evaluate whether the value or message of a text is by the current context or not.

Abdullah Saeed', 57.

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