



Abdullah Saeed's Contextual Restructures of The Qur'an

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Abstract

This paper tries to explain Abdullah Saeed's ideas with a new approach to interpreting the Qur'an, namely an approach called the contextualist approach. In Abdullah Saeed's perspective, there has been a gap between the text that has been understood literally by most scholars and the socio-historical context of the Qur'an at the time the revelation was revealed and the contemporary needs of Muslims today. With the hermeneutic interpretation model, he proposes four stages in his interpretation of the Qur'an, namely: meeting the world of the text, conducting critical analysis, finding the meaning of the text for its first recipient, and determining the meaning and application of the text for the present. Abdullah Saeed's idea is at least an alternative solution to address the contemporary challenges faced by Muslims today.

Keywords: Abdullah Saeed, contextual, restructures, the Qur'an

Introduction

Many studies of the interpretation of the Qur'an from a methodological perspective have been carried out to dig up understanding and possible meanings contained therein. (Yasin, 2020). Efforts to understand the truth of the Qur'an in its history have long experienced a process of quite serious intellectual struggles, although it can be understood that these struggles arise only up to the part of perception or on the methodological side and the results of their understanding, not to doubt the truth of the Qur'an.

Abdullah Saeed is one of the thinkers who theorizes the methodological side of the study of the Qur'an in several of his ideas. Contextualization of understanding, interpretation, and application is the goal of Abdullah Saeed's ideas. (Muliadi, 2021)

Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach is a book that tries to explain the thoughts of Abdullah Saeed, an Islamic thinker who has concerns about the interpretation of the Qur'an. As a scholar who has studied in the Middle East (Medina) and in the West (Australia), Saeed tries to offer a new approach to understanding the text of the Qur'an by the socio-historical context of the Qur'an at the time of revelation in the first/seventh century and the contemporary concerns and needs of Muslims today. (Saeed, 2006a).

In this book, Abdullah Saeed further explains his thoughts and offers a model of interpretation of the verses of the Qur'anic text. The purpose of this writing is first, to describe the background of Abdullah Saeed to bring up a new approach to interpreting the Qur'an. The answer to this question wants to reveal the scholarly awareness felt by Abdullah Saeed seeing

that there is a gap between the text and the current context. Abdullah Saeed's two thoughts are related to his new approach to interpreting the Qur'an.

Literature Review

In terms of terminology, contextual interpretation can be interpreted as an interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an which are related to conditions and situations that occur in the reality of life.(Ikhsan, 2011). The forerunners of contextual interpretation are the verses of the Qur'an which have Asbab al-Nuzul, especially those related to social phenomena at that time. Because, as usual, the most perfect understanding of the verse is by paying attention to the social setting that surrounds the revelation of the verse.(Suaidi, 2016). There are times when these social settings only apply to certain times, certain individuals, and in certain places, but there are times when they apply all the time, to anyone, and anywhere. Asbab al-Nuzul is a major milestone in contextual interpretation.(Ahmad Zaini, 2014). Because it is an illustration of the historical record of a social event that lies behind and accompanies the revelation of the verse. Unfortunately, only a handful of verses have Asbab al-Nuzul.

The tradition of interpreting the Qur'an has existed since the time of the Prophet Muhammad (w.11 H/632 AD). Understanding the Qur'an was easier to do at the time of the Prophet for several reasons. The Qur'an was revealed in Arabic, a language used by the Prophet and his companions. More than that, the recipients of the Qur'an also have a personal and social context directly with the Prophet. More importantly, the Qur'an exists in its original context so it has an ideological connection with it. The elements of this context also include the time of the revelation (610-632 AD), the place where the revelation was sent (the Hijaz in the Arabian Peninsula), and the customs and society at the time the revelation was revealed(Saeed, 2006b)..

According to Abdullah Saeed, a textual approach that relies heavily on the "literal" meaning of verses by considering the complexity of its practical application has become the main approach in the tradition of interpretation, especially about legal/ethical verses, and in fiqh literature.(Saeed, 2006a). However, in all its variants, the textual approach fails to provide complete justice for the particular verses it interprets. As a result, the verses of the Qur'an are seen as irrelevant to the conditions of contemporary Muslim society, or they are not properly practiced so they damage the basic principles of the Qur'an. Meanwhile, the contextualist group gave great hermeneutic value to the historical context during the revelation of the Qur'an in the early 7th century AD and its subsequent interpretations. They argue that scholars should be very sensitive to the social, political, economic, intellectual, and cultural conditions at the time of revelation.(Hasbiyallah, 2018)

The contextualist group tends to see the Qur'an as a source of practical guidance. Thus, the contextual approach contributes so that the verses of the Qur'an can become a perspective for dissecting contemporary human problems.(Hs & Parnasih, 2020).. In Abdullah Saeed's notes, Umar's contextual interpretation became one of the important references to how the Qur'an was interpreted in the early days. Umar bin Khattab reinterpreted the rules and commands in the Qur'an by considering the context. For Umar, the Qur'an is a living text, and its instructions require interpretation according to its spirit so that it remains in a changing

environment. (Thayyibi, 2022) The ideas in the contextual interpretation carried out by Umar, such as public interest, public property, equity, and justice, as well as awareness of the context, have turned into references for contemporary contextual interpretation. The main issue for this interpretation effort is how the Qur'an is made in harmony with the Muslim community of religions over more than 1,400 years. (Ikhsan, 2011).

Research Methods

This research includes library research, which is research that utilizes library resources to obtain research data (Zed, 2004). One of the characteristics of library research is that the researcher deals directly with the text (text) which is the source of the data. Data sources consist of primary sources in the form of the book *Interpreting the Qur'an Towards a Contemporary Approach* by Abdullah Saeed, and secondary sources from several journals related to contextual interpretation. Data analysis uses content analysis. content analysis as a research technique that can be replicated (imitated) and valid data by making inferences and paying attention to the context. (Khusnul Auliyah, Suwarno, Uswatun Chasanah, 2021).

Results and Discussion

1. Academic anxiety of Abdullah Saeed

Abdullah Saeed's ideas and ideas were motivated by anxiety about the situation of the majority of Muslims who felt that the results of studies by previous scholars, especially in the field of fiqh, were considered "final". This causes that every time there is a new problem, Islamic scholars or experts do not refer to the Qur'an as a source of Islamic teachings to explore meanings that are appropriate to the current social context, but only refer to the classic fiqh books which are socio-economically historical, cultural, different values with the current conditions. This causes the Islamic sciences to stagnate because the values and meanings contained in the Qur'an are no longer explored and used as the main reference. (Saeed, 2006a).

That's why he sees a gap between the needs of Muslims in the 21st century which are developing so rapidly and complexly and the understanding of the verses of the Qur'an which are still widely interpreted literally and applied in everyday life as well as socio-religious life in the early days. -beginning of Islam. Despite this reality, the social context of Islamic society in the 21st century is very different from the socio-historical context of Muslim society 14 centuries ago when the Qur'an was revealed. According to Abdullah Saeed, there is a need for a new approach called the contextualist approach (Kusroni, 2021) which pays attention to the socio-historical context in which the Qur'an was revealed in the early days of Islam and the needs of Muslim society in the 21st century and the future. This approach is expected to free Muslims from the legalistic-literalistic approach that has dominated interpretations of interpretation and fiqh since the formation of Islamic law until today's modern era (Saeed, 2006a). It is in this context that Abdullah Saeed offers a new approach as a bridge that connects the needs of Muslims in the 21st century with the development of Islamic sciences that rely on the results of the re-interpretation of the main source of Islamic teachings, namely the Qur'an. It is hoped that the development of the need for reinterpretation will eventually answer the needs of Muslims in the 21st century and the

future so that the Qur'an is capable of meeting the needs of Muslims at any given time or place.(Saeed, 2006a).

Society in the 20-21 century shows extraordinary development compared to the previous period. Discoveries in the fields of astronomy and astrophysics can change the view of humans, especially Muslims, toward the universe. The issue of human rights and gender equality is not only subject to study but has become a demand, even though this issue has not been touched upon or even considered as an issue that requires serious attention. (Suwarno, 2020). Likewise with the issue of genetic engineering, which can not only select genes - good genes, can determine sex can even clone humans. Matters related to religious and non-religious, sacred and non-sacred in the text of the Qur'an and the current system of government that is developing, also need to be reviewed. This of course requires answers from Islamic teachings, especially from the Qur'an which must always be re-interpreted by the current context based on scientifically justifiable methodologies and approaches.

This is what lies behind Abdullah Saeed coming up with the idea that there is a need for a new approach to interpreting the Qur'an to answer his anxiety which is manifested in the following questions: (1) Can one be faithful to the Qur'anic revelation while attempting to relate it to the needs of Muslims today?, and (2) Can Muslims legitimately rethink aspects of methodology and the approaches to interpretation transmitted to us historically?(Iffah, 2015).

2. The group for understanding the text of the Qur'an according to Abdullah Saeed

Abdullah Saeed provides several different descriptions of understanding the interpretation of the Qur'an which he manifests in several terminologies, each of which has its characteristics and also has different directions of understanding from one another. From the several approaches to understanding given by Abdullah Saeed, between one understanding and another understanding has a differentiation that does not bring together these thoughts.

Abdullah Saeed provides separation and differentiation of groups of thinkers into six groups of thinkers:

- a. The legalist-traditionalist, whose emphasis is on the laws developed and interpreted by the scholars of the pre-modern period;
- b. The theological puritans, whose thoughts are focused on the dimensions of Islamic ethics and doctrine;
- c. The political Islamists, whose thinking tends to be on the political aspects of Islam with the ultimate aim of establishing an Islamic state;
- d. The Islamist Extremists, who tend to use violence against every individual and group they perceive as opponents of both Muslims and non-Muslims;
- e. The Secular Muslims, who think that religion is a private matter;
- f. The progressive jihadists, namely modern thinkers on religion seek to reinterpret religious teachings to answer the needs of modern society. In this last category is the position of progressive Muslims (Saeed, 2006a).

Typology like this is a typology that is also followed by Fazlurrahman, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and of course Abdullah Saeed himself. (Saeed, 2006a).

3. *Ethical-Legal Text Dalam al-Qur'an*

Saeed classifies the types of text in the Qur'an according to their content into four, namely

a. Theological verses

Many verses of the Qur'an belong to this type. At least it can be divided into two parts: first, verses about God, including the nature and deeds of God. Second, other than about God, for example, 'arsy, heaven, hell, angels, and al-lauhul mahfudz. In short, these verses deal with something that is beyond human experience.

Although something unseen is beyond human reach, it cannot be said that these verses have no meaning and cannot be understood. It must have had implications at the start of the descent and therefore must have had a purpose. But as he notes, he can only be understood to the extent of human experience and knowledge. Therefore, it is not valid if the interpreter then claims the meaning he embraces as the only true one (because there are no references that humans can reach to investigate that truth). The role of the interpreter in this case is to find out the relationship between the text and the intended community and to explain what this relationship means. (Hs & Parninsih, 2020).

b. Story verses

These verses refer to events in human history that can therefore be examined through sources and traditions outside the Qur'an. For example, verses about nations, people, stories, Prophets, and past religions, including events during the time of the Prophet.

Like verses about the unseen, the verses of this story seem to aim to convey a message about how humans should live in God's way, not just as mere historical information. (Harahap, 2022). Nevertheless, according to Saeed, to achieve a better understanding, knowledge of the data related to the story is important, because the Qur'an does not provide detailed events. (Ummah, 2019). Saeed further added, the focus of the mufassir task is not on disclosing what is behind the story, but on what the meaning of the story is for the present. (Lestari, 2017)

c. Parable

In the interpretation of the Qur'an, it is very important to know the mass function. parable is used in the Qur'an as a compliment, for example, praise for the steadfastness, steadfastness, and loyalty of their friends and followers to Allah and the Messenger. Masal is also used to denote insults. For example, the Qur'an parable to those who have been sent down the holy book and religion, they accept it but reject the truth that is in it.

d. Legal ethics verses

Before building an interpretation model, and he realizes this, Saeed first builds arguments that allow verses that contain ethics-legal content to be free from the shackles of legalistic-literalistic interpretation, by reading and criticizing tradition, which seems to have become the official interpretation model from the first part of the 2nd century H to the modern period, both in the realm of interpretation and fiqh, towards the interpretation that is called contextual, namely a model of interpretation that is more flexible by taking into

account the context of the time of revelation, at the same time also paying attention to the context when the interpretation is carried out (Iffah, 2015)..

Saeed stated that the ethical legal text is one part of the group of verses of the Qur'an which is the focus of the study of Islamic law where based on these verses, Muslims for 14 centuries have developed a legal structure that is often referred to as "Islamic law" or shari'ah. Verses that fall into the ethical legal category are verses about belief systems: verses about faith in God, Prophets, and life after death; worship practices: orders to pray, fast, pilgrimage, zakat; rules in marriage, divorce, and inheritance; what is commanded and forbidden; orders for jihad, prohibition of stealing, punishment for crimes, relations with non-Muslims; commandments related to ethics, interreligious relations and government.

It is these verses that receive more attention in Saeed's interpretation because according to him these verses are the 'most unprepared' when faced with reality, even though at the same time these verses fill the daily lives of most Muslims the most. . Therefore, there is a need for a reinterpretation of these verses so that they are by current and heretical conditions. (Amir & Hamzah, 2019).

4. *Abdullah Saeed's Building of Contextual Interpretation*

About interpretation, Abdullah Saeed offers an interpretation model that can be used as an approach to interpreting the Qur'an. With this model, it is hoped that readers can interpret the Qur'an interactively, that is, the reader is someone who actively participates in giving meaning to the text, not just a passive person who only accepts the meaning of the text. In other words, the reader should carry out a continuous process of interpretation of the text and the author according to the socio-historical context. The following is a model offered by Abdullah Saeed for someone who wants to interpret the text of the Qur'an in the surrounding socio-historical context.(Jayana, 2019).

Model of Interpretation

Stage I

Encounter with the world of the text

Stage II

Critical Analysis

Linguistic

Literary Context

Literary form

Parallel texts

Precedents

Stage III

Meaning for the first Recipients

Socio-Historical context

Worldview

Nature of the message: legal, theological, ethical

Message: contextual versus universal
Relationship of the message to the overall message of the Qur'an

Stage IV

Meaning for the Present
Analysis of the present context
Present context versus socio-historical context
Meaning from the first recipients to the present
Message: contextual versus universal
Application today (Saeed, 2006a).

According to Abdullah Saeed, the classical interpretation has covered stages I and II well, and a small part of the elements of stage III. But most of the elements of stages III and IV have not been seen as an important part of interpreting the contents of the Qur'an related to ethical-legal verses or texts. The scholars during the formative period classified by Abdullah Saeed as textualist mufassir have used linguistic criteria in interpreting the Qur'an, but they a priori even rejected its socio-historical context. This group acknowledges that it was the early generation of Muslims who had the authority in interpreting ethical verses from the Qur'an. This group has also received support from the present day which is known as the modern textualist group. (Oki Rahadianto Sutopo, 2019).

Abdullah Saeed in offering this new approach views that a linguistic approach, like textualist mufassir, is still necessary for interpreting the Qur'an. The use of linguistics becomes the first of the four steps it offers. Linguistic usage is used, for example in understanding the meaning of verses. Saeed argues that "meaning is often indeterminate". He even stated that the meaning of those texts is also inherently unstable, in the sense that certain aspects of the meaning we attribute to them have changed over time. This means that we must not narrow down the meaning of verses to one or two understandings, but must remain open to the possibility of discovering new meanings or understandings according to contemporary realities. He stated, "If the meaning is fluid and susceptible to change, that is, it is dependent on time, linguistic context and socio-historical circumstances, then that has to be an essential part of our approach to the text." (Muliadi, 2021)

Saeed's view is of course based on his expertise in linguistics and the existence of historical facts which show that there is flexibility in reading the Qur'an as the sacred text. This could be an indication, in Saeed's view, that there is also flexibility in interpreting the Qur'an. The word ahruf in the hadith "Al-Qur'an which was revealed in 7 ahruf" has implications for various understandings. Is ahruf interpreted by [seven] aspects of Arabic, including dialects or [seven] ways of reading known as qira'ah sab'ah. Regardless of the existing debate, this shows that there is flexibility in the Al-Qur'an not only in the way of reading or dialect but also flexibility in interpreting and understanding the verses of the Qur'an by its socio-historical context. (Amir & Hamzah, 2019).

Conclusion

Abdullah Saeed offers a productive method of interpretation, which can find common threads of meaning that emerged at different times. Starting from exploring the original meaning, then understanding the meaning or message behind the literal message of the text being interpreted. This meaning must be implemented in the present and the future.

Abdullah Saeed, saw the need for a new approach due to the rapid development of social, economic, political, medicine and astronomy, human rights, and gender, and Muslims need a foundation based on the Qur'an. This new approach is called the contextualist approach which pays attention to the socio-historical context in the hope that Muslims can free themselves from the shackles of the legalistic-literalistic approach that has dominated interpretations of interpretation and fiqh since the formation period of Islamic law until today's modern era.

Abdullah Saeed, broadly speaking, explained that there are at least 4 (four) steps to interpret the Qur'an according to the model he offers, namely (1) Encounter with the world of the text. (2) Critical Analysis. (3) Meaning for the first Recipients, and (4) Meaning for the Present. Abdullah Saeed's thoughts on the Model of Interpreting the Qur'an to need to be appreciated as an offer whose mechanism needs to be sharpened so that the model is applicable and can be applied immediately by interconnecting and integrating between experts in responding to complex problems faced by humanity, especially Muslims.

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