

Non-Muslim Discourse in Abdullah Saeed's Perspective

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Abstract. This study specifically looks at Abdullah Saeed as a minority Muslim scholar *whose* topic specifically addresses non-Muslim discourses in the Qur'an. with the aim of seeing Abdullah Saeed's construct of thought in interpreting the Qur'an and to see how Abdullah Saeed interprets non-Muslim verses in the Qur'an. Meanwhile, in the research process, the researcher uses the library research method which is descriptive-analytical which functions to interpret data with a historical- critical approach. In general, there are two sources of data, namely primary and secondary. Primary data sources will be seen from the works of Abdullah Saeed. As for the secondary data from several documents and other related articles. Data analysis used three techniques of descriptive analysis, taxonomic analysis and interpretive analysis. The results of this discussion are divided into 3 things. The first is the presentation of Abdullah Saeed's socio-historical background. Second, the exposure *about* Abdullah Saeed's contextualist approach who is elaborative, argumentative and comprehensive in interpreting the Koran. Third. non-Muslim discourse in this regard, Abdullah Saeed reviews the doctrine of the crucifixion of Isa in the Koran and freedom of religion and interfaith brotherhood in the verses of the Koran; Abdullah Saeed highlighted the apostasy law as the basis for freedom of religion.

Keywords: Discourse, non-Muslims, Abdullah Saeed

Introduction

Martin Lings in the work entitled *Muhammad: His Life Based on Earliest Sources* explains in detail how the conditions of the Prophet Muhammad's preaching before the Hijrah. The Muslim community was socially and economically embargoed until the Prophet Muhammad and his followers only ate leaves due to lack of food.¹ However, despite constant pressure from the people of Mecca,² the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad eventually gained wider acceptance outside Mecca, especially the people of Yathrib.³ Prophet Muhammad then migrated to Yathrib, where Islam developed more rapidly.⁴ Muhammad Izzat Darwah, Mufiammad stated that the Prophet Muhammad's da'wah journey, from when he received pressure and threats in Mecca to being able to fight in Medina, can be traced in the Qur'an with the tartīb method.⁵ These scholars state that the Qur'an can reflect the characteristics of Muhammad's da'wah through tracking the order of the Qur'an's descent (*tartīb nuzūlī*) and connected with Muhammad's biography. Angelika, a German scholar who has intensely studied the Quran, argues that the pre-codification Quran is a text that accompanies and sees the historical process of the emergence of the first Muslims. This feature can also be seen in relation to non-Muslim discourses in the Quran.

¹Martin Lings, -Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources,|| *Religious Studies* 20, no. 3 (1984).

² Ahmad Anas and Hendri Hermawan Adinugraha, -The Prophet Muhammad's Da'wah to the People of Medina from the Perspective of Intercultural Communication,|| *Ilmu Dakwah: Academic Journal for Homiletic Studies* 11, no. 1 (2017): 53-72.

³ Ummu Salamah Ali, -The Islamic Civilisation of Medina (Reflections on the Primordialism of the Auz and Khazraj Tribes),|| *Kalimah: Journal of Religious Studies and Islamic Thought* 15, no. 2 (2017): 191- 204.

⁴An in-depth study of the prophet's preaching in yastrib is comprehensively explained in the journal Muhamad Faizul Amirudin, -The Prophet Muhammad's Preaching in Medina (Analysis of the Prophet's Preaching Success in Sociological Review),|| *El-Ghiroh: Journal of Islamic Studies* 15, no. 2 (2018): 1-16.

⁵Muhammad Julkarnain, -Fragmentation of Chronology-Based Tafsir of Surah Al- 'Alaq (Study of Fahm Al-Qur'an Al-Hakim: Al-Tafsir Al-Wadhīh Hasb Tartīb Al-Nuzul by Muhammad'Abid Al-Jabiri),|| *RELIGIA* (2015): 129-161.

According to Mun'im Sirry⁶ there is a difference or *distinction between the redaction* of the Qur'anic revelation about the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) which was revealed during the Mecca period (*makkiyah*) and which was revealed during the Medina period (*madaniyah*). According to the Hadith, the history of the revelation of the Qur'an in Mecca, the verses about the People of the Book are more positive, there are verses that talk about the continuity and similarity of teachings, while when they are in Medina, the verses that are displayed are negative, namely about criticism and theological deviations committed by the People of the Book.⁷ The question then is how do the mufassirs respond to the editorial differences regarding the Qur'anic attitude towards non-Muslims? Do you tend to use a positive tone when talking about non-Muslims? Or do you tend to be negative?

Mufassirs such as al-Wahidi, al-Baghawi, al-Qurthubi in principle have not touched the discourse on the differentiation of non-Muslim editorials. Has not presented two Quranic realities about non-Muslims. The mufassirs instead emphasise the aspect of deleting verses (*naskh*) that connote peace towards non-Muslims with verses of war / *ayatul qital*. This condition is inseparable from the way of understanding as part of the history of the civilisation of the people during the medieval period, when war was the hallmark of the political system. it can be understood that the background of the life of the mufassirs will affect the product of their interpretation either directly or indirectly.⁸

In its journey, the discourse on the verse of peace in the nask by the verse of war in the Koran has been revised by Rashid Rida in his book *al manar*. That is when in interpreting Q.s al - Baqarah verse 195⁹ states that the correct interpretation of the verse of war is by

⁶Mun'im Sirry, *-Polemics of Scripture: A Reformed Interpretation of the Qur'an's Criticism of Other Religions*, Terj, R Cecep Lukman Yasin, Jakarta: Gramedia (2013).

⁷The concepts of Makkiyah and Madaniyah are not terms that were established by the Prophet, he only a technical term of the scholars of tafsir to see the atmosphere of the revelation of the

Qur'an to the first audience at that time. Muhammad Misbahul Huda, *-The Concept of Makkiyah and Madaniyah in the Qur'an (A Historical-Sociological Study of Fazlur Rahman's Perspective)*, *Al-Mubarak: Journal of Qur'anic and Tafsir Studies* 5, no. 2 (2020): 61-81. In Wildan Imaduddin Muhammad's thesis, *-Tafsir Minority: The Discourse of Non-Muslims in the Qur'an in the Perspective of Abdullah Saeed and Farid Esack* which quotes from a book entitled Badr al-Dīn al- Zarkashī, *al-Burbān fī 'Ulūm al-Qurān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutb al-Ilmiyah, 2011), 306 explains that Idri summarises that there are four approaches in understanding *makki* and *madani* verses or letters, namely: geographical approach (*mulābahāzah makān al-nuzūl*) also called territorial approach (*tab}did makani*), subjective approach (*mulābahāzah mukhabāthin fi al-nuzūl*) or target orientation (*ta'yin syakhsī*), historical approach (*mulābahāzah zaman al-nuzūl*) or temporal approach (*tartīb zamanī*), and content analysis approach (*mulābahāzah mā tad}ammanatal-simwar wa al-ayāt*).

⁸ Alan G Jamieson, *Faith and Sword: A Short History of Christian-Muslim Conflict* (ReaktionBooks, 2006).

⁹ Mufiammad Rashīd Ridā, *-Tafsir Al-Manār*, *|| Dār al-Fikr*, tt, volume IV, pp: 347-

positioning it as a verse of causality or cause and effect that is only used when the condition of Muslims is threatened.

From this, it can be seen that interpreting Quranic verses about non-Muslim discourse is not easy. Researchers distinguish it into two styles

1. The mufassirs give a negative characterisation to non-Muslims by emphasising the war verses.
2. The second style of mufassirs tries to present a balanced proportion between verses of peace and verses of war.

The next problem is how the Koran is read, understood in the present context with the condition of a heterogeneous society, especially the religious aspect. The following illustrates the interpretation of modern mufassirs on non-Muslim verses in the Koran. Which is divided into two categories.

1. Views of Non-Muslim Mufassirs in Examining Non-Muslim Verses in the Qur'an.

Researchers raised 3 non-Muslim mufassir figures as examples in interpreting the word *Kafir*¹⁰ in the Koran.

- a. Toshihiko Izutsu¹¹ examines the word *kafir* in the Qur'an using a thematic method that is read in a semantic perspective. The word *kafir* is interpreted with two global meanings that are transformative. Toshihiko Izutsu divides the word *kafir* in two categories, first the Makkah period, *kafir* is interpreted as an attitude of opposition and rejection of the concept of faith. Second, in the Medina period, *Kafir* is addressed to religious and political enemies. Izutsu concluded that the Quran positions non-Muslims according to their conditions and attitudes towards Muslims.
- b. Waldman, divides it into four periods. Namely, three periods of Mecca and one period of Medina.¹² According to Waldman, in Mecca the word *kafir* meant denying, associating and defending oneself from the truth. Whereas in Medina, the word *kafir* changed its meaning to become an enemy of war. This implies that Waldman's findings reinforce Izutsu's conclusions.

¹⁰This word has become an absorbing word in the Indonesian language. In the KBBI this word is defined as -not believing in Allah and His Messenger; Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia Depdikbud, -Balai Pustakal (Jakarta, 1990).

¹¹A Japanese philosopher whose focus of study lies in the field of semantics is more clearly biographed in the journal Fatum Abubakar, -CONCEPT OF UMMAH IN THE AL- QUR'AN (SEMANTICS ANALYSIS OF TOSHIHIKO IZUTSU), *Hunafa Journal: Studia Islamika* 17, no. 2 (n.d.): 1-190.

¹²Marilyn Robinson Waldman, -The Development of the Concept of Kufr in the Qur'an, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (1968): 442-455.

- c. David Marshall, examines the Prophet's preaching and his contact with the unbelievers¹³ through the punishment-narrative. Marshall explains the Qur'ānic story in terms of triangular drama. This is the term he uses to refer to God, Muhammad and his unbelievers. According to Marshall, there is a difference in the threat narratives between Mecca and Medina. In the Mecca period, the threatening narratives in the Qur'an are only in the realm of discourse that tells the stories of the early prophets, whereas the threatening verses revealed in the Medina period are direct.¹⁴

Despite the contributions of Izutsu, Waldman, and Marshall to alternative interpretations of the word kafir and the semantic dynamics associated with non-Muslim discourse in the Qur'ān, the question is their status as outsiders, for various reasons, often disputed by some Muslim scholars. The reasons include their faith in Islam, and perhaps the influence of colonial interests.

In Indonesia itself, there is still scepticism towards non-Muslim scholars. This can be proven by the findings in Noer Huda Noor's article.¹⁵ He said that their attitude towards Islam and its writings is positive, but if they do not consciously and sincerely accept Islam, they are still orientalists, and the basic attitude of orientalists towards Islam is religious jealousy and economic jealousy, and in the end the main motive is ideological control and economic control.

2. Views of Muslim Mufasssirs in studying Non-Muslim Verses in the Quran.

Judging from the perspective of Muslim mufaasirs in the study of the text of the Qur'an about non-Muslims is divided into four categories; Historical, legal Formal, da'wah and pluralism. Among the figures are Sabir Ta'imah, Yyusuf Al qardawi, Ragib al shirajani and Ahmad and who specifically examines aspects of Pluralism is Nasir Muhammad. who believes that Islam is a teaching that is sustainable and perfects the teachings of the previous heavenly religions. Therefore, the principles of equality, equity, tolerance and compassion should be the foundation of their relationship.

For the Indonesian context itself, there have been many Indonesian Muslim mufasssirs who interpret the verses of al-Quran about non-Muslims. Such as Sa'dullah Affandi, Waryono Abdul gahafur, Abdul Moqsith Ghozali although the approaches, methods and theories used are different but the scholars

¹³ David Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers* (Routledge, 2014).

¹⁴ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *-God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers: A Qur'anic Study* (JSTOR, 2003).

¹⁵ Noer Huda Noor, *-Orientalists and Islamic Figures Contaminated with Orientalist Thought in the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, *Al Daulah: Journal of Criminal Law and State Administration* 2, no. 1 (2013): 74-87.

Indonesian Muslims agree that the Qur'an does not hate non-Muslims and believe the Qur'an as a guide to respect and appreciate other religions, especially in the context of Indonesia which has been given the freedom to embrace religion according to their respective beliefs.

From the long description from the beginning to the end above related to non-Muslim discourse, especially those that refer to the Qur'an, from the views or perspectives of Muslim minorities are often forgotten. The minority perspective here refers to how Muslim scholars living as minorities in a country/region respond to Qur'anic verses that are critical or negative towards non-Muslims. They face a very different reality to Muslim scholars living in Muslim-majority countries. In a global climate with a growing Muslim community in the West, Muslim scholars must overcome the pressures of Islamophobia.

To present the non-Muslim discourse in the Quran from a minority perspective, the researcher chose Abdullah Saeed's ideas for several reasons. Firstly: Abdullah Saeed's character and stature in the world of Islamic studies is undoubted. Second, Abdullah Saeed contributes to international relations and interfaith dialogue. Another reason is that Abdullah Saeed is one of the contemporary Muslim thinkers who in his interpretation carries what is called -contextualist approach that is an approach that in the interpretation of the Koran does not only focus on the linguistic aspects of the Koran but on the socio-historical aspects of the time of its revelation even though there are already mufassirs who do it such as Fazlur rahman, Nashr Hamid Abu Zayd but in this case Saeed provides a comprehensive argumentative elaboration in the interpretation of the Koran.¹⁶

In this study, researchers want to see how the construct of Abdullah Saeed's thought as a Muslim minority in understanding the verses concerning non-Muslims. Simply put, this main question is divided into two categories. First: how is the construct of Abdullah Saeed's thought in interpreting the Koran? Second: how does Abdullah Saeed interpret the verses of non-Muslims in the Quran?

Basically, there have been many studies and journal articles that examine the figure of Abdullah Saeed as a Muslim mufassir including: Anik Faridah, in her work entitled -The Trend of Progressive Islamic Thought¹⁷ | explains the concept of progressive ijihad of Abdullah Saeed and the position of progressive Muslims in the current trend of Muslim thought.

¹⁶ Abdullah Saeed and Islamic Thought, -An Introduction, | *Sabiron Syamsuddin & M NurPrabowo S. (eds.)*, Yogyakarta: *Kaukaba* (2014).

¹⁷ Anik Faridah, -The Trend of Progressive Islamic Thought (A Study of the Thought of Abdullah Saeed), | *Al-Mabsut: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies* 7, no. 2 (2013): 19-34.

Tasmuji, 2011¹⁸ - Abdullah Saeed's Thoughts on Riddah and Human Rights|| this paper provides Abdullah Saeed's view of Riddah (apostasy) comprehensively which places Riddah in its true position, which is a sin not a criminal act. **Aminudin**,¹⁹ "Abdullah Saeed's Thought on Muslim Progressive as an alternative way of modern era challenges". This paper explains one of the areas of progressive Muslim thought, which only raises one dimension, namely progressive Fiqh. The discussion of progressive fiqh includes: characteristics, framework, issues, challenges and some of Abdullah Saeed's views on progressive Islam. Zainudin Fanani 2019²⁰ - The Progressive Islamic Movement in a sociological context - understands Abdullah Saeed's thoughts in his book -Islamic Thought||, whose main focus is on Muslim doctrine, development, production, religious insights, main themes, education, and movements that contribute to scholarly production.

The research that will be discussed by researchers is basically only looking at one point of view, which will specifically see Abdullah Saeed as a minority Muslim scholar whose topic specifically discusses non-Muslim discourse in the Qur'an. While in the research process, researchers use a *descriptive-analytical library research method* that functions to interpret data with a historical-critical approach. There are two sources of data in general, namely primary and secondary. Primary data sources will be seen from Abdullah Saeed's works in which there is a discussion of verses concerning Non-Muslims and Muslim minorities among his works entitled 1) *interpreting the Qur'an: towards a contemporary Approach*, 2) *Interpreting the Quran*, 3) *Islamic Thought An Introduction, the Quran: An Introduction, Reading the Quran in Twenty- First Century: Contextualist Approach and Islam in Australia*. As for secondary data from several documents and other articles related to Abdullah Saeed's thoughts in the frame of non-Muslim discourse in the Quran. As for data analysis in this study using 3 analysis techniques, namely:

Firstly: Descriptive analysis used to describe background of Abdullah Saeed's life and contextual interpretation.

Secondly, Taxonomic Analysis is an analytical technique that focuses research on certain domains of the character's thinking, which in this case is the following

¹⁸Tasmuji Tasmuji, -The Thoughts of Abdullah Saeed on Riddah and Human Rights,|| *Religio Journal of Religious Studies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 69-81.

¹⁹Aminudin Aminudin, -ABDULLAH SAEED'S THINKING ABOUT PROGRESSIVE MUSLIMS AS AN ALTERNATIVE PATH TO THE CHALLENGE OF THE ERA MODERN,|| *RUSYDLAH: Journal of Islamic Thought* 2, no. 1 (2021): 50-63.

²⁰Zainudin Fanani, -Progressive Islamic Movement in the Context of Sociology: Understanding Abdullah Saeed's Thought in His Book Islamic Thought,|| *Journal of Pusaka Media for Islamic Studies and Thought* 7, no. 1 (2019): 53.

non-Muslim discourse in the Quran with its figure is Abdullah Saeed.

Third: Interpretative, researchers try to interpret Abdullah Saeed's thoughts about the interpretation of the Quran, especially about non-Muslims and to find and understand the meaning of what Abdullah Saeed initiated.

Discussion

Abdullah Saeed's Socio-Historical Background

Abdullah Saeed was born on 25 September 1964 in a small country located on the Asian continent (South Asia) called Maldives or Maldives Islands or with the official name of the Republic of Maldives. Saeed is of Omani Arab descent who settled in the Maldives. He spent his childhood on the island of Meedhoo in the Addu Atoll region.²¹ The Maldives is a small country with a long history of Islam dating back to the 12th century, when Islam was brought by Abu al-Barakat al-Barbari, an Islamic scholar.

Alim from Morocco in 1153, although there is another opinion that Shamsuddin al-Tibrizi brought Islam to the Maldives in 1147, where he was a traveller from the Abbasid dynasty. It was in this century that the kingdom of Maldives accepted Islam as the official religion of the kingdom under Muhammad al-Adil who was previously named Dhoni Kalaminjaan. The Maldivian people gradually accepted Islam and became the leadership for generations.

At first, the practice of Islamic law used in the Maldives was the Maliki school, as brought by Abu al-Barakat al-Barbari, which became a well-known school in Morocco. But after the spread of the Shafi'i school of thought in the southern Asian region which was quite massive, where this region was connected to the Maldives trade route. Then the Shafi'i school of thought during the time of Sultan Muhammad Tharukufanu became the official school of thought used in the Maldives in the 15th century through Sheikh Jamaluddin from Hadramaut, Yemen. Until now, the majority of the Maldives is dominated by Sunnis with the Shafi'i madhhab.²²

²¹ Wartoyo Wartoyo, -Bank Interest: Abdullah Saeed vs Yusuf Qaradhawi (A Dialectic of Thought Between Modernists and Neo-Revivalists), *La_Riba* 4, no. 1 (2010): 119-135.

²² Hassan Ahmed Maniku, -Conversion of Maldives to Islam, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Sri Lanka Branch* 31 (1986): 72-81.

The Maldives used to be a protectorate, which according to International law is a country or territory controlled, not owned, by another more powerful country,²³ in this case the UK. The UK only had an interest in building military bases in the Maldives and did not interfere with the internal Maldives which remained under the rule of the sultan, before finally turning into a Republican state with president Ibrahim Nasir in 1968. As the Maldives was once a British protectorate, the Maldivian republic government and its people use English as an official language in addition to Divehi (the native language of the Maldives).²⁴ Saeed himself witnessed the Maldives sultanate's transition to a sovereign republic, and was a teenager at the time.²⁵

The educational process certainly contributes greatly to the pattern of one's thinking, especially a figure in this case Abdullah Saeed. History records that Saeed studied in Pakistan²⁶, then continued to Medina in the field of Arabic language and literature, from the experience of studying Arabic language and literature, Saeed argued that the period 1977-1986, Islamic studies in the Arabic literature department had not been directed at the Salafi-Wahabi ideology as massive as in the late 20th century, therefore Saeed continued his studies in Australia in Middle Eastern Studies and Applied Linguistics studies at the University of Melbourne Australia, and earned a PhD in Islamic Studies at the same campus. This made Saeed very competent in reading the reality of the West and the East, and gave birth to many works in the form of books, articles, papers and other writings.²⁷

Saeed's awareness of tolerance and pluralism emerged after he started living in Australia, a multicultural, multiracial and multi-religious society, and he realised the importance of interfaith dialogue to build a universal image and value of Islam. Saeed, who is a Muslim minority in Australia, is now a professor at the University of Melbourne and has become a permanent resident. In addition, the Australian Government

²³<https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protectorat#:~:text=According%20to%20international%20law%20ional%2C%20protectorat%20adalah%20negara%20atau%20wilayah,jabatan%20kepala%20negara%2C%20walaupun%20hanya%20sebatas%20nominal%20saja.>

²⁴Clarence Maloney, -The Maldives: New Stresses in an Old Nation, *Asian Survey* 16, no. 7 (1976): 654-671.

²⁵ Wildan Imaduddin Muhammad, -Tafsir Minority: Non-Muslim Discourse in the Qur'an from the Perspectives of Abdullah Saeed and Farid Esack (Graduate School of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, n.d.).

²⁶ Pakistan is the place where Fazlur Rahman existed. At the same time, the traditional scholars who founded the madrassas where Saeed studied were opposed to FazlurRahman's progressive Islamic ideas.

²⁷Tasmuji, -The Thoughts of Abdullah Saeed on Riddah and Human Rights.

often trust Saeed to conduct research between countries. So it is not surprising that Abdullah Saeed's name often appears in the world of Islamic education both in Indonesia and abroad.

Abdullah Saeed's Categorisation of Muslims

In looking at the development of Islamic thought in the 21st century, Abdullah Saeed classifies six categories of Muslims, among others;

Legalist-Traditionalist, this school is a follower of the schools of fiqh that are spread throughout the world. The Shafi'i school is spread across Southeast Asia such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei, the Maliki school is dominant in western and northern African countries such as Morocco and Tunisia, the Hanafi school is popular in South Asia and Turkey, and the Hanbali school is dominated by countries in the Arabian Peninsula such as Saudi Arabia. According to Saeed, there has been an attempt to bring out the similarities and similarities of all the madhhabs rather than their differences, and one of the central figures in this school is Sheikh Yusuf al-Qardhawi.

Political **Islamists** develop Islam as a political and social basis, rejecting modern ideologies such as nationalism, secularism, communism and westernisation. This group is more about Islamic activism that opposes the state and religion, and is represented by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Jamaat Islam in Pakistan.

Secular Muslims, this secular Muslim school is more inclined to personal faith and there is no need for the implementation of Islam in the public sphere. **Theological Puritans**, the puritan theological school focuses on correct belief or true faith and avoids deviant teachings such as bid'ah. This school quotes Ibn Taymiyyah and Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab with the modern figure Muhammad bin Salih al-Uthaimin. In Indonesia, this school is often referred to as salafi-wahabi.

Islamist Extremists, this militant extremist sect views that Islam has always been weakened due to colonialisation and westernisation, hence the need for violence in fighting for Islam. This school is represented by al-Qaeda and its network, as well as ISIS and its network. **Progressive Ijtihadists**, Saeed gives several characteristics that characterise this progressive ijtihadist school; 1) this school seeks to create a new methodology and ijtihad in answering contemporary problems, 2) this school has the view that some traditional fiqh laws are no longer relevant to the present, 3) Collaborating traditional Islamic thought, education and western thought, 4) emphasising social justice, gender, and social justice.

and human rights. It seeks change in Islam through the reinterpretation of Islamic texts and traditions, with an emphasis on thought and activism.

Abdullah Saeed's Contextual Interpretation

Before interpreting Abdullah Saeed first classifies the Qur'an into four types of interpretative verses;²⁸

1. Theological verses that contain information on divinity, eschatology, and other supernatural matters.
2. Verses of Acts that refer to events in human history, both in the context of the past, present and future.
3. Parable verses that illustrate a certain concept or idea through certain phases, expressions and texts.
4. Practically oriented ethico-legal verses that are currently the focus of Islamic studies, such as worship, marriage, divorce, inheritance, jihad, crime, and Muslim and non-Muslim relations.

While in the context of the interpretation of ethico-legal verses in the Qur'an Abdullah Saeed focuses on language criteria to determine the meaning of the text and takes into account the socio-historical context of the past and present, he classifies it into three groups;

1. Textualist, this school leads to a literalistic approach to the Qur'an, because the meaning of a text applies universally, therefore Muslims are obliged to follow what is stated in the Qur'an.
2. Semi-Textualist, this school basically also emphasises a literalist approach and denies sociohistoricality, but they are able to package their approach with modern idioms. Saeed gives examples of this school as the Ikhwanul Muslimin in Egypt and Jamaat Islami in Pakistan.
3. Contextualist, this school is very concerned with social-historical in interpreting ethical-legal verses in the Qur'an with a comprehensive understanding.²⁹ It is in this contextualist stream that Saeed exists, where Saeed emphasises more on understanding the Qur'an contextually.

²⁸ Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Abdullah Saeed's Argumentation in Promoting Contextual Approach in Qur'anic Interpretation" Paradigms, Principles, and Methods of Contextual Interpretation of the Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Ladang Hikmah and Baitul Hikmah Press, 2016).

²⁹ Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (Routledge, 2005).

The scheme of Abdullah Saeed's Contextual Interpretation is as follows:

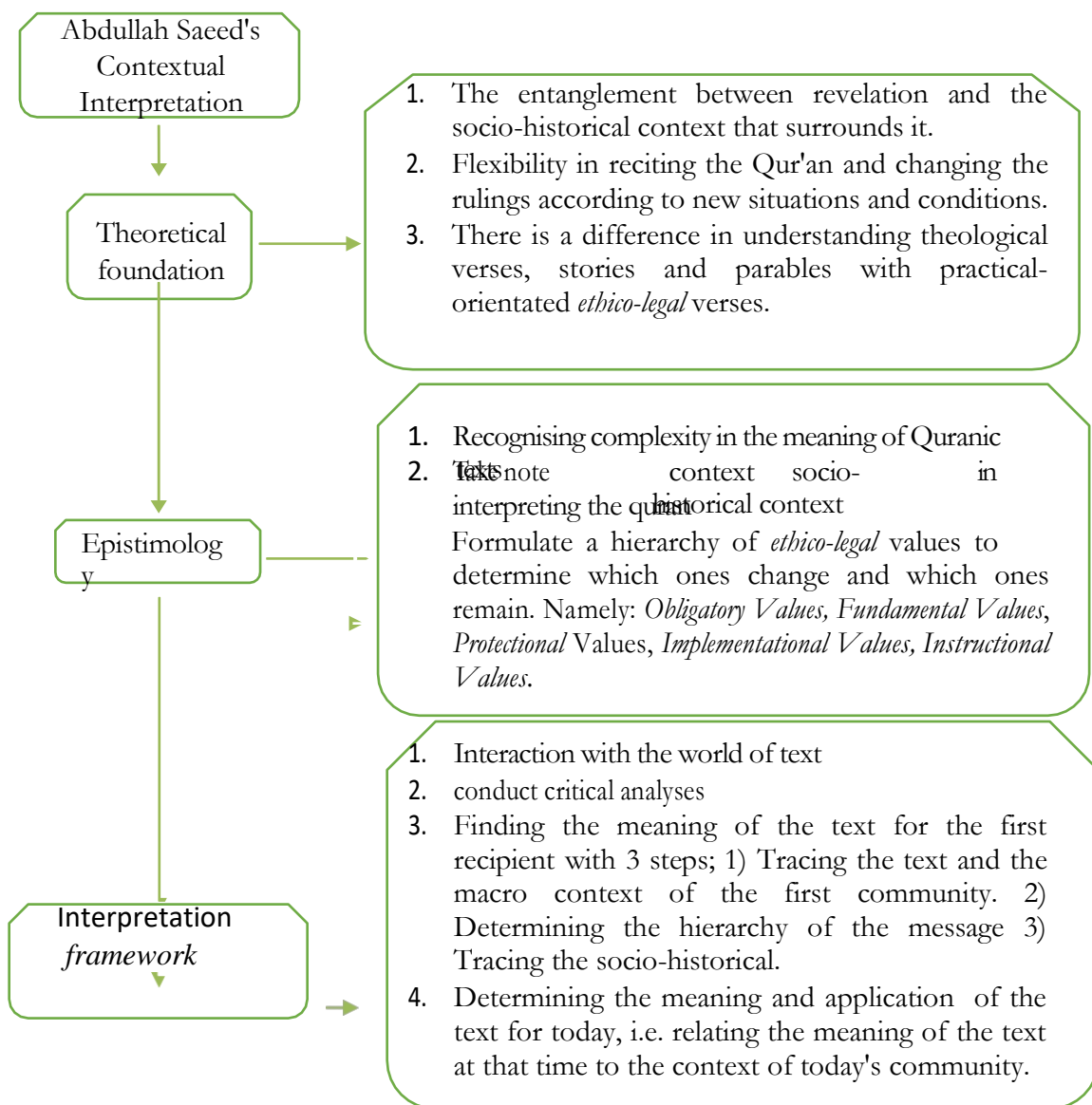


Figure 1
Abdullah Saeed's Contextual Interpretation Scheme

Non-Muslims in Abdullah Saeed's Perspective

1. Crucifixion and Death of Prophet Jesus

In his practice of contextual interpretation, Saeed raises the issue of the crucifixion and death of Jesus or Isa as Saeed's theological discourse. In Q.S. al-Nisa verses 156-158

And for their disbelief (in Jesus) and their accusing Maryam of a great lie (adultery) (156). and for their saying: "We have killed Al Masih, Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of Allah", whereas they neither killed him nor crucified him, but they killed the one whom they likened to him. Verily, those who disputed about the killing of Jesus were really in doubt about the one killed, and they had no certainty about the one killed except by mere conjecture, nor were they certain that the one they killed was Jesus (157); but Allah raised him to Himself, and Allah is the Mighty, the Wise (158).

Abdullah Saeed explained that Q.S. al-Nisa verse 157 was revealed in the Medina period as a criticism of the Jews who often conflicted with the Prophet and the Companions. Because during the Medina period, the religious and political tension between the Muslims and the Jews was quite high, so many verses of the Qur'an were revealed that criticised the behaviour and attitudes of the Jews. Saeed cites Lawson's opinion that the Qur'an criticises what is called -faithlessness (kufr) in Jewish history, when they killed their prophets without good reason, slandered Maryam the mother of Jesus (peace be upon her) and degraded her honour, then they boasted of having killed Jesus (peace be upon him). It is emphasised that the crucifixion of Jesus is not the main theme of this verse nor is it a criticism of the doctrine of the Christian church, but rather the moral failure of the Jewish people.³⁰

In interpreting this verse, Saeed cites several views or interpretations from **pre-modern** scholars;³¹ **al-Thabari** (839M - 923M) / (224H - 310H), Jesus assembled his disciples and asked them who was

³⁰ Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach* (Routledge, 2013).

³¹ Ibid.

Willing to volunteer to take his place in exchange for paradise, and one of his disciples was willing to become a martyr. It was he who was then likened to the Prophet Jesus who was later crucified by the Jews. al-Thabari, There was a disciple of the Prophet Jesus who leaked the existence of the Prophet Jesus, then as a punishment for the betrayal, he was likened to the Prophet Jesus, who was later crucified. **Fakhruddin al-Razi** (1149M - 1209M) / (543H - 606H), He quoted the bible of the Nestorian Christians (is a doctrine that teaches that Jesus has two persons, as a man and as the son of God, rather than as one person)³². Al-Razi identifies a second possibility that may be sympathetic to the critical view, saying that the Nestorian community claimed Jesus was only crucified in his human aspect and not in his divine aspect. Al-Razi also refers to the philosophers (hukama) who hold the view that man is not limited to his physicality (haiakal). This view is in line with al-Razi's penchant for rationalist explanations and his suspicion of the quality of hadith reports on the theory of substitution.³³

Saeed said that al-Razi implicitly tends to the theory that the Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) died on the cross, but his soul was raised by Allah SWT. Compared to the substitution theory. Saeed cites **Abu A'la al-Maududi** (1903M-1979M) / (1321H-1399H), **Sayyid Qutb** (1906M- 1966M) / (1324H-1386H) and **Mahmoud Ayoub** (1935 - 2021) / (1354H - 1443H) with their various arguments as **modern** mufasssirs, but there is a similarity in the conclusion that there was no crucifixion and murder of Jesus. Saeed concludes that the dominant opinion that there was no crucifixion of Jesus is based on stories narrated by the second generation and is not based on saheeh hadith. Moreover, it is based on the theological belief adopted by Muslims since the early days that someone took the place of Jesus (peace be upon him).³⁴

Wildan Imaduddin gives his interpretation of Abdullah Saeed's thought, saying that Saeed wants to say that the miracle of a person's likeness to the Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) is irrational, and Saeed says that in the present context, theologically it is not difficult to say that the Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) was crucified and killed as well as recognising that the previous prophets of the Jewish people were also killed. For Saeed, such a view would not detract from his faith and high regard for the Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him).³⁵

³² <https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nestorianisme>

³³ Abdullah Saeed, -The Qur'an in the 21st Century: Contextual Interpretation,|| Bandung: MizanLibrary (2016).

³⁴ Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach*.

³⁵ Muhammad, -Tafsir Minority: Non-Muslim Discourse in the Qur'an Perspective
Abdullah Saeed and Farid Esack. I

Saeed pointed out that the view on the rejection of the concept of Jesus' crucifixion was influenced by conflicts in the early generations of Islam even since the first century A.H. History records that since the beginning of the Companions, Islamic troops have met Christians in various places in the context of Islamic expansion. This political conflict has strengthened the theological polemics between Islam and Christianity. These theological views may have been influenced by the theological debates between early Muslims and Christians about the relative superiority of each religion and which of them was right. Saeed says that this is what fuelled the texts denying the crucifixion of Jesus (peace be upon him), the most fundamental doctrine of Christianity, and made the later 4th and 5th centuries the standard for the foundation of Islamic theology, even today. Yet according to Saeed, the textual basis on which Muslims have built their theological foundations is not strong, and most of the views attributed to the early Muslim generation actually come from the second generation (*tabi'in*), if not later, and are not directly attributed to the Prophet or the first generation (*companions*).³⁶

2. The concept of apostasy

In Q.S. al-Kahf verse 29, Allah SWT says;

"The truth comes from your Lord; so whosoever desires (to believe) let him believe, and whosoever desires (to disbelieve) let him disbelieve". Verily, We have prepared for the wrongdoers Hell, whose churning surrounds them; and if they ask for drink, they will be given water like boiling iron that scorches the face. That is the worst drink and the ugliest resting place. (29)

Also in Q.S. al-Isra' verse 15, Allah SWT says:

"Whoever acts in accordance with (Allah's) guidance, then surely he is acting for his own salvation; and whoever goes astray, then surely he is going astray to his own detriment. and a sinner

³⁶Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach*.

We do not bear the sins of others, and We will not punish until We send a messenger. (15)
Also in Q.S. al-Baqarah verse 256, Allah SWT says:

“There is no compulsion to (enter) the religion (of Islam); Verily, the right way is clear from the wrong way. Therefore, whoever disbelieves in Thaghut[162] and believes in Allah, then surely he has taken hold of a very strong rope that will not break. And Allah is All-hearing, All-knowing.” (256)

According to Saeed, these three verses indicate the freedom to choose religion, and declare their religion without coercion, especially in this case Islam. Even the Prophet Muhammad did not have the right to force someone to embrace Islam, as in Q.S. al-Ghashiyah verse 21;³⁷

“So warn, for indeed you are only a warner. (21)

There are several things that become Abdullah Saeed's thoughts about the punishment imposed on people who apostatise from Islam;

- a. The death penalty for apostates has violated the principle promoted by Islam, namely *freedom of religion*,³⁸ as in the three verses that researchers have mentioned above.
- b. Saeed quoted Muhammad Salim al-Alwa who said the death penalty for apostasy is a form of *ta'zir* and not *hadd*, where *ta'zir* provisions can change with the times and agreement in society, in contrast to *hadd* which is absolute.³⁹
- c. There is no Qur'anic text that mentions the death penalty for apostates, only the threat of punishment in the hereafter. As in Q.S. al-Baqarah verses 8-18, which according to Saeed this verse explains about *apostasy*, which is a Muslim who tries to damage Islam from within and damage the image of Islam that is not only good, but also good.

³⁷ Abdullah Saeed, -Religious Freedom in Islam: The Witness of the Qur'an and the Prophet, *ABC Religion and Ethic* (2018).

³⁸ Abdullah Saeed, *Freedom of Religion, Apostasy and Islam* (Routledge, 2017).

³⁹ Abdullah Saeed, *Islam and Belief: At Home with Religious Freedom* (Zephyr Institute, 2014).

- known as hypocrites. And Q.S. al-Nisa verse 137, which according to Saeed describes apostates who leave Islam just to show their rejection of Islam.⁴⁰
- d. The existing Hadiths only mention the death penalty in their wording. as in the sahih hadith narrated by Bukhori: **بَدَلٌ مِّنْ دِينِهِ فَاَقْتُلُوهُ** which means - whoever changes his religion, kill him. however, the Prophet Muhammad in practice did not punish death. apostates.⁴¹
 - e. Saeed emphasises a contextual approach in understanding the authentic traditions that explain the death penalty for apostasy. When reflecting on the Muslim community at that time, they were surviving in a social system and identity still based on tribalism. So that in some cases it is found that people who enter Islam only to gather information about Islam and its people, then after they feel enough, they return to their original religion or community to fight Islam, people like this are called apostates and are sentenced to death. Therefore, Saeed thinks that the death penalty for apostates is given not only because they leave Islam but also because they fight against the Islamic community afterwards. According to Saeed it is because of this that the Hanafi school does not prescribe the death penalty for apostate women on the assumption that it is highly unlikely for them to engage in warfare.⁴²

Conclusion

This study shows that the construction of interpretation done by Abdullah Saeed and who is positioned as a minority scholar, can provide its own style of interpretation model, especially when interpreting Quranic verses about non-Muslims. Abdullah Saeed with the idea of contextual interpretation can set up three bases of interpretation methodology. The three are used to ensure the extent to which the books of legal ethics, including those that affect non-Muslims, can be understood and practised in the current context while still being guided by the substance of the values that were brought when the verses were revealed. Contextual interpretation was developed by Saeed based on his concern about the dominance of textual interpretation models that in certain aspects reduce the meaning of the Qur'an to the point that it seems irrelevant to the development of an increasingly complex era.

⁴⁰Saeed, -Religious Freedom in Islam: The Witness of the Qur'an and the Prophet. I

⁴¹Saeed, *Islam and Belief: At Home with Religious Freedom*.

⁴²Saeed, -Religious Freedom in Islam: The Witness of the Qur'an and the Prophet. I

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