

Contextual Qur'an Interpretation: The Study on the Concept of "Hierarchy of Values" Abdullah Saeed

Dr. Aan Najib¹

Abstract

Abdullah Saeed is one of Muslim scholars who concerns on contemporary Qur'anic studies very much. In his writing entitled Interpreting the Qur'an Towards A Contemporary Approach, Abdullah Saeed offers a methodology of contextual interpretation, which he called as contextual approach, that is more detailed in comparison to other scholars on contemporary Qur'anic studies. In the writing, he offers a hierarchy of values in order to understand the ethico-legal verses. The author realized that it is an urgent need to know Abdullah Saeed's contextual interpretation more as a counter for the number of textual interpretation existing in Muslim community nowadays. Because of it, this article will explore the methodology of contextual interpretation introduced by Abdullah Saeed generally and the concept of a hierarchy values offered by him particularly. The author sees that the concept of a hierarchy values is a continuance of 'general principles initiated by Fazlur Rahman. Abdullah Saeed himself has admitted that he was influenced by Fazlur Rahman's Double movement theory in arranging his framework of contextual interpretation methodology.

Key Words: Abdullah Saeed, Contextual, Hierarchy of Values

A. Introduction

Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid called the Qur'an as a producer of culture, in the sense that the text of the Qur'an into a hegemonic text is the reference and basis for other texts.² Abu Zaid argued that the text of the Qur'an that there has attracted attention of many people, both Muslims and non-Muslims, to continue to examine the contents of the content of the Qur'an. From the early years of the Qur'an was revealed until now does not count how many works written about the Qur'an, either in the form of interpretation, *'Ulum al-Quran*, and the form of community reception. That culture was produced by al-Qur'an. In the view of Muslims, the Qur'an was a sea of knowledge that is not trimmed. Study it is always done in every context of time and space, from the classical era to modern-contemporary era. Especially with an adage that states that the Qur'an will always be real-time in every time and place, making the assessment, analysis, and interpretation of it never stops. In the age of modern-contemporary, paradigms and nuances of the study of the Qur'an experienced a shift from the classical era in accordance with the problems and demands of Muslims today.

However, unfortunately many Muslims today are stuck and tend to impose literal meanings of texts to be applied today. Departure from the jitters, emerging modern Muslim thinkers who emphasized the importance of looking for the hidden meaning of a literal editorial verses of the Qur'an so that messages of universal Qur'an capable captured and implemented in accordance spirit of the times which is always dynamic. There are so many names that emphasize the importance of Muslim thinkers reveal the meaning behind the literal verse, such as Fazlur Rahman with thought-ratio legis, M. Talbi with his *Maqasid* (goal), Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid with his *maghza* (significance paragraph) and other figures.³

One of the figures of contemporary studies of the Qur'an that is currently and has been on the rise is Abdullah Saeed that is widely known by its contextual approach. This latter figure is unique because it offers a more detailed methodology than its predecessors and a little number he had been influenced by the theories Fazlur Rahman.

By looking at her academic background you've traveled in Arab and in the West, making a review of this figure thought to be very interesting, especially in order to find a creative synthesis that can bridge the West and the East.

¹ Dept. of Arabic Language Education, "Sunan Ampel" State Islamic University, Surabaya Indonesia

² Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, 2001, *Textuality Koran Critique of the Ulumul Qur'an*, Khoirun Nahdliyyin (Yogyakarta: LKIS.), p. 20

³ Sahiron Syamsuddin, 2014, A Peacefull Message Beyond the Permission of Warfare (Jihad) An Interpretation of Qur'an 22: 39

This article will photograph the figure Abdullah Saeed and his thoughts on the Qur'an, especially in the field of interpretation. By using descriptive-analytic method, the authors will examine the methodology Abdullah Saeed contextual interpretation of some of his works such as *Interpreting the Qur'an Towards A Contemporary approach* and other works. Furthermore, the authors also will examine the concept of a hierarchy of values that she has to offer and see its relevance for dealing with problems of Muslims today.

B. Intellectual biography of Abdullah Saeed

Born on the island of Meedhoo (Seenu Atoll) on 25 September 1964, Mr. Abdullah Saeed is a descendant of the Dhiyamigili Dynasty of the Maldives. He also belonged to the illustrious family of scholars, jurists and educators in the Maldives which includes Chief Justice Mohamed Shamsudhdhin EI-Kabeeru, Chief Justice Ibrahim Majududhdhin, Chief Justice Moosa Badhurudhdhin, Chief Justice Ismail Bahaaudhdhin, Chief Justice Shaikh Ali Didi and Chief Justice Hussain Afeefudhdhin (Bodufenvalhugey Seedi). The distinguished scholar EI-Sheikh EI-Hafiz Ibrahim Dhonbeyyaa of Aisaabeegedharu, S. Meedhoo was his great grandfather. According to Mr. HCP Bell, the famous historian and archeologist, his ancestors were "erudite scholars and jurists and judges, Meedhoo has produced for generations past." [citation needed] Since the Sixteenth century, more than eight of his ancestors have filled the high office of Chief Justice of the Maldives. He is the first son of Mr. Mohamed Saeed and Maumoon Mohammed Didi of Alivaage, S. Meedhoo. His father, Mohamed Saeed, served as a Khatib of Meedhoo for nearly a decade.

Education

Saeed's education includes:

- An L.L.B (Combined Honours Degree in Shari'ah and Law) from Al-Azhar University, Cairo, 1994.
- An L.L.M from IMO International Maritime Law Institute, Malta, 1999.
- A Parliamentary Studies and Legal Drafting course at the Lok Sabha, India, 1997.
- Coursework, national and international seminars and conferences including judicial studies and training programs at Judiciaries in Singapore, Malaysia, and Australia, 2001.
- *Effective Dispute Management in a Changing World* and *An Executive Programme in Negotiation and Mediation*, conducted by the Singapore Mediation Centre, Singapore, 2001.
- *Seminar on Customer-Oriented Service*, organized by the Civil Service College (Singapore) in cooperation with the Public Service Division at The President's Office, Male', 2000.
- *Workshop on Aviation Accident Investigation* conducted by the Singapore Aviation Academy, Singapore, 16 – 22 February 2000.
- *WIPO National Workshop on Intellectual Property and the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement)* organized by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in cooperation with the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Male', 1999.
- A special course on *International Maritime Labour Law* in conjunction with ISF, ITF and MMA, Malta, 15 – 19 February 1999
- Seminar on the FIDIC forms of contract (MASIONS) Male', 1996.
- Workshop on *EEZ Management and Maritime Legislation* organized by the Economic and Legal Advisory Services Division, Commonwealth Secretariat, in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Male', 1995.

He is also undertaking his L.L.D Program, in Public International Law.

Career

Saeed was admitted as an advocate of the Maldives in 1995 and began his legal carrier with the Attorney General's office. He served as a State Attorney in the Attorney General's Office from 27 June 1995 to 12 September 1998, and from 8 June 1999 to 1 August 2000. As a State Attorney, he represented the state in the courts, and advised government departments on numerous legal matters presented for opinion at the Attorney General's Office.

He was appointed as Director of Institute of Shari'ah and Law of the Maldives College of Higher Education from 2 August 2000 to 31 January 2001. He was also appointed as the first Dean of Faculty of Sharia and Law (the Maldives National University) from 1 February 2001 to 24 April 2001, and entrusted with the responsibility of laying the foundation for legal education in the Maldives.

He also continued to teach law at certificate, diploma and degree level programmes conducted at the Faculty of Sharia'h and law, the Faculty of Management and Computing of the Maldives College of Higher Education, and at the college of Islamic Studies.

From 25 April 2001 to 15 June 2005, Saeed served as a Director in Attorney General's Office and as Assistant Director General of Public Prosecutions, from 16 June 2005 to 11 September 2005. As head of the prosecutions in the AGO, he directed prosecutions to the Courts of the Republic of Maldives.

His appointments included being:

- Member of the Maritime Training Advisory Board, 2003 – 2005.
- Member of the Advisory Council to Narcotics Control Board, 2003 – 2005.
- Member of the Committee established under Clause 11 (b) of Act Number 77/7 (Act on Narcotics and Psychotropic Substance Use: 3rd Amendment), 2002 – 2005.
- Member of Tender Evaluation Board, 2001 – 2004.
- Member of the Law Commission of the Republic of Maldives, 1997 – 2002.
- Member of the Council for the Protection of the Rights of Children, Maldives, 1996 – 1998 and 2002 – 2005.
- Legal Officer, at the Unit of the Rights of Children in the Maldives.
- Member of the legal office of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Rome, Italy from 17 September to 17 November 2006.
- Deputy Attorney General from 11 September 2008 to 18 September 2008.

Saeed was also appointed as a Justice of the Supreme Court of the Maldives on 18 September 2008, and assumed office as Chief Justice of the Maldives, from 18 September 2008 to 10 August 2010. At the helm of the judiciary he inspired and guided efforts to reform and re-organize the judiciary with the aim of building a responsive and efficient judiciary system without compromising the function of dispensing justice. He introduced reforms and innovative measures to improve the administration of justice and the service provided to the public by the judiciary. He is well-versed in Common Law, Civil Law and Shari'ah. He is also well-versed in several languages: Dhivehi, English, Arabic, Persian and Urdu.⁴

C. Characteristics of Contemporary Interpretation

Along with the pulse of the times are constantly changing, in fact science has developed and part-time shift theory in particular. Because the theoretical constructs of science knowledge is a product of a certain age are not universally applicable and suitable for the next era postscript has historical characteristics that vary with time and place where it was first built construction. This is what is meant by Thomas S. Kuhn with the *Shifting Paradigm* in the area of science.⁵ Study of the Qur'an today also experiencing what Kuhn called *a paradigm shift*. In the book *History Dynamics Tafsir al-Qur'an*, the author of a paradigm shift, theories, and approaches used in understanding the Qur'an since the classical era to the modern era.

Furthermore, it divides the history of interpretation into three periods: the flow of interpretation of the Qur'an classical period (I-II century H / 6-7M), Tafsir flow medieval period (III-IX century H / 9-15 M), and the flow Tafsir modern-contemporary period (XII-XIV century H / 18-21 M), each period has its characteristics and uniqueness. Unlike previous periods interpretation characteristics that tend to be ideological, repetitive, and partial, characteristic of contemporary modern interpretation hermenutis more nuanced, scholarly, critical, non-sectarian, contextual, and oriented spirit of the Qur'an. Reveals contextual meaning and action-oriented spirit of the Qur'an, he said, are characteristics that stand out in this contemporary-modern era.⁶ Abdullah Saeed said that the emergence of a contemporary interpretation of the characteristics which tend to differ with the previous period is a response to global developments in many sectors, such as politics, the environment, and ethics, which urges Muslims to seek a balance between their life with the values of modernity.⁷

D. Contextual Interpretation of Abdullah Saeed Model

Etymologically, the word comes from the contextual noun English language is a context that becomes a term in the English language with the word 'context' which in this dictionary has at least two meanings,

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdullah_Saeed, accessed on 17th August 2016

⁵ Thomas Kuhn, 1970, *the Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.), p 104

⁶ Abdul Mustaqim, 2014, *Dinamika Sejarah Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Adab Press.), p. 165.

⁷ Abdullah Saeed, 2008, *The Qur'an an Introduction* (New York: Routledge.), p. 208

- 1) Part of a description or phrase that can support or augment the clarity of meaning,
- 2) a situation that has to do with an incident.⁸

The contextualist, as explained Saeed, are Muslim scholars who believe that the teachings contained in the Qur'an should be applied in different ways according to the context surrounding it. They tend to view the Qur'an as a source of practical guidance to be implicated differently in Conditions and different situations, not a set of rigid law. Muslim scholars who use This contextual approach argue that an interpreter must know the context of the social, political, and cultural time of revelation of the Quran was revealed and also the context of what happened today.

In contrast to the textual groups who base their interpretation to the analysis of language alone, the group contextualist exploration even further by embracing the modern scientific disciplines, such as hermeneutics and literary theory, as well as other disciplines. One of the contextualist figures - although not call himself explicitly as a contextualist - is Fazlur Rahman. Saeed itself looks highly admired figure Rahman, this can be seen from Saeed praise to the thought Fazlur Raman in the book *Interpreting the Qur'an Towards a Contemporary Approach*.⁹

For Saeed, Rahman is one of the modern Muslim leaders were very instrumental in developing a contemporary approach on the Qur'an. The theory of double movement Rahman has provided new color in thinking Saeed later he developed his own¹⁰ *Double movement* is a process of interpretation that sees reality happens now and then see the revelation of the Qur'an to take their message, and then apply the message in the present life (from the present situation to Qur'anic times, then back to the present).¹¹ Saeed who tend to follow a pattern of interpretation Rahman who consider the context of past and present not only emulate the approach, but develop it. With the knowledge gained from Rahman through various work will investigate the importance of the context of the revelation.

Saeed formulate a contextual interpretation of the following steps:

Model interpretation

Text

Stage 1st : The encounter with the world of text

Stage 2nd : Critical analysis

Linguistic
Literary Context
Literary Forms
Parallel of texts
Precedent

Stage 3rd : Meaning for the first recipients

Socio Historical context
Worldview
Nature of the message: Legal, theological, ethical
Message: cotextual versus universal
Relationship of the message to the overall message of the al-Q ur'an

Stage 4th: Meaning for the present

Analysis of present context
Present context versus socio historical contest
Meaning from first recipients to the present
Message: cotextual versus universal
Application today

To clarify the idea of Saeed, the authors describe briefly the following order of hierarchy of the above:

1. The first stage, into the world of the text. This is the first stage that certainly passed by every commentator when he met with the text, but not entered into the study analysis.

⁸ Oxford online Dictionary

⁹ Abdullah Saeed, 2014, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century* (London dan New York:Routledge.), p. 19

¹⁰ Abdullah Saeed, 2006, *Interpreting the Qur'an Towards a Contemporary Approach* (New York:Routledge.), p

¹¹ Fazlur Rahman, 1982, *Islam and Modernity Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: TheUniversity of Chicago Press.), p. 5

2. The second stage, commentators performing a search for the words of the text and start doing analytics without associating with the first recipient community or the present. as for the analytical tools used in this phase is the *first*, linguistics (all issues related to the study of linguistics and gramatical associated with text). *Second*, the context of literature (how a text functions in sura certain or more broadly in the Qur'an, for example, what are the verses that exist before and after passage question, how the composition and structure of the text, including how rhetorical style is used. *Thirdly*, literary form (ie, the study of the form of identification of text, whether the text including paragraph stories, prayers, proverb, parable or law). *Fourth*, the analysis of texts related (ie other text searches that match the text being studied, then analyze the extent of the similarities and differences). *Fifth*, contextual relationships (ie, identification texts that have similarities in terms of content or context for further analysis based on the chronology of revelation. do text- the text went down before or after the text in question)

3. Third Stage, explore how the understanding of the text by the first receiver, with search tools that consider socio historical context, welstanchang, the essence of the message of the text in question (whether including legal texts, theological or ethical), investigating whether the text is universal or local temporal and look for the text relationship with other texts in the Qur'an.

4. The fourth stage, provide a portion of the withdrawal of the meaning of the text that corresponds to the contemporary context. Systematics should be done at this stage is melakukan analysis of the context that is happening at the moment (one denggan determine the problems and needs of today which seemed relevant to text messages which are interpreted), commentators and then comparing the present context to the context of socio historical texts to understand the similarities and differences between the two. Further search for a relationship meaning of the text as it is understood, interpreted and practiced by the first receiver to the present context, and then determine the meaning kontekkstual and universal. The final part of this stage is to apply the verse to the present context of the results of this long process.¹²

It uses a variety of word choice, such as amr (command), nahy (prohibition), associated with the good charity *amal Salih masal* (parable), story or special events. The following are among examples of verses that fall into these categories:

a. command polygamy at Surah an-Nisa' : 3

and if you fear you will not be able to apply fair against (rights) female orphans (if ye marry), then marry women (the other) that you enjoy: two, three or four. then if you fear you will not be able to apply justice, then (marry) only one. or slaves you have. such is closer to not doing injustice.

b. Command that the man is a 'leader' for women at Surah an-Nisa': 89

they wish that you should disbelieve as they have disbelieved, then you become equal (with them). So do not you make them helpers, till they emigrate in the way of Allah. But if they turn away, seize them and slay them wherever ye find them, and do not take any of them to be protective and not (also) be a helper.

c. The command to not make the disbelievers as a helper at Surah al-Maidah: 51

O those who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians as leaders; some of them are the leaders for sebahagian others. Whoever among you takes them as leaders, verily man group that included them. Indeed, Allah does not guide the unjust people.

In this area that the interpreters had difficulty to connect the message al-Qur'an with modern life today. Due to the ambiguity in this value, Saeed then formulate a way to be able to explore and find out if the value contained in the verses as above apply universal or limited to the time of the Prophet. Saeed Criteria used in this case are: 1) the frequency, in terms of how often the message delivered by al-Qur'an, 2) suppression of the message when the Prophet preaching mission in progress, 3) relevance to culture, time, place, and condition The Prophet and the early Muslim community.

a. Frequency, related to the frequency of how often the values mentioned in the Qur'an and can be measured through a search of the core themes associated with these values. Doing a search is not an easy job for a certain value, for example, help the poor presented by al-Qur'an through some concepts such as helping the needy, feeding the poor, and care for orphans.

Therefore, an interpreter must discover themes or concepts related to giving 'estimates' the most accurate of the frequency of mention of a certain value. The more often a specific theme repeated in al-Qur'an, the more important these values.

¹² Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, p. 149-154

- b. The emphasis of this concept is the emphasis questioned whether certain value really stressed during the preaching of the Prophet. That principle held is the greater emphasis on a certain value, the more significant of these values in the Qur'an. For example, since the beginning of the preaching of the Prophet 'help people who are oppressed' is a value that is emphasized by the Prophet whether we are in Mecca and Medina. However, if a value is mentioned once or only a few times and then abandoned it can be assumed that they are no longer relevant if it is associated with the Qur'an as a whole.
- c. Relevance Knowing the cultural context at the time of the revelation plays a very important role in determining the relevance of the Qur'an with modern times. In this case, the interpreter is required to perform a search of the past revelations and the context surrounding them, how traditional Arab society, socio-historical and cultural constructs. Furthermore, commentators compare it with the condition of society today. Examples raised by Saeed is about the death penalty (capital punishment) that have been highly prevalent implemented in pre-Islamic times. Ayat al-Qur'an speaks of the death penalty would have considered pre-Islamic culture so that the dialectic between the Qur'an and the recipient community. In this case, the interpreter must reflect on the relevance of these values and see whether the value is an objective, or in fact only partially 'media' to achieve the fundamental values, such as protecting property rights.

F. Conclusion

Abdullah Saeed contextual approach is one among so many contemporary approaches seeking to capture the hidden meaning of the text of the Qur'an as a counter on the rise-literalist legalistic approach which is used the majority of Muslims during this time. In terms of its interpretation methodologies, Saeed stressed the importance of knowing the current context of the revelation of the Qur'an and so are the current context for the messages of the Qur'an can be universally applied in the contemporary dynamic life.

In preparing their interpretation, Saeed developed the theory of *Double movement* (motion detectors) Fazlur Rahman and formulate its own methodology. In addition, the concept of hierarchy value Saeed is also initiated a continuation of the general principles of hierarchy Rahman. The concept of this value, the authors think, is very important to be known by the study of the Qur'an advocates contemporary hierarchy of values Because it offers a new insight into how it should respond ayat- ethico-legal verses in the Qur'an. In the hierarchy of values, the more often a value mentioned in the Qur'an and the Prophet's emphasis on the future, the more important and significant that value, and vice versa.

Bibliography

- Auda, Jasser, 2008, *Maqasid al-Syariah A Beginner's Guide*. London: Cromwell Press.
- Kuhn, Thomas, 1970, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Mustaqim, Abdul, 2014, *Dinamika Sejarah Tafsir al-Qur'an*. Yogyakarta: Adab Press,.
- Rahman, Fazlur, 1982, *Islam and Modernity Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Saeed, Abdullah, 2008, *The Qur'an an Introduction*. London dan New York: Routledge,.
- _____, 2006, *Interpreting the Qur'an Towards a Contemporary Approach*. London dan New York: Routledge.
- _____, 2014, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty -First Century*. London dan New York: Routledge.
- _____, 2008, "Some Reflection on the Contextualist Approach to Ethico-Legal Texts of the Qur'an" in *Buletin of School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)*, 71 (2)
- _____, 2004, "Fazlur Rahman: A Framework for Interpreting the Ethico-Legal Texts of the Qur'an, in Suha Taji-Farouki (ed.) *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an*, Oxford: Oxford University Press,
- Syamsuddin, Sahiron, 2014, *A Peacefull Message Beyond the Permission of Warfare (Jihad) An Interpretation of Qur'an 22: 39-40 dalam (un) Common SoundsSongs of Peace and Reconciliation among Muslims and Christians*. USA: Cascade books,.
- Zaid, Nasr Hamid Abu, 200, *1Qur'an Textuality of the Criticism of the Ulumul Qur'an..*
<http://www.abdullahsaeed.org/about-me>, accessed on 11 April 2016