

FROM TEXTUAL TO CONTEXTUAL: CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC THINKER ABDULLAH SAEED ON QUR'ANIC EXEGESIS

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ABSTRACT

The Qur'anic tafsir (exegesis) has undergone changes over time, addressing issues from classical eras to current challenges faced by the Muslim community. Concerns have been raised about approaches that are overly literal or forceful in understanding the contexts of Qur'anic verses for application in the present time. Hence, there is a need to formulate a more profound effort to explore the meanings of the Qur'an to extract its messages and guidance. This involves understanding the contextual aspects of Qur'anic verses in terms of history and literal meanings, applying them to contemporary situations. However, as highlighted, there appears to be a gap between existing theories and their practical realities. This underscores the necessity for more careful and structured research to bridge the theoretical and practical aspects. The objective of this study is to analyze the contextualization of the Qur'an in the contemporary era, as pioneered by Abdullah Saeed. The study employed a qualitative method with an analytical study approach, utilizing literature review as the primary data collection method, drawing from Abdullah Saeed's writings, journal articles, books, and relevant references. The findings revealed that Abdullah Saeed's contextualization of the Qur'an is highly relevant in understanding verses that remain textual and challenging to interpret. With the evolution of the modern era, there is a need for reinterpretation, especially in the context of nation-building and culture. The local descent of Qur'anic revelations and the complexity of developments in the modern context necessitate a new understanding. The understanding sought in the current context is dynamic and can contribute to a more harmonious life. This points towards a new direction for humanity in the current millennial era.

Keywords: *Contextualization, Qur'an, Textual, Exegesis*

ABSTRAK

Penafsiran Al-Quran telah mengalami perubahan seiring perubahan zaman, dari masalah-masalah era klasik hingga isu-isu yang dihadapi umat Islam saat ini. Ada keprihatinan tentang pendekatan yang terlalu literal atau memaksa dalam memahami konteks ayat-ayat Al-Quran untuk diterapkan pada zaman sekarang. Oleh karena itu, ada kebutuhan untuk merumuskan usaha yang lebih mendalam dalam menggali makna-makna Al-Quran guna mendapatkan pesan dan panduan yang terkandung di dalamnya. Ini melibatkan pemahaman kontekstual ayat-ayat Al-Quran dari segi sejarah dan literalnya, serta menerapkannya pada situasi masa kini. Namun, seperti yang disoroti, tampaknya ada kesenjangan antara teori-teori yang ada dan realitas praktisnya. Ini menyoroti perlunya penelitian yang lebih cermat dan terstruktur untuk menyatukan teori dengan situasi yang sebenarnya terjadi. Tujuan penelitian ini untuk menganalisis kontekstualisasi Al-Qur'an di era masa kini sebagaimana yang dipelopori oleh Abdullah Saeed. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi analitis dengan cara pengumpulan data kepustakaan (*library research*) yang bersumber dari karangan Abdullah Saeed, artikel jurnal, buku dan beberapa rujukan

lainnya yang terkait dengan pembahasan. Adapun hasil penelitian ini ialah hasil kajian kontekstualisasi Al-Quran oleh Abdullah Saeed yang sangat relevan dalam memahami ayat yang masih bersifat tekstual yang sukar untuk ditafsirkan. Kemudian seiring dengan perkembangan zaman yang modern ini untuk membuktikan perlunya adanya pemaknaan ulang seperti dalam kehidupan berbangsa dan berbudaya. Lokalitas turunya wahyu Al-Quran dan hadis serta kompleksitas perkembangan dalam konteks kemoderenan menjadikan adanya pemahaman baru mutlak adanya. Pemahaman yang hendak diperoleh dalam konteks sekarang adalah pemahaman yang bersifat dinamis dan dapat menjadikan kehidupan lebih harmonis. Sebagai arah baru manusia di era milenial masa kini.

Kata Kunci: *Kontekstualisasi, Al-Qur'an, Tekstual, Tafsir*

A. Introduction

In recent modern-contemporary times, the paradigm and nuances of Qur'anic *tafsir* (exegesis) has shifted from the classical era to suit the problems and demands of current Muslims. However, it is unfortunate that many Muslims today are still trapped in and tend to force the contextual meanings of Qur'anic verses to be applied in the present day. In light of this issue, modern Muslim thinkers propose the importance of discovering the hidden meaning of a verse context in the Qur'an so that the universal messages of the Qur'an can be captured and implemented according to the spirit of the times that is always dynamic (changing).¹ Contemporary thinkers, in their efforts to understand the Qur'an, do not simply accept what is expressed in the text literally. Instead, they try to look beyond the text so that the *mufassir* (exegetes) can reveal the whole idea and spirit (*ruh*), which is the moral message of the Qur'an, '*shalih li kulli zaman wa makan*' (relevant at any time and place). In principle, the verses of the Qur'an must be understood in a deep, integral, comprehensive, and contextual way. If these verses are only interpreted textually and rigidly, they will cause confusion, provoke conflict, and be irrelevant to the development of the times.

In the practice of religion, humans are influenced by the circumstances and contexts in which they live. The influences are reflected in the way they understand and practice their religions, including in this case when understanding the Qur'an and Hadith as the sources of religious teachings. In Islam, it is clearly stated that the Hadith is one of the sources of Islamic teachings and laws, besides the Qur'an. Thus, knowledge and understanding of the Hadith is a necessity to comprehend Islamic teachings and laws properly.²

Despite being the sources of Islamic teachings, the Qur'an and hadith are ultimately derived from revelation. However, in terms of function, the hadith is explicitly stated by the Qur'an to be an explanation or *al-bayan* of the Qur'an, corresponding with the duties of the Messenger himself. It is for this reason that the Qur'an is being dialogued with the current reality through the study of the contextualization of the Qur'an. In a broader sense, the study of the contextualization of the Qur'an is the study of civilization based on a socio-historical approach. The socio-historical understanding in the contextual approach is an approach that

¹ Annas Rolli Muchlisin and Khairun Nisa, 'Geliat Tafsir 'Ilmi Di Indonesia Dari Tafsir Al-Nur Hingga Tafsir Salman', *Millati: Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities*, 2.2 (2017), 239 (p. 2) <<https://doi.org/10.18326/mlt.v2i2.239-257>>.

² M. Ajjaj Al-Khatib, *Usul Al-Hadis: 'Ulumuhu Wa Mushthalahuhu* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1989), p. 19.

emphasizes the importance of understanding the actual conditions when the Qur'an was revealed in order to interpret its legal and socio-economic statements. In other words, it aims to view the Qur'an in its historical and literal contexts, and then project them onto the present situations, or to social phenomena underlying the purposes of the Qur'an.³

Throughout history, the Qur'an has been a central part of every Muslim life. As a guide for all humankind (*hudan li al-naas*), the Qur'an has become a reference in every aspect of Muslim life. For a Muslim, the Qur'an is not only a text that is read and understood, but also a text that is "listened to" (its admonitions).

In Islamic teachings, there are two fundamental sources, i.e., the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. For Muslims, the Qur'an is a divine revelation: the word of God and the presence of the Divine in the space and time of history.⁴ All forms of explanations of the Qur'an are an effort to uncover the veil of meanings in order to obtain the messages and guidance contained therein. The variant forms and motivations for its writing also affect the direction and tendency of its interpretations. There are works of Qur'anic exegesis that emerge with their own perspectives, both in terms of the approach and the academic background of the author. In addition, there are also those that emerge as a reaction to previous works, either in the form of refutation or correction.⁵

According to Taufik (2020), the contextualization of the Qur'an is an important effort in discerning the messages contained therein by taking into account the historical, social, and cultural contexts at the time the verses were revealed. However, often in this contextualization process, violations occur that result in erroneous or manipulative interpretations of the Qur'anic texts. One of the most common violations is the imposition of contextual interpretations that do not conform to the original meanings.⁶

Oftentimes violations happen within the historical context in which the verses of the Qur'an were revealed. Interpretations that ignore the social, political, and cultural conditions at the time the verses were revealed can lead to misunderstanding of the messages being conveyed. For example, interpreting verses about past customs or practices literally and enforcing them to be applicable to a different context today.⁷

Violations in the principle of literality are also common in the contextualization of the Qur'an. Interpretations that overemphasize the literal meaning of a verse without taking into account the framework of thoughts and metaphors contained therein can reduce the

³ Muhammad Hasbiyallah, 'PARADIGMA TAFSIR KONTEKSTUAL: UPAYA MEMBUMIKAN NILAI-NILAI AL-QUR'AN', *Al-Dzikra: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Al-Hadits*, 12.1 (2018), p. 32 <<https://doi.org/10.24042/al-dzikra.v12i1.2924>>.

⁴ Ferry Muhammadsyah Siregar, 'EXPLORING METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF LINGUISTIC IN THE QURAN AND ITS TAFSIR', *RELIGIA*, 15.1 (2017), p. 1 <<https://doi.org/10.28918/religia.v15i1.119>>.

⁵ Syahrullah Syahrullah, 'Tarjamah Tafsiriah Terhadap Al-Qur'an: Antara Kontekstualisasi Dan Distorsi', *JOURNAL OF QUR'AN AND HADITH STUDIES*, 2.1 (2013), p. 43 <<https://doi.org/10.15408/quhas.v2i1.1307>>.

⁶ Egi Tanadi Taufik, 'Two Faces of Veil in the Quran: Reinventing Makna Jilbab Dalam Al-Qur'an Perspektif Tafsir Maqāshidi Dan Hermeneutika Ma'nā Cum Maghāzā', *Panangkaran: Jurnal Penelitian Agama Dan Masyarakat*, 3.2 (2020), 213 <<https://doi.org/10.14421/panangkaran.2019.0302-05>>.

⁷ Ani Zulaiha, 'Analisa Gender Dan Prinsip Prinsip Penafsiran Husein Muhammad Pada Ayat-Ayat Relasi Gender', *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir*, 3.1 (2018), 1-11 <<https://doi.org/10.15575/al-bayan.v3i1.3125>>.

depth of understanding of the actual messages intended to convey.⁸Violations in the contextualization of the Qur'an can also occur when interpretations are forced to meet certain needs or agendas. This can lead to the manipulation of the meanings of the sacred texts to support a particular view or interest, which may ruin the true essence of the messages that the Qur'an intend to deliver.⁹

In this present study, the aim is to explore descriptively, analytically, and critically the contextualization of the Qur'an from the view of a great figure in the field of Qur'anic interpretation studies, Abdullah Saeed. The study expects to provide an insightful contribution to the treasure trove of knowledge, especially in contemporary Qur'anic interpretation thoughts.

a. Literature Review

Research by Jailani (2021)¹⁰ highlights that the contextualization of the Qur'an plays a crucial role in a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings in the modern context. This is especially evident in the efforts to reformulate the meanings of the Qur'an so that they are relevant to the social, cultural, and political realities of today's world. The research also indicates that the contextualization of the Qur'an allows Muslims to interpret religious messages to be more inclusive and applicable.¹¹

Another study by Muhammad Wildan Imamuddin (2020)¹² reveals that the contextualization of the Qur'an has opened up space for more flexible and dynamic thinking in understanding the sacred texts. This helps to break down rigid or literal interpretations of the verses of the Qur'an, empowering Muslims to apply the teachings in the context of diverse life situations.¹³

Several studies also note that the contextualization of the Qur'an raises debates and challenges within the Muslim community. There are different views on how the Qur'an should be understood and interpreted in the context of the modern era. This shows that the contextualization of the Qur'an is not always homogeneous, but rather a dynamic area with diverse perspectives.¹⁴

Relevant research conducted by Hatib Rachmawan (2013)¹⁵ points out that Abdullah Saeed, a prominent Islamic studies professor in Australia, advocates for a contextual approach to Qur'an interpretation. This research specifically examined the methodological aspects of Saeed's perspective on contextualizing Qur'anic interpretation. The study reveals that Saeed proposes a four-step operational process for contextual interpretation. These steps

⁸ Taufik.

⁹ Hatib Racmawan, 'Hermeneutika Alquran Kontekstual: Metode Menafsirkan Alquran Abdullah Saeed', *Afkaruna*, 9.2 (2013), 148–61 <<https://doi.org/10.18196/AIIJIS.2013.>>.

¹⁰ Mohammad Jailani and Nur kholis, 'Kajian Pendekatan Hermeneutika Dalam Tafsir Al- Qur ' an', *Journal of Qur'an and Hadits Studies*, 10.1 (2021), 93–120.

¹¹ Mohammad Jailani, 'Kajian Pendektan Hermeneutika Dalam Tafsir Al-Qur'an Perspektif Ulama Muslim Kontemporer', *Journal of Qur'an and Hadits Studies*, 10.1 (2021), 93–121.

¹² Wildan Imadudin Muhammad, 'Tafsir Minoritas Studi Pemikiran Tafsir Abdullah Saeed Dan Farid Esack Soal Diskursus Non-Muslim Dalam Al-Qur'an' (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2020).

¹³ Muhammad.

¹⁴ Muhammad Nasrullah, 'Pandangan Abdullah Saeed Pada Konsep Naskh Mansukh (Analisis Surah An-Nur Ayat 2)', *Al-Munir*, 53.9 (2013), 1689–99.

¹⁵ Racmawan.

include identifying the textual world, critically analyzing the text, examining the text in relation to the early recipients of the revelation, and analyzing the text within the contemporary context.¹⁶

Muhammad Nasrullah (2017)¹⁷ states that Abdullah Saeed believes that the concept of *naskh mansukh* (abrogating and abrogated) provides a reasonable idea that legal rules can be abolished to meet the needs of different societies in changing conditions and situations. In the past, the Qur'an provided a solution by changing existing rules through the revelation of new verses, or *naskh mansukh*. However, with the Qur'an having been revealed, the solution to meeting the needs of the present community is to refer to the Qur'an itself. Abdullah Saeed employs the concept of *naskh mansukh* as the first step in the contextualization of Qur'anic laws.¹⁸

Hauqola's (2016)¹⁹ research findings showed that contextualization of the Qur'an has raised arguments about the importance of harmonizing religious values and universal values in efforts to understand and apply Islamic teachings to the present time. This creates a platform for interfaith dialogue and broader discussions about mutual understanding between cultures and religious values.²⁰

Contextualization of the Qur'an in the contemporary era is an approach that requires in-depth understanding of the teachings of the Qur'an in the context of the present day. In this ever-evolving and changing era, the interpretation of the Qur'an does not only rely on the knowledge of history and culture of the past, but also involves the application of its values and principles in different situations today.²¹

According to Muchlisin (2017)²², the significance of contextualizing the Qur'an in the contemporary era lies in the effort to understand how the messages of the Qur'an can be relevant and meaningful in responding to the challenges and complexities of the modern era. This requires a comprehensive study of issues such as in technology, globalization, human rights, and social change that are happening today, and thus, the teachings of the Qur'an can be applicable according to the needs of society.²³

In a contemporary context, the contextualization of the Qur'an also takes into account plurality and diversity, both in terms of culture and perspective. This allows for an inclusive interpretation of the teachings of the Qur'an, by considering the differences that exist in current society.²⁴

¹⁶ Racmawan.

¹⁷ Nasrullah.

¹⁸ Nasrullah.

¹⁹ Nurkholis Hauqola, 'HERMENEUTIKA HADIS: Upaya Memecah Kebekuan Teks', *Jurnal THEOLOGIA*, 24.1 (2016), 261–84 <<https://doi.org/10.21580/teo.2013.24.1.324>>.

²⁰ Hauqola.

²¹ Siiti Khodijah Nurul Aula, 'Peran Tokoh Agama Dalam Memutus Rantai Pandemi COVID-19 Di Media Online Indonesia', *Living Islam: Journal of Islamic Discourses*, 3.1 (2020), 125–48.

²² Muchlisin and Nisa.

²³ Muchlisin and Nisa.

²⁴ M. Abdul Fattah Santoso, 'The Rights of the Child in Islam: Their Consequences for the Roles of State and Civil Society to Develop Child Friendly Education', *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, 7.1 (2017), 101–24 <<https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v7i1.101-124>>.

Contextualizing the Qur'an in the contemporary era also underscores a deeper understanding of the universal values contained in the Qur'an, such as justice, peace and diversity. This allows these teachings to become a guide for Muslims in contributing positively to today's global society.²⁵ Overall, the contextualization of the Qur'an in this era challenges Muslims to not only understand, but also implement the teachings of the Qur'an wisely and relevantly in facing the dynamics of an ever-evolving era.²⁶

Abdullah Saeed, an influential scholar of Islamic studies, views contextualization of the Qur'an as a pivotal approach to understanding the holy texts. In his perspective, contextualization of the Qur'an involves comprehending the historical, social, and cultural contexts in which the verses were revealed, and applying their meanings to the realities of the present day.²⁷ Saeed reiterates that such contextualization is necessary to bridge the gap between the past and the present, allowing the teachings of the Qur'an to be interpreted and implemented properly in the daily lives of contemporary Muslims. This concept recognizes that the contexts and needs of society can change over time, and the interpretation of the Qur'an must be able to adapt to such changes.²⁸

In Quraish Shihab's view, Abdullah Saeed also highlights that contextualization of the Qur'an does not only involve a historical understanding of its verses, but also considers a broader interpretation of the moral messages and principles contained therein. This enables the use of Qur'anic verses as a guide to addressing complex contemporary issues.²⁹ Ali Nuar (2016)³⁰ states that in Abdullah Saeed's view, contextualization of the Qur'an requires an in-depth study of the conditions of today's society to acknowledge how the teachings of the Qur'an can be applicable in a relevant and practical way. He emphasizes the need to align the principles contained in the Qur'an with current social, cultural, and political realities.³¹

In principle, Abdullah Saeed's view regarding the contextualization of the Qur'an weighs the importance of wise adaptation and interpretation of the teachings of the Qur'an. Therefore, the Qur'an remains relevant and instrumental in helping people encounter the changing times and the problems of contemporary society.³²

This current study used the qualitative research method. The study employed literature review, by collecting library data (e.g., online news, scientific articles/journals, documents, books, or related literature). The primary data consisted of relevant books and

²⁵ Arif Maftuhin and Abidah Muflihah, 'The Fikih Difabel of Muhammadiyah: Context, Content, and Aspiration to an Inclusive Islam', *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, 12.2 (2022), 341–67 <<https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v12i2.341-367>>.

²⁶ Mohammad Jailani, Jannatul Husna, and Nur Kholis, 'Membedah Hermeneutika Perspektif Ilmuan Muslim Modern: Korelasinya Dalam Studi Ilmu Hadits', *AL QUDS: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Hadis*, 6.1 (2022), 211 <<https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v6i1.3028>>.

²⁷ M. Quraish Shihab, *Kaidah Tafsir: Resepsi Hermeneutika Dalam Penafsiran Alqur'an*, ed. by Waharjani, 1st edn (Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2016).

²⁸ Muhammad ibn Jarir Abu Ja'far al Tabari, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'Wīl Ayy Al-Qur'Ān*, ed. by Abdullāh ibn Abd al Muḥsin, 1st edn (Dār Hijr, 2001).

²⁹ M. Quraisy Shihab, *Membumikan Al Quran* (Bandung: Mizan, 1992).

³⁰ Jannatul Husna Bin Ali Nuar, 'Minangkabau Clergies and the Writing of Hadith', *Jurnal Ushuluddin*, 24.1 (2016), 1 <<https://doi.org/10.24014/jush.v24i1.1357>>.

³¹ Ali Nuar.

³² Syamsul Arifin, Syafiq A Mughni, and Moh Nurhakim, 'Meaning and Implication of Islam Berkemajuan in Muhammadiyah', *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 60.2 (2022), 547–84 <<https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2022.602.547-584>>.

articles that refer to the concepts, theories, and models developed by Abdullah Saeed. The secondary data consisted of research-based article outputs that are relevant to the contextualization of the Qur'an involving *tafsir*, *ulumul Qur'an*, and the concept of Abdullah Saeed's theory. Data were analyzed by using descriptive analysis, a systematic description of all concepts, followed by understanding and explanation of the results as the object of the study. The data collection procedure involved searching for and gathering the data required. After obtaining the data, the next step was conducting an analysis in relation to the problems being studied. The collected data were then examined qualitatively through inductive reasoning.

B. Discussion

a. Contextual Approach in the Interpretation of the Qur'an

Context refers to the situation in which an event occurs, or the situation that accompanies the emergence of a text, whereas contextual means relating to a particular context. The term "contextual" has several definitions which, according to Noeng Muhadjir, has at least three different understanding, namely: 1) various efforts to understand meaning in order to anticipate current problems that usually arise; 2) meaning that connects the relevance of the past, present, and future, wherein something will be viewed from the point of past history, the functional meaning of the present, and the prediction of relevant meaning in the future, and 3) showing the relationship between the center and the periphery,³³ in the sense that the center is the text of the Qur'an and the periphery is its application. In addition, the meaning of this periphery also means subordinating the Qur'an as a central morality.

The contextual approach referred to here is an approach that seeks to interpret the Qur'an based on considerations of language analysis, historical background, sociology, and anthropology that prevailed in the life of pre-Islamic Arab society and during the process of the revelation of the Qur'an. Furthermore, it involves the scrutiny of the moral principles contained in various approaches. Substantially, this contextual approach is related to the hermeneutical approach, part of the text interpretation approach that departs from the studies of language, history, sociology, and philosophy.³⁴

Therefore, it is highly necessary to understand the verses of the Qur'an not only through a textual approach, but also through the conditions related to the revelation of the verses. The involvement of these conditions becomes a reference point to interpret the verses of the Qur'an using a contextual approach. In this case, Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905 CE), as quoted by Munawir Sjadzali, suggests careful reading of the works of previous interpretations, as they were written in the circumstances and intellectual levels of society that were vastly different from those of today. Abduh also recommends to study the message of the Qur'an directly and to create one's own exegesis work. However, if the latter is to be carried out, one must be proficient in language, possess great knowledge on the history of the Prophet, particularly on the cultural situations of the society in which the Qur'an was revealed, and be well versed in the history of humanity in general.³⁵

³³ Noeng Muhadjir, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Yogyakarta: Rake Sarasin, 2000), pp. 263–64.

³⁴ Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996), pp. 34–35.

³⁵ Munawir Sjadzali, *Ijtihad Dan Kemaslahatan Umat* (Bandung: Mizan, 1988), p. 121.

The use of the contextual approach in interpreting the Qur'an is an effort to understand the verses of the Qur'an by considering and examining the context or aspects outside of the texts; connected with the events or circumstances that caused the verses to be revealed, such as the historical, geographical, and socio-cultural background as well as the law of causality.³⁶ The contextual study of the verses of the Qur'an is closely related to the understanding of the *asbāb nuzūl al-āyat* (occasions and circumstances for the revelations). However, not all the verses contain *asbāb al-nuzūl*, which makes the status of the verses general or specific. Therefore, by knowing the conditions that caused the verses of the Qur'an to be revealed, it will be easier to determine whether a verse can be understood with a textual or a contextual approach. The issue at hand is how to determine which verse is textual or contextual.³⁷

The contextual approach typically uses an analysis that moves from praxis to reflection. This analysis implies that contextual understanding of the Qur'an is an effort by the *mufassir* to interpret the verses of the Qur'an through the context of the verses, by exploring the conditions and situations in which and for what reasons the verses of the Qur'an were revealed.³⁸

b. Biography of Intellectual Abdullah Saeed

Abdullah Saeed is a Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Melbourne, Australia. He was born on December 25, 1964 in the Maldives, of Arab Omani descent who domiciled in the Republic of Maldives archipelago. In his studies, Saeed earned degrees from both Australia and abroad. He has a BA in Arabic/Islamic Studies from Saudi Arabia, an MA in Applied Linguistics and a PhD in Islamic Studies from the University of Melbourne, Australia. In 1993, he joined the Department of Asian Languages and Anthropology at the University of Melbourne and was appointed Lecturer, and then promoted to Senior Lecturer in 1996 and Associate Professor in 2000. In 2003, Sultan of Oman appointed Saeed as Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies.³⁹

In Australia, Saeed teaches at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Among the courses he teaches are Ulumul Qur'an, Muslim Intellectualism and Modernization, Hermeneutics of the Qur'an, Hadith Methodology, Usul al-Fiqh, Freedom of Religion in Asia, Islam and Human Rights, and Islam and Muslims in Australia. Saeed was awarded a professorship in 2003 in the field of Arabic and Islamic Studies. In the midst of his busy teaching schedule and participation in various other scholarly activities, Saeed also finds time to be involved in various interfaith dialogue groups: between Islam and Christianity, and between Islam and Judaism.

³⁶ Abudin Nata, *Peta Keagamaan Pemikiran-Pemikiran Islam Di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2001), pp. 107–10.

³⁷ Nuraini, *Otentisitas Sunnah: Analisis Pemikiran Fazlur Rahman* (Yogyakarta: AK Group dan Ar-Raniry Press, 2006), p. 42.

³⁸ Muhammad Solahudin, 'Metodologi Dan Karakteristik Penafsiran Dalam Tafsir Al-Kashshaf', *Wawasan: Jurnal Ilmiah Agama Dan Sosial Budaya*, 1.1 (2016), pp. 16–26 <<https://doi.org/10.15575/jw.v1i1.582>>.

³⁹ 'No Title' <https://www.academia.edu/25600769/ABDULLAH_SAEED_KAJIAN_DESKRIPTIF_ANALITIS>.

This Maldivian-born scholar is known to have a broad knowledge. He is fluent in many languages, including Maldivian (his mother tongue), Arabic, English, Indonesian, German, and Urdu. His fluency in several foreign languages has given Saeed a wide network of experts around the world. He has also visited various countries around the world for various scholarly activities. He has been to North America, Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. All of these has made Saeed famous on the international scene.⁴⁰

Saeed is also a member of the Asia Institute's Asia Professorial Association and the American Academy of Religion. Saeed is also an editorial board member of international journals, such as the Journal of Qur'anic Studies in the UK, the Journal of Islamic Studies in Pakistan, and the Journal of Arabic, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies in Australia. In addition, since his career at the University of Melbourne in the 1990s, Saeed has built a strong foundation for Islamic Studies at the University, in particular, and in Australia in general. Since then, the Islamic Studies program has grown rapidly. This achievement has led Saeed to become a leading, if not the best, Islamic Studies scholar in Australia.⁴¹ Abdullah Saeed is one of the most productive Muslim scholars, who has poured his ideas into books and articles.

The biography of Abdullah Saeed has an urgency in the contemporary era because of his role as an influential and critical Muslim intellectual towards the understanding of Islam. In an era where Islam is often stereotyped and misrepresented, the biography of Abdullah Saeed offers a narrative that shows an open, contextual, and comprehensive understanding of Islam.⁴²

Abdullah Saeed is a figure who embraces a critical approach to the understanding of the Qur'an and Islamic teachings in general. His biography becomes significant in facing contemporary challenges, especially in overcoming the gap between Islamic teachings and the rapidly developing social, cultural, and political realities.⁴³

Yolanda (2022) notes that,⁴⁴ as a Muslim scholar, Abdullah Saeed is an inspiring example in articulating the relationship between Islam and modernity, and the importance of interpreting Islamic teachings contextually in the contemporary era. His biography becomes relevant because it traces his intellectual journey which offers a more inclusive and adaptive understanding of the dynamics of the present day.

Abdullah Saeed's biography also illustrates how a Muslim intellectual can contribute to shaping positive and informative narratives about Islam in the complex contemporary era.

⁴⁰ M. Solahudin, 'MEMBINCANG PENDEKATAN KONTEKSTUALIS ABDULLAH SAEED DALAM MEMAHAMI AL-QUR'AN', *QOF*, 2.1 (2018), p. 51 <<https://doi.org/10.30762/qof.v2i1.499>>.

⁴¹ Lien Iffah, 'Interpretasi Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed: Sebuah Penyempurnaan Terhadap Gagasan Tafsir Fazlur Rahman', *Hermeneutik*, 9.1 (2015), p. 65.

⁴² Ilyya Muhsin, Nikmah Rochmawati, and Muhammad Chairul Huda, 'Revolution of Islamic Proselytizing Organization: From Islamism to Moderate', *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies*, 7.1 (2019), 45–70 <<https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v7i1.5076>>.

⁴³ Ahmad Baidowi and others, 'Theology of Health of Quranic Pesantren in the Time of COVID-19', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 77.4 (2021), 1–11 <<https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6452>>.

⁴⁴ Motsepe L Mogoane, Malan Nel, and Yolanda Dreyer, 'Pentecostal Preaching and Christology : An Empirical Study', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 1.2 (2023), 1–7.

His view and open approach to interfaith dialogue and respect for diversity are also crucial in building a broader and more tolerant understanding of Islam.⁴⁵

Through his biography, Abdullah Saeed turns into a figure who represents a progressive direction of thought, which encourages Muslims to broaden their horizons and accept a diversity of views in facing complex contemporary challenges.

c. Contextualization of the Qur'an in the View of Abdullah Saeed

Abdullah Saeed argues that the search for an acceptable method in the modern period should not ignore or forget the classical tradition of interpretation altogether. On the contrary, Saeed believes in the need to appreciate, learn from, and utilize what is still relevant and useful from the classical tradition for contemporary problems. The formulation of a new model of exegesis will not be possible without the process of filtering, developing, doubting, questioning, and adding to the tradition.⁴⁶ Therefore, according to Saeed, knowledge of how the Qur'an interpreted throughout history is instrumental in formulating a new interpretation that is appropriate to the conditions and challenges of the present day.⁴⁷

For Saeed, the Qur'an is a text. In the world of texts, whatever text it is will definitely require an interpretation, even in the form of simple understanding.⁴⁸ In the 10-15 centuries after the Prophet Muhammad's death, there was an extraordinary effort made by Muslim scholars to understand and interpret the texts of the Qur'an as a whole and to determine the relevance of the specific texts of the Qur'an.⁴⁹ They employed a variety of approaches, including linguistics (especially for legal and theological verses), logic (for theological verses), Sufism (for the hidden meanings of the texts), and history (hadith-based texts).⁵⁰

Nevertheless, the classical exegetes' approaches are still inadequate to answer the challenges of modernity.⁵¹ The changing context of modern society requires fresh and new interpretations. The contextual approach formulated by Saeed has several theoretical and epistemological bases. The theoretical bases are as follows.

The first is the concept of revelation. Abdullah Saeed's argument about revelation is based on his emphasis on the historical-psychological aspect of revelation.⁵² It attempts to see the relationship between revelation, the Prophet, and his *da'wah* (propagation) mission and the socio-historical context in which the Qur'an was revealed. The Qur'an was not revealed in a cultural vacuum. This indicates the active role of the Prophet as a human being

⁴⁵ M. Amin Abdullah, 'Mendialogkan Nalar Agama Dan Sains Modern Di Tengah Pandemi Covid-19', *Maarif*, 15.1 (2020), 11–39 <<https://doi.org/10.47651/mrf.v15i1.75>>.

⁴⁶ Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an Toward Contemporary Approach* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 4.

⁴⁷ Daud Rasyid Harun and others, 'The Writing of Hadith in the Era of Prophet Muhammad: A Critique on Harun Nasution's Thought', *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 59.1 (2021), 191–220 <<https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2021.591.191-220>>.

⁴⁸ Irwan Abdullah and others, 'From Selfism to Indifferentism: Challenges Facing Indonesian Society and Culture, 2015-2045', *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 8.3 (2019), 102–12 <<https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2019-0009>>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, hal. 30

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, hal. 31

⁵¹ Kusmana, 'THE QUR'AN, WOMAN, AND NATIONALISM IN INDONESIA Ulama Perempuan's Moral Movement', *Al-Jami'ah*, 57.1 (2019), 83–116 <<https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2019.571.83-116>>.

⁵² Andi Asdar Yusuf, 'Metode Bibel Dalam Pemaknaan Alquran (Kajian Kritis Terhadap Pandangan Orientalis)', *Hunafa: Jurnal Studia Islamika*, Vol. 13.1 (2016), 35–65.

in the process of revelation.⁵³ This also rejects the dominant view among Muslims that the Prophet was a passive recipient, and that revelation took place on a meta-historical level that did not receive direct influence from its actual context.⁵⁴ According to Saeed, this understanding will actually narrow the dimension of revelation because it tends to ignore the organic relationship between revelation and its context.⁵⁵

The second is attention to the socio-historical context. Saeed perceives that many verses of the Qur'an, especially the ethico-legal verses, are difficult to understand without properly considering the socio-historical context of the time of revelation. The socio-historical context aims to make the ethico-legal verses meaningful and relevant to the lives of contemporary Muslims. The socio-historical context is necessary so that the context is recognized, and so one can produce a context-sensitive understanding of the Qur'an at a broader level.⁵⁶ To understand the socio-historical context, the *mufasssir* need detailed knowledge of the Prophet's life in both Mecca and Medina, including the social, economic, political, legal, cultural, and intellectual climate.

The third is formulating a hierarchy of values for ethico-legal verses. This formulation is useful in determining which values are changing (mutability) and fixed (immutability) and in identifying the universality or particularity of a particular verse. Saeed remarks that the effort to interpret the Qur'an by considering the 'context' and taking into account the mutable and immutable values has long existed since the early generations of Muslims.⁵⁷

Further, Saeed's epistemological bases for reinterpreting ethico-legal verses are as follows. The first base is the recognition of the complexity of the meaning of the text. According to Saeed, the meaning in a text is very diverse. Meaning is not something rigid and definite, and therefore, in exegesis, it is necessary to view the Qur'an as a discourse. Saeed disapproves of total objectivity; however, it does not imply that he agrees with total subjectivity. In his view, there are aspects that determine the meaning of the text, such as the Prophet, the context in which the text was revealed, the role of the *mufasssir*, the nature of the text itself, and the cultural context. Given the complex layers of meaning in the Qur'an, Saeed proposes recognizing the existence of uncertainty and complexity of meaning, the importance of context (i.e., linguistics, socio-history, and culture), and the legitimacy of multiple understanding.⁵⁸

The second base is factoring the context that underlies the *mufasssir*. According to Saeed, many aspects of the Qur'an allow for diversity of interpretation and are only approximate. Aside from the complexity of the Quran's content, which consists of a variety of themes, ideas, concepts, values, and text genres, the Qur'an also acknowledges the

⁵³ M.K. Ridwan, 'Metodologi Penafsiran Kontekstual; Analisis Gagasan Dan Prinsip Kunci Penafsiran Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed', *Millati: Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities*, 1.1 (2016), pp. 11–12 <<https://doi.org/10.18326/mlt.v1i1.1-22>>.

⁵⁴ Fahmi Imam Fauzy & Aptiani Nur Jannah, 'Islamic on Screen: Religious Narrative on Indonesia's Television', *Studia Islamika Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies*, 28.2 (2021), 474–81.

⁵⁵ Abdullah Saeed, *Al-Qur'an Abad 21: Tafsir Kontekstual*, ed. by Ervan Nurtawab (Bandung: Mizan, 2016), p. 97.

⁵⁶ Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an Toward Contemporary Aproach*, p. 125.

⁵⁷ Iffah, p. 75.

⁵⁸ Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an Toward Contemporary Aproach*, p. 102.

existence of *mutashabih* (ambiguous) verses. Saeed then divides the verses of the Qur'an into four types that are difficult to discern and are therefore only approximate, namely: (1) theological verses, (2) narrative verses, (3) metaphorical verses, and (4) practically oriented verses, i.e., verses with ethico-legal content.⁵⁹ The classification made by Saeed suggests the understanding that each verse of the Qur'an cannot be treated in a general or equal manner.

The third base is the phenomenon of flexibility in the way the Qur'an is recited (*sab'ah ahraf*) and the changes in law that occur following the situations and conditions (*naskh-mansukh*). This indicates that the Qur'an has actively engaged in dialectics with its first audience. Saeed argues that the Prophet Muhammad was very flexible in terms of the recitation model of the Qur'an. The fact that the Qur'an was revealed using the 'seven dialects' at the time and the Companions were allowed to recite the Qur'an according to the dialect of their choice or the one they mastered. Furthermore, the phenomenon of *naskh* shows that flexibility indeed occurred. The changes of legal rulings when the revelation was still ongoing were more in line with the conditions at that time. For Saeed, the flexibility in reciting the Qur'an and changing legal rulings intends to ease Muslims to actualize Islamic teachings.⁶⁰

Abdullah Saeed's contextualization involves four steps as follows: 1) Making initial consideration on three dimensions, e.g., the world of the text, the reader, and language/meaning; 2) Carrying out interpretation by examining the accuracy and reliability of the text; 3) Identifying the meaning of the text using linguistic analysis (i.e., syntax, morphology, stylistics, semantics, and pragmatics) as the basis of the text elements, and 4) Linking the interpretation of the text to the current context.⁶¹ The following table displays the four methodological steps of Abdullah Saeed's contextual interpretation framework.⁶²

Table 1. Abdullah Saeed's Methodology of Contextual Exegesis of the Qur'an

1	Initial Consideration	The World of the Text	The World of the Reader	Language & Meaning
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What - Status - Significance - Relevance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Life experience - Education - Values - Initial impressions - Like/Dislike - Family - Norms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Beliefs about the characteristics of language - belief about the meaning of deconstruction
2	Carrying out Interpretation Work	Ensuring Text Accuracy and Reliability		

⁵⁹ Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an Toward Contemporary Approach*, pp. 90–91.

⁶⁰ Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Argumentasi Abdullah Saeed Dalam Mengusung Pendekatan Kontekstualis Dalam Penafsiran Al-Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Ladang Kata dan Baitul Hikmah Press, 2016), pp. viii–ix.

⁶¹ Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Al-Qur'an in the Twenty-Fist Century A Contextual Approach* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 136.

⁶² Saeed, *Reading the Al-Qur'an in the Twenty-Fist Century A Contextual Approach*, p. 161.

3	Identifying the Meaning of the Text	Basic Linguistic Meaning of the Main Elements		
		Literary Context		Macro Reconstruction 1
		- text exactly before/after - thematic units		Social, cultural, political, economic, intellectual, values, practices
		Linguistic Analysis	Text Type	Parallel Texts
		Syntax, morphology, stylistics, semantics, pragmatics	Ethico-legal, historical, theological	- Qur'an - Hadith
		Time, Place, Target, Specific Issue Highlighted		
		The First Recipient's Understanding of Revelation		
		Areas of emphasis, areas of de-emphasis, actual practice, agreement and disagreement		
4	Linking Text Interpretation to the Current Context	Understanding Linking Context		
		Interpreting through the Next Generation Consecutively		
		Areas of emphasis, areas of de-emphasis, actual practice, agreement and disagreement		
		Modern Context Analysis		Comparison of Contexts 1 and 2
		Social, economic, cultural, political, intellectual, values, and practices		Areas of emphasis, areas of de-emphasis, initial practice, agreement and disagreement
		Adopting Relevant Context		Checking the Feasibility of Interpretation
				- No conflict with independent context values

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wider attention and time - Logical - The sensibility of a broad religious community - Values and views of the exegete community
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Source: Literature data related to Abdullah Saeed’s interpretation work and contextual methodology.

In Saeed’s view, the key factor in carrying out contextual interpretation is understanding the hierarchy of values in the Qur’an, such as mandatory values, fundamental values, protection values, implementation values, and instructional values.⁶³ The specifics of this hierarchical principle can be seen in the following scheme.

Table 2. The Hierarchical Principle of Contextualized Qur’an

<p>Mandatory Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fundamental beliefs (pillars of faith) - Practice fundamental worship (pillars of Islam) - Specific aspects that are firm and clear about halal and haram supported by the actual practices of the Prophet
<p>Fundamental Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confirmed repeatedly, such as human values (<i>maqâsid al-sharî‘ah</i>)
<p>Protection Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Values that provide fundamental support such as property ownership
<p>Implementation Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Specific measures taken to protect society, such as punishment for thief, adultery, etc.
<p>Instructional Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Referring to specific directions of the Qur’an, such as the environment

Source: Primary and secondary data from reputable books and journals.

C. Conclusion

This study explores the contextualization of the Qur’an through a descriptive, analytical, critical method based on the perspective of a leading figure in the study of Qur’anic exegesis, Abdullah Saeed. The study concludes that re-actualization and contextualization of hadith is highly necessary following the development of the times.

⁶³ Saeed, *Reading the Al-Qur’an in the Twenty-Fist Century A Contextual Approach*, pp. 116–17.

Hadith as a historical product that explains the Qur'an contains many nuances of the local conditions of Arab society at the time of revelation. Consequently, as times change and the need to signify the hadith emerges, re-interpretation is deemed crucial within the context of national and cultural life. The difference between the locality where the Qur'an and hadith were revealed and the complexity of developments in the modern context make it imperative to have new understanding. The understanding that is sought in the present context is a dynamic one that can benefit human life: the approach that emphasizes the importance of understanding the actual conditions when the Qur'an was revealed in order to interpret its legal and socio-economic statements. In other words, it is essential to understand the Qur'an within its historical and literal contexts, and then project it onto the present situations.

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