

Seeing Islam as a Social Fact: Hermeneutic Approach to the Quran in Abu Zayd's Thought

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ABSTRACT

Article:

Accepted: March 02, 2023

Revised: February 15, 2023

Issued: June 30, 2023

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Doi: [10.15408/quhas.v12i1.31372](https://doi.org/10.15408/quhas.v12i1.31372)

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This study aims to discuss Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's thoughts on the Quran as scripture. Using the type of literature study research, this article explains Abu Zayd's thoughts as contained in several of his writings. This study's findings state that Abu Zayd's argument that the Quran as a cultural product and cultural producer (muntaj tsaqafi and muntij tsaqafi) departs from Abu Zayd's approach, which sees Islam as a social fact. There is a big difference between Islam, studied as a social fact, and Islam, seen as a religious doctrine. Islam as a social fact demands objective and positive scientific work. Abu Zayd took a new approach to the Quran by shifting the direction of study from a vertical dimension to a horizontal dimension. The horizontal dimension referred to by Abu Zayd is the canonization in which the teachings of the Quran were spread gradually by the Prophet Muhammad. This article also concludes that Abu Zayd sees it as a text for studying the Quran. It is at this point that Abu Zayd uses a hermeneutic approach. It is at these two points that Abu Zayd said that his study of the Quran is based on the human aspect. What Abu Zayd means by studying the Qur'an, which departs from the human aspect with a horizontal dimension is also what is meant by Islam as a social fact in this article. In the order of writing, the article sequentially discusses the following points. The first part of this article reviews a brief biography of Abu Zayd, along with the social and political conditions that influenced his thinking. The second part explains the Quran as a text. And in the last section describes the Quran as a product as well as a cultural producer.

Keyword: Islam as Social Fact, Quran, Hermeneutic Approach, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd

Introduction

So far, there has been some literature discussing Abu Zayd's thoughts. Most of these works discuss Abu Zayd's thoughts on revelation and al-Quran hermeneutics (e.g., Campanini 2011, pp. 52-62; Kermani 2006; Rahman n.d.). Some scholars discuss the humanistic approach of Abu Zayd's thought (e.g., Sukidi 2009). Some scholars also compare Abu Zayd's thinking with other Islamic thinkers, especially those with an Islamic reformist spirit, such as Fazlur Rahman and Muhammad Arkoun (e.g., Völker 2015). Research also explores pluralism from Abu Zayd's perspective (e.g., Zohouri 2021). In addition, several scientific works support the Egyptian court's decision against Abu Zayd; in other words, this scientific work is here to criticize Abu Zayd's thinking. Traditionalist scholars write most scholarly works on this model (e.g., Bälz 1997; Najjar 2000).

Previous researchers have not looked at Abu Zayd's thinking comprehensively. They did not see the political conditions that influenced Abu Zayd, nor did they see that each of Abu Zayd's thoughts departed from an objective philosophical paradigm. The point is that Abu Zayd is aiming to see religion as a social fact, including his view of the Quran as a cultural product. Instead of trying to see first the paradigm used by Abu Zayd in his thinking, these scholars who criticized Abu Zayd immediately justified Abu Zayd. They let go of specific factors that influenced Abu Zayd. For example, the research by Abu Hadi in his Ph.D. thesis reviews the thoughts of Abu Zayd in understanding the texts of the Quran and Hadith (Abu Hadi 2011). Apart from that, the research conducted by Mustafa also did the same thing in criticizing Abu Zayd (Mustafa 2014). They did not see the essential factors why Abu Zayd had thoughts like that.

Different from the studies mentioned above, this article will position itself as a study in viewing the thoughts of Abu Zayd, who sees religion as a social fact, not a matter of theology and faith. Not only that, using the type of literature study research, this article explains Abu Zayd's thoughts as contained in several of his writings. The previous researchers were still trapped in studies that saw Abu Zayd's work as the work of theology and faith. The first part of this article reviews a brief biography of Abu Zayd, along with the social and political conditions that influenced his thinking. The second part explains the Quran as a text. And in the last section describes the Quran as a product as well as a cultural producer.

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd is an Egyptian scholar who authored several works in Arabic literature, the Quran, and Islamic studies. He received his Ph.D. at Cairo university in 1981 with the thesis title *Ibn Arabi*. During his lifetime Abu Zayd was known as a controversial

scholar. At least two of his magnum opus books received much criticism, namely *Naqd al-Khitab al-Dini* and *Mafhum al-Nass*. The first book discusses his criticism of religious discourse, and the second discusses the Quran as a text. The controversy over Abu Zayd spread when the Cairo Court of Appeals declared in June 1995 that Abu Zayd had left Islam (an apostate). Eventually, Abu Zayd moved to the Netherlands, earning a professorship in Islamic Studies at the University of Leiden until his death (Abu Zayd and Nelson 2004, p.ix).

It is essential to explain that since the beginning Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd has said that his study of the Quran is based on the human aspect. Abu Zayd wants to present a study of the Quran by moving the direction of study from the vertical to the horizontal dimension (Abu Zayd 2004). What Abu Zayd meant by studying from the horizontal dimension was canonization, namely the gradual dissemination of the message of the Quran by the Prophet Muhammad. Moreover, a basis for this study is to see the Quran as a text. It is referred to in this article by Islam as a social fact. What is meant by Abu Zayd with the study of the Quran, which departs from the human aspect with a horizontal dimension, is also what Islam means as a social fact in this article. It is essential to understand in advance so that there are no misperceptions that it confuses the study of faith and the study of social facts.

Methodology

This research is library research, a series of activities or processes of obtaining, finding, and selecting written sources or data regarding a problem in a particular aspect or field, which becomes the object of research reasonably through systematic, directed, and accountable work procedures. In other words, this research uses library materials as research objects. For primary sources, the author refers to and relies on analysis and synthesis of almost all of Abu Zayd's scientific writings on the Quran, both books and various articles. While secondary sources consist of written works on Abu Zayd's thoughts on the Quran.

To analyze these sources, descriptive-explanatory is used. Descriptive research is aimed at analyzing and presenting an analysis and synthesis of the construction of thought systematically so that the conclusions put forward later are always clear on a factual basis and can always be returned directly to the source of the data obtained. Meanwhile, explanatory research explains the socio-historical background which is the reason emergence of thoughts, as well as exploring the extent of the relevance and implications of thought in contemporary discourse and context. With these two analyses, the author seeks to read, see, understand, and present Abu Zayd's thoughts on the Quran and its studies.

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd and His Political Culture

At the age of 11, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd began to join the movement group al-Ikhwān al-Muslimun (1954) because he was interested in and amazed at Sayyid Qutub's thoughts through his book *al-Islām wa al-Adālah al-Ijtimā'iyah* (Islam and Justice Social). In 1964, Abu Zayd's writings appeared for the first time in a journal led by Amin al-Khuli; Abu Zayd offered a literary approach to the text of the Quran (*al-manhaj al-adābi*) (Abd As-Salam 2015).

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd is a student who is very interested in the study of literature, language, and philosophy. He also focuses on discourse analysis methodology and the dynamics of text theory in semiotic studies. His interest in such studies is separate from the influence of his thoughts on prominent French figures, namely Jacques Derrida, Mohammad Arkoun, and admirers of Hasan Hanafi. To strengthen his interest in literature, he entered the Faculty of Letters at Cairo University and completed his bachelor's degree in Arabic Studies in 1972, then a master's degree in 1977. From 1978 to 1980, Abu Zayd continued his academic career with doctoral studies at the Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, University of Pennsylvania Philadelphia, USA (France24 2010).

Abu Zayd earned his Ph.D. for the second time from the same department in Islamic Studies and Arabic with a cum laude predicate. He completed his dissertation entitled *Philosophy at-Ta'wīl: Dirāsah fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān 'and Muhyi ad-Din Ibn' Arabi* (Tawil Philosophy: Study of the Hermeneutics of the Qur'an Muhyiddin ibn Arabi). This dissertation was published in 1983, after which many of Abu Zayd's works appeared. One is *Mafhūm an-Nash* by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd in response to his study of the Mu'tazilah group. He began to argue that the study and interpretation of a text must be viewed "objectively," namely by using scientific methodologies and approaches such as linguistics and hermeneutics as a scalpel to the text (Abu Zayd 2008). According to Abu Zayd, the two approaches, namely hermeneutics and linguistic studies, are two sets of science that can produce a product of contextual and progressive interpretation of the Quran (Abu Zayd 2004).

Since Islamic thinkers such as Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida emerged, Egypt has always been a mecca for developing Islamic world thought. The study discourses widely discussed is the study of the Quran. Various types of methods of understanding the Qur'an emerged from Egyptian intellectuals. From Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, Amin al-Khulli, and Thaha Husain. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd is further considered the latest figure in this field (Abdul Rahman 1999).

Since childhood, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd experienced hot and tense times and situations in Egyptian history. After being free from the shackles of French colonialism, Egypt was immediately faced with efforts to create self-government. At the same time, several movements and struggles of competing ideological thoughts emerged, some of which were religious and secular. The dominant ideology and the majority at that time was the ideology of secular Arab nationalism (separating religion and state affairs). At that time, the ideology of Gemal Abdul Nasser's regime was official (Haydar 2015).

The controversy over the figure of Abu Zayd began in May 1992 when he proposed promotion to professor at the Faculty of Letters at the Department of Arabic Studies at the University of Cairo. The committee of examiners rejected his promotion proposal because it was considered to have injured Islamic purity. Apart from being a case of religious discourse, this issue also developed into a law that issued a court decision and stated that Abu Zayd had left Islam (apostate) so that his marriage was automatically annulled. He had to be divorced from his wife, namely Ibtihal Yunis (Abu Zayd 2004).

After that case, on July 26, 1995, Abu Zayd and his wife left for Leiden, Netherlands, as visiting professors in Islamic studies. Five years later, on November 27, 2000, he was named a full professor at Leiden University. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's last position was head of studies at the Ibn Rushd Institute of the Faculty of Humanities and Islam (Ibn Rushd Chair of Humanism and Islam) at the University of Utrecht-Netherlands since May 27, 2004. He was buried in Qahafah, the land of his birth, the Nile delta, on Monday, July 5, 2010, in Cairo, at the age of 66 years (Nur Mahmudah 2017).

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's academic achievements are numerous, including being appointed as an assistant professor in 1982. In the same year, he received the title Abd al-Aziz al-Ahwani because of his expertise in humanity and Arabic culture. He was also a visiting professor at Osaka University of Foreign Studies, Japan, from 1985-1989 and was promoted to Associate Professor in 1987. In addition, Abu Zayd was also awarded the Republican Order of Merit for the Service to Arab Culture by the President of Tunisia in 1993. Nasr Hamid was elected as a member of the advisory board for the Encyclopedia of the Quran in 1994 and, at the same time, received an award from the Jordanian Writers Association Award for Democracy and Freedom in 1998. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd admits that his studies in America have greatly influenced his life, especially his way of thinking (Abu Zayd 2008). There Abu Zayd began to recognize and study philosophy and hermeneutics. he said,

"My academic experience in the United States was quite fruitful. I did much reading on my own, especially in philosophy and hermeneutics. Hermeneutics, the science of interpreting texts, opened up a brand-new world for me and has opened up a whole new world for me."

Undeniably, the influence of colonialism from Western countries on Islam has caused Islam to be divided, giving birth to a European-style social elite. Apart from that, the education sector is deliberately infiltrated by state interests and structured duping.

According to Said Masykur (Masykur2015), there were at least several attempts to make the Western imperialists or colonialists try to deceive, which ultimately resulted in the infertility of the Islamic world.

First, from the beginning, the colonialists intended to divide Islamic countries. They know that the solid ideological-cultural power of Islam is difficult to defeat if united. The imperialists know that such a force will be easily defeated if conditions are divided.

Second, the imperialists tried to destroy the order of life starting from their penetration into the traditional agricultural sector, the system of ownership, exchange, production, and other public works carried out by traditional societies. The imperialists demand that the natives dress, eat and drink, build houses, and even educate their children in the Western way. So that an assumption is embedded in the minds of the natives that their civilization is ancient and Western civilization is advanced. From there, gradually, the natives began to be anti-local products and switched to Western products.

Third, they, the imperialists, entered Islamic sciences and traditional educational institutions. The imperialists encouraged the natives to enter European universities and then formed a notion that the parameters of truth must follow the Western-style modernist way of thinking.

Fourth, the imperialists deliberately created intrigues against minorities (non-Muslims) which became the embryo of the birth of schisms and conflict between traditional schools of thought. Because according to them, the imperialists must make such an effort to facilitate the mission of forming a modern society.

In general, there are at least two factors behind the rise of Muslim intellectuals in the mid-20th century; first, the restlessness of the clergy against the presence of imperialism. Finally, the Aqidah purification movement emerged, which became known as the reform movement. Second, the dominance of the West in the field of Islamic politics ultimately encourages Muslims to carry out political movements to create a balance of power against the progress of the West.

The Wahhabi movement emerged in Arabia (Mecca and Medina) as the first to respond to the above challenges. Wahhabism was founded by Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahab (1703 - 1792), who allied himself with Ibn Sa'ud, which eventually gave birth to a Saudi State. Then followed Shah Waliyullah (1703 - 1762) in India and the Sanusiyyah movement in North Africa led by Muhammad Ibn Ali al-Sanusi (d. 1859). Then this movement became the background for the birth of the political movement Pan-Islamism (World Islamic Union), a movement led by Jamaluddin al-Afghani (1839 - 1897). According to Jamaluddin al-Afghani, the Muslim community had to unite under the banner of Islam and leave strife. He tried to raise local spirits and nationalism in Muslim countries, which were previously dim, so it is not strange when Jamaluddin al-Afghani was dubbed the Father of Islamic Nationalism (Said Masykur 2015).

Jamaluddin al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh in Egypt started modernist thinking. Then theoretically and practically, Abduh's thinking was continued by his student Muhammad Rasyid Rida. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd continued it as a contemporary Islamic intellectual figure. There is a significant difference in freedom of thought between the modern Arab-Islamic world (19th to early 20th century) and the contemporary Arab-Islamic world (from the 1940s-the present). That is what made Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd a Messianic intellectual accused of apostasy and eventually expelled from the country; ask yourself. Abu Zayd mentions that the current Arab-Islamic world is *ashr al-takfīr* (an era of disbelief), while the previous period was *ashr al-tafkīr* (an era of thought). This statement is not an exaggeration because it is true that many Muslim intellectual figures today have suffered the same fate as him.

Al-Quran as a Text

Since the beginning of his discussion, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd built his epistemology of thought by saying that the Quran is a communication domain in the form of text where communication occurs between God and humans. The language used by the Quran is the language of the Arabic people which then infiltrates into everyday language (Abu Zayd 2000).

Abu Zayd sees that the study of religion is currently filled with theological views that efficiently justify (Harb 2005). In the end, there is only mutual accusation against one another; this study always looks at the object of study in religion from a black-and-white point of view. Thus, according to Abu Zayd, a vital research task, today is a critical and

analytical study by returning religious texts to their original context in which the text was born as a product of human history. In this way, the central core of religious teachings will be known.

To achieve this type of study like the model above, the first step that researchers must consider is first to place an aura of sanctity from the text and then return it to its original context in the context of plunder. Researchers in this momentum need to guarantee a broad and open mind space to reach the context of a complete historical understanding. Open-mindedness can make it easier for researchers to understand society's condition when the text is present with them. The text (in this case, the Quran) must be understood as part of the reality of society as a party that interacts with the text. Using text, understanding it, and solving specific problems. That is the spirit of study that Abu Zayd wants to bring.

According to Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, the Quran is a sacred text that remains in terms of pronunciation. However, it becomes different when humans interact, so it loses its sacredness. Permanent from the side of God's absolute revelation but becomes relative when humans try to interact with him (Abu Zayd 1994).

- إن القرآن - محور حديثنا حتى الآن - نص ديني ثابت من حيث منطوقه، لكنه من حيث يتعرض له العقل الإنساني ويصبح (مفهوما) يفقد صفة الثبات، إنه يتحرك ويتعدد دلالاته. إن الثبات من صفات المطلق والمقدس، أما الإنساني فهو نسبي متغير، والقرآن نص مقدس من ناحية منطوقه، لكنه يصبح مفهوما بالنسبي والمتغير، أي من جهة الإنسان، ويتحول إلى نص إنساني (يتأنسب) ومن الضروري هنا أن نؤكد أن حالة النص الخام المقدس حالة ميتا فيزيقية لا ندري عنها شيئا إلا ما ذكره النص عنها ونفهمه بالضرورة من زاوية الإنسان المتغير والنسبي.

For Abu Zayd, religion is "a collection of divine texts embodied in history," while religious thought is human interpretation or understanding of these texts (Abu Zayd 1996).

فالدين هو مجموعات النصوص المقدسة الثابتة تاريخيا، في حين أن الفكر الديني هو الاجتهاد البشري لفهم تلك النصوص وتأويلها استخراج دلالاتها

Abu Zayd distinguished between revelation and understanding of revelation (Abu Zayd). According to him, historically, religion is a fixed collection of sacred texts, while thinking about religion as a human effort (ijtihād) to understand religious texts. If so, interpretation is human understanding of the revealed text; therefore, it is relative and cannot be an absolute truth that all humans must follow.

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd sees *nash* (text) and *mushaf* (book) as different. According to him, "Text" requires explanation, understanding, and interpretation, whereas *mushaf* is more to writing whose form has been formed into an object (book) or a particular corpus of manuscripts (Abu Zayd 1990). The very fundamental and essential area of scholarly study, according to Abu Zayd, is to question the definition of the text and the scope of social reality that surrounds it so that there is no dichotomy between the two which seem unrelated and unrelated so that it seems as if there is a dividing wall or partition between sacred texts on the one hand. And human territory on the other. Abu Zayd argues that the holy text of the Quran when was revealed to the Prophet. The language used is the language understood by the people where the Qur'an was revealed. Whereas the Quran that we are reading today is a "civilizational text" that was influenced by the Arab civilization at that time, which then served as a guide to a new civilization, he said (Abu Zayd 1994):

وظلت الثقافة العربية الإسلامية حية نشطة ظالما ظل تأسيس العقل شاغلها الأساسي

To respond to this fact, according to Abu Zayd, we must look at the treasures of classical Islamic thought from various perspectives. One way is with hermeneutics. Historically, hermeneutics has been used by Muslim scientists according to the knowledge they have studied since the beginning of the course of Islamic thought. The holy text they believe in and have faith in is the Quran. History tells us that the Quran cannot be separated from the development of other Islamic studies such as Islamic law, *ushul fiqh*, philosophy, and Sufism (Abu Zayd 1994). Al-Qur'an hermeneutics is more than *ulum al-Qur'an* as traditionally understood. More than that, it is a study that is transformed into a multi-interdisciplinary. Contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutic studies inspired by the social sciences and humanities must be addressed. That was what Abu Zayd wanted to do.

To arrive at that stage, Abu Zayd first deconstructs the concept of revelation (*Tabī'at al-Naṣṣ*). This step is the beginning of entering the contextual interpretation methodology initiated by Abu Zayd. According to Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, the Qur'an was revealed in two stages. The first is the process of the vertical descent of the text of the Quran from Allah to the angel Gabriel, and this stage is called *tanzil* (Abu Zayd). Second, the process of the angel Gabriel conveying revelations to the Prophet Muhammad, this stage is called the revelation/*kalam* stage. he said (Abu Zayd 1990):

واعلم أن في حالة الوحي كلها صعوبة على الجملة وشدة قد أشار إليها القرآن، قال تعالى: إنا سنلقي عليك قولا ثقيلا، وقالت عائشة: كان مما يعاني من التنزيل شدة،..... والحالة الثانية هي الحالة التي يتحول فيها الملك إلى الصورة البشرية، فيكون الاتصال بالكلام العادي، بالنظام اللغوي البشري الخاص بالمستقبل

Abu Zayd argues that the Quran is described as a treatise (message) because the Quran is a message (Abu Zayd 2000). Then, of course, there is a communication relationship between the Sender and the recipient of the message through a language code or system. However, because the Sender cannot be the object of scientific study, the entry point for scientific study is reality and culture. The reality that gave birth to human movement as the target of the text and governed the recipient of the text, namely the Prophet Muhammad. and culture in the form of grammar.

For Abu Zayd, Arabic is the language of the Quran used by Jibril when conveying his revelations to the Prophet Muhammad, not the language of Allah. He built his argument by quoting al-Zarkasyi in the book *al-Burhān fī Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. The book explains the opinion regarding the revelation of the Qur'an. First, the Qur'an came down with its pronunciation and meaning from Allah; secondly, the Qur'an was revealed to Jibri only with its meaning, then Jibril spoke it in Arabic when conveying it to the Prophet; and third, the Qur'an was revealed in meaning to Gabriel, then Jibril conveyed it to the Prophet Muhammad also in meaning, then it was the Prophet who spoke it in Arabic (Abu Zayd 1990). Of the three opinions, Abu Zayd did not explicitly choose one of them, but based on his thoughts on the concept of revelation, it seems that he tended to lean toward the second opinion.

Abu Zayd sees the Qur'an as a place for communication between God and humans; this condition is called the vertical dimension. The vertical dimension is the dimension of the textuality of the Quran. Then Abu Zayd sees the Quran as a horizontal dimension, namely what is contained in the structure of the Quran and has been manifested during the communication process between the Quran and its audience (Abu Zayd 2004). This dimension is the dimension of Al-Qur'an discourse. The discourse dimension is a living and dynamic area; it manifests in the context of everyday life so that it is not only conveyed in Arabic, which only focuses on the place where the revelation was sent down, but also has an influence on the thinking and culture of the recipient.

It can be seen in how the Qur'an enters and influences everyday human life. Abu Zayd mentions in his writing "the Qur'an in Everyday Life" that the Quran greatly influences Muslims (Abu Zayd 2000). Abu Zayd sees this in the implementation of the pillars of Islam, zakat as the concern of Muslims towards social conditions, the area of Islamic philanthropy, rules regarding food and drink, the nature of women, the language of communication used daily, and so on which are found in the spiritual life of Muslims.

Departing from that thought, Abu Zayd began studying the text of the Quran by placing the Quran as a cultural product of *muntaj al-tsaqāfat*, as well as producing a culture of *muntij li al-tsaqāfat*. It can be proven historically to have occurred in two phases, the first is the openness phase (*marhalah al-tasyakkul*) in more than 20 years when the Qur'an formed itself structurally in the underlying cultural system, and the second is the phase of forming a new culture, namely when the text of the Quran forms and rebuilds its cultural system.

Al-Quran as *Muntaj and Muntij Tsaqafi*

In his basic view, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd said that the nature of the Quran is a language text (*nash lughawi*), a cultural product (*muntaj tsaqafi*), and a historical text (*nash Tarikhi*) (Abu Zayd 1990). Some researchers emphasize that Yusuf Rahman, for example, said that Abu Zayd's statement was since the text of the Quran appeared together with a cultural structure in which there was a central signifying system (Rahman n.d.). Even though the text's origin is from a holy divine source, it cannot be separated from the bounds of space, time, and certain social-historical conditions. From there, the Quran is a product of culture because it interacts with humans as cultural actors, and at the same time, the Quran is also a cultural producer because it presents a new culture. The new culture can be completely new that has never been found before, or the tradition is new through changes to old traditions that have been changed and modified.

To strengthen his theory of the Quran as a cultural product (*muntaj al-tsaqāfah*) and, simultaneously, a maker of a new culture (*muntij li al-tsaqāfah*) in the two phases above, he applies a semiotic study of the Quran (Abu Zayd 2004). According to him, an accurate text is a text that can free itself from the bonds and shackles of the initial context in which it was produced; according to Abu Zayd, an accurate text can bring out its vitality, apart from norms from outside it. Text, on the one hand, is an object in the form of a cultural product where it is born and joined in, and on the other hand, it is also a subject that changes the socio-cultural system itself.

Text enters the level of "semiotics" when it becomes a subject that can carry out transformations and changes at a new structural level. Therefore, Abu Zayd sees that the power of the text of the Qur'an as a miracle (*i'jāz al-Qur'ān*) is not to be returned to its divine source because, indeed, from the beginning, the source was extraordinary; more precisely, the *mu'jizatan* side of the Qur'an lies in the privilege of its literature which far surpasses other texts and brings extraordinary changes to the form of civilization.

Abu Zayd's reconstruction of the study of the Qur'an originates from his work *Mafhūm an-Naṣṣ Dirāsah Fī Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, which is about the dialectical problem between the Sufi tradition (Ibnu Arabi) and the Mu'tazilah's kalam tradition of ta'wil and majaz (metaphor) (Abu Zayd 1990). In looking at these two studies, Abu Zayd found common ground that the interpretation model of both the Mu'tazilah, which is based on ratio, and the Sufis, which is based on intuition, both of which cannot be separated from various factors in the form of social politics and culture in which the interpreter stays.

Abu Zayd argues that the work of interpretation should not see the text as a passive object, so it tends to be a proof text (argument) justification for specific ideas without looking at the context. Finally, consequently, "there is a neglect of the essence of a text and sacrifice it for the sake of a certain interpretation."

Abu Zayd sees the need for a reconstructive step towards the traditional Qur'anic sciences based on scientific awareness of turāts (*al-wa'y al-'ilm bi al-turās*). It is essential to do considering that ulum al-Qur'an is a scientific discipline that is directly in contact with the text of the al-Qur'an. Abu Zayd applies this reconstruction in positioning the Qur'anic text with literary hermeneutics.

Nasr Hamid thinks that the study of religious texts has yet to reach the level of scientific-objective interpretation (*'ilmy-maudu'ī*). A new methodology is needed that emphasizes context more, which he calls al-Masyru' al-Istiksyafy (investigation/interpretation project) (Abu Zayd 2000). Nevertheless, a deconstructive step must be taken to the concept of revelation itself before getting there. The deconstructive step towards the concept of revelation is the primary way before entering into the interpretation methodology initiated by Abu Zayd.

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's next offer is the concept of text (naṣṣ). In the context of civilization, according to Abu Zayd, Islam is a civilization of texts (hadārah an-nass) (Abu Zayd 1990). The text of the Quran is based on the foundation of Muslims' religion (shari'a and way of life). Abu Zayd's writings about the Qur'an, such as *Mafhūm an-Naṣṣ*, are considered a new face in contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics.

Abu Zayd understands the Qur'an as a text (*mafḥūm al-naṣṣ*). The point is that the text, whatever its form, is a cultural product (*inna fī haqīqatihi wa jawharihi muntaj as-ṣaqāfi*) (Abu Zayd, 1994), namely that the text of the Quran was formed and culture for approximately 20 years. The texts of the Quran live in the social and cultural context of the

time, so contextualization and actualization must be carried out regarding their historical realm.

For Abu Zayd, the most crucial thing in interpreting religious texts is always involving two historical aspects and the context of the text itself. The historical aspect means that a reviewer of religious texts needs to consider the text's historicity, authenticity, and the extent to which the text is accepted and influential in society. Meanwhile, the second aspect means that it is essential to consider the context of a text to be then developed and contextualized in social reality, and so on over time.

Once again, in viewing the Qur'an as a text, Abu Zayd has a strong stance on this concept, even though it is still a lengthy discussion among scholars. To strengthen his argument, he categorizes it in a statement (Abu Zayd 1990)

إن البحث عن مفهوم للنص ليس إلا محاولة لاكتشاف طبيعة النص الذي يمثل مركز الدائرة في ثقافتنا. إن محاولة البحث عن مفهوم للنص سعي لاكتشاف العلاقات المركبة لعلاقة النص بالثقافة من حيث تشكله بما أولاً، وعلاقته بما من حيث تشكيله لها ثانياً.

"As for what is meant by the concept of text, first to look for systematic relations and contacts (al-alaqat al-murakkabat) between texts and cultures that influence the formation of these texts. Both texts are forms of culture, in this case, the Qur'an as a cultural product (al-muntaj ats-tsaqāfi) and, at the same time, forming or producing culture (al-muntij ats-tsaqāfi). Therefore, the concept of text is focused on the cultural and traditional side, namely on the text's historicity, authority, and the text's contextual reading (manhaj al-qirā'ah as-siyāqiyyah).

Contextual reading tries to see texts at the level of contexts that are interconnected and have relationships with each other, namely in the form of socio-cultural contexts (as-siyāq as-tsaqāfi al-ijtimā'i), discourse contexts (as-siyāq at-takhatubi), external contextual context (as-siyāq al-khāriji), internal context (as-siyāq ad-dākhili), narrative context (as-siyāq al-lughawi), and reading context (as-siyāq al-qirā'at) or interpretation context (as-siyāq al-ta'wīl) (Abu Zayd 1996). The text's historicity, in this case, is examined through the study of Asbāb al-Nuzul and Nāsikh wa Mansukh sciences as well as linguistic sciences as a tool for doing intelligence interpretation and legal istinbāt of a text.

This kind of model is what he calls "contextual reading" (manhāj al-qirā'ah as-siyāqiyyah); this effort is made to produce a broader and comprehensive point of view so that the interpreter can know the historical location of the text. The text has no authority,

authority, and power except for the epistemological area (*as-sultah al-ma'rifiyyah*) (Abu Zayd 1990), namely the text's authority only as a text to be applied at a certain epistemological level. Every text can bring out its new epistemological side, departing from the assumption that it renews the texts that make it new. However, the authority of this text does not change and metamorphose into cultural-sociological authority unless it is carried by certain groups that carry it with an ideological framework.

Therefore, Abu Zayd voiced efforts to liberate from the power of the text (*tahrīr min sultah al-nusus*); he called for an effort to understand, analyze, and interpret texts objectively and authoritatively. The point is a scientific interpretation based on language studies without getting stuck in text authoritarianism. Authoritarian interpretation (interpretative despotism) occurs when the reading model has tendentious, ideological, and political nuances (*al-qirā'ah al-mugridah*).

Conclusion

Discussing a thinker like Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd must start with who Abu Zayd was, how the political situation influenced his thinking, and from what point of view he studied religion. Abu Zayd is not in the mood to see Islamic studies as mere theological studies. However, Abu Zayd sees it deeper from the point of view of objective social facts. The model of religious studies that Abu Zayd is studying is a form of effort to advance Islamic studies, which were initially known to be backward. It was motivated by the social conditions in Egypt at that time, where Abu Zayd lived.

One of the results of Abu Zayd's thoughts departing from this way of thinking is regarding the Quran. Abu Zayd sees the Quran as a cultural product as well as a cultural producer. It is again important to emphasize that Abu Zayd's argument departs from the point of view of religious studies, which are objective and historical, not theological. Thus, according to Abu Zayd, a vital research task, today is a critical and analytical study by returning religious texts to their original context in which the text was born as a product of human history. In this way, the central core of religious teachings will become known.

Abu Zayd sees the Quran as a text that communicates between God and his creatures. God wanted to respond to the social conditions of Arab society at that time through the Quran. In this way, the Quran is present as a response to the culture and social conditions of the Arab community. Furthermore, the response of the Quran to Arab social conditions sometimes comes in the form of a complete abolition of old traditions or a slight change in the

model of old traditions, and it also presents ultimately new traditions. From there, the term "al-Quran as a cultural product (*muntaj tsaqafi*) and the al-Quran as a cultural producer (*muntij tsaqafi*) emerged.

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