

THESIS

THE “SWORD VERSE” IN CONTEMPORARY TAFSIR DISCOURSE:

Analysis of Muhammad Abdel Haleem’s Interpretation in *Understanding the Qur'an* and *Exploring the Qur'an*

by:

Nisrina Nur Afifah

210204110033



QUR’ANIC SCIENCE AND TAFSIR DEPARTEMENT

FACULTY OF SHARI’AH

MAULANA MALIK IBRAHIM STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY

MALANG

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2024

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

For the sake of Allah,

With awareness and a sense of responsibility towards the development of knowledge, I declare that the thesis titled:

“THE ‘SWORD VERSE’ IN CONTEMPORARY TAFSIR DISCOURSE: An Analysis of Muhammad Abdel Haleem’s Interpretation in *Understanding the Qur’an* and *Exploring the Qur’an*”

Is genuinely my own work, prepared according to the principles of scientific writing that can be accounted for. If in the future this thesis report is found to be plagiarized from someone else’s work, either in part or in whole, then the thesis as a requirement for obtaining a bachelor’s degree shall be declared null and void by law.

Malang, October 3, 2024



Nisrina Nur Afifah

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APPROVAL SHEET

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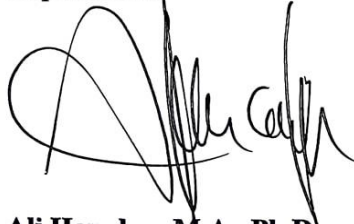
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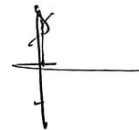
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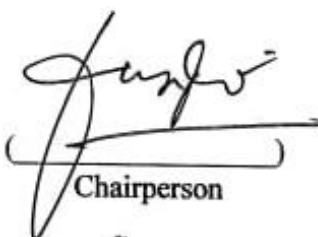
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**“THE ‘SWORD VERSE’ IN CONTEMPORARY TAFSEER DISCOURSE:
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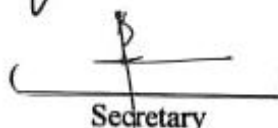
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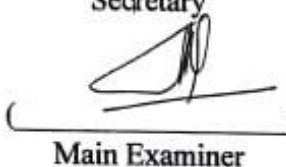
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MOTTO

رَبِّ هَبْ لِي حُكْمًا وَأَلْحِقْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ ۝ ۸۳ وَأَجْعَلْ لِي لِسَانَ صِدْقٍ فِي الْآخِرِينَ ۝ ۸۴

“My Lord! Grant me wisdom, and join me with the righteous. Bless me with honourable mention among later generations.”

(Qur’an 26:83-84)

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

All praise and thanks be to Allah SWT, who constantly provides blessings, mercy, and assistance, allowing the writer to complete the thesis titled: **THE “SWORD VERSE” IN CONTEMPORARY TAFSIR DISCOURSE: An Analysis of Muhammad Abdel Haleem’s Interpretation in *Understanding the Qur’an* and *Exploring the Qur’an***. Peace and blessings be upon the Prophet Muhammad SAW, who has guided humanity from the age of darkness into the light we enjoy today.

The purpose of writing this thesis is to fulfill one of the requirements for obtaining a bachelor's degree (S1) in the Qur'anic Science and Tafsir Department, Faculty of Shari'ah, at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. The writer acknowledges that this thesis could not have been completed without the prayers, support, guidance, and encouragement of many people. Therefore, with great respect and humility, the writer would like to express sincere gratitude to:

1. Prof. Dr. H. M. Zainuddin, MA., as the Rector of UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.
2. Prof. Dr. Sudirman, M.A., Dean of the Faculty of Shari'ah at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.
3. Ali Hamdan, M.A., Ph.D., as the Head of Qur'anic Science and Tafsir Departement at the Faculty of Shari'ah, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.
4. Miski, M.Ag., as the thesis supervisor, for his guidance, assistance, direction, motivation, and encouragement provided to the writer in planning, composing, and completing this research. Special thanks for the opportunity given to me

to explore my interests and skills while writing this thesis. It has been a true honor and pride to be one of his students.

5. Dr. Nasrulloh, M.Th.I., as the writer's academic advisor, for his advice, guidance, and motivation throughout the writer's studies at the Faculty of Shari'ah, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.
6. All lecturers at the Faculty of Shari'ah, especially those in the Qur'anic Science and Tafsir Departement, who have sincerely and wholeheartedly shared their knowledge with the students.
7. Most importantly, to the writer's beloved parents: the most outstanding father, Alimar Ismail, who has always been at the forefront in providing the best despite not having had the chance to experience higher education himself but has successfully educated, motivated, and supported me through my journey. And the most loving mother, Nanik Murniati, whose prayers never ceased. She has always been the most caring person, continually supporting the writer's dreams, one of which has now become a reality. Thank you to both of you for believing in and allowing your eldest daughter to pursue her dreams. May you both always be blessed with good health.
8. To the sweet younger sister, Yasmin Nur Azizah, who constantly encouraged me with messages like, "Kak, sehat selalu ya."
9. To Abi Dr. H. Isroqunnajah, M.Ag., and Umma Ismatud Diniyah Miftah, the caretakers of PPTQ Nurul Huda, where the writer resided and studied religious teachings while in Malang. Thank you for the guidance and endless

prayers for your students. May you always be granted health, blessings, and an abundance of rewards from Allah SWT.

10. The writer's teachers, starting from TK PGRI II Cakranegara, SDN 39 Cakranegara, Mts and MA Putri Al-Aziziyah, and English teachers at IEC Mataram, who have selflessly taught and prayed for writer. May Allah grant you long life, ease in your affairs, and the fulfillment of your hopes.
11. To writer's friends in Lombok: Ika Rosalba Humairo, Nisrina Dhia Salsabila, and Gina Fitrotin Nufus, who always supported her, listened to her concerns, and backed her up in every possible way. Keep being the best versions of yourselves, girls!
12. To writer's college friends, Fahmia, Balqis, Ika, Auliya, Nanda, and Abida, who have been great companions and helped her throughout her university life, making the journey feel easier and quicker. See you on top, girls!
13. Friends from IAT Vlog and Short Movie Project and the PKL at PP. Miftahul Huda, who have brought new colors and experiences to the writer's life.
14. The QUIENTION Family (Qur'anic Science and Tafsir Department 2021), with whom writer shared the journey, teaching her invaluable life lessons throughout her studies at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Wishing you all success in the future, friends!
15. Finally, heartfelt thanks to everyone who has contributed to supporting and making the writer's thesis journey smoother, although not all can be mentioned here.

With the completion of this research, it is hoped that the knowledge gained during writer's studies will be beneficial in both this life and the hereafter. As a human being, the writer acknowledges her imperfections and welcomes any suggestions or constructive criticism for future improvement.

Malang, October 3, 2024

Writer,

Nisrina Nur Afifah
210204110033

TRANSLITERATION GUIDELINES

A. General

Transliteration refers to the process of transferring Arabic script into Indonesian (Latin) script, rather than translating Arabic into Indonesian. This category includes Arabic names of Arab people, whereas Arabic names of non-Arabs are written according to their national language spelling, or as they appear in the reference books. Titles of books in footnotes or bibliographies must still follow these transliteration guidelines.

B. Consonants

In academic writing, the use of foreign terms is often unavoidable. According to the *Pedoman Umum Ejaan Bahasa Indonesia* (General Guidelines for Indonesian Spelling), foreign words should be italicized. For Arabic terms, there are internationally accepted transliteration guidelines.

The Faculty of Sharia at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang adheres to the Library of Congress (LC) transliteration system of the United States, as outlined below:

Arabic Letter	Name	Latin Letter
ا	Alif	Not represented
ب	Ba	B
ت	Ta	T
ث	Tha	Th

ج	Jim	J
ح	Ḥa	Ḥ
خ	Kha	Kh
د	Dal	D
ذ	Dha	Dh
ر	Ra	R
ز	Zayn	Z
س	Sin	S
ش	Syin	Sh
ص	Ṣad	Ṣ
ض	Ḍad	Ḍ
ط	Ṭa	Ṭ
ظ	Ẓa	Ẓ
ع	‘Ain	‘.....
غ	Gain	Gh
ف	Fa	F
ق	Qof	Q
ك	Kaf	K
ل	Lam	L
م	Mim	M
ن	Nun	N
و	Waw	W

هـ	Ha	H
ءْ	Hamzah'
ي	Ya	Y

Hamzah (أ) at the beginning of a word follows its vowel and is not marked. If it is in the middle or at the end, it is written with an apostrophe (').

C. Long Vowels and Diphthongs

For the transliteration of Arabic vowels into Latin script, *fathah* is written as “a”, *kasrah* as “i”, and *dhammah* as “u”. Long vowels are written as follows:

Short Vowel		Long Vowel		Diphthong	
أَ	A		Ā		Ay
إِ	I		Ī		Aw
أُ	U		Ū		Ba'
Long Vowel (a)=	Ā	Example	قال	becomes	Qāla
Long Vowel (i)=	Ī	Example	قيل	becomes	Qīla
Long Vowel (u)=	Ū	Example	دون	becomes	Dūna

For the *ya'* *nisbat* reading, it should not be replaced with “I” but must be written as “iy” to depict the *nisbat* ending. Likewise, the diphthong sound of *waw* and *ya'* after *fathah* is written as “aw” and “ay,” respectively.

Observe the following examples:

Diphthong (aw) =		Example	قول	Become s	Qawlun
Diphthong (ay) =		Example	خير	Become s	Khayrun

D. Ta' Marbutah

Ta' marbutah is transliterated as "t" if it appears in the middle of a sentence, but if it occurs at the end of a sentence, it is transliterated as "h". For example: الرسالة المدرسة becomes *al-risalatun li al-mudarrisah*. If it is in a compound of *mudhaf* and *mudhaf ilayh*, it is transliterated as "t" connected to the following word, for instance: في رحمة الله becomes *fi rahmatillah*.

E. Definite Article and Lafadh al-Jalalah

The definite article "al" (ال) is written in lowercase at the beginning of a sentence. However, if "al" in *lafadh jalalah* is in the middle of the sentence and part of a compound (*idhafah*), it is omitted. Consider the following examples:

1. Al-Imam al-Bukhariy says....
2. Al-Bukhariy in the introduction of his book, explains...
3. Billah 'azza wa jalla.

F. Indonesianized Arabic Names and Terms

As a general rule, every word derived from Arabic must be written using the transliteration system. However, if the word is an Indonesian person's name of Arabic origin or an Arabic word that has been Indonesianized, it should not be written using the transliteration system. Consider the following example:

“...Abdurrahman Wahid, the fourth President of Indonesia, and Amin Rais, the former Chairman of the MPR, during the same period, reached an agreement to eliminate nepotism, collusion, and corruption from Indonesia, in part by intensifying prayers in various government offices...”.

Note how the names “Abdurrahman Wahid” and “Amin Rais” as well as the word “salat” are written according to Indonesian spelling conventions. These words are derived from Arabic but are Indonesian names or Indonesianized, hence they are not written as “Abdal-Rahman Wahid”, “Amin Rais”, or “Shalat”.

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ABSTRACT

Nisrina Nur Afifah, 2024. "The Sword Verse in Contemporary Tafsir Discourse: An Analysis of Muhammad Abdel Haleem's Interpretation in *Understanding the Qur'an* and *Exploring the Qur'an*," Undergraduate Thesis, Department of Qur'anic Studies and Tafsir, Faculty of Sharia, Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University, Malang. Supervisor: Miski, M.Ag.

Keywords: Sword Verse; misinterpretation; Muhammad Abdel Haleem; *Understanding the Qur'an*; *Exploring the Qur'an*.

Muhammad Abdel Haleem is a contemporary interpreter who has given special attention to the concept of the Sword Verse in At-Tawbah:5. Historically, this is linked to the fact that, for Haleem, there has been a significant misunderstanding of the verse's interpretation, particularly in the Western world. In light of this issue, this study focuses on two main areas: first, how Abdel Haleem constructs his interpretation of the Sword Verse in his books *Understanding the Qur'an* and *Exploring the Qur'an*; second, how his interpretation is relevant in the discourse of classical tafsir and issues of tolerance in Indonesia. This research aims to enrich the discourse on tafsir and strengthen a more inclusive understanding of the Sword Verse in Indonesia.

In explaining these two main focuses, this study is formatted as a qualitative and library-based research. The two primary sources are Haleem's *Understanding the Qur'an* and *Exploring the Qur'an*, which are supported by secondary sources such as scholarly articles, classical tafsir, academic books, and websites. The collected data are then analyzed using a hermeneutic approach to uncover a more comprehensive meaning of the text and context of the Sword Verse.

The study demonstrates that Haleem's interpretation of the Sword Verse is constructed through two main approaches: first, considering the historical context of the verse, namely the violation of the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah by the Quraysh *musyrik*, which led to war as a last resort after diplomacy failed; second, emphasizing the linguistic aspect, where the phrase "*slay the polytheists*" refers specifically to those who violated the treaty, rather than being a mandatory command, and the conditional phrase "*if they repent*" prevents attacks on those *musyrik* who have repented. This interpretive framework significantly contributes to the understanding of the Sword Verse, recontextualizing earlier discourse and proving relevant for addressing issues of intolerance in Indonesia, as widely discussed.

ABSTRAK

Nisrina Nur Afifah, 2024. “Ayat Pedang dalam Diskursus Tafsir Kontemporer: Analisis terhadap Penafsiran Muhammad Abdel Haleem dalam *Understanding the Qur’an* dan *Exploring the Qur’an*”, Skripsi, Program Studi Ilmu Al-Qur’an dan Tafsir, Fakultas Syariah, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Malang. Pembimbing: Miski, M.Ag.

Kata kunci: Ayat Pedang; kesalahan penafsiran; Muhammad Abdel Haleem; *Understanding the Qur’an*; *Exploring the Qur’an*.

Muhammad Abdel Haleem merupakan tokoh *mufassir* kontemporer yang memiliki perhatian khusus terkait konsep Ayat Pedang dalam QS. At-Taubah:5. Secara historis, hal ini berkorelasi dengan sebuah fakta bagi Haleem, bahwa telah terjadi kesalahpahaman terkait penafsiran ayat ini terutama di dunia Barat. Dengan mempertimbangkan persoalan tersebut, penelitian ini diarahkan pada dua fokus utama: pertama, bagaimana konstruksi pemikiran Abdel Haleem terkait Ayat Pedang dalam bukunya *Understanding the Qur’an* dan *Exploring the Qur’an*; kedua, bagaimana relevansi pemikirannya dalam diskursus tafsir klasik dan isu toleransi di Indonesia. Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memperkaya diskursus tafsir dan memperkuat pemahaman yang lebih inklusif terkait Ayat Pedang di Indonesia.

Dalam menjelaskan dua fokus utama yang telah disebutkan, kajian ini diformat sebagai kajian kualitatif dan kepustakaan. Dalam hal ini, dua buku Abdel Haleem yakni *Understanding the Qur’an* dan *Exploring the Qur’an*, menjadi sumber data primer yang kemudian dikuatkan dengan literatur-literatur lainnya seperti artikel ilmiah, kitab tafsir, buku ilmiah dan web yang dalam hal ini diposisikan sebagai data sekunder. Data yang sudah didapatkan kemudian dianalisis dengan menggunakan pendekatan hermeneutika untuk mengungkap makna yang lebih komprehensif dari teks dan konteks Ayat Pedang.

Melalui semua proses yang telah dipaparkan sebelumnya, kajian ini menunjukkan bahwa penafsiran Abdel Haleem terkait Ayat Pedang dikonstruksi melalui dua pola utama: pertama, mempertimbangkan konteks historis ayat, yaitu pelanggaran Perjanjian Hudaibiyah oleh kaum *musyrik* Quraisy yang memicu perang sebagai opsi terakhir setelah diplomasi gagal; kedua, menekankan aspek linguistik, frasa “*slay the polytheists*” merujuk pada musyrik yang melanggar perjanjian, bukan perintah wajib, dan pengandaian “*if they repent*” mencegah serangan pada *musyrik* yang bertaubat. Pola tafsir ini memberi kontribusi penting dalam penafsiran Ayat Pedang, mereaktualisasikan wacana lama dan relevan untuk menghadapi isu intoleransi di Indonesia, sebagaimana banyak informasi yang beredar.

مستخلص البحث

نسرينا نور عفيفة، 2024، "آية السيف في خطاب التفسير المعاصر: تحليل لتفسير مُجّد عبد الحليم في فهم القرآن (*Understanding the Qur'an*) واستكشاف القرآن (*Exploring the Qur'an*)"، بحث جامعي، قسم علوم القرآن والتفسير، كلية الشريعة، جامعة مولانا مالك إبراهيم الإسلامية الحكومية، مالانج. المشرف: مسكي، الماجستير.

الكلمات المفتاحية: آية السيف؛ التفسير الخاطيء؛ مُجّد عبد الحليم؛ فهم القرآن؛ استكشاف القرآن.

مُجّد عبد الحليم هو مفسر معاصر أولى اهتمامًا خاصًا لمفهوم آية السيف في سورة التوبة 5. نظرا إلى النهج التاريخي، يرتبط هذا بحقيقة لدى حليم، كان هناك سوء الفهم الكبير لتفسير الآية، وخاصة في العالم الغربي. بمراعاة هذه المسألة، تركز هذه الدراسة على محورين رئيسيين، وهما: أولاً، كيف بنى عبد الحليم فكره فيما يتعلق بآية السيف في كتابيه فهم القرآن واستكشاف القرآن؛ ثانياً، كيف يكون تفسيره ذا صلة بخطاب التفسير الكلاسيكي وقضايا التسامح في إندونيسيا. يهدف هذا البحث إلى إثراء الخطاب حول التفسير وتعزيز الفهم أكثر شمولاً لآية السيف في إندونيسيا. ولتوضيح المحورين الرئيسيين المذكورين، تم تنسيق هذه الدراسة على أنها بحث نوعي قائم على المكتبات. والمصدران الرئيسيان هما كتاب حليم "فهم القرآن" (*Understanding the Qur'an*) و"استكشاف القرآن" (*Exploring the Qur'an*)، اللذان تدعمهما مصادر ثانوية مثل المقالات العلمية والتفسير الكلاسيكي والكتب الأكاديمية ومواقع الويب. ثم يتم تحليل البيانات المجمعة باستخدام النهج التأويلي للكشف عن المعنى أكثر شمولاً لنص وسياق آية السيف. وتوضح الدراسة أن تفسير حليم لآية السيف مبني على منهجين رئيسيين: الأول، النظر في السياق التاريخي للآية، أي انتهاك مشركي قريش لمعاهدة الحديبية، مما أدى إلى الحرب كمالاذ أخير بعد فشل الدبلوماسية؛ والثاني، التأكيد على الجانب اللغوي، حيث تشير عبارة "اقتلوا المشركين" على وجه التحديد إلى أولئك الذين انتهكوا المعاهدة، بدلاً من كونها أمراً إلزامياً، والعبارة الشرطية "إن تابوا" تمنع الهجمات على المشركين الذين تابوا. يساهم هذا الإطار التفسيري بشكل كبير في فهم آية السيف، وإعادة وضع الخطاب السابق في سياقه وإثبات أهميته في معالجة قضايا التعصب في إندونيسيا، كما نوقش على نطاق واسع.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Research Background

Muhammad A.S. Abdel Haleem is a Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). He earned his undergraduate degree from Al-Azhar University in Cairo and pursued his PhD studies at the University of Cambridge.¹ Born in Egypt in 1930, Abdel Haleem has been passionate about studying the Qur'an since childhood. In 2004, he successfully published his English translation of the Qur'an titled *The Qur'an*, through Oxford University Press.² Additionally, Abdel Haleem is well-versed in Arabic literature and culture. As recognition for his contributions to the development of Arab culture, literature, and interfaith understanding, he was appointed as an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2008.³

Throughout his career, Abdel Haleem has produced numerous outstanding writings in the field of Qur'anic studies such as *Understanding the Qur'an* and *Exploring the Qur'an*. These works, alongside *The Qur'an*, have significantly enhanced his reputation. Through his writings, Abdel Haleem aims to make the

¹ Ayman S. Ibrahim, *A Concise Guide to the Quran: Answering Thirty Critical Questions* (Baker Books, 2020), 81.

² Explained on the website of SOAS University of London, "Professor Muhammad AS Abdel Haleem, OBE" (London), accessed August 22, 2024, <https://www.soas.ac.uk/about/muhammad-abdel-haleem-obe>.

³ SOAS University of London, "SOAS Academic Awarded an OBE in Queen's Birthday Honours," 2008, <https://web.archive.org/web/20080621004211/http://www.soas.ac.uk/news/newsitem44235>.

Qur'an accessible to English-speaking audiences.⁴ Targeting Westerners, particularly orientalists, he articulates his distinctive thoughts through thematic, stylistic, and comparative approaches. He often compares specific themes found in the Qur'an and the Bible, such as the concept of war, the story of Adam and Eve's creation, and the tale of Prophet Joseph.

As a prominent figure who memorized the Qur'an and then delved into scholarship in the Western world, this undoubtedly shapes Haleem's perceptions, attitudes, and viewpoints regarding the Qur'an. One of the issues that often becomes the focus of Haleem's work in *Understanding the Qur'an* and *Exploring the Qur'an* is how to provide counter-discourse to orientalists who frequently misunderstand the Qur'an. According to Haleem, the limitation in the reception of Islamic teachings in the West is due to the linguistic gap between these two horizons. This realization has driven him to bridge this gap in order to rectify existing misconceptions.⁵

One of the extensively discussed issues in both of his works is the interpretation of the true meaning of *jihād* in the Qur'an. Since the rise and expansion of the Muslim community, *jihād* has played a central role in Islam, sometimes even referred to as the sixth pillar of Islam.⁶ In contemporary times, the concept of *jihād* often undergoes misinterpretation and misuse. *Jihād*, in

⁴ SOAS University of London, "Promoting Inter-Faith Understanding Worldwide through an Accessible Translation of the Qur'an (Muhammad Abdel Haleem)," School of Oriental & African Studies, accessed August 22, 2024, <https://impact.ref.ac.uk/casestudies/CaseStudy.aspx?Id=43433>.

⁵ Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Understanding The Qur'an: Themes and Style* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), vii.

⁶ John L Esposito, "Jihad: Holy or Unholy War?," *Alliance of Civilizations*, 2007, 1, https://www.unaoc.org/repository/Esposito_Jihad_Holy_Unholy.pdf.

Islamic teachings, was originally understood as the wholehearted effort to embody the values of the Qur'an in daily life.⁷ Therefore, it is clear that *jihād* actually refers to the effort to enhance justice and well-being, both in personal and social contexts. Throughout history, the call to *jihād* has strengthened the Muslim community to continuously strive in defense of Islam.

By the end of the 20th century, the term *jihād* became increasingly popular as it was widely used by resistance movements, liberation movements, and even terrorism to legitimize their goals and motivate their followers.⁸ In other words, the term *jihād* has been adopted and exploited by various groups with specific political or ideological agendas to support or justify their actions. One of the traumatic events associated with *jihād* was the attack on the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001. The attack, which claimed thousands of lives, was orchestrated by the extremist Islamic network Al-Qaeda led by Osama bin Laden.⁹ Furthermore, in an attempt to understand the concept of *jihād*, Western orientalist often offer tendentious and biased interpretations of the original concept of *jihād*. In Western stereotypes, *jihād* is portrayed as a holy war conducted to spread Islam as if Islam was only introduced widely through the sharpness of the sword.¹⁰

⁷ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Pesan-Pesan Universal Islam Untuk Kemanusiaan* (Bandung: Mizan, 2003), 313–14.

⁸ Esposito, "Jihad: Holy or Unholy War?," 2.

⁹ Iman Fadhilah, "Penyebab Tragedi Serangan 11 September 2001 Ke Gedung WTC," *zenius.net*, 2022, <https://www.zenius.net/blog/serangan-11-september-2001-wtc>.

¹⁰ Agus Handoko, "Analisis Kejahatan Terorisme Berkedok Agama," *SALAM: Jurnal Sosial Dan Budaya Syar-I* 6, no. 2 (2019): 156, <https://doi.org/10.15408/sjsbs.v6i2.11041>.

One of the Quranic verses on *jihād* that has been widely misinterpreted is Surah Al-Tawbah:5,¹¹ known as the “Sword Verse”. This verse is interpreted to mean that Muslims must kill polytheists wherever they find them, unless the polytheists convert to Islam. Haleem responds to this interpretation, arguing that the misunderstanding of the meaning of this verse arises from the gap between the Western horizon and the Qur’anic horizon. Haleem believes that to understand the intended meaning of the text, one must first have mastery over aspects such as its linguistic and historical context. Surah At-Tawbah verse 5 cannot simply be interpreted as Islam commanding its followers to indiscriminately kill polytheists they encounter. The historical background of why this verse was revealed must be reconsidered. Additionally, the linguistic rules of Surah At-Tawbah verse 5 need to be analyzed, as Arabic is distinctly different from English, which Western scholars use to translate the verse. There are grammatical aspects of Arabic that English does not possess. Therefore, both of these aspects are crucial in uncovering the hermeneutical aspects of the “Sword Verse”.¹²

From the foregoing, it is understandable why Abdel Haleem's thoughts in *Understanding the Qur’an* and *Exploring the Qur’an* need to be revisited. This is

¹¹ Here is the full text:

فَإِذَا أَنْسَلَخَ الْأَشْهُرَ الْحُرْمَ فَاقْتُلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَيْثُ وَجَدْتُمُوهُمْ وَخُذُوهُمْ وَأَحْضُرُوهُمْ وَأَقْعُدُوا لَهُمْ كُلَّ مَرْصِدٍ ۚ فَإِن تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَءَاتُوا الزَّكَاةَ فَخَلُّوا سَبِيلَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

Search in Tim Penyempurnaan Terjemahan Al-Qur’an, *Al-Qur’an Dan Terjemahannya Edisi Penyempurnaan* (Jakarta: Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur’an, 2019), 258.

Surah At-Tawbah (the Repentance) is the ninth surah in Al-Qur’an. It is one of the Medinan surahs which contains 129 verses. Besides At-Tawbah, this surah also known as surah Al-Bara’ah, according to the opening word of the surah. In some narrations, it is mentioned that this surah was revealed at the time of Tabuk Expedition in Medina 9H.

¹² Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Exploring the Qur’an: Context and Impact* (London-New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers & Co. Ltd, 2017), 8, <https://doi.org/10.29117/jcsis.2019.0221>.

primarily to correct the misconceptions Western scholars have regarding the meaning of the “Sword Verse” in the Qur’an. Because, in essence, Islam is a mercy to the worlds, a religion that spreads mercy and compassion to all of Allah’s creatures.

B. Statement of Problem

1. What is Muhammad Abdel Haleem’s perspective on the “Sword Verse” in *Understanding the Qur’an* and *Exploring the Qur’an*?
2. How Muhammad Abdel Haleem’s interpretation of the “Sword Verse” is relevant in the discourse of classical tafsir and issues of tolerance in Indonesia?

C. Objective of Research

1. Describing Abdel Haleem’s thoughts on the “Sword Verse” in *Understanding the Qur’an* and *Exploring the Qur’an*.
2. Explaining that Muhammad Abdel Haleem’s interpretation of the “Sword Verse” is relevant in the discourse of classical tafsir and issues of tolerance in Indonesia.

D. Benefit of Research

This research is expected to provide benefits both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it is hoped that this paper will assist in understanding Abdel Haleem’s thoughts as expressed in *Understanding the Qur’an* and *Exploring the Qur’an*, serving as a construction against the misunderstandings of the interpretation of the “Sword Verse” by orientalist. This will offer a broader

insight into how contemporary Islamic scholars, whose thinking is influenced by Western scholarship, interpret controversial verses in the Qur'an.

In terms of practical benefits, it aims to enrich the author's understanding of the meaning of the "Sword Verse" in the Qur'an according to Abdel Haleem, providing understanding to readers and writers, enriching the scholarly discourse particularly in the fields of Islamic studies and Qur'anic tafsir, and serving as a basis for the development of better policies in the context of interfaith relations and countering radicalism.

E. Operational Definition

In an effort to avoid misunderstanding stemming from the title “THE “SWORD VERSE” IN CONTEMPORARY TAFSIR DISCOURSE: An Analysis of Muhammad Abdel Haleem’s Interpretation in *Understanding the Qur'an* and *Exploring the Qur'an*”, it is necessary for the author to provide definitions for certain terms that may require further elaboration. This ensures that both the author and the reader have a shared, clear and targeted understanding.

1. Sword Verse

The term "Sword Verse" refers to Surah Al-Tawbah:5 in the Qur'an, which states:

فَإِذَا انسَلَخَ الْأَشْهُرُ الْحُرُمُ فَاقْتُلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَيْثُ وَجَدْتُمُوهُمْ وَخُذُوهُمْ وَأَخْصِرُواهُمْ وَأَقْعُدُوا لَهُمْ
كُلَّ مَرْصِدٍ ۖ فَإِنْ تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوْا الزَّكَاةَ فَخَلُّوا سَبِيلَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

"When the sacred months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish

prayer, and give zakah, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful."

This verse is referred to as the "Sword Verse" because it contains a command to combat polytheists (*mushrik*) offensively. Understanding this verse can influence the perceptions of non-Muslims regarding Islam.¹³ Western scholars often interpret this verse as containing violence and warfare. However, it is crucial to understand this verse comprehensively by considering its historical, linguistic, cultural context, as well as its correlation with preceding and succeeding verses.

2. *Understanding the Qur'an*

The book *Understanding the Qur'an* is a work authored by Abdel Haleem as a response to Western orientalist studies that have failed to accurately map the Qur'an. Haleem aims for his work to assist readers and scholars in understanding the Qur'an through three approaches he combines: thematic, stylistic, and comparative analysis between the Qur'an and the Bible.¹⁴

3. *Exploring the Qur'an*

Similar to the exposition of the previous book, *Exploring the Qur'an* is also written by Haleem to critique both Western and Muslim scholars, whether classical or contemporary, especially extremists who tend to interpret the Qur'an without considering important aspects beyond the text itself. They often overlook the historical and grammatical contexts of a verse, thus failing

¹³ Ulummudin, "Tafsir Atas 'Ayat Pedang' Q.S. Al-Taubah (9): 5: Studi Komparatif Penafsiran Sayyid Qutub dan Rasyid Ridha," *Al-Tadabbur : Jurnal Ilmu Al- Qur ' an dan Tafsir*, 2022, 230, <https://doi.org/10.30868/at.v7i0>.

¹⁴ Haleem, *Understanding The Qur'an: Themes and Style*, vii.

to understand it properly. *Exploring the Qur'an* is structured into 13 sections, with four of them discussing *jihād* and the “Sword Verses” in the Qur'an.¹⁵

F. Previous Research

From the author's analysis, at least four trends of previous research relevant to this study were identified. Firstly, the concept of *jihād* in the Qur'an.¹⁶ Secondly, interpretations of the "Sword Verse" in the Qur'an.¹⁷ Thirdly, studies on the figure and thought of Muhammad Abdel Haleem.¹⁸ Fourthly, Qur'anic studies in the Western world.¹⁹

¹⁵ Haleem, *Exploring the Qur'an: Context and Impact*, 1–2.

¹⁶ Saiful Akmal, “Deradikalisasi Pemahaman Al-Qur'an (Ayat-Ayat Jihad dan Qital),” *Tafse: Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2021): 137, <https://doi.org/10.22373/tafse.v6i1.9540>. Ahamad Bazith, “Jihad dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an,” *Jurnal Al-Mubarak: Jurnal Kajian Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 2, no. 1 (2014): 67–94, <https://doi.org/10.47435/al-mubarak.v3i2.219>. Akmal Alna et al., “Makna Jihad dalam Al-Qur'an Menurut Penafsiran Ibnu Katsir,” *Gunung Djati Conference Series* 9, no. 1 (2022): 69–79. Darmawan, “Membaca Ulang Konsep Jihad dalam Al-Qur'an: Usaha Merevitalisasi Islam Rahmat,” *Ilmu Ushuluddin* 5, no. 1 (2018): 15–30.

¹⁷ Moh. Nailul Muna, “Konsep Naskh Ayat Damai dengan Ayat Pedang (Studi Komparatif Tafsir Jalālain Dan Tafsir Marāḥ Labīd)” (UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2019). Ulummudin, “Tafsir Atas ‘Ayat Pedang’ Q.S. Al-Taubah (9): 5: Studi Komparatif Penafsiran Sayyid Qutub dan Rasyid Ridha.” Wardani, “Kekerasan atas Nama Al-Qur'an: Penganuliran Ayat-Ayat Damai dengan Ayat Pedang dan Pengaruhnya dalam Formasi Fiqh,” *Ilmu Ushuluddin* 10, no. 1 (2011): 123–52.

¹⁸ Muhammad Imam An-Nasa'i, “An Analysis of Figurative Languages in the English Translation of Al-Qur'an By M.A.S Abdel Haleem” (UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, 2020). Muhammad Sultan Shah, “A Critical Study of Abdel Haleem's New Translation of the Holy Qur'an,” *Al Qalam* 1, no. December (2010): 1–15. Hanif Mudhofar, “Epistemologi Tafsir Abdel Haleem (Studi Kitab Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style),” *Tesis* (UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2016), <https://digilib.uin-suka.ac.id/id/eprint/20620/>. Mutmainnah Mutmainnah, “Analysis of Lexical Relation and Diction in Muhammad Abdel Haleem's Translation of Surah Saba in The Holy Quran” (UIN Antasari Banjarmasin, 2023). Hanif Mudhofar Abdul Jalil, Monika @ Munirah Abd Razzak, and Selamat Amir, “Elemen Living Quran oleh Abdel Haleem: Tinjauan dalam Buku Understanding The Quran; Themes and Style,” *Quranica, International Journal of Quranic Research* 11, no. 2 (2019): 84–102. Sabrina Nurhasanah, “Kisah Al-Quran dalam Perspektif M.A.S Abdel Haleem: Studi Interpretasi Intertekstual dalam Understanding The Qur'an: Themes And Style” (UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, 2023).

¹⁹ Ah Fawaid, “Dinamika Kajian Al-Qur'an di Barat dan Dampaknya pada Kajian Al-Qur'an Kontemporer,” *Nuansa* 10, no. 2 (2013): 229–58. Muhammad Anshori, “Tren-Tren Wacana Studi Al-Qur'an dalam Pandangan Orientalis Di Barat,” *Nun* 4, no. 1 (2018). Hasani Ahmad Said, “Potret Studi Alquran di Mata Orientalis,” *Jurnal At-Tibyan: Jurnal Ilmu Alquran dan Tafsir* 3, no. 1 (2018): 27, <https://doi.org/10.32505/tibyan.v3i1.474>. Siti Fahimah and Vika Madinatul Ilmi, “Pandangan Orientalis Atas Al-Quran Studi Tokoh Atas yang Pro dan Kontra,” *Al Furqan: Jurnal Ilmu Al Quran Dan Tafsir* 5, no. 2 (2022): 288–301, <https://doi.org/10.58518/alfurqon.v5i2.1400>.

One of the previous studies on the concept of *jihād* in the Qur'an is a journal article titled “*Deradikalisasi Pemahaman Al-Qur’an: Ayat-Ayat Jihad Dan Qital*” (*Deradicalization of Understanding the Qur'an: Jihad Verses and Qital*) by Saiful Akmal. In his writing, Saiful Akmal attempts to elucidate Qur'anic verses commonly used as triggers for radical actions. Verses frequently examined include those related to *jihād* and *qitāl*. Superficially, these verses indeed convey a harsh tone. However, to obtain an accurate interpretation, it is not sufficient to merely examine them textually; one must also consider the historical and sociological contexts in which these verses were revealed.²⁰

Another study titled “*Jihad dalam Perspektif Al-Qur’an*” (*Jihad in the Perspective of the Qur'an*) by Ahamad Bazith gathered verses themed around *jihād* and classified them into Meccan and Medinan period *jihād* verses. The findings of this study suggest that *jihād* during the Meccan period did not involve physical warfare but rather the exertion of all capabilities to confront polytheists with persuasive and heartfelt words, considering the situation and condition of the weak Muslim community lacking physical strength. On the other hand, *jihād* during the Medinan period tends to be interpreted as "war," namely the efforts of Muslims to retaliate against attacks directed at them. However, in the context of Indonesia, the understanding of *jihād* can be expanded into the realms of social-political and horizontal significance, such as humanitarian concerns in the form of social care.²¹

²⁰ Akmal, “Deradikalisasi Pemahaman Al-Qur’an (Ayat-Ayat Jihad dan Qital).”

²¹ Bazith, “Jihad dalam Perspektif Al-Qur’an.”

Furthermore, the article “*Makna Jihad dalam al-Qur’an menurut Penafsiran Ibnu Katsir*” (*The Meaning of Jihad in the Qur'an according to the Interpretation of Ibn Kathir*) studied by Akmal Alna et al. focused on the methodology of interpretation used by Ibn Kathir, with the word *jihād* in the Qur'an as its main focus. The research findings indicate that Ibn Kathir did not extensively discuss linguistic aspects related to the word *jihād* in the Qur'an. Instead, he consistently relied on *bi al-ma'thur* interpretation sources as supporting arguments. Ibn Kathir also did not delve into the legal and socio-cultural aspects of *jihād* in detail but tended to focus on the core of the verses with a textual approach. His interpretation tends to view *jihād* verses as warfare to defend Islam. Ibn Kathir emphasized the urgency, virtue, and special status of *jihād* according to Islamic teachings in the Qur'an and the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad. Thus, *jihād* in Ibn Kathir's view encompasses a broader meaning than just warfare, and the study recommends comprehensive interpretation to avoid misconceptions.²²

In his article titled “*Membaca Ulang Konsep Jihad dalam Al-Qur’an: Usaha Merevitalisasi Islam Rahmat*” (*Rereading the Concept of Jihad in the Qur'an: Efforts to Revitalize Islam as a Mercy*), Darmawan mentions that the background of his research is the emergence of radicalism under the guise of *jihād*. Therefore, to dispel this notion, he examines the true meaning of *jihād* in the Qur'an. The study employs a thematic (*maudhu'i*) method by collecting all verses related to *jihād*. The results show that *jihād* in the Qur'an depicts relentless

²² Alna et al., “Makna Jihad dalam Al-Qur’an Menurut Penafsiran Ibnu Katsir.”

struggle involving the sacrifice of everything owned by a servant until the goal of the struggle is achieved, whether through sacrificing one's life, wealth, or possessions. Furthermore, in interpreting verses discussing *jihād*, the object intended is not always explicitly clear. Only two objects are explicitly mentioned, namely fighting against disbelievers and hypocrites. However, this does not imply that only these two objects need to be confronted in *jihād*. Through observations of verses that do not specify their object, it is evident that *jihād* is not limited to conflicts with disbelievers and hypocrites but can also be applied to all human activities based on Islam's teachings full of mercy.²³

In the second trend of research, regarding the interpretation of the "Sword Verses" in the Qur'an, "*Tafsir atas 'Ayat Pedang' Q.S. Al-Taubah (9): 5: Studi Komparatif Penafsiran Sayyid Qutub dan Rasyid Ridha*" (*Exegesis of the 'Sword Verses' Surah Al-Tawbah (9): 5: A Comparative Study of Interpretations by Sayyid Qutb and Rashid Rida*) by Ulummudin discusses the comparative interpretation of the "Sword Verse" by Sayyid Qutb and Rashid Rida. Ulummudin mentions that verse 5 of Surah Al-Tawbah is often cited as a justification for violence in the name of religion. Understanding this verse has significant implications for the basic relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims, whether in the context of war or peace. Qutb and Rida have different views in interpreting this verse, so this study uses a comparative approach to explain their interpretations and implications. The study concludes that both agree that the verse does not nullify the verses emphasizing peace and tolerance. However, the main difference

²³ Darmawan, "Membaca Ulang Konsep Jihad dalam Al-Qur'an: Usaha Merevitalisasi Islam Rahmat."

between them lies in their approach to the temporality of Qur'anic verses. Qutb views verse (9):5 as the last verse related to holy war, while Rida does not differentiate between temporal and final verses. Rida sees the purpose of holy war as the defense of religion, while Qutb sees it as an effort to establish Sharia globally. Rida's opinion reflects a moderate stance, while Qutb's view may promote extremism and exclusivity.²⁴

Wardani's article titled "*Kekerasan atas Nama Al-Qur'an: Peng anuliran Ayat-ayat Damai dengan Ayat Pedang dan Pengaruhnya dalam Formasi Fiqh*" (*Violence in the Name of the Qur'an: Substitution of Peaceful Verses with Sword Verses and Its Influence on Fiqh Formation*) explains the justification of violence carried out in the name of the Qur'an, especially in the context of bombing incidents in Indonesia involving Imam Samudera. This justification stems from controversial interpretations of the concept of "substitution" (*naskh*) in the Qur'an, where hundreds of peaceful verses often referred to as "verses of patience" or "reconciliation verses" are considered null and void because they are abrogated by one or several "Sword Verses." The status of this "substitution" has been a source of controversy among Qur'anic scholars, as besides the issue of identifying the verses considered as "Sword Verses," there is also debate about the number of peaceful verses declared nullified by the substitution, which has undergone dramatic changes throughout history. This substitution is based on interpretations

²⁴ Ulummudin, "Tafsir atas 'Ayat Pedang' Q.S. Al-Taubah (9): 5: Studi Komparatif Penafsiran Sayyid Qutub dan Rasyid Ridha."

that do not fully grasp their original context and has a significant impact on the formation of Islamic law related to the concept of *jihād*.²⁵

Similarly, in line with previous research, Moh. Nailul Muna's thesis titled "*Konsep Naskh Ayat Damai dengan Ayat Pedang : Studi Komparatif Tafsir Jalalain dan Tafsir Marah Labid*" (*The Concept of Substitution of Peaceful Verses with Sword Verses : A Comparative Study of Tafsir Jalalain and Tafsir Marah Labid*) also discusses the concept of substitution or naskh of "Peaceful Verses" with "Sword verses" in the Qur'an. However, in this thesis, Muna compares the concept of substitution in Tafsir Jalalain and Tafsir Marah Labid. The results of this study show that Imam Jalalain applies the substitution of "Peaceful Verses" with "Sword Verses", while Imam Nawawi does not. This difference is due to their different ways of understanding Qur'anic interpretation. According to the synthesis of the author, although peaceful verses are not actually abrogated, previous interpreters, as seen in Tafsir Jalalain, are bound by the dogma of the removal of these verses, albeit only partially. However, subsequent interpreters, as exemplified by Imam Nawawi, do not adhere to the concept of substitution in peaceful verses. Therefore, comprehensive investigation into the concept of substitution becomes important in efforts to reduce radicalism in Qur'anic interpretation.²⁶

As for the third trend, one of them is explained in a thesis by Sabrina Nuhasanah titled "*Kisah Al-Quran Dalam Perspektif M.A.S Abdel Haleem: Studi*

²⁵ Wardani, "Kekerasan atas Nama Al-Qur'an: Penganuliran Ayat-Ayat Damai dengan Ayat Pedang dan Pengaruhnya dalam Formasi Fiqh."

²⁶ muna, "Konsep Naskh Ayat Damai dengan Ayat Pedang (Studi Komparatif Tafsir Jalalain dan Tafsir Marah Labid)."

Interpretasi Intertekstual Dalam Understanding The Qur'an : Themes And Style" (*The Stories of the Qur'an from the Perspective of M.A.S Abdel Haleem: An Intertextual Interpretation Study in Understanding The Qur'an: Themes And Style*). This thesis discusses Muhammad Abdel Haleem's interpretation of the stories in the Qur'an such as the story of Adam and Eve and the story of Prophet Yusuf. Additionally, it explains how Abdel Haleem compares these stories found in the Qur'an and the Bible.²⁷

Muhammad Imam An-Nasa'i's thesis titled "*An Analysis of Figurative Languages in The English Translation of Al-Qur'an by M.A.S Abdel Haleem*" analyzes the figurative language used in the English translation of the Qur'an by Muhammad Abdel Haleem. The figurative language found in The Qur'an includes metaphor, simile, allegory, personification, metonymy, synecdoche, and hyperbole. The objects examined in The Qur'an are Surah Al-Waqi'ah with 96 verses and Surah Al-Mulk with 30 verses. The research findings indicate that 30 verses contain figurative language, including nine allegories, seven personifications, seven symbols, three metaphors, two similes, and two metonymies. The dominant type of figurative language used in Surah Al-Waqi'ah and Al-Mulk in the English translation of the Qur'an by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem is allegory. The research findings can be used as additional literature material in English language teaching.²⁸

²⁷ Nurhasanah, "Kisah Al-Quran dalam Perspektif M.A.S Abdel Haleem: Studi Interpretasi Intertekstual dalam Understanding The Qur'an : Themes and Style."

²⁸ An-Nasa'i, "An Analysis of Figurative Languages in the English Translation of Al- Qur'an By M.A.S Abdel Haleem."

Then, regarding the research trend on the study of the Qur'an in the Western world, one of them is discussed in "*Tren-Tren Wacana Studi Al-Qur'an dalam Pandangan Orientalis di Barat*" (*Trends in Discourse on Qur'anic Studies from the Perspective of Orientalists in the West*) by Muhammad Anshori, which explores the trend of studying the Qur'an and its development up to the present.²⁹ Similarly, in the article "*Dinamika Kajian Al-Qur'an di Barat dan Dampaknya pada Kajian Al-Qur'an Kontemporer*" (*Dynamics of Qur'anic Studies in the West and Its Impact on Contemporary Qur'anic Studies*), Ah Fawaid explains that the first step taken by the West to delve into Islam is by translating the Qur'an into Latin and other European languages. Qur'anic studies in the West have an impact on the dynamics of Qur'anic studies in other parts of the world, including among Muslims. The advancement of printing and technology makes information exchange easier and faster. Furthermore, investments in knowledge through Islamic Studies scholarships to various Islamic study centers in the West also aid in the 'transmission' of Western Qur'anic studies to their colleagues in the Islamic world.³⁰

Lastly, the article "*Pandangan Orientalis Atas Al-Quran Studi Tokoh Atas Yang Pro dan Kontra*" (*Orientalist Views on the Qur'an: Pros and Cons of Figure Studies*) written by Siti Fahimah and Vika Madinatul Ilmi. This qualitative research article explains that there are two Orientalist views on the Qur'an. One negative view states that the Qur'an is seen as a story made up by Muhammad,

²⁹ Anshori, "Tren-Tren Wacana Studi Al-Qur'an dalam Pandangan Orientalis di Barat."

³⁰ Fawaid, "Dinamika Kajian Al-Qur'an di Barat dan Dampaknya pada Kajian Al-Qur'an Kontemporer."

claiming inspiration from God, so for this group, the Qur'an is considered to have no strong foundation and is not worthy of being a guide or a legal source. Meanwhile, another group understands that the Qur'an is a revelation directly from Allah, not the work of Muhammad, so it is considered as the primary source to be followed.³¹

From all these descriptions, it is evident that despite many previous studies with similar trends as those advocated in this research, there has yet to be a complete adoption of Abdel Haleem's thinking to dispel the misunderstandings prevalent among Western society regarding the “Sword Verses” or *jihād* in his works *Understanding the Qur'an* and *Exploring the Qur'an*. This is a crucial moment where this research comes in to fill the gap untouched in the discussion. By bringing a fresh and in-depth perspective, it is hoped that this research will not only provide a more comprehensive understanding but also revive constructive dialogue in seeking a more accurate and inclusive understanding of the concept of “Sword Verse” in the Qur'an.

G. Research Methodology

Research methodology is a scientific approach to obtain data for specific purposes and utilities.³² In this study, the author employs a qualitative method, often referred to as library research. Therefore, as an initial step, the author gathers materials related to the discussion, namely Abdel Haleem's ideas when

³¹ Fahimah and Ilmi, “Pandangan Orientalis atas Al-Quran Studi Tokoh Atas Yang Pro dan Kontra.”

³² Abdul Mustaqim, *Metode Penelitian Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* (Yogyakarta: Idea Press Yogyakarta, 2014), 35.

interpreting “Sword Verse” in *Understanding the Qur'an and Exploring the Qur'an*. Subsequently, these materials will be analyzed using hermeneutical theory, one of the contemporary methods of interpretation. For a more comprehensive understanding, the author will delineate it into several sections as follows:

1. Research Type

In delving into the realm of texts and ideas, the author utilizes a qualitative research method or library research, which will elucidate the figure of Abdel Haleem and his attempts to bridge the gap between the Qur'an and Western audiences, thereby eliminating misunderstandings in interpretation. This can be examined by gathering relevant literature, including books, articles, theses, websites, and others.³³

2. Research Approach

For the research approach, the author opts for an explanative-hermeneutic analysis, which combines explanatory and hermeneutic approaches. The explanatory approach seeks to provide explanations regarding the relationship between phenomena from one variable to another.³⁴ By applying this approach to the misunderstanding of the "Sword Verse," factors influencing it can be identified. One of these factors involves considering the contextual relationship of the verse with those preceding and following it.

³³ Mestika Zed, *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2008), 3.

³⁴ Nur Sadam Afandi, “Kepemimpinan dan Profesionalisme Karyawan, Pengaruhnya terhadap Kinerja Pegawai Melalui Kepuasan Kerja sebagai Variabel Intervening (Studi Empiris pada Kantor Kementerian Agama Kota Malang)” (UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, 2014), 55.

As for the Hermeneutical approach, it is a method of interpretation that begins by analyzing the language and then considers the broader context of the text. When applied to understanding the Qur'an, the focus is on how the Qur'an is understood and interpreted within society, and how the text interacts with its historical context. Hermeneutics helps in explaining how the Qur'an is relevant in our daily lives, and how its messages can be translated and debated in the context of the present time.³⁵ Therefore, with a hermeneutic approach, it is hoped that we can uncover how Haleem interprets the “Sword Verse” by considering both historical aspects and grammar, thereby achieving a true understanding of the verses.

3. Data Sources

Given that this is a qualitative research, the data, both primary and secondary, is derived from literature.

- a. Primary data sources for this research are two popular works by Abdel Haleem, which contain explanations about the “Sword Verse,” there are *Understanding the Qur'an* and *Exploring the Qur'an*.
- b. Secondary data sources for this research are obtained from various books, journals, and articles related to the topic.

4. Data Collection Techniques

The initial step taken in gathering data for this research is to determine the variables and the trends of discussion. The subsequent step involves collecting

³⁵ Ummi Inayati, “Pendekatan Hermeneutika dalam Ilmu Tafsir,” *Falasifa* 10, no. 2 (2019): 80.

data that align with Abdel Haleem's perspective on the "Sword Verse" in *Understanding the Qur'an* and *Exploring the Qur'an*, which in this case comprises verse 5 of Surah Al-Tawbah and critical interpretations thereof. Additionally, all literature related to the subject matter is gathered, including other tafsir texts, books, articles, theses, and internet sources. Thus, it can be concluded that this research utilizes the data collection technique of literature review.

5. Data Processing Techniques

In qualitative research analyzing Abdel Haleem's thought construction in reactualizing the "Sword verse" in *Understanding the Quran* and *Exploring the Qur'an*, an explanatory-hermeneutic approach is employed based on the hermeneutical theory of Qur'anic interpretation. The first step in this analysis is the selection of appropriate data, namely the "Sword Verse" analyzed by Haleem and relevant excerpts from his works.

Subsequently, textual analysis is conducted comprehensively. This involves a deep understanding of the historical, linguistic, and literary contexts of these verses. By considering these contexts, we can identify how Haleem reactualizes these "Sword Verse", including his contextual understanding and unique interpretations.

Furthermore, the hermeneutical theory as a contemporary Quranic interpretation is applied to understand Haleem's interpretive process. This section emphasizes the importance of understanding historical and linguistic contexts in textual interpretation, aligning with Haleem's critical approach to understanding

the Quran.³⁶ Thus, we can observe how Haleem employs hermeneutical principles in his thought construction.

From here, the findings of the analysis are formulated in the conclusion. This includes an understanding of Haleem's thought construction, as well as the relevance of hermeneutical theory in the context of interpreting “Sword Verse”. Finally, critical reflection is undertaken to review the entire analysis process. This involves evaluating the strengths and limitations of the approaches used, as well as suggestions for further research in this field. Thus, this analysis provides profound insights into Haleem’s thought and his contribution to reinterpreting “Sword Verse” in the context of the Qur’an, often misunderstood by the Western world.

H. Discussion Structure

To ensure that this research is coherent and well-structured, it is divided into four chapters as follows:

Chapter I Introduction: This chapter provides the background on why this theme is chosen and what makes it intriguing for this research. It also outlines the research problem as the scope of the discussion, the objectives, the benefits of the study, and the research methodology.

Chapter II Literature Review: This chapter consists of a review of relevant literature. It explains previous studies that have addressed the same theme and highlights the differences between this study and those previous ones. This

³⁶ Haleem, *Exploring the Qur’an: Context and Impact*, 8.

chapter presents four variables related to the theme discussed by the author: the meaning of *jihād* in the Qur'an, the interpretation of the "Sword Verse," the figure of Muhammad Abdel Haleem and his thoughts, and the development of Qur'anic studies in the Western world.

Chapter III Results and Discussion: This is the most substantial part of the research. In this chapter, all the research questions are addressed, including Abdel Haleem's thoughts on the "Sword Verse" in *Understanding the Qur'an* and *Exploring the Qur'an*, as well as the contributions derived from his thoughts.

Chapter IV Closing: This final section concludes all the results of the analysis and provides recommendations related to this research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Uncovering Meaning: The Concept of Interpretation (Tafsir) in the Qur'an

The word “tafsir” comes from the Arabic root word *fasara* (فسر), which means to explain or clarify something.³⁷ In line with this, Imam az-Zahabi explains that *al-fasr* means to explain and reveal.³⁸ Additionally, Ibn Manzur, in his book *Lisan al-Arab*, mentions that *al-fasr* refers to uncovering something hidden. Here, “hidden” refers to words that are difficult to understand. Meanwhile, *at-tafsīr* is the act of revealing the intended meaning of a word.³⁹ Based on these explanations, we can conclude that *tafsir* means to explain, reveal, and uncover the meaning of a word. Moreover, the term *tafsir* can also be used to uncover concrete things.⁴⁰

From a technical standpoint, Imam al-Zarkashi explains that:

“Tafsir is the science used to understand the Qur'an, which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), by explaining the meanings of its verses, uncovering all the laws and wisdoms within, based on the knowledge of Arabic grammar, syntax (*nahwu*), morphology (*sharf*), the science of Qur'anic recitation (*qirā'ah*), rhetoric (*al-bayān*), the principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl fiqh*), as well as requiring an understanding of the circumstances of revelation (*asbāb an-nuzūl*) and the knowledge of abrogating and abrogated verses (*nasīkh wa al-mansūkh*).”⁴¹

³⁷ Abi al-Husain Ahmad ibn Faris, *Mu'jam Muqayyis Al-Lughah* (Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 504.

³⁸ Muhammad Husain Al-Zahabi, *Al-Tafsir Wa Al-Mufasssirun Jilid 1*, 1st ed. (Maktabah Mus'ab Ibn 'Umair al-Islamiyyah, 2004), 13.

³⁹ Muhammad bin Makram bin Manzur al-Afriqi Al-Mishri, *Lisan Al-Arab* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1990), 3412.

⁴⁰ Danial Danial, “Corak Penafsiran Al-Qur'an Periode Klasik Hingga Modern,” *Hikmah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 15, no. 2 (2020): 75, <https://doi.org/10.47466/hikmah.v15i2.136>.

⁴¹ Danial, 76.

According to Muin Salim, there are three important concepts in the term “tafsir”: a) A scientific activity to understand the meaning of the Qur’an; b) A scientific activity to explain the content of the Qur’an; c) Knowledge gained through efforts to comprehend the Qur’an.⁴² Imam al-Zarqani defines *tafsir* as a science that focuses on studying the content of the Qur’an, both in terms of the meaning of its verses and the intended meanings in line with what Allah has willed, according to human capacity. Similarly, Abu Hayyan, as quoted by al-Suyuti, explains that *tafsir* is the science that discusses how the words of the Qur’an are pronounced, along with their meanings and the laws contained within them.⁴³ From these explanations, we can conclude that *tafsir* is the science that seeks to understand, explain, and explore the meanings of the Qur’an.

In the study of Qur’anic *tafsir*, various methods, styles, and approaches have evolved as efforts to understand the Divine message in a broader and deeper context. The following sections will discuss these methods, styles, and approaches.

1. Methods of Interpreting the Qur’an

The methods of interpreting the Qur’an are ways to explain its meaning. Generally, there are four main methods: the *tahlīliyy* method, the *ijmāliyy* method, the *muqarān* method, and the *mawdhū’iy* method.⁴⁴

⁴² Danial, 76.

⁴³ Abuddin Nata, *Metodologi Studi Islam* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2011), 209–11.

⁴⁴ Parid Nurjaman, “Metodologi Dan Karakteristik Tafsir Yasin Karya Syekh Hamami Zadah” (UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, 2020), https://etheses.uinsgd.ac.id/19474/5/5_bab2.pdf.

a. The *Tahlīliyy* Method

In language, “*tahlīliyy*” means something that is broken down or explained. In Islamic studies, the *tahlīliyy* interpretation refers to explaining the meanings of the verses of the Qur‘an by following the order of the chapters and verses as they appear in the Qur‘an. This is the oldest method of interpretation. According to M. Quraish Shihab, this method was used even before the *mawdhū‘iy* method. It has been known since the time of the tafsir by Al-Farra or since the time of Ibn Majah, and at the latest, during the era of At-Tabari.⁴⁵ Examples of tafsir (interpretations) using the *tahlīliyy* method include *Jami’ al-Bayan fi at-Takwil fi Al-Qur‘an* by At-Tabari, *Tafsir Samarkandi* by Nasr bin Muhammad bin Abu Ahmad Al-Laits As-Samarqandi, and *Al-Mizan fi Tafsir Al-Qur‘an* by Al-‘Allamah Al-Sayyid Muhammad Husyain Al-Tabataba’i.⁴⁶

Ansori, in his book *Ulūmul Qur‘an: Kaidah-kaidah Memahami Firman Tuhan* (The Principles of Understanding God’s Word), explains several important aspects that must be considered by a *mufassir* (interpreter) when using the *tahlīliyy* method:

1. Explaining the meaning of individual words (*mufradāt*) found in the verse being interpreted.
2. Describing the historical context of the verse.

⁴⁵ Ahmad Izzan, *Metodologi Ilmu Tafsir* (Tafakur: Tafakur, 2014), 104.

⁴⁶ Nurjaman, ““Metodologi Dan Karakteristik Tafsir Yasin Karya Syekh Hamami Zadah,” 4.

3. Highlighting the correlation of the verse with surrounding verses, as well as the connection between the chapter being interpreted and the chapters before and after it.
4. Explaining the lessons that can be drawn from the verse, whether they involve legal rulings, beliefs (*aqīdah*), ethics, and more.⁴⁷

b. The *Ijmāliyy* Method

In epistemology, *ijmāliyy* means summary or something that is general. In terms of interpretation, the *ijmāliyy* method is one that explains the verses of the Qur'an in a general or broad way, following the sequence and structure of the text. When using this method, the interpreter employs language that is similar or even identical to the Qur'an, making it easier for readers to understand. This method is not as detailed as the *tahlīliyy* method, as it focuses only on the basic meanings of individual words, the background of the verse's revelation, and a brief explanation of the content of the verse.⁴⁸

The interpretation of the Qur'an using the *ijmāliyy* method appears simple, practical, and quick, which makes the messages of the Qur'an easier to grasp. However, this strength is also why the method is often considered too simplistic, resulting in shallow, limited, and non-comprehensive analysis. Compared to other methods of interpretation, the main weakness of the *ijmāliyy* method is that it only provides a general overview without delving deeply into more complex meanings.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Nurjaman, 6.

⁴⁸ Nurjaman, 6–7.

⁴⁹ Nurjaman, 7–8.

c. The *Muqarān* Method

The *muqarān* method of interpretation involves comparing verses of the Qur'an that either seem to have similar wording but address different issues or have different wording but address the same issue. In addition, the *muqarān* method is used to compare the interpretations of various scholars regarding specific verses. Although this method is relatively rare in Qur'anic interpretation, it is still used by some scholars. Examples of tafsir (interpretations) that employ this method include *Tafsir Al-Maraghi* and *Al-Jawahir fī At-Tafsir*.⁵⁰

To use the *muqarān* method, an interpreter must first gather all relevant verses—either those that have different wordings for the same issue or similar wordings for different issues. After collecting these verses, the interpreter compares and analyzes them based on the principles of interpretation to reach a conclusion. The same approach is used when comparing Qur'anic verses with hadiths that seem contradictory: gather, compare, analyze, and conclude. When comparing interpretations from different scholars or schools of thought, the interpreter should first examine the relevant verses and study the associated interpretations before drawing conclusions.⁵¹

Muhammad Abdel Haleem also applies this method in his book *Understanding the Qur'an*. He compares how the Qur'an and the Bible describe the treatment of prisoners or those conquered in war. According to the Qur'an, even if prisoners are not freed, they must be treated with kindness and

⁵⁰ Nurjaman, 8.

⁵¹ Nurjaman, 9–10.

humanity. This contrasts with the Bible, which states that prisoners should be offered peace; if they accept, they become forced laborers. If they refuse, they can be attacked, and the men are to be killed, while the women, children, livestock, and other goods may be taken as spoils of war.⁵²

d. The *Maudhu'i* Method

Literally, the word *maudhu'i* comes from the Arabic word وضع, which means to place or to put. In etymology, *maudhu'i* refers to a theme or topic that becomes the focus of discussion. In the context of Qur'anic interpretation, *maudhu'i* method is an interpretation that centers on a particular problem or theme faced by the interpreter.⁵³ Historically, this method has existed since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, where one verse of the Qur'an was explained using other verses. Al-Farmawi suggested that this practice was the early foundation of the *maudhu'i* method, albeit in a simpler form. This method developed further and became more widely known during the 14H, particularly when Prof. Dr. Ahmad Sayyid Al-Kummi introduced it as a course at the Faculty of Ushuluddin, Al-Azhar University in Cairo.⁵⁴

In his book *Understanding the Qur'an*, Haleem also uses the *maudhu'i* method. This can be seen in his explanation of the "Sword Verse" in the chapter "War and Peace in the Qur'an," where he includes other verses related to war or *jihad*, such as the obligation to defend religious freedom (22:39-41),

⁵² Haleem, *Understanding The Qur'an: Themes and Style*, 67–68.

⁵³ Irsyad Al Fikri Ys and Deden Rohmanudin, "Sebab-Sebab Historis Lahirnya Metode Maudu'i Dalam Tafsir," *Jurnal Iman Dan Spiritualitas* 1, no. 3 (2021): 360, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jis.v1i3.12944>.

⁵⁴ Fikri Ys and Rohmanudin, 361.

self-defense (2:190), and defending the oppressed: men, women, and children who cry out for help (4:75).⁵⁵

2. Styles of Qur'anic Interpretation

In Islah Gusmian's book, the style of interpretation, also referred to as "nuances of tafsir," refers to the dominant perspective in a particular interpretation work. In other words, the style of tafsir is the specific characteristic or unique approach that colors an interpretation. The knowledge and ability of the interpreter form the foundation for explaining the meanings of the Qur'anic verses.⁵⁶ Various styles of tafsir have developed from classical to modern times, including the following: *fiqh* interpretation (legal), linguistic-literary, *sūfiy* (mystical), philosophical, sectarian, scientific, *ilhādiy* (heretical), social-literary (*adābiy ijtimā'iy*), ethical (*akhlāqiy*), and revolutionary (*harakiy*).⁵⁷

Among these styles, the one that fits Haleem's interpretation is the *adābiy ijtimā'iy* style because it focuses on the cultural and societal aspects of the verses. According to Al-Farmawi, this interpretation style also links the verses to the natural laws (*sunnatullāh*) that operate within society.⁵⁸ Haleem pays close attention to the contextual aspects of the verses and how their interpretations can offer solutions to societal issues. Another style that aligns with Haleem's approach is the linguistic-literary style, as Haleem uses this approach to explain the meanings of the Qur'anic verses with a strong focus on Arabic grammar and language structure.

⁵⁵ Haleem, *Understanding The Qur'an: Themes and Style*, 63.

⁵⁶ Danial, "Corak Penafsiran Al-Qur'an Periode Klasik Hingga Modern," 76.

⁵⁷ Danial, 99.

⁵⁸ Danial, 94.

3. Approaches to Qur'anic Interpretation

The approach to interpreting the Qur'an is the way a interpreter reveals all the meanings contained in the Qur'an. Kusroni, in his article, explains that Abdullah Saeed initially divided this approach into four types: the linguistic approach, the logical approach, the *taṣawuf* (mystical) approach, and the *riwāyāt* (narrative) approach. However, Saeed regretted that these four approaches did not focus enough on understanding the broader context of the verses or considering the contextual relevance of the Qur'an. Because of this, Saeed proposed the contextual approach, which is crucial in the field of Qur'anic interpretation.⁵⁹

This contextual approach assumes that within the verses of the Qur'an, there are values that are inherently relevant to current issues faced by society. This clearly demonstrates that the Qur'an is indeed valid for all times (*ṣahīh li kulli zamān*).⁶⁰ This is the approach used by Haleem in interpreting the Qur'an in his books, especially in interpreting the "Sword Verse". Haleem employs the concept of hermeneutics, which emphasizes the importance of understanding the text within its broader context, including the historical, cultural, and social factors that influence interpretation. Haleem uses hermeneutic analysis to interpret the meanings contained in the Qur'an, making it applicable to the challenges and needs of modern society.

⁵⁹ Kusroni, "Mengenal Ragam Pendekatan, Metode, Dan Corak Dalam Penafsiran Al-Qur'an," *Jurnal Kaca Jurusan Ushuluddin STAI Al-Fitrah* 9, no. 1 (2019): 88.

⁶⁰ Kusroni, 92.

B. Characteristics of Contemporary Qur'anic Interpretation

The study of the Qur'an within the Islamic intellectual tradition continues to evolve, with each generation bearing the responsibility of revitalizing previous studies that may be considered outdated. The emergence of contemporary interpretation methods stems from concerns that overly textual interpretations of the Qur'an might neglect the historical context and circumstances in which the verses were revealed, which are essential aspects.

At first glance, contemporary interpretation does not appear very different from classical interpretation, as both focus on aligning the Qur'an's message with the time.⁶¹ The rise of contemporary tafsir reflects the theological belief of Muslims that the Qur'an will always remain relevant for every era and place. Muhammad Syahrur argues that the Qur'an must always be interpreted according to the demands and needs of the contemporary age faced by humanity. This requires the development of new methodologies that adapt to changes in social, political, cultural, scientific, and civilizational contexts.⁶² As a result, contemporary interpretation methods are crucial in ensuring that the Qur'an's messages can be applied in a relevant and meaningful way within the current context of human life.

Each method of interpretation naturally has its own characteristics. Fazlur Rahman emphasized that contemporary interpretation must be contextual to address the pressing issues of today. Contextual meaning here refers to

⁶¹ Maolidya Asri Siwi Fangesty, Nurwadjah Ahmad, and R Edi Komarudin, "Karakteristik dan Model Tafsir Kontemporer" 3, no. 1 (2024): 3, <https://journal.uinsgd.ac.id/index.php/mashadiruna>.

⁶² Sun Choirol Ummah, "Metode Tafsir Kontemporer Abdullah Saeed," *Humanika* 18, no. 2 (2019): 127, <https://doi.org/10.21831/hum.v18i2.29241>.

interpretation that aligns with the current situation. Despite paying close attention to the present context, contemporary interpretation also considers past meanings and their implications for the future. This means that contemporary tafsir not only takes into account the historical context of when the verses were revealed but also considers their functional meaning in today's context, while attempting to forecast meanings that might be relevant in the future.⁶³ Thus, contemporary tafsir offers a more holistic and progressive perspective on understanding the Qur'an, combining historical, contemporary, and forward-looking dimensions.

In the context of the characteristics of contemporary Qur'anic interpretation discussed earlier, it is important to delve deeper into the impact of this approach on understanding specific verses of the Qur'an, particularly the interpretation of the Sword Verse. One interesting aspect is how contemporary tafsir perspectives, such as those introduced by Abdel Haleem in *Understanding the Qur'an* and *Exploring the Qur'an*, analyze common misinterpretations made by Orientalists. A thorough understanding of the historical and social context is crucial in avoiding misinterpretations that can occur.

According to Haleem, the misinterpretation of the "Sword Verse" by orientalist stems from their narrow view of sacred texts, often neglecting the relevant cultural and historical context. In interpreting the Qur'an, it is essential to consider more than just the textual aspect, such as the grammatical function of Qur'anic Arabic and the historical function of *asbāb al-nuzūl* (the reasons for revelation) of the "Sword Verse". The narrowness of the orientalist interpretation

⁶³ Asri Siwi Fangesty, Ahmad, and Edi Komarudin, "Karakteristik Dan Model Tafsir Kontemporer," 56.

is due to the gap between their perspective and the horizon of the Qur'an.⁶⁴ By applying the characteristics of contemporary tafsir, this study emphasizes the importance of understanding the "Sword Verse" in its proper context, not merely in a literal sense or without deep consideration of the historical situation in which the verse was revealed.

The characteristics of Haleem's interpretation show that he employs a hermeneutic approach in his interpretive work. Although hermeneutics originated in the West and was initially used to interpret the Bible, it has successfully been adopted and applied in Qur'anic interpretation. The use of hermeneutics in Islam often sparks debate. Supporters view hermeneutics as a new methodological approach that complements traditional methods. They believe that applying hermeneutics to the Qur'an can ensure its relevance across various situations and contexts. On the other hand, critics argue that hermeneutics, being rooted in Western traditions, does not fit the Qur'an, which originates from an Eastern tradition.⁶⁵

Despite this debate, Sahiron Syamsuddin, in his book *Hermeneutika dan Pengembangan Ulumul Qur'an*, suggests that doubts about hermeneutics can be addressed with the argument that, although most Muslims believe the Qur'an is the literal word of God (verbatim from Allah), while Christians believe the Bible is God's word conveyed through inspiration, both scriptures use human language to convey divine messages. This human language can be analyzed through

⁶⁴ Haleem, *Exploring the Qur'an: Context and Impact*, 7–8.

⁶⁵ M. Miski et al., "Hermeneutika Sebagai Metode Tafsir: Mengurai Konstruksi Pengetahuan Generasi Z Kota Malang," *Khazanah Theologia* 3, no. 1 (2021): 58, <https://doi.org/10.15575/kt.v3i1.11204>.

hermeneutics as well as *Ulūmul Qur‘an* (the sciences of the Qur‘an). Therefore, some methods of interpretation in hermeneutics and *Ulūmul Qur‘an* can be integrated and unified.⁶⁶

C. The Discourse on the “Sword Verse” in Qur‘anic Interpretation

The term “Sword Verse” in the Qur‘an refers to verses that command warfare, aligning with the historical context where battles were fought with swords. This term became common as scholars often referred to these verses as “Sword Verses” rather than “*jihād* verses”. While some may use terms like “*qitāl* verse” (fighting) or “killing verse”, these are less frequent compared to the use of “Sword Verse”.⁶⁷

The origin of the term “Sword Verse” can be traced back to Qatadah bin Di‘amah as-Saddusi, who mentioned that certain extraordinary verses abrogate multiple others at once. Although Qatadah did not explicitly label the verses as “Sword Verses,” he referred to specific verses of war, particularly 9:5, 9:29, and 9:36 from Surah At-Tawbah.⁶⁸ While many verses discuss warfare, the most well-known “Sword Verse” is Surah At-Tawbah 9:5.

In his dissertation, “Kontroversi Penganuliran Ayat-ayat Damai dengan Ayat Pedang dalam Al-Qur‘an: Kajian Analitis Kritis” (*The Controversy of the Abrogation of Peace Verses by the Sword Verse in the Qur‘an: An Analytical-Critical Study*), Wardani categorizes sword verses as follows:

⁶⁶ Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika Dan Pengembangan Ulumul Quran (Edisi Revisi Dan Perluasan)* (Yogyakarta: Pesantren Nawasea Press, 2017), 7.

⁶⁷ Moh. Nailul Muna, “Konsep Naskh Ayat Damai dengan Ayat Pedang (Studi Komparatif Tafsīr Jalālain dan Tafsīr Marāḥ Labīd)” (UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2019), 15.

⁶⁸ Wardani, “Kekerasan atas Nama Al-Qur‘an: Penganuliran Ayat-Ayat Damai dengan Ayat Pedang dan Pengaruhnya dalam Formasi Fiqh,” *Ilmu Ushuluddin* 10, no. 1 (2011): 124.

1. **Verses on warfare due to broken peace treaties** by certain polytheists, which are seen as a command or obligation.
2. **Verses seen as having a higher status**, often regarded as abrogating earlier peace verses, representing the strongest stance against non-Muslims.
3. **Target groups** of these commands include polytheists, disbelievers, hypocrites, and *Ahl al-Kitāb* (People of the Book), as well as *bughāt* (rebellious Muslims), which remains a topic of debate in classical *fiqh*.⁶⁹

Among these categories, the 9:5 verse is often misunderstood, particularly by Western Orientalists. Michael Cook, for example, argues that the verse promotes violence by instructing Muslims to fight polytheists unless they convert, which he sees as proof of Islam's intolerance towards other faiths.⁷⁰ This misinterpretation prompted Abdel Haleem to offer his correct understanding of the "Sword Verse" in his works *Understanding the Qur'an* and *Exploring the Qur'an*.

Haleem emphasizes the need to consider various aspects beyond just the textual level when interpreting verses, including the "Sword Verse" in Qur'an 9:5. According to him, a more nuanced understanding can be achieved by examining the historical context and the grammatical structure of the verse. Thus, this study explores Abdel Haleem's thoughts on the correct interpretation of the "Sword Verse", drawing from his two books and applying hermeneutical theory. The study will delve into Haleem's writings to deeply investigate the psychological and

⁶⁹ Muna, "Konsep Naskh Ayat Damai dengan Ayat Pedang (Studi Komparatif Tafsir Jalālain dan Tafsir Marāḥ Labīd)," 15–16.

⁷⁰ Haleem, *Exploring the Qur'an: Context and Impact*, 7.

contextual factors influencing his interpretive approach, aiming to uncover the true meaning of the “Sword Verse” that Haleem seeks to reactualize.

CHAPTER III

FINDING AND RESULT

A. Construction of Muhammad Abdel Haleem’s Thoughts on the “Sword Verse” in the *Understanding the Qur’an* and *Exploring the Qur’an*

1. Biography of Muhammad Abdel Haleem

a. Birth and Educational Background

Muhammad Abdel Haleem is a prominent Egyptian Muslim scholar, born in 1930.⁷¹ From a young age, Haleem showed a strong interest in learning and memorizing the Qur’an. He successfully completed memorizing the Qur’an by the age of 11. With this foundation, Haleem continued his education at Al-Azhār University in Cairo, one of the world’s leading institutions for Islamic and Arabic studies, where memorizing the Qur’an is a requirement for admission. After earning his degree from Al-Azhār University, he pursued his PhD at the University of Cambridge, England. Even before graduating from Cambridge, Haleem began teaching at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies), where he has been based since October 1971.⁷²

In addition to being a senior lecturer at SOAS (1991-1995), Muhammad Abdel Haleem is also recognized as a Professor of Islamic Studies at King Fahd University (1995). In 1996, he became the founding Director of the Centre for Islamic Studies, and the following year, in 1997, he established and

⁷¹ Ibrahim, *A Concise Guide to the Quran: Answering Thirty Critical Questions*, 81.

⁷² University of London, “Promoting Inter-Faith Understanding Worldwide through an Accessible Translation of the Qur’an (Muhammad Abdel Haleem),” 1.

became the first Editor of the *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*.⁷³ Due to his significant contributions, Haleem was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Islamic Studies by the University of Jordan, as well as the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2008 for his services to the development of Arab culture, literature, and interfaith understanding.⁷⁴ In addition to his mastery of Arabic, Haleem has a deep interest in English lexicography and Qur'anic studies,⁷⁵ which motivated him to translate the Qur'an into English.

Abdel Haleem's translation of the Qur'an, titled *The Qur'an*, was first published in 2004 by Oxford University Press. In 2010, *The Qur'an* was revised to include the Arabic text alongside the translation. This addition was made in response to requests from readers, particularly from the Muslim community. Haleem explained the purpose of writing *The Qur'an* in the Introduction chapter of the book.

“It is written in a modern, easy style, avoiding where possible the use of cryptic language or archaisms that tend to obscure meaning. The intention is to make the Qur'an accessible to everyone who speaks English, Muslims or otherwise, including the millions of people all over the world for whom the English language has become a lingua franca. The message of the Qur'an was, after all, directly addressed to all people without distinction as to class, gender, or age: it does not rely on archaisms or pompous language for effect.”⁷⁶

Thus, Haleem aims not only to create a bridge for a deeper understanding of the Qur'an but also to contribute to interfaith dialogue and enhance Islamic literacy in the English-speaking world.

⁷³ Shah, “A Critical Study of Abdel Haleem's New Translation of the Holy Qur'an,” 4.

⁷⁴ University of London, “SOAS Academic Awarded an OBE in Queen's Birthday Honours.”

⁷⁵ Shah, “A Critical Study of Abdel Haleem's New Translation of the Holy Qur'an,” 4.

⁷⁶ Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), xxix, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315414775-4>.

In addition to *The Qur'an*, Haleem has written many other notable works related to the translation and interpretation of the Qur'an. Two of these are the books *Understanding the Qur'an* and *Exploring the Qur'an*, which contain Haleem's ideas on the interpretation of several verses he considers controversial. Additionally, his articles have been published in various journals, including the *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, *Islamic Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*.⁷⁷

b. His Published Works

On the SOAS University of London webpage about Muhammad Abdel Haleem, his publications are divided into several sections. In the section of books he has written, there are a total of 10 books, including *Structure, Coherence and Rhetoric in the Qur'an*, *Exploring the Qur'an: Context and Impact*, *The Qur'an: English Translation with Parallel Arabic Text*, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage*, *The Qur'an: A New Translation*, *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style*, *Chance or Creation? God's Design in the Universe*, *English-Arabic Business Dictionary*, *The Superiority of Dogs over Many of Those Who Wear Clothes* (Edition, Translation, and Introduction), and *The Creed of Islam*.

There are also 23 listed articles, some of which are *Water in the Qur'an*, *Grammatical Shift for Rhetorical Purposes: Iltifat and Related Features in the Qur'an*, *Adam and Eve in the Bible and the Qur'an*, *The Role of Context in Interpreting and Translating the Qur'an*, *A Perennial Challenge to Belief in*

⁷⁷ Shah, "A Critical Study of Abdel Haleem's New Translation of the Holy Qur'an," 3-4.

Resurrection: Surat Qāf (Q. 50), and others. Additionally, there are four books edited by Haleem, including *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, *The Moral World of the Qur'an*, and *Criminal Justice in Islam: Judicial Procedure in the Shāri'a*.

Furthermore, Haleem frequently contributes chapters to books, as shown on the SOAS University of London page. In the Book Chapter section, there are 30 chapters listed. These include *The "Sword Verse" Myth* and *Qur'anic Paradise*, which are featured in Part 1 of his book *Exploring the Qur'an*. Additionally, Haleem gave a speech titled *Problems of Translation* at the 90th Conference of the Arabic Language Academy on April 28, 2024, and has also spoken on topics such as *Greening the Hajj* and *Translating the Qur'an*.⁷⁸

2. *Understanding the Qur'an* and *Exploring the Qur'an* Book

a. Profile of the Book *Understanding the Qur'an*

Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style is a work by Muhammad Abdel Haleem, first published by I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd in 1999. Haleem wrote *Understanding the Qur'an* in response to Western orientalist studies that failed to grasp the message of the Qur'an. These scholars believed that the teachings of the Qur'an were merely a collection of borrowed ideas, resulting in a confusing and directionless message.

“Many English studies of the Qur'an tend to regard it as nothing more than a jumble of borrowed and rambling thoughts with no sense of direction. This approach has resulted in a series of unstudied theories which, instead of mapping out the Qur'anic world, have added more confused ideas to an already confused comprehension.”⁷⁹

⁷⁸ University of London, “Professor Muhammad AS Abdel Haleem, OBE.”

⁷⁹ Haleem, *Understanding The Qur'an: Themes and Style*, vii.

Through *Understanding the Qur'an*, Haleem hopes to assist readers and scholars in understanding the Qur'an using three approaches he combines: thematic, stylistic, and a comparative analysis between the Qur'an and the Bible.⁸⁰

Thematic study of the Qur'an is a relatively new approach in the Western world. This method gained popularity after scholars realized that a thematic approach could provide a more balanced perspective on specific topics in the Qur'an. In 1976, Fazlur Rahman observed that there was an urgent need to study certain themes within the Qur'an. In his book *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, Rahman highlighted several key themes such as God, the individual, humanity in society, the universe, and more. Recognizing this, Haleem sought to make *Understanding the Qur'an* a step toward this direction. The themes in his book were chosen from contemporary issues that are often seriously misunderstood by Western orientalist, such as the topics of war, marriage, and tolerance in the Qur'an. Haleem believes that these themes need to be explored more deeply and accurately.⁸¹

In addition to thematic analysis, *Understanding the Qur'an* also discusses the style of the Qur'an. Haleem emphasizes that explaining themes in the context of the Qur'an's linguistic style not only helps communicate its message effectively but also introduces readers to the core teachings of

⁸⁰ Haleem, vii.

⁸¹ Haleem, vii.

Islam.⁸² For instance, in chapter 13, titled “Dynamic Style”, the book elaborates on the importance of understanding the features of Qur’anic style in order to achieve a complete understanding. What some might perceive as poor grammar is actually an established and effective feature in Arabic literary writing.⁸³

Apart from misconceptions about its style, the Qur’an is also often labeled as a copy or adaptation of Jewish or Christian teachings. To address this, Haleem uses a comparative approach, highlighting differences between similar themes in the Qur’an and the Bible.⁸⁴ These differences cover a wide range of topics, from stories to laws in both scriptures. Examples include the rules of warfare, the treatment of prisoners of war, the concept of *jizya* (a tax for non-Muslims), and the creation story of Adam and Eve, their sin in Paradise, and their descent to Earth. The comparative analysis in this book is intended solely to clarify the Qur’an’s perspectives and approach. Ultimately, Haleem stresses that the Qur’an is capable of speaking for itself regarding the controversial subjects surrounding it.

b. Profile of the Book *Exploring the Qur’an*

Exploring the Qur’an: Context and Impact is a book that challenges the portrayal of the Qur’an by many Western writers, as well as by some Muslim

⁸² Sabrina Nurhasanah, “Kisah Al-Quran dalam Perspektif M.A.S Abdel Haleem: Studi Interpretasi Intertekstual dalam Understanding The Qur’an : Themes And Style” (Uin Sunan Ampel Surabaya, 2023), 38.

⁸³ Haleem, *Understanding The Qur’an: Themes and Style*, viii.

⁸⁴ Haleem, viii.

scholars—both classical and modern, especially modern Muslim extremists. These interpretations often fail to fully grasp the Qur'an's meaning because they neglect important aspects such as context, style, and rhetoric. Moreover, these interpreters often impose Arabic grammar and rhetoric directly onto English, resulting in translations that appear literal and flat due to the lack of stylistic adaptation.

“They often force norms of Arabic grammar and rhetoric on to the English, producing an Arabised, rather than an eloquent English translation, while also disregarding the power of the original Arabic. Sometimes they overlook the Qur'anic text and base their views on the tradition of exegesis (*tafsīr*) or images and ideas that have accumulated in the West over centuries.”⁸⁵

In response to this issue, Haleem addresses these concerns through this book. *Exploring the Qur'an*, first published by I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd in 2017, delves into elements that have been overlooked by such writers. To achieve a complex interpretation, Haleem focuses closely on the Qur'anic text itself, considering its context, style, and how its messages were traditionally conveyed. However, it's important to note that the book is not written to undermine Western or Muslim scholars who have contributed valuable insights that enrich readers' understanding of the Qur'an.

The book is organized into 13 chapters, divided into three categories: teachings, style, and impact. The first section (Chapters 1–4) explores several controversial issues. The second section (Chapters 5–10) addresses questions often leading to misunderstandings due to the Qur'an's writing style. The third section (Chapters 11–13) discusses the impact of the Qur'an on both Muslims

⁸⁵ Haleem, *Exploring the Qur'an: Context and Impact*, 1.

and non-Muslims. Haleem selected these issues because they are frequently highlighted by Western writers in their discussions of the Qur'an.⁸⁶

One notable example is the discussion of the "Sword Verse" in the first chapter. Here, Haleem reveals widespread misunderstandings and myths surrounding this verse. These myths arose because interpreters have focused on a single verse, isolating it from the surrounding verses and the historical context in which it was revealed. As a result, there is confusion about its true meaning. In reality, no one lost their life because of this verse when it was first revealed. Unfortunately, for the sake of debate and controversy, the original message conveyed by the Qur'an is often ignored.⁸⁷

In general, this book highlights how, for various reasons, the true essence of the Qur'an is often overlooked, leading to inaccurate interpretations. These misinterpretations have been passed down through generations, hindering a deeper understanding of the Qur'an. To provide a more complete view, Haleem often includes direct quotations from Qur'anic verses, allowing the Qur'an to explain itself more fully.

B. Muhammad Abdel Haleem's Interpretation of the "Sword Verse" in

Understanding the Qur'an and Exploring the Qur'an

The "Sword Verse" is the popular name for verse 5 of Surah At-Tawbah. This verse is called the "Sword Verse" because it contains a command to fight against the polytheists offensively. How this verse is understood can shape non-Muslims'

⁸⁶ Haleem, 2.

⁸⁷ Haleem, 2.

views of Islam,⁸⁸ and it is often cited by propagandists, Western scholars, and even extremist Muslims. As Muhammad Abdel Haleem mentions in *Exploring the Qur'an*, Michael Cook, a well-known Western orientalist, translates At-Tawbah:5 as follows:

“Then, when the sacred months are drawn away, slay the polytheists wherever you find them, and take them, and confine them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they repent, and perform the prayer, and pay the alms, then let them go their way: God is All-forgiving, All-compassionate.”

Then, Cook interprets the verse as follows:

“In other words, you should kill the polytheists unless they convert. A polytheist (*mushrik*) is anyone who makes anyone or anything a ‘partner’ (*sharik*) with God; the term extends to Jews and Christians, indeed to unbelievers.”⁸⁹

Abdel Haleem states that Michael Cook's interpretation of the verse, if followed, would lead to significant misunderstanding, especially in the Western world. According to Haleem, a closer examination of the verse shows that it refers only to a specific group of people, not to Jews, Christians, or all non-believers as Cook suggests in his interpretation. This kind of misunderstanding has contributed to the distortion of the concept of war in Islam, as it is outlined in the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*.

In his discussion, Cook uses 9:5 to compare Qur'anic interpretation with the Western axiom that religious beliefs of others must be tolerated and respected.⁹⁰ In his discussion, Cook uses 9:5 to compare Qur'anic interpretation with the Western axiom that religious beliefs of others must be tolerated and respected. Abdel

⁸⁸ Ulummudin, “Tafsir atas ‘Ayat Pedang’ Q.S. Al-Taubah (9): 5: Studi Komparatif Penafsiran Sayyid Qutub dan Rasyid Ridha,” *Al-Tadabbur : Jurnal Ilmu Al- Qur ' an Dan Tafsir*, 2022, 230, <https://doi.org/10.30868/at.v7i0>.

⁸⁹ Michael Cook, *The Koran: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford, 2000), 34.

⁹⁰ Cook, 33.

Haleem emphasizes that there is no verse in the Qur'an that justifies forcing people to change their religion or initiating war. The Qur'an clearly states that there is no compulsion in religion (2:256). He also points out that humanity will always differ (11:118), with different religions and ways of life, and this is a reality that cannot be changed (5:48). Allah also tells the Prophet that most people will not believe "even if you are eager that they should" (12:103).⁹¹ However, despite these verses, criticism of Islam continues to spread widely.

In *Exploring the Qur'an*, Haleem references the criticism made by Pope Benedict XVI during his lecture in Regensburg, where the Pope quoted Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 2:256:⁹²

"...surah 2:256 reads: '*There is no compulsion in religion*'. According to the experts, this is one of the suras of the early period, when Mohammed was still powerless and under threat. But naturally the emperor also knew the instructions, developed later and recorded in the Qur'an, concerning holy war."

According to Pope Benedict XVI, this verse (2:256) shows that Islam values religious freedom, as it was revealed during the early stages of Islam, when the Prophet Muhammad was in a vulnerable position and facing threats. Additionally, he emphasized that Islamic teachings on religious freedom and holy war evolved over time, depending on the situational context, demonstrating flexibility in how threats and differing beliefs were addressed.

The "Sword Verse", often used to justify fighting non-believers, has long been exploited by both Western and Muslim writers from the past and present. It is also frequently cited to justify the views and actions of Muslim extremists and

⁹¹ Haleem, *Understanding The Qur'an: Themes and Style*, 61.

⁹² Haleem, *Exploring the Qur'an: Context and Impact*, 8.

terrorists. Therefore, in his books *Understanding the Qur'an* and *Exploring the Qur'an*, Haleem provides an in-depth analysis of the interpretation of the “Sword Verse” by writers such as Michael Cook, a modern British scholar, and Ibn Salāma, a 15th-century Muslim writer.

Haleem explained in his book that Hibatullah Ibn Salāma supports an extreme view on abrogation (*nasikh-mansukh*), claiming that the “Sword Verse” (Q.S. 9:5) abrogates approximately 124 verses that advocate for patience, tolerance, and kindness towards others. Ibn Salāma mentions several examples, such as the command to speak kindly to others (Q.S. 2:83) and not to grieve over disbelievers (Q.S. 15:88), as verses replaced by the “Sword Verse’s” instruction to fight polytheists. He even considers verses about showing mercy to those who seek protection (Q.S. 9:6) and the peace treaty with those who remain loyal (Q.S. 9:7) to be abrogated by the “Sword Verse’s” command. This approach illustrates how Ibn Salāma disregards historical context and textual nuances in his interpretation, choosing to read these verses as universal commands for warfare. Many scholars view this perspective as extreme, as the “Sword Verse” is considered relevant only in specific situations, not as a negation of peaceful teachings.⁹³

Therefore to remove those misunderstanding, Haleem argues in his book that the term “Sword Verse” is nothing more than a myth, deliberately created and maintained. Furthermore, he shows that anti-Islam polemicists and propagandists share the same foundational thinking as Islamic extremists and terrorists in this context.

⁹³ Haleem, 23–25.

1. Historical Background of the “Sword Verse”

The first step Haleem mentions to gain a comprehensive understanding of the “Sword Verse” is to consider the aspects involving the transmission, journey, and arrival of the Qur’an from Allah to the Prophet Muhammad. It is known that the Qur’an is defined by scholars as the word of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through the Jibrīl.⁹⁴ The word “revealed” indicates that the Qur’an underwent a process to reach the Prophet Muhammad. The Qur’an did not descend suddenly without any socio-cultural events triggering it. The events that caused the verses of the Qur’an to be revealed are referred to as *asbāb al-nuzūl*.⁹⁵ Haleem states that the *asbāb al-nuzūl* of this verse can be traced through intertextual analysis of the previous verses. From this, it can be understood that this verse relates to a violation of a treaty by the polytheists of the *Quraysh* of Mecca against the Muslims. The treaty in question is the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah, which took place in the 6th year of Hijrah.⁹⁶

Initially, the Prophet Muhammad, along with about 1.500 of his followers, left Medina to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca.⁹⁷ However, since the polytheists of Mecca refused, the Prophet Muhammad sent Uthman ibn Affan as a delegate to explain their intentions for coming to Mecca. After lengthy negotiations, it was agreed that the Muslims would not be allowed to perform Umrah that year but would return the following year to carry out the pilgrimage. The residents of

⁹⁴ Shafwatul Bary and Zakirman Zakirman, “Hermeneutika Friedrich D.E. Schleiermacher sebagai Metode Tafsir Al-Qur’an (Kajian Ayat Iklās; Jilbāb; Sayyārah; Dan Al-Hudā),” *Journal of Qur’an and Hadith Studies* 9, no. 1 (2020): 58, <https://doi.org/10.15408/quhas.v9i1.15209>.

⁹⁵ Bary and Zakirman, 58.

⁹⁶ Haleem, *Exploring the Qur’an: Context and Impact*, 8.

⁹⁷ Ahmad al-Usaury, *Sejarah Islam: Sejak Nabi Adam Hingga Abad XX*, Terj. Samson Rahman (Jakarta: Akbar Media, 2013), 121.

Mecca did not want it to appear that they were forced to allow the Muslims to enter Mecca and perform the pilgrimage.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the Prophet did not give up and wanted to continue discussions with the *Quraysh* envoy to resolve the misunderstanding. Finally, the *Quraysh* sent their envoy, named Suhayl ibn Amr.⁹⁹

From the meeting between the Prophet Muhammad and Suhayl ibn Amr, the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah was born, which was agreed upon by both parties. This treaty essentially contained four main points as follows:¹⁰⁰

- a. The Muslims and the polytheists of *Quraysh* agreed to a ceasefire for 10 years, starting from the day the treaty was agreed upon and signed.
- b. Polytheists from *Quraysh* who wished to embrace Islam and join the Prophet in Medina must obtain permission from their guardians; otherwise, they must be returned. Conversely, if any Muslims wanted to return to Mecca with the polytheists, they would be allowed and not returned.
- c. No one should obstruct any tribe that wishes to ally with either party.
- d. For that year, the Prophet and the Muslims were not allowed to perform the pilgrimage in Mecca. However, in the following year, they were permitted to return, provided they stayed in Mecca for three days and did not carry any weapons.

⁹⁸ Haleem, *Exploring the Qur'an: Context and Impact*, 8.

⁹⁹ Agus Wahid, *Perjanjian Hudaibiyah: Telaah Diplomasi Muhammad Saw* (Jakarta: Grafikatama Jaya, 1991), 46–51.

¹⁰⁰ Ulummudin, "Tafsir Kontemporer Atas 'Ayat Pedang' Q.S. Al-Taubah (9): 5-6: Perspektif Hermeneutika Jorge J.E. Gracia," *Journal of Islam and Plurality* 4, no. 2 (2019): 222.

One of the agreements stated that there should be no war between the two parties for 10 years. However, just two years after the agreement, the *Quraysh* violated it by provoking an incident that led to war.¹⁰¹ The *Quraysh* broke the treaty by supporting the Banu Bakr with troops and weapons to attack and kill several members of the Banu Khuzā'ah (allies of the Muslims), even though the Banu Khuzā'ah had sought refuge at the Ka'bah. The Banu Khuzā'ah sent a delegation to the Prophet to inform him that the people of Mecca had violated the agreement and killed some of their members at the "Sacred Place" while they were kneeling and prostrating in prayer. Despite the *Quraysh's* violation of the treaty, the Prophet did not immediately attack them. Instead, the *Quraysh* were given four months to decide whether they would continue to resist or surrender, in accordance with the verse in the Qur'an (9:2). According to the interpretation by al-Maragiy, the four sacred months referred to in the verse began from the 10th of Dhū al-Ḥijjah in 9 AH to the 10th of Rabī' al-Tsāniy in 10 AH.¹⁰²

After the four-month period ended and the polytheists were still unwilling to make peace, the Qur'an permitted the Muslims to fight the *Quraysh* polytheists of Mecca in response to the violation of the Ḥudaybiyyah agreement (9:5).¹⁰³ In *Exploring the Qur'an*, Haleem even includes a warning issued by the Prophet's messenger when the polytheists were nearing Mecca:

“Whoever stays in his house is safe, whoever enters Abu Sufyan's house is safe, whoever enters the Sanctuary is safe.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ al-Usairy, *Sejarah Islam: Sejak Nabi Adam Hingga Abad XX*, Terj. Samson Rahman, 121.

¹⁰² Ulummudin, “Tafsir Kontemporer Atas ‘Ayat Pedang’ Q.S. Al-Taubah (9): 5-6: Perspektif Hermeneutika Jorge J.E. Gracia,” 223.

¹⁰³ Ulummudin, 224.

¹⁰⁴ Haleem, *Exploring the Qur'an: Context and Impact*, 9.

From this statement, it can be concluded that the Prophet and the Muslims never called on the polytheists of Mecca to enter the Islamic faith or forced them to believe in Allah and abandon their idols to avoid war. When performing the pilgrimage, the Prophet chose Aliy bin Abiy Ṭālib as a delegate to deliver an ultimatum to the people of Mecca, as mentioned in 9:3. At that time, Ali conveyed four points that the Prophet had instructed him to share. *First*, after that year, no polytheist should perform the pilgrimage. *Second*, no one should perform *ṭawāf* (circumambulation) around the Ka’bah naked, which was a custom of some polytheists. *Third*, only believers would enter paradise. *Fourth*, all conditions of any agreement must be fulfilled.¹⁰⁵

Based on the previous explanation, it can be concluded that according to Abdel Haleem’s thinking, a comprehensive understanding of the “Sword Verse” must consider the historical context surrounding its revelation, namely the Ḥudaybiyyah Agreement between the Muslims and the *Quraysh* polytheists of Mecca. Initially, this agreement was made to avoid conflict and maintain the safety of both parties, even though some of its points were more disadvantageous to the Prophet and the Muslims. One important agreement was the ceasefire for ten years. However, when the *Quraysh* violated this agreement by supporting an attack against the Muslim allies, this became the trigger for the revelation of the verse commanding war in response to the aggression. Nevertheless, the Prophet still offered protection and safety to the *Quraysh* who were not involved in the conflict. This, according to Haleem, demonstrates that Islam prioritizes a peaceful

¹⁰⁵ Haleem, 10.

approach, and war is only chosen as a last resort after diplomatic efforts have failed.

2. Linguistic Aspects of the “Sword Verse”

In his attempt to reinterpret the “Sword Verse”, Haleem emphasizes not only the historical context but also pays special attention to the linguistic context behind the verse. Extremists, terrorists, and propagandists often use interpretative strategies that ignore this context to manipulate Qur’anic verses for their own purposes. The interpretations they produce are often misleading and contradict proper linguistic norms.¹⁰⁶ In his discussion, Haleem uses Arberry’s translation, which Michael Cook also uses when interpreting the Qur’an.

a. ***“Then, when the sacred months are drawn away, slay the polytheists”***

In Haleem’s interpretative construction, verse 9:5 must be understood by considering the surrounding verses. In verses 1-2, it mentions the annulment of the Hudaibiyyah treaty as *‘the treaty you [believers] made with the polytheists’*. The term *‘polytheists’* in this verse, according to Haleem, refers to what is mentioned in verse 5 as *‘the polytheists with whom you [the Muslims] made a treaty’*. He further explains that *‘you [polytheists] may move freely about the land for four months’*.¹⁰⁷ This, according to Haleem, shows that although the *Quraysh* polytheists violated the treaty, they were still given a four-month period to decide whether to continue opposing the Muslims or surrender. During these four months, the Muslims were not allowed to directly engage in combat with them.

¹⁰⁶ Haleem, 10–16. (Exploring the Qur’an). Selain itu lihat juga Haleem, *Understanding The Qur’an: Themes and Style*, 65–66.

¹⁰⁷ Haleem, *Exploring the Qur’an: Context and Impact*, 10.

Aside from giving time to the *Quraysh* polytheists, the Qur'an also advises them to repent, as explained in 9:3: *'It will be better for you if you repent.'* Even before the command to fight in the "Sword Verse", verse 4 already provides exceptions by saying:

*"those polytheists who honoured the treaty you made with them, and who have not supported others against you: fulfil your agreement with them to the end of the term. God loves those who are mindful of Him."*¹⁰⁸

Essentially, these verses already clarify that the command to fight the polytheists in verse 5 is specifically directed at those who broke the treaty and supported others in attacking the Muslims during the truce period. It is not a general order to fight the polytheists to force them to embrace Islam.

In *Understanding the Qur'an*, Haleem further links several other verses related to the call for war in the Qur'an. For example, in 2:191, it states: *'Slay them where you find them and expel them from where they expelled you; persecution [fitna] is worse than killing.'* Haleem explains that:

*"Thus the Qur'an simply gave the Muslims permission to fight those enemies, whether outside or inside Mecca, and assured them that the persecution that had been committed by the unbelievers against them for believing in God was more sinful than the Muslims killing those who attacked them, wherever they were."*¹⁰⁹

The resistance against the enemies of the Muslims is the key point that is similar to the command *'slay the polytheists wherever you find them'* in verse 5. For Haleem, the idea that Islam aims to convert the polytheists to faith is a misinterpretation, often brought up by Western orientalisks. Instead, the rising hostility between Muslims and polytheists was due to the polytheists' attempts to

¹⁰⁸ Haleem, 11.

¹⁰⁹ Haleem, *Understanding The Qur'an: Themes and Style*, 64.

force Muslims back into paganism, while continuously violating existing treaties. In this context, Muslims were commanded to respond similarly, by fighting or driving them out as a response to the real threat.¹¹⁰ Therefore, the command to fight them was not an act of aggression without reason but a response to a direct threat that endangered the stability and safety of the Muslim community.

Moreover, from Haleem's analysis, the term *al-mushrikīn* in verse 5 refers specifically to the polytheists mentioned in verses 1-4. The definite article *al* (ال) in *al-mushrikīn* is *al-ahdiyyah* according to Arabic grammar rules. *Al-ahdiyyah* indicates specificity, while its opposite, *al-jinsiyyah*, indicates generality. Cook misunderstood the term *al-mushrikīn* in verse 5 because he did not grasp the correct usage of *al-ahdiyya* within that word. He relied only on the English translation without paying attention to the Arabic grammatical context of the verse.¹¹¹ In reality, if we examine it more deeply, all the verses surrounding the "Sword Verse" are interconnected and provide a clearer, more complete interpretation. Therefore, a thorough understanding of the grammatical context and the interrelation of the verses is essential to avoid misinterpretation that could obscure the true meaning of the Qur'anic verses.

Another important point to consider is the announcement of the four sacred months, during which Muslims were not allowed to fight the polytheists. According to Haleem, the sacred months mentioned in verse 5 began on the 9th day of Dhū al-Ḥijjah, also known as 'the day of the Great Pilgrimage.' This

¹¹⁰ Haleem, 65.

¹¹¹ Haleem, *Exploring the Qur'an: Context and Impact*, 11.

indicates that the treaty covered the remaining days of Dhū al-Ḥijjah that year (9 AH) and the month of Muḥarram in the following Hijri year (10 AH), which are part of the traditionally sacred months.¹¹² For the polytheists who had no treaty with the Prophet, the grace period of not being fought during these sacred months ended in Muḥarram, about 50 days after the announcement was made. This was due to the already established sacred months from the pre-Islamic period, namely Rajab, Dhū al-Qi'dah, Dhū al-Ḥijjah, and Muḥarram.¹¹³ This interpretation is what Cook believed. However, in verse 5, the four sacred months mentioned actually continue until the 10th of Rabī' al-Thāniy 10 AH, meaning they extend beyond the commonly recognized sacred months.¹¹⁴ Thus, it is crucial to ensure the correct translation of the Arabic Qur'anic text.

Similarly, Haleem points out that Cook's next mistake is interpreting the command '*kill the polytheists*' as an absolute obligation that must be fulfilled by Muslims once the four sacred months are over. In Arabic linguistics and Islamic jurisprudence, the imperative form can carry a broad range of meanings such as command, permission, advice, or encouragement. In verse 5, the imperative form used actually indicates permission, which aligns with a principle of *uṣuliyyah* (Islamic legal theory):¹¹⁵

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“Any command that follows a prohibition is considered permissible (*mubāḥ*).”

¹¹² Haleem, 11.

¹¹³ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an Vol. 5* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 504.

¹¹⁴ Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir Ath-Thabari, *Tafsir Ath-Thabari Vol. 12*, trans. Abdul Shomad et al. (Jakarta: Pustaka Azzam, 2009), 523.

¹¹⁵ Haleem, *Exploring the Qur'an: Context and Impact*, 12.

This principle means that when a command comes after a prohibition, the action that was previously prohibited returns to its original ruling, which is permission, rather than becoming obligatory. To make this clearer, Haleem gives an example: the command to eat and drink at night after fasting during the day. This action, while allowed, is not mandatory but simply returns to its initial state, where eating and drinking are permitted.¹¹⁶ In the same way, the end of the four sacred months does not signal that Muslims must begin fighting the polytheists; rather, it restores the original state where war is permitted, not mandatory.

b. “*wherever you find them, and take them, and confine them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush*”

Another point that Haleem corrected in Cook’s interpretation is the phrase ‘*wherever you find them*’, which, according to Haleem, actually means ‘*inside or outside the Sanctuary*’. Similarly, the phrase ‘*confine them*’ should be understood as ‘*restrict their movement*’, or in other words, prevent the polytheists from entering the “Sacred Land” or Muslim territories. Haleem relates this to the use of the word ‘*uhşirtum*’ (you are prevented/obstructed) in 2:196, which commands Muslims to complete their *Hajj* or *Umrah* for Allah. However, if they are prevented from doing so (due to being obstructed by enemies), they are required to offer a sacrifice according to their means. Therefore, in 2:196, the word *ha-şara* in ‘*uhşirtum*’ means Muslims being prevented from entering the Sacred Land. In the context of the “Sword Verse”, Haleem interprets this word to mean preventing polytheists from entering the same land. Additionally, the translation

¹¹⁶ Haleem, 12.

of 'lie in wait for them at every place of ambush' should be interpreted as 'sit watching for them at every lookout post', which is consistent with any nation's right to monitor and safeguard against the movements of enemies entering their territory.¹¹⁷

A significant error highlighted by Haleem regarding the "Sword Verse" is the use of the word 'wa' (وَ) translated as merely 'and'. The Qur'an says: 'and take them, and confine them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush', but this does not mean that Muslims are commanded to simultaneously kill, capture, and detain polytheists. Haleem explains that 'wa' (وَ) should be interpreted as 'or' in this Arabic grammatical context. This aligns with Adrian Gully, in *Grammar and Semantics in Medieval Arabic*, explains about Ibn Hisham's discussions in *Mughni al-Labib*. Ibn Hisham argues that the conjunction 'wa' (وَ), typically meaning "and," can also imply "or" depending on context and stylistic needs. He illustrates how 'wa' (وَ) may convey an alternative meaning in certain Qur'anic verses, reflecting the interpretative flexibility of Arabic in these contexts.¹¹⁸

Therefore, Cook's literal interpretation creates an impression of persecution endorsed by the Qur'an, whereas the Qur'an actually presents a series of options for Muslims to avoid unnecessary killing.¹¹⁹ This according to Quraish Shihab in

¹¹⁷ Haleem, 12.

¹¹⁸ Adrian Gully, *Grammar and Semantics in Medieval Arabic: A Study of Ibn-Hisham's "Mughni l-Labib"* (Curzon Press Ltd, 1995), https://books.google.co.id/books?id=i-4pvHWislwC&printsec=frontcover&hl=id&source=gbs_ViewAPI&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false.

¹¹⁹ Haleem, *Exploring the Qur'an: Context and Impact*, 13.

his tafsir *Al-Misbah*, the command to kill/slay in the “Sword Verse” is not an absolute obligation but rather permission, similar to the directive to capture or detain the polytheists. The response chosen may vary according to the attitude and behavior of each group of polytheists. The more severe the threat they pose, the harsher the sanction may be.¹²⁰

c. *“But if they repent, and perform the prayer, and pay the alms, then let them go their way: God is All-forgiving, All-compassionate.”*

In his explanation of the translation of verse 9:5, Haleem mentions that the phrase *‘if they repent...’* cannot be understood as an exception to the command to kill the polytheists at the start of the verse. In Arabic, the use of the word *‘in’* (إن) means *‘if’*, which is clearly different from Cook’s interpretation of *‘kill the polytheists unless they convert’*, since verse 9:5 does not use the word *‘illā’* (إلا), meaning *‘unless’*, or *‘hattā’* (حتى), meaning *‘until’*. Therefore, the verse, particularly the phrase *‘but if they repent, and perform the prayer...’* is actually meant to prevent Muslims from chasing or attacking polytheists who have repented, promised to fulfill their religious duties, and no longer oppose Islam.¹²¹ From Haleem’s interpretation, it is understood that this verse emphasizes peace and forbids aggressive actions against enemies who have committed to changing their behavior.

¹²⁰ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur’an Vol. 5*, 504.

¹²¹ Haleem, *Exploring the Qur’an: Context and Impact*, 13.

Additionally, at the end of verse 9:5, it says ‘*God is All-forgiving, All-compassionate*’, which indirectly means “you too should forgive them and not continue to pursue them”. Haleem’s interpretation is further supported by verse 9:11, which states:

“If they turn to God, keep up the prayer, and pay the prescribed alms, then they are your brothers in faith: We make the messages clear for people who are willing to learn.”

Polytheists who have repented and are fulfilling their religious duties properly are to be considered as brothers, and it is forbidden to oppress or pursue them with hostility. This verse provides a way for any polytheist who chooses to take that path.¹²² The same idea is also explained in verse 9:6, as follows:

“If any of the idolaters should seek your protection, Prophet, grant it to him so that he may hear the word of God, then take him to a place safe for him, for they are people who do not know.”

That verse disproves Cook’s interpretation of verse 5, which suggests a command to kill unless they believe, as verse 6 contradicts this. The important point Haleem highlights here is that after the “Sword Verse”, the Qur’an actually encourages offering protection to polytheists and ensuring their safe passage, without requiring them to convert to Islam first. This shows that Islam does not force belief, even in the context of war.¹²³

Haleem continues his interpretation through verses 7-13, which discuss how the polytheists violated the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, and therefore, Muslims are no longer obligated to honor the treaty. Verse 7, as Haleem explains, questions how there can be an agreement between God and His Messenger with the polytheists

¹²² Haleem, 14.

¹²³ Haleem, 14.

who have broken their promises. However, there is an exception for polytheists who have kept their promises, and Muslims are still obligated to honor agreements with them.¹²⁴ Verses 8-10 describe the evil actions and deceit of the polytheists against Muslims. They violated the treaty, insulted Islam, disregarded family ties, and obstructed Muslims from following God's path. These are the polytheists targeted in verse 9:5. However, in the following verses, such as 9:11-12, it is emphasized that if they repent, establish prayer, and pay zakat, they should be treated as brothers, and Muslims must refrain from hostility.¹²⁵

In conclusion, Haleem's interpretation of the "Sword Verse" cannot be understood as an absolute command to kill polytheists unless they believe, as Cook suggests. Instead, the phrase '*if they repent...*' is interpreted by Haleem as a way to prevent Muslims from fighting polytheists who have changed their ways and committed to fulfilling their religious duties. Moreover, the verses following the "Sword Verse", such as verses 6, 11, and 12, stress the importance of peace and protecting enemies who have repented, showing that the command to fight only applies to polytheists who violated the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah and continued to oppose Muslims.

C. Relevance of Muhammad Abdel Haleem's Interpretation of the "Sword Verse" in the Context of Classical Interpretation (Tafsir) and Issues of Tolerance in Indonesia

1. Relevance of the "Sword Verse" Interpretation by Muhammad Abdel Haleem to Classical Interpretation (Tafsir) Discourse

¹²⁴ Haleem, 14–15.

¹²⁵ Haleem, 14–15.

In the study of Qur'anic interpretation, the evolution of methodologies from classical to modern interpretation demonstrates significant changes in the way the Qur'an is understood. The methods used during the Prophet's time differ from those applied today. Abd. Hadi, in his book *Metodologi Tafsir dari Masa Klasik sampai Masa Kontemporer* (Methodology of Tafsir from the Classical to the Contemporary Period), classifies the development of Qur'anic interpretation into four periods: the time of the Prophet (pbuh), the time of the Companions (*ṣahābah*), the medieval period, and the modern-contemporary period.¹²⁶ Each period reflects different approaches and methodologies, shaped by the historical, social, and intellectual contexts of the time. This difference illustrates how Qur'anic interpretation has been adapted to meet the challenges and needs of each era.

During the Prophet's era, Qur'anic interpretation was based on the second source of Islamic law after the Qur'an itself, namely the hadiths of the Prophet (both in *qawliyyah*, *fi'liyyah*, and *taqrīriyyah* approvals). The interpretation of this period was practical and explanatory, aimed at clarifying matters for implementation. Interpretations during this time are considered highly authoritative and of the highest quality, as the Companions (*ṣahābah*) could directly ask the Prophet whenever they faced difficulties in understanding the Qur'an. A major advantage of tafsir during this period was that it was always based on divine revelation, particularly for issues related to the unseen, laws, and acts of worship. The Prophet also practiced *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) in

¹²⁶ Abd. Hadi, *Metodologi Tafsir Dari Masa Klasik Sampai Masa Kontemporer* (Salatiga: Griya Media, 2021), 7, http://repository.uinsa.ac.id/id/eprint/164/1/Abd_Hadi_Metodologi_Tafsir_Al_Quran.pdf.

matters of social dealings (*mu'āmalat*), political decisions, and war strategies. If any mistakes were made, Allah would reveal corrections through further revelations.¹²⁷

After the Prophet's death, Qur'anic interpretation was continued by the Companions (*ṣaḥābah*), who relied on the knowledge passed down from the Prophet. They often referred to the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (circumstances of revelation) which they were familiar with. Many Companions (*ṣaḥābah*), having spent significant time with the Prophet, had a deep understanding of the reasons behind various revelations. Therefore, their *ijtihād* (legal reasoning) was not heavily focused on the linguistic aspects of the Qur'an, unlike many contemporary interpreters. The Companions (*ṣaḥābah*) had an innate understanding of the Arabic language, allowing them to grasp the linguistic nuances of the Qur'an naturally.¹²⁸ As a result, their method of interpretation reflected their direct experiences with the Prophet and their deep understanding of divine revelation.

After the era of the Companions, tafsir continued to evolve, especially during the medieval period, which spanned from the 12th to the 18th century CE. This period began with the institutionalization of knowledge during the late Umayyad and early Abbasid periods, particularly during the caliphate of Umar bin Abdul Aziz in 99 AH.¹²⁹ The medieval period is often referred to as the “Golden Age” of Islamic knowledge. The development of tafsir during this time can be divided into five phases. In the first phase, tafsir was still combined with hadith collections. In the second phase, tafsir began to be separated and compiled

¹²⁷ Hadi, 7–8.

¹²⁸ Hadi, 10–12.

¹²⁹ Hadi, 13–14.

independently, including *isnād* (chains of narration). The third phase saw the shortening of *isnād* and the citation of scholars' opinions without always naming individuals, which led to ambiguity between authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) and weak (*ḍaʿīf*) narrations. The fourth phase was influenced by translations of works from outside the Islamic world, leading to the specialization of tafsir in specific fields. In the fifth phase, the thematic approach (*mawdhūʿi*) became popular, organizing tafsir around particular topics, tailored to the specific areas of expertise of each *mufasssir* (interpreter).¹³⁰

Tafsir, which had previously been based largely on traditional reports (*bi al-maʿtsūr*), began to develop new methods under the Abbasid dynasty's policies. Advances in fields such as hadith studies, Arabic grammar, history, jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and theology (*kalām*) influenced the development of Qur'anic interpretation. Exegesis was no longer solely reliant on the reports of the Prophet and his Companions but began to expand into the realm of reasoning and *ijtihād* (*bi ar-raʿyiy*). Verses that had not been thoroughly explored during the time of the Prophet and his Companions became the focus of later scholars. Unfortunately, in some cases, interpretation during this period was used as a justification for the biases of particular groups, such as those with strict adherence to certain schools of jurisprudence (*madzhab*), theological movements, or Arabic grammarians.¹³¹ As a result, interpretations during the medieval period were highly diverse, reflecting the interests of various fields, such as scientific exegesis (*tafsir ʿilmīy*),

¹³⁰ Hadi, 15–16.

¹³¹ Hadi, 15.

legal exegesis (*tafsir fiqhiy*), philosophical exegesis (*tafsir falsafiy*), and mystical exegesis (*tafsir sūfiy*).

In the modern and contemporary era, the methodology of tafsir has undergone significant transformation with the emergence of contextual and hermeneutic approaches. This change is due to the evolving times and shifts in social, political, and cultural contexts influenced by the West, leading to a need to enrich tafsir methods.¹³² To fully understand the Qur'an, interpreters are required to consider aspects beyond just linguistics. Other fields such as history, philosophy, philology, and anthropology are also necessary. This approach emphasizes the importance of integrating various disciplines in the interpretation of the Qur'an, as proposed by Amin Abdullah, to produce richer and more comprehensive interpretations.¹³³ Additionally, the integration of thematic analysis and hermeneutics is relevant for providing appropriate understanding of today's societal challenges and needs.

In his two books, *Understanding the Qur'an* and *Exploring the Qur'an*, Haleem employs several contemporary approaches in his interpretations, including thematic, stylistic, and comparative methods in *Understanding the Qur'an*, and a hermeneutic approach in *Exploring the Qur'an*. The thematic method was first introduced by al-Farmawi in his work *al-Bidayah fi al-Tafsir al-Maudhu'i* around the 1970s. According to al-Farmawi, this thematic method requires someone to gather verses from the Qur'an that discuss the same theme.¹³⁴

¹³² Hadi, 17.

¹³³ Hadi, 18.

¹³⁴ Mudhofar, "Epistemologi Tafsir Abdel Haleem (Studi Kitab Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style)," 2.

In *Understanding the Qur'an*, Haleem interprets the verses of the Qur'an by grouping them into several major themes such as war, peace, tolerance, marriage, and divorce. The "Sword Verse" in this book is presented by Haleem in the chapter titled "War and Peace in the Qur'an".

After collecting the verses that discuss war, Haleem then examines the linguistic style present in those verses. This is what is called a stylistic approach. A unique way that Haleem explains the beauty of the language in the verses of the Qur'an is by describing *iltifāt*. *Iltifāt*, linguistically, means to turn, to look, or to shift. According to al-Zarkasyi, *iltifāt* is the transition of speech from one form to another, aimed at providing variation for the listener so they do not become bored with different delivery patterns. This demonstrates the uniqueness of the high literary style possessed by the Qur'an. Al-Zarkasyi's explanation emphasizes the benefits or wisdom of the *iltifāt* patterns in the Qur'an.¹³⁵ One example of *iltifāt* is when the Qur'an suddenly shifts from talking about Allah in the third person (He) to the first person (We) or addresses humans directly in the second person.

In addition to thematic and stylistic approaches, Haleem also employs a comparative approach in these books. This comparative approach was chosen based on suggestions from audiences during public lectures. Many of them were interested in comparing the teachings of the Qur'an and the Bible on certain themes. The main goal of this comparison is to help readers who are more familiar with the Bible understand the perspective of the Qur'an, without attempting to prove that the Qur'an merely reiterates the teachings of Judaism or Christianity, as

¹³⁵ A Amirudin, "Stilistika Gaya Bahasa Al-Qur'an (Kajian Ayat-Ayat Iltifat: Analisis Struktur Dan Makna)," *Jurnal Al-Bayan* 5 NO 1 (2013): 3.

is sometimes claimed by some Western scholars.¹³⁶ In the chapter “War and Peace in the Qur’an,” Haleem explains the differences between the reasons in the Qur’an and the Bible for allowing war, what prohibitions exist regarding warfare, and outlines the differences in how the Qur’an and the Bible treat prisoners of war.

Then, in *Exploring the Qur’an*, Haleem uses a hermeneutic approach to explain the meanings and contents of the Qur’an. Essentially, hermeneutics and tafsir of the Qur’an are not different. Both teach how to understand and interpret texts accurately and carefully. The main difference, aside from their historical emergence, lies in their scope and subjects of study. Hermeneutics does not only discuss texts but also examines objects of study in social sciences and humanities, such as the structure of language in texts and human symbols and behavior. Meanwhile, tafsir focuses entirely on textual studies.¹³⁷ Although hermeneutics often faces criticism for initially being developed as a method for studying the Bible, M. Quraish Shihab argues that hermeneutics can still be applied in the study of the Qur’an, as long as the type of hermeneutics used does not alter or damage the essence of the Qur’an as a revelation from Allah.¹³⁸

In explaining his interpretation, Haleem emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical and social context behind the revelation of the “Sword Verse”. In this context, Haleem refers to the reasons for the revelation of the verse. Haleem explains that the “Sword Verse” does not stand alone but is a response to the polytheists who violated the Hudaibiyyah Treaty and attacked the

¹³⁶ Haleem, *Understanding The Qur’an: Themes and Style*, viii.

¹³⁷ Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika Dan Pengembangan Ulumul Quran (Edisi Revisi Dan Perluasan)*, 7.

¹³⁸ Syamsuddin, 6.

Muslim community. Therefore, this verse is fundamentally not a command but permission to fight in self-defense. Moreover, Haleem also uses linguistic analysis of the Arabic in the verse to interpret key terms. For example, the word “*they*” in the “Sword Verse” refers to the polytheists who have unilaterally broken the treaty. Meanwhile, the phrase “*wherever you find them*” signifies permission to fight against enemies attacking Muslims, no matter where they are attacked. Even if they are attacked in sacred areas, this provides the understanding that Muslims are only permitted to fight in self-defense, not to initiate violence.

2. Interpretation of the “Sword Verse” from Muhammad Abdel Haleem’s Perspective: Reactualization of Classical Tafsir in Contemporary Era

In the study of Qur’anic tafsir, the “Sword Verse” is one of the most debated verses, particularly regarding its meaning and legal implications. Both classical and contemporary scholars generally agree that the “Sword Verse” should not be interpreted outside its historical context, namely the state of warfare experienced by the Muslim community and the polytheists of *Quraysh* during the time of Prophet Muhammad. One example of interpretation from classical scholars is Ibn Kathir, who explains that verse 9:5 is also related to the verses before and after it. For instance, verse 9:3 mentions the severing of relations or treaties with polytheists who broke the agreement and attacked the Muslims.¹³⁹ In contrast, those polytheists who uphold their treaties and do not assist others in opposing

¹³⁹ Abu Al-Fida Al-Hafidz Ibnu Katsir, *Tafsir Ibnu Katsir Jilid 4*, trans. M. Abdul Ghoffar (Jakarta: Pustaka Imam Asy-Syafi’i, 2007), 90.

Muslims should be granted protection and their promises must be honored until the appointed time ends (9:4).¹⁴⁰

Additionally, Ibn Kathir explains that the “Sword Verse” applies to very specific situations, particularly when polytheists attack Muslims, placing them in a threatened condition. However, before being permitted to retaliate against the polytheists, the Qur’an allows a period of four months for them to accept the invitation to peace from the Muslims. If this four-month deadline expires and the polytheists continue their violence, then fight them wherever they confront you, even in sacred territory.¹⁴¹ Yet, if they repent, then cease fighting them, and if they seek protection, provide them with security as long as they remain in a Muslim land until they return to their own country..¹⁴² In agreement with Ibn Kathir, Imam Al-Qurtubi also provides a similar viewpoint in his tafsir. He explains that the command in the “Sword Verse” applies after the polytheists have betrayed the treaty and rejected the invitation to peace with the Muslims. Verse 9:5 permits warfare, while still considering certain conditions, such as offering opportunities for repentance and reconciliation if possible.¹⁴³

The discourse of classical tafsir, as previously explained, is also addressed by contemporary scholars, including Haleem. He argues that the “Sword Verse” cannot be separated from the historical context surrounding it, as only through this understanding can we see that the “Sword Verse” is a response to aggression from the polytheists, not an absolute command to fight all non-Muslims. A similar

¹⁴⁰ Katsir, 93.

¹⁴¹ Katsir, 94–95.

¹⁴² Katsir, 97.

¹⁴³ Syaikh Imam Al-Qurthubi, *Tafsir Al-Qurthubi Jilid 8*, ed. M. Iqbal Kadir, trans. Budi Rosyadi, Fathurrahman, and Nasiulhaq (Jakarta: Pustaka Azzam, 2008), 164–70.

perspective is presented by Rashid Rida in his tafsir, stating that the command to fight in 9:5 is for defensive warfare to protect and uphold the faith. Therefore, polytheists who agree to peace should not be disturbed in their activities.¹⁴⁴ The command to kill, capture, and imprison polytheists in the verse is seen as an alternative response tailored to their actions. The more severe their transgressions against Muslims, the harsher the punishment they receive.¹⁴⁵

In contrast to these interpretations, Sayyid Qutb views the “Sword Verse” as a directive to enforce Allah’s law, implying an offensive form of warfare. He argues that the call to arms in this verse should not merely be interpreted as a defense of the faith, as explained by Rashid Rida. Qutb contends that such interpretations arise from a misunderstanding of the fundamental principles of Islamic action. He considers the “Sword Verse” as a final ruling, asserting that when Allah commands Muslims to fight, capture, besiege, or ambush the polytheists, they must do so whenever possible. The goal of this action is to eliminate all forms of tyranny on earth and to call humanity to believe solely in Allah. Essentially, there are many stages overlooked before reaching the final ruling in verse 9:5, and this offensive warfare is the last resort to guide polytheists to faith.¹⁴⁶ Thus, the differing interpretations reflect the various approaches to understanding *jihād* and warfare in Islam, which remain relevant in the ongoing discourse of tafsir today.

¹⁴⁴ Ulummudin, “Tafsir Atas ‘Ayat Pedang’ Q.S. Al-Taubah (9): 5: Studi Komparatif Penafsiran Sayyid Qutub Dan Rasyid Ridha,” 240.

¹⁴⁵ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur’an Vol. 5*, 504.

¹⁴⁶ Ulummudin, “Tafsir Atas ‘Ayat Pedang’ Q.S. Al-Taubah (9): 5: Studi Komparatif Penafsiran Sayyid Qutub Dan Rasyid Ridha,” 236–38.

3. Contextualization of Muhammad Abdel Haleem's Interpretation of the "Sword Verse" in Addressing Tolerance Issues in Indonesia

In *Understanding the Qur'an* and *Exploring the Qur'an*, Haleem interprets the "Sword Verse" using a more moderate and contextual approach. The historical context is crucial for creating a comprehensive interpretation of the "Sword Verse". By understanding the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (the circumstances surrounding the revelation) of the "Sword Verse", it becomes clear that the verse commands Muslims to engage in defensive warfare against polytheists, rather than serving as a universal command to attack non-Muslims. Haleem firmly rejects interpretations that view this verse as a justification for violence or intolerance against non-Muslims. His interpretation is highly relevant to the context of tolerance in Indonesia, a country with six officially recognized religions, in addition to various unrecognized faiths.¹⁴⁷ Nearly 90% of Indonesia's population adheres to Islam, which internally contains differences and tensions due to inconsistencies in the application of values and norms, making religion appear as a potential source of concern among the broader society.¹⁴⁸

Although only six religions are recognized in Indonesia, tolerance is still viewed as a critical aspect of religious life. This indicates that the urgency of religion does not solely rely on a single perspective, but encompasses diversity and harmony among different faiths within a broader social context.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, the richness of religious diversity in Indonesia often invites issues of intolerance,

¹⁴⁷ Imas Kurniasih, Rifqi Rohmatulloh, and Ibnu Imam Al Ayyubi, "Urgensi Toleransi Beragama Di Indonesia," *Jazirah: Jurnal Peradaban Dan Kebudayaan* 3, no. 1 (2023): 2, <https://doi.org/10.51190/jazirah.v3i1.62>.

¹⁴⁸ Kurniasih, Rohmatulloh, and Al Ayyubi, 2.

¹⁴⁹ Kurniasih, Rohmatulloh, and Al Ayyubi, 4.

such as discrimination against minority religions and religiously based conflicts in various regions. This situation arises because the majority group feels more empowered and has greater power influence compared to minority groups, which often experience intervention or discrimination.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, Muhammad Abdel Haleem's tafsir can serve as an important foundation to ease these tensions, as he emphasizes that Islam fundamentally respects peace and rejects the use of violence without justification.

Examples of intolerance and violent religious conflicts that have left deep scars include the Bali Bombing 1 in 2002 and Bali Bombing 2 in 2005. These events not only shocked national security but also heightened public awareness of the real threats posed by extremism and terrorism.¹⁵¹ Hambali, who is suspected to be the mastermind behind the Bali Bombings and was responsible for a series of bomb attacks on several churches in seven Indonesian cities in 2000, claimed that these terrorist actions were forms of *jihād*. His actions were based on a fatwa from Osama bin Laden, the Al-Qaeda leader responsible for the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001. Furthermore, Osama argued that in this era, it was permissible to respond to violence by killing civilians, including women and children.¹⁵² As written in his letter:

“I say to our Muslim brothers across the world: your brothers in Saudi Arabia and Palestine are calling for your help and asking you to share with them in the jihad against the enemies of God, your enemies the Israelis and

¹⁵⁰ Kurniasih, Rohmatulloh, and Al Ayyubi, 5.

¹⁵¹ Liputan6.com, “Peringatan Bom Bali Dan Kisah Lahirnya Fatwa Terorisme,” Liputan 6, 2022, <https://www.liputan6.com/islami/read/5098298/peringatan-bom-bali-dan-kisah-lahirnya-fatwa-terorisme?page=2>.

¹⁵² Heyder Affan, “Taliban, Al-Qaeda Dan ‘Teroris Berbahaya’ Hambali: Sang Penghuni Penjara Guantanamo Selama 15 Tahun ‘Tanpa Dakwaan,’” BBC News, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/dunia-58326087>.

Americans. They are asking you to defy them in whatever way you possibly can, so as to expel them in defeat and humiliation from the holy places of Islam. God Almighty has said: *If they seek help from you against persecution, it is your duty to assist them.*¹⁵³

In addition, the case of persecution in South Tangerang in May 2024 is another instance of intolerance in Indonesia. This incident occurred when a Catholic community's Rosary prayer meeting was forcibly disrupted by a group of individuals. The event involved four suspects who were charged with assault and possession of sharp weapons. This case highlights the issue of religious freedom, which remains a serious concern in Indonesia, particularly for religious minority groups. According to research by the Indonesian Scholar Network on Freedom of Religion or Beliefs (ISFORB), incidents of discrimination against minority groups have increased during Jokowi's administration. This is supported by data from the SETARA Institute, which focuses on issues related to Freedom of Religion/Belief (KBB), revealing that from 2007 to 2022, there were at least 573 incidents of disruption to worship and places of worship in Indonesia.¹⁵⁴

Based on the previous explanation, Haleem's interpretation of the "Sword Verse" can be used by religious leaders and communities to address interfaith tensions in Indonesia. His interpretation, which emphasizes peace and the protection of polytheists who repent or seek refuge, is highly relevant as a foundation for building more harmonious relationships between Muslims and other religious groups. As Haleem intended, this tafsir can support efforts to

¹⁵³ Osama bin Laden, "Osama Bin Laden's Declaration of Jihad against Americans," Salem Press, accessed September 25, 2024, [https://www.911memorial.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/1996 Osama bin Laden's 1996 F atwa against United States_0.pdf](https://www.911memorial.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/1996%20Osama%20bin%20Laden%27s%201996%20F%20atwa%20against%20United%20States%200.pdf).

¹⁵⁴ Muhammad Hanafi, "Melihat Nasib Kaum Minoritas Dari Kasus Persekusi Di Tangsel," DW Global Media Forum, 2024, <https://www.dw.com/id/melihat-nasib-kaum-minoritas-dari-kasus-persekusi-di-tangsel/a-69022249>.

promote interfaith dialogue, an approach needed to strengthen social and religious relations in Indonesia. Additionally, this tafsir can serve as a reference for developing policies that support interfaith harmony, reinforcing the notion that Islam prioritizes peace and tolerance. Policies concerning interreligious relations, protection for minority groups, and the promotion of social harmony could adopt the values contained within Haleem's tafsir.

Besides being a catalyst for promoting social harmony among religions, Haleem's recontextualized tafsir of the "Sword Verse" can also provide a counter-argument against radical interpretations that extremist Muslim groups often use to justify violence against non-Muslims. Some groups view the "Sword Verse" as a command to engage in offensive *jihād* to uphold the religion, even considering the command for war as part of their religious obligations. Haleem's tafsir, which rejects such interpretations, can serve as an important alternative in the discourse of Islam in Indonesia, particularly in reducing the spread of extremist interpretations. The promotion of tolerance and moderation through Haleem's tafsir can also be disseminated through mass media, allowing society to be more open to interpretations that support peaceful and harmonious coexistence.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

A. Conclusion

Muhammad Abdel Haleem felt motivated to reinterpret the “Sword Verse” (9:5) due to the many misunderstandings in the Western world, where Islam is often seen as a violent religion. This is largely due to a literal interpretation of the verse. According to Haleem, to properly understand the “Sword Verse”, an interpreter must consider the historical context (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) and its linguistic details. The verse was revealed after the *Quraysh* polytheists broke the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, which was originally created to maintain peace. Even though the Prophet Muhammad offered protection to those not involved, war was eventually commanded as a last resort after diplomacy failed, showing that Islam values peace.

Haleem also stressed the importance of grammatical analysis in understanding the verse, especially the phrase “*slay the polytheists*,” which refers to the polytheists who broke the treaty. The definite article “ال” in “المشركين” (the polytheists) specifies that the permission to fight was given only after the polytheists were given four months to surrender. The word “*slay*” is in the imperative form, which means it is allowed after being previously forbidden, not an absolute command to fight. Additionally, Haleem pointed out that the word “*wa*” is better translated as “or,” and the phrase “*but if they*

repent, and perform the prayer...” prevents any attack on polytheists who have repented and committed to practicing the religion.

Haleem’s reinterpretation of the “Sword Verse” is important because it shows how classical interpretations are still relevant in addressing modern issues, especially in the context of diversity and tolerance in Indonesia. By understanding the “Sword Verse” through a full historical and linguistic perspective, this interpretation offers a more inclusive and peaceful view, emphasizing that Islam never encourages violence. This contribution not only enriches academic discussions on Qur’anic interpretation but also helps build a more tolerant society in the face of religious diversity in Indonesia.

B. Suggestion

The researcher acknowledges that this work still contains many shortcomings in presenting the explanations related to the reinterpretation of the “Sword Verse” as discussed by Muhammad Abdel Haleem in his books *Understanding the Qur’an* and *Exploring the Qur’an*. This study only covers a small part of the effort to uncover the true meaning of the “Sword Verse” and its contextualization in addressing issues of religious intolerance, particularly in Indonesia. Therefore, this research leaves room for further exploration by future researchers. Constructive criticism and suggestions from readers or any other parties are highly encouraged as an effort to improve and refine this study.

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