

## Interpretation of Farid Esack's Hermeneutics as a Value of Social Movement Transformation

Syahrul<sup>1</sup>, Syarifaturrahmatullah<sup>2</sup>, Mahbub Humaidi Aziz<sup>3</sup>, Moh. Buny Andaru Bahy<sup>4</sup>, Bima Fandi Asy'arie<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Institut Agama Islam Negeri Sorong, Sorong, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Aji Muhammad Idris, Samarinda, Indonesia

<sup>3,4,5</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Malang, Indonesia

Correspondence: syarifaturrahmatullah@gmail.com

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**Abstract:** The slogan apartheid by the National Party that governs black life in South Africa caused turmoil and harsh criticism both inside and outside Africa. The establishment of The Call of Islam organization in 1984, initiated by Esack with the idea of liberation derived from his hermeneutic concept, was one of the forms of resistance. This study discusses the idea of Esack's hermeneutics in-depth and presents a form of Qur'an reading with Esack's hermeneutics in strengthening social movements. This paper uses a qualitative approach with a library research model. Primary data are taken from books by Esack related to hermeneutics and social movements. At the same time, secondary data is in the form of articles and writings related to his thoughts and social movements. The results showed that Esack's hermeneutics combined Arkoun's *regression-progressive model* and Fazlurrahman's *double movement*. Esack's hermeneutics has six interrelated interpretation keys and aims to liberate the oppressed from the ruler's tyranny. The six keys in question are *Taqwa*, *Tawhid*, *Al-Nas*, *Al-Mustadh'afun fi Al-Ardh*, *Al-Adl*, *Al-Qisth*, and *Jihad*. Social movements inspired by Esack's hermeneutics include the Muslim Student Association (MSA), Muslim Youth Movement (MYM), Qiblah, and The Call of Islam. The forms of resistance are anti-apartheid (*jihad* and *shahada*), racism *jihad* (against racism), socio-economic jihad (for development, reconstruction, and against poverty), and gender *jihad*.

**Keywords:** Hermeneutics; Farid Esack; Apartheid; Social Movement

### Introduction

The slogan of apartheid in southern Africa, promoted by the National Party that governed black life in South Africa, caused turmoil and intense criticism both at home and abroad. The establishment of the ANC (African National Congress) in 1912, which aimed to abolish the policy of apartheid, was one form of resistance to the slogan.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the development of other virgin organizations, in 1984, the Call of Islam organization was also established, initiated by Esack with the idea of liberation derived from Esack's concept of hermeneutics.<sup>2</sup>

Hermeneutics, as spoken by Komarudin Hidayat, is an effort to interpret and trace the basic message of a speech or text by a reader or listener.<sup>3</sup> Per Josef Bleicher's perspective, hermeneutics is a field of study that delves into the theory of interpretation, encompassing the understanding and comprehension of a text's meaning.<sup>4</sup> Hermeneutics, as a methodology of Western interpretation, is subject to much debate when interpreting the Qur'an. There are at least three types of groups when

<sup>1</sup> Wadhana, "Muslim Di Afrika Selatan Menentang Paitik Apartheid - Islami[Dot]Co," n.d.

<sup>2</sup> Afik Fathur Rohman, "Kontribusi Muslim Minoritas Dalam Menggulingkan Rezim Apartheid Di Afrika Selatan (1948-1994)," *JSI: Jurnal Sejarah Islam* 1, no. 2 (December 12, 2022): 21–46, <https://doi.org/10.24090/jsij.v1i2.6963>.

<sup>3</sup> Suryani Suryani, "Urgensi Hermeneutika Sebagai Metode Dalam Pemahaman Hadis," *AL QUDS: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Hadis* 6, no. 2 (2022): 779–800.

<sup>4</sup> Miladu Ahadi Ahmad and Umi Sumbulah, "Khaled Abou El Fadl's Perspective on Hadith Hermeneutics," *Religia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 24, no. 2 (2021): 157–74.

faced with this problem. First, the group that accepts hermeneutics as a whole; second, those who reject the application of hermeneutics in interpreting the Qur'an; third, groups that take hermeneutics but are accompanied by specific terms and conditions.<sup>5</sup>

Through his book *Qur'an: Liberation and Pluralism*, Esack mentions that hermeneutics has been used for a long time as a method of interpreting the Qur'an; this is shown by interpretations that pay attention to and discuss *asbabu al-nuzul* and *nasakh wa al-mansukh*. The categorization of types of interpretation, such as *Mu'tazilite* tafsir, *Shi'a*, law, philosophy, and others, also evidences it. This indicates an awareness of group, ideology, period, and social level considerations that are generally very similar to hermeneutics. According to Mukhtar, interpreting the Qur'an through the lens of hermeneutics depends on the interpreter's point of view, background, and personal experience. This can result in many diverse understandings, contradicting those of other interpreters, thus creating broader understanding conflicts among Muslims or within society.<sup>6</sup>

Esack has played an essential role in understanding the Qur'an with hermeneutics. Esack preferred to use hermeneutics as a tool in interpreting the Qur'ān. With hermeneutics, Esack believed that the meaning of the Qur'an could be attained to make it always appropriate beyond space and time.<sup>7</sup> Esack argues that the Qur'an is not only a book containing religious ritual teachings; more than that, it also carries a mission of liberation for humankind.<sup>8</sup>

In the context of strengthening social movements, Esack emphasized the importance of understanding the Qur'an holistically and contextually to encourage progressive and inclusive social change. Esack's approach to hermeneutics transcends traditional interpretation's limitations and highlights the Qur'anic text's relevance in response to contemporary social and political challenges. For him, hermeneutics is critical in interpreting the messages of the Qur'an dynamically, paying attention to actual social conditions, and encouraging a broader understanding of the values of justice, equality, and human rights. Through hermeneutics, Esack sought to develop a progressive Islamic discourse, championing inclusive social change and encouraging awareness of humanitarian issues in line with the understanding of the Qur'an.

Research on Esack's hermeneutics has been widely discussed. Among them is the research of Asnawan, Munir, Abidin, and Sudarman, which examines the concepts and principles of Esack's hermeneutics and their relation to liberation.<sup>9</sup> Other research by Ridani links the hermeneutics of Esack's liberation with Thomas Kuhn's Scientific Revolution.<sup>10</sup> Rozak and Ghafur, in their research, discussed Al-Mustad'afin through Esack's hermeneutic approach. Also, Mubarak writes on the

<sup>5</sup> Supriyanto Supriyanto, "Implementasi Pemikiran Hermeneutika Martin Heidegger Dalam Studi Tafsir Alquran," *AL QUDS: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Hadis* 6, no. 1 (2022): 255–78.

<sup>6</sup> Mukhtar Mukhtar, Suriana Suriana, and Nizar Nizar, "Diskursus Hermeneutika Dalam Studi Al-Qur'an Arah Baru Cara Menalar Wahyu Tuhan," *JPPI (Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Pendekatan Interdisipliner)* 7, no. 1 (2023): 11–24.

<sup>7</sup> Achmad Lutfi, "Meraih Makna Al-Quran: Hermeneutika Farid Esack Sebagai Teori Tafsir Al-Qur'ān," *MAGHZA: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 4, no. 2 (2019): 264–75.

<sup>8</sup> Zunly Nadia, "Pandangan Farid Esack Tentang Al-Qur'an, Tafsir Dan Takwil Serta Implikasinya Terhadap Bangunan Teologi Pembebasan," *AN NUR: Jurnal Studi Islam* 4, no. 1 (2012): 1–18.

<sup>9</sup> Asnawan, "Hermeneutika Pembebasan Farid Esack," *Jurnal Filsafat Indonesia*, 2023; Misbachul Munir, "Hermeneutika Farid Esack," *Jurnal Ilmiah Spiritualis: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam Dan Tasawuf* 4, no. 2 (2018): 190–210; Ahmad Zainal Abidin, "Epistemologi Tafsir Al-Quran Farid Esack," *Jurnal Theologia* 24, no. 1 (2013): 5–36; Sudarman Sudarman, "Pemikiran Farid Esack Tentang Hermeneutika Pembebasan Al-Qur'an," *Al-Adyan: Jurnal Studi Lintas Agama* 10, no. 1 (2015): 83–98.

<sup>10</sup> Ridani Faulika Permana et al., "Hermeneutika Pembebasan Farid Esack Dari Perspektif Revolusi Ilmiah Thomas Kuhn," *AL QUDS: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Hadis* 6, no. 3 (December 2022): 2580–3190, <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v6i3.4244>.

significance of Esack's liberation hermeneutic thought.<sup>11</sup> Then Teguh Saputra's research discusses justice during the iddah period for women according to Esack's hermeneutics. There is also a discussion of religious pluralism from the perspective of Esack's hermeneutics, which Said wrote about in his research.<sup>12</sup> Unlike the studies above, this study discusses Esack's concept of hermeneutics and aims to develop how his approach to understanding and reading the Qur'an can reinforce social movements.

The qualitative approach with the library research model is the method used in this study. Data was collected by an exploratory process using keywords such as Qur'an reading, tafsirs, Esack's thought, and social movements. Primary data are taken from books by Esack on hermeneutics and social movements, such as *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression*, *Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Problems and Prospects*, and *The Qur'an: A User's Guide*. At the same time, secondary data is in the form of articles and writings related to Esack's thoughts and social movements.

After the data is collected, a systematic literature exploration and inventory process is carried out through print and digital sources, ensuring that the sources used are credible and academic. The successfully collected literature is then classified based on its relevance to the focus of the study and differentiated between primary and secondary sources to facilitate further analysis. The analysis process is carried out thematically by identifying and grouping the main themes in Esack's works, especially those related to the hermeneutic approach and its contribution in supporting the social movement agenda. Therefore, this study aims to (1) find out how to conceptualise Farid Esack's hermeneutics, (2) explore Farid Esack's Liberation Hermeneutic Framework, and (3) analyse the Interpretation of *al-Mustad'afun* Liberation through Farid Esack's Social Movement.

## Discussion

In this discussion, the researcher explores and analyses the results of the research objectives that have been formulated in depth, including three main focuses. **First**, it discusses the conceptualisation of Farid Esack's hermeneutics, namely how Esack understands, formulates, and applies hermeneutic principles in interpreting the Qur'an, especially in answering the problem of social injustice and oppression. **Second**, it examines the liberation hermeneutic framework developed by Esack, which is rooted in the experience of the struggle against apartheid and aimed at presenting a contextual, inclusive, and unbiased interpretation of the Qur'an for the oppressed. **Third**, analyse Farid Esack's understanding of the concept of *al-Mustad'afun* (weakened or oppressed group) in the Qur'an and how this interpretation is actualised through various forms of social movements that he initiated to transform and liberate.

### Conceptualization of Hermeneutics Farid Esack

Esack has the full name Maulana Farid Esack.<sup>13</sup> Born in 1959 in a poor area of Cape Town, South Africa. Esack was a Muslim intellectual who was raised harshly in conditions of economic

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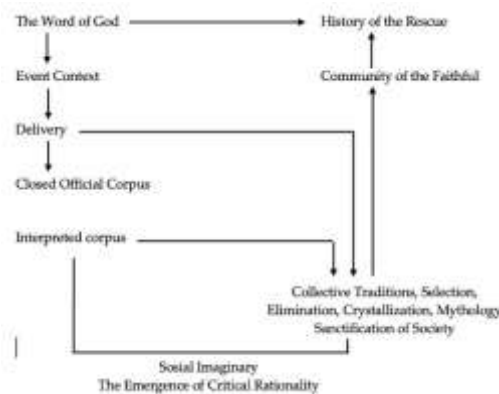
<sup>11</sup> Oleh : Muhammad and Abdul Rozak, "Kontekstualisasi Penafsiran Ayat-Ayat Tentang Al-Mustad'afin (Kajian Dengan Pendekatan Hermeneutika Farid Esack)," *Qaf: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 2, no. 2 (May 1, 2017): 303–26, <https://ojs.unsiq.ac.id/index.php/qaf/article/view/2021>; Muhammad Abdul Rozak and Hanief Saha Ghafur, "Studi Tafsir Hermeneutika Farid Esack Terhadap Perjuangan Al-Mustad'afin (Kaum Lemah Dan Tertindas)," *Journal of Syntax Literate* 7, no. 7 (2022).

<sup>12</sup> Akhmad Ali Said, "Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an Tentang Pluralisme Agama Perspektif Farid Esack," *Jurnal Ilmiah Spiritualis: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam Dan Tasawuf* 6, no. 1 (August 26, 2020): 1–26, <https://doi.org/10.53429/spiritualis.v6i1.74>.

<sup>13</sup> Firdaus Ainul Yaqin, "Membangun Masyarakat Pluralis Perspektif Farid Esack Dalam Konteks Politik Praktis Di Indonesia," *Al-Fikru: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Sains* 2, no. 2 (2021): 190–205.

limitations. Esack experienced a tragic and traumatic event because he witnessed his mother being raped.<sup>14</sup> He earned his doctorate in 1996 in Qur'anic studies at the University of Birmingham's Centre for Islamic Studies and Relations Between Christians and Muslims in the United Kingdom (UK). He continued his postdoctoral research in biblical hermeneutics in Frankfurt, Germany.<sup>15</sup>

Esack, on the scientific side, wanted to fight oppression and racism by shifting the paradigm to the study of the Qur'an through hermeneutics.<sup>16</sup> In this context, he considered it necessary to present the Qur'an as a solution to the racist problems experienced by his people.<sup>17</sup> Esack's hermeneutics is synonymous with resistance to oppression, often called liberation hermeneutics.<sup>18</sup> Esack's hermeneutics was inspired by the thoughts of his predecessors, M. Arkoun and Fazlur Rahman. It can even be said that each combines the two by highlighting the sides of humanity.<sup>19</sup> Esack used Arkoun's *regression-progressive model* and Fazlurrahman's *double movement*. Regression, referred to in the Arkoun procedure, is the procedure of understanding and interpreting the text by looking at the past continuously and the needs of the time when the text is present to reveal the historical mechanisms and causes of how the text was formed. The progressive in question is a procedure that seeks to bring up new meanings in the latest context.<sup>20</sup> In this context, Esack proposes using concepts in *ushul al-fiqh*, such as *maslahah al-mursalah* and *istihsan* by considering *maqashid shari'ah*.<sup>21</sup> These *maqashid shari'ah* include protecting honor, saving reason, and protecting the religion.<sup>22</sup>



**Picture 1.**  
Procedural regression-progressive Arkoun (2023)<sup>23</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Asnawan, "Hermeneutika Pembebasan Farid Esack."

<sup>15</sup> Asnawan.

<sup>16</sup> Kamaruddin Mustamin and Basri Basri, "Epistemologi Penafsiran Farid Esack Terhadap Ayat-Ayat Pembebasan," *Jurnal Ilmiah AL-Jauhari: Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Interdisipliner* 5, no. 2 (October 1, 2020): 171–91, <https://doi.org/10.30603/jiaj.v5i2.1767>.

<sup>17</sup> Ahmad Muttaqin et al., "From Contextual to Actual Approach: Towards a Paradigm Shift in Interpreting the Qur'an," *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadith* 11, no. 2 (December 2021): 203–30, <https://doi.org/10.15642/MUTAWATIR.2021.11.2.203-230>; Permana et al., "Hermeneutika Pembebasan Farid Esack Dari Perspektif Revolusi Ilmiah Thomas Kuhn."

<sup>18</sup> Haiva Satriana Zahrah Siregar, "Kajian Komparatif Konsep Hermeneutika Pembebasan Perspektif Hassan Hanafi (L. 1935 M) Dan Farid Esack (L. 1955 M)," 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Nur Hadi Ihsan and Dhita Ayomi Purwaningtyas, "Omid Safi's Concept of Progressive Muslims," *Kalimah: Jurnal Studi Agama Dan Pemikiran Islam* 17, no. 2 (2019): 61–80, <https://doi.org/10.21111/KLM.V17I2.3426>.

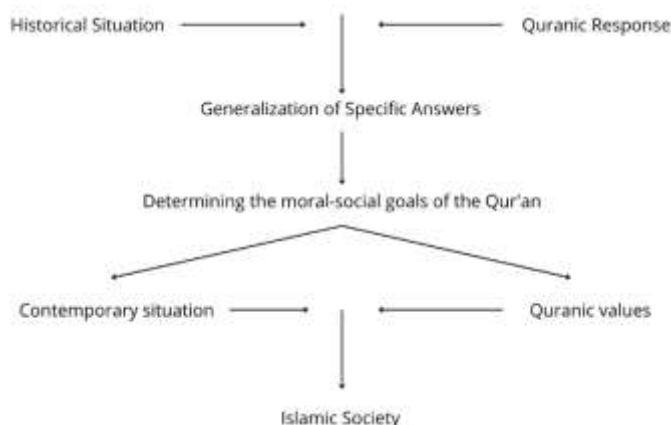
<sup>20</sup> Permana et al., "Hermeneutika Pembebasan Farid Esack Dari Perspektif Revolusi Ilmiah Thomas Kuhn."

<sup>21</sup> Farid Esack, "Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Problems and Prospects," *The Muslim World* 83, no. 2 (1993): 118–41.

<sup>22</sup> Agus Purnomo et al., "Characteristics of Hate Speech and Freedom of Expression in the Perspective of Maqāṣid Al-Shari'ah," *JURIS (Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah)* 22, no. 1 (2023): 171–83.

<sup>23</sup> Mohammed Arkoun, "Rethinking Islam Today," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 588, no. 1 (2003): 18–39.

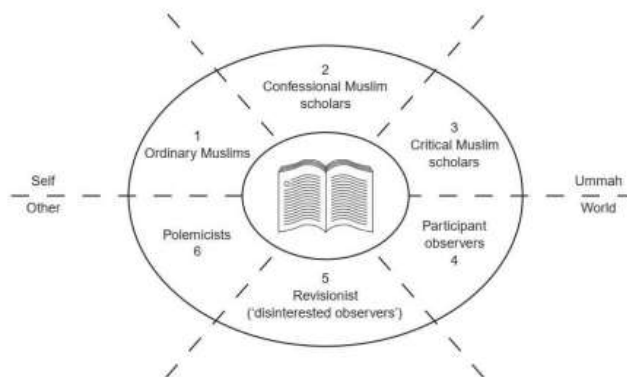
Fazlurrahman's double movement, often called the theory of double movement, is depicted in two patterns of reciprocating movement.<sup>24</sup> First, understand the entire content of the Qur'anic verse, both prohibitions and commandments related to a problem. This first step goes through two stages: 1) pay close attention to its historical conditions and moral and ethical demands before discussing the text of the Qur'an under special conditions, and 2) generalize the specific answer and frame it as a moral-social statement derived from specific texts taking into account the socio-historian and the causes behind the defense of law. Second, the shared values resulting from the first step are applied to the socio-historical present.<sup>25</sup>



**Picture 2.**

Procedure *double movement* Fazlurrahman (1983)<sup>26</sup>

Esack grouped Qur'anic readers into six groups: the uncritical lover, the scholarly lover, the critical lover, the friend of the lover, the voyeur, and the polemicist.<sup>27</sup>



**Picture 3.**

Six groups of Qur'anic readers, according to Esack (2008)<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Mohammad Jailani, Jannatul Husna, and Nur Kholis, "Membedah Hermeneutika Perspektif Ilmuan Muslim Modern: Korelasinya Dalam Studi Ilmu Hadits," *AL QUDS: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Hadis* 6, no. 1 (2022): 211–32.

<sup>25</sup> Permana et al., "Hermeneutika Pembebasan Farid Esack Dari Perspektif Revolusi Ilmiah Thomas Kuhn."

<sup>26</sup> Fazlur Rahman, "Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 17, no. 2 (December 9, 1983): 192–93, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026318400013328>.

<sup>27</sup> Farid Esack, *The Qur'an: A User's Guide* (Oneworld, 2008).

<sup>28</sup> Esack.

According to Esack, the Qur'an should be read by a critical reader who places the Qur'an as a plain text. As plain text, reading it requires paying attention to the empirical realities and cultures that influence it. In this context, the Arabic culture in which the Qur'an was mainly revealed determines the meaning it contains. In this position, critical efforts are needed when using the text in regions and cultures different from Arabic when the text was revealed. In this case, Esack argues that there is no neutral recitation; the recitation of the Qur'an is very subjective.<sup>29</sup>

According to Esack, Islamic societies are divided into three groups when faced with the situation of having to use Qur'anic interpretation in answering contextual questions: First, groups that use classical interpretation to answer contemporary problems; second, the group that critically selects classical exegesis to reinterpret the Qur'an in response to current issues; third, groups that use the expertise of understanding texts, contexts, and contemporary contexts to reinterpret the Qur'an to get new Qur'anic answers to modern problems.<sup>30</sup>

### Esack's Liberation Hermeneutical Frame of Thought

Esack's hermeneutics has six interrelated keys; the unity of the six keys has the primary purpose of liberation and lifting the oppressed from the tyranny of rulers and racists. The six keys in question are *Taqwa*, *Tawhid*, *Al-Nas*, *Al-Mustadh'afun fi Al-Ardh*, *Al-Adl*, *Al-Qisth*, and *Jihad*. *Taqwa* and *tawhid* are key in constructing moral and doctrinal criteria to test the other four keys. These two keys act as the primary keys that work as a theological lens in reading the text of the Qur'an in general or specifically. Then the keys to *al-nas*, *al-mustadh'afun fi al-ardh*, *al-adl*, and *al-qisth*, as well as *jihad*, provide an overview of the methods that shape the contextual understanding of Qur'anic verses in groups of people who are colored by oppression, racism, and injustice.<sup>31</sup>

The six keys to Esack's hermeneutics above have other purposes, namely: 1) Serves as a means of understanding the Qur'an for the oppressed in the fight for faith and justice in his native South Africa, 2) as a measure of hermeneutic continuity to the developing text and context, 3) as a standard direction and guideline so that interpretation does not go off track.<sup>32</sup> Here is an explanation of the keys to hermeneutics according to Esack:



**Picture 4.**

The Keys of Esack's Hermeneutics (1997)<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Permana et al., "Hermeneutika Pembebasan Farid Esack Dari Perspektif Revolusi Ilmiah Thomas Kuhn."

<sup>30</sup> Achmad Khudori Soleh and Erik Sabti Rahmawati, "Maulana Farid Esack: Hermeneutika Pembebasan Dan Relasi Antar Umat Beragama" (UIN-Maliki Press, 2021).

<sup>31</sup> Alfi Aflahasoleh, "Penafsiran Ayat-Ayat Al-Qur'an Tentang Anak Yatim Dengan Pendekatan Hermeneutika Pembebasan Farid Esack" (IAIN Syekh Nurjati Cirebon S1 IAT, 2023).

<sup>32</sup> Soleh and Rahmawati, "Maulana Farid Esack: Hermeneutika Pembebasan Dan Relasi Antar Umat Beragama."

<sup>33</sup> Farid Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oneworld, 1997).

**First, *Taqwa* is the moral basis of interpretation.** According to Esack, in the understanding of the Qur'an, *taqwa* is a basic term often used, and it has a comprehensive meaning in uniting responsibilities towards God and man. Therefore, *taqwa* becomes the capital root in the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an. Based on the study of lafadz, *taqwa* was mentioned 242 times in the Qur'an out of 140 Madaniyah verses and 102 Makkiyah verses.<sup>34</sup> The activity of interpretation in *taqwa* has essential implications, namely, 1) the interpreter is free from good and bad prejudices and *nafsu*. This ensures interpreters are free from theological obscurantism, political backlash, and subjective speculation. 2) cause a balance of the interpreter from aesthetic and spiritual aspects, meaning that the soul of the interpreter must be clear of impurities or not be affected by socio-political urges; 3) Strengthen the interpreter's loyalty to the process of personal interaction with social and political changes, ensuring the creation of harmony between active involvement in the transformation of self and society.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to its implications, Esack also details the impact of *taqwa* in practical struggle. In the key to *taqwa*, there is a bulwark to strengthen the fighters of Progressive Islam from revolutionary falsehoods and activist arrogance so that interpreters remember the initial concepts of *taqwa*, namely equality, justice, and freedom. It is essential to consider this so as not to affect the negative aspects of interpreting the Quran. In the case that occurs, according to the tafsir scholars, many errors and deviations in the interpretation are Sufi. Still, the Sufi interpretation can be accepted if it meets the conditions, namely that it does not contradict the external meaning of the verse, the interpretation can be corroborated with other Sharia postulates, the interpretation does not contradict the postulates of Sharia 'and reason, the exegetes do not consider if the interpretation is the only interpretation that it is true, but it must first acknowledge the outward meaning of the verse.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, in *tasawwuf* and Islamic psychology, the soul of an interpreter must have positive (*taqwa*) and negative (*fujur*) potentials.<sup>37</sup>

**Second, *Tauhid* is the principle of the integrity of the word and the unity of humanity.** According to Esack, *Tauhid* is considered a strong foundation of Muslim ideology, just as tawhid is at the heart of a comprehensive and rapidly developing social and political ideology in the last decade. On a socio-political level, monotheism means opposing the ethnic segregation of humanity in South Africa. This underlies Esack's opposition to apartheid rule by openly rejecting the ethnic separation of humankind through the concept of monotheism because monotheism is a characteristic of the unity of humanity in the world that any ideology cannot leave. At the same time, the key to *tawhid* in interpreting the Qur'an is a philosophical, spiritual, legal, and political approach needed to reveal the meaning of the Qur'an as a whole.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the concept of monotheism in Esack's hermeneutics is a form of rejection of dualism, namely the attitude of widowing and separating between social ideology and human ethnicity in South Africa.

**Third, *Al-Nas*: man as the determinant of truth.** As a caliph, a man has a dual role as the subject and object of implementing religious teachings and shari'a.<sup>39</sup> Esack made man the key to

<sup>34</sup> Soleh and Rahmawati, "Maulana Farid Esack: Hermeneutika Pembebasan Dan Relasi Antar Umat Beragama."

<sup>35</sup> Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*.

<sup>36</sup> Ummi Kalsum Hasibuan, Risqo Faridatul Ulya, and Jendri Jendri, "Tipologi Kajian Tafsir: Metode, Pendekatan Dan Corak Dalam Mitra Penafsiran Al-Qur'an," *Ishlah: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin, Adab Dan Dakwah* 2, no. 2 (October 5, 2020): 96–120, <https://doi.org/10.32939/ishlah.v2i2.9>.

<sup>37</sup> Devi Nurqomariah and Yeti Dahliana, "A Calm Soul in Surah Al-Fajr 27-30 Al-Azhar Tafsir Perspective," *Al-Afkar, Journal For Islamic Studies* 7, no. 1 (January 4, 2024): 146–58, <https://doi.org/10.31943/AFKARJOURNAL.V7I1.915>.

<sup>38</sup> Asnawan and Oqik Suherlan, "Hermeneutika Pembebasan Farid Esack," *Jurnal Filsafat Indonesia* 6, no. 2 (June 30, 2023): 258–67, <https://doi.org/10.23887/jfi.v6i2.57647>.

<sup>39</sup> Irfan Abu Nazar, Sunarto Sunarto, and Ihsan Nul Hakim, "Pengembangan Konsep Ekoteologi Al-Qur'an Untuk Mewujudkan Pembangunan Berkelanjutan," *AL QUDS: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Hadis* 7, no. 3 (2023): 561–76.

hermeneutics in the liberation activity that suffocated humans as a parameter of cruelty. Because God's interest in the Qur'an is in the direction of human interests, the truth of absolute lies in al-Nas as a speaking creature (*al-hayawan al-natiq*) backed up to the God universe. Thus, the criterion of actual reality does not lie in humans in the lives of humans from God.<sup>40</sup> This context is in stark contrast to the case in South Africa, where the policies of the Apartheid regime were strongly in favor of whites by slowly removing white people from economic and political access.<sup>41</sup> This prompted Esack to uphold *al-Nas* as the key to truth based on the Qur'an as a form of interpretation in determining good and evil or right and wrong policies.

**Fourth, Mustadh'afin is the basis of the defense.** The word *mustadh'afin* comes from *dla'afa* and is mentioned in the Qur'an five times. Lafadz *dla'afa* refers to the weak and is often attributed to the oppressed, who are treated like slaves. Therefore, the word *mustadh'afin* can be divided into *fugara'* and *masakin*. The Qur'an mentions *mustadh'afin* into three groups, namely Muslims, infidels, and Muslim infidels.<sup>42</sup> *Mustadh'afin* is oppressed, and those with a low social status are vulnerable to socio-economic exclusion.<sup>43</sup> The term *mustadh'afin* became the key to hermeneutics because, for Esack, there was hope in the form of a promise of freedom God gave to the oppressed. This incident is a defense for those suffering from poverty and hunger. This defense can foster positive things, namely, 1) identifying shortcomings or omissions in existing interpretations, whether traditional or modern, if these interpretations are used instead as justification for injustice. 2) recognize the unity of humanity regardless of racial, ethnic, and religious differences while making this unity principle an impetus for liberation and against injustice.<sup>44</sup>

As a contemporary interpreter, Esack became one of the people who championed the *mustadh'afin* of the Apartheid regime. Therefore, through the interpretation of the Qur'an, *mustadh'afin* is defended as weak and oppressed. In this case, the victims are always individuals or groups forced to accept a tactic.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, what plays the most role is how to see a theological assumption when faced with the reality of oppression, which can lead to an effort to establish justice and liberation.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the problems faced by the *mustadh'afin* or weak or even oppressed groups, especially those in Indonesia, can be addressed by reflecting the doctrine of Esack's liberation theology.<sup>47</sup>

**Fifth, Justice is a struggle orientation.** Justice is an essential measure in life. The order of the universe, including the way man lives his life, is based on the principle of justice. When there are deviations from this principle, it will cause harm. Therefore, people are expected to uphold justice as the foundation of their socio-political life because injustice can give rise to disharmony, chaos, and corruption.<sup>48</sup> The importance of justice as the foundation of hermeneutics implies that the interpretation of the Qur'an should aim to advocate for the creation of justice. Justice becomes a central focus in hermeneutics that intends to liberate the individual. There is no room for neutrality

<sup>40</sup> Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon: Derived from the Best and the Most Copious Eastern Sources...*, vol. 4 (Williams and Norgate, 1872).

<sup>41</sup> Muhammad Fatih, "Pluralisme Agama Dalam Al-Qur'an Telaah Atas Penafsiran Farid Esack," *Progressa: Journal of Islamic Religious Instruction* 4, no. 1 (September 25, 2020): 69–80, <https://doi.org/10.32616/pgi.v4i1.201.69-80>.

<sup>42</sup> Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*.

<sup>43</sup> Hasbi Nawi Ashidiki, "Konsep Mustadh'afin Dalam Kajian Tafsir Kontemporer (Studi Atas Tafsir Farid Esack)," *Al-Kauniah* 2, no. 2 (March 20, 2022): 13–34, <https://doi.org/10.56874/alkauniah.v2i2.707>.

<sup>44</sup> Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*.

<sup>45</sup> Piet H Khaidir, *Teologi Kaum Tertindas Sajak Ber-Islam Untuk Praksis Keadilan Sosial*, Bestari (Muhammadiyah University Malang, 2003).

<sup>46</sup> Muhammad and Rozak, "Kontekstualisasi Penafsiran Ayat-Ayat Tentang Al-Mustadh'afin (Kajian Dengan Pendekatan Hermeneutika Farid Esack)."

<sup>47</sup> Rozak and Ghafur, "Studi Tafsir Hermeneutika Farid Esack Terhadap Perjuangan Al-Mustadh'afin (Kaum Lemah Dan Tertindas)."

<sup>48</sup> Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*.

in interpretation; if there is imbalance, injustice, or oppression in social reality, neutrality will only prolong the state of unfairness and oppression that it is supposed to fight against.<sup>49</sup>

In this case, encouraged minority Muslims in South Africa to oppose the Apartheid regime, which began with its policies in laws governing black life in South Africa, including 1) Violations of interracial marriage of different colors (1949), 2) Categorization of the population by race (1950), 3) Violations of sexual relations between white people and people of other races (1950), 4) Racial segregation of whites from people of other races in public facilities (1953). The government carries out this regulation based on state interests, political stability, and social and economic welfare.<sup>50</sup> This policy led to intense criticism of the Apartheid regime at home and abroad. Thus emerged the ANC organization, the African National Congress, in 1912, aimed to uphold justice for the oppressed and defend human rights.<sup>51</sup> Thus, reaction and criticism were not only carried out by the Christian majority in South Africa, but South African Muslims were also instrumental in opposing measures aimed at the elimination of the politics of desegregation.<sup>52</sup>

**Sixth, *Jihad* is a practical movement of liberation.** *Jihad* refers to the effort of fighting, emphasizing the action or expenditure of energy and property. The Qur'an mentions the word *jihad* and its derivations 41 times. For most Muslims, *jihad* is often associated with the concept of holy war. Nevertheless, the meaning of *jihad* covers a vast area, including the sense of striving to change circumstances at the individual and social levels. As a hermeneutic principle, *Jihad* asserts that interpretation is not only about conceptual and theoretical understanding but must also be implemented and realized through social movements or real social action. This event can be recognized based on the Qur'anic verse, "*Verily Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in them*" (Ar-Ra'd [13]:11).

This verse explains that individual social change must be based on one's consciousness and also requires movements in the field and society, not only on mere theory and cognitive ideology. According to Esack, this concept of *jihad* is the opposite of the idea or understanding of some commentators who state that the interpretation of *jihad* occurs outside history. For Esack, the situation was precisely the opposite; Human life is a practice that results in interpretations being in history and followed by theology.<sup>53</sup> According to Esack, the primary goal of *jihad* is to end and eliminate injustice, not to replace one system of injustice with another or replace one dominant group with another. Thus, *jihad* is a continuous and effective effort in the struggle for justice. Amid ongoing suffering and resistance, committing to action as an expression of faith implies that trust and understanding will develop naturally through concrete programs against suffering and dehumanization.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Soleh and Rahmawati, "Maulana Farid Esack: Hermeneutika Pembebasan Dan Relasi Antar Umat Beragama."

<sup>50</sup> Muhammad Fakhriansyah, "Mandela Dan Pemilu Yang Meruntuhkan Apartheid Di Afrika Selatan," dalam *tirto*.Id diakses pada 10 Januari 2024, 2022, <https://tirto.id/mandela-dan-pemilu-yang-meruntuhkan-apartheid-di-afrika-selatan-gdPK>.

<sup>51</sup> Rohman, "Kontribusi Muslim Minoritas Dalam Menggulingkan Rezim Apartheid Di Afrika Selatan (1948-1994)."

<sup>52</sup> Abdullah Haron, "Ikon Perjuangan Muslim Melawan Apartheid," *islami.co* diakses pada 10 Januari 2024, 2019, <https://islami.co/abdullah-haroon-ikon-perjuangan-muslim-melawan-apartheid/>.

<sup>53</sup> Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*.

<sup>54</sup> Mustamin and Basri, "Epistemologi Penafsiran Farid Esack Terhadap Ayat-Ayat Pembebasan."

## Interpretation of *al-Mustad'afun's* Liberation through the Esack Social Movement

Esack's liberation of *al-Mustad'afun* underwent real implementation through his participation in a social movement responsive to social facts. These movements were a form of *jihad* from the Eskom in liberating the oppressed from the political cruelty of the Apartheid regime. Opponents of the arbitrariness of the apartheid regime among Muslims gave birth to the Muslim Student Association (MSA), Muslim Youth Movement (MYM), Qiblah, and The Call of Islam in the 1980s.<sup>55</sup> It is recorded in history that the Call of Islam organization was an opponent of the Apartheid regime and affiliated with the United Democratic Front (UDF), as well as the African National Congress (ANC), which was very persistent in fighting for the liberation of the people in South Africa.<sup>56</sup> The liberation groups' movements, especially the Call of Islam, followed by Esack, not only opposed the tyranny of the apartheid regime but also promoted religious pluralism and interfaith collaboration (including with non-Muslims) to achieve their goals. Esack believes this pluralist and cooperative attitude is essential because of religious diversity, while every religion teaches good values and opposes oppression.<sup>57</sup>

Esack viewed *al-Mustad'afun*, which means "the oppressed" or "the weak" in Islamic terminology, as the primary focus of social struggle. In context, Esack uses this understanding as an impetus for social movements prioritizing rights and justice for marginalized and oppressed groups.<sup>58</sup> Esack translated the concept of *al-Mustad'afun* into concrete action, building solidarity movements that empower and protect those marginalized from social injustice. In addition, Esack has actively mobilized social movements that adopted the concept of *al-Mustad'afun* in response to social phenomena such as economic inequality, racial inequality, and human rights abuses.<sup>59</sup> Thus, through his approach grounded in an inclusive and progressive understanding of religion, Esack has built interfaith dialogue to fight for social justice and humanity. It can also build tolerance between other religions. For example, cooperation to eradicate poverty, uphold human rights, and reject violence. This cooperation will create harmony in religious life.<sup>60</sup>

### The struggle against apartheid

#### *Jihad and shahadat*

The terms *jihad* and *shahada* find extensive use in the speeches and publications of The Call of Islam, MSA, and MYM, which consider their dedication to the anti-apartheid cause as a religious duty. During MYM and MSA gatherings, echoes of the Muslim Brotherhood's slogans like "*al-jihad sabiluna*" (jihad is our way) and "*al-mawt fi sabil Allah asma amani-na*" (death in the way of Allah is our highest ideal) are commonplace. These slogans, particularly resonant for the younger members of these organizations, specifically pertain to the anti-apartheid struggle. The intricate legal aspects of jihad, extensively discussed by classical Islamic scholars, such as who holds the authority to declare jihad and under what conditions, are not of relevance to these Islamic activists involved in the anti-apartheid

<sup>55</sup> M Sultan Latif Rahmatulloh, "Revitalisasi Nilai-Nilai Tauhid Sebagai Upaya Mewujudkan Muslim Progresif Dalam Beragama Dan Bernegara: Interpretasi Dan Aplikasi QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 21-22 Perspektif Teori Hermeneutik Farid Esack," *AT-TURAS: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 7, no. 2 (2020): 253–66.

<sup>56</sup> Na'eem Jeenah, "Jihad as a Form of Struggle in the Resistance to Apartheid | Chimurenga," Chimurenga: Iman & Ideologi, Sistem Pemerintahan. diakses pada 10 Januari 2024, 2015, <https://chimurengachronic.co.za/jihad-as-a-form-of-struggle-in-the-resistance-to-apartheid-in-south-africa/>.

<sup>57</sup> Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*.

<sup>58</sup> Akhmad Ali Said, "Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an Tentang Pluralisme Agama Perspektif Farid Esack."

<sup>59</sup> Rozak and Ghafur, "Studi Tafsir Hermeneutika Farid Esack Terhadap Perjuangan Al-Mustad'afin (Kaum Lemah Dan Tertindas)."

<sup>60</sup> Nuzul Fitriansyah and Rachma Vina Tsurayya, "Tauhidic Paradigm Sebagai Basis Dalam Mewujudkan Umat Beragama Yang Toleran Dan Moderat," *Al-Mada: Jurnal Agama, Sosial, Dan Budaya* 3, no. 1 (March 2, 2020): 50–63, <https://doi.org/10.31538/almada.v3i1.480>.

cause. It is also unrelated to presume that jihad may be a struggle waged exclusively on behalf of Muslims.<sup>61</sup>

### ***Other forms of jihad in South Africa***

MYM and Call of Islam activists extended the term "jihad" to include other social justice struggles, as former president of MYM Rashied Omar coined the term "gender jihad" in 1995 to refer to Muslims' fight for women's rights and equality. Shamima Shaikh, a member of MYM and head of the organization's Gender Desk, popularized the term in 1993. Since then, it has become popular among Islamic feminists worldwide, especially after Amina Wadud became famous worldwide. Occasionally, the term "jihad" is also used to refer to racism ("jihad against racism"), poverty ("jihad against poverty"), and South African socioeconomic misfortune.<sup>62</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Esack's hermeneutics was inspired by the thoughts of his predecessors, M. Arkoun and Fazlur Rahman. Each combines the two by highlighting the sides of humanity. Esack used Arkoun's regression-progressive model and Fazlurrahman's double movement. According to him, the Qur'an should be read by a critical reader who places the Qur'an as a plain text. Therefore, reading it must consider the empirical reality and culture that affects it. Thus, in Esack's hermeneutics, there is no neutral reading, meaning that the reading is based on subjectivity.

Esack's hermeneutics has six interrelated keys of interpretation; the unity of the six keys has the primary objective of liberation and lifting the oppressed from the tyranny of rulers and racists. The six keys in question are *Taqwa*, *Tawhid*, *Al-Nas*, *Al-Mustad'afin fi Al-Ardh*, *Al-Adl*, *Al-Qisth*, and *Jihad*. Esack also interpreted *al-Mustad'afin's* liberation through social movements, including those within the Muslim Student Association (MSA), Muslim Youth Movement (MYM), Qiblah, and The Call of Islam. Esack's forms of resistance were anti-apartheid (*jihad* and *shahada*), racism *jihad* (against racism), socio-economic *jihad* (for the reconstruction of development and against poverty), and gender *jihad*.

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<sup>61</sup> Jeenah, "Jihad as a Form of Struggle in the Resistance to Apartheid | Chimurenga."

<sup>62</sup> Jeenah.

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