Deciphering Qs. al-Maidah: 51 in Qur'an, Liberation Pluralism: Analyzing the Interpretation of the Word Auliya' through Farid Esack's Perspective

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Abstract

The interpretation of the term "leader" about "auliya'" is mentioned in Qs. al-Maidah: 51 has been a topic of debate among Indonesian Muslim scholars. In contrast to Farid Esack, who appears to need more understanding regarding the definition of leadership in this verse, his focus remains firmly fixed on issues more relevant to the South African context. This study proposes Farid Esack's interpretation of the term auliya' in Qs. al-Maidah: 51, as it pertains to the South African context. Specifically, it examines his exploration of the word's meaning and delves into the implications of his unique perspective. This goal can be an alternative to other interpretations of the word aliyah in Qs. al-Maidah. 51: 51. The research is qualitative research with literature data that is analyzed descriptively. The primary data in this research is the meaning of the word auliya' in the book Qur'an Liberation & Pluralism by Farid Esack. The analysis of Esack's meaning presentation examines the literature by revisionist mufassirs. The findings of this investigation conclude that Farid Esack, based on his liberation hermeneutics, interprets the term auliya to connote collaboration and solidarity. Esack's interpretation implies that it is impermissible for a Muslim to collaborate with non-Muslims unless he does not forsake Muslims, intends to safeguard believers, has entered into a peace treaty with believers, and refrains from fighting against them. When contextualized within South Africa, Esack contends that a believer can cooperate with non-Muslims if it promotes the well-being of Muslims and combats racist conduct, oppression, and injustice. However, additional research is imperative to ascertain the pertinence of utilizing these interpretations within the Indonesian context. This study solely focuses on scrutinizing the outcomes and consequences of Esack's interpretation.

1. Introduction

Farid Esack completely ignores the implications of the term "leader" when discussing the term *auliya'* in *Qur'an Liberation & Pluralism*, Qs. al-Maidah: 51. This is in contrast to the majority of Indonesian scholars who, to some extent, touch upon the meaning of "leader" when attempting to interpret the verse. Many of them respond to the views of other experts because they arrive at different interpretations in the end.

The interpretation of Qs. al-Maidah: 51 and the significance of a leader has become a contentious issue in Indonesia, resulting in polarization among its people. This dispute arose after Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), the former governor of Jakarta, claimed that he was targeted by individuals seeking to impede his political progress due to his non-Muslim status. He argued that choosing a leader who is not Muslim does not align with Islamic teachings, sparking widespread debate on this topic. He said, "You could not have voted for me because you were lied to by people who used Surah Al-Maidah 51 or something like that. So if you don't vote for me because you're afraid of going to hell, being fooled like that, it's okay." (Kato, 2017).

In response to this, the founder and leader of the Front Pembela Islam (FPI), Reziq Shihab, believes that within the context of a predominantly Muslim society, the most appropriate interpretation of the term *auliya'* in Qs. al-Maidah: 51 is "leader." Therefore, allowing a non-Muslim to become a leader, including a governor, is an incorrect interpretation of Islam. However, it is not denied that the term auliya' also carries other meanings, such as close friend and protector (Hamdi et al., 2017).

Reziq Shihab's viewpoint was subsequently responded to by Arif Safri, as stated in the article titled *The Challenge to Religious Tolerance: Fundamentalists' Resistance to a Non-Muslim Leader in Indonesia.* He argued that the conservative factions have strayed far from the context of the verse. He claims that the word auliya' in the verse refers to the interpretation of a "close friend", not a "leader" (Kato, 2017). Upon analysis, none of those above perspectives can be deemed culpable as each scholar's interpretation contains a portion of veracity. Lexically, the word *auliya'* is the plural of the word *waly*. From the root of the word waly, various derivation of words with different meanings emerge, such as *wala-yali* which means close friend or following, *walla* which means master, help, and love, *aula* which means authorising, entrusting, *tawalla* which means settling, taking care, mastering, and *al-aula* which means most entitled and most worthy (Ismatilah, Hasyim, and Maimun, 2016).

It is imperative to note that the term wali/auliya' is not solely comprehensible in lexical sense but rather from a relational perspective as it assimilates into the sentence's context. Ismatilah in her article entitled *Makna Wali daan Auliya' Dalam Al-Qur'an (Suatu Kajian dengan Pendekatan Semantik Toshihiko Izutsu)* summarises the various meanings of the words wali and auliya' in the context of Quranic sentences. Referring to her writing, Ismatillah argues that the word auliya' in Qs. al-Maidah: 51 can mean as a friend and can also be interpreted as a leader (ibid.).

Aligned with the elucidation above, General Budi Karyanto eloquently expounds on the significance of the term auliya in his article *"The Appointment Of Non-Muslim Leaders,"* by semantic theory. He said that all revisions of the word wali refer to the

meaning of closeness. This enables the term *wali* to encompass multiple connotations, including but not limited to an intimate confidant, supportive aide, protective guardian, a strategic ally, devoted follower or leader and cherished beloved. These interpretations share a common thread of "closeness" within the language. Like a father who becomes his daughter's protector *(waly)* because he is the closest to his daughter. A fervent adherent is designated as a custodian owing to their proximity to their deity. This principle also pertains to the definition of a guide, as an effective leader should be intimately connected with those they oversee (Karyanto, 2017).

Thus, the narrative of "spreading lies to hinder Ahok's rise to power" cannot be justified because all opinions can hold their own validity with their respective arguments. Furthermore, even before the alleged blasphemy case became a contentious issue, many commentators had already drawn the meaning of a leader in connection with the interpretation in Qs. al-Maidah: 51 that aligns with the conservative scholars' version as put forth by Safri. This indicates that interpreting the word *auliya'* as a leader is not actually the dissemination of false information, as this discussion had already been addressed in the commentaries of Islamic scholars.

For instance, Buya Hamka stated unequivocally that the verse explicitly prohibits a Muslim from choosing a leader from among the Jews and Christians. Whoever among the Muslim community appoints Jews and Christians as leaders has chosen a path of darkness, for they have designated leaders from among those who are considered adversaries (the enemies of the faithful) (Amrullah, 1990).

In stark contrast to Hamka, Quraish Shihab argues that the word *auliya'* in the text of the verse actually means close associates or close people. He then criticizes the translation of the Quran by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementrian Agama), which is not entirely accurate when translating *auliya'* as leaders. According to him, the meaning of the word *auliya'* is broader than that; any form of closeness can be referred to as "*auliya'.*" (Shihab, 2012).

The meaning of the word leader in the Quran translation does have a significant impact. For example, in an article written by Makshsus with the title *Leadership Criteria In Islam And Its Benefits: Muslim Involvement In Non-Muslim Governments*. Makshsus' article posits that the appointment of non-Muslims as leaders is unequivocally proscribed in Islam, citing Qs. al-Maidah: 51 as evidence. However, his conclusion appears to be based solely on translation and lacks sufficient examination of other pertinent factors (Hayati, Fatarib, and Saharuddin, 2020).

Returning to Shihab, he holds the view that the prohibition of appointing non-Muslims as leaders is not absolute. In specific contexts, there is a possibility of appointing a leader from among non-Muslims (Shihab, 2012). Although Shihab appears to reject the view of prohibiting the appointment of non-Muslim leaders, it is evident that the dynamics of the discussion regarding whether or not to appoint non-Muslim leaders had already been debated long before the Ahok case gained prominence.

Based on the results of hermeneutical analysis in the article titled Comparative Research of Hamka and Quraish Shihab's Interpretation: *Application of Gadamer's Hermeneutics in Qs. Al-Maidah [5]: 51*, the difference in opinions between Hamka and Shihab occurs due to the differing contexts that surrounded them when they wrote their interpretations of the verse. For instance, Hamka wrote his commentary on *al-Azhar* while he was imprisoned as a political detainee. Furthermore, he was a significant figure in the

Masyumi party, which opposed the presence of the Communist party due to their rejection of Islamic values (Awaluddin, Nurjannah, Ghoffari, et al., 2022).

The writing situation of Hamka was vastly different from the context surrounding Shihab when he wrote the commentary *al-Misbah*. Shihab composed *al-Misbah* in 1997 during a period when the political situation was not heated, and the relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims were still considered harmonious. Furthermore, he did not have a track record in practical politics, which made his interpretation of the verse significantly removed from political interests. Throughout his life, he spent a significant amount of time in academic circles (ibid.).

The dissimilarity in the authorship context of this work is what accounts for the disparate conclusions drawn by experts. Thus, it comes as no surprise that Esack's earlier mentioned work exhibits a complete disregard for discerning the significance of the term *"auliya'"* in relation to leadership. This is because the context that surrounded him at that time was not a struggle between the idea of whether or not a Muslim could be led by a non-Muslim, but how marginalised people from various ethnicities, tribes and religions united to fight the Apartheid regime. Esack acknowledges the possibility of variations in interpretation among *mufassir* when deciphering the Quranic text. He attributes such divergences to differences in contextual factors. In light of this, Esack proposes that individuals or groups need not engage in hostile exchanges over discrepancies in their interpretations (Muhammad, Y. Rahman, et al., n.d.). Bearing this insight in mind, our research shall abstain from participating in any debate regarding the meaning of the word "auliya" by pitting experts' views against each other.

Esack's perspective offers an alternative interpretation of the term *"auliya'"* in Qs. al-Maidah 51, which warrants further exploration. By examining Esack's theological and methodological foundations, we can gain insight into how this term may carry a distinct yet similar significance compared to the interpretation provided by Indonesian Muslim scholars. Furthermore, the motivation to appreciate the diversity of interpretations between parties is also something that is very meaningful in the Indonesian context. This is because this is what allows divisions between people, even within one Muslim body as happened in 2017.

In the world of scientific writing, the discussion of Farid Esack is actually not new. Some writers have actually conducted research on Farid Esack's thoughts, for example Ahmad Zainal Abidin with his article entitled Epistimologi Tafsir al-Quran Farid Esack (2013) well as Fawaizul Umam with his article *Menimbang Gagasan Farid Esack Tentang Solidaritas Lintas Agama (2010)*. However, the aforementioned writings provide general analyses of Farid Esack's views. Umam examines Esack's perspective on religious solidarity, while Abidin focuses on his interpretation of Quranic verses without specializing in any particular one. In contrast to these studies, this research specifically analyzes how Esack interprets Qs. al-Maidah 51 from the Quran. The author does not deny the relevance of Umam and Abidin's work as they are related to interpreting the Quran and interfaith relations - two themes also discussed in this study. However, what sets this research apart is its unique combination of both themes in analyzing one interpretation of a Quranic verse that will potentially impact religious solidarity moving forward.

It seems that the writing that really contains a discussion of Esack's interpretation of the word auliya' comes from Zaenal Muttaqin's writing with the title *Farid Esack's Qur'anic Hermeneutics Of Pluralism For Interreligious Cooperation In Indonesia (2020)*.

Muttaqin explores Esack's interpretation and its potential impact on interreligious solidarity in South Africa. Additionally, he examines how this mode of interpretation can be adapted to the Indonesian context. In several paragraphs, Muttaqin delves into the application of Esack's understanding of the term auliya' within the South African context. However, his discussion is limited to description without analysis.

This paper delves deeper into the analysis of Farid Esack's interpretation of a specific verse, exploring the various quranic aspects considered by him and examining his resulting interpretation based on an extensive review of tafsir books. Moreover, this research study aims to investigate the implications that arise from Esack's interpretation within the context that surrounds him. Specifically, this study focuses solely on how he interprets the word "auliya'." The main purpose of this study is to see what are the theological and methodological foundations when expressing opinions related to the word auliya' in Qs. al-Maidah: 51, and what are the implications of his views.

2.   Methods

2.1.   Data Source

This study employs a qualitative approach through literature review as its research methodology. The data is gathered from diverse scientific sources, which are classified by the author into two categories: primary and secondary data sources. The primary source in this research is Esack's book entitled Qur'an Liberation & Pluralism: *An Islamic Presoective of Interrligious Solidarity Against Opperession* which contains a discussion of Esack's interpretation of the word auliya' in Qs. al-Maidah: 51. The book also describes in full the discussion of the theological-methodological foundations and contexts that surround Esack in interpreting Quranic verses.

Regarding secondary sources, the author uses other works written by Esack such as *On Being a Muslim, The Qur'an: A user's guide, The Qur'an: A Short Introductions, Qur'anic Hermeneutic: Problems and Prospects*, Some of these writings will offer a more profound elucidation on the context of Esack's authorship and his perspective in interpreting the Quran. Furthermore, the author draws upon various other literary works that encompass discussions about Farid Esack and his comprehension. These sources have been previously introduced in the opening section. The utilization of additional writings apart from those authored by Farid Esack is bound to facilitate an enhanced construction of his ideologies.

Table 1. List of primary and secondary sources used by the author in this research

Source	Author	Title
Primary	Farid Esack	Qur'an Liberation & Pluralism: An Islamic Presoective of Interrligious Solidarity Against Opperession
Secondary	Farid Esack	On Being a Muslim
		The Qur'an: A user's guide
		Qur'anic Hermeneutic: Problems and Prospects
	Ahmad Zainal Abidin	Epistimologi Tafsir al-Quran Farid Esack
	Fawaizul Umam	Menimbang Gagasan Farid Esack Tentang Solidaritas Lintas Agama

Zaenal Muttaqin	Farid Esack's Qur'anic Hermeneutics Of Pluralism For Interreligious Cooperation In Indonesia

Table 1 shows that the keyword used in finding relevant articles is Religious Moderation in Higher Education. The focus determined in this literature leads to the evaluation of tracing research trends related to Religious Moderation. There are 487 literatures from three relevant data sources related to Religious Moderation. The next stage is to determine the criteria for article inclusion and exclusion from the focused theme according to the framework required for review as shown in Table 2

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Journal Articles	Book chapters, book, proceedings, review
Articles published in 2019-2023	Articles not published between 2019 and 2023.
Related Articles Religious Moderation in Higher Education	Articles Not Related to Religious Moderation in Higher Education
English-language articles	Articles not published in English.

2.2. Data Analysis Method

In practice, this research will first describe Farid Esack's biography, book profile of Qur'an Liberation Pluralism along with how Esack's thought in general. This aims to find the context behind Esack's thought. After contextualizing the subject matter, the subsequent measure entails presenting Esack's interpretation of the term "auliya'" in Qs. al-Maidah: 51 while concurrently conducting an analytical examination.

The analysis in this study is facilitated by the data that the author acquires from primary literature on the Qur'an and Tafsir. Particularly, the works of reformist mufassirs such as Abul Kalam Azad, Thabataba'i, Buya Hamka, Muhammad Jawd Mugniyyah, Jamaluddin al-Qasimi, Rasyid Ridha and Muhammad Abduh are employed to augment this process. The author's curation of names is predicated upon the imperative of ensuring the pertinence of their analysis vis-à-vis Esack's significance in present circumstances. Additionally, the writer also sources information from a diverse array of scientific literature, including journals that engage with themes germane to their research.
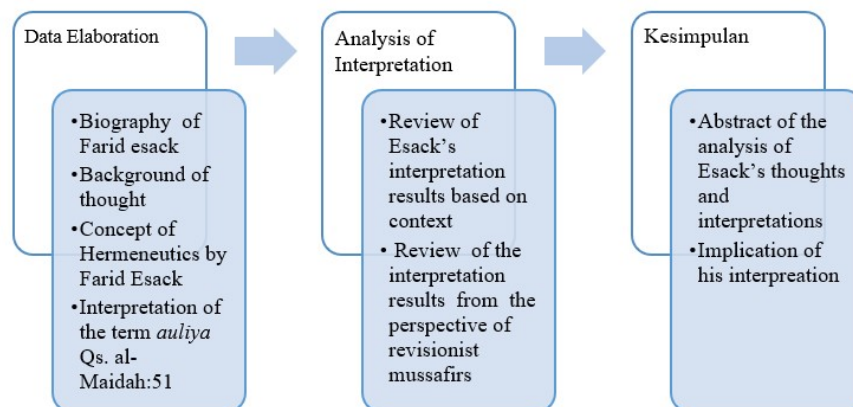

Figure 1. Flow of this research.

As previously stated, this research shall not prolong the discourse on conflicting scholarly perspectives regarding the term auliya' in Qs. al-Maidah: 51. This study exclusively concentrates on delineating the methodology and significance of Qs. al-Maidah: 51 viewpoint as espoused by Farid Esack in his work, "Qur'an Liberation & Pluralism," alongside a thorough scrutiny of the literature review data pertaining to this identical subject matter. The author feels no need to present at length how the meaning of the word auliya' normatively, because in fact there are too many differences in scholarly views on this matter. Presumably the explanation in the introduction is enough to describe the meaning of the word auliya' in general. If the meaning of the word auliya' is presented in a special sub-discussion, this will take the author away from the main purpose of this writing. Not to mention the fact that scholars, when trying to understand the word auliya', differ from one another in their contexts.

3.   Results and Discussion

3.1.   Biography of Farid Esack

Farid Esack was born in Wynberg, Cape Town, South Africa, in 1965. His childhood was marked by hardship, poverty, and racist actions (Rahemtulla, 2020). When he was just three weeks old, his father abandoned Esack, along with his mother and five siblings. Three of those siblings were the children of his mother's first husband. Similar to his father's case, his mother's first marriage also ended when their third child was three months old (Esack, n.d.).

The Esack family was a colored family; Esack's mother was of Malay descent, and his father originated from India. Under the Apartheid regulations at that time, people with colored skin were required to reside in Bonteheuwel, Cape Flats, South Africa. This city then became the place of Esack's childhood (Esack, n.d.).

Esack did not grow up in a family that placed significant emphasis on religious values. His neighbors were Christians. However, he acknowledges in his autobiography that he was actually a religious child. He mentioned that he spent a lot of his playtime in the vicinity of the mosque. He even served as a community representative in mosque management until he reached adulthood (Sezgin, 2020).

After completing his school education, Esack pursued higher education with a scholarship in Pakistan for eight years at an institute known for its extreme conservatism. However, during his time in education, he actively joined the Christian student movement (Breakthrough), whose core mission was to seek meaning in life as a Christian while in an unjust and exploitative environment (Esack, 1997).

He also joined a social group under the leadership of Norman Wray and engaged in various social work activities, such as serving as a paramedic in Karachi Central Prison, teaching in impoverished Hindu and Christian communities, and caring for orphaned children in a home. In Esack's view, the social work he undertook in Pakistan served as valuable lessons that guided him in bridging the gap between faith and practice upon returning to South Africa (Esack, 1997).

He pursued his doctoral education at the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom, and obtained a PhD in Theology. His academic career continued when he became a lecturer in Biblical hermeneutics at the School of Postgraduate Philosophy and Theology

at St. Georgen, Frankfurt, Germany. Currently, he holds the position of a professor in Islamic Studies at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa (Okawa, 2021).

Throughout his intellectual career, he has published several globally recognized works. For example, *"Qur'an Liberation & Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression,"* first published in 1997. Then *"On Being A Muslim" in 1999, "The Qur'an: A User Guide" in 2002, "Whose Quran? A Concise Guide To Progressive Islam" in 2014, "The Qur'an: A Beginner's Guide" in 2009*, and many more scholarly essays.

3.2.   Apartheid, Accommodation Theology, and Liberation Theology

Living through hardship and a racist situation led Esack to believe in the necessity of establishing justice. In his view, the cruel Apartheid regime had unjustly imposed on the community. In the 1980s, two-thirds of South Africa's national income could only be enjoyed by the white population, which comprised only one-tenth of the population. Meanwhile, the marginalized community, consisting of black people, could only access one-quarter of the national income, despite making up three-quarters of the total population (Esack, 1997).

Millions of unemployed individuals lived in the darkness of the cruelty of the Apartheid regime, sleeping wherever they could without proper homes and buildings, with empty stomachs. In the morning, they would wake up and then search for work to earn a meal. If they couldn't find any work, they would return empty-handed, hoping if there were any leftover food in the trash bins that happened to be discarded. This is the depiction from Francis Wilson and Ramphle in Uprooting Poverty: The South African Challenge as quoted by Esack regarding the economic hardships faced by the oppressed (Esack, 1997).

The complex situation under the Apartheid regime was exacerbated by the two expressions of religious communities of any faith that could not unite against oppression and injustice. In Esack's terminology, these two religious expressions are referred to as Accommodation Theology and Liberation Theology. These two ideologies had at least one distinct task each, which was either to support the sustainability of the Apartheid regime or to resist the injustices of the Apartheid regime for a more equitable life (Esack, 1997).

Accommodation Theology is an ideology that seeks to uphold the status quo of racism, capitalism, and the totalitarianism of the Apartheid regime. They completely disregard the suffering of black people and the poor. Their primary orientation is the salvation of the afterlife within their respective religions, while silently condoning the existence of a social system that perpetuates differences and injustice (Esack, 1997). However, it cannot be denied that there is no religious evidence supporting the righteousness of the racist and exploitative social-economic structure of Apartheid.

The indifference of religious adherents of Accommodation Theology towards oppression and injustice is evident in the following writings:

The munafiks [hypocrites] in our town who just make all the trouble . . . want to change our deen [religion] and say Muslims must go to the townships and help the black koeffaar [unbelievers] and to tell our children to fight and make trouble agenst the government . . . What have we Muslims to do with all these things. Let us leave this politics and other business to the koeffaar ... Let them take the dunja [this world] and let

us not forget our icbaadaat [rituals] works and we will take the aagira [hereafter] (Esack, 1997).

Unlike Accommodation Theology, Liberation Theology tends to resist all forms of Apartheid oppression. Liberation Theology mobilizes for practical struggle for justice based on theological reflection. Liberation Theology is manifested in the form of religious organizations whose members consider themselves sinful for remaining silent in the face of oppression, consenting to exploitation, and displaying power over the suffering of the powerless. They seek a God who is active in history, desiring freedom for all and stimulating changes in the soul and social structures, a God whose unity is reflected in the unity of the people under a just order (Houston, 2023).

The Liberation Theology perspective is not exclusive to a single religion but is embraced by various religions such as Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, and traditional African religions in South Africa. In its opposition to Apartheid, Liberation Theology understands that all religions are comrades in the struggle for justice against the Apartheid regime. In Islam specifically, the manifestation of Liberation Theology is evident in theological contemplation activities related to the interpretation of religious teachings about solidarity with other religions and the goal of resisting oppression (Esack, 1997).

Concrete expressions that may help understand the motivations of religious adherents of Liberation Theology are reflected in the following words:

My Muslim brother, please learn the real Islam and take it to the black people of this country. Why are we only good for you as cus¬tomers in your shops, as servants in your homes, but not as fellow oppressed and fellow Muslims? We have been dehumanized for very long now, and it will be through Islam that [we] will be liberated. Not the 'American Islam' the Islam which says pray, fast, perform hajj [pilgrimage] and keep quiet. NO! I am talking about the Islam the Prophet Muhammad practised, the Islam that stood for justice, peace and love (Esack, 1997).

3.3.   Qur'an Liberation Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression" and Liberation Hermeneutics

3.3.1.   Book Profile

Qur'an Liberation Pluralism is a dissertation that he completed in the field of Quranic Studies at the University of Birmingham in 1996 (Abidin, 2013). This research was transformed into a book titled Qur'an Liberation Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression. It was first published in 1997 through Oxford: One World Publication.

In its initial publication, this book's discussion is divided into seven chapters, totaling up to 283 pages, which encompass the following topics: The Context (regarding Muslims in South Africa), Between Text and Context (introduction to Hermeneutics), Hermeneutical Keys (the principles of Hermeneutics), Redefining Self and Other (examination of the meanings of faith, Islam, and Kufr), The Quran and The Other (exploring how the Quran interprets non-Muslims), Redefining Comrades and Opponents (viewing others as solidarity companions), and From the Wilderness to the Promised Land (discussion on the promised goal of justice as promised by God).

Regarding his motivation for writing Qur'an Liberation Pluralism, Esack articulates that he aims to achieve at least four objectives. Firstly, to convey that an individual

can coexist in contemporary contexts with people of different religious beliefs, living harmoniously alongside them, fostering solidarity, and shaping a more humane society without undermining religious faith. Secondly, he seeks to develop the concept of theological pluralism within Islam by emphasizing the idea of Quranic hermeneutics. Thirdly, he aims to reexamine how the Quran defines the categories of Muslims and non-Muslims to provide space for the truth and justice of others for the sake of liberation. Fourthly, He delves into the relationship between the ideas of religious exclusivism and their support for the Apartheid regime while also exploring the connection between forms of religious inclusivism and their resistance to the Apartheid regime and providing theological-Quranic evidence for the latter (Esack, 1997).

In his exposition, and also in the juxtaposition of the meaning of liberation theology as previously discussed, it becomes evident where Farid Esack's stance lies. He aligns more with progressive political actions that reject the existence of the Apartheid regime due to reasons of racism, injustice, and extreme exploitation. On the other hand, he disagrees with the exclusive religious factions in South Africa because they appear to turn a blind eye and show indifference to the injustices and oppressions taking place. The reasoning of the exclusive groups is quite simple: those who are marginalized are not part of us, there is no bond of brotherhood between us and them, so why should we defend them? Similarly, their stance on not opposing the Apartheid regime is rooted in the belief that the regime has not harmed the Muslim community. They have not demolished mosques, they have not prohibited any form of worship, they allow the call to prayer (azan) to be heard, and they even permit the construction of madrasas. With all these reasons, why should the Apartheid regime be overthrown? (Esack, 1999).

By understanding this, the main theme of the book also becomes evident. It is the response to the conservative religious attitudes and the defense of the oppressed against the Apartheid regime, both from within and outside Islam, based on theological reflection aided by a strengthened understanding of religious texts through the application of Hermeneutics methodology. This is a natural outcome, as the political developments and the inadequacy of conservative factions in dealing with these developments have given rise to pluralistic perspectives (Sejdini, 2022).

Therefore, it is not surprising that many discussions in this book bring forth pluralism-hermeneutics arguments as ammunition in refutation of the arguments put forth by conservative religious groups. This includes the redefinition of the meanings of faith, Islam, and kufr through the lens of hermeneutics, as well as a comprehensive interpretation of terms such as ahlul-kitab, polytheists, and adherents of other religions. This also encompasses discussions regarding the term auliya' as an argument for collaboration among different communities.

3.3.2. A Review of Liberation Hermeneutics in Theological and Methodological Aspects

Driven by the motivation to respond to these two concerns, Esack subsequently advocates a hermeneutical model that he terms "hermeneutics of liberation." Such a hermeneutical model seeks to position the primary text (the Quran) at the center of interpretation, elucidating how it responds to the audience's context as the basis for determining the relevance of the primary text within contemporary contexts (Abidin, 2013).

The audience context as the initial recipients (the companions) in Esack's view is crucial because the Quran was not directly formulated into a composed book. The Quran was revealed in response to the actual social issues prevailing at that time. It was recited to the Prophet, absorbed, and memorized by the companions, thus becoming a reference for their practices when facing the social situations and society of that era. In Esack's perspective, revelation is rich with elements that provoke progressive actions, emanating from the responsive impact of social change (Muhammad Rahman, 2022). Furthermore, Farid Esack characterizes liberation theology as a movement aimed at emancipating religion from societal, political, and religious frameworks rooted in unquestioning compliance, and advocating for the liberation of individuals from various forms of injustice and exploitation, encompassing race, gender, class, and religion (Rehman, 2017).

The concept of liberation hermeneutics by Esack is inspired by the idea of reception hermeneutics, as articulated by Francis Schüssler-Fiorenza, which is popular in the tradition of interpreting the Bible. Upon deeper examination, reception hermeneutics essentially aligns with the functionalist text approach, which closely associates the existence of sacred texts with their functionality and pragmatism. In other words, the truth of sacred texts can be perceived in terms of how well the texts contained within them address the social issues of society (Abidin, 2013).

Reception hermeneutics does not solely examine how a text responds to its initial audience. Beyond that, liberation hermeneutics also focuses on its research of the interpretative process within different contexts from the original audience. The implication of employing reception hermeneutics lies in the inevitability of yielding different interpretive outcomes when conducted in different contexts, as the primary orientation in reception hermeneutics is the reader's world based on non-prophetic conditions and its interpretative nature due to the background of context and culture (Abidin, 2013).

On the the other side, Esack's hermeneutics are primarily influenced by Fazlur Rahman and Muhammad Arkoun. Their theories are extensively discussed in a separate sub-discussion to illustrate how their hermeneutical methods function. By drawing from the methodologies of Arkoun and Rahman, Esack distills the essence of hermeneutics, which he later coined as the "hermeneutical circle." According to Esack, this circle comprises three elements: firstly, the text and its author; secondly, the interpreter; and thirdly, the activity of interpretation (Esack, 1997).

Esack then developed the concept of "hermeneutical keys." The hermeneutic principles, essential elements of textual interpretation, are derived from the Fazlur Rahman-Arkoun framework and fortified by theological expressions based on Quranic doctrine. The hermeneutic keys comprise of several crucial elements. Firstly, Taqwa embodies a servant's obligation to both Allah and humanity in equal measure. Secondly, Tauhid is an orthopraxy social concept that highlights the unity of an inclusive society without discrimination. Thirdly, Nas (human being) represents not only the subject but also the object of praxis within the South African context according to Esack's perspective. Fourthly, Mustadafin refers to those who are marginalized and requires protection as per Qur'anic commandments. Fifthly, justice takes on various forms in the Quran but ultimately emphasizes Qisth. Sixthly, Jihad denotes a genuine struggle where Esack believes it can be fused into South Africa's context by fighting against oppression and injustice (Demichelis, 2014).

It is intriguing to observe that scholars frequently misconstrue the foundation, techniques, and outcomes of Esack's hermeneutics. For example, Abidin in Epistimologi Tafsir al-Quran Farid Esack suggests that the concept of the hermeneutical circle and Esack's hermeneutical keys are separate and unrelated concepts. He fails to address the contributions made by Francis Schussler-Fiorenza, Fazlur Rahman, and Muhammad Arkoun towards the evolution of Esack's liberation hermeneutics. Upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that there is a correlation between Esack's hermeneutic terminology and an association between acceptance-based hermeneutics and the overarching concept of liberation hermeneutics (Abidin, 2013).

It is noteworthy to mention that his emancipatory hermeneutics draws inspiration from notable personalities such as Gustavo Gutierrez, Ashgar Ali Engineer, Juan Luis Segundo, Amina Wadud Muhsin, Clodovis-Leonardo Boff, Hassan Hanafi, Paul Knitter, Abdullah al-Naim and Fatima Mernissi. These names, as Esack says, are people who share his frame of reference, although in Qur'an Liberation Pluralism, he rarely directly quotes them. (Esack, 1997). Esack's lack of citation of these names implies that it is difficult to construct a mapping of liberation hermeneutics based on a review of their methods.

The ensuing chart provides a contextual framework for the hermeneutics of liberation through an analysis of Esack's philosophical allusions
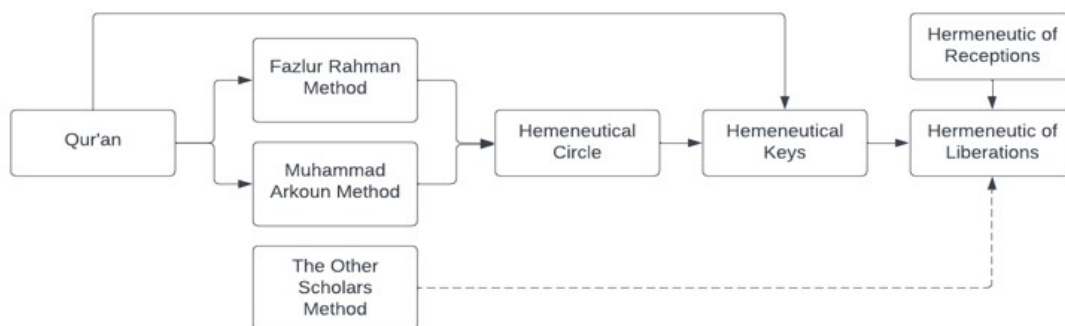

Figure 2. Esack's Philosophical Allusions.

3.3.3. The Interpretation of the Term Auliya' in Qs. Al-Ma'idah: 59 from Farid Esack's Perspective

It is noteworthy that Esack employs the lexicon of wilayah rather than auliya' in his discourse. Esack groups these regional verses in a subchapter entitled The Qur'an and Wilayah as Collaboration. Even so, the verse that is the main concern of Esack's discussion in the subchapter is Qs. al-Maidah: 51, as he says:

The text under discussion, Qur'an 5:51, like all those prohibiting Muslims from the territory of Others, is Medinan and reflects the religio-political tensions of that period (Esack, 1997).

Esack's objective in examining the connotation of the term auliya' is to elucidate the specific types of alliances that are forbidden for believers vis-à-vis the ahl al-kitab, as stipulated by Quranic scripture. While acknowledging that such prohibitions do exist within Islamic doctrine, he endeavors to provide an all-encompassing explanation of

what constitutes prohibited forms of association and their implications on future permissibility for believers to enter into alliances with members of the ahl al-kitab under certain circumstances.

Some scientific literature has actually discussed Esack's interpretation of Qs. Al-Maidah: 51. For example, Zaenal Muttaqin in his writing Farid Esack's Qur'anic Hermeneutics Of Pluralism For Interreligious Cooperation In Indonesia (2020). Nevertheless, as previously expounded, Muttaqin solely offers descriptive data without delving into analysis. This paper aims to expand beyond that scope by conducting an in-depth analysis of the review of tafsir literature and other Qur'anic sciences.

It is important to emphasize that Esack's motivation in discussing the meaning of the term auliya' is to illustrate the nature of alliance or alliance that is actually prohibited for believers towards the ahlul-kitab by the Quranic text. He does not deny that there is indeed a prohibition against forming alliances because the text of the verse states so. However, he aims to comprehensively explain what forms of alliance are prohibited, which will have implications for the permissibility of believers forming alliances with the ahlul-kitab in specific contexts in the future. Esack initiates his discussion by quoting Surah Al-Ma'idah: 51, which reads:

$$\text{يٰٓاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا الْيَهُوْدَ وَالنَّصٰرٰٓى اَوْلِيَاءَ ۘ بَعْضُهُمْ اَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ ۚ وَمَنْ يَّتَوَلَّهُمْ مِّنْكُمْ فَاِنَّهٗ مِنْهُمْ ۗ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ لَا يَهْدِى الْقَوْمَ الظّٰلِمِيْنَ}$$

O You who have attained to faith! Do not take the Jews and the Christians for your allies; they are but allies of one another; and whoever of you allies himself with them becomes, verily, one of them. Behold, God does not guide such evildoers

In the literature of Quranic exegesis, as Esack has mentioned, this verse has several narrated occasions of revelation, such as:

1. When a conflict arose between the Banu Qaynuqa' and the Muslim community, a hypocrite named Abdullah bin Ubay sided with the Banu Qaynuqa'. Abdullah then approached the Prophet and said, "I fear the changing times, and I should not deny allegiance with my supporters." On the other hand, Ubadah bin Samit and another member of the Banu Auf bin Khazraj opposed any alliance with the Banu Qaynuqa'. They approached the Prophet and said, "We stand with Allah, His Messenger, and the believers, seeking protection with Allah and His Messenger from the disbelievers and their allies."

2. When the Banu Qurayzah violated their covenant with Allah, Prophet Muhammad sent Abu Lubabah ibn Abdul Mundzir as a representative to request Abu Sufyan ibn Harb and the Quraysh people to surrender. Upon reaching there, he gestured with his hand across his throat, indicating that they were to be killed.

3. Some Muslims who established connections with the Christians in Syria, as well as others with the Jews in Medina, have disclosed information about the military activities and plans of Prophet Muhammad "to gain advantage from their wealth, even if it meant borrowing money."

4. During the Battle of Uhud, a group of Muslims felt fearful that the disbelievers would overcome them. Some among them showed signs of intending to join the Jews, seeking protection from them, and even converting to Judaism, while others sought refuge with the Christian community in Syria.

The four narrations presented by Esack correspond to the category of specific occasions of revelation (asbabun nuzul khas) in Rasyid Ridha's version of the commentary in al-Manar. Referring to Ridha's perspective, it is essential to understand that Surah Al-Ma'idah: 51 has two categories of occasions of revelation, namely general (asbabun nuzul am) and specific (asbabun nuzul khas). According to Ridha, the narrations mentioned above are specific occasions of revelation for this verse. As for its general occasion of revelation, Ridha argues that the verse is revealed in the context of the polemical situation between the Jewish community of Medina and the Muslim community, during which there were indications of betrayal by the Jewish community of the peace treaty with the Muslims. It is also mentioned that they conspired to assassinate Prophet Muhammad (Ridha Abduh, 1947).

This perspective is also presented by Abul Kalam Azad in The Tarjuman Alquran. Azad reveals that the prohibition of taking non-Muslims as auliya' (allies or protectors) in Surah Al-Ma'idah: 51 occurs because they opposed Muhammad. On one hand, during the religious tensions of that time, the hypocrites made non-Muslims their auliya' (Azad, n.d.). However, Azad does not delve into the various narrations of the occasions of revelation. He only discusses a meaning that is presumably based on the story of the first occasion of revelation mentioned above.

The differences in narrations of the occasions of revelation (asbabun nuzul) are crucial to emphasize because the existence of various and divergent narrations of the occasions of revelation suggests the possibility that one of the narrations of the occasions of revelation may not be authentic. It is also improbable that the same verse was revealed multiple times in different contexts, as the four narrations of the occasions of revelation mentioned above are recounted with different contexts and figures.

If this issue is referred to books that make the occasions of revelation (asbabun nuzul) their main subject, such as Lubabun Nuqul Fi Asbabun Nuzul by Suyuti, it can be found that Suyuti only presents one narration regarding the reason for the revelation of this verse. This narration is identical to the narration mentioned as the first reason for the revelation in the discussion above (asy-Syuyuti, 2002). Similarly, as stated in the book As-Shahih min Asbabin Nuzul by Isham al-Humaidan (1999) and Irsyadurrahman li Asbabin nuzul by Athiyah al-Ajhuri (2009), the last two authors only present one narration, which is the same as the narration mentioned as the first reason for revelation above, and consider it authentic. In other words, they regard other narrations as not authentic.

Regarding this matter, Esack acknowledges that there are indeed differing views among scholars when narrating the occasions of revelation (asbabun nuzul). He considers such differences to be common and acceptable, especially in the context of the discussion about taking non-Muslims as auliya' (Esack, 1997). On the other hand, Thabari, in his commentary on the occasions of revelation in Surah Al-Ma'idah: 51, does not comment on which narration is more authentic than the others. In his view, no other narration has been found to elevate the status of one of these narrations above the others (at-Thabari, 2001).

Esack then states that the meaning of auliya' in the Quran is not static. However, based on the occasions of revelation he presented, he proposes that at least three aspects can be gleaned from the narrations regarding the meaning of "auliya." First, personal closeness. Second, agreements that characterize relationships between tribes in Arabia, or even relationships between individuals and tribes that are not their own. Third, a bond of faith in God. In his view, even though these three meanings may not have clear differences, it is important for a person to consider how these meanings are applied differently (Esack, 1997), depending on the context of the society receiving the verse.

This perspective serves as the gateway to discussing the meaning of auliya' in the context of South Africa. Esack views the appropriate and contextually relevant meaning as collaboration and solidarity. He believes that the Quranic prohibition against appointing non-Muslims as auliya' pertains to collaboration with oppressive parties, rather than collaboration with marginalized non-Muslims who suffer from racism, oppression, and exploitation (Esack, 1997). In clear terms, he states:

The word was never actively invoked in the South African context. However, two terms embody its socio-political and religious applications: collaboration and solidarity. While collaboration is defined in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary as 'to co-operate' and a collaborator as 'some¬ one who works in conjunction with another or others', in South Africa it had long since acquired a pejorative sense: to emerge from the communi¬ ty of the oppressed and to willingly participate in the socio-political struc¬ tures of that oppression. Solidarity, defined as 'the fact or quality on the part of communities, etc., of being perfectly united or at one in some respect especially in interests, sympathy or aspirations', was how the rela¬ tionship between the various components of the liberation struggle was described (Esack, 1997)

This simultaneously addresses the arguments of the conservative-accommodative faction, which completely disregards the oppression of marginalized groups because they are not part of Islam. On the other hand, it serves as Esack's justification for interfaith collaboration to oppose the Apartheid regime, which, in this case, is deemed worthy of resistance due to its oppression and injustice.

Esack's interpretation of Qs. al-Maidah: 51 appears to be greatly influenced by the methodology of interpretation proposed by Fazlur Rahman, even though it is not explicitly mentioned by him in this chapter. In Rahman's methodology, he introduces the concept of the "double movement." This means that the meaning of a Quranic verse can be understood by referring to the moral values conveyed by the data of the occasions of revelation of the verse (first movement) and then applying those moral values to the contemporary context (second movement) (F. Rahman, 2017).

Referring to this concept, based on the occasions of revelation data that he presented, Esack extracts three moral values as previously mentioned. These are personal closeness, agreements among Arab tribes, and the bond of faith in God. This indicates that Esack applies the first movement as per Rahman's approach.

Regarding the moral values he conveys, there is an indication of the lack of relevance between one moral value and another. This occurs because of the differences in the stories among the narrations of the occasions of revelation of the verse. Even the characters and social settings in these narrations differ from one another. Therefore, it is reasonable if the conclusions regarding moral values among the narrations of the occasions of revelation also differ. However, Esack seems unfazed by this and only selects

the moral value that aligns with the context of South Africa. This involves collaboration among religious groups to resist the Apartheid regime, which is a method of interpretation identical to Rahman's second movement.

Furthermore, Esack believes that the prohibition of appointing non-Muslims as auliya' in Qs. al-Maidah: 51 only applies in the context of warfare, enmity, or any situation that has negative implications for the Muslim community. Additionally, the prohibition of appointing non-Muslims as auliya' is also prohibited if they display hostile factors, such as mocking religion or oppressing the believers and expelling them from their homeland, as stated in Surah Al-Mumtahanah: 90 (Esack, 1997).

In line with what Esack conveys, a Shia commentator, Muhammad Jawad Mughniyyah, when interpreting Qs. al-Maidah: 51, states that believers should not appoint Jews and Christians as auliya' if they display hostility or engage in fighting against the believers. However, if it is in the context of peace, then what a believer should do towards them is to live together in peace and harmony. They should be treated with kindness and justice because Allah loves such actions, regardless of whether they are believers or not (Mughniyyah, n.d.).

Returning to Ridha's perspective, Esack states that this verse is clear evidence that the prohibition is based on the hatred between people who are at war with each other, rather than on religious differences. Islam encourages respect for the differences in other religions by saying, "To you, your religion, and to me, my religion." This then implies that a believer can appoint a non-Muslim as an auliya' if, first, it does not lead to abandoning the fellow believers, second, it aims to protect the believers. Third, the group has made a peace agreement with the believers, and fourth, it does not apply to those who are not fighting against the believers (Esack, 1997).

Regarding the legal status of appointing a non-Muslim as an auliya', Muhammad Jamaluddin al-Qasimi, as quoted by Munim Sirry in Polemik Kitab Suci reveals that appointing a non-Muslim as an auliya' can be considered haram if it leads a Muslim into disbelief and poses a danger to other Muslims. However, if it does not lead to disbelief and rebellion, then it is considered permissible (mubah). If it brings blessings and good fortune to the Muslim community, then it becomes obligatory (wajib) (Sirry, 2013).

If this legal concept is juxtaposed with the context of South Africa, as described by Esack, it can be said that the law of appointing non-Muslims as auliya' is obligatory, in the sense that collaborating and forming alliances with them is a necessity. This is because such collaboration and alliances are aimed at building justice. Certainly, such a view aligns with Esack's aspirations along with his hermeneutics of liberation. What he desires is a just state, where people of all races, ethnicities, and religions can experience equality. Far from the oppression and tyranny of the Apartheid regime, which was keenly felt by marginalized communities at that time.

This perspective simultaneously criticizes the theological accommodationist or conservative groups that seem to turn a blind eye to the injustices that were happening. Logically, the injustice perpetrated by the Apartheid regime was fundamentally contrary to the ideals of justice espoused by Islam, even though, in general, the oppression in South Africa was mostly experienced by Black Christian communities. However, this doesn't dismiss the fact that injustice was also experienced by those of the Islamic faith, even though their numbers were smaller compared to the Black Christian population, as Esack himself experienced directly before reaching adulthood.

Referring to the views of Mughniyah as previously mentioned, doesn't Allah love peaceful, just, and harmonious relationships among humans, even if they belong to different religions? Esack, in another work, The Quran: A User's Guide, also states that the Quran explicitly emphasizes the importance of harmonious relationships with all parties that are not involved in armed conflict with the Muslim community. This is evidenced by the permission for a Muslim to consume the meat slaughtered by the People of the Book and even allowing a Muslim to marry individuals from their community (Esack, 2008).

4.   Conclusions

The outcome of this discussion demonstrates that Farid Esack, in his quest for the meaning of the Quran, employs a method he has developed, namely the Hermeneutics of Liberation. He draws this method from the essence of the theological motivation within the Quran, which he terms as hermeneutical keys, namely Taqwa, Tauhid, Humanity, the Marginalized, Justice, and Jihad.

Esack's methodology in reaching the meaning of the Quran is greatly influenced by Fazlur Rahman and Muhammad Arkoun, although at the same time, he does not hesitate to provide criticism of these two figures. Based on his reading, he reveals that in hermeneutics, three closely related elements are undeniable - which he refers to as the hermeneutical circle - namely the text and its author, the interpreter, and the activity of interpretation. The implication of the hermeneutical circle pattern is that the existence of the text within the context of interpretation is greatly determined by the interpreter themselves, who can shift the way the text is read from the original context to the locus of interpretation (in this case, South Africa).

Based on the hermeneutics of liberation that he initiated, Esack derives the meaning of the word auliya' in Surah Al-Ma'idah: 51 to mean "collaboration" and "solidarity." His interpretation is influenced by the method of extracting meanings from Quranic verses, which he drew from his inspirational figure, Fazlur Rahman, and the context of South Africa, which was then under the Apartheid regime. He also presents this interpretation as a response to conservative religious groups that seemed silent in the face of the injustice that was occurring.

The implications of Esack's interpretation of solidarity lead to the prohibition of a Muslim forming alliances with non-Muslims, except under certain conditions: not abandoning Islam and having the intention to protect fellow Muslims. The further consequence of this interpretation, in line with the context of South Africa, is the permission to build solidarity and collaboration with non-Muslims to support marginalized communities in their fight against the Apartheid regime.

5.   Acknowledgments

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