

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Critique of Religious Text Perspective**

Pontianak: IAIN Pontianak Press, 2013.

*By Luqman Abdul Jabbar*

Reviewed by

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The phenomenon commonly found in the field of interpretation often portrays the claim of truth. As a result, the truth is hard to define. It is certainly something that is reasonable, given the task instead of a human is not to determine who is right and who is wrong. Only God Almighty who has the right to become the holder of the authority of the truth.

This is what Luqman Abdul Jabbar tried to explain in his book, *Critique of Religious Text Perspectives*. Each individual and even a community often has different perspectives of looking at or understand something. The difference is human nature, and therefore it is difficult to avoid. Of course the difference of opinion is not to be contested, but it should becomes a means to achieve essential understanding in a process of searching for the truth.

In a book published by the STAIN Pontianak Press, Luqman argued that difference in opinion can be understood from our definition of the “justification”. Hermeneutically, most individuals often justify someone else’s fault, but in fact, they are also part of a community of “truth seekers”. It should not be the case, however, because we are part of that community that has no legal authority to justify the truth from God. This is the writer called “framing”. To quote William E. Paden, Luqman argued that this framing attitude has made everyone different in everything including perspectives. (p. 31-32)

In the perspective of Sayid Abu al-A’la al-Maududy for example, in the discussion about the Quran, he argued that the Quran is not a book that contains a detailed matters, but it is a book containing the basics of general and global issues. Therefore according to Luqman, Al-Maududy viewed that reading the Qur’an is certainly not the same as reading other texts, which are also written.

Al-Maududy explained that the Qur’an written in human language (read: Arabic) is essentially the words of God even its verse system, as acknowledged

by the majority of Muslims. Even the Qur'an was not written to follow systematic writing in chapters like commonly found in other books. Al-Quran with its in typical language style covers issues such as faith, morals, law, appeal, advice, example, criticism, restrictions, threats, advice, history, and so on as the instructions of Allah Almighty. (p. 22)

In addition to al-Maududy, Ignaz Goldziher also had different perspectives about the Quran, more precisely his criticism as an orientalist on the Quran. Ignaz Goldziher, an orientalist who was born in Szekesfeherva Hungary on June 22, 1850 argued that at least there are five aspects that became a focal point for research in his criticism of the interpretation of the Qur'an, i.e. *first*, interpretation of the classic period; *second*, the interpretation in perspective of rational theology; *third*, the interpretation in perspective of Sufism; *fourth*, the interpretation in perspective of a religious sect; and *fifth*, the interpretation of the awakening era (p. 48). In this context, Luqman Abdul Jabbar maintained that Goldziher presumably preferred a descriptive method in approaching the history and development of the interpretation of the Quran (p. 63).

In addition to various perspectives of religious texts, the book written by Luqman Abdul Jabbar also discussed matters related to living Qur'an. Citing Paden, Luqman Abdul Jabbar, mentioned that there are two components always present in the effort to interpret religious texts i.e. purpose and context. *Purpose* is one's interests and objectives when looking at an object, while *context* is socio-cultural conditions and everything that affects the way and pattern a person thinks in looking at and addressing something. *Purpose* and *context* will always give its own colors to the text interpreter, and there is no exception whether it is literary or sacred religious texts.

In the context of living Quran, the Holy Book is not only about the "interpretation" but has also been transformed into religious social phenomena such as the teaching of Qur'an reading, recitation of the Quran, writing certain part of the Quran in particular places, writing extracts of particular verses as a decoration, extraction of units of the Quran which later became formula for treatment of illness, prayers, supernatural powers and so on. (p. 84)

In addition to the discussion of the above subjects, the book also presents a study on how we should read texts in the perspective of gender as well as culture and pluralism (p. 109-204). Luqman discussed two important points in addressing "reading texts in gender perspective", i.e. first, reading masculine dimension of the Quran; and second, the reflection of misogynistic *Hadith* (violence against women). Meanwhile the last section dealt with "reading texts in the perspective of culture and pluralism" includes a discussion of, *first*, the peace signals in the teaching of religions in Indonesia; *second*, the rites of

religion (a description of the plurality of ways of religion); *finally*, the nation state in the Quran.

In outlining the concept of gender in the Qur'an, Abdul Jabbar tended to use a syntactic, semantic and hermeneutic method. For example, when he described why patriarchal culture exists in the Islamic world. In his opinion, patriarchal culture in the structure of Arabic – the language of the Qur'an (God's Words) – is *khitab* (do's and don'ts) using the *mudzakkar* form. In the structure of the Arabic language, the use of the *mudzakkar* does not only contain the notion of male but also *muannats* (women) sexually. So, if both genders are intended for in the *khitab*, then it is enough to use the *mudzakkar* form because women are automatically included. Thus, because the Quran uses the language of the Arabs whose culture is patriarchal, then no wonder the Quran is often accused of gender bias.

In this context, Luqman Abdul Jabbar detailed some of the verses that often become contentious because of gender bias, such as: *first*, QS al-Baqarah: 221-223 that talks about marrying polytheist women and menstruation; *second*, QS al-Baqarah: 226-242 about ignorant behavior toward women, and *thalaq* (divorce), husband-wife interaction, *khitbah* (marriage proposal) and widowhood; *third*, QS al-Maidah: 3 about the marrying with a woman of *ahl al-kitab*; *fourth*, QS an-Nur: 31-33 about keeping women's honor and wearing of jewelry for women; *fifth*, QS al-Ahzab: 30-59 about solution to household problems and taking example from the wives of the Messenger of Allah; *sixth*, al-Mujadalah QS: 1-4, about the *dzihar*; *seventh*, al-Mumtahanah QS: 10-12, about the equal rights between men and women; and *eighth*, QS at-Tahrim: 1-5, 10-12 about things that apply to the Prophet's wives including this case the wife of every Muslim and about obligations and responsibilities that must be borne by women themselves. (p. 120)

According to Luqman, in his book, more specifically there are five aspects of referable analysis to uncover the verses of the Qur'an that give rise to the gender bias issues in the interpretation of the Quran; *first*, bias in vocabulary; *second*, bias in the structure of language; *third*, bias in the dictionary of the Arabic language; *fourth*, bias in the method of interpretation; and *fifth*, bias in the reduction of meaning. (p. 121)

This 213 page book, in spite of its shortcomings, in my opinion should be considered by enthusiasts of studies of the Quran and socio-religious subject. This book is part of a writer's perspective (Luqman Abdul Jabbar), a lecturer whose research deals a lot with the study of the Quran.