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Al Kindi's Ethical Frameworks*

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Suggesting the Semiotics of the Qur'an: Critical Study of Muhammad Arkoun's Revelation Reason

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Abstrak

Muhammad Arkoun, a controversial liberal Muslim figure, has attracted the attention of many researchers with his innovative approach to understanding revelation through semiotic analysis. This research aims to critically analyse how Arkoun reads Qur'anic texts using a semiotic approach, as well as its impact on religious understanding. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with a critical analysis approach, which combines eclectic approaches, postmodernism, and tafsir science. The results show that Arkoun tries to subjugate the Qur'an within the framework of linguistic analysis that is heavily influenced by western thought. With this approach, he ignores classical and contemporary Islamic methodologies, preferring to focus on the western intellectual way of thinking that separates revelation from its transcendence dimension. Arkoun argues that the reading of the Qur'an should follow global intellectual dynamics, although his views are widely considered incompatible by more conservative circles. This study hopes that Arkoun's thought can provide a new perspective for Muslim academics in the West, especially in criticising the theoretical paradigm imposed by the Western intellectual tradition. However, for ordinary people who study religion with a simpler understanding, Arkoun's thinking tends to be regarded as a dangerous theological heresy.

Keywords: Semiotics of the Qur'an; Reason of Revelation; Muhammad Arkoun



الملخص

استقطب محمد أركون، وهو شخصية مسلمة ليبرالية ليبرالية مثيرة للجدل، اهتمام العديد من الباحثين بمنهجه المبتكر لفهم الوحي من خلال التحليل السيميائي. يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحليل نقدي لكيفية قراءة أركون للنصوص القرآنية باستخدام المنهج السيميائي، وكذلك أثره على الفهم الديني. ومنهج البحث المستخدم هو المنهج الوصفي الكيفي مع منهج التحليل النقدي الذي يجمع بين المناهج الانتقائية وما بعد الحداثة وعلم التفسير. وتظهر النتائج أن أركون يحاول إخضاع القرآن في إطار التحليل اللغوي المتأثر بشدة بالفكر الغربي. وهو بهذا المنهج يتجاهل المنهجيات الإسلامية الكلاسيكية والمعاصرة، مفضلاً التركيز على الطريقة الفكرية الغربية في التفكير التي تفصل الوحي عن بعده المتعالي. يجادل أركون بأن قراءة القرآن يجب أن تتبع الديناميات الفكرية العالمية، على الرغم من أن آراءه تعتبرها الأوساط الأكثر تحفظاً غير متوافقة على نطاق واسع. وتأمل هذه الدراسة أن يقدم فكر أركون منظوراً جديداً للأكاديميين المسلمين في الغرب، خاصة في نقد النموذج النظري الذي يفرضه التقليد الفكري الغربي. ومع ذلك، بالنسبة للأشخاص العاديين الذين يدرسون الدين بفهم أبسط، يميل فكر أركون إلى اعتباره بدعة لاهوتية خطيرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: سيميائية القرآن; نالار وحيو; محمد أركون

Abstrak

Muhammad Arkoun, seorang tokoh Muslim liberal yang kontroversial, menarik perhatian banyak peneliti dengan pendekatannya yang inovatif dalam memahami wahyu melalui analisis semiotika. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis secara kritis bagaimana Arkoun membaca teks-teks al-Qur'an dengan menggunakan pendekatan semiotika, serta dampaknya terhadap pemahaman keagamaan. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis kritis, yang memadukan pendekatan eklektik, postmodernisme, dan ilmu tafsir. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Arkoun mencoba menundukkan al-Qur'an dalam kerangka analisis linguistik yang sangat dipengaruhi oleh pemikiran barat. Dengan pendekatan ini, ia mengabaikan metodologi klasik dan kontemporer Islam, lebih memilih untuk fokus pada cara berpikir intelektual barat yang memisahkan wahyu dari dimensi transendensinya. Arkoun berargumen bahwa pembacaan al-Qur'an harus mengikuti dinamika intelektual global, meskipun pandangannya ini banyak dianggap tidak sesuai oleh kalangan yang lebih konservatif. Penelitian ini mengharapakan agar pemikiran

Arkoun dapat memberi perspektif baru bagi akademisi Muslim di Barat, khususnya dalam mengkritisi paradigma teori yang dipaksakan oleh tradisi intelektual Barat. Namun, bagi masyarakat awam yang mendalami agama dengan pemahaman yang lebih sederhana, pemikiran Arkoun cenderung dianggap sebagai bid'ah teologis yang berbahaya.

Kata Kunci: Semiotika al-Qur'an; Nalar Wahyu; Muhammad Arkoun

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A. Introduction

The unfolding discourse about God's revelation in contemporary Islamic thought has represented various variants within a more progressive, dynamic framework of thought, both from a methodological and substantive point of view. Progressive variants of thought can be observed in a series of representations of liberal-deconstructive Islamic scholarship in treating texts -the text of the Qur'an in the light of humanities social sciences such as Fazlurrahman with double movement theory, Muhammad Syahrur with contemporary reading,¹ Muhammad Abed al-Jabiri with criticism of Arabic reasoning², and Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid with his understanding of al-nas.³

A thought project that has a typology of thought that tends to be deconstructive-reformative is one of the variants of thought that cannot be stopped in religious discourse. These progressive ideas in religious discourse are indeed important to consider for the reason that Islam is a religion that is quite open to debate and still provides room for thought to reinterpret in line with the times. The enthusiasm in this direction, not without leaving various problems and controversies, on the one hand, in religious doctrine, has teachings that are absolute, eternal and almost inviolable.⁴ On

¹ Mohammad Syahrur, *The Islamic State: A Contemporary Reading of the Qur'an and Sunna* (USA: American University of Beirut Press, 2000).

² Mohammad Abid Al-Jabiri, *Arab Reasoning: A Critical Study of the Formation of Arab Thought* (Beirut: Dar al-Tanwir, 1998).

³ Nasr Abu Zayd, *Critique of Arab Thought and Theories of Meaning in the Qur'an* (Kairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1993).

⁴ Yusdani Yusdani and Supriyanto Abdi, "Turats and the Reconstruction of Scientific Civilization in Progressive Muslim Perspective," *RSF Conference Series: Business, Management and Social Sciences* 3, no. 2 (August 3, 2023): 79–82, <https://doi.org/10.31098/bmss.v3i2.654>.

the other hand, religion must clash with the increasingly dynamic reality of humanity which requires reinterpretation which implicitly "desacralizes the text of the Qur'an".

To fulfill these hopes, Muhammad Arkoun emerged as one of the leading Islamic thinkers who took part in propagating what he thought needed to be repaired and rethought, even deconstructed in religious discourse through one of his works "Rethinking of Islam" which roughly describes the importance of the book. carry out a re-reading of the early scholarly perspective of the Qur'an. Arkoun wants a reading to make Islam more authoritative in the reality of life. Where Islam can be responsible for the complex problems faced by humans. One of the reasons why Arkoun thought about Islam again was because he saw a tendency towards "logocentrism".⁵ One of the tendencies characteristic of logocentrism that Arkoun pays attention to is that Islamic thought is more concerned with external discourse which is projected in a limited language space and tends to repeat old discourse over and over again. Therefore, Arkoun again attempts to deconstruct old "unthinkable" and "unthinkable" discourses through structural and semiotic analysis.⁶

Arkoun invites us to become critical and productive readers so as not to standardize an interpretation and work. by considering revelation as a text that has very rich meaning and can give birth to new understanding.⁷ On the other hand, fanaticism towards closed thinking has implications for religious works and thoughts which actually have a relativity content. Because, there are no works and thoughts that contain standardness and absolutism.⁸ Part of this reality is what inspired Arkoun's reasoning to return to understanding revelation by looking at it through a set of social and humanities sciences which he deals with what is called semiotics.

One of Arkoun's controversial thoughts that will be criticized in this research is his perspective on revelation using a methodology and approach that is different from the perspective inherited by early commentators, namely the semiotic approach, a term that emerged from linguistics philosophy or modern linguistic theories. Assessing Arkoun from this perspective is certainly something worth considering rereading. The use of semiotic discourse in the study of the Qur'an is not a spirit that does not leave a number of problems as projected by Arkoun. Moreover, the semiotic approach is something that is considered new in religious discourse in some circles. Based on the

⁵Suadi Putra, *Mohammed Arkoun: Islam dan Modernitas* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1998), p, 38

⁶Muhammed Arkoun, *lectures du Coran* terj. Machasin dengan judul "*Berbagai Pembacaan Qur'an*", (Jakarta: INIS,1997), p. 19

⁷ Umar Kustiadi, "Reconstruction Of Contemporary Interpretation Theory An Examination Of Muhammad Arkoun's Thought," *International Journal of Research* 1, no. 2 (December 26, 2023): 171, <https://doi.org/10.55062/IJR.2023.v1i2/343/4>.

⁸ Farid I. Guseynov, "Fanaticism as a Type of Mentality in the Works of Gabriel Marcel and Karen Armstrong," *RUDN Journal of Philosophy* 26, no. 3 (September 30, 2022): 697–712, <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2302-2022-26-3-697-712>.

contemporary Al-Qur'an study project with a social and humanities science approach that Arkoun wants to offer, it is considered that a series of liberal Muslim scholars are brave enough to "ravage" the area of the sacredness of the Al-Qur'an which has given rise to a number of lawsuits which of course must be based on scientific objectivity.⁹

Through this research, the author tries to challenge it by still prioritizing academic rules while trying to get rid of blind dogmatic thinking by describing the weaknesses of the hypothesis he offers in a critical analysis. Some of the problems include, what is the meaning of the semiotics of the Qur'an, what is the genealogy of Muhammad Arkoun's thinking, what are the main points of his thinking regarding the study of the Qur'an using semiotic theory, and where is the confusion in Muhammad Arkoun's thinking regarding the use of semiotics in the study of the Qur'an?

B. Literature Review

There are several figures who have adopted the semiotic theory, including Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, one of the figures who adopted the semiotics theory developed by de Saussure. Nasr Hamid included the Qur'anic text in the category of parole based on langue. This assumption places the text of the Qur'an as a result of culture. In the end, Nasr Hamid also concluded that the Qur'an is a cultural product (*muntaj al-saqafi*).¹⁰ Nasr Hamid made an offer to uncover the meaning of the Qur'an by examining the linguistic issues of ala de Saussure's strukturalism and cultural aspects that have an influence on the text of the Qur'an.

One significant research was conducted by Muhammad Rusydi and Suhadi. This research analyses the paradigm of Arabic language learning in strengthening al-Qur'an studies at PTKIN South Sulawesi through the critical perspective of Arkoun's semiotics. The results show that Arkoun's semiotic approach can be an alternative framework in understanding the Qur'anic text more contextually and holistically, by emphasising three levels of understanding: historical-anthropological, linguistic-semiotic, and theological-religious.¹¹

Another study by Arisy Abror Dzukroni explores Arkoun's historical approach to the Qur'an. The study highlights how Arkoun uses historical, linguistic, and semiotic

⁹ Sufrianti Ramdhani and Muhammad Said Said, "SEMIOTICS AS A TAFSIRS APPROACH: A Review of Mohammed Arkoun's Thoughts," *Jurnal AlifLam Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 2, no. 1 (January 25, 2021): 112–37, <https://doi.org/10.51700/aliflam.v2i1.287>.

¹⁰ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Teks Otoritas Kebenaran terj. Sunarwoto Dema* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2003), p. 108, dan juga bisa dilihat di bukunya yang lain, *Mafhum al-Nass: Dirasah fi Ulum al-Qur'an* (Kairo: Al-Hay'ah al-Misriyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitab, 1993), p. 24.

¹¹ Muhammad Rusydi and Suhadi Suhadi, "ARABIC LEARNING PARADIGM IN STRENGTHENING THE QUR'ANIC STUDIES AT PTKIN IN SOUTH SULAWESI: MUHAMMAD ARKOUN'S SEMIOTIST CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE," *Al-Qalam* 28, no. 2 (November 2, 2022): 217, <https://doi.org/10.31969/alq.v28i2.1153>.

tools to interpret the sacred text, emphasising the importance of understanding the historical and cultural context in the interpretation of the Qur'an.¹²

In the context of religious discourse in the Arab media, Mekki Klaina discusses how Arkoun's thought influences the interpretation of religious texts. The study highlights the use of hermeneutics and semiotics in understanding the Qur'an, as well as the challenges faced in dealing with different interpretations in the media.¹³

In addition, Ramdhani and Said in "Semiotic as Tafsir Approach: A Review of Mohammed Arkoun's Thoughts" examine how Arkoun adopts semiotic theory from figures such as Ferdinand de Saussure and Jacques Derrida in interpreting the Qur'an. They highlight that this approach allows for a deeper understanding of the meaning of the text, but it also raises controversy because it is considered to displace the transcendental aspect of revelation.¹⁴

From some of these studies, it appears that Arkoun's semiotic approach makes a significant contribution to contemporary Qur'anic studies, especially in opening up a more inclusive and contextualised space for interpretation. However, this approach also faces challenges, especially in dealing with resistance from more conservative circles who may see this approach as a deviation from the classical tafsir tradition. Therefore, it is important to continue to study and discuss new approaches in Qur'anic studies in order to enrich the understanding and interpretation of the sacred text in the context of the evolving times. The study of Muhammad Arkoun's thought has indeed been widely carried out, especially in examining his contribution to the contextual and historical reading of the Koran. However, very few studies specifically criticise the epistemological and methodological foundations of Arkoun's way of understanding revelation (al-wahy). This is where the significance of this research lies, namely in the attempt to critically evaluate the pattern of reasoning used by Arkoun in approaching the text of revelation, especially through the approaches of semiotics, archaeology of knowledge, and discourse deconstruction.

Arkoun explicitly rejects the traditional normative-theological reading of the Qur'an, and chooses to place the sacred text in the space of historical and linguistic analysis, as he describes in *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*.¹⁵ He also mentioned the need for a separation between the "Official Closed

¹² Arisy Abror Dzukroni, "Integrasi Ilmu Keislaman dan Sosial Humaniora dalam Studi Islam: Kritik Epistemologi Muhammad Arkoun terhadap Metodologi Studi Islam," *AT-TURAS: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 9, no. 1 (June 30, 2022): 142–64, <https://doi.org/10.33650/at-turas.v9i1.3712>.

¹³ Mekki Klaina, "RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE IN THE ARAB MEDIA," *Living Islam: Journal of Islamic Discourses* 6, no. 2 (July 1, 2023): 199–218, <https://doi.org/10.14421/lijid.v6i2.4488>.

¹⁴ Ramdhani and Said, "SEMIOTICS AS A TAFSIRS APPROACH."

¹⁵ Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, ed. Robert D. Lee, 1st edition (Boulder: Routledge, 1994), p. 52–53.

Corpus" and the "Open Text" in Islamic discourse, where revelation is no longer treated as a closed sacred text, but rather as an object of scientific analysis that is equal to other cultural products.¹⁶ This approach, while opening up space for dialogue between civilisations and a multidisciplinary approach, raises serious questions about the place of transcendence in Islamic epistemology.

Thus, this study underlines that the criticism of Arkoun is not only about his courage to deconstruct the text, but more deeply on how he overhauls the ontology of revelation itself. This critique is needed so that modern approaches to religious texts do not lose the spiritual and normative dimensions that are the spirit of Islamic teachings.

C. Research Methods

This research uses a descriptive qualitative study that is critically analysed.¹⁷ the purpose of this research is to examine in depth the workings of Muhammad Arkoun's thought in interpreting revelation through a semiotic approach. The main approach used in this research includes three approaches: first, the eclectic approach, which is a combination of dogmatic and scientific approaches that seek to understand religious discourse rationally and scientifically, without neglecting aspects of faith. This approach is important to place the study of revelation in the space of spirituality, but open to scientific studies. Second, the postmodernist approach, which in the context of Qur'anic studies is also known as the post-traditional approach.¹⁸ This approach sees the text not as a single, final entity, but as a field of interpretation that is open to various interpretations that are plural and contextual. This is very relevant to the post-structuralist framework that colours the thinking of Arkoun and similar figures in an effort to deconstruct and dismantle the sole authority over the text.

Thirdly, the approach of the science of tafsir, which although in this context is not used in its classical form, remains the underlying framework for how the Qur'anic text is understood in the relationship between meaning, context, and the reader's reality. By utilising deductive and inductive methods of analysis, the author directs the analysis of general data regarding liberal discourse in the interpretation of the Qur'an (deductive), and explores specifically the post-structuralist style of thinking

¹⁶ Mohammed Arkoun, *The Unthought In Contemporary Islamic Thought* (London: Saqi Books, 2002), p. 125–26.

¹⁷ Andi Muawiyah Ramli, *Peta Pemikiran Karl Marx* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2000), p. 24

¹⁸ At present, intellectual groups have emerged, such as Hassan Hanafi, Muhammad Imarah, Muhammad Arkoun, Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, Muhammad Syahrur, Muhammad Abed al-Jabiri, and Fazlur Rahman and others who continue and develop previous critical thinking. In Indonesia, groups have emerged that call themselves liberal groups or liberal Islamic thinkers. See Munzir Hitami, *Pengantar Studi Al-Qur'an: Teori dan Pendekatan*, (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2012), p. 12-14

used by Arkoun (inductive).¹⁹ Data were collected through literature studies, consultations and scientific discussions, which were then described, systematised and critically analysed. The approach of tafsir science serves as a bridge between tradition and renewal, allowing criticism of Arkoun to remain grounded in the epistemological roots of Islam.

D. Results and Discussion

1. Meaning and Problems of Semiotics of the Qur'an

In terms of language, "semiotics" according to Umberto Eco as quoted by Ahmad Muzakki from a social sciences and humanities perspective is how to read a world full of signs. The term "semiotics" is a word that comes from the Greek word "semion" which means sign. Meanwhile, the sign is a representation of another reality based on social reality.²⁰ The definition above is emphasized by Preimenger that "semiotics" is knowledge that discusses symbols. Thus, this scientific study holds the view that social reality consisting of culture is part of the signs.

Basically, all the definitions put forward by these experts provide an understanding that the term semiotics is the science or study of discussing signs in general, both those contained in the text and outside the text. Or in other words, it can be emphasized that the reality we witness every day is text that can be given meaning and can be interpreted. From this basis, it can also be said that the world of text is a very wide world in which there are implied texts and explicit texts.

The analysis above was confirmed by Charles Sanders Peirce that humans are homo semioticus. The human world is a world of signs. In other words, human life is surrounded by various signs which are full of interpretations, we even base our thinking on the sign system.²¹ In the structuralistic school of thought, cultural creation is the actualization of a virtual system. Prior to all meaning-giving activities and outside the realm of human direction, there is a universal code that is the basis of all sign systems.²² So it becomes increasingly clear that humans cannot be separated from signs, when they want to understand and interpret something that is part of the text. Therefore, the main task of semiotics is an instrument to explore with various scientific tools the various signs that surround humans, both expressed and implied,

¹⁹Mattew, B. Miles dan Michel Huberman, *Analisis Data Kualitatif*, Terj. Tjetjep Rohadi (Jakarta: UIP, 1992), p.16-21

²⁰Akhmad Muzakki, *Kontribusi Semiotika dalam Memahami Bahasa Al-Qur'an*, dalam Jurnal ISLAMICA, Vol 4. Nomor 1 September 2009, p.37.

²¹Komaruddin Hidayat, *Memahami Bahasa Agama: Sebuah Kajian Hermeneutik* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1996), p.147

²²W. Poespoprodjo, *Interpretasi: Beberapa Catatan Pendekatan Filsafatnya* (Bandung: Remaja Karya, 1987), p. 161.

or in religious language in the form of qauliyah or kauniyah. However, this study will focus more on written or verbal texts such as in the linguistic texts of the Al-Qur'an which contain a system of signs or verses in which Arkoun is the central figure who is involved in intensely subordinating the sacredness of the Al-Qur'an from The point of view of semiotic studies is highlighted in this article.

The reality of the linguistic symbols of the Qur'an is fertile ground for semiotic studies. In the Qur'an there are signs that have meaning, which can be studied using semiotics. Thus, Al-Qur'an semiotics can be defined as a branch of semiotics that studies the signs in the Al-Qur'an.²³ The texts of the Qur'an are a collection of systematic signs that contain messages from God to be conveyed to humans. This means that communication has occurred between the giver and recipient of the message, namely communication between God and humans.²⁴ Because the texts are the Qur'an, a collection of symbols and signs from both the signifier system and the signified system. These two terms are concepts in semiotics. If the signifier is understood as a sound symbol and the signified is the understanding or interpretation or concept of meaning of the signifier. Abu Zaid quotes Abdul Qahir al-Jurjani that the signifier is the initial meaning, while the signified is the second meaning or meaning. Therefore, the semiotics of the Qur'an attempts to build the meaning of the language of the Qur'an with a sign system. The method of interpreting signs is to synergize the signified and the signified to give birth to a new meaning representation.

2. Genealogy of Thought (Sanad Scientific) Muhammad Arkoun

Arkoun's scientific knowledge can be seen from a series of French philosophers in formulating his thoughts, such as Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur's work that is often referred to is *Philosophie de La Volonte* (Philosophy of the Will), especially the part *La Symbolique du Mal* (Symbols about Evil). *De l'interpretation* (Concerning Interpretation). Ricoeur was the pioneer of a new vision of myth.²⁵ Referring to Ricoeur, Arkoun formulated his own views on myth, where Arkoun is of the view that myth is one of the most important elements of social imagination. Without paying attention to the influence of social imagination, according to him, it is impossible to understand the development of Muslim thought and society in the past and in the future. Social ideals will take an important role in Islamic thought.²⁶ Arkoun's way of thinking follows Ricoeur. It seems that Arkoun wants to emphasize from his teacher's view that myths which he calls "social dreams" exist in life, are something important in human life. Implicitly, Arkoun only reconstructs Ricoeur's views with the same substance.

²³Ali Imron, *Semiotika Al-Qur'an: Metode dan Aplikasi terhadap Kisah Yusuf*, (Yogyakarta: Teras, 2011), p. 33.

²⁴Ali Imran, *Semiotika Al-Qur'an...*, p. 34.

²⁵Suadi Puta, *Mohammed Arkoun: Islam dan Modernitas...*, p. 21

²⁶Suadi Puta, *Mohammed Arkoun: Islam dan Modernitas...*, p. 21

Following the normative way of thinking, isn't myth something that has no facts, isn't it something irrational, even though Arkoun himself invites us to think on the basis of rationality, then why are we being led back to something irrational.

Another French thinker who greatly influenced Arkoun was Jacques Derrida (born 1930). Derrida, in turn, was heavily influenced by the famous German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). The most popular terminology in Derrida's thought is "logocentrism" and "deconstruction" which Arkoun often refers to. Logocentrism which means focusing on "logos" or logocentric traditions. Derrida means the tradition based on certain assumptions about "being" which is the center of Heidegger's attention. Logocentrism is based on the assumption that "existing" is the same as presence and what is true is real or present. Derrida also formulated the basis of logocentrism as the assumption that a theory, text, or statement shows or refers (as a signifier) to the "real", namely present and that the "real" (as a signified) is earlier and more genuine than the signifier. And what is more extreme in Derrida's view is that there is no "transcendental signified" in the sense that there is nothing outside, on the other side of the text.²⁷

In the construction of his thought, Muhammad Arkoun adopts the influence of Jacques Derrida, especially in the concept of deconstruction and the rejection of signifié dernier or transcendental signifier. Derrida rejects the existence of a final meaning behind the text and encourages a reading that is always open to new interpretations through deconstruction, which dismantles the basic assumptions that have been considered established in the textual tradition. Arkoun accepts this method as a tool to re-examine the construction of classical Islamic thought that has undergone "dogmatization". However, unlike Derrida who rejects the total signifié dernier, Arkoun still leaves room for transcendence, although not within a traditional theological framework.

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In his book *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, Arkoun emphasises the importance of exploring areas of thought that have been unthought

²⁷Johan Meuleman, *Muhammad Arkoun, Nalar Islami dan Nalar Modern: Berbagai Tantangan dan Jalan Baru* (Jakarta: INIS, 1994), p. 23-24.

(l'impensé) in the Islamic intellectual treasury. He mentions that critical and deconstructive hermeneutic approaches are needed to liberate the Qur'an from readings that have been frozen by orthodox interpretive traditions.²⁸ Thus, Arkoun does not simply adopt Derrida rawly, but adapts it in the context of Islamic discourse. He uses deconstruction to explore meanings covered by the hegemony of traditional meanings and opens up opportunities for dialogue between revelation and contemporary reason.

Apart from Derrida, the French philosopher who influenced Arkoun's thinking was Michel Foucault (1926-1984), he discovered that humans in each era perceive reality in certain ways. The way humans capture, that is, view and understand, reality is what he calls "episteme". Because humans perceive reality in a certain way. The way humans talk about reality is called "discourse" every era views, understands and talks about reality in different ways. Another term that Foucault often coined was "archaeological". He coined the term "archaeology of knowledge" which he considered the most appropriate approach to researching human thought in its various forms.²⁹ In Arkoun's work he is found to often use the terms "episteme" "discourse" and "archaeologist" even though Arkoun uses them in his own way as a tool which he believes is an important element in understanding and criticizing Islamic thought.

Of course, citing the name Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), a linguist from Switzerland,³⁰ became important in the development of Arkoun's thought, although basically the terms signifier and signified that Derrida introduced came from Saussure. Saussure was the philosopher who was most instrumental in initiating the signs of language which he often called "langue" and "parole".³¹ One of Saussure's loyal successors who Arkoun often refers to is Roland Barthes, a French semiotician. In various works, Arkoun uses the terms "langue" and "parole" which he formulates in other ways. Of the many philosophical figures that Arkoun refers to, it is natural that he is very rich in complicated terminology so you need to be careful when studying him, because sometimes in various places he uses terms from other philosophers, but uses them with different meanings. This suggests that Arkoun is inconsistent in his use of terms.

3. Arkoun's Way of "Subjecting" Text in the Light of Semiotics: Some Critical Notes

As admitted by Ali Harb himself, a critic of reason and philosopher from Lebanon, Arkoun is basically a thinker who is critical of religious thought as

²⁸ Arkoun, *The Unthought In Contemporary Islamic Thought*, p. 19–21.

²⁹ Johan Meuleman, *Muhammad Arkoun...*, p.21

³⁰ Johan Meuleman, *Muhammad Arkoun...*, p.14

³¹ Mukhtar, *Filsafat Tafsir Kontemporer: Metodologi Penafsiran Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid* (Makassar: Gunadarma Ilmu, 2017), p. 128-129.

represented in Islamic reason.³² The Islamic reasoning propagated by Arkoun was utilized by subjecting the texts of the Qur'an to the light of social sciences, humanities and philosophy of language, such as semiotics and hermeneutics, as two families of science that help each other in tracing the traces of the text. Then how does Arkoun play his role in studying texts using a semiotic approach?

This article will focus on several important points which are the root of Arkoun's critical reasoning concerns regarding his thoughts on revelation, although it is not always easy to reconstruct his ideas which require long reflection in analyzing them so that in mapping his thoughts there may be differences for other readers, but the substance is remain the same, namely, among others, the Historical Revelation, Linguistics of the Qur'an, and Transcendental Signs. The themes that will be studied in this article are a glimpse of what Arkoun thinks, which has a connection between one problem and another. Of course, the most important of all that is important for the reviewer himself is objectivity reading (*Qira'ah al-Maudhi'iyah*), in Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid's terms. Therefore, the author will remain based on scientific objectivity that avoids ideological biases that allow us to build criticism just because of ideological differences with Arkoun.

4. The Historicity of Revelation from Arkoun's Perspective

What is in Arkoun's mind regarding the history of the revelation of the mushaf, can be concreted into three levels of periods: first, when the revelation process occurred (610-632 AD), second, starting from the collection and codification of the Ottoman mushaf (12-324 AH/632- 036 AD), third, the period of classical orthodoxy from 324 H/936 AD until now. The first period is known as the "Prophetic Discourse". The second level is termed "Official Closed Corpus". The period of prophetic (verbal) discourse, in Arkoun's view, was more worthy and sacred and more trustworthy than the period of the Al-Qur'an written in the mushaf. Because the Qur'an in its verbal form is still open to all meanings, while in its textual form it has descended from a revealed book to the level of an ordinary book, so that it no longer has the right to sacredness and holiness.³³ For the latter, Arkoun does not distance the discourse of revelation from the area of historical criticism. Arkoun said "we must know that the Al-Qur'an is a discourse rooted in a dynamic history. but its historicity becomes eclipsed and turns into "something holy and transcendent."³⁴

The conclusions regarding the history of the Al-Qur'an according to Arkoun are as follows: (1) the period of the Al-Qur'an as the word of God whose true nature is

³²Ali Harb, *Naq Al-Nash*, terj. M. Faisol Fatawi, *Kritik Nalar al-Quran* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1995), p. 87.

³³Fahmi Salim, *Kritik Terhadap Studi al-Qur'an Kaum Liberal* (Jakarta: Kelompok Gema Insani, 2010), p. 206.

³⁴Ali Harb, *Naq Al-Nash*, p.94.

unknown, (2) the period in which the Al-Qur'an was transmitted to us through the Prophet who is still in the form of oral discourse (verbal), (3) the period of the Al-Qur'an as a mushaf or closed official corpus, (4) the period of interpretations of the Al-Qur'an which have been developed and established so that to understand the Al-Qur'an one must go through the intermediary of orthodoxy who has standardized the text and the Qur'an.³⁵ In his analytical framework, Muhammad Arkoun divides revelation into three levels. The first level is revelation as the transcendent and infinite word of God, which is beyond the reach of human reason and experience. He refers to this concept as the absolute word of God that has not been bound by language or historical medium. In Islamic tradition, this form of revelation is often referred to as Ummul Kitab or Lauh Mahfuz, which is the master book that perfectly stores all divine knowledge and will. Arkoun's ideas intersect with traditional conceptions in Ulumul Qur'an, especially as explained by az-Zarkasyi³⁶ and as-Suyuthi,³⁷ which states that the Qur'an before being revealed to the Prophet Muhammad SAW was already in Lauh Mahfuz in an absolutely preserved form. However, unlike Arkoun who strictly separates transcendent revelation and historical revelation, classical scholars see more continuity between the two in one chain of revelation. The classical approach emphasises the connection between the transcendental and historical dimensions of revelation as a whole in the process of revelation. Second, pointing to the appearance of revelation in history. Third, referring to revelation as written in the mushaf with letters and various signs in it. With regard to the Qur'an, this passage refers to the Ottoman mushaf.³⁸

Arkoun's categorization above is very important, especially to follow his train of thought which is heavily influenced by semiotic theories. Arkoun is well aware that these findings must be used to explore the intellectual and spiritual treasures of the Qur'an. In this theory, text is the most important factor in producing meaning. Arkoun also invites you to understand the word of God by utilizing linguistic and semiotic findings, because no one can have access to the word of God except through text.³⁹

Arkoun has processed the issue of the historicity of the Al-Qur'an from the perspective of the history of its revelation to the process of its codification. He saw that there had been a crucial change point in the historical flow of the Al-Qur'an which was reflected in the change from verbal revelation to the written corpus, namely the Mushaf. Herein lies the problem of the mushaf which is considered no longer authentic and has been interpreted haphazardly by ideological and radical Islamic discourses. In Arkoun's

³⁵Fahmi Salim, *Kritik Terhadap Studi al-Qur'an...*, p. 206

³⁶ Badruddin Muhammad bin Abdullah Az-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi Ulumul Qur'an*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Darul Fikr, 2009), p. 62.

³⁷ Jalaluddin Al-Suyuthi, *Al-Itqan Fi Ulum al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar Al-Fikr, 1998), p. 137.

³⁸St. Sunardi, *Membaca al-Qur'an Bersama Muhammad Arkoun* dalam Johan Henrik Meuleman, *Membaca al-Qur'an Bersama Muhammad Arkoun* (Yogyakarta: LkiS, 2012), p. 91.

³⁹St. Sunardi, *Membaca al-Qur'an Bersama Muhammad Arkoun...*, p.92-93.

mind, Muslims must deconstruct the discourse that has crystallized over the centuries and clean up the verbal revelation of the Qur'an from the historical plates until the original discourse of the Qur'an is born as it was in the first place.⁴⁰ Or in this case, Arkoun invites you to penetrate the first formation events to the initial development events in a state that is still fresh and rich, even though this means dismantling the geological layers of the orthodoxy building.⁴¹ Arkoun then criticized that the Qur'an must be subject to history (the Qur'an is subject to historicity). Following semiotic analysis, Arkoun emphasizes that the text in our midst is the result of an act of enunciation. In other languages, this text comes from spoken language which is then transcribed into text form.⁴²

Arkoun's efforts to create anggitan or levels of how the process of revelation begins from the Qur'anic discourse which he considers to be authentic, sacred and transcendent. Revelation in this area, according to him, is an area that humans will not be able to reach and will forever be in the realm of language parole to God. Herein lies Arkoun's attempt, which is considered utopian, to call on Muslims to deconstruct scientific constructs which he considers to be "historical accidents" in the process of revelation, especially texts at the third level, namely during the reign of Caliph Usman. It was during this time that the "imprisoned" text became a "closed official corpus" that could not be contested. Revelation at this level, implicitly, Arkoun wants to vent all his deconstructive "methodological lust". However, Arkoun himself did not realize that with all his denial of "purity at the historical level", especially the third and fourth levels, it would no longer be possible to return it, because the authentic text would remain with God. Isn't this that we are invited to wander into the realm of mythology to explore the authenticity of revelation as avoided by Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid. In this context, Arkoun is trapped by the concept of historical revelation without providing real solution ideas to his own assumption that there is "chaos" even though the Al-Qur'an itself explains that the Al-Qur'an was revealed in clear Arabic, the language of which has miracles and chastity. The source and origin of the Qur'an that the Prophet received comes from the preserved (*lawh mahfuz*, (QS: 56:79) *lauh* is also called hidden (*kitab maknun*, (QS: 56:78) or the mother of all books (*Ummul kitab* (QS : 13:39) which can only be touched by the purified⁴³

⁴⁰Fahmi Salim, *Kritik Terhadap Studi Al-Qur'an.*, p. 261

⁴¹Ali Harb, *Naqd Al-Nash*, p. 62

⁴²In the original language as quoted by Farid Esack, several points of Arkoun's views "All the signs and symbols are produced by a human being (ie, semiotic productions) in the process of his or her social and cultural emergence are inextricably bound to historicity. see Farid Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: an Islamic Perspective of Interriligious Olidarity Against Oppression* (Oxford: One word, 1997), p. 69.

⁴³Taufik Adnan Amal, *Rekonstruksi sejarah al-Qur'an*, (Tangerang Selatan, Pustaka alvabet, 2013), p. 64

On the other hand, Arkoun seems to avoid studying the first and second levels of revelation, where Arkoun considers them still authentic and holy. This can be seen in the historical semiological-linguistic building of revelation which places the second level on a horizontal level which is actually a vertical level. What's worse, Arkoun doesn't seem to make any comments about history at the transcendent divine level at the first level. In fact, isn't this also part of his thoughts which constitute the history of revelation? In fact, Arkoun has again trapped himself into something ahistorical.

Arkoun should have divided the historical revelations from various levels into two areas, namely the theological area and the historical area so that we can clearly distinguish which revelation is at the theological level, even though this will give rise to a lot of thought speculation, as occurs in Islamic thought, and which is the historical area. where revelation has become a verbal discourse. Or perhaps Arkoun deliberately avoided getting caught up in theological speculation as had happened to his predecessors.

It seems that Arkoun is very persistent in dismantling the building of the sacredness of the Qur'an which has crystallized in Muslim beliefs and thoughts. If you look at the obsession with thinking that Arkoun wants to do, he vulgarly removes the sacredness of the Qur'an by wanting to shift the perspective of Muslims that what we believe in today, especially the Ottoman mushaf which he considers to be a closed official corpus, is not the Qur'an. which is authentic, impure and has experienced "distortion" as a result of the policies of the Usman government. The criticism that Arkoun continues to level against the policies of the Caliph Usman is ahistorical.⁴⁴ Arkoun only tried to harm the figures of friends who were members of the codification committee formed by Usman. This crucial issue was discussed several centuries ago, which is strengthened by the argument that Usman's codification has been accepted by the wider community across generations.

Apart from that, Arkoun, by taking advantage of the latest social science findings in West-France, wants to divert Muslim views in order to develop a hypothesis that the most essential and authentic Qur'an is the Qur'an which is still in oral form, not the Al-Qur'an. -The Qur'an has been naturalized in written form as we see today by subordinating and shifting the sacredness of the Qur'an from the theological area which itself seems to be at an impasse in discussing it to the historical area so that the concept of the historicity of revelation that it constructs becomes "collapsed" because several levels of the journey of revelation described above actually "got lost" in something ahistorical.

5. Linguistics of the Qur'an: The Problem of the Authenticity of Revelation

The figure who is often referred to by Arkoun when reasoning about the authenticity of revelation is De Saussure who introduced the terminology of

⁴⁴Fahmi Salim, *Kritik Terhadap Studi al-Qur'an*. p. 296

structuralism, namely "parole" and "langue".⁴⁵ Implicitly, it can be seen that langue and parole are in opposition, but at the same time they are also interdependent. On the one hand, the system that applies in langue is the result of the production of parole activities, while on the other hand, the use of parole and its understanding is only possible if it is based on tracing langue as a system.⁴⁶ Aksin Wijaya as in his study describes the linguistic analysis of structuralism regarding revelation as God's parole, the Qur'an as Arabic langue, and mushaf as a closed official corpus⁴⁷ although this term is also actually a term introduced by Muhammad Arkoun in some of his critical attitudes towards his final journey of revelation which starts from the transcendent to "humanized" in the language of Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, namely *nasssun insaniyyun* (human text).⁴⁸

According to Arkoun, the Qur'an uses linguistic appreciation of the Arabic language to renew religious awareness. That is why according to Arkoun why theologians then used the sources of literary criticism to instill the famous dogma about the inimitable characteristics of the Qur'an and its amazing authenticity (*i'jaz*). In the context of the language of the Qur'an, Arkoun then explains the discourse of the Qur'an in three literary levels: metaphorical, narrative and stylistic levels.⁴⁹

In the framework of semiotic analysis developed by Muhammad Arkoun, the text of the Qur'an is seen as the result of the act of utterance (*énonciation*), which is a text that comes from spoken language which is then transcribed into written language. This concept emphasises that the Qur'anic text is not just a final product, but the result of a

⁴⁵Johan Meuleman, introduction to Muhammad Arkoun h. 14. Abu Zaid in formulating the language patterns introduced by De Saussure about "parole" (speech) and langue (language) then he translated in Arabic "parole" to mean "kalam" and "langue" to mean "lughah" to differentiate between "specific linguistic codes text" and the "cultural linguistic system" in which the text appears. In "Naqd Al-khithab" he further explains the two linguistic terms above. Langue in its universality and plurality of levels: phonology, (Al-Shautiyah) morphology, (Al-Sharfiyah) syntax, (Al-Nahwiyah) and semantics (Al-Dalaliyah) which is a semantic system in social groups. It is a storehouse that is relied upon by individuals in formulating Paroleh. So, parole (Al-kalam) in relation to langue (Al-lughah) is particular and real, reflecting a particular system, or a special code in the universal system which is stored in public memory. If parole, even though it is particular and unique, is a revealer of the structure of a universal language system, then this means that the relationship between parole and langue is dialectical (*Jadaliyah*) and separating the two is a form of simplification (*Al-Thabsiyathu*) which is not needed in scientific analysis (*Al-ilmyah*). See Mukhtar, *Filsafat Tafsir Kontemporer*, .. p.128-129.

⁴⁶Martin, Krampen, "*Ferdinand de Saussure dan Perkembangan Semiologi*", dalam Panuti Sudjiman dan Aar van Coest (ed.), *Serba-serbi Semiotika* (Jakarta: Gremedia, 1996), p., 57

⁴⁷Aksin Wijaya, *Menggugat Otensitas Wahyu: Kritik Atas Nalar Tafsir Gender* (Yogyakarta: Sapiria Insania, 2004).

⁴⁸Mukhtar, M., Mahmud, B., & Hamzah, H. (2022). Kontroversi Kesarjanaan al-Qur'an Kontemporer (*Telaah Kritis Hermeneutika al-Qur'an kontemporer Nashr Hamid Abu Zaid*) Zawiyah: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam, 8(2), <https://ejournal.iainkendari.ac.id/index.php/zawiyah/article/view/4430>

⁴⁹Muhammad Arkoun, *Arab Thought...*, p. 7.

long historical, social and linguistic process. This view is in line with the critical approach to the history of the codification of the Qur'an, where the text of revelation was only officially recorded during the time of Caliph Uthman bin Affan, about two decades after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. In this context, Arkoun emphasises the importance of treating the Qur'an not only as a normative text, but as a historical text that needs to be studied with an interdisciplinary approach, including linguistics, semiotics, and historical anthropology.⁵⁰

As a comparison, Fazlur Rahman developed a double movement approach in understanding the Qur'an. He views that to understand the message of the Qur'an as a whole, it must be traced in its original historical context, then normatively drawn back to the present context. Rahman emphasises that revelation is not only interpreted as a written text, but as a dynamic interaction between God and human society, which is then standardised into a mushaf.⁵¹

Meanwhile, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd emphasises that the Qur'an is a cultural text (النص الثقافي), which must be read critically as a historical and linguistic product. He rejects the notion that the Qur'anic text is ahistorical, and emphasises the importance of using a hermeneutic approach to unlock the meanings hidden behind the construction of the text.⁵² Abu Zayd, like Arkoun, also considers that the classical tafsir tradition has ignored the historical and social dimensions of the Qur'anic text, and therefore needs to be dismantled through a more contextual and critical method.

Arkoun considers that the Qur'an which can be touched by humans is actually only the langue side of God's revelation. Because of its infinite and transcendent nature, humans will not be able to touch God's parole, because of its uniqueness, humans will not be able to reach it. Just like the uniqueness of individual human language, anyone other than that person does not know the true meaning. Arkoun in several of his writings always wants to remind text readers that revelation at the transcendent level cannot be reached. It seems that Arkoun himself is not aware that the language of revelation has undergone a transformation in form or in the study of Al-Qur'an science is the process of the revelation of the Al-Qur'an.

In the tradition of Ulumul Qur'an, the majority of scholars agree that the Qur'an was revealed in two stages: first all at once from Lauh al-Mahfuz to Bait al-'Izzah in the heavens of the world, and second gradually to the Prophet Muhammad SAW through the Angel Gabriel for about 23 years. This view is reinforced by the narration from Ibn 'Abbas who said that the Qur'an was revealed all at once on the night of

⁵⁰ Arkoun, *The Unthought In Contemporary Islamic Thought*, p. 27–29.

⁵¹ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), P. 6–8.

⁵² Nasr Abu Zayd, *Reformation of Islamic Thought: A Critical Historical Analysis* (Erscheinungsort nicht ermittelbar: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), p. 45–48.

Lailatul Qadr to the world sky, then revealed little by little according to the context and needs of da'wah.⁵³ In *Al-Itqan fi Ulumul Qur'an*, Jalaluddin as-Suyuthi asserts that the descent of the Qur'an in two stages is a form of divine wisdom so that revelation can be more easily accepted by the Prophet and his people, as well as to strengthen the Prophet's heart in facing various challenges.⁵⁴

The basis for this concept is found in the words of Allah: "Verily, We have revealed it (the Qur'an) on the night of glory (Lailatul Qadar)" (QS. Al-Qadr: 1) and "The month of Ramadan is (the month) in which the Qur'an is revealed..." (QS. Al-Baqarah: 185). These two verses are understood by the mufassir as confirmation that the beginning of the revelation of the Qur'an occurred on the night of Lailatul Qadr. On the other hand, QS. Al-Isra: 106 explains, "And the Qur'an We sent down gradually so that you may recite it slowly to the people," which indicates the gradual process of revelation. Therefore, the classical understanding of the two stages of revelation is an important foundation in the study of Ulumul Qur'an, as well as explaining the integration between the transcendental and historical aspects of revelation.⁵⁵

From this knowledge, we can learn a lot, as in contemporary studies, that the Al-Qur'an experienced a movement from an unknown place to a known one or the language of the Al-Qur'an was transformed from an unknown language to a known one. This means that God's will as the creator of the text is that his language can be touched and understood by humans by transferring or changing the language. How can something that has been passed down or transformed be sought to find its existence by touching and reading it. So Arkoun's statement in this case is something that is not interesting, because with all sound thinking it is impossible for anyone to touch and read God's parole language.

However, it is quite unfortunate, because Arkoun does not explain the transformation of the text from its primordial form in the form of Allah's words and Qur'anic discourse to a form that can be captured by humans in the form of the mushaf. We can only understand that the process is beyond the scope of human knowledge and that Arkoun considers the pretensions of certain people or groups that they can directly touch the word of Allah as completely unacceptable. Van Koningsvel criticized that Arkoun's way of assessing the process of transitioning the Qur'anic discourse to a closed official corpus was inaccurate and characterized by an unjustified sense of suspicion. It can also be categorized that Arkoun has succeeded in building a "bridge of thought" in the opposite direction. This is because the opposing terminologies in

⁵³Taufik Adnan Amal, *Rekonstruksi sejarah al-Qur'an*, p. 71

⁵⁴ Al-Suyuthi, *Al-Itqan Fi Ulum al-Qur'an*, p. 37–39.

⁵⁵ Marlinda Inda, Juswandi Juswandi, and Muh. Radiyal Musa, "INTEGRATION AND RELATIONALIZATION BETWEEN THE FACT OF REVELATION AND THE FACT OF SCIENCE (A STUDY OF THE MIRACLES OF THE QUR'AN)," *TAFASIR: Journal of Quranic Studies* 2, no. 1 (June 28, 2024): 129–41, <https://doi.org/10.62376/tafasir.v2i1.29>.

terms of usage quoted by Arkoun are very varied so that when Arkoun applies them to the study of the Qur'an it feels unclear.

6. **"Foreshadowing Transcendental": How Arkoun Looks for the Presence Behind the Text**

Discussing the term "transcendental signified", it is important to see Arkoun's attitude towards what was initiated by Derrida regarding the use of the terms "signifier", which refers or marks) and "signified" (signified, which is referred to or marked) which are actually terms -This term comes from De Saussure, but there are differences in how it is used. If De Saussure does not deny the existence of an "object" in "reality" outside the text,⁵⁶ So Derrida formulates logocentrism also as an assumption, which can be called a consequence of the assumption that a theory, text, or statement shows or refers (as a signifier) to the "real", namely present and the "real" (as a signified) is prior and original of the marker. Because of this statement, traditional philosophy is also called Derrida "philosophy of presence".⁵⁷

Derrida's view, if guided in understanding the text of revelation, then explicitly denies the transcendent existence of God. So Derrida's view does not recognize the existence of God who is the source of all presence, both transcendent and profane behind the expanse of explicit and implied texts. Derrida, in this case, radically eliminates the authorship of texts, not only texts that are considered sacred, including texts composed by humans. In conclusion, Derrida also denies his own existence behind the texts he writes. This is the same as Nietzsche's view of declaring the "death of God" and Derrida declaring the "death of the author" of the text.

Even though Arkoun has been "possessed" by Derrida's thoughts, Arkoun still maintains the values of transcendence from the Omnipresent. This can be seen from the vision developed by Arkoun which is different from Derrida. If Derrida denies the view that there are "objects" in reality, namely on the other side of the text. Even Derrida is of the view that there is no reference at all across the text. And even more fatal, Derrida makes a very secular formulation, that there is no "transcendental signified". The implication of this theory is a denial that is completely at odds with the vision of divinity.

Against Derrida's rejection of the "transcendental signified" or "final signified", Arkoun actually recognizes the existence of the "transcendental signified" and "final signified". In other words, Arkoun and Derrida's views are very contradictory. Up to this point, Arkoun still maintains the transcendence values of the divine reality behind the text which he once denied its sanctity at the historical level. Arkoun's acknowledgment of the existence of a "transcendental sign" behind the text, we cannot yet be sure at which level he acknowledges it, whether at the heavenly level, namely

⁵⁶Suadi Putra, *Mohammed Arkoun: Islam dan Modernitas...*, p. 21

⁵⁷Johan Meuleman, *introduction to Muhammad Arkoun...*, p.24.

the Qur'anic discourse or the earthly level, namely the codified mushaf discourse that has experienced human intervention. If Arkoun's confession at the level of the Qur'anic discourse is that he himself builds his mind that at the Qur'anic level it is a level that is relatively impossible for the human mind and cognitive to reach, then how can one discuss the existence of a reality that has not been considered a text that can be used as a marker in exploring traces of existence, while what must be acknowledged is the reality behind a text. On the other hand, if what he admits is at the mushaf level, how can Arkoun admit the reality of a text that is impure and inauthentic? This is where Arkoun is unclear in determining his attitude towards which level of text is recognized as having a "transcendental sign" or "ultimate sign". It seems that Arkoun implicitly swallowed the denial of Jaques Derrida, who also experienced a deadlock in thinking by eliminating the "transcendence of the text" so that in turn he denied the "transcendental sign". A region and domain that is most important in revealing the meanings of the text of the Qur'an, where the texts cannot be separated from the creator of the text.⁵⁸

It seems that Meuleman is right in assessing Arkoun with his recognition of a "transcendental sign" that Arkoun's recognition of the existence of a "transcendental sign" is very vague. Like Arkoun in his view that "Kalam Allah" experiences a series of transitions, which are explained in the following chart: KL—WQ—KRT—sd---KA⁵⁹ The word is closely related to the "ultimate signified" ("Allah"), but the description regarding this chart does not contribute to the explanation of what exactly is meant by "transcendental signified" or how we should imagine it. It seems that Arkoun in this case is a bit confusing with his attitude of not providing a concrete explanation or at least being able to offer various complete solutions so that what he has in mind has become an established concept that is ready to be implemented.

It seems that Arkoun has to travel back to the past, looking back at classical discourse to look for "transcendental signs." In this case, Arkoun took two steps: First, historical exploration, and, Second, anthropological exploration. For historical exploration, Arkoun chose the work of a famous commentator, namely Fakhruddin al-Razi who wrote Tafsir al-Kabir. Historical exploration aims to re-read one of the treasures of classical interpretation and look for the final sign in it. Through anthropological exploration, Arkoun wants to look for "transcendental signs" with theories about myth, which show how language is used in various types of symbols. Furthermore, Arkoun also wanted to see the extent of the similarities between the last

⁵⁸Mukhtar, M., Mahmud, B., & Hamzah, H, *Kontroversi Kesarjanaan al-Qur'an Kontemporer* p. 52.

⁵⁹KL-kalam Allah: WQ- Wacana Qurani, KRT- Korpus Resmi Tertutup, KT=Korpus yang di tafsirkan; sd-Sejarah Duniawi; KA Kehidupan Abadi, Johan Meuleman, pengantar dalam Muhammad Arkoun *Nalar Islam dan Nalar Modern*, p. 261

sign shown by Fakhruddin al-Razi and the "last sign" shown by Surah al-Fatihah.⁶⁰ which is read using the method being proposed by Arkoun.⁶¹

Of the many tafsir produced by classical and contemporary tafsir scholars, it seems that Arkoun is more interested in studying Fakhr al-Razi's al-tafsir in search of "transcendental signs". It seems that the only interpretation that can help explore traces of God's presence behind the text is Fakhr al-Razi's interpretation. Why did Arkoun's choice fall on Fakhr al-Razi, what advantages does al-Tafsir Fakhr al-Razi have in Arkoun's eyes compared to other tafsirs? Can al-Tafsir Fakhr al-Razi, which is philosophical in nature, fulfill Arkoun's taste in proving that there is a reality on the other side that Derrida denies?

It cannot be denied that Fakhr al-Razi's interpretation is very significant in the area of Islamic thought. Even though its existence is a polemic. Al-Suyuthi even said that in Fakhr al-Razi's tafsir we can find everything except tafsir.⁶² This confirms that the tafsir written by Fakhr al-Razi has the specialty of examining various issues. So it is unique in its efforts to integrate its extensive knowledge within the framework of the Qur'an. Even Michel Lagard, one of Arkoun's colleagues, was interested in researching Fakhr's Tafsir al-Kabir al-Razi.

E. Conclusion

In the contemporary study of the Qur'an, Muhammad Arkoun's thought occupies an important position because of his courage to offer a radical new approach to Islamic discourse, especially in understanding the text of the Qur'an. As a historian of thought who has long been immersed in the Western intellectual tradition, Arkoun absorbs

⁶⁰The seven verses in surah al-Fatihah are seven doors (chapters), each of which is: chapter az-dhikr (door of dhikr, remembrance of Allah's name) namely in the sentence Bi-smi-l-lahir-rahmanir-rahim, chapter ash thanksgiving (the door of gratitude) in the sentence alhamdu li-llahi rabbil-'alamin, bab ar-raja' (the door of hope) in the kaiimat -i-rahmanir-rahim, bab al-khauf (the door of fear) in the sentence maliki yaumid-din, chapter al-ikhlas (door of sincerity), in the sentence iyyaka na'budu waiyyakansta'inu, bab ad-du'a wat-tadharu (door of prayer and tadharu), in the sentence *ihdina-as-shirathal-mustaqim*, and bab al- iqtida' wal-ihtida' (the door to example and guidance), in the sentence *shithal-ladzina an'amta 'alaihim, ghairil-maghdhubi 'alaihim wa ladh-dhallina*. See St. Sunardi, *Membaca al-Qur'an Bersama Muhammad Arkoun...*, p.114

⁶¹In his reading of surah al-Fatihah, Arkoun placed Fakhruddi al-Razi in the historical stage. In this stage, Arkoun intends to examine "the achievements and limitations of the laogiac-lexicographic and imaginative exegetical interpretations that have been attempted by Muslims up to the present day. He also pointed out that the intelligence of al-Razi's work must also be traced through implicit presuppositions. To read and assess al-Tafir al-Kabir, Arkoun provides five types of codes which include linguistic codes, religious codes, symbolic codes, cultural codes and anagogical codes. In semiotics, the code is a sign system that produces a text. The code is a kind of "filter" that determines the choice of meaning by the speaker. See St. Sunardi, *Membaca al-Qur'an Bersama Muhammad Arkoun...*,p. 112-116.

⁶²St. Sunardi, *Membaca al-Qur'an Bersama Muhammad Arkoun...*,p. 113.

various concepts such as episteme, logocentrism, and deconstruction to be used as a tool to criticise the construction of Islam which is considered final and untouchable. Through semiotic approach and discourse analysis, Arkoun attempts to read the Qur'anic text as a historical cultural product that needs to be parsed and reinterpreted in the present context. He refuses to follow the classical Islamic scientific pattern that tends to be normative, and instead adopts the Western critical paradigm to re-question the meaning and authority of the revelation text. This can be seen from the concept of the "worldly Qur'an" which symbolises his detachment from the transcendental dimension in understanding revelation. His criticism is directed at the Islamic scientific structure which is considered to absolutise meaning and close the door to new epistemological dialogue. Although his thought makes a significant contribution to Muslim intellectuals in the West or academic communities accustomed to theoretical criticism, for ordinary Muslims, Arkoun's approach can be considered deviating from traditional theological principles. As such, Arkoun's thought challenges the dominance of the old narrative, but at the same time has the potential to create a divide between tradition and modern critique.

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²Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West* (Oxford: One World Publications, 1991), h. 190.

³Syeikh Ja’far Subhānī, *Mafāhim Al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Mu’assasah Al-Tarīkh Al-’Arabī, 2010), Juz 5, h. 231.

⁴Syeikh Ja'far Subhānī, *Maḥālim Al-Qur'ān*, h. 8-9.

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Al-Qur'ān, Al-Baqarah/2: 185.

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2. Qur'anic translation

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3. Book

¹Muḥammad 'Ajjaj al-Khaṭīb, *Uṣl al-Ḥadīth: 'Ulumuh wa Muṣṭalahuh* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1989), h. 57.

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6. Article in book

¹Sahiron Syamsuddin, "Metode Intratekstualitas Muhammad Shahrur dalam Penafsiran al-Qur'an" dalam Abdul Mustaqim dan Sahiron Syamsuddin (eds.), *Studi al-Qur'an Kontemporer: Wacana Baru Berbagai Metodologi Tafsir* (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 2002), h. 139.

7. Article in encyclopaedia

¹M. Th. Houtsma, "Kufr" dalam A. J. Wensinck, et al. (ed.), *First Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. 6 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), h. 244.

8. Article in journal

¹Muhammad Adlin Sila, "The Festivity of *Maulid Nabi* in Cikoang, South Sulawesi: Between Remembering and Exaggerating the Spirit of Prophet", *Studia Islamika* 8, no. 3 (2001): h. 9.

9. Article in mass media

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10. Article in Internet

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