Mohammed Arkoun's Thought on Sharia Deconstruction: A Historical and Anthropological Approach

Makmun Syar'i[*]
UIN Sultan Aji Muhammad Idris Samarinda, Indonesia

Abstract

This article explores Mohammad Arkoun's thoughts on understanding Islamic Sharia in the modern world. Arkoun's thought differs from previous Islamic thinkers in analyzing Islamic texts. Arkoun exceeded the limit of traditional Islamic studies by utilizing several elements from Modern Western philosophy, social sciences, and humanities. Arkoun took this effort to realize his ambition, which was the combination of valuable thoughts from Islamic notions and modern philosophy. In the philosophy of Islamic law, the combination in line with the particular theorem stated: "*al-muḥāfaẓah `alā al-qadīm al-ṣālih wa al-akhdzu `alā al-jadīd al-aṣlah*" (literary means keeping good old traditions and adopting a new better ones). Islamic sharia should be related to historical context. According to Arkoun, the traditional and textual paradigm in understanding Islamic sharia leads people to misunderstand Quranic interpretation. People sanctify Islamic thoughts instead of understanding the substantial meaning behind the Quranic texts. Arkoun called this phenomenon "*taqdīs al-afkār al-dīniyyah*" (sanctifying religious thoughts). This study finds that Arkoun's thoughts are close to an anthropological and historical approach. The Quranic interpretation has to look at both universal and particular texts of the Quran by deconstructing the logic and discourse that underlay the emergence of these texts.

Keywords: Muhammad Arkoun, Islamic sharia, Quranic interpretation, sharia deconstruction, historical and anthropological approach

[*] Corresponding author, email: m.makmun58@gmail.com

Introduction

Sharia is a concrete manifestation of God's will (*al-Shāri*) in society. Nevertheless, sharia as an essence of Islamic teaching grows in various situations.[1] The reality of the ontology of sharia, which later creates the epistemology of Islamic law, is basically the result of interaction between Muslim scholars and the social facts surrounding them.[2] These historical facts show that Islamic law justifies the plurality of legal epistemological formulations caused by the role of different etymological discussions[3]. However, the flexibility of this fundamental structure of Islamic law is not equaled by productivity of substantive understanding through *ijtihad*. As a result, the tradition of Islamic knowledge, especially Islamic law, after the 10th century AD tended to be legal-formalistic and stagnant. The assumption that the existence of Islamic law already contained the points of divine law that had hampered the interpretation of substantive (*ijtihad),* then, *taqlīd*[4] tradition had developed. This situation worsened when the interpretive texts of Islamic law were made into authoritative texts. Whereas the text is an interpretation or even a comment on some interpretations, thus, the first text was missing. As the impact, the

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[1] Ilyas Supena, *Dekontruksi Dan Rekonstruksi Hukum Islam* (Yogyakarta: Gama Media, 2002); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *A Young Muslim's Guide to the Modern World* (Des Plaines, Ill: Kazi Publications, Inc., 1994).

[2] Ahmad Hasan, *The Early Development of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Adam Publishers & Distributors, 1994).

[3] Rizal Mustansyir, *Filsafat Analitik: Sejarah, Perkembangan, Dan Peranan Para Tokoh* (RajaGrafindo Persada, 1995). Langue Games, language has various functions according to the context, language games theory applies to various form of life, including Muslims' life in practicing sharia.

[4] *Taqlīd Literarry means "to imitate", "to follow". The term used in Islamic law to follow a teaching of one Islamic schoolar without mastering a comprehensive knowledge of the Islamic teaching*

formulation of Islamic law had been missing its relevance to the reality of practical life.

A gap between theoretical and practical aspects was noticed in the 16th century when the current modernity entered the Islamic world either in socio-political and intellectual fields or in the domination of Western knowledge and power. In addition, the modernity project, which was built on the basis of a philosophy of rationalism, and empiricism closely related to positivism, had created scientific and technological discoveries. These scientific and humanities findings influenced the lifestyle and social interaction of Muslims in the midst of cultural and religious pluralism.

The biggest obstacle was bio-technology findings in medical fields, such as transplantation and contraception, as well as contemporary socio-political issues concerning human rights.[5] Muslims, in various forms of response, faced this obstacle. In the 18th century AD, the phenomenon of Wahhabism emerged, pioneered by Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahab (1703-1792 AD) through the Islamic purification movement based on the ideas of ibn Taimyah. In the 19th century AD, there was an attempt to reconcile revelation with a logical reason. The shot was popularized by some prominent scholars: Jamaluddin-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Muhammad Iqbal. [6]

Meanwhile, in the 20th century AD, Muslim intellectual phenomena emerged, which were very diverse even though in one framework that was almost in a similar condition. It started to be introduced social science and

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[5] Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'Im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law* (Syracuse University Press, 1990), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvj7wn6k.

[6] Fazlur Rahman, *Metode Dan Alternatif Neomodernisme Islam / Fazlur Rahman;Penyunting, Taufik Adnan Amal* (Mizan, 1993).

philosophy approaches that developed in the West. From this, a new paradigm emerged in approaching Islamic issues: the historical-empirical and normativism-idealistic approaches. Their differences were in the proposition level that was given to the two approaches. These Muslim intellectual figures were Hassan Hanafi' Fazlur Rahman, Syekh Naquib al-Attas, Sayyid Hossein Nasr, and Muhammad Arkoun. Arkoun's thoughts had a distinctive and unique style among these intellectual figures. His thinking model differed from Hassan Hanafi's, which was more oriented towards revitalization efforts in classical Islamic science. Besides, he was also different from Sayyed Hossein Nasr's model of thinking, which was oriented to perennial philosophy and different from the study of Sheikh Naquib al-Attas's thought which introduced the Islamization of science. Moreover, Muhammad Arkoun's thought was closer to Fazlur Rahman's model of thought, particularly in his critical line of thought against the Islamic intellectual heritage of the classical-scholastic era.[7]

The uniqueness of Arkoun's thought that was not found in previous Islamic thinkers was in his effort to analyze Islamic texts that exceeded the limit of traditional Islamic studies because he utilized several elements from modern Western philosophy, social science, and humanities. This effort was made by Arkoun in order to realize his ambition, which was a synthesis of what was good from Islamic thought and what was good from valuable things of modern civilization.[8] In other words

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[7] Johan H. Meuleman, ed., "Arkoun Dan Kritik Nalar Islam," in *Tradisi, Kemodernan, Dan Metamodernisme: Memperbincangkan Pemikiran Mohammed Arkoun*, Cet. 1 (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1996).

[8] Suadi Putro, *Mohammed Arkoun Tentang Islam Modernitas*, (Ed) Arief Subhan (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1998), https://opac.perpusnas.go.id/DetailOpac.aspx?id=512731.

were *al-muhafadhah `ala al-qadim al-shalih wa al-akhzu `ala al-jadid al-ashlah.* According to Arkoun, the history of Islamic society is related to the Western context. Thus, there was no dichotomy between Islamic and Western thought. Both must be appreciated, evaluated, and regarded in a historical context appropriated with Islamic scribe groups who reformed universality without destroying particularity.[9]

Background and Intellectual

Mohammed Arkoun was born on 1st February 1928 in an unpretentious family and came from lower class social strata.[10] He was born in Torirt-Mimoun, Kabylia, which was a mountainous area that populated Berber in East Algiers,[11] an area that Arab writers called the Middle West (central Maghrib or *al-Maghrib al-awsat*), lived from agriculture, livestock, and handicraft selling. Berber is known for people who are scattered in Northern Africa. The language used is Berber language, inherited from pre-Islamic and pre-Roman eras. The Berber language is a language that does not recognize writing. Hence, the communication is conducted orally. Those who speak Berber are the citizens of Shawiyya and Kabylia, located West of Djidjeli and East of Algiers. This area of Kabylia was where Arkoun was born and grew up. Kabylia people who are Awras and Tureg people in Sahara deeply practice Islam in their social life, although they still believe the habits which are not provided in Islamic text. They are generally adherents of Maliki school (*madzhab*), and some adherents of Hanafi, particularly people of Turkish

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[9] Mohammed Arkoun and Robert D. Lee, *Rethingking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers* (New York: Routledge, 2019), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429304651.

[10] Arkoun and Lee.

[11] Meuleman, "Arkoun Dan Kritik Nalar Islam."

descent in Algiers and Tlemcen.

The influence of Arabs began to appear in Algerian society when this region was conquered by Uqbah bin Nafi` (w. 683) in 682 H, precisely during the caliphate of Yazin bin Mu'awiyah of the Umayyad Dynasty. Most of the people were Islam together with Uqbah. However, since 1830, Algeria was under the influence of French colonialism, which attacked this region under Charles X. Nevertheless, the military aggression of Charles aimed at normalizing its political prestige after suffering degradation in the Greek War of independence. Since then, the Algerian people have tried to struggle for independence from France but always failed. In 1962, Algeria succeeded struggling for freedom through a war of independence that had been going on since 1954. During this political situation, Arkoun witnessed Western society's hegemony over Islamic society. Therefore, Arkoun faced three traditions from a young age, represented by three different languages. Those traditions were Kabylia tradition (Berber Language) in everyday life, which is thousands of years old. Western tradition (French Language) at school and in administrative matters, and Islamic tradition (Arabic language), which he learned and practiced when he continued his high school in Oran, the main city of Western Algeria. Arkoun realized that there were a rivalry among the three languages and the way of thinking in which there were differences between spoken and written language and the correlation among language, thought, history, and power. Arkoun also realized that language was not only a technical tool for expressing oneself; even more, the language had background and values. Arkoun realized language limitation in which a language was often unable to contain other languages. This condition was faced by Arkoun when he had to

translate the word "myth" into Arabic. Therefore, Arkoun tried to integrate these various traditions, and cultural orientations, which were religious spirits maintained among Muslims and rational critical attitudes developed in the Western world. This situation influenced Arkoun's attention to the role of language in human thought.

Arkoun attended elementary school in Kabylia and high school in the port of Oran. After graduating from high school, he continued his study in Arabic language and literature major at the University of Algiers from 1950-1954 AD while teaching Arabic at a high school in al-Harrach, a suburb of Algerian capital. Amid the Algerian war for independence (1954-1962 AD), he registered as a student in France. Since then, he has lived in France. In 1969, he obtained a Doctor of Literature at Sorbonne University in France with a dissertation concerning humanism in the ethical thought of Misykawaih (a Muslim thinker from Persia who died in 1030 AD and studied medicine and philosophy fields).

Arkoun's departure to study in France coincided with a new intellectual situation that developed in France. This situation was characterized by the French intellectual tendency towards a philosophical model of structuralism and post-structuralism, which reached its popularity in the 1960s. Ferdinand de Saussure pioneered this ideology, which Claude Levi Strauss later developed.[12] After that, structuralist figures emerged, such as Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, Roger Garaudy, Louis Althusser, Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, and Michel Foucault, and Post-structuralist actors, such as Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard.

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[12] Bertens, *Filsafat Barat Kontemporer: Inggris-Jerman* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2006),

The ideology of structuralism[13] and this Post-Structuralism highlighted the phenomenon of language (linguistics) as an object of analysis, which became Arkoun's primary attention since he witnessed the rivalry among Berber, Arabic, and French languages. Arkoun's attention, which was previously a personal experience, had received ontological-metaphysical views from both ideologies. Arkoun's encounter with the structuralism and post-structuralism traditions further hastened his adaptation to various languages and traditions of thought, particularly the Islamic tradition revealed in Arabic language and Western tradition developed in France.[14] Since then, Arkoun's career gradually started to rise. In 1961, he was appointed as a lecturer at Sorbonne University, French. From 1970 to 1972, Arkoun taught at the University of Lyon, and then, he returned to Paris as a professor of history of Islamic thought. In addition, Arkoun often gave lectures outside France, including in Algeria. He also became a guest lecturer abroad, such as at University of California Los Angeles, the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic studies in Rome, Catholic

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[13] Structuralism is a philosophical ideology which in mid-20th century France, a language became main object, thus, this ideology is logocentric, logocentric is a new phenomenon of Western philosophy that previously, it is cosmocentric (Ancient Greece), theocentric (medieval), and anthropocentric-centralistic (modern). The existence of structuralism in particular is a reaction against ideology of existentialism and phenomenology, which glorifies humans as special beings, the structuralism actually underestimates humans by saying that humans are dead because they are objects of science. If existentialism defends human freedom, structuralism denies the human existence, because according to structuralism, humans are only a product of structureE. Sumaryono, *Hermeneutik Sebuah Metode Filsafat* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1993).

[14] Mohammed Arkoun, *Min Faisal Al- Tafrīqah Ilā Fasl al-Maqāl; Aina Huwa al-Fikr al-Islāmī al-Mu`asir* (Bayrut: Dar al- Saqi, 1995).

University of Louvain-la-Neuve in Belgium, Princeton University, and Temple University in Philadelphia. Finally, in 1993, Arkoun was appointed as a guest professor at University of Amsterdam. He also ever visited Indonesia to present a seminar about Contemporary Expressions of Islam in Building" (Yogyakarta, October 1992) and in honor of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture (Yogyakarta and Solo, November 1995).

Epistemological Origin of Arkoun's Thought

Arkoun grew up at a time of rapid development of science for either social, humanities, or natural sciences in the Western world. This momentum was not wasted without meaning. Thus, his writing was dominant with the nuances of modern Western science terms. Therefore, later on, one of Arkoun's critiques was about poor Islamic thinkers from using Western scientific developments that caused Islamic thought to be unable to answer obstacles contemporary Muslims faced. In the Islamic environment, modern social sciences were considered as assistive sciences, not core sciences.

Regarding these concerns, Arkoun used a lot of approaches and methodologies from various branches of social science, from anthropology, sociology, history, and linguistics. He thought these sciences contributed to illustrating and remapping scientific performance and human experience in all fields. According to Arkoun, these social sciences could also be used to imagine the base of consciousness and beliefs that regulated people's behavior and achieved the understanding of direct and total reality. Furthermore, a background in using these sciences was based on the logical and rational paradigm applied to strengthen faith.[15]

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[15] Putro, *Mohammed Arkoun Tentang Islam Modernitas.*

From the modern Western social science, Arkoun's analysis was influenced by French philosophers, such as Paul Ricoeur,[16] Michael Foucault,[17] Jacques Derrida (French anthropologist), Pierre Bourdieu, Jack Gody (Swiss linguist), Ferdinand de Saussure (French semiotician), Ronald Barthes, and Canadian literary scientist, Northrop Frye. The terms they used were used by Arkoun in order to describe texts (including Quran) and other Islamic products. Nonetheless, Arkoun did not take Western ideas as a whole and even seemed to have only partially adopted and interpreted them with his own understanding. For example, the concept of myth is a continuation of his adoption against the linguistic and semiotical idea popularized by Barthes and De Saussure.

According to Arkoun, myth was the most essential element of social imagination, which was built from elements of history, social reality, and environment that had an important role in forming, preserving, and directing various social groups. The myth created images, stories, and values and functioning to explain, show, and even build collective consciousness of the perpetrators. This understanding was then applied to reading Quran and other religious texts.[16][18] Despite the fact that revealed religions until now had refused to acknowledge the existence of mythical knowledge in their basic texts. According to Arkoun, if we wanted to form new historical science for religions, we must pay attention to three dimensions of knowledge: knowledge based on myths, knowledge generated from critical historical science, and

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[16] K. Bertens, *Filsafat Barat Abad XX: Perancis*, vol. 11 (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1996).

[17] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge: And the Discourse on Language* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1972).

[18] Arkoun, *Min Faisal Al- Tafrīqah Ilā Fasl al-Maqāl.*

knowledge confirmed to us by philosophical criticism.[19]

As we know that semiotics is a science about signs and everything that relates to them; a way of functioning (semiotic syntax), correlation to other signs (semiotic semantics), sending and receiving for those who use it (semiotic pragmatics). According to Saussure, a sign is a unity of two fields that cannot be separated between signifier or form and signified or meaning. The first is a material element (for example, certain sounds in spoken language or graphic scribbles in written language). The second is a mental element (agitation or concept). The correlation between the two is arbitrary (made up) because there is no logical correlation between them, and it is stable.

Arkoun tried to show historical facts about the language of Quran and its contents in semiotics theory and suggested that semiotic analysis of the Quran had two objectives. The first was in order to reveal historical facts about the language of the Quran. The second was to show how new meaning could be obtained from the text of the Quran without being limited by traditional studies. In the first objective, Arkoun explained that Quran consisted of words that referred to certain historical figures. The first question that he thought about was, `how can we relate to things which are sacred, spiritual, transcendent, and ontological when we are obliged to notice all vocabularies that relate to them, which must refer to stable and immaterial values, comply to the impact of historical facts.' Therefore, Arkoun disliked the common practice of Muslims that quoted the Quran in prayers and celebrations. Arkoun labeled such practices as a semiotic and fundamentalist deception because they helped

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[19] Arkoun.

Muslims to isolate Quran from its socio-historical and linguistic context. At the same time, they also intentionally shaped their own context to make the Quran relevant to its context.[20]

The second semiotic objective was Arkoun explained that language in general and the language of the Quran, in particular, consisted of signs and symbols. By viewing these signs and symbols from semiotic analysis, it is clear that these arbitrarily referred to their objects and were based on decisions of conventions in a society where these signs and symbols did not have a natural correlation with what was symbolized, and Arabic was no exception as the language of Quran. Furthermore, Arkoun questioned all the *qirāat* (way of reading), which claimed that all these readings had more to do with the norms of earlier Muslim societies rather than the true meaning of the Quran. Because the needs and norms of this century had changed dramatically from previous generations of Muslims, Arkoun wanted new study about Quran that was according to needs. By this alternative methodological paradigm, Quranic study is able to provide all meanings and is open to anyone, with no interpretation that could weaken the text that was interpreted.[21]Therefore, Arkoun's analysis could be seen as a semiological and hermeneutics type defined as an understanding of a series of signs arranged in a coherent textual complex. This kind of understanding would reveal aspects of a particular text or textualization but is always related to alternative texts.

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[20] Hasyim Shalih, *Mohammed Arkoun Wal Mukawwināt Al-`Aql al-Islāmi al-Klasiki* (al_Ribat al-Majli al-Qawmi li al-Tsaqafah al-`Arabiyyah, 1984).

[21] Mohammed Arkoun, *Tarīkhiyāt Al-Fikr al-`Arabi al-Islāmi* (Beirut: Markaz al-Inma al-Qaumi, 1996).

Arkoun obtained semiotic analysis from Derrida,[22] although he agreed more with Saussure in certain aspects. Because Derrida did not recognize the existence of transcendental signs, which meant that if it were applied to the Quran texts, it would deny divine truth or not recognize Allah as being behind the text.

A French thinker who influenced Arkoun was Michele Foucault. The concept of "episteme" and "discourse" was very tolerant against heterogeneous and plural realities, particularly in understanding texts. In order to analyze it, Foucault proposed what he called the archeology of knowledge.

Through the experience and knowledge gained, Arkoun built a theory and epistemological building criticism that aimed to deconstruct and place all thoughts at the historical level. Nothing sacred could be criticized, changed, and dismantled by considering aspects of space and time in understanding thought. Therefore,

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[22] Derrida offered the concept of deconstruction as a critique of Western philosophical and linguistic traditions, including Sausassure because structural linguistics had developed the concept of binary opposition between speech and writing, meaning and form, soul and body, transcendental and immanent, good and bad. Even though both of them were occurred together but the first was considered as superior, meanwhile, the second was a false representation of truth. The first was called as logocentrism. Deconstruction was an attempt to deny this opposition and reject against the truth of the logos (logocentrism) itself. When it came to the opposition of writing and speech, writing was a precondition of language and before oral speech, writing separated from speech. Thinking, writing, and creating were trace principles that Derrida called as difference. Concerning with Sausassure's Logocentrism, difference was a rejection of signified or absolute meaning. It was occurred because there was always a distance to the traces. The signifier was always behind the trace. Therefore, according to Karen, there was always a distance between the signifier and the signified or between the text and its meaning. For Karen, searching for absolute meaning was impossible Yasraf Amir Piliang, *Hiper-Realitas Kebudayaan* (Yogyakarta: LKIS, 1996).

historicism played a role in reconstructing meaning by eliminating the relevance between text and context. According to Arkoun, new meanings that potentially existed in these texts would emerge if this method was applied to religious texts.[23] This probability is argued because the essentialist and substantial postulates of classical metaphysics that existed in Islam (imprisoning) had been freed.[24]

All the Muslim intellectuals who raise hues and cry about deconstructing Islamic thought and sources of Islamic law, including Arkoun, are graduates and professors of the Sorbonne University, France, which had also been the alma mater of Heidegger and Derrida. Thus, it is basically a case of the mentors and the guides directly and profoundly influencing the thinking and working of their *protégés*.[25]

Historical Approach to Revelation

Arkoun approached the phenomenon of revelation from a general perspective. The beginning point was from Quran, but he included several phenomena of scriptures from other religious communities, such as Hindu scriptures, Buddhist scripture, and Bibles, which were the Old Testament and New Testament.[22] Using an anthropological perspective, he put the nature of the Prophet based on a phenomenon he called "production of a great man." According to Arkoun, a prophet was a wise leader endowed with a holy spirit and great imagination.

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[23] Mohammed Arkoun, "Rethinking Islam Today," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 588 (2003): 18–39.

[24] Mohammed Arkoun, *Al-Fikr al-Uṣūlī Wa al-Istilāhāt al-Ta`sīl Nahwa Tārikhīn Akbar Li al-Fikr al-Islāmi* (Beirut: Dar al- Saqi, 1999).

[25] Usman Khalil and Abida Khan, "Islam and Postmodernity: M. Arkoun on Deconstruction," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 3, no. 1 (2013): 28–57.

Following a view "production of a great man, Arkoun argued for all forms of holiness, which considered God to be actively involved at all times in history, in a heroic and charismatic period of the prophets. This understanding implied that the history of the prophets became uninteresting; it was just like a heroic history story.

Regarding Quranic revelation, Arkoun is divided into two ranks. The first rank was what the Quran usually referred to as *Umm al-Kitāb* (Mother Book) (Quran, 13:39, 43:4). In the second rank were various scriptures, including Bible, Gospel, and al-Quran. As we know, *Umm al-Kitāb* is the Book of Heaven, perfect revelation, from which the Bible, Gospel, and Quran were derived. He made this classification clearer than other classifications by placing *Umm al-Kitab* and its parts in the foremost place. In various generations, all Islamic knowledge and literature by Ulama (Islamic theologian) were put in second place.

The First rank of the Quran *(Umm al-Kitāb)*, the revelation was eternal, it was not bounded by time, and contained the highest truth. However, according to Arkoun, this absolute truth was beyond human reach because this form of revelation was secured in *Lauhul Mahfuzh* (Preserved Table) and remained together with God Himself. Besides, humans could only know the revelation through the second rank. However, this second rank, or in Arkoun's term "*edition terrestres*" (the world edition) had undergone modifications, revisions, and substitutions,[23] the "Book of Heaven" could only be followed by its adherents through written versions of the scriptures that existed today. This second aspect of the Mother Book/Book of Heaven, then, had to be subject to various obstacles in arbitrary historical reality. In turn, it relativized and shaped the type of truth contained in the

Quran. Therefore, Arkoun considered that it was the responsibility of historians to open and show the historical reality of an incident that related to the Quran, which the Quran had long used sacred things. In other words, a modern historian had to history what had been systematically lost from history.[26]

Moreover, the main objective of Arkoun's historical study was to relate the Quran to its 7th-century environment in the Arabian Peninsula,[27] which began with the new Quran history. As we know, the Quran was first conveyed orally and then written on existing materials, even though in an irregular form. During the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad, less than a decade after the Prophet's death, the letters in Quran were codified in the form of *Mushaf*. The *Mushaf* remained as it was, until now, even before it became a form of *muṣhaf*, the art of memorizing and reciting the entirety of *surah* of the Quran had developed well.

Generally, Arkoun put the history of the Quran into two periods, the revelation period or formative period and the collection period. The formative period included the revelation period in Mecca and Medina (610-632), when the Quran was transmitted orally among the companions. The period of determination and writing ranged from the time of the death of Prophet Muhammad SAW until the 4/10th century AD (11-324/632-936). According to Arkoun, the final form of the Quran did not exist before the 4/10th century AD.[28] Arkoun preferred to refer to Quran in the first transition as "Prophetic Discourse" (*al-*

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[26] Mohammed Arkoun, *Al-Qurān Min al-Tafsīr al-Maurūth Ilā Tahlīl al-Khitāb al-Dīniy*, Translated by Hasyim Salih (Beirut: Dar al-Tali`ah, 2001).

[27] Arkoun, *Tarīkhiyāt Al-Fikr al-`Arabi al-Islāmi.*

[28] Arkoun, *Al-Qurān Min al-Tafsīr al-Maurūth Ilā Tahlīl al-Khitāb al-Dīniy*, 237.

Kitāb al-Nabawī) and the second transition as "Closed Official Corpus" *(al-Naṣ al-Rasmī al-Mughlaq).* Concerning these two transitions, he defined Quran as a complete and open corpus revealed in Arabic, which we could not access except through text that was determined after the $4^{th}/10^{th}$ century AD. Through comparing the spoken and written forms of the Quran, Arkoun stated distinctly that Quran was purer, more authentic, and more reliable when it was still in discourse rather than when it was in written form. Arkoun's rationale was that Quran was open to all meanings when it was in spoken form, but in written form, it was conversely.

On the contrary, he said that the use of writing instruments such as pens and paper had reduced the divine status of the Quran to be a world book. Arkoun did not give an opinion that *Mushaf* deserved holiness status. Nevertheless, orthodox Muslims elevated this corpus to status as God's words.[29]

Anthropological Approach

Through anthropological exploration, Arkoun wanted to find the last sign with theories about myth, which showed how language was used in various types of symbols. That anthropological analysis could also be applied to the Quran. This way, Arkoun could understand the text from various perspectives and dimensions. This analysis could complement traditional analysis centered on lexico-grammatical, theological, etc. Arkoun emphasized that this kind of analysis helped his readers explore the richness of religious texts; according to Arkoun, it was more symbolic than narrative. In addition, through mythic analysis, people could see "symbolic

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[29] Arkoun, *Al-Fikr al-Uṣūlī Wa al-Istilāhāt al-Ta`sīl Nahwa Tārikhīn Akbar Li al-Fikr al-Islāmi*, 29–30.

expressions of reality and human universal".[30] It meant that through myth, people could discover a primordial or basic reality everyone experienced.

Arkoun conducted his study inspired by Paul Ricoeur's efforts, who studied a mythical analysis against the story of the fall of Adam in the Bible. According to Ricoeur's analysis, the story of Adam was not only the story of a man named "Adam" but also the story symbolizing human beings. This kind of conclusion was drawn through research and symbolic analysis. The word "Adam" means that it was not only someone who was coincidentally named Adam, but it had a human meaning (symbol).

Arkoun observed the Quran, in which many symbolisms revealed humans' original and universal reality. Firstly, it was the symbolism of human awareness of mistakes. Secondly, it was human symbolism of the eschatological horizon. Thirdly, it was the symbolism of human consciousness as a people. Fourthly, it was the symbolism of life and death. In order to interpret these symbols in Surah *al-Fātihah,* for instance, it was necessary to be familiar with the situation of cultural discourse that occurred in the Middle East during the pre-revelation and revelation period.

Hence, to analyze the symbolic and mythical meaning of the text of Surah al-Fatihah, the ability to connect various intrinsic elements of the text, which were sometimes meta-language. Through linguistic and semantic analysis, Arkoun looked for various possible signs. Many classical commentators conducted these two analyses, for example, al-Thabari, who explained *al-Rahmān* with *al-Rafiq, al-Hamd li-llāh with al-Syukr li-*

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30 Mohammed Arkoun, *Kajian Kontemporer Al-Qur`an*, Translate: Hidayatullah (Bandung: Pustaka, 1998), 55–57.

Allah, rabb al-`ālamīn* with *sayyid al-`ālamīn, and with *al-Tharīq.* The use of *al-Thariq* as an interpretation of *al-Shirat* by *al-Thabari* was the first designatum that Arabs conventionally accepted. Because it was placed in the revealed text, *the al-Ṣirat sign was used to reveal the contents of the* revelation that would be conveyed to humans. Moreover, this showed how *al-Ṣirat* sign had been symbolized into *al-Ṣirat* symbol.

The mystical analysis against *al-Fātihah* was conducted in several stages. First, the reader must treat linguistic data as "words as symbols" *(mot-symbole)* and not "words as signs" *(motsige).* In this way, Arkoun observed the symbolism of human consciousness. For example was "*iyyāka na`budu, ṣirat al-Muthaqim, an`amta, maghdhūb, alaihim, dhāllīn,*" an expression of awareness of crime problem that was one of the fundamental problems in human life. The symbolism regarding crime awareness was also in the opposition that was expressed "*al-Ladzina an`amta `alayhim, ghayr al-Maghdhūb `alayhim."* It stated that the awareness of life condition consisted of either good or evil. Its existence was uncertain. That's why the preacher submitted himself to those who had power.

The symbolism of awareness of "being" (which included life and death) of humans was revealed in the words of Allah and *Rabb al-`ālamīn.* Philologically, the word Allah came from the article *al-*and the word *Allah.* For Arkoun, the word Allah, *Rabb al-`ālamin* in surah *al-Fātihah* was an expression of the symbolism of human awareness of life and death. This form of expression was the concept of divinity for Muslims to distinguish the concept of divinity for people before Islam. This philological data invited a reader to know more about the concept of divinity before Islam in its symbolic status.

At this stage of anthropology, Arkoun also discussed about denotative functions. This function was not identical to the denotative position at the level of sign analysis when the denotative function was parallel to lexical meaning or meaning according to a dictionary. Surah *al-Fatihah* had a denotative function, which meant that its entire structure had power to point to the deepest realities (*originare*) of human life. It concerns the "limited experiences of human life such as life, death, time, love, value, power, holiness, and violence." Surah al-Fatihah was like a gate to see humans from the deepest side.

According to Arkoun, symbolic analysis allowed religious language to become a performative language or a language with creative power (*force effectuante)*. According to Arkoun, the performative discourse was a "parole," which was a discourse that was expressed simultaneously with an "action." This performative aspect allowed al-Fatihah to become a parole again for anyone who said it, and formerly, it was a parole for Prophet Muhammad. In other words, this showed the creative power of language. Regarding surah al-Fatihah, if the reader said "al-Rahman al-Rahim", the reader not only said or performed a state or action, but also created an action. It was a confession (that Allah was *al-Rahman and al-Rahim*), a hope of forgiveness from *al-Rahman al-Rahim*, or other actions based on the condition of the person who said it. Some of those Islamic thoughts led Arkoun to capture an alternative of Quranic interpretation. Arkoun is equally dissenting from traditionalists in Islamic theology as well as Orientalist scholarship and modernist trend in contemporary Islam.[31]

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[31]Aziz Esmail and Abdou Filali-Ansary, *The Construction of Belief: Reflections on the Thought of Mohammed Arkoun* (Saqi, 2013).

Conclusion

What makes Arkoun becomes one of the most influential intellectuals in modern Islamic studies? Mohammed Arkoun was a reformist of avant-garde Islamic thinkers. His thoughts were far ahead of the current state of affairs of the Islamic world by using methodologies from various contemporary social sciences that had developed in the West: philosophy, sociology, history, anthropology, and linguistics. The integral outstanding between Islamic normativity and western theoretical framework led Arkoun to a critical and radical revaluation of the role Islamic concepts have played in ideological struggles between traditional and modern times. Arkouns then seek these investigations by describing modern social sciences' conceptual and theoretical sources, such as anthropology and history.

Therefore, in order to dismantle the crystallization in understanding sharia of Islam (al-Quran), Arkoun used a historical approach by dissecting the history of the Quran into two periods, the revelation period or the formative period and the collection period. The formative period included the revelation period in Mecca and Medina when the Quran was transmitted orally among the companions. The period of determination and writing ranged from the time of the death of Prophet Muhammad. Moreover, Arkoun preferred to designate Quran in the first transition as "Prophetic Discourse" (*al-Kitāb al-Nabawī*) and the second transition as the "Closed Official Corpus" (*al-Naṣ al-Rasmī al-Mughlaq*). Regarding with two transitions, Anthropologists analyzed various symbols in Quran by reconstructing the logic and discourse that underlay the emergence of these symbols.

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