

HERMENEUTICS IN QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION

An Analysis Of Muhammad Arkoun's Exegetical Method

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Abstract

The Development Of Quranic Interpretation In The Islamic World Continues To Evolve Along With Social, Cultural, And Intellectual Changes. Muhammad Arkoun, A Contemporary Islamic Thinker, Has Introduced A Renewal In Quranic Interpretation That Emphasizes Critical Analysis Of Islamic Texts And Discourse. This Study Aims To Analyze The Contextual Approach Used By Muhammad Arkoun To Challenge Dogmatic Thinking In Quranic Interpretation. Using A Qualitative Descriptive Method, Data Is Integrated Through A Literature Review Of Arkoun's Works And Related Studies Discussing His Thoughts. The Research Findings Indicate That Arkoun Employs A Hermeneutical Approach, Particularly The Deconstruction Of Meaning, To Understand How Textual Meanings Develop Within Various Historical Contexts. His Method Of Interpretation Seeks To Distinguish Between The Quran As Divine Revelation And The Quran As A Text That Has Undergone Codification And Interpretation. Despite Facing Significant Challenges From Conservative Scholars, Arkoun's Approach Provides A Substantial Contribution To Modern Islamic Studies, Especially In Fostering A More Inclusive And Dynamic Understanding Of Islamic Texts.

Keywords: *Muhammad Arkoun, Interpretation method, Hermeneutics, Deconstruction of meaning*

Introduction

The Changing Times Always Influence Every Development of Episteme, Including Religious Practices That Cannot Be Separated from the Socio-Cultural and Scientific Developments Behind Them. However, as time progresses, stagnations sometimes arise that cause Islamic discourse to regress. This is due to the strong-rooted consumption of literatures derived from traditional texts (*turāth*) that are often regarded as sacred. According to him, *turāth* is a collaboration between text, culture, and episteme that together form a body of tradition. As an Islamic revolutionary, Arkoun was determined to change the rigid and literal paradigm of Islamic understanding into a more dynamic one. He believed that Islam must be able to adapt to the modern world, whose socio-historical conditions are significantly different from those of the classical era. In this regard, Arkoun proposed a critical approach by employing hermeneutics, deconstruction, and discourse analysis to deconstruct the construction of meaning within Islamic texts.

For him, the process of interpreting the Qur'an should not rely solely on traditional understandings passed down through generations, but must also open space for reinterpretation in line with the challenges of the times. The hermeneutical approach employed by Arkoun aims to explore how meanings within the Qur'an can evolve in accordance with specific historical and cultural contexts. He rejected the notion that the Qur'anic text holds a single, fixed meaning, as is often believed by conservative groups. On the contrary, he argued that sacred texts must

be continuously reexamined by taking into account the advancement of knowledge, critical thinking, and the ever-changing social realities.

One of the key aspects of Arkoun's thought is the distinction between the Qur'an as revelation and the Qur'an as text. According to him, the Qur'an as revelation is divine and transcendent, but once that revelation was written down and codified into the *mushaf*, it underwent a process of historization. This means that the Qur'an as a text cannot be separated from the social and cultural context of the society that codified it. Therefore, understanding the Qur'an should not be based solely on linguistic aspects, but must also take into account how the text has been interpreted and utilized within various historical contexts.

However, the contextual approach that Arkoun offered to Islamic interpretation has not been without criticism. Many conservative groups rejected his ideas, arguing that they are too closely aligned with Western thought and potentially undermine the authority of Islamic texts. Additionally, the deconstructive method he employed has often been misunderstood as an attempt to relativize the meaning of the Qur'an. In fact, the main purpose of this approach is not to dismantle Islamic teachings, but to open up broader spaces for interpretation so that Islam can continue to evolve in line with contemporary challenges. Arkoun's approach to Qur'anic interpretation has made a significant contribution to building a more contextual and relevant Islamic discourse for the modern world. Through his critique of intellectual stagnation and the dominance of rigid textualist understandings, he encouraged Muslims to be more courageous in interpreting their faith in creative and open ways. In this era of globalization and rapid

technological advancement, Arkoun's thought remains highly relevant as an alternative framework for addressing the challenges of modernity.

Based on the author's research, several studies have been found that discuss Muhammad Arkoun's thoughts in the field of Qur'anic interpretation. One such work is *"Mengenal Pemikiran Muhammad Arkoun Dalam Memahami Wahyu dan Al-Qur'an"* by Fairuz Hidayat. This study presents an analysis of the Qur'an as a text and explores its meanings, while also identifying the influence and controversies surrounding Arkoun's ideas. The findings indicate that Arkoun's interpretative approach is highly contextual. According to him, in order to achieve a profound understanding of revelation, one must consider the concrete historical situations in which the revelation occurred. Another relevant study is by Muhammad Chabibi, titled *"Metodologi Muhammad Arkoun dalam Diskursus Islamic Studies."* This research highlights how Arkoun proposed a new epistemological framework for studying Islamic sciences, drawing on methodologies developed by Western scholars—many of which were initially influenced by the intellectual culture of the classical Islamic-Arab world. Arkoun's initiative was driven by the rupture in the reading of Islamic texts and religious traditions. Therefore, he emphasized the need for critical and scientific knowledge to further develop Islamic studies, both within Islamic civilization and among contemporary Muslim societies.

A study by Syifa Urrahmi (2024), titled *"The Concept of Qur'anic Revelation from the Perspective of Muhammad Arkoun and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd,"* shows that through a semiotic-linguistic method, Arkoun categorizes the understanding of revelation into three

levels: (1) absolute revelation as the Word of God, (2) revelation revealed within a historical context, and (3) revelation codified in the *mushaf*. This stage of codification has sparked debates regarding the authenticity of the *mushaf* used today. Another relevant study is “*Reconstruction of the Qur’anic Interpretation Method According to Muhammad Arkoun*” by Alhini Zahratana (2022). This research reveals that Arkoun considered the Qur’an to be an open sacred text that can be reexamined through various scientific approaches. For him, the reconstruction of Qur’anic interpretation is a crucial step in addressing what he perceived as a troubling situation. He argued that the interpretations of classical scholars have shaped a dogmatic mindset among Muslims, making them less open to new perspectives and understandings of the meaning of the sacred text (Alhini Zahratana, *Reconstruction of the Qur’anic Interpretation Method According to Muhammad Arkoun, Mozaic*, 2022).

A study by Misnawati (2022), titled “*Muhammad Arkoun’s Thought in Contemporary Interpretation*,” reveals that the Qur’an is a combination of both oral traditions, or open and substantive communication, and written text, corpus, which is closed and formative. As an oral tradition with an inclusive nature, the Qur’an essentially allows for a variety of interpretations that can be analyzed through various academic disciplines. This demonstrates that the understanding of the Qur’an is not limited to a single approach, but can be examined from linguistic, historical, social, cultural, and philosophical perspectives. With its flexible nature, the Qur’an offers space for Muslims to continuously explore the meanings contained within it, in

accordance with the evolution of time and societal needs. Therefore, a multidisciplinary approach to interpreting the Qur'an becomes an inevitability to ensure that the understanding of this sacred text remains relevant and contextual in various human life situations and conditions.

Based on previous studies, there is a considerable amount of research on Muhammad Arkoun's thoughts and interpretation methods. However, the author has not found any studies that include examples of the application of Arkoun's method in interpreting Qur'anic verses, particularly in the deconstruction of the meaning of Qur'anic verses. Therefore, this research is both interesting and important to conduct.

Research Method

This study uses a qualitative-descriptive method with a library research approach aimed at analyzing Muhammad Arkoun's contextual tafsir method in understanding the Qur'an. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on exploring the theories and concepts developed by Arkoun through various written sources. The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include the works of Muhammad Arkoun related to Qur'anic tafsir, while secondary sources encompass books, journals, and articles that discuss and analyze his thoughts. Data collection is carried out by tracing and analyzing relevant literature. To ensure data validity, this research applies source triangulation, which involves comparing various references to obtain a more objective understanding. With this method, the study is expected to contribute to the understanding and

development of contextual tafsir methods in contemporary Qur'anic studies.

Biography of Muhammad Arkoun

This world-renowned Muslim intellectual and philosopher was born on February 28, 1928, in Tourit Mimoun, Kabylia, a mountainous region inhabited by the Berber people in eastern Algeria. "Berber" refers to those who live in the North African region. Arkoun was born into a Berber family whose livelihood was in the spice trade. His parents were local residents who still spoke the Kabyle language as their native tongue. Nevertheless, Arkoun was able to master Arabic, Algeria's national language, which he had studied since his youth. However, when expressing his ideas in writing, he predominantly used French. This preference is closely related to his background, having been born and raised during the period of French colonization in Algeria, which began in 1830.

Historically, Algeria was Islamized after being conquered by Arab forces in 683 CE under the command of 'Uqbah ibn Nafi' during the reign of Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah from the Umayyad dynasty. The form of Islam that developed among the Berber people and much of North Africa was characterized by Sufism (Baedhowi, 2008, *Islamic Humanism: A Study of the Philosophical Thought of Muhammad Arkoun*). Due to Algeria's geographical and cultural context, its people were exposed to three distinct languages: Kabyle—the indigenous Berber language inherited from pre-Islamic and pre-Roman North Africa; Arabic—the national language of Algeria; and French—

introduced by the French colonial regime that ruled Algeria from 1830 to 1962 (Arif Budiono, *Qur'anic Interpretation through the Semiotic and Anthropological Approach: A Study on Muhammad Arkoun's Thought*). This multilingual environment played a crucial role in shaping Arkoun's intellectual focus, especially his deep concern for the role of language in every dimension of his thought. Each of these three languages represented a distinct tradition and cultural orientation—Kabyle for indigenous African heritage, Arabic for Islamic-Arabic civilization, and French for Western intellectualism (Baedhowi, 2008). Given this complex cultural background, it becomes evident that Muhammad Arkoun embodied a synthesis of three civilizations—Arab, Islamic, and Western—ultimately guiding him toward a profound understanding of humanism.

Arkoun's contributions extended beyond the academic realm; he was also actively involved in interfaith dialogues and intellectual debates. As a contemporary Muslim intellectual, Arkoun made enduring contributions to the field of Islamic studies and the contextual understanding of sacred texts. Even after his passing in 2010, his intellectual legacy continues to inspire. His scholarly works have become valuable references in both Islamic studies and the broader discourse on interpreting sacred texts in light of modern challenges. His efforts have inspired subsequent generations to continue exploring and deepening their engagement with Islamic knowledge in order to address the evolving problems of each era.

Arkoun's View on Qur'anic Interpretation

Before addressing his perspective on Qur'anic interpretation, Arkoun first presented his view on the nature of revelation. He argued that divine revelation, as given by God, consists of two hierarchical levels. The first is the *Umm al-Kitab* (Mother of the Book) and the sacred scriptures revealed by God, such as the Bible, the Gospel, and the Qur'an. At this initial stage, the revelation manifested in the Qur'an and the *Umm al-Kitab* is eternal, transcends time, and contains absolute truth. According to Arkoun, this absolute truth remains preserved in the *Lawh Mahfuz* (Preserved Tablet) and is known only to God. Meanwhile, human beings can only comprehend revelation through its manifestation at the second level (Syifa Urrahmi, 2024).

The Qur'an, according to Arkoun, should not be read merely in a literal sense, but requires contextual interpretation and meaning-making. For him, the Qur'an is not a rigid document, but a sacred text that allows for evolving interpretations across different historical and cultural contexts. This is why Arkoun criticized traditional Islamic exegetical thought, which is dominated by a normative approach that tends to preserve the meaning or interpretation of Qur'anic verses in a fixed and unchangeable form. Classical tafsir, as developed by early scholars, largely relied on textual and philological methods oriented toward legal and theological doctrines. In his book *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), Arkoun stated: "I am not saying that the Qur'an is irrelevant... What I am saying is that the thinking used by theologians and jurists to interpret the Qur'an is irrelevant. Because today, new sciences such as

anthropology are not mastered by them. We also have modern linguistics, historical methods, biology—none of these are understood by them. With the same episteme, based on the textual nature of the Qur'an, which is written in Arabic, it is considered to have similarities with literary texts or other sacred scriptures.”

Muhammad Arkoun observed that Qur'anic interpretation over the centuries has experienced a *fixation of meaning*. This phenomenon, he argued, stems from the normative interpretations—both classical and modern—which tend to uphold an authoritative meaning that is regarded as final or already conclusively interpreted by early Islamic scholars. Moreover, the historical context in which the revelations occurred is rarely taken as a primary consideration in interpretation. Exegesis has often been used to support the arguments of specific groups or religious authorities. Such a condition, Arkoun believed, hinders a more flexible understanding of the Qur'an. For instance, verses concerning *hudud* laws or gender roles are frequently interpreted literally, without considering changing social contexts. While Arkoun offered a thorough critique of classical Islamic theological thought, he still appreciated the religious fervor that existed during that era.

The emergence of various understandings among Muslims regarding the revelation of the Qur'an is structured within specific grammatical and discursive frameworks. This has led to an extreme sacralization of the Qur'an among many Muslims. The Qur'an is viewed as a sacred text that originates from Allah, possessing a divine and transcendent nature. As a result, its textual meaning is often

considered absolute, with little regard for the socio-historical context in which the revelation occurred (Imam Ghazali, 2018).

Arkoun emphasized that Qur'anic interpretation must be dynamic and continuously re-examined in order for Islam to remain relevant in modern life. According to him, Qur'anic exegesis should be widely open to various scientific approaches so that it can accommodate the ever-evolving social realities and societal changes. Arkoun's critique also highlights the lack of contextual awareness applied in classical exegesis, where certain verses are often interpreted from a single perspective, thus failing to address the complexity of contemporary social and political dynamics. For example, the verse on polygamy in Surah An-Nisa (4:3) is frequently understood as a man's absolute right, without considering its historical context as a solution for orphaned women in the aftermath of war.

Therefore, Arkoun offers a hermeneutical method aimed at providing a new space for understanding revelation by acknowledging the complexity of divine messages and promoting broader interpretation and dialogue (Fairuz Hidayat, 2019). In response to such challenges, the hermeneutical approach he proposes serves as an alternative mode of exegesis that is more critical, dynamic, and relevant to contemporary developments. The hermeneutical concept introduced by Arkoun emphasizes that readers play an active role in shaping the meaning of the text in synergy with modern realities.

Arkoun's Hermeneutical Concept in Qur'anic Exegesis

The concept of hermeneutics is not new, as it has become increasingly prominent in the academic world in recent years, being utilized by scholars from various fields (Fahrudin Faiz and Ali Usman, 2019). In the realm of Qur'anic exegesis, the term hermeneutics is understood in two meanings: as a set of methodological principles for interpretation and as the excavation of philosophical meaning from certain traits and conditions (Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*, Evanston, 1969). Hermeneutics can also be understood as a science that reflects on a word or event from the past, which can then be understood and become meaningful in the present (Farid Esack, 1997).

Arkoun's approach to hermeneutics builds upon these understandings. He views the Qur'an as the Kalamullah (Speech of God), which is filled with *Huda* (guidance) as stated in Surah Yunus (10:57), and free from doubts (as in Surah Al-Baqarah 2), deception, ignorance, and contradiction (as in Surah An-Nisa 4:82). The Qur'an, which is applicable for all times and places (*Shalih li kulli zaman wa makan*), must be able to address and provide solutions to the problems and challenges of any given era.

Arkoun emphasizes that the Qur'an should not be understood as a static text but as one that is relevant to the contemporary issues faced by society. He argues that interpretation should not be confined to rigid, traditional interpretations but should remain dynamic, open to reinterpretation in the light of new knowledge and changing societal

conditions. This is the essence of his hermeneutical approach in Qur'anic exegesis, which strives to ensure the Qur'an remains a living and adaptable guide for contemporary issues.

As previously discussed, the interpretation of the Qur'an remains stagnant due to the rigid meanings imposed by religious authorities. Meanwhile, the Muslim community today faces a world filled with opportunities and challenges, such as globalization, pluralism, human rights, and gender equality, all of which require a specific dialogue with the sacred text (the Qur'an) to address these issues. Arkoun's critique of traditional exegesis highlights this very concern: the need for the Qur'an to be interpreted in a way that remains relevant to contemporary issues and reflects the evolving societal realities. In his view, the Qur'an's teachings are not static; they offer timeless guidance, but that guidance needs to be contextualized and reinterpreted to answer the questions and challenges of the modern world. By doing so, Arkoun emphasizes the importance of critical, dynamic, and contextual exegesis that engages with the present-day concerns, while also staying rooted in the core spiritual and ethical principles of Islam.

Thus, Arkoun, through his hermeneutical theory, aims to formulate a new paradigm in interpreting the verses of the Qur'an and bringing Islamic exegesis into a broader dialogue with the social sciences and humanities (Alhini Zahratana, *Rekonstruksi Metode Penafsiran Menurut Muhammad Arkoun*, Mozaic, 2022). Arkoun's reinterpretation of the Qur'an is formulated through various Western and Eastern social sciences. Academically, his hermeneutical concept was borrowed from the hermeneutic method that had been developed

by earlier Orientalists, which was initially used to study other religious scriptures, particularly the Bible, rather than the Qur'an (Fairuz Hidayat, 2019). However, the hermeneutics developed by Arkoun is fundamentally based on the understanding that the Qur'anic text has a dimension that goes beyond just its literal meaning. By exploring the methods of deconstructing meanings, linguistic analysis, historical context, and sociology, this approach not only liberates exegesis from the constraints of absolute authority but also encourages Muslims to be more critical and innovative in responding to the divine messages contained in the sacred text (the Qur'an). Arkoun's approach advocates for an interpretation that is open to new methodologies, allowing for a deeper and more dynamic engagement with the Qur'an in the context of modern societal issues.

Deconstruction of meaning

The deconstruction of meaning in Arkoun's tafsir method is inspired by the deconstruction theory developed by Jacques Derrida. In the context of Islamic exegesis, Arkoun employs deconstruction to unravel the meaning of religious texts that have long been considered fixed and absolute by orthodox Islamic tradition.

1. Arkoun argues that the meaning in classical Islamic texts (including the Qur'an) is not fixed or final. For centuries, the tafsir of the Qur'an has been dominated by interpretations deemed legitimate by certain scholars, while other interpretations were often marginalized or considered heretical. Through deconstruction, Arkoun aims to expose how certain meanings became dominant in Islamic tafsir,

showing that these meanings are not singular but are, instead, the result of social, political, and historical constructions. Ultimately, his approach seeks to provide space for new interpretations of the Qur'an that are more relevant to the context of modern times.

2. **Deconstructing Language and Textual Structure:** Arkoun emphasizes that the language in sacred texts is not free from ambiguity. Language is inherently polysemous (having multiple meanings), so each word or concept in the Qur'an can have many interpretations. Through deconstruction, he seeks to: reveal the layers of meaning within the text that have been overlooked, critique how the choice of words in the Qur'an has been contextualized in a particular historical moment and then turned into dogma that cannot be questioned. For instance, the concept of "Jihad" in the Qur'an holds multiple meanings, but throughout Islamic history, this meaning has often been reduced to physical warfare (Qital), even though linguistically, it can also signify spiritual and intellectual struggle.
3. **Criticizing the Dogmatic Tafsir Tradition:** Arkoun opposes the notion that the meaning of the Qur'an can only be interpreted using methods inherited from the tradition of classical scholars. He argues that classical tafsir tends to: maintain the authority of specific religious and political systems, ignore the social and historical context when interpreting the text, and reject new interpretations that are more inclusive and critical. As a solution, Arkoun encourages Muslim intellectuals to adopt a deconstructionist approach so that: the tafsir of the Qur'an does not become trapped

in a singular truth, remains open to scientific and rational critique, and is able to address the challenges of modernity without losing its relevance.

Linguistic Analysis

Mohammad Arkoun employs linguistic analysis to understand how meaning in religious texts, particularly the Qur'an, evolves and changes within historical and cultural contexts. He argues that the meaning of a text is not fixed but is always connected to the structure of language, social context, and the authority that controls its interpretation. Among these considerations:

1. The Influence of Language Structure in Qur'anic Tafsir

Arkoun adopts modern linguistic methods, particularly from the structuralist theory developed by Ferdinand de Saussure. In this approach, he emphasizes that: the meaning in language is arbitrary, meaning the relationship between a word and its meaning is not absolute, but is determined by the system of language and its usage in society. Every word in the Qur'an is related to other words within the Arabic language system. Therefore, changes in language structure can affect how the text is understood. Language has historical elements, so the meaning of words in sacred texts may differ from their usage in the present time.

For example, the word "Kafir" in the Qur'an originally meant "one who conceals themselves from the truth," without the extreme negative connotation. However, throughout Islamic history, this word has

undergone a shift in meaning, evolving into "the enemy of Islam" or even being used as a justification for violence against certain groups.

2. Semiotic Analysis and Hidden Meaning

Arkoun also employs a semiotic approach, the study of signs and meanings, to analyze how religious texts are constructed and understood. He distinguishes between literal (denotative) meaning and implied (connotative) meaning in the text. He examines how dominant interpretations often overlook other possible hidden meanings within the text. He highlights how certain meanings are reinforced by religious and political authorities, while others are dismissed.

For example, the word "Hijab" in the Qur'an originally meant "a barrier" or "a curtain," not specifically referring to women's clothing. However, in Islamic history, this meaning has been reduced to the obligation for Muslim women to wear specific attire, demonstrating how meanings in texts evolve due to social and political factors.

3. Social Context and Evolution of Meaning

Arkoun emphasizes that the meaning of a text cannot be separated from its social and historical context. He criticizes traditional tafsir methods that often ignore these factors and treat the language of the Qur'an as something eternal and unchanging. The language of the Qur'an did not emerge in a vacuum but developed within the 7th-century Arab society. The meaning of words in the sacred text must be analyzed in the context of its time, not only based on modern understandings or the interpretations of classical scholars. He highlights how dominant tafsirs often adjust the meaning of texts according to the political and ideological interests of each era in Islamic history.

For example, the concept of "Sharia" in the Qur'an originally meant "the path to a water source" (a metaphor for God's law guiding humanity). However, in Islamic history, its meaning shifted to a set of legal-formal laws that are often used by the state to control society.

4. Criticism of Static Traditional Tafsir

Arkoun rejects the traditional tafsir approach that views the language of the Qur'an as something fixed and unchanging, while also overlooking the development of the Arabic language throughout history. He criticizes this approach for not considering how society understands the text differently in various eras. As an alternative, Arkoun proposes that tafsir of the Qur'an should be open to modern linguistic methods. This approach includes structural analysis to understand the language patterns in the text, discourse analysis to examine how religious authority shapes the meaning of the text, and etymological studies to observe how words in the Qur'an undergo shifts in meaning over time. In doing so, a more dynamic tafsir, relevant to the development of the times, can be created.

Historis-Antropologis

Mohammed Arkoun uses a historical-anthropological approach to understand Islamic texts, particularly the Qur'an, within the social and cultural context in which these texts emerged and developed. This approach aims to examine how the text has been understood, interpreted, and used by society throughout various periods of history. Arkoun rejects the notion that religious texts have fixed and unchanging meanings. Instead, he argues that the meaning of a text is always

influenced by the social, political, and cultural developments of each era (Muhammad Arkoun, *Essair Sur La Hensee Islamique*, trans. Hidayatullah, Bandung, 2000).

1. Historical Approach: Understanding the Text in the Context of Its Time

Arkoun emphasizes that the Qur'an must be understood within the historical context of the 7th century, specifically during the pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arab societies. The Qur'an did not descend in a vacuum, but within a society that had its own social, cultural, and political structures. The meaning of the Qur'anic verses is closely tied to the social realities of that time, and thus, the interpretation of the text must consider its historical context. Many Islamic laws (such as those concerning slavery, inheritance, or gender roles) were influenced by the culture and customs of the Arab society of that period, and are not merely absolute divine laws.

Example: In Islamic tradition, the inheritance law stating that a male inherits twice as much as a female (2:1) is often regarded as a divine decree that cannot be altered. Arkoun argues that this rule was heavily influenced by the social structure of 7th-century Arab society, where men were economically responsible for their families. In the modern era, when women have more equal economic rights, this verse's interpretation should be revisited in light of societal developments. With the historical approach, Arkoun aims to distinguish between teachings that are universal and those that are only relevant to a particular context.

2. Anthropological Approach: Islam as a Social and Cultural Tradition

Arkoun's anthropological approach focuses on how Islamic teachings are practiced and understood by societies across different times. He examines how Islamic texts are interpreted differently in various cultures and eras. He views Islam not only as a religion but also as a cultural phenomenon that continuously evolves. He criticizes the notion that Islam has a fixed, unchanging form, as in reality, the practice of Islam varies significantly across different Muslim communities worldwide.

Example: The concept of "Hijab" in Islam has various interpretations: In 7th-century Arabia, the hijab was more about the physical separation of men and women than about specific clothing. In post-revolutionary Iran (1979), hijab became a symbol of Islamic identity and resistance to the West. In several Western countries, the hijab is viewed as a symbol of personal freedom of choice for Muslim women. Arkoun's anthropological approach demonstrates that there is no single "pure Islam"; rather, Islam constantly evolves according to the culture and history of each society.

3. Critique of the Standardized History of Islam

Arkoun critiques how the history of Islam is often standardized and presented as a singular truth. Many historical narratives of Islam were written by scholars and historians who had specific ideological interests. The history of Islam taught in many Muslim countries often ignores different versions of events and only presents the official version that benefits certain groups. He calls for a more scientific

critique of Islamic history, one that involves comparing various sources and examining the socio-political context behind the writing of history.

Example: The narrative that Islam has always developed peacefully and has never experienced internal conflict is often taught in traditional Islamic education. However, history records that after the death of Prophet Muhammad, there were serious political conflicts between the supporters of Ali (Shia) and Muawiya (Sunni), leading to the Battle of Siffin and the emergence of major divisions within Islam. Through his historical approach, Arkoun seeks to dismantle myths in Islamic history and replace them with more objective analyses.

4. Opening Space for a New, More Contextual Interpretation

Arkoun argues that the historical-anthropological approach can help develop a more relevant interpretation of the Qur'an for the modern era. Many rules in Islam must be understood as part of history, rather than as fixed laws. Qur'anic interpretation must be able to respond to social changes such as democracy, human rights, and gender equality. Islam should be open to criticism and renewal, just as other religions have evolved throughout their histories.

Application of Arkoun's Interpretation Method to the Qur'anic Verses

In applying the deconstruction of Qur'anic interpretation, Arkoun believes that the study of the holy book must be based on a deep historical approach and adopt the intellectual methods that have been developed by scholars (Muhammad Arkoun, 2000). However, the main issue that must be addressed is how to study the sacred text in a way

that corresponds to the current era. Therefore, Arkoun emphasizes that there are three important aspects that must be implemented in the study of the Qur'an (Muhammad Arkoun, 1998). First, linguistic analysis to uncover the hidden meanings within a text in order to observe the continuity between the text and contemporary conditions. Second, the anthropological aspect, which is believed to maintain consistency in recognizing the mystical language structure (historically and typologically based) in the Qur'an (Baedhowi, 2008). According to Arkoun, the mystical elements contained in the sacred text stimulate intuition, ignite passion, and deepen religious experience. This is because mystical discourse enriches the understanding of religious texts that contain various meanings and require an interdisciplinary approach. By analyzing these mystical aspects, one can uncover symbols that reflect true reality and portray the universality of humanity from a broader perspective (Muhammad Arkoun, 1998). Third, the historical aspect, which bridges the excavation of contextual meaning by examining phenomena from the past up to the present.

Arkoun has not interpreted the Qur'an as a whole like other classical scholars who have produced extensive tafsir works, but he provides several insights related to his interpretive model for Qur'anic verses. One example of his interpretation is seen in his analysis of the linguistic elements in Surah Al-Fatihah, such as *ism ma'rifah* (definite nouns), *ism dhamir* (pronouns), *fi'il* (verbs), and *musamma* (the named). He finds that most of the definite nouns in this surah refer to Allah, such as the words *Allah*, *ar-Rahman*, *ar-Rahim*, *Rabb al-'Alamin*, and *Malik Yawm ad-Din* (M. Solahudin, 2021). Arkoun

emphasizes the importance of understanding these words by referencing verses from the surahs revealed before Al-Fatihah in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding (Sunardi, 2012).

Arkoun then analyzes the critical relationship through the postulation of the ultimate sign (*signifie dernier*). According to Arkoun, the search for this ultimate sign can be carried out by exploring both historical and anthropological contexts. Through historical-anthropological exploration, one can trace the ultimate sign by understanding the *asbabun nuzul* (circumstances of revelation), which can be obtained from the classical tafsir tradition. One of the classical tafsirs Arkoun refers to in his exploration of Surah Al-Fatihah is the *Mafatih Al-Gaiyb* by Fakhruddin Ar-Razi. From this second stage, he introduces five codes within the text: the linguistic code, the religious code, the symbolic code, the cultural code, and the anagogical code.

The final interpretation of Surah Al-Fatihah using Muhammad Arkoun's hermeneutic method is as follows. "Alhamdulillah Rabbil 'Alamin" shows a tendency towards foundational knowledge, such as the ontological and methodological aspects of knowledge. The ontological meaning here refers to the nature of existence. This verse affirms that Allah is the "Rabb" (Lord/sustainer) of all the worlds, inviting us to recognize the existence of God as the foundation of everything that exists. Meanwhile, the methodological aspect of knowledge refers to how humans understand Allah and the universe. Through this praise, humanity is encouraged to use reason and experience to know God, either through His creations or through knowledge.

"Maaliki Yawmid-Din" pertains to eschatology, which is the study of the end of times or the Day of Judgment. This verse explains that Allah is the Sovereign on the Day of Judgment, which according to Arkoun, must be understood not just as a threat but as a divine system of justice. In Arkoun's approach, this verse carries ethical values and social awareness that every human action will be accounted for. "Iyyaka na'budu wa iyyaka nasta'in" pertains to worship. Worship is not merely understood as formal rituals but as an existential bond between humans and their Lord. Therefore, it's not just about prayers or fasting, but acknowledging human limitations and the need for God in a holistic sense.

"Ihdinas-Siratal Mustaqim" addresses ethics, asking to be guided to the straight path, which Arkoun interprets as a path of life that is ethical and full of integrity. It is not just about being legally correct but also being just, honest, and highly moral. "Alladzina an'amta 'alaihim" speaks about the knowledge of prophethood, referring to those who have been blessed by Allah, such as the prophets, truthful ones, martyrs, and the righteous. In Arkoun's view, this reflects the teachings and legacy of the prophets, which must be studied, emulated, and contextualized. It is not just about knowing the prophets historically, but also emulating the values they stood for: justice, honesty, tolerance, and compassion.

The phrase "ghairil maghdhubi 'alaihim wa ladhallin" touches on themes of history, human spirituality, and symbolic representations of evil, as depicted in past narratives. It refers to those who are angered by Allah and those who have gone astray—often interpreted as past

communities who deviated from the right path. Arkoun interprets this part symbolically: as a depiction of human errors throughout history, structures of oppression, moral deviations, and spiritual stagnation. Therefore, it is not meant to blame specific groups but to serve as a reflection for humanity to avoid repeating the same mistakes. *Wallahu a'lam* (And Allah knows best).

Implications of Transformative Hermeneutics for Islamic Studies

Although Arkoun's ideas have sparked controversy and debate among the Muslim community, his contributions in promoting critical thinking and renewal in Islamic studies are undeniable. The hermeneutical approach he offers opens up the dialogue within the study of tafsir, expanding it and ensuring that the Quran continues to address various issues according to its context and the transformation of time. One of the main implications of Arkoun's hermeneutics is the emergence of critical thought in Islamic studies. This approach encourages Muslim academics and intellectuals not to merely accept texts literally but to examine the context behind those texts. In doing so, Islam is understood not as something static, but as a system of thought that continuously develops and adapts to the social dynamics of each era.

Furthermore, Arkoun's hermeneutics also encourages Islamic studies to be more transparent and open to other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and linguistics. With this multidisciplinary approach, the study of Islam is no longer limited to textual understanding alone, but also considers various factors that have

influenced the development of Islamic teachings throughout history. This approach can renew the paradigm of the Muslim community in responding to the Quran, allowing it to be understood from a broader and more inclusive perspective, thus becoming more adaptive in addressing the challenges of the modern world.

Conclusion

This study examines Muhammad Arkoun's hermeneutical approach to the interpretation of the Quran, aiming to provide a new perspective in understanding the Islamic holy text in a more contextual and inclusive manner. Arkoun critiques the traditional tafsir approach, which he views as static and insufficiently considers the social, cultural, and historical factors that underlie the revelation of the Quran. He proposes a deconstruction of meaning that allows for a separation between the divine revelation and the text, which has undergone codification and interpretation over time. With this approach, he urges Muslim academics and intellectuals to engage critically with religious texts and to open the door for more dynamic and progressive thinking.

Arkoun's approach is also multidisciplinary, integrating anthropology, sociology, and linguistics to gain a more holistic understanding of Islamic teachings. One of the key implications of this method is the emergence of more open and adaptive Islamic thought, responsive to social developments. Arkoun also criticizes the extreme sacralization of the Quranic text, which he believes leads to stagnation in Islamic thinking.

He emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between teachings that are universal and those that are related to specific social contexts. Arkoun's approach to Islamic studies has sparked controversy, especially among conservative scholars who reject his ideas on the reinterpretation of the holy text. However, his contributions in opening a dialogue space for modern Islamic thought cannot be ignored. By stressing the importance of contextual understanding of the Quranic text, Arkoun's hermeneutical method seeks to maintain the relevance of Islamic teachings in addressing the challenges of the times.

This study shows that the interpretation of the Quran must continue to evolve to avoid being trapped in rigid dogmas that no longer align with social realities. Therefore, this research recommends the need for a more critical and open approach in Islamic studies, so that the values of justice, humanity, and inclusivity contained in the Quran can be more effectively applied in modern society. In this way, the transformative hermeneutical method introduced by Arkoun could serve as an alternative to developing a more progressive and relevant study of Islam that keeps pace with the development of the times.

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