

**Woman's Mind and Religion Decrease:
MUHAMMED ARKOUN's Semiotic Analysis
A Social Approach**

**نقصان عقل ودين المرأة من خلال التحليل السيميائي عند محمد أركون
مقاربة اجتماعية**

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Abstract:

Arkoun chose woman's mind and religion as a model to practice his semiotic analysis accordingly to shake the hereditary language. This analysis is part of Arkoun's project that consists of six main poles which are: Theological, Anthropological, Historical, Social, Semiotic, and Linguistic analysis. This is to put revelation in a questionable situation where it encounters all divine books: the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran. Hence, the legendary layer that covers and surrounds these books has to be removed. Thus, a critical distance or space has to be established between the reader, no matter what his religion is, and these books. All this to establish a new discourse with which Muslims enter to the world of modernity with great guarantees to success; basing on the idea that the Quran increases the human being level in comparison to what it was in the past, not what it is now .

Keywords: Semiotic; Social; Analysis; Approach; Mind; Religion.

ملخص:

اختار محمد أركون عقل ودين المرأة نموذجا لتطبيق تحليله السيميائي، هذا التحليل هو جزء من مشروع أركون الذي يتأسس على ست مقاربات هي: العقدية والأنثروبولوجية والتاريخية والاجتماعية واللسانية السيميائية، وهذا لأجل خلخلة مفهوم الوحي وجعله في وضع إشكالي، مشتتلا على كل الكتب السماوية: التوراة والإنجيل والقرآن. لذلك يجب إبعاد كل التلاعبات السيميائية التي أحاطت بهذه الكتب، مما يحتم ترك مسافة نقدية بينها وبين القارئ مهما كانت ديانتها. وكل هذا لتأسيس خطاب جديد يدخل به المسلم عالم الحداثة بضمانات أكيدة في النجاح، وهذا تأسيسا على فكرة أن القرآن رفع من مستوى الشخص البشري بالقياس إلى ما قبله ولكن ليس بالقياس إلى العصور الحديثة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السيميائية؛ الاجتماعية؛ التحليل؛ المقاربة؛ العقل؛ الدين.

Introduction:

Professor Muhammed Arkoun is a very significant secular scholar in Islamic studies supplementing modern rational Islamic restructuring. For some 30 years, he remained a reviewer of the concerns about Islam and Islamology, supporting Islamic modernism, as well as promoting secularism, and humanism¹.

Arkoun uses the tools and methodologies of history, sociology, psychology and anthropology to critically assess different belief-systems, traditions of exegesis, theology and jurisprudence to liberate reason from dogmatic constructs.

The researcher seeks to unveil a real creative critique shown in Arkoun's works, where the creativity is still in there despite its dependence to the translation; due to Arkoun's paradigm that keeps both critic's independence and creativity.

Besides the above, one of the most known stands of this arsenal is the semiotic and linguistic analysis which we do find in almost all of his works, but the question here is how did Arkoun use the semiotic and linguistic analysis to read the civil states? And how did he deal with the contradictory results during the application of this method?

The importance of this paper comes from: the importance of woman's research in the world.

We concentrate on the understanding of the semiotic and linguistic analysis as a necessity to perceive Arkoun's point of view, and readers one.

This research, however, is a Semiotic Analysis with a social approach, and analytical induction methodology.

Arkoun used Induction to check his texts about this issue.

Analysis then is utilized to discover the features of renewing without ignoring, the critique to stand on an epistemological ground that satisfies both Arkoun and the reader.

For this, the investigation is divided into two parts rather than a conclusion.

1- The semiotic and linguistic liberation effort and the overwhelming text solemnity:

Many scholars have investigated the concept of semiotics. Among them Umberto Eco who approached this science as two different poles: general semiotics, and specific semiotics.

The basic problem of a general semiotics splits into three different questions:

a- Can one approach many, and apparently different, phenomena as if they were all phenomena of signification and/or of communication?

b- Is there a unified approach able to account for all these semiotic phenomena as if they were based on the same system of rules (the notion of system not being a mere analogical one)?

c- Is this approach a 'scientific' one? If there is something which deserves the name of general semiotics, this something is a discourse dealing with the questions above, and this discourse is a philosophical one.²

However, the second part of semiotics is the specific one which is explained hereunder:

<A specific semiotics is, or aims at being, the 'grammar' of a particular sign system, and proves to be successful insofar as it describes a given field of communicative phenomena as ruled by a system of signification>³.

Basing on a methodological observation regarding the common dealing with the Quranic text, Muhammad Arkoun thinks that Muslims are consuming the Quran in their daily life without a linguistic study.⁴ He sees the linguistic course as: the semiotic analysis offers a great chance for us to practice a good methodological training that allows us to understand all the language levels that form the meaning. This step has also its epistemological bets that allow us to leave a critical distance between us and the Quranic discourse.⁵ Among many fruits of this reading, we mention: the spiritual reaction, morals beauty, pleasure and excitement of the text, and the exploration of truth, good, and beauty values⁶.

Now, if we ask Arkoun: did Muslim scholars know this form of reading (semiotic and linguistic analysis) earlier or not? He explains that Muslim scholars had a semiotic and/or denotational manipulation to move Quranic verses from their context, and forced them to be into another one that is the second, the third, or the fourth century after the migration of the prophet (Peace Be upon Him). For this reason, they legislated jurisprudence decisions to depose God legitimacy on the exegesis, the jurisprudence, and all what we call the living Islamic heritage⁷.

This operation, according to Arkoun, does not distinguish between the Quran moment when it was descending and the second or the third century after the migration of the prophet (PUH). Therefore, it shows that all heritages is holy just with its quotation of Quranic verses, then for this it can be afterwards inserted into politics and intellectuality⁸.

For this, Arkoun is in a clear contradiction; once he praises fundamentalists' interpretations before the fifth century after the migration of the prophet (PUH), which is the dogmatic closure period when the interpretations were a posteriori activity and/or a creative thinking that can be discussed⁹. Following the same respect, he said

that these interpretations tried to get legitimacy since the second century for its jurisprudence product.

Therefore, Arkoun should tune-up his historical determinations unless he practices in some of his books what he calls an invisible content to the Muslim readers, and did not do this in other books. Thus, the problem in here is that Arkoun admits the presence of an invisible content in some of his books¹⁰ And, this is done under the influence and pressure of the beforehand ideological policies, but Arkoun denies the presence of any ideological intention in most of his books¹¹.

So, we are not seeking to discover the reasons behind Arkoun's writing, or mistakes in his project formation, but our goal understands his analysis paradigm picture. Hence, the linguistic analysis required by Arkoun is what he calls the synchronic and linguistic discovery of the Quranic discourse¹², when preserving the meaning of the Quranic words; and keeping each term within its meaning as it was perceived in the seventh century during the prophet (PUH) era¹³.

For this reason, the question now is whether the goal of the Almighty God is that people do understand the Quranic words in their descending time or not? If the response is yes; the descent of the holy Quran then should be continued till the Day of Judgment, but why? Because Allah says:

Say: O men! I am sent unto you all, as the messenger of Allah to whom belongeth the dominion of the heavens and the earth: there is no god but he: it is he that giveth both life and death. So believe in Allah and his messenger. The unlettered prophet, who believeth in Allah and his words: follow him that (so) ye may be guided¹⁴.

We have not sent thee but as a (messenger) to all mankind giving them glad tidings, and warning them (against sin), but most men know not¹⁵.

According to these verses, we understand that the discourse of Allah is to all people with no exception, from the prophet era till the Day of Judgment, unless these verses unveil from their reserve in every historical reading. However, there is no need to talk about understanding words in their descending period.

Therefore, it is not important for this study that the verses of Quran are directed to a person by himself, or aimed to be addressed universally, but the goal lies in understanding the verses according to their special aim, and main axis.

It is weird that Arkoun too supports this idea when he mentioned the prophet's (PUH) work, through the following: the different Islamic legislative texts, the establishment of a new semiotic system that annuls the ignorance semiotic system, and the continuity of the new system as a way of living accordingly. This is because the

Quran -according to Arkoun- allows the interpolation of suitable indications of various and changeable historical cases¹⁶.

Therefore, what is the aim of Arkoun when he calls for understanding the Quranic words at their time of descent? If we take his view into consideration superficially, we will end up either in his contradiction or our misunderstanding.

Consequently, this question pushes us to arrive at the bottom line of Arkoun's analytic reading, which is his appeal to study the Quranic text and its explanatory texts through a deconstructive and/or an archeological method, following some questions that are totally different from the previous questions of the traditional linguistics, which were used in the past decades¹⁷.

Hence, Arkoun aims to research for the Quranic language characteristics, and building afterwards its own linguistics, where he does not contrive legislative rules opposed to the Islamic scholars ones. Arkoun hereby seeks to understand how these words changed Arabic people through their internal logic. And at the same time, he investigates how Islamic scholars exploited these words for their external logic.

So, this lead to what Arkoun calls the trace of meaning through which the reader can understand things, inspirations in the text faraway from God's goal¹⁸. Our question now to Arkoun is: how could we know that this meaning is the real meaning of the text? Or it may be a trace of meaning that is not aimed by God? And what is the reference to know the truth?

Due to the fact that Arkoun is busy with building theories about his project where many questions are asked and a lot of windows are open, he cannot answer on these questions. Thus, scholars after him will answer these questions which are not over till now.

Among these opened windows, Arkoun insists for the necessity to clean the Quranic language with all its words and structures from the surrounding and edging denotations. For example: The Holy Inspiration, the Forbidden, and all words of belief and theology.¹⁹ Therefore, Arkoun's aim is shaking the heritage language in order to establish a new discourse with it Muslims enter to the world of modernity with a great guarantees to success.

For this reason, Arkoun starts his procedure in the civil states field from the idea that the Holy Quran increases the human being level in comparison to what it was in the past, not what it is now. As a result, the Quranic judgment should be interpreted to be compatible with the modern mentality²⁰ depending on Deconstruction that settles the Quranic discourse in the middle between after and before²¹.

Wherefore, the etymology of the civil states concept and all what is related to it, in the view point of Arkoun, is an impossible etymology, because the civil states are

old rules that close the discussion about the concept of the person within the Quranic verses boundaries²².

Although, he sees that the Islamic Law has come to fulfill people's interests. So, we should observe its development and don't become fixed on rigid texts or on the old rules. And this is a safe basis, but the problem here is on the goal of Arkoun. This latter is named according to Taha Abdurahmān: law dependency²³. But in our research it is referred as: The Islamic legislative texts dependency. In addition, law normally is legislated before the happening of events, and sets afterwards rules according to ethical values where it guides, corrects, and orients people steps. So, audience whom legislations are made for are requested to obey these legislative texts until the emergence of any clear contradiction in these texts, then comes the obligation to change this law.

When this law is the Islamic Legislation which is a wholly justice, a wholly mercy, and a wholly interest, according to Ibn al-qayim²⁴, its texts are too the same in every moment or place. So, where are these rigid texts that cannot surround the real world? Is it reasonable that God legislates a texts that doesn't fit time and space? Does God neglect this? No for sure it is not, because contradiction and rigidity are not in the Quran texts, but in the human mind who requested from the legislation of God: to consecrate reality, stop only to response to the requests, and praise what is present now²⁵. Hence, the new basis in here becomes like this: Customs and traditions are the root and legislation of God is but a follower to the mind authority that interprets its texts for obtaining unlimited rights.

So, if Arkoun goal is to demonstrate that some legislative civil state texts are executed temporarily and they are only restricted of the era of the prophet (PUH), he has to provide the proof from the legislator Himself (God).

2- The Epistemological Discussion:

We will not generally compare human being position between the modern interpretation of Arkoun's disposal, and the Islamic legislation goal, but we will rather specify the position of human being with a specific position that is of women.

At first hand, we should differentiate between the Islamic legislation point of view that consider men and women as equal, as they are two faces of a creature who is honored by Mohammad's message without exception for women. For this God says:

<We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of our creation>²⁶.

Furthermore, the Arabian mentality that believes in women downgrading, or between some recitations that think that the protection of women by men is just a

financial supervision and a social imitation; hereby real world fingerprints have more influence on people than the text sense and its common rhetoric²⁷.

At second hand, this Arabian mentality and this recitation that flips Islamic texts, takes its continuity from religious texts no doubt about them. Is not the prophet (PUH) who said that women are incomplete in their religion and mind? Is he? And they are created from a curved rib? The absolute suggestion of such texts without any legislative etymology opens the door to modern interpretations that try to adjust these texts to be compatible with the contemporary modern time. So, how can we deal with these texts to get the exact aim of the prophet (PUH)?

For this, we will rely on Arkoun's tools themselves. But instead of starting from deconstruction, we will go for the Gadamarian hermeneutics to study the Quran and let him to talk for himself, and not interrogate him²⁸.

In the same respect and in order to deal with the prophet's (PUH) speech about women as they are incomplete in their religion and mind, we have to analyze it with objectivity, and place it in its synchrony (in its historical moment). For this reason, the text should be apart from us, and then re-linked to us according to our understanding and thinking. Here below the text (speech) of the prophet (PUH) in quest:

Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) left for the prayer to the mosque for the Eīd (Aḍha or Fiṭr) and then admonished the people and command them to pay charity, therefore called out "O people do pay alms" and then passed by women and called out to them: O assembly of women, do pay alms for I see you making up the majority in Fire (Hell), and he was asked why/how is that O Messenger of Allah, he replied: (You women do) excessive La'na (Cursing) and ingrate to husbands (refusing them), and Naqīṣat 'ql Wa Dīn (females decreased in religion and mind) taking away the mind of the resolute man (Translation?) and they asked what is our Nuqṣān Dīn and 'ql (decrease in religion and mind) and he replied: the witness of woman half the witness of a man (in court of law), they replied yes and then he continued: the latter the Nuqṣān 'ql and excuse from praying and fasting when in menses the Nuqṣān Dīn²⁹.

On a first look at the surface structure of the prophet's speech³⁰, we find at this level a logical situation when the prophet (PUH) said: incomplete in their religion and mind, and the question here is: how the mind and/ or the religion will be incomplete? This is the same question which was asked by women to the prophet (PUH). This indicates that women wanted to know what the prophet (PUH) meant by the mind, where the concept mind has a lot of responses: it may be the talent, or it is the intellectual activity which can be increased or decreased due to the surrounding circumstances.

Hence, it is clear that the prophet (PUH) aimed to show women's weakness in terms of intellectual activity in this era, due to manhood control over the general social life, for example: justice, and witnessing. For this, the prophet (PUH) fastened the weakness of women's mind with her witness.

At the same time, the problem presented here is the same one women raised in their discussion with the prophet (PUH) when they want to know his aim in: incomplete in their religion. This is what the prophet (PUH) explained as the duties of Islam, not the belief degree or the piety.

This is about the surface structure; let us deal now with the deep structure³¹ of the prophet speech according to his habit in organizing words to express certain meanings, because hearing words without knowing the speaker and his habits have no indication about anything as Ibn taymiya said³².

Now, do obscenity and hurting others seem the habit of the prophet (PUH) in dealing with people especially women? We should not go so far in digging into his conduct, the proof is just too close and within the same speech of the prophet (PUH) where the event is a feast, the day where the habit of people, among which the prophet (PUH), is to celebrate, enjoy, and have fun with each other. So, the prophet (PUH), hereby, chooses the touch of joke mixed with love and advice to give charity. This indicates that the prophet (PUH) joins woman's imperfect mind with her ability to get the mind of the resolute man, so they were in a funny happy environment, not a contempt and disgraced one.

Till now, we have studied the text (Prophet's speech) and let it talk for itself following the objectivity of the study that linked it to its special environment, place, and chronological circumstances. Then, move this text (Prophet's speech) into our time to let it be a contemporary text.

Therefore, women's rights and their duties are the main issue here and everyone who believes that Islam is against women's rights and opposed to her equality to man, they are absolutely wrong whether they are for the modern interpretation or against it. So, all what the prophet (PUH) has said was just the obligation of charity, and ordering women for not asking their rights without any consideration of the husband.

Hence, the prophet (PUH) was in front of a gradual transformation of a whole nation that had its customs and traditions. This operation is done upon justice, equality, and liberty between men and women. But its success is linked to the conscious interaction between these two members, and this is what the speech of the Prophet (PUH) has highlighted through showing the role of women in shaping man's direction toward them. This tendency has been forgotten by Arkoun in his analysis.

Finally, it is proved that the semiotic and linguistic study of Arkoun is not clear, because he did not understand all its methods and theoretical sides.

Conclusion:

The examination of this Semiotic Analysis study, our social approach depicts some results:

- 1- Arkoun misunderstood the idea that Islam increases human being's level comparing to what it was in the past, not what it is now.
- 2- In the application of the epistemological techniques, Arkoun opens new horizons to the human being thoughts to be interacted and interchangeable with each other mainly those expressed in the holy books.
- 3- We should let the holy texts speak for themselves. This is seen when dealing with the speech of the Prophet (PUH) regarding the decrease in women's mind and religion, and the text being contemporary to itself based on its historical state from one side, and to us according to our understanding and rationality. It is quite true that Islam calls for man and woman as equals, but it is far from rationality to judge Islam through social mistakes committed in a society controlled and dominated by man.

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