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## THE CRITIQUE OF ARAB THOUGHT: MOHAMMED ARKOUN'S DECONSTRUCTION METHOD

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### Abstract

Mohammed Arkoun is one of international modern Islamic thinkers that his thought comes into Islamic thinking discourses in Indonesia recently. His Islamic thought was influenced by the modern philosophical concepts such as 'myths' of Ricoeur, postmodern concepts like 'discourse' and 'episteme', which were developed by Foucault as well as 'deconstruction' of Derrida. If Derrida focused on deconstruction as a final concept, on the other hand Arkoun insisted that 'deconstruction' must be followed by 'reconstruction' of a discourse. Arkoun's reconstruction leaves the limitation, the rigidity and deviation from the past. Arkoun proposes two ways: firstly it is 'ijtihad' and subsequently it is Islamic critical reason with the whole of critical meaning. In this research I used the method of library investigation. Based on the result I came into the conclusion that Arkoun loss the communication with the scholars in the Islamic world, particularly in the Middle East tradition. Since, he applied the method of deconstruction that Islamic world percept it was going too far.

*Keywords: myths, discourse, episteme, deconstruction, reconstruction, ijtihad*

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### Introduction

There are at least three dominant typologies in the discourse of modern Arab thought. First, the transformatif typology represents Arab thinkers who's radically offer the transformation processes for the Arab-Muslim society from the traditional patriarchy culture into a rational and scientific society. Second, the reformist thinking typology, using the deconstructive method. Third, the ideal totalistic thinking typology, with the main characteristic as idealistic attitude and view towards totalistic Islamic teachings (Assyaukanie, 1988: 61-65). Deconstructive method is a new method/phenomena for the contemporary Arab thinkers. The Arabic deconstructive thinkers are influenced by French (post) structuralism movement and some other post-modernism thinkers, such as Lacan, Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, and Gadamer. The *avant-garde* thinkers from this group are Mohammed Arkoun and Mohammed Abid Jabiri. Other thinkers with the same view are M.Bennis, Abdul Kebir Khetibi, Salim Yafut, Aziz Azmeh and Hashim Shaleh.

In recent days, most of the international Islamic thought that came to Indonesia are developed by Mohammed Arkoun (born 1928). He is from Aljazair, most part of his life living in French. He is included in a few contemporary international Islamic thinkers whose thought entering into Islamic thinking discourse in Indonesia. Arkoun has a deep concern on Islamic thinking development nowadays, which according to

him, has been frozen, closed, and being dogmatic and easily grows into the Islamic fundamentalism. To him, all these problems are caused by the dim of philosophy tradition, so that the acceptance of Islamic tradition is without critical investigation. He sees the need of critical method to read the Arab-Muslim thought. He uses social science approaches and methods and post-modernism concepts like myth from Paul Ricoeur, discourse and episteme developed by Michel Foucault, and also the deconstruction method of Jacques Derrida. The deconstruction method is one of the methods uses by Arkoun in rethinking Islam (Meuleman, 1993: 9-103).

According to Arkoun, Islam is not a rigid organized and dogmatic religion, but in its historical development, through the authority path, Islam has become a dead dogma for the sake of the authority itself. So, from the historical point of view, Islamic thinking has been stagnant. The emerging Islamic thought now is fragmentary, closed, narrow, logo centric, and not open ended.

For Arkoun, Islamic thinking does not accept any changes in its procedures and activities. Islamic society has to realize that along four centuries Islamic thinking has been dying, unlike the development in Europe (Arkoun, 1990: 83). Islamic thinking only repeating the conservative scholastic reason-religious attitude, as used in the middle Ages, never moved into modern position (Arkoun, 1990: 121).

For that reason, Arkoun proposed a big project he called "The critique of Islamic Reason" and reopening the *ijtihad* way". The fact is that *ijtihad* is only an ideological means of the authority. So, he proposes that *ijtihad* can be widened with the trial of the critique of Islamic Reason (Arkoun, 1990: 54).

### The Core Of Arkoun Thought

The core of Arkoun thought laid in the key word, epistemological critique. The notion is used in most of his works, though in a different contexts. The epistemology ideas and meaning in his concept is sharper, because it is directed to the scientific building of religious sciences as a whole.

The main characteristic of Arkoun thought is in the conjoining between Western world and Islamic world, in line with his dream to arrange the specific combination of different ways of thinking. The effort in combining the two elements, the most divine of Islamic thought (Islamic Reason) and the most valuable in the modern western thought (modern thought), is his wish that motivates his activities and works, that is particular combining of different ways of thinking.

Arkoun's epistemological and methodological basics were taken from Descartes Rationalism and Kant's Criticism, Saussure Structuralism, Barthes, Hjelmslev, and Greimas Semiotics and also "the Paris school", the myth concept from Ricoeur, the discourse and episteme from Foucault, and the deconstruction from Derrida.

As we have known, the truth theory in Descartes and in Kant based on logical reasoning aspect, consistency, and clearly focused in the subject, not in the experimental verification. Although Kant criticized the logic of empiricism – positivism, but he himself in fact admiring the sophistication of logical reasoning which has clarity and validity in its method. That is why, the whole of his philosophical building mainly influenced by logical language formulation. The clearest example of it is his famous ethical concept of categorical imperative. He argued that to know a good and a bad conduct human being /men and women do not have to refer to the Holy Book, but it is enough to use Critical and Practical Reason (Copleston, 1968: 216-217). If we view around critique towards Islamic thought, it seems he followed Kant's logic which in fact totally different from deconstruction method.

Saussure differentiates between language as a system (*langue*) and language as a speech (*parole*). *Parole* is an activity or a process and it is diachronic. *Langue* as a structure is a web of internal relationship amongst elements of language and it is synchronic. *Parole* is individual and intentional, as *langue* is collective and anonym. Arkoun proposed to reread Islamic texts, so

that Quran not only as *langue*, but also as *parole* for the society nowadays. In the performatif aspect (which has creative power) with the symbolic analysis, which make possible Surat al Fathihah, becomes *parole* for anyone who read it.

If we investigate further, we will find that almost all Quran classical interpretation closed to the concept of *langue*. The interpretation weaknesses, which emphasize *langue*, are the process of "drying" in the meaning and the function of Quran as the enlightenment for all men and women. Arkoun called this kind of interpretation as philologist because it is only limited to textual aspect (Barthes, 1996: 80-88).

Barthes followed de Saussure path in his Semiology. He described that semiology started from language basic system, that is *langue* and *parole*. Two of Saussure thesis he developed was the concept of sign and about the arbitrary and conventional as the characteristic of sign. According to him, human being in his/her speech not directly talks about "reality", but using many signs as related to particular rules. The signs, as the combination of signifier and signified can become a signifier in the second level semiotic system, which is called myth. Around developed Barthes and Ricoeur myth' approach for the Quran and Islam. He borrowed Ricoeur term to do a kind of re-enactment of religious experience in the anthropological analysis (mythical/symbolic) in reading Surat Al Fathihah.

Ricoeur defined myth as a secondary symbol that talk about human being. That is why myth is something that should not be left to modernize human thought. What should be left is the misuse of the myth. Arkoun takes over this theory. According to him, as also the stories in the Biblical, Quran text is being mythical. In socio-historical, Quran text changes into a dead corpus.

Foucault defined *episteme* as the way to view and understand reality. Human being from time to time grasped the reality differently. So that they talked about reality differently. The way people talked about reality he called discourse. Foucault divided episteme into three according to historical time, classical centuries, middle ages, and modern time. Arkoun adapted Foucault's thought by implementing episteme concepts to his division of three historical stages in the forming of Arab – Islam thought: classical, scholastic, and modern. Although he did not take over all Foucault's philosophical views, the term episteme, discourse and archeology got the specific meaning from him and often used in his writings.

Derrida offered critical processes from inside which he called "deconstruction" or uncovering. The deconstruction processes, which got specific attention from him, were "the unthinkable" and "never being

thought". Through Derrida's deconstruction of a text, Arkoun tried to reinvented the meaning that has been marginalized or forgotten by the closing and freezing undergone by Islamic thinking (Norris dan Benjamin, 1988: 30-36).

### Arkoun's Deconstruction

Arkoun published his *Pour une critique de la raison Islamique* (Critique of Islamic Reason) in 1984, in French and the work was translated into Arabic as *Tarikhiyah al-Fikr al-Arabi al-Islami* (The Historicism of Islamic Arab Thinking). He focused on the problem of the reading of Islamic Arab tradition. Arkoun thesis started from historical reading or the problem of historicism and interpretation (hermeneutics). Arkoun intended to comprehend the whole socio-cultural phenomenon through historical perspective, that the past should be viewed through its historical stages. In understanding history, it is should be limited according to its chronological and obvious/empirical (?) facts. It means, historicism functioned as a meaning reconstruction method through eradication of the relevancy between the text and the context. If this method used for religious texts, what is needed is a new meaning which potentially hidden in the texts (Tarikhiyah al-Fikr al-Islami, 1986: 14).

Historical method used by Arkoun is one of the combinations of western social sciences developed by French (post) structuralism thinkers. His main references are de Saussure (linguistic), Levi-Strauss (anthropology), Lacan (psychology), Barthes (semiology), Foucault (epistemology) and Derrida (grammatology). All elements above he managed as such, so that they become 'the Critique of Islamic Reason'. His investigation on classical texts was to find out other meaning hidden in the texts, so that to go to reconstruction (context) must undergo the deconstruction (text). Arkoun not only give attention to classical texts from Islamic scientists, he also investigated the scripture/holy texts.

How would Arkoun view the tradition (*turats*)? Arkoun generally differed two traditions. In his work written in French, he used two terms, tradition and *turats* at the same time, and classified it into the first two division, Tradition and *Turats* with capital letter 'T', that is a transcendence tradition which is understood and percept as an ideal 'tradition from God' and cannot be changed by historical events. This kind of tradition is eternal and absolute. The second tradition, written in small case 't', tradition or *turats*. This kind of tradition is formed by man and woman' history and culture, as heredity or as human interpretation on the God's Holy texts (Arkoun, 1987: 17-24).

Between those two traditions, Arkoun marginalized the first kind of tradition. According to him, that kind of tradition is outside human knowledge and reason. So, his target and investigation object was the second kind of tradition, a tradition formed by historical condition (in relation to time and space).

Reading *turats* means reading texts, all the texts, because *turats* was formed and standardized in the history, and should be read through the historical sketches. To him, one of the goals to read the texts, particularly the Holy texts, was to appreciate them in the changing situation and condition. It means, religious teachings from the Holy texts should accommodate and not in opposition with every situation and condition. Here, what Arkoun tried to do was to harmonize between tradition and modernity through a new method.

There are many Quran commentators undergo an historical and linguistic critique which is the feature of hermeneutics, nowadays. Many writings emerge from the orientalist as also from Islamic writers themselves. Jane Ms. Aucliffe wrote "Quranic Hermeneutic: "The views of Al-Tabari and Ibn Katsir" which emphasized interpretation method and a small part about social horizon (Mc. Mauliffe, 1988: 46-62). Muslim contemporary thinker, Fazlur Rahman discussed it with the double movement interpretation, while Arkoun with his circle of language-history thinking.

For Arkoun, the integrated interpretation is an interpretation that sees the connection between language thinking and history dimension. To do this hermeneutical interpretation, the first step is to distinguish and to show which one is the first/former original text and which is the hermeneutical text. Arkoun intended to bring the Islamic thought into Quranique discourse, as it is which is open against various reading and at the same time open for different understanding.

The difficulty Arkoun faced in his project was that Quran as the first text or the first event has been covered by Islamic thinking as such in the form of various literatures as a second text or hermeneutical text. The covering is as such so that hindered to understanding Quran as it is (Arkoun, 1990: 232).

To overcome this problem, Arkoun borrowed Derrida's "deconstruction's" method or "uncovering" and archaeological analysis used in examining historical artifacts. By this archaeological analysis he tried to do an historical clarification on hermeneutical texts from certain thinking tradition, that is to clarify and clean the "dust" of space and time which covered them so that it will be noticed the relation between texts from particular historical stages and social context, the

generation and the various thinking movement in the same historical time (Arkoun, 1990: 233-234).

Instead of showing the relation between thinking and history, Arkoun also showing the inseparable relation between thinking and language. Any Islamic thinking, besides as a “mirror” of the dynamic struggles of the socio-historical reality, it is also formulated, conceptualized and spoken in a certain “language”.

What Arkoun did was an example of how to “manage” Quran with the hermeneutic instrument. Hermeneutic tradition focused on three aspects: text, context, and contextualization in a continued circle. It means, when one investigating and at the same time “reproducing” meaning, the three aspects should be employed continually. When one investigates the meaning of a text, the he/she should give attention to its context at the same time from where the text came and how the text understood in its original context, so that with the kind of understanding, the reinterpretation of meaning of the particular text in a different context can be done.

In this case, Arkoun revealed that there should always be a connection between language, thinking and history. Islamic society, and religious society in general should be fully aware that there is a dialectical relation between language, thinking and history. No any other religious thinking that loosely untied from language and history. In relation to Quran, Arkoun insisted that the holy book of Moslems is words, language, cultural and religious phenomena coming up from its own situation, so that it would not producing meaning, except in its context; and in its turn, creating an awareness’ structuralized, furthermore Quran is a religious text to read and to live through (Arkoun, 1990, 19: 185-186).

To my opinion, Arkoun’s works are important to investigate, formerly, because it offered a critical methodology. To understand them, I tried to focus on deconstruction aspect of his study on Islamic texts. By his critical approach, he succeeded in explaining that the history of Islamic thought was authorized by two tendencies, they are the tendency to make sacred the text and the tradition and the tendency to uncovered the sacredness of it. Islamic thinking needs an interaction between universalism and pluralism.

The religious institutions crisis strongly indicated that religion as far as nowadays tends to be an authoritative one. Religious messages in its original existence as an effort to liberate lost by the historical processes, which distorted it. The crisis emerged because religion changing into a “hierarchical” institution where the authorized was an “authority” that has right to speak about truth in the name of “absolute authority”, whether God, the authoritative or others.

When a religion is too much institutionalized, what happened was the limitation of multi-interpretations. Outside of the official interpretation, which legalized by authorized institution, it is impossible to recognize the truth of other interpretations. Holy Book, which formerly opened to multi-interpretations become one interpretation (monophonic exegesis). Out of that situation, that emerged a kind of inquisition institution (*mihnah*) in al-Makmun era in Islam, and in reformation era in Christianity (Herdi dan Abdalla, 1994: 84-85).

All above cases showed that when a religion become an institution monopolized by a certain authority, then it will loose its nature as a liberate religion. Another effect of mono-interpretation is how difficult to get a new and fresh interpretation. So, a new and fresh reinterpretation is a must. Only by a contextual a continuous reinterpretation, a religion will open to changing of time and progress and also will escape from authoritarianism, which will make infertile the society itself.

The religious discourse domination on other religious discourses supposing a hierarchical structure, which placed the dominant in “central” position and the other in the “margin” (*periphery*) position. This hierarchical structure is not only exclude a certain religious discourse, but also conquer, subordinate and repress it (Alam, 1994: 33).

For the reason above, it is needed a strategy to do a turning in this interpretation hierarchical structure to delegitimise the “central”, “origin” and “primary” claims of the dominant discourse. The advantageous strategy to reinterpret n the over institutionalized religious processes is by deconstruction method.

Deconstruction is not a discourse, in term of a group of statements which directing and forming those practices. Deconstruction is not a method consists of a set of formal rules to analyze discursive and non-discursive practices, too (Culler, 1987: 156). Deconstruction is more as a strategy to reveal the ambiguity of a discourse by tracking the pathway of paradoxical movements inside the discourse, so that any discourse’s unit subversively basic assumption of it.

The ambiguity in the text and the interpretation of it is related to the problem of meaning in connection with the text. The text, according to Derrida, does not have a literal meaning, because it supposing the absolute self-presence of the meaning (Mauleman, 1993: 101). In fact, the text (*signifier*) as a representation will never be able to represent the representing of the meaning (*signifier*) pointed out by the text (Young, 1981: 15).

The text’s role is to differ and at the same time to defer a meaning. By doing a signification of the meaning, the

text showed the absence of another meaning. But then, what is left is a trace of a meaning pointed out. The movement of sign “to differ” and “to defer” is what Derrida called the *différance*.

By emphasizing that any text (religious text) is a “trace” which always refers to the other texts, at the same time strengthen the objection on the claim that a religious discourse can have direct access to the “original” meaning of a text. This claim strengthened the dominant position of a discourse against the other discourses. By changing the interpretation hierarchical structure, deconstruction placed the discourses in coexistence position.

The subordinate discourses formed the resistant structure altogether against the dominant one. By destroying hierarchical structure which formed domination-subordination relation, the conquered religious discourses can destroy legitimate’s role and the power relation justification which is supported by the dominant religious discourses. Because the power relation cannot work without a supported discourse, the repressive power relation will be transformed into power relation in its positive form.

The use of deconstruction strategy developed by Derrida complementarily in the Islamic thinking study field can form a critical and practical Islamic study perspective. Critical means it involved in the historical investigation on religious practices discursively and socially, in order to reveal a working field of power relation. While practical means that this perspective give way to “historical ontology” of ourselves in the field of power relation, primarily to participate in the struggle to transform repressive forms from power relation into the positive form.

By the deconstruction strategy, this perspective offers us not only a way to read a “text” but also lead us to an attitude, ethos, and principle to recognize and appreciate other existence. If this method is applied into religious texts, then what should be done first is to separate the mono linear relationship between the text and the meaning (the interpretation). The belief that there is a final relationship between the text and the meaning should be uncovered. Because, this kind of belief will make a negative effect. Firstly, the fanaticism of a certain interpretation and the possibility to reject the validity of other interpretation. Secondly, it will close the possibility the openness of various interpretations. By the impossibility of other interpretation, the text will destroy itself. Thirdly, a text that has been frozen by legalizing an interpretation into mono interpretation will make a text meaningless against the big flow of social changes in modern era nowadays (Herdi dan Abdalla, 1994: 87).

A deconstruction to a text means to open the possibility over the various interpretations on the text. The deconstruction of a text also bring another consequence sociologically, that is uncovering interpretation monopoly on a certain authority which talked about “one truth” in the name of God, state or the ruler. Because, by supposing that there were a certain authority, it also means supposing “The Transcendence I”. If we bring the “transcendence I” to the side, then the many possibilities opened for the various interpretation. Interpretation becomes democratic, so that the truth will not be monopolized by one certain interpretation.

The understanding of this one truth actually in relation with the assumption about the existence “the transcendence I” which omnipotent about the text, so that the interpretation He produced has the “one authority” on the truth. Arkoun deconstructed “the transcendence I” through the concept of the “logos historicity”, then the one authority lost its supports, so that the plurality interpretation alternatives emerges. In the plurality contexts, the interpretation hegemony falsified and the text become alive and open to all interpretation. At the same time, no more “the freezing of a text” in religion and ideology, which we know as a starting point of all frozen thinking until now. The possibility to employ discourses on the religious texts open democratically. A good consequence is religious life of mankind relatively become critical, plural and dynamic.

Arkoun took advantage in this deconstruction method in order to reconstruct the Islamic classical scientific tradition. By this uncovering method will be seen the knowledge’ layers which had been covered by orthodoxies. After this step, it will be distinguished which part is important and which one is not in the Islamic study.

The elaborative study offered by Arkoun is a little different from what other Islamic thinkers did. His thought colored by structuralism, post-structuralism, and deconstruction which all of them emphasize on linguistic analyses. In many of his works, Arkoun uses the three paradigms mentioned above to read and understand Islam, and also the more important is to reformulate Islam.

It is good to be noted that the deconstruction method cannot be employed without the knowledge preparation about history, about the hidden Islamic tradition and also the tradition that has been contaminated by external elements. In this process, Arkoun tried to reemphasize the marginalize meaning or the forgotten one because of the many covering and freezing processes underwent in Islamic thinking. If in one hand Derrida emphasized that “deconstruction”, Arkoun obviously did so that the

deconstruction should be followed by “reconstruction” of a discourse which has left the limitation, frozen, and the distortion of former discourses.

To find out the relation of Islamic text and the deconstruction is by searching or tracing Derrida’s texts specifically which has connection with analyses on Islamic texts in particular. Arkoun tried to turn the higher hierarchy between bipolar concepts. Turning upside down the higher concept between bipolar concepts is one of the characteristic of deconstruction. But on the contrary, Arkoun still insists on a “transcendental signifier”. He said that oral language is the earlier language form and more original than written language. Arkoun corresponds the shift from oral to written language as a shift from language of prophet into a teaching discourse. The prophet language discusses the limited situation of human condition, which opens to various contexts. While teaching discourse explained and classified according to a rigid concept and tended to close the meaning in a rigid interpretation which reject other interpretation. As a result, a “text” into “pretext” (arguments), which often only repeated and not profoundly thought and functioned as a legalization of a certain group authority.

Arkoun argued that we should be critical on traditional Islamic reasoning models, which make chaotic the traditional interpretation, which rooted in history with God messages content. He suggested the Islamic people to deconstruct the way of past thinking and the interpretation of holy texts. The habit of Islamic reasoning, which generated uncritically, should be deconstructed and the holy texts should open for the historical and modern linguistic investigation. For that reason, he employed this deconstruction method to reconstruct scientific tradition of classical Islam. He believes that without stimulus and the discipline of openness with the meeting of modern thinking results, the Islamic knowledge standard among the traditional Islamic expert and the Islamists will degrade.

### **Critical Evaluation on Arkoun Thought and the Relevancy of the Enquires**

As a post-modernist thinker, Arkoun has the views that difficult to understand, furthermore his epistemology. To understand his thinking wholly, we have to understand contemporary science, particularly developed in French, like linguistics, anthropology, semiotics, and also various views and approaches of post-modernism discourse which is so familiar to Arkoun.

Arkoun uses complicated language in his works. As he said, it is almost impossible to express ideas in the language that the users have not yet thought about it. In this case, Arkoun is faithful to a certain French

tradition. One aspect of Arkoun’s language difficulty is his tendency to employ various terms and expression without clear formulation or they emerge in different meaning. The reason is because he refers to so many references, which he uses invariably. One example is the use of the term *langue* and *language* from de Saussure, but he uses in a different meaning. What he offers us make us think hard to come to his proper thought.

Derrida gave his real influence on Arkoun. Arkoun made “unsought” area (*l’impense*) and “unthinkable” area (*l’impensable*) as the field of his analyses. He elaborated that the texts of the classical Islamic thinker emerged from a certain culture and the way of thinking and at its turn strengthen it. By Derrida deconstruction process, Arkoun tried to rediscover meaning which has been marginalized and forgotten by the many layer coverings and freezing undergone by Islamic thinking.

Although Arkoun refers too much to Derrida, but he in fact stands in contrary to Derrida’s vision, in two points. Arkoun did not follow Derrida in the way that Derrida radicalize his view about the absence of “object” in “reality” outside the text. Derrida said that there was no reference at all outside the text. The discourse or whatever mentioned as “reality” by former philosophers, was constructed by and in the text or among some texts that interfere each other. Derrida formulated that there is no “transcendental Signifier”. It means, nothing is outside, nothing is outside the texts. If Derrida assumptions applied to the holy text, the implication is there is no divine truth; there is no God behind the holy text.

Arkoun is in contrast with Derrida’s argument above. He said that Quran discourse, which at the end become closed and frozen in the legal closed corpus, and which interpretation corpus that created various interpreted works, *fiqih*, and theology, was originated from God’s words. Controversies based on religion lied on language signs domain, ritual, historicity, and art, which refers to the same transcendences. Arkoun developed an assumption which has three important elements, they are: first, he connects freezing and closing processes in interpreting Quran with the shifting from oral form into written one; second, he presupposes that the human mind thinking undergo the shift between two ways of language uses; third, he argues that oral language is the earlier form than the written one.

Arkoun made a problem of the freezing processes in interpreting Quran. He argued that the shift from oral form into written one is a very important aspect. To scripture human thinking into written text is one of the important factors of the freezing of the text. In human mind undergoes the shift from prophet’s words into teaching or academic discourses. Prophet words said

about existence situation love and care, life and death. While the teaching discourse explained and classified it into a rigid concepts. The first one is open to any contexts. The second one tends to freeze the meaning in a fix interpretation, which object other interpretation. As the result of that shift, "text" becomes "pretext" (argument), which is only repeated and never profoundly thought and functioning as a validation of a certain authority group. Finally, Arkoun connects the shifting from prophecy words into academic discourses with the shift from oral language into written one. In line with that, Arkoun always writes oral language is earlier and more original than written one.

Derrida underlined the primacy of written language than oral one in accordance with his objection to traditional philosophy views, which emphasizes the priority of subject (the user, the speaker, the writer, the hearer, the text reader) against the text and the priority of the signified than the signifier. But Arkoun related the philosophical problems above with the anthropological ones, which supposed that written language society comes after the oral society.

Derrida rejected the "last signifier". Language, according to Derrida is a metaphor that has no final reference. The meaning emerges because of the changing of the metaphor. The meaning will change as the agent changes. Meaning always dynamic and relational. That is why the references are unlimited. Here, Arkoun did not reject the "transcendental signifier" or the "final transcendence", which is in contrary with Derrida's. To discover this final signifier, Arkoun took a step by unveil the *Surat Al-Fatihah* which is read by a method he proposed (Sunardi, 1996: 76-77). By using the text deconstruction theory hopefully, the Islamic schematization will be unveil and uncover. If the schematization has been known, we will be able to differentiate which is Islam and which is not. Besides, by text deconstruction we also be able to include the subject never been thought before and the subject which impossible or forbidden to be thought in Islam.

Although Arkoun mostly refer to Derrida, but he has contradictory standpoint from Derrida in two things. First, in his assumption that the oral language is earlier and more original than the written one. In this case, an English anthropologist, Jack Goody, influences him. According to Meuleman, Derrida discussed philosophical problems, whereas Goody talked about anthropological problems. Second, about final signifier. To find out final signifier Arkoun took two steps they are: historical and anthropological exploration. For the historical exploration, he selected the work of Fakhr ad-Din ar Razi to reread one of the classical interpretation domains and find out the final signifier in it. Through anthropological exploration, he wished to find out the

final signifier by theories about myths, which shows how language used in variety of symbols, pointed out by *Surat al-Fatihah* which is read by the method he proposed. It seems, he – aware or not aware – tried to combine many theories in employing his methodological approach, and the result is confusing.

Critical evaluation to give to Arkoun is that he wants to wander anywhere to make true his project. This confuses his commentators, especially for the beginners. And at the same time, he did not think about his limit as an Islamic critic, besides his limited space and time.

Arkoun has published many works on epistemology and methodology. His works can be treated as an introduction, but has not offered a new Islamic theology. His contribution is controversial for the internal Islamic discourse.

Most of his works focused on various texts of classical thinkers but also from contemporary, which represent certain great tradition. In one hand, Arkoun goes beyond the border of Islamic study tradition, because he borrowed many elements from philosophy, social sciences, and western Human sciences, which have not yet been applied in the Islamic study in the past.

Deconstruction to a text means to open the possibility to many interpretations on a text. Arkoun employed this approach to reread the Islamic discourse. What he has done gives a very important contribution and brings to a "new atmosphere" for the development in Islamic thinking in Indonesia, as a state with Islam majority population. What he has done can be implemented to reconstruct scientific tradition in various inquires and other religion study (Christian, Jew, Buddha, and Hindu).

To reconcile and focus various schools and religions, he suggested to avoid the mixture between the "sociological truth" (majority view) and the "the truth of the truth" (the debate and exploration of mind). The only way to take is the scientific and technical ones.

## Conclusion

Around founded the fundamental causes on Islamic world crisis, that is the dim of philosophical tradition and the understanding of Islam dogmatically without critical investigation so that the development of Islamic thinking nowadays in frozen, closed and boring.

Meanwhile, post-modernism in the western thought as developed by Derrida and Michael Foucault emerged as an analytical instrument to criticize modernity. By positioning as a critic, post-modernism tried to stand against modernism, though it does not offer a blue print to build a new society. What should be appreciated from



what Derrida and Foucault offered is their consistency to implement relational thinking system in their works.

In following Derrida and Foucault explanation, Arkoun discusses Islamic texts primarily as many momentum in the freezing, limitation, and closing processes, which has undergone along the history of Islamic thinking. By his deconstruction, he tried to find out meaning again which many closing, freezing processes in Islamic thinking have marginalized.

Nevertheless Arkoun wishes to make Islam as multidiscipline object of inquires, but he is still an Islamic thinking investigator. His work is rich with theoretical references, taken from some brands of contemporary western sciences. Principally, the variety of the references is something positive. But Arkoun not always realize of the tension between those various references or between such elements from the reference and from his own view.

One more problem about Arkoun work is that many problems in it remain unsolved. He did not explain some view he offered. He did not offer the solution and final doctrine ready to apply. We will not convince with Arkoun, if we expect it from him.

We need a sharp and critical power to grasp Arkoun thought, as he uses various methodologies from many social sciences, history, politic, sociology, myths, philosophy, semantic, and linguistic, to investigate Islamic religious manuscripts and texts which is considered as standard hitherto.

His thought is sophisticated so that it needed phases of understanding to enter into his thought. As far as now, to understand such thought as Abduh, we have to understand Islamic Arab culture. But for Arkoun, it is not enough to only understand Islam Arab culture, but at the same time we should understand French culture and a set of the results of contemporary social sciences methods and also philosophy.

Arkoun is in the position who tried to make progress to understand Islam by taking advantage of the development of western modern social sciences, primarily historical critic and literary critic, which developed, in French and German intellectual tradition. The advantages of Arkoun, who grew up in Algiers, are the closeness to classical Islam tradition and French intellectual tradition, which is very powerful in literary criticism and philosophy. That is why his Arkoun thought is hard to get appreciation and dialogical responses from Arab thinkers which more conservative.

Arkoun's invitation to represent prophecy discourse atmosphere which is open and dynamic is relevant for Muslim scholars living in the West or academic

community which studied Islam and care about theory paradigm criticism imposed by western intellectual tradition. But for people in the street or for they who enjoy peaceful life and the meaning of life through understanding Islam that gave the certainty without critical thinking, his thought will be treated as a theological *bid'ah*. For the Islamic mass organization activist who give priority on religious actions and interested in activism ideology, instead of reading Arkoun's works, mostly in French, they prefer the work of Maududi (Islamic India thinker, 1903-1979), Hasan al-Bana (Egypt movement thinker, 1906-1949), Ali Shariati (Iran sociologist, 1933-1977), Sayyid Qutb (the leader of militant Islamic movement in Egypt, 1906-1966), or Ayatullah Khomeini (The Iran revolution leader, 1900-1989), and the many (Hidayat, 1996: 33).

The methodology proposed offers a valuable contribution to prepare progress. His project is a collective trial, which has a "passing by" atmosphere, than a statement of a final standpoint.

There are many reasons why Arkoun less famous as he should be. First, as an expert who works in the margin of Western academic and in the bank of Islam, many of his work emerge first in the journal in limited exemplars. With one exception, his first book is a collected writings. Second, the method he built uses many social scientific terminologies, and his research about Islamic tradition, which he did it carefully, needs details beyond public readers. One need to know contemporary books in human sciences and need to be familiar with Islamic history and also the need to know French language to appreciate many of his works (Lee, 1994: viii).

The conclusion we can draw is that Arkoun has lost the communication with Islamic society in Arab world or in Indonesia. He offers a very valuable and contributive knowledge, but his thought steps too far, while Islamic thought in general is still very limited. In my opinion, the new way task to use reason he taught us not only his task, but also need the support from other Muslim intellectual.

If we taken for granted what he offers us, to me, what he has built is failed. Because Arkoun himself has suggested us to be critical to every subject, even against his own thought.

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