



The Historical Approach in Muhammad Arkoun's Thought: Its Relevance to the Study of Contemporary Islamic Civilization History

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Abstract. This paper discusses the historical approach in Muhammad Arkoun's thinking. It aims to reveal and analyze the historical approach in Muhammad Arkoun's thinking and explain its relevance to the development of contemporary Islamic Civilization History studies. This research stems from concerns about the normative and apologetic tendencies in Islamic historical writing, which necessitate a more contextual and rational critical reading. It uses a qualitative method based on literature study, specifically library research. Data was collected through searching primary and secondary sources in the form of Muhammad Arkoun's works, books, scientific articles, and relevant academic writings. Data analysis was carried out through content analysis in three stages: (1) data reduction, namely selecting and classifying the main concepts in Arkoun's thinking; (2) data presentation, by describing the findings in accordance with the frameworks of historicity, deconstruction, and interdisciplinary approaches; and (3) drawing conclusions, to assess the relevance of Arkoun's thoughts to the study of contemporary Islamic Civilization History. The results of the study show that Arkoun's thinking produced five important findings. First, the concept of textual historicity offers a new paradigm in reading Islam as an evolving socio-cultural construct, rather than a frozen dogma. Second, the deconstruction of classical Islamic historiography opens up space for criticism of ideological historical narratives and opens up opportunities for alternative historical writing from the perspective of marginalized groups. Third, Arkoun integrates the humanities—such as anthropology, linguistics, and philosophy—as the basis for an interdisciplinary approach to the study of Islam. Fourth, his thinking provides a new methodological model for education and research in Islamic Civilization History, namely Islamic history as a reflective discourse that interprets the social and cultural dynamics of the ummah. Fifth, Arkoun's historical approach became an instrument of religious reasoning reform, encouraging a transformation from closed reasoning (*la raison close*) to open reasoning (*la raison ouverte*) that is rational, dialogical, and contextual. Thus, the historical approach in Arkoun's thinking is not only a critique of classical Islamic

historiography, but also provides a new direction for epistemological, methodological, and paradigmatic renewal in the development of Islamic Civilization History studies in the modern era.

Keywords: Historical Approach, Muhammad Arkoun, History of Islamic Civilization, Contemporary.

Abstrak. *Tulisan ini membahas pendekatan sejarah dalam pemikiran Muhammad Arkoun. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap dan menganalisis pendekatan sejarah dalam pemikiran Muhammad Arkoun serta menjelaskan relevansinya bagi pengembangan studi Sejarah Peradaban Islam kontemporer. Penelitian ini berangkat dari kegelisahan atas kecenderungan penulisan sejarah Islam yang normatif dan apologetik, sehingga diperlukan pembacaan kritis yang lebih kontekstual dan rasional. Melalui metode kualitatif berbasis studi literatur, jenis penelitian kepustakaan (library research). Data dikumpulkan melalui penelusuran sumber-sumber primer dan sekunder berupa karya-karya Muhammad Arkoun, buku, artikel ilmiah, dan tulisan-tulisan akademik yang relevan. Analisis data dilakukan melalui analisis isi (content analysis) dengan tiga tahap: (1) reduksi data, yakni memilih dan mengklasifikasi konsep-konsep utama dalam pemikiran Arkoun; (2) penyajian data, dengan menguraikan temuan sesuai kerangka historisitas, dekonstruksi, dan pendekatan interdisipliner; dan (3) penarikan kesimpulan, untuk menilai relevansi pemikiran Arkoun terhadap studi Sejarah Peradaban Islam kontemporer. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa pemikiran Arkoun menghasilkan lima temuan penting. Pertama, konsep historisitas teks menawarkan paradigma baru dalam membaca Islam sebagai konstruksi sosial-budaya yang terus berkembang, bukan dogma yang beku. Kedua, dekonstruksi historiografi Islam klasik membuka ruang kritik terhadap narasi sejarah yang ideologis dan membuka peluang penulisan sejarah alternatif dari perspektif kelompok terpinggirkan. Ketiga, Arkoun mengintegrasikan ilmu-ilmu humaniora—seperti antropologi, linguistik, dan filsafat—sebagai landasan pendekatan interdisipliner dalam studi Islam. Keempat, pemikirannya menyediakan model metodologis baru bagi pendidikan dan riset Sejarah Peradaban Islam, yaitu sejarah Islam sebagai wacana reflektif yang menafsirkan dinamika sosial dan budaya umat. Kelima, pendekatan historis Arkoun menjadi instrumen reformasi nalar keagamaan, mendorong transformasi dari nalar tertutup (la raison close) menuju nalar terbuka (la raison ouverte) yang rasional, dialogis, dan kontekstual. Dengan demikian, pendekatan sejarah dalam pemikiran Arkoun tidak hanya bersifat kritik terhadap historiografi Islam klasik, tetapi juga memberikan arah baru bagi pembaruan epistemologis, metodologis, dan paradigmatis dalam pengembangan studi Sejarah Peradaban Islam di era modern.*

Kata kunci: *Pendekatan Sejarah, Muhammad Arkoun, Sejarah Peradaban Islam, Kontemporer.*

INTRODUCTION

The history of Islam is often written within a theological framework that emphasizes the glorification of the past and closes the door to criticism. As a result, understanding of the dynamics of Islamic history and civilization is often trapped in normative and apologetic narratives. In this context, Muhammad Arkoun presents a critical historical approach that dismantles

the dogmatic tradition of writing Islamic history (Arkoun, 1994, p. 27). He emphasized that Islamic texts were not born in a vacuum, but rather in a social and cultural context that influenced their interpretation. Therefore, it is important for students majoring in Islamic Civilization History to study Arkoun's ideas in order to understand Islamic history rationally and contextually. Islamic history has often been written within a theological framework that emphasizes the glorification of the past and closes the space for criticism of the social and intellectual dynamics that occurred within it. The classical Islamic historiographical tradition generally focuses on dogmatic legitimacy and heroic narratives that portray Islamic civilization as a perfect and unproblematic entity. As a result, the understanding of Islamic history tends to be normative and apologetic, rather than reflective and analytical (Randa et al., 2022, p. 139); (Hariyanto, 2018, p. 132). This situation indicates an urgent need for a more critical, contextual, and open approach to the development of modern science.

This research explores the theme of Muhammad Arkoun's thought in a historical approach and relates its relevance to the study of contemporary Islamic civilization history. This research uses a qualitative method based on library research. Qualitative research is generally research based on quality using library data sources, including books, journals, and other sources. Data was obtained from Arkoun's primary works and related secondary literature. Data analysis was performed using content analysis through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. His theoretical framework is based on Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida's theories of historicity and deconstruction, which Arkoun uses to construct his critique of classical Islamic reasoning.

Muhammad Arkoun (1928–2010) was an Algerian thinker who worked at the Sorbonne University in France. Muhammad Arkoun, hereafter referred to as Arkoun, was a contemporary thinker born in Algeria. Arkoun's thoughts on Islam in general, and the Quran in particular, are worth re-examining, because his thoughts can be said to deviate from the corridor agreed upon by the scholars. One of Arkoun's statements is that the Quran is a product of history (Arkoun, 2022, p. 21). Arkoun distinguishes between sacred history and profane history. Sacred history is a religious construct that considers the Islamic past to be perfect and free from criticism, while

profane history sees the human dynamics in the formation of Islamic civilization. Arkoun also introduces the concept of “l’impensé” or “the unthinkable,” which are aspects of Islamic history that have been ignored by orthodoxy. He offers a new approach to history and religious texts. Arkoun emphasizes the importance of historicity, deconstruction, and an interdisciplinary approach in understanding Islam. He rejects “closed reason” (*la raison close*), which limits Islamic thought to a specific theological and ideological framework, and replaces it with “open reason” (*la raison ouverte*), which is critical, rational, and humanistic (Arkoun, 1986; 1994). His thinking provides a new foundation in the study of Islamic Civilization History, which requires integration between theology, history, and social sciences and humanities.

Several previous studies have discussed aspects of Arkoun's hermeneutics (Zahratana & Khovivah, 2022; Batubara et al., 2025), historical revelation (Laila Sari Masyhur et al., 2025), and the relevance of his thoughts to the renewal of Islamic studies (Rasyid & Djafar, 2020, p. th); (Silalahi, 2024, p. th). However, these studies have not yet positioned Arkoun's historical approach as an epistemological and methodological framework that can be directly applied in the development of Islamic Civilization History studies. Most only describe Arkoun's ideas without elaborating on how the concepts of historicity, deconstruction, and interdisciplinarity can be operationalized in Islamic historical research. In addition, there is still inconsistency in the literature regarding Arkoun's position in the tradition of modern Islamic thought. Some researchers place him as a neo-modernist thinker who continues the tradition of Fazlur Rahman and Hasan Hanafi (Abdullah, 2017, p. 90); (Nurita & Masruhan, 2021, p. 78), while others see him as a radical deconstructionist who challenges the entire classical Islamic epistemological system (Thahir, 2002, p. th); (Rofik, 2002, p. 3). This difference in interpretation opens up new space for examining Arkoun's historical approach not only from a hermeneutical perspective, but also from the aspects of historical epistemology and paradigmatic relevance to contemporary Islamic Civilization History.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Biography and Educational History of Muhammad Arkoun

One of the most famous contemporary Muslim thinkers of the 21st century is Muhammad Arkoun (Abdullah, 2017, p. 90). Muhammad Arkoun, as written by many translators of Arkoun's works, said that Arkoun was born in Taourirt, Mimoun Kabilia (Zahratana & Khovivah, 2022, p. 19); (Maulida Nuzula Firdaus, 2023, p. 314); (ARKOUN & Sumarkan, 2012, p. 125); (Nugroho, 2019, p. th); (Utomo et al., 2023, p. 179) or the mountainous region inhabited by the Berber people east of Algiers on February 1, 1928 (Arkoun, 2022, p. 19); (Batubara et al., 2025, p. 482); The city of Aljazair is located in northern Africa (Ruslaini, 2000, P. th); (Laila Sari Masyhur et al., 2025, p. 888); (Metodologi & Kontroversi, 2020, p. 2); He is an Islamic scholar and Algerian writer (Ardana & Sari, 2018, p. th). Muhammad Arkoun lived in three worlds: the Arab world, the Islamic world, and Europe. This situation led Arkoun to use three languages: Kabyle for everyday conversation, French in school and for administrative matters, and Arabic when he attended secondary school in Oran, the main city in western Algeria (Prakoso, 2023, p. 158). Arkoun's parents were community leaders in their region and still speak their native language, Kabilia. Arkoun is famous for his courage in challenging traditional paradigms in Islamic studies (Fairuz Hidayat, 2024, p. 103). Throughout his intellectual journey, Arkoun adopted a hermeneutic and literary criticism approach in interpreting the Qur'an, giving rise to unique views that often sparked controversy. His courage in exploring aspects of the Islamic holy text that were rarely touched upon paved the way for new ideas and a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings. Despite often facing controversy, Arkoun remains a respected figure among Muslims and in academic circles. His innovative ideas and critical stance toward tradition have contributed to shaping the intellectual discourse on modern Islam. The influence of his thinking continues through his consistency in challenging conventional views and integrating elements of contemporary thought into Islamic studies.

Muhammad Arkoun sought to present a new critical, rational, and contextual approach to Islam, with the aim of ensuring that Islamic teachings could be understood in a way that was relevant to the dynamics of modern society without losing their fundamental values (Nurita & Masruhan, 2021, p.

78). Muhammad Arkoun's educational journey reflects a long process of seeking knowledge and deep understanding. He began his basic education in Algeria (Al Jufri, 2021, p. 88), where he gained his initial foundation in Arabic and Islamic studies. Arkoun's education began at elementary school in his hometown, then he attended secondary school in the port city of Oran. (Muhammad & Dan, n.d., p. 100); (Imron, 2007, p. th). After completing his primary education, Arkoun continued his studies at the secondary level, deepening his knowledge of Arabic language, literature, and Islam, which became an important foundation for his intellectual development. These steps became a solid foundation for Arkoun's intellectual development, while also providing a strong basis for further exploration in the field of science (Arkoun, 2022, p. 19). Arkoun's main field and research remained unchanged, namely Arabic language and literature as well as Islamic thought (Muhammad & Dan, n.d., p. 97). In 1948, Arkoun continued his intellectual journey by pursuing his education in France (Silalahi, 2024, p. 414). In the midst of the Algerian War of Independence and the French colonial government (1954–1962), Mohammed Arkoun enrolled as a student in Paris (ARKOUN & Sumarkan, 2012, p. 125). At Sorbonne University (University of Paris), he not only deepened his studies in philosophy, but also broadened his intellectual horizons in a wider academic environment. At this stage, he earned a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy, which became an important milestone in his academic journey and scientific thinking.

However, Arkoun's academic journey did not stop there. His passion and dedication to knowledge drove him to continue his studies until he earned a doctorate in philosophy from the Sorbonne University. In his doctoral dissertation, Arkoun paid close attention to the thoughts and intellectual legacy of Ibn Khaldun, one of the most influential Muslim scholars of the Middle Ages. Thus, his educational background not only reflects his perseverance and commitment to knowledge, but also demonstrates his desire to critically and deeply examine the intellectual wealth of the Islamic tradition.

After completing his education in France, Muhammad Arkoun emerged as a highly successful and influential professor. His dedication to the world of academia is evident in his work teaching at various educational institutions and renowned universities in various countries, including Algeria,

France, and the United States (Syifa Urrahmi, 2024). From 1970 to 1972, Muhammad Arkoun taught at the University of Lyon and returned to Paris as Professor of Islamic Thought at the Sorbonne University. He was also frequently invited to give lectures and scientific lectures at several world-renowned universities such as the University of California, Princeton University, Temple University, the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies in Rome, the University of Amsterdam, and so on (Zahratana & Khovivah, 2022, p. 20). As a professor of Islamic thought at Sorbonne University in France, his ideas were greatly influenced by French philosophers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, particularly their theories of deconstruction (Ardana & Sari, 2018, p. th).

The Historical Approach in the Thought of Muhammad Arkoun

One of the modern Islamic thinkers, Muhammad Arkoun, argues that Muslims today are still trapped in stagnant religious thinking and have not been able to break out of established traditional patterns of thought without intellectual innovation relevant to the context and challenges of the modern era (Arkoun, 2022, p. 23). Muhammad Arkoun is an influential Muslim thinker and intellectual in the academic world (Syifa Urrahmi, 2024, p. 2021). Arkoun's intellectual thinking is essentially based on two civilizations, namely Islam and the West (Imron, 2017, p. 320). Muhammad Arkoun is a thinker influenced by the French (post)structuralist movement and uses the method of historicism (Nugroho, 2019, p. th). Essentially, Arkoun sought to shape Muslims into inclusive and tolerant individuals. In addition, he also wanted to deconstruct the exclusive, rigid, and intolerant mindset of Muslims, because, according to him, such attitudes hindered the emergence of a pluralistic understanding of religion that respects differences.

The anxiety that colored almost all of Arkoun's thinking was rooted in the reality of dichotomy in society, especially among Muslims (Rofik, 2002, p. 3). This dichotomy generally relates to the issue between the particular and the universal, as well as between the marginal and the central. This problem is evident through various opposing divisions, such as between Sunni and Shia, mystics and traditionalists, Muslims and non-Muslims, Berbers (non-Arabs) and Arabs, North Africa and Europe, and so on. The emergence of this dichotomy is rooted in the history of relations between the Islamic world

and the West. Arkoun invites us to understand this history as an attempt to unite the universal with the particular, that is, as a form of uniting humanity in its diversity of beliefs and identities in the modern era. For Arkoun, the history of Islamic society is closely linked to the history of the West; there is no separation between Islamic and Western thought. The two interact with each other and need to be appreciated, studied, and critically evaluated (Prakoso, 2023, p. 160). According to Arkoun, a unitary state is a form of state in which there is a single center of power that governs, controls, and leads the entire territory of the state (Latif & Mutawalli, 2023, p. 224). According to Arkoun, Muslims need to deepen their understanding of Islam through various scientific approaches in order to gain a comprehensive understanding. Classical Islamology needs to be studied and understood in greater depth in order to be able to interact with the changes of the times (Raya et al., 2016, p. 270).

Arkoun integrates various disciplines of modern humanities, such as linguistics, history, anthropology, and discourse criticism, in his efforts to interpret the Qur'an comprehensively (Adilah, 2025, p. 223). Arkoun attempted to apply scientific methodology to the Qur'an, treating religious texts as subjects for comparative historical criticism, deconstructionist analysis, and philosophical reflection on the production of meaning (Rasyid & Djafar, 2020, p. 46). Arkoun criticizes and challenges traditional interpretations of Islam, arguing that such approaches are too narrow and overly focused on historical and normative readings of religious texts, thereby neglecting the contextual, social, and human dimensions that should also be taken into account in understanding Islamic teachings. (Saidah et al., 2025, p. 154).

Arkoun's concept of historicity stems from his efforts to reconstruct the process of revelation transmission until the formation of the mushaf (closed corpus) and then developed into an understanding of the Qur'an through interpretation (interpreted corpus). According to Arkoun, tracing the history of the period when the Qur'an became a mushaf is an important step in comprehensively understanding its meaning and historical context (Laila Sari Masyhur et al., 2025, p. 890).

Arkoun criticizes the way Islamic history is often standardized and viewed as the only absolute truth. According to him, many Islamic historical

narratives are compiled by scholars and historians who have certain ideological interests. As a result, Islamic history taught in many Muslim countries tends to present an official version that benefits certain groups, while differences in versions and diversity of sources are often ignored. Arkoun calls for a more scientific and objective critique of Islamic history, namely by comparing various sources and examining the social and political contexts behind the writing of history. For example, the narrative that Islam developed peacefully and without internal conflict from the outset is often taught in traditional Islamic education. However, historical records show that after the death of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, serious political conflicts arose between the supporters of Ali (the Shia group) and Muawiyah (the Sunni group), which then triggered the Battle of Siffin and gave rise to a major schism in the Islamic world.

In Mohammed Arkoun's book, translated into Arabic with the title *Tarikhiyah al-Fikr al-'Arabi al-Islami* (Historical Arab-Islamic Thought), Arkoun attempts to examine various social and cultural phenomena through a historical perspective. He asserts that the past must be understood according to its historical layers, so that each event can be interpreted proportionally within the context of its time (Ardana & Sari, 2018). Through a historical approach, Arkoun seeks to dismantle the myths that have become ingrained in Islamic history and replace them with a more critical, rational, and objective analysis, so that our understanding of Islamic history becomes more honest about its reality and complexity. According to Arkoun, there must always be a connection between language, thought, and history. Muslims and religious people in general need to be fully aware of the dialectical relationship between the three (Nugroho, 2019, p. th). No religious thought is completely detached from language and history (Thahir, 2002, p. th).

Academically, he sought to critique the validity and relevance of classical understanding so that it would remain relevant to the needs of the current generation. This was based on his view that the modern generation tended to accept teachings dogmatically, without critical examination and deep reflection. Therefore, Arkoun seeks to reconstruct and deconstruct traditional religious thought to make it more relevant to contemporary social and intellectual realities. Arkoun's first step is to critique the text and the

historical, cultural, and social aspects that led to its emergence. He then continues by using contemporary social science approaches, which are then applied within the framework of inclusive and open (dialogical) Islamic thinking (Imron, 2007, p. th). Arkoun's thinking was greatly influenced by European intellectuals, and one of his efforts was evident in his attempt to combine Islamic reasoning with modern reasoning. However, Arkoun felt that this approach was unsatisfactory, so he turned to criticizing Islamic reasoning itself, because for him, this approach was not the only way in his studies. This shows the innovative nature of Arkoun's thinking, which is imbued with the spirit of modernity as he understands it (Arkoun, 2022, p. 19).

The historical approach in Arkoun's thinking stems from his criticism of classical Islamic historiography. He believes that the writing of Islamic history is too bound by political and ideological interests. According to Arkoun (2002: 45), The history of Islam must be read using an interdisciplinary approach, involving history, anthropology, and philosophy. Arkoun emphasizes the importance of the historicity of texts, namely the understanding that religious texts must be studied in the socio-cultural context in which they emerged. He also encourages the deconstruction of sacred history so that Muslims can understand intellectual dynamics more openly. This approach is in line with efforts to modernize Islamic studies, which emphasize rationality and humanism. Arkoun's observations on Islamic thought show that Islamic thought cannot be separated from the processes of sacralization, mythologization, and ideologization, which epistemologically need to be explained in depth through appropriate and accurate historical studies (Randa et al., 2022, p. 131).

In his work "Tarikhiyyah al-Fikr al-'Araby al-Islami," Arkoun examines social and cultural phenomena through a historical approach. He emphasizes the importance of historical research based on chronological order and empirical facts. This historicist approach forms the basis of his efforts to reconstruct meaning, by separating the relationship between text and context to open up the possibility of new interpretations of the text. Arkoun believes that the Qur'an has a very broad potential meaning that has not been fully revealed, thus leaving room for deeper interpretation and understanding (Syifa Urrahmi, 2024, p. 2021).

In general, Arkoun distinguishes between two forms of tradition in his work written in French, using the terms “tradition” and “turats.” The fundamental difference between the two lies in the initial consonant of the word. The first “tradition/turats” refers to a transcendent and ideal heritage, originating from God, and having absolute value. Meanwhile, the second “tradition/turats” refers to a heritage that is formed through historical processes and human cultural interactions. Arkoun's research focuses more on turats in the second sense, namely traditions that are influenced by historical context, space, and time.

Muhammad Arkoun places history as a fundamental dimension in understanding Islam. For Arkoun, religion cannot be separated from the historical process because all forms of religious expression, whether texts, interpretations, or social institutions, are born in specific socio-cultural contexts. According to him, an understanding of Islam that ignores the historical dimension will fall into a form of closed reasoning (*la raison close*), which is a way of thinking that considers religious doctrine to be ahistorical and absolute (Arkoun, 1986, p. th).

The Essence of Muhammad Arkoun's Historical Approach

Arkoun's historical approach is not merely a study of past events, but a mode of thought that places Islamic texts and civilization as products of human dynamics, rather than sacred entities that exist outside of space and time. Arkoun refers to this approach as an attempt to “read Islam historically” (*lecture historique de l'Islam*), that is, to read Islamic texts with an awareness of the social, political, and cultural contexts that gave birth to them (Arkoun, 1994, p. th). Within this framework, Arkoun distinguishes between two forms of history: First, sacred history, which is a religious construct that considers the Islamic past to be perfect and free from error. Second, profane history, which is the empirical reality of Muslim life, filled with debate, power struggles, and social constructs. For Arkoun, the task of modern Muslim scholars is to deconstruct sacred history and reconstruct profane history so that Muslims can understand their religion in a more humane, rational, and open-minded way.

The Principles of Muhammad Arkoun's Historical Approach

Arkoun's historical approach is based on three main epistemological principles: First, Historicity (*al-tarikhyyah*). Historicity means the awareness that all forms of religious texts and thought are formed through historical processes. Arkoun states that the Qur'an, as divine revelation, has gone through four stages of historicization: Pure revelation (*kalam Allah*), Qur'anic discourse (when delivered by the Prophet), Closed corpus (codification of the *mushaf* during the time of Uthman), and interpreted corpus (interpretation by scholars thereafter). These stages show that the interaction between revelation and history is inevitable, and this is where there is room for re-reading Islamic texts in different contexts. Second, Deconstruction of Classical Islamic Historiography (Arief, 2013, pp. 224–225). Arkoun rejects the theological and ideological approach to writing Islamic history. He refers to the classical Islamic historical tradition as “official history” shaped by political power and orthodox scholars. Through a critical historical approach, Arkoun seeks to dismantle the mechanisms of censorship and standardization of narratives in Islamic historiography, such as the removal of non-Uthmanic versions of the Quran, the exclusion of minority groups (Shiites, Khawarij), or the marginalization of women and non-Arab ethnic groups.

In this way, history is understood not as a single document of truth, but as an arena of discourse and power struggles. Third, Interdisciplinary and Humanistic. Arkoun combines history with other disciplines such as anthropology, linguistics, and philosophy. He believes that Islamic Historical Studies would be incomplete without understanding the language structure, cultural symbols, and meaning systems that exist within Muslim societies. Arkoun's approach to history is thus interdisciplinary and humanistic, placing humans as active subjects in the process of forming religious meaning.

Muhammad Arkoun's Historical Approach Methodology

The methodology used by Arkoun is analytical and deconstructive. First, he begins with a historical analysis of the text, tracing the context of the emergence of religious texts, socio-political motives, and the intellectual debates that accompanied them. The second stage is discourse analysis, which examines how texts are interpreted and used to construct a particular

legitimacy. The third stage is the deconstruction of meaning, which is to dismantle the ideological structures that shape religious consciousness. Through these steps, Arkoun wants to show that the history of Islam is not a record of the past, but a dynamic field where negotiations between revelation, reason, and human culture take place. He asserts that history is not merely a chronology of events, but a process of meaning production. Arkoun uses a historical approach to deconstruct Islamic thought. The historicity of the method means that the interpretation of texts must be viewed from their historical context; they certainly existed when they were born (Arief, 2013, p. 224)

Example of Application: The Case of the Historicization of the Qur'an According to Muhammad Arkoun

One concrete example of Arkoun's historical approach is his analysis of the codification process of the Qur'an. Arkoun argues that the codification carried out during the reign of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan shows human intervention in the process of writing and standardizing the text. He does not mean to cast doubt on revelation, but emphasizes that even sacred texts undergo historical processes that can be studied scientifically. Thus, understanding the Qur'an requires consideration of the social and cultural aspects of 7th-century Arabia as the context in which revelation emerged. An important aspect of Arkoun's thinking is the distinction between the Qur'an as revelation and the Qur'an as text. According to him, the Qur'an as a revelation is divine and transcendent, but when the revelation was written and codified into a mushaf, it underwent a process of historicization. In other words, the Qur'an as a text cannot be separated from the social and cultural context of the community that codified it. Therefore, understanding the Qur'an should not only focus on linguistic aspects, but also need to pay attention to how the text is interpreted and understood in various different historical contexts (Putra et al., 2025, p. 321).

Historically, Arkoun had a different view regarding the contents of the Quran manuscript compiled during the reign of Caliph Uthman. He argues that because of human involvement in the codification process, the possibility of errors remains, which could potentially distort the revelation believed to be stored in Lauh al-Mahfuz. According to Arkoun, this view is

similar to the codification process of hadith, which also gave rise to thousands of false hadith. In addition, during the establishment of the Uthmani Mushaf, Caliph Uthman ordered the burning of various versions of the text that caused differences and debates. Arkoun argues that it is possible that among the texts that were burned there were correct manuscripts, while some of the texts that were retained contained errors. In fact, according to him, Aisha herself once admitted the possibility of errors in the writing of some of the texts of the Quran (Laila Sari Masyhur et al., 2025, p. 891). The process of interpreting the Qur'an should not only rely on traditional understandings that have been passed down from generation to generation, but must also open space for reinterpretation in line with the challenges of the times (Putra et al., 2025, p. 311).

According to Arkoun, the revelation of the Qur'an sent down by Allah cannot be separated from the influence of the historical and socio-cultural realities of Arabia at that time. He argues that the Qur'an is a manifestation of God's word conveyed to humans, then constructed through human language, transmitted orally through the human voice, and finally standardized in written form (Hariyanto, 2018, p. 132). Therefore, Arkoun argues that the Qur'an has a historical dimension as a product of its time, so that reinterpretation is necessary to understand its divine messages in a way that is more relevant to the developments and realities of modern life. According to Arkoun, the Qur'an that Muslims have today is not completely detached from the historical process.

In his view, the history of the codification of the Qur'an shows that there was intervention and editing (censorship) during the reign of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan, which then resulted in several decisions that Arkoun believes should be critically examined from an academic perspective. This approach encourages modern Islamic researchers to distinguish between the divine (transcendent) and historical (contextual) dimensions in religious texts, so that their interpretation remains relevant to the challenges of the times.

Its Relevance to the Study of Contemporary Islamic Civilization History

For the study of Islamic Civilization History, Arkoun's thinking provides a new paradigm. Students of Islamic Civilization History can use Arkoun's approach to analyze the development of Islamic thought, power

relations in the history of the ummah, and the process of constructing Islamic knowledge. In this way, history becomes not only a narrative of past glory, but also a critical reflection on the journey of Islamic civilization.

Mohammed Arkoun's historical thinking has significant relevance for the development of contemporary Islamic Civilization History studies. Arkoun places history not merely as a record of past events, but as a dialectical space between text, context, and social reality. The historical approach he offers contains methodological values that can enrich the perspective of Muslim academics in understanding the dynamics of Islamic civilization, both theoretically and practically.

1. The Historical Approach as a Critique of the Freezing of Islamic History

Arkoun rejects the view that Islamic history is a single, final, and absolute narrative. His criticism of the standardization of history, which he believes is laden with ideological interests, teaches the importance of reopening the field of historical study with a scientific and critical attitude. For the study of Islamic Civilization History, this idea emphasizes that every Islamic event, text, or institution must be understood in the social, political, and cultural context of its time. Thus, historical research no longer stops at glorifying the past, but is directed at discovering the dynamics and complexity of Islamic civilization over time. Arkoun argues that the history of Islam taught in many Muslim countries is often the result of ideological standardization. The official narrative is written by scholars and rulers who have certain interests. Therefore, according to Arkoun, historical criticism is needed to compare various sources and trace the socio-political context behind the writing of history (Arkoun, 2002, p. th).

For example, the claim that Islam developed peacefully without internal conflict is often repeated in classical Islamic education. In fact, history records major political conflicts after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, such as the Battle of Siffin between the supporters of Ali and Muawiyah, which gave rise to the Sunni-Shia schism (Nasr, 2003, p. th). Arkoun's historical approach helps to uncover the ideological layers behind the construction of this narrative.

2. Historicism and Deconstruction of Religious Reasoning

In his work *Tarikhyyah al-Fikr al-‘Arabi al-Islami* (Historical Arab-Islamic Thought), Arkoun asserts that social and cultural phenomena must be viewed through a historical perspective. Each historical period has its own unique historical strata and cannot be equated with the context of the present day (Arkoun, 1986, p. th). Thus, to understand the development of Islamic civilization, a researcher must place texts, thoughts, and events in the context of the space and time that gave birth to them. This historicist approach is a critique of the traditional view that tends to freeze Islamic history as a single narrative without considering the diversity of sources and social backgrounds. The historical method introduced by Arkoun aims to restore a purely human perspective in understanding various matters, including holy books, by separating them from purely historical assessments and linking them to the context and social situation surrounding their emergence and development (*18-Article Text-3-1-10-20240913*, n.d., p. 7).

3. Contextualization of the Qur'an and Historicization of Religious Texts

Arkoun asserts that the Qur'an must be understood in the context of 7th-century history, when revelation interacted with the social structures of Arab society. This perspective provides methodological inspiration for the study of Islamic civilization history in understanding the relationship between religious texts and social reality. In a contemporary context, this view helps researchers see how Islamic teachings transformed from normative revelation into social, political, and cultural systems throughout the long history of Muslims. Arkoun also emphasizes the urgency of using a historical-critical approach in interpreting the Qur'an, namely by examining how historical, social, and political contexts influenced the process of revelation and the acceptance of the holy text. In his view, the study of Quranic interpretation should involve various disciplines, such as history, sociology, anthropology, and psychology, so that the understanding of the text becomes more comprehensive and contextual. (Adilah, 2025, p. 229).

4. Relevance to Updates on Islamic Civilization Studies

Arkoun distinguishes between the Qur'an as revelation and the Qur'an as text. According to him, when revelation is codified into a mushaf, it enters the realm of history and becomes a product of a particular culture (Arkoun, 1988, p. th). Therefore, understanding religious texts must take into account the socio-cultural context of the society that produced them. This view is relevant to the study of Islamic Civilization History because it opens up new avenues of analysis on how Islamic teachings were transformed into social, legal, and political systems throughout the history of Muslims.

5. Critical Reflection on the Historical Awareness of Muslims

Arkoun reminds us of the importance of historical awareness as the foundation for the intellectual revival of Muslims. By understanding that Islamic civilization was born, developed, and changed through a long historical process, Muslims are expected to be able to interpret their past more critically. Mohammed Arkoun emphasizes the importance of reconstructing the forms of Islam that were established in the past so that they can be adapted and revived in the context of modern society (Hidayati, 2025, p. 650). In the study of contemporary Islamic civilization, this means fostering an awareness that Islamic modernity cannot be separated from the dialogue between tradition and change, between transcendent values and the historical challenges facing humanity.

CONCLUSION

Muhammad Arkoun's historical approach is an epistemological framework that places Islam as a product of human history that constantly interacts with its social, cultural, and political contexts. Arkoun rejects ahistorical and closed religious thinking by offering three main principles: the historicity of texts, the deconstruction of classical Islamic historiography, and a humanistic interdisciplinary approach. Through the historicization of revelation to the codification and interpretation of the Qur'an, Arkoun shows that understanding religion must always take into account historical dynamics and social change. This approach not only serves as a critique of normative historiography traditions, but also provides a new methodological direction

for the development of Islamic Civilization History (SPI) studies to be more reflective, critical, and contextual with the challenges of modernity. Thus, Arkoun's thinking emphasizes the importance of reading Islam historically to build an intellectual awareness that is open, rational, and oriented towards humanity.

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