



**Jihad Verses in Surat AL TAWBA**

**MOHAMMED ARKOUN's Historical Study**

**A Critical Analysis**

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## Abstract

Arkoun chose "Surat Al Tawba" as a pattern to practice his historical study according to a triangle of "violence, Holiness, Truth", all this to discover the anthropological content, which establish for us an explanative theory for the Islamic phenomenon, and destroy the spasmodic preference of Jihad-as he said-, where Arkoun decided that the allowable Jihad is what the prophet Mohamed (PBUH) was practiced.

Keywords: Analysis, Historical Analysis, Critic, Jihad.

## ملخص البحث بالعربية

اختار أركون سورة التوبة لتكون أنموذجا يطبق عليه دراسته التاريخية في إطار مثلث "العنف، التقديس، الحقيقة"، وهذا لاكتشاف المضامين الأنثروبولوجية التي تؤسس لنا نظرية تفسيرية للظاهرة الإسلامية، والتي نقضي من خلالها على التشنجات التبجيلية للجهاد-كما يقول-، حيث خلص أركون إلى أن الجهاد المشروع هو ما مورس في عهد النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحليل، التحليل التاريخي، النقد، الجهاد.

## Introduction:

The reader of ARKOUN's texts notes the use of a horde of concepts and intellectual tools based on his study of the contemporary scientific research in various areas; according to ALI HARB: "Any new product, ARKOUN will be always the first one to display and use it"<sup>(1)</sup>. For this, a lot of contemporary thinkers, as well as the concepts and tools used by them are found in ARKOUN's works.

Some scholars consider ARKOUN as just a transporter of the western methodology or "a Technician who applies and implements the western methods upon the Arab and Islamic heritage"<sup>(2)</sup>, otherwise others think that ARKOUN is not

just an transmitter, but rather a thinker who exposes western results during his exploration journey in the Arab-Islamic field. He mobilizes this cognitive arsenal to be invested in his work<sup>(3)</sup>.

In order to discover a general theory of the text that stands on three overlapping and interacting trends to read the holy Quran as a text: the historical and anthropological, semio-linguistic, theological and explanatory reading<sup>(4)</sup>, ARKOUN distinguishes between two concepts: The Quranic event and the Islamic event.

On one hand, The Quranic event shows the historical emergence of a new phenomenon; where in the other hand, the Islamic event is the interpretations, judgments, and legal opinions mentioned in the books of fikh<sup>(5)</sup>, including the texts related to Jihad.

Based on the above, this requires, as per ARKOUN, the re-analysis and exploration through knowledgeable areas on the form of triangles among which the Anthropological triangle that is composed of “violence, holiness, truth”. These terms present three overlapping and interacting powers that generate every human presence, and control the formation of every sense or meaning<sup>(6)</sup>.

Every researcher for the meaning claims that he is the only one who has the absolute truth. This allows him to practice violence as he controls the meaning. On this course and in order to get legitimacy, he focuses on the holy text. And this is what happened throughout the history of the Islamic nation till now, where the current Islamic mainstream considers that the western world is regularly and permanently the enemy. These things cannot be understood only through this perspective of hostility, confrontation and war<sup>(7)</sup>.

Thus, to understand this Anthropological triangle “violence, holiness, truth” the verses of Surat Al Tawba will be taken as an example. Hence, the question here is how did ARKOUN use the historical analyses to read the verses of Jihad in Surat Al Tawba, and how did he deal with contradictory results?

**The importance of this paper comes from:** the topic itself and the methodology used to structure this research.

**Regarding the topic,** we concentrate on the understanding of the historical analysis as a necessity to perceive both the path drawn by ARKOUN as an author, and ours as readers of this future project following critique and analysis tools.

However, this research is a critical analytical study that stands on the real world from one hand, and the open epistemological tools on the other hand. Both contents and results take into account the former points.

**Regarding the methodology used in this paper**, the analytical induction methodology is implemented in this study as it is an epistemological one.

**Induction** is utilized to check some knowledgeable points of view.

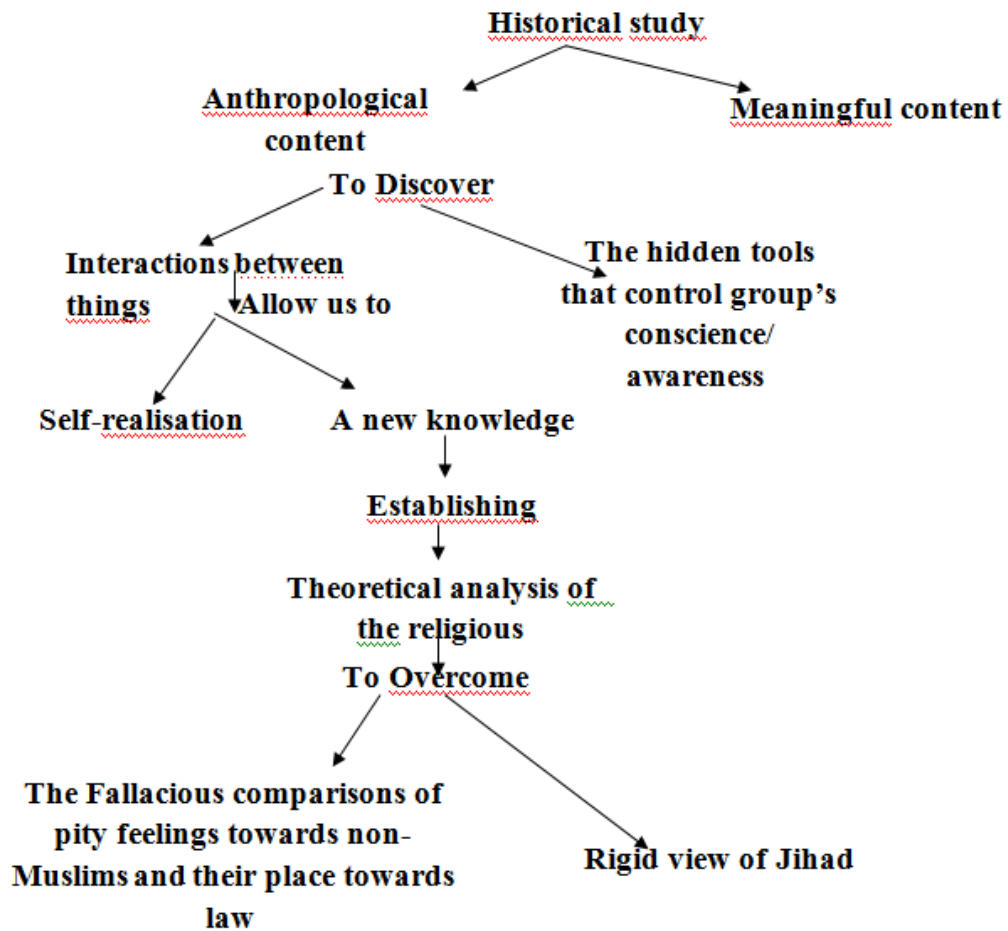
**Analysis** then is applied to put these opinions into their composing constituents to discover the features of rebuilding standing, at the same time, on a rational critique.

This is what the topic aims to get through two parts: the historical study, and the epistemological discussion.

### **1- The Historical Study of the Verses of Jihad:**

ARKOUN calls to read Surat Al Tawba with a historical reading, and to clarify and make it easier we can draw the following plan, which we have set based on some of what ARKOUN wrote.

#### **First table : historical study**

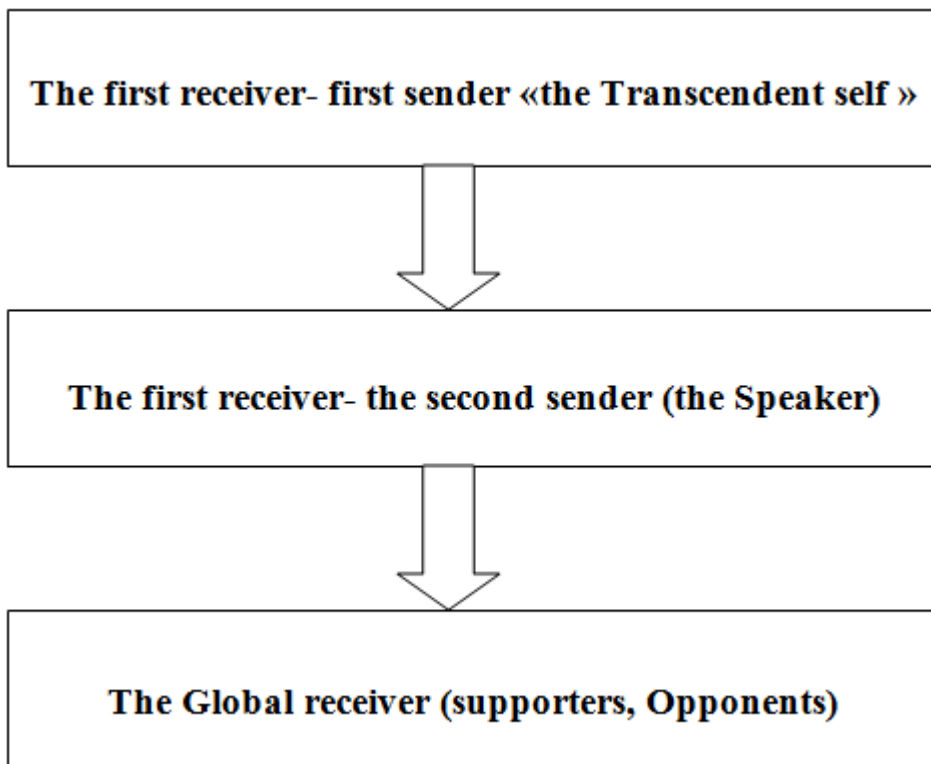


أركون: القرآن من التفسير الموروث إلى تحليل الخطاب الديني: Ref

Therefore, this historical study permits us, according to ARKOUN, to discover the invisible tools that control the Muslims consciousness/ awareness till

now. Thus, it should have a clear methodological reading, which is the communicative manner or the structure that controls relations between people and pronouns. ARKOUN determines this latter through this plan<sup>(8)</sup> :

## Second table : discution plan



أركون: القرآن من التفسير الموروث إلى تحليل الخطاب الديني: Ref

The above plan can be explained as follows:

The first sender is the Almighty God, He is both the sender of the message and the receiver by the fact that everything goes back to him, but the second sender is the Prophet-Peace be Upon Him- and here ARKOUN uses Linguistic terminology to focus on the mechanics of meaning forming, and how to receive this sense by targeted listeners of the speech, and all this is clear without questions. But what make us interpreting his speech are his words when he says: this work liberates“ the listener/reader from the shades of meaning imposed directly by the firm lexicon of the Orthodox belief”<sup>(9)</sup>

In this context, ARKOUN uses the word \*liberate\* because he sees no possibility of combining between the firm lexicon of orthodox belief and the new scientific analysis methods such as: the linguistic analysis, the semantic semiotic analysis, the historical and sociological analysis, the anthropological, and the philosophical analysis<sup>(10)</sup>.

The reason behind this, according to ARKOUN, is that the verbal Quranic lexicon will erase or fades up gradually, as a result of the ideological deviation that transposes functions that are undertaken grammatically, semiotically and historically by two factors: Allah and his messenger, to the religious scholars and their orthodox lexicon. They then will engage in the interpretation of the word of God, comment on it, enlarge it, and expand it to infinity. All this is done under the influence and pressure of the actual constraints of life.

Consequently, this leads, according to ARKOUN, to hide and obliterate historically the self factor - the first sender or the second, i.e. God or the prophet for the benefit of the word Islam<sup>(11)</sup>.

For this, ARKOUN points that the Jihad project which has been practiced in the era of the prophet –Peace Be Upon Him- because of the war declared on Allah and his messenger has no longer the legitimacy by this condition that is the death of the prophet-Peace Be Upon Him-. However, this is the opposite of what the Islamic philologist and scholars claimed as they interpreted the verses related to the war on Allah and his messenger by the war on Islam.

Although ARKOUN does not deny the role of the militant character of the nation that overwhelmed in some periods of the history of the Islamic nation, but he rather questions the Islamic people and their big support to the militant jihadist nature neglecting, at the same time, the knowledgeable critical nature<sup>(12)</sup>, he is talking about what it should be, and at this level he does have right.

However, preserving the meaning of the words; and keeping terms of Allah and/or his messenger with no substitution for the word Islam, and any war to be declared on the name of Allah and/or his messenger is not understood as a war against Islam. Hence, his interpretation, in this case, requires evidence or his method becomes just a new superficial doctrine that stands only on the surface feature of the text and not far away.

The problem here is that ARKOUN tends to put the Quran within its original historical context in order to understand its vocabulary<sup>(13)</sup>; at the same time, he praises both linguists and literary critics and their understanding on how to distinguish between the literal adjacent meanings of any discourse and the meanings generated by readers according to their needs, consciences / awareness and time conditions<sup>(14)</sup>, and this is a clear contradiction.

The bottom line is that ARKOUN chose Surat Al Tawba to be a model to apply his historical study using his epistemological triangle\*violence, holiness, and truth\*. Hence, each researcher who is looking for the meaning claims to own the absolute truth for which he allows himself to exercise violence in the protection of the holy to get legitimacy<sup>(15)</sup>.

Moreover, ARKOUN depends on the historical study to detect the invisible tools that control Muslims conscience. This analysis helps to unveil the historical deface (obliteration) of the self- factor, i.e. the first sender Allah or the second who is the messenger-Peace Be Upon Him-, on behalf of Islam. For this, ARKOUN states that the allowable Jihad is only what the prophet Mohamed (PBUH) had already practiced.

## 2- The Epistemological Discussion:

In his book ‘**The method’s innovation to evaluate the heritage**’ Taha Abdurahman replied back on some modernists, such as Al-Djabiri, that they failed their competence in dealing with the transpose mental tools which are: concepts, bases, methods, and theories<sup>(16)</sup>; and that is where ARKOUN fell too in his historical study.

In this respect, the legitimacy of this study will be discussed according to an open epistemological view.

For instance, Islamic scholars always deal with the legislative text, but they detect its content according to the case in hand standing on the historical study to detect the exact meaning<sup>(17)</sup>. For this reason, Islamic scholars occupy themselves



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with the historical value of the legislative text in its application and practice in real life.

So, what will be the historian, ARKOUN in this case, work? He seems to be busy only with the basic meaning of the legislative text, the manner by which is done, and its legitimacy in the time of its descending in the period of the prophet-peace be upon him-, but the question here is: how ARKOUN will know all this? And could he know this without his conscience about the circumstances between the Prophet's era and today's time? Will he do the same as the Islamic scholars did before; which means distinguishing between the main meaning of the legislative text and what he supposes, as a receiver, to be the meaning? It seems that the hermeneutic state is the same between the historian and the Islamic scholar, because the effective content of the legislative text which is understood from both sides is the same. Since we cannot obtain the historical knowledge unless digging deeply in the past according to its continuity to the present, and this is what the Islamic scholars do with the legislative text in their fundamentally practice. They assure then the continuity of the legislative text without breaking through the application of the common rule: means is taken by the word in general not by a specific causality.

In addition, this is what the historian does too when he puts himself in the place of the first receiver to understand the legislative text, because the reference of the understanding is not on the legislative text's word; but rather in understanding the state and the behavior of the receiver at that time. For this reason Saied Kotb announces: the Quranic text is set up to work not only for the contemporary, but also in every environment afterwards, at any period of time, is taken absolutely to work in the human being *soul* whenever *she* faces the same event or something like in the lengthy periods of time, and in various environments with the same power that the Quranic text worked with within the first community; and the Quranic texts cannot be understood exactly unless the reader faces the same circumstances happened the first time ...Quran is a newish inspiration in terms of situations and events, and its texts are ready to work in any moment, whenever he(Quran) finds the heart who sympathizes and responds back to him, and he finds the circumstance which throws out the potential energy in this texts<sup>(18)</sup>.

Therefore, it is not important for the historical study that the verses of Surat Al Tawba are directed to a person by himself, or aimed to be addressed

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universally, but the goal lies in understanding the verses according to their special aim, and main axis which is Repentance.

Moreover, the interpretation achieves through this historical study not only a new meaning but rather a more determinate one. Therefore, it does not become a clear action to understand a given text through looking for the surface meaning in the text words, but trying to approach and discover the aim of the Almighty God. So, the fundamental basis to the historian is to interpret the verses of Surat Al Tawba according to a new meaning deferent from the exact meaning of these verses themselves, it will be going behind these verses and their meaning.

Finally, the historian in here approaches the verses of Surat Al Tawba in the same way and method the philologist does with the context, but understanding only the facts from the contexts does not allow anyone to be a historian, but what rather helps him to be so is his understanding of what he gets as a sense. It is not much important for us to search for the change in the self significance from the sign of Allah and his Messenger to a sign relevant to the word Islam, but our pledge is to discover the purpose of God in telling us all these details about the disbelievers, Arabs, and hypocrisy phenomenon. Thus, this issue should have a particular purpose that needs to be discovered.

For this, ARKOUN could not put forward the verses of Surat Al Tawba according to the method through which the Quran links his verses and chapters. Therefore, he focused on a superficial study of the superficial structure of Surat Al Tawba verses. Therefore, he concluded that Jihad is only restricted to what was in the messenger era based upon the deconstruction view that tends to understand history as a temporary negation between two sides before and afterwards<sup>(19)</sup>; before the death of the prophet Peace be upon him was a Jihad, but afterwards is violence!

Hence, history in the Quran is not a temporary negation, but rather a complementary alternation; every nation has all what she owes, and what she deeds. The Quran should be read according to his own methodology that controls every legislation that is controlled by the method.

Consequently, it is proved that the historical study of ARKOUN is not so firm, because he did not encounter and surround of all its techniques and practical sides.

### **Conclusion:**

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After this critical analytical study, this research depicts some results that can be seen as below:

- 1- ARKOUN sees History as a set of separate stations one from the other, before and afterwards. For the real world, it is also a group of truths where no relations gather them. And for his view reference the word of Allah, it is considered as separate texts without any sort of bond or relationship that links between these verses.
- 2- He misunderstood the historical approach when he based his work on the triangle: Violence, Holiness, and Truth.
- 3- Based on the open epistemological discussion, some of its techniques are applied not to interrogate the holy texts to get along with our thinking system, and live each time for its own past alone, so the present and the future. Thus, no historical knowledge is built. But to let these verses speak for themselves. Therefore, the historical knowledge cannot be attained unless a clear vision of the past that is continued with the present time and the future is established.

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- 7- أركون: الإسلام أوربا، الغرب، ص 8.
- 8- أركون: القرآن من التفسير الموروث إلى تحليل الخطاب الديني، ص 62.
- 9- أركون: القرآن من التفسير الموروث إلى تحليل الخطاب الديني، ص 63.
- 10- أركون: القرآن من التفسير الموروث، ص 69-70.
- 11- أركون: القرآن من التفسير الموروث، ص 70-72.
- 12- أركون: الإسلام أوربا الغرب، ص 8.
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