

Deconstructing Theological Authoritarianism in Classical Islam: Muhammad Arkoun's Critique of Islamic Reason

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Abstract

This study aims to explore Muhammad Arkoun's critique of the phenomenon of theological authoritarianism in the tradition of classical Islamic thought. Arkoun views Islamic orthodoxy as often trapped in dogmatic reasoning that closes the door to *ijtihad* and marginalizes critical thinking through the mechanism of the formation of a "single truth". Using descriptive-analytical methods and deconstruction approaches, as well as "Critique de la Raison Islamique", this study dissects how the structure of power and language in classical theology forms the "unthinkable" (*l'impensable*) and "unthinkable" (*l'impensé*) regions. The results of the analysis show that, according to Arkoun, theological authoritarianism is rooted in the sacralization of the product of human interpretation that is aligned with the word of God. Arkoun offers solutions through epistemological dismantling and the multidisciplinary application of the humanities and social sciences (such as linguistics, sociology, and anthropology) to free Islamic reason from scholastic rigidity. This study concludes that Arkoun's thinking makes a significant contribution to Islamic modernization efforts by reclaiming the spirit of plurality of interpretation that was lost due to the hegemony of religious authority in the past. This transformation is crucial to building a more democratic and open Muslim society in the face of the challenges of the times.

Keywords: Deconstructing Theological, Authoritarianism, Criticism of Islamic Reason, Classical Islam.

1. Introduction

The discourse of thought in the tradition of classical Islamic treasures is a civilizational heritage that is very valuable for every civilization in the future.¹ However, at the same time, the discourse of classical Islamic thought also holds problematic complexity in its structure of reason.² Over the centuries, Islamic thought has undergone construction through a dialectical process between texts, contexts, and even the interests of power. It is also undeniable that, in the course of history, the discourse of Islamic thought cannot be separated from political interests that ultimately give rise to religious authority.³ This, in its development, gives rise to the establishment of traditions that often give birth to the phenomenon of rigid orthodoxy.

¹ Zulfahmi Lubis, "Revisiting Islamic Classical Treasures to Build Human Civilization". *UINSU Journal: Ihya Ulum al-Din*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2021), p. 193.

² Aisyah Elvina Sari, Amril Mansur, "An Analysis of the Reasoning of Bayani, Burhani, and Irfani in the Perspective of Muhammad Abid Al-Jabiri's Philosophy". *MICJO: Multidisciplinary Indonesian Center Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2025), p. 546.

³ Ahmet T. Kuru, *Islam, Authoritarianism, and Backwardness: A Comparison Across Eras and Regions in the Islamic World*. Terj. Febry Ady Prasetyo. (Jakarta: Gramedia Popular Literature, 2020), pp. 4-5.

Muhammad Arkoun was a very influential Islamic thinker from Algeria. He saw that behind the rich discourse of the classical Islamic theological tradition, there is a phenomenon of "theological authoritarianism" that systematically closes the space for critical reason and dynamic *ijtihad*.⁴ The theological authoritarianism referred to by Muhammad Arkoun is not just a domination of one individual over another individual, but an epistemological repression.⁵ This phenomenon arises when the human interpretation of revelation that is relatively abbreviated to the sacred is seen as equivalent to the absolute divine truth.⁶ In the classical Islamic period, this process was often strengthened by the collaboration between the power of the *ulama* (religion) and the political power (ruler) in order to maintain balance in people's lives. As a result, the discourse of Islamic thought is trapped in a cycle of dogmatism that produces only classical ideas without questioning and criticizing their methodological foundations.⁷

Arkoun conceived a visionary project called *Critique de la Raison Islamique* (Critique of Islamic Reason), with the aim of uncovering the cognitive framework that has long shackled the intellectual dynamics of Islamic thought.⁸ The central concept in this idea is the division between the thinkable (*le pensable*) and the unthinkable space (*l'impensable*), where crucial topics are deliberately excluded as taboo in order to maintain doctrinal authority. Orthodoxy, according to Arkoun, systematically buries such issues into the "unthinkable", thereby stifling epistemological innovation and making Islamic thought static, unresponsive to contemporary advances such as critical hermeneutics, anthropology, and post-structural philosophy. As a result, Muslims are trapped in the reproduction of classical texts without the will and ability to revitalize their treasures to face the challenges of modernity.

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of reconstructing authoritarian reasoning in the midst of turbulent contemporary issues. Muslims today often struggle with the rise of extremism and exclusivity stemming from the dogma of absolutism in the classical discourse tradition, which hinders adaptation to global dynamics such as pluralism and scientific progress. Arkoun proposes a multidisciplinary approach including structural linguistics, semiotic analysis, semiotics, and sociology of knowledge to unravel the process of production and consumption of classical theological texts, thus revealing the historical layers behind them.⁹ This approach allows us to realize that many doctrines that are considered sacred are merely products of the contemporary socio-cultural and political constructions of their time, which can be revitalized for the present context without losing their spiritual essence.

⁴ Tjahyo Adhi Prakoso, "Around Religious Anthropology: Views on Muhammad Arkoun's Applicative Islamology". *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2023), p. 158.

⁵ Milda Apriliana, "Analysis of Contemporary Islamic Thought (Critical Study of Mohammed Arkoun's Thought)". *INTEGRATION: Journal of Social Science and Culture*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2024), hlm. 270.

⁶ Ernawati, et al., "The Conformation of Revelation as a Legal Text in the Mushaf of the Qur'an in the Classical Period". *Lex Jurnalica*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (2025), p. 248.

⁷ Hasan Hanafi, *From Faith to the Revolution of Our Attitude Towards Old Traditions*. Terj. Asep Usman Ismail, et al. Cet II (Jakarta: Dian Rakyat, 2010), p.xli.

⁸ Ismet Sari, "The Narrative of Mohammad Arkoun's Contemporary Philosophy". *Al-Hikmah: Journal of Theosophy and Islamic Civilization*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2019), p. 70.

⁹ Misnawati, et al., "Mohammed Arkoun's Thoughts in Contemporary Interpretation". *MUDARRISUNA: Journal of Islamic Religious Education Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2022), p. 273.

Based on this background, this research is focused on an in-depth dissection of Muhammad Arkoun's criticism of the authoritarian nature in classical Islamic theology. This research aims to reveal the process by which the suppression of rationality is formed, as well as how Arkoun's proposed methodological approach is able to offer a solution to the stagnation of thought among Muslims. Through this deconstructive approach, it is hoped that a new awareness will emerge about the importance of interpretive pluralism and freedom of critical thinking in realizing Islam that is more emancipatory and adaptive to the changing realities of the times.

2. Literature Review

Studies of Muhammad Arkoun's thought and his critique of the authoritarianism of classical Islamic theology can be seen in various contemporary studies. These studies reveal that Islamic rationality is often trapped within narrow limits due to the dominance of interpretive power from certain groups. An analysis of Arkoun's critique of authoritarianism in theology, from Muhammad Arkoun's point of view, requires a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of Islamic reason in the midst of its historical context.¹⁰ According to Arkoun, the root of the problem of traditional Islamic theology lies in what he calls "cloture dogmatique". This condition arises when Islamic reason loses the ability to explore meaning flexibly, and instead becomes trapped in the texts and interpretations of previous scholars that have been considered sacred.¹¹ As a result, contextual-historical human interpretations are often equated with the nature of revelation, thus giving birth to theological authoritarianism that hinders the space for contemporary criticism and *ijtihad*.¹²

Studies have shown that Muhammad Arkoun's intellectual initiatives are focused on deconstructing traditional epistemology that often limits the possibilities for new interpretations, especially by excluding historical, linguistic, and social aspects in the process of forming theological doctrine. Therefore, Arkoun encourages the application of interdisciplinary methods that include history, anthropology, linguistics, and philosophy in order to free Islamic studies from the dominance of mere dogmatic and normative thought.¹³

This situation eventually separates the Islamic thought landscape into two main domains: the "the thinkable" and the "unthinkable" (*l'impensé*).¹⁴ The imaginable realm is completely dominated by established theological orthodoxy, supported by political authority, while the unthinkable realm holds critical ideas that are considered taboo or threaten doctrinal stability. Arkoun emphasizes that this kind of authoritarianism not only shackles intellectual freedom, but also triggers a decline in Muslim thought due to the inability to revisit fundamental issues that have been considered final by conventional authorities.

¹⁰ Taufik Hidayatulloh, "Navigating Contemporary Islamic Reason: An Epistemological Analysis of Mohammed Arkoun". *Journal of Islamic Thought*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2024), p. 3.

¹¹ Fadlil Munawwar Manshur, "Mohammed Arkoun's Critique of Rationalism on Arab-Islamic Intellectual Culture". *TAJIDID*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2023), pp. 3-4.

¹² Zakya Rafsanjani Award, Rhythm Yoga, "Islam and Society 5.0: A Rereading of Islamic Theology from the Perspective of Mohammed Arkoun". *GLASS: Journal of Ushuluddin Dialogical Science*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2022), p. 126.

¹³ M. Amin Abdullah, *Kalam Philosophy in the Contemporary Era*. (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2022), p. 46.

¹⁴ Mohammed Arkoun, *Contemporary Islam Towards Interreligious Dialogue*. (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Siswa, 2005), p. 36.

Departing from these conditions, this research is positioned as a conceptual study that seeks to link Muhammad Arkoun's epistemological criticism with the issue of authoritarianism in classical Islamic theology, not only as a scientific challenge, but also as an ethical dilemma related to freedom of thought, intellectual obligation, and the revitalization of Islamic rationality today.

3. Research Methods

The method used in this study is a qualitative method that is descriptive-analytical, with the type of library research.¹⁵ This research is focused on the analysis of the text and the thought of Muhammad Arkoun related to criticism of classical Islamic theological authoritarianism. As is common in research on a figure's thought, the main data are obtained through a study of literature that is relevant to the formal object of research.¹⁶

Data collection was carried out through a documentary study of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources used in this study are in the form of Muhammad Arkoun's fundamental works, such as the book *Rethinking Islam, Islamic Reason and Modern Reason*, and *Contemporary Islam Towards Interreligious Dialogue*. Meanwhile, secondary sources are obtained from scientific journals, books, and academic articles that discuss Arkoun's thinking in the last 5 years (2020-2025). This aims to maintain the actuality and academic relevance of the research conducted.

The data analysis technique used in this study refers to the content *analysis* model and deconstruction method as offered by Muhammad Arkoun himself in his thoughts.¹⁷ This analysis process is carried out through several stages: first, data reduction by classifying Arkoun's thought which specifically discusses the authoritarianism of classical Islamic theology; second, the systematic presentation of data based on points that have been formulated in the literature review; third, drawing conclusions through critical interpretation to find answers to the phenomenon of epistemological repression in classical Islamic theology. This approach is also used so that researchers can dissect and analyze the historical and ideological layers that cover theological texts objectively.

4. Results and Discussion

Muhamamad Arkoun came from the Berber region, Tourit-Mimoun, Kabilia, Algeria. Born on February 1, 1928 A.D. / 9 Sha'ban 1346 H.¹⁸ Kabilia is a mountainous area inhabited by Berbers in the east of Algiers. Arkoun was born into a modest Berber family and belongs to the lower strata of society, where his family works as spice traders.¹⁹ Since childhood, Arkoun, who was born in the Kabila region, grew up and developed in the midst of exposure to three main languages. First, the Kabila language is the official language, a Berber language, the cultural heritage of North Africa since the pre-Islamic and Roman eras. Second, the Arabic language, which entered through the expansion of the Islamic region, began in the

¹⁵ Mestika Zed, *Literature Research Method*. (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2008), p. 3.

¹⁶ Sugiyono, *Qualitative Research Methods*. (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2020), p. 9.

¹⁷ Lexy J. Meleong, *Qualitative Research Methodology, ed. Revision* (Bandung: PT. Remaja Rosdakarya, 2018), p. 192.

¹⁸ Mizanul Akrom, *Islamic Thought of Critical Madzhab: Muhammad Abed Al-Jabiri, Mohammed Arkoun, Hassan Hanafi*. (Malang: PT. Literasi Nusantara Abadi Group, 2023), p. 68.

¹⁹ Tjahyo Adhi Prakoso, "Around Religious Anthropology: Views on Muhammad Arkoun's Applicative Islamology. *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, Vol. 5, No. 2, (2023), p. 158.

first century of the Hijri. Third, the French language was brought in by the French colonizers when they occupied Algeria from 1830 to 1962.²⁰

To some extent, the three languages influence thinking patterns and understanding in many different ways. This situation has been familiar to Arkoun since childhood. He gets along intensively with these three languages. His closeness to these three languages has formed a deep interest in him in understanding how language affects human mindsets and cultural structures. Arkoun views language as an entrance to studying how human thought works in the context of human civilization that continues to evolve and change.²¹

Arkoun began his primary education in Tourit-Mimoun, continuing at Oran and the University of Algiers (1950–1954) with a focus on Arabic, while teaching at Algiers secondary schools.²² During the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962), he studied at the Sorbonne in Paris and earned a doctorate in literature in 1969 with a dissertation on Miskawayh. He taught in Lyon (1970–1972), then became professor of the history of Islamic thought at the Sorbonne in Paris, as well as a visiting professor at European universities such as Amsterdam and Princeton, with influence extending to America, Africa, and Asia. Arkoun opposed orientalism in the West, but felt uncomfortable in the Middle East because fundamentalism hindered discussion. He is also the director of the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, editor of the *Arabica* journal, and recipient of French honors such as Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur and Officier des Palmes académiques.²³

4.1 Authoritarianism in Classical Islamic Theology and Dogmatic Orthodoxy

Authoritarianism in classical Islamic theology is evident through the tendency to assume the absolute results of the *ijtihad* of previous scholars and to limit the opportunities for contemporary interpretation adapted to the context. Theological ideas arising from specific social, political, and cultural conditions are often treated as eternal truths that seem to be free from the constraints of time and place. This kind of tradition blurs the line between revelation as a transcendent divine message and contextual-historical human interpretation.²⁴ As a result, theological constructions that are inherently relative and susceptible to criticism are instead glorified to the point of being almost parallel to revelation, a phenomenon that is the main focus of Muhammad Arkoun's intellectual attack.

Arkoun argues that the habit of taking the conclusions of the *ijtihad* of previous generations to absolute terms creates what he calls dogmatic reasoning (*raison dogmatique*), a form of thought that consciously rejects critical interrogation and worships the authority of classical science as an unshakable beacon of truth.²⁵ This pattern of dogmatic reasoning not only extinguishes innovation in thinking, but also forms a system of exclusion from

²⁰ Sholihan, *Mohammad Arkoun & Critique of Islamic Reason; Criticizing Orthodoxy to Build Islam in the Future*. (Semarang: Walisongo Press, 2009), pp. 15-16.

²¹ Muhammad Fauzi Batubara, Nada Ramadhania, Rahmaifa Nasyah, "The Hermeneutical Thought of Muhammad Arkoun: Interpreting the Qur'an in the Midst of the Changing Times". *NAAFI: Student Scientific Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 3, (2025), p.482.

²² Hasan Baharun, Akmal Mundiri, et al., *Methodology of Islamic Studies; Spark of Figures' Thinking in Grounding Religion*, (Yogyakarta: ArRuzz Media, 2011), pp. 221-222.

²³ Mohammed Arkoun, *Pour une Critique de la Raison Islamique* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 1984), hlm. 35.

²⁴ Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*. (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Siswa, 1996), p. 114.

²⁵ Johan Hendrik Meuleman, *Reading the Qur'an with Mohammed Arkoun*. (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2012), pp. 3-4.

innovative ideas that are considered to deviate from the path of dominant orthodoxy.²⁶ As a result, theology loses its role as a rational means of delving into belief, and instead transforms into an ideological tool that maintains the solidity of religious power.

Authoritarianism in classical Islamic theology is inseparable from the dynamics of institutionalization of theological schools. When a school succeeds in gaining political and social recognition, its doctrine is gradually placed as the face of "authentic Islam". This mechanism gives birth to a level of religious knowledge, where the dominant interpretation is considered orthodox, while others are marginalized as heterodox or heretical. Such a situation transforms the intellectual discussion that was originally alive into a field of strengthening symbolic dominance. Theology also moves from the realm of rational dialogue to an instrument of control and arrangement of thought.²⁷

According to Arkoun, one of the main sources of authoritarianism stems from the inability of the classical theological tradition to build awareness of the historical dimension. Various theological ideas are often considered to arise directly from divine revelation, ignoring the historical background that shaped the process of their formulation.²⁸ In fact, Arkoun asserts that every construction of religious thought is born from the complex dynamics between sacred texts, interpreters' interpretations, and the socio-political situation of the time. If this historical aspect is ignored, the intellectual works of previous scholars will continue to be adopted dogmatically without critical evaluation, even though the social reality of Muslim society has undergone profound transformation.²⁹

In this perspective, Arkoun brings forward the idea of *l'impensé* (the unthinkable), referring to areas of thought that are excluded or have never found a place in official Islamic discourse. The mechanism of theological authoritarianism operates by limiting the space of thought that is allowed, so that fundamental issues around belief, power, and the nature of humanity are taboo for discussion. Dogmatic reasoning reinforces these limitations through the affirmation of the authority of classical scholars as the sole source of legitimacy, where any attempt to explore beyond that line is often labeled as a betrayal of the essence of religion.³⁰

More deeply, Arkoun highlights that dogmatic reasoning not only damages the realm of theology, but also triggers widespread ethical and social consequences. By placing theological authority as absolute, individuals lose their independence of thinking as moral agents. Intellectual freedom, which should be the foundation of ethical responsibility, is eroded. As a result, blind obedience to authority figures is prioritized rather than the pursuit

²⁶ Amin Abdullah, *Philosophy of Kalam in the Contemporary Era...*, pp. 47-48.

²⁷ A. Hidayat, *Contemporary Islamic Thought: A Dialogical Religious Reflection*. (Bandung: CV. Pustaka Setia, 2005), p. 132.

²⁸ Muhamad Rozak and Khoirun Niam, "Mohammed Arkoun's Epistemological Critique of Classical Islamic Thought," *Fikri: Journal of Religious, Social and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2021), p. 102

²⁹ M. Syaiful Rijal, "Dismantling the Dogmatism of Islamic Thought: Mohammed Arkoun's Perspective on the Historicity of Texts," *Reflections: Journal of Islamic Philosophy and Thought*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2022), p.187.

³⁰ Ahmet T. Kuru, *Islam Authoritarianism and Backwardness...*, p. 147.

of essence through common sense, so that theology that ideally fosters moral awareness risks producing excessive resignation and submission.³¹

Arkoun criticizes the classical theological tradition that views dissent as a threat to chaos, not intellectual property. This dogmatic reasoning triggers the delegitimization of alternative views, marginalizing theological, philosophical, and mystical thinkers who deviate from the mainstream, thus narrowing the horizon of Muslims' critical rationality. His criticism is not a rejection of tradition, but an exemption from historical freezing so that intellectual heritage is open to reinterpretation. In the contemporary era, this is relevant for a theology that dialogues with modern socio-political dynamics, giving birth to Islamic thought that is humanist, emancipatory, inclusive, and based on ethical reflection rather than just the legitimacy of power.

4.2 Epistemological Criticism and Deconstruction of Arkoun's Authoritarianism

Muhammad Arkoun developed an epistemological critique that was inherently directed at trying to deconstruct authoritarianism in the tradition of Islamic thought.³² This criticism departs from a fundamental distinction between revelation as a transcendent and absolute divine message, and the human understanding of revelation that is always historical, relative, and influenced by certain socio-political contexts. According to Arkoun, the failure of the classical Islamic theological tradition to maintain this distinction has given rise to a tendency to sacrosanctize the products of human interpretation, so that certain interpretations acquire an authoritative status that is almost immune to criticism.³³

In classical Islamic theological epistemology, the production of religious knowledge depends on the inheritance and strengthening of the authority of previous scholars. Classical interpretation and *ijtihad* are no longer seen as products of contextual thinking, but as absolute truths that must be accepted unconditionally. Arkoun calls this phenomenon the closure of reason, in which the space for critical reflection is constrained by rigid orthodox dogma, so that theological authority remains dominant, while fresh interpretations that are in tune with the dynamics of the contemporary era are rejected.³⁴

Arkoun's deconstruction does not aim to deny revelation or weaken beliefs, but rather to reveal the power dynamics that shape the production of religious knowledge. In this case, he carries the concept of *l'impensé* (the unthinkable), that is, realms of thought that are deliberately excluded from official Islamic discourse because they are considered to threaten theological and social stability. Orthodoxy, for Arkoun, is not only distinguishing right and wrong, but also proactively limiting what is worthy and unworthy of contemplation.³⁵

Through the idea of *l'impensé*, Arkoun reveals that theological authoritarianism operates epistemically by narrowing the horizon of Muslim thought. Historical-critical approaches to sacred texts, philosophy, and non-orthodox interpretations are often

³¹ Hasan Hanafi, *From Faith to Revolution Our Attitude to Old Traditions*. (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2010), pp. 194-195.

³² Abdullah Hanif, "A Deconstructive Review of Khaled M. Abou El-Fadl's Concept of Authority". *Reflections: Journal of Islamic Philosophy and Thought*, Vol. 20. No. 1 (2020), p. 29.

³³ Sheyla Nichlatus Sovia, "Criticism of Islamic Reason: A Study of Mohammed Arkoun's Thought". *Empiricism: Journal of Islamic Thought and Culture*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2021), p. 127.

³⁴ Mizanul Akrom, *Islamic Thought of Critical Madzhab Muhammad Abed Al-Jabiri, Mohammed Arkoun, and Hassan Hanafi...*, p. 79.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

systematically marginalized or legitimized. This practice forms a pyramid of religious knowledge that glorifies one interpretation as the authentic face of Islam, while other variants of thought are thrown into the margins of discourse.³⁶ As a result, theology, which is supposed to be an arena for reflection of common sense to bring people closer to God, has instead turned into a tool of intellectual mastery and an instrument of legitimacy of power. Arkoun sees that the history of Islamic theology is filled with tensions between independent reason and reason that is subject to political-religious authority. By dismantling these layers, he wants to show that much of what has been considered "certain" in religion is actually the result of human debates that were unilaterally decided by the authorities of the past.³⁷

To deconstruct the structure of authoritarianism, Arkoun proposes applied Islamology, which is the study of Islam that adopts contemporary humanities methods such as history, anthropology, linguistics, and sociology. This approach is intended to revive historical consciousness in Islamic studies and uncover layers of meaning that have been buried by theological dogmatism.³⁸ Thus, revelation remains revered as a divine source, while human interpretations of it are positioned as a dynamic process that is vulnerable to criticism and innovation. Arkoun's epistemological critique also has profound ethical implications. Theological authoritarianism not only shackles intellectual freedom, but also undermines the moral independence of the individual as a responsible actor. When truth is imposed via authority, blind obedience defeats critical reflection. On the contrary, Arkoun's deconstruction fosters a reflective religiosity, in which faith is not an attitude of resignation and submission, but a conscious experience based on reason and personal ethics.³⁹

Arkoun's epistemological critique carries far-reaching ethical implications, particularly on the human dimension. Theological authoritarianism not only limits freedom of thought in the intellectual realm, but also destroys the moral autonomy of the individual as a responsible agent. When theological doctrine is imposed hierarchically through authoritative institutions, blind obedience is made a top priority, while self-reflection and personal honesty are suspected of danger.⁴⁰ In contrast, Arkoun's deconstruction approach fosters a mature and introspective faith, with faith as a conscious process that brings together individual revelation, reason, and ethics. This encourages Muslims to explore l'impensé and break down rigid dogmas to build an inclusive and critical society.

Arkoun not only provides analytical tools to unravel the past, but also to form a more vital Islamic thought of the future. He emphasized that religious truth does not belong to a few elite interpreters, because revelation is addressed to all mankind in its historical diversity. Through the restoration of the sovereignty of reason with the deconstruction of orthodoxy, it is hoped that a theological paradigm will emerge that liberates, rather than oppresses, human

³⁶ Mohammed Arkoun, *Dismantling Hegemonic Discourse in Islam and Post Modernism*. (Surabaya: AL-FIKR, 1999), p. 19.

³⁷ Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam...*, p. 106.

³⁸ Tjahyo Adji Prakoso, "Around Religious Anthropology; Views on Muhammad Arkoun's Applicative Islamology". *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2023), p. 159.

³⁹ Muhammad Habib Ahasdiansra, Nurul Wulan Giar Fitria, "Criticism of Islamic Tradition: Muhammad Arkoun's Deconstructive-Hermeneutic Approach". *TASDIQ: Journal of Religious Studies and Da'wah*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2025), p. 5.

⁴⁰ Johan Hendrik Meuleman, *Reading the Qur'an with Mohammed Arkoun...*, pp. 6-7.

beings from intellectual and spiritual shackles, as well as realizing Islam as a blessing for the universe authentically.⁴¹

Thus, Muhammad Arkoun's epistemological critique and deconstruction of authoritarianism aim to liberate Islamic rationality from historical rigidity and orthodoxy supremacy that blocks open dialogue. This intellectual initiative is not to discard tradition, but to position it as an asset of human thought that must be tested and revitalized on an ongoing basis.⁴² In the realm of Islam today, Arkoun's ideas open up opportunities for a theology that is more inclusive, human-oriented, and adaptive to contemporary humanitarian issues.

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research on Muhammad Arkoun's thought, it can be concluded that the critique of the authoritarianism of classical Islamic theology is a crucial step to free Islamic rationality from the snare of "dogmatic closure" (closure of reason). Arkoun, with a multilingual and multicultural background, reveals that this authoritarianism was born from the inability to separate transcendent revelation from historical-contextual human interpretation. The sanctification of the products of the thought of past scholars has transformed theology from a tool of spiritual reflection into a mechanism of intellectual domination and mastery. This research reveals that authoritarianism operates through "dogmatic reason" (*raison dogmatique*), which consciously establishes a firm line between the permissible realm of thought (the thinkable) and the excluded from official discourse as *l'impensé* (the unthinkable). Through his deconstruction, Arkoun shows that orthodoxy is often born from an institutionalization process driven by the political-social forces of the past, then hardens into rigid dogma. With the methodology of applied Islamology, Arkoun paves the way through an interdisciplinary approach based on modern humanities, in order to dismantle the historical layers and re-explore the meaning of revelation buried in dogma in a fresher and more embracing context.

Overall, Arkoun's thinking carries profound ethical implications: the deconstruction of theological authoritarianism aims to humanize Islamic reason and restore moral autonomy to every Muslim, not to undermine the faith. By penetrating *l'impensé*, he invites intellectual courage to face modernity without losing its spiritual roots. Finally, it becomes a call for internal enlightenment for emancipatory theology, a critical-democratic Islamic society, in which religion liberates rather than controls.

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⁴¹ Sholihan, *Mohammad Arkoun & Critique of Islamic Reason Criticizing Orthodoxy to Build Islam in the Future*. (Semarang: Walisongo Press, 2009), p. 119.

⁴² Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam...*, p. 79.

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