

Entity of God in the Quran: A Semiotic Study

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Abstract. This study is not trying to judge God, but doing reinterpretation on values given by humans to the God's entity. This study aims to identify the meaning of the God's entity signs in an ontological relation with humans in Quran. This study uses semiotic approach since it is aimed to study the meaning of signs, thus, the historical Quran is referred as a worth field for semiotic analysis. The result pointed that the majority of verses narration which expressed about God's entity in ontological relation with humans were in the forms of informative sentences. God is the creator of universe called as *al-Khaliq*, while His creations in forms of universe (*macrocosm*) and human (*microcosm*) are called as *al-Makhluq*. Allah signifier has not only had signified for showing His almightiness as the creator of universe, but also due to His love, Allah created humans and breathed souls at the same time. The finding also implies that by knowing God as the creator, humans must be able to manage nature well as the implementation of His entity.

Keywords: Entity · Semiotics · Informative Sentence · Creator · Love

1 Introduction

Human need for the existence of God has appeared since the time human are in soul realm (QS, 7: 172). Therefore, human need religion for the following reasons: first, human want to be the glorious God's creation (QS, 95: 4-6), and second, religion can guide the human mind to stand with the call of conscience. Meanwhile, discourse about God's entity is one of philosophical study objects since classic era, although the study on God's entity is not comprehensive. Every human has divinity experience, or it is named as relational experience. The issue about God's entity really needs either transmitted knowledge (*naqliyah*) or rational knowledge (*aqliyah*) argument [1].

Discourse on God's existence is one of objects of philosophical study since the era of pre-Socrates, even though the study on the God's existence is not comprehensive. Based on the philosopher's idea, the word "God" refers to an eternal and supernatural essence that oversees all of creations. This idea can refer to many similar concepts, for instance the energy which permeates into the entire of universe. By its absolute nature, God is not bound by space and time, so, when people question about the existence of God? This such question will indirectly limit His supremacy [2]. Every human will have divinity experience, or named as the relational experience with God, including the experience of search of God's existence.

Since, God "says", Islam appears as a religion. Islam is not merely a historical fact, but also a God's presence in the form of "*kalam*". All Islamic cultures initiate their pace with a historical fact that the human are greeted by God in the language of God. It is sent by God to greet human and take them to the path of truth. The original position of scripture as a subject to seek Muhammad as the object, switches as a passive document and waits for the readers who will respond and interpret the message. In this context, the role of semiotics is really significant [3].

If semiotics is formulated as a science of signs, so it is clear that the historical (*lughat*) Quran is a valuable field for semiotic analysis. Among the philosophers, such as Jacques Derrida, he refused and not admitted the last marker. According to Derrida, language is a metaphor that does not have any final reference. The meaning arises from metaphor exchange, and the meaning will change when the doer also changes. To put in another word, the meaning is always dynamic and relational; therefore, the reference is unlimited [2]. In line with Derrida, [4] has asserted that the risk of closing a text is that the text will be seen as irrelevant. The determination of final meaning attached on the readers do not have reason to return taking reference and exploring from the text. As the consequence, the original text loses its autonomy, and it becomes the text that depends on the other parties.

Referring from this phenomenon, Quran as the holy book can also be understood and constructed through the development of linguistic and cultural studies, especially the field of semiotic study. This study is not trying to judge God, but doing reinterpretation on values that human draw on the entity of God, particularly in ontological relation between God and human. Even in *tasawwuf* study, the two of His natures, al-Jalal and al-Jamal always color human behavior and character. As stated in existentialist philosophy, that the nature, including human are considered as a manifestation of some of the God's natures, thus, the nature is no longer seen as an independent and profane entity. Human are sacred creatures and contained of divinity features, hence, they need power from outside, the God's power, in order to establish the true ontological relation between The Creator and His creation.

This study is a response to the lack of existing studies, so in line with that, two questions are formulated: (a) How is the narrative form of verses that express about God's entity in the ontological relation with human within the Quran? And (b) What is the meaning of signs of God's entity in the ontological relation with human through semiotic perspective of Ferdinand de Saussure? This study is based on the arguments that (a) not all verses of the Quran telling about the entity of God use the word of Allah, (b) a misunderstanding on the meaning of God's existence term that is sometimes identified with His substance.

2 Method

The design of study was library research by exerting qualitative method. As it has been explained by Bogdan & Taylor that qualitative method as a procedure of study would result descriptive data in forms of written or spoken words from of observable person and behaviour [5]. The step of data collection was documentation method. In this method,

the authors collected the data in form of narration of the Quran verses, specifically the verses of Quran that expressed about God's entity in an ontological relation with human. After the data were collected, the authors examine through data reading, identification, analysis, and then interpretation.

Semiotic theory suggested by de Saussure claimed that language was a sign that has two inseparable components, *signified* and *signifier*. The *signified* itself was defined as a thing that could represent the other things on the basis of social conventions. *Signifier* was a material aspect of language, what was said or heard, and what was written or read. Whereas, sign was a description of mental, thought, concept, or meaning of the language [6]. Semiotics was a model of approach in understanding the meaning of Quran signed which were basically qualitative-interpretative, was a method that focused itself on signs and texts as the objects of study, and how to interpret and understand the code beyond those signs and texts. As it has been explained by Henny [7], semiotic method was always operated on two analysis stages. First, individual sign analysis, for example: types of sign, mechanism or sign structure, also meaning of individual sign. Second, sign analysis as a group of signs that made up text. In the simplest definition, text was a combination of signs.

Inasmuch as, semiotics emphasized the interpretation on language as sign, thus, the role of hermeneutics was really significant to understand the texts of Quran. It was an approach that attempted to interpret a totally classic or foreign text belonged to us who lived in the different era and place also cultural situation. Although, this approach generated pros and contras among Muslim thinkers, the authors believed that hermeneutics was also acknowledged in Islamic tradition, borrowing the term of Abdullah, the name of *al-ta'wil al-ilmi* [8].

3 Findings

Most of verses narration that expressed about God's entity in the ontological relation with human was in the form of *kalam khabari* or informative sentence. The informative sentence was a sentence contained of information, informative, and explanatory. The explanatory must be educative, simulative, and persuasive. In Arabic literature study, this informative sentence was called as the term of *kalam khabari*, the sentence that contained truth or lies within the sentence itself, not on the speaker. Whether the sentence was in accordance with the fact, so the sentence has truth value, otherwise, if the sentence was not in accordance with the fact, the sentence would have lies value [9].

The term of *kalam khabari* (and *kalam insya'i*) appeared during caliphate of *Al-Ma'mun* during conflict between *Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah and Mu'tazilah* relating to whether the Quran was a creature or eternity (*qadim*). *Mu'tazilah* sect has said that if Quran was a revelation, it was a creature, because His verses were not inseparable from words of order, prohibition, and announcement. Those three points were indications that this thing was new (creature). Table 1 shows some verses expressing about the ontological relation between God and human.

This semiotic study did not attempt to value God, but make reinterpretation on values that the human placed on the entity of God. Semiotics was significant because the phenomena of God's appearance in various manifestations, was actually read as a

Table 1. Verses

1.	Al-Fushilat verse 53	سَنُرِيمْ ءَايَاتِنَا فِي الآفَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّى يَتَبَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ أَوَّلَمْ يَكْفِ بِرَبِّكَ أَنَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ
2.	As-Sajadah verse 7-9	الذِيِّي أَحْسَنَ كُلُّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ وَبَدَأَ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانِ مِنْ طِينٍ .ثُمَّ جَعَلَ نَسْلَهُ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِنْ مَاءٍ مَهِينٍ .ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِهِ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالأَفْئِدَةَ قَلِيلًا مَا تَشْكُرُونَ
3.	Al-Hijr verse 15	وَلَقَدٌ خَلَقْنَا الأِنْسَانَ مِنْ صَلصَالٍ مِّنْ حَمَاٍ مَسْنُوْنٍ
4.	Az-Zukhruf verse 9	وَلِنْ سَالَتَهُمْ مَّنْ خَلَقَ السَّمُوٰتِ وَالأَرْضَ لَيَفُوْلَنَّ خَلَقَهُنَّ الْعَزِيْزُ العَلِيْمُ
5.	Ar-Rahman verse 15	وَخَلقَ الجَانَ مِنْ مَّارِجٍ مِّنْ نَارٍ
6.	Ibrahim verse 19	أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ جَلقَ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالأَرْضَ بِالحَقِّ اِنَّ يَشأُ يُذُهِبْكُمْ وَيَأْتِ بِخَلْقٍ جَدِيْدٍ
7.	Al-Fusshilat verse 37	وَمِنْ الْبِنِهِ اللَّيْلُ وَالنَّهَارُ وَالسَّمْسُ وَالقَمَرُ لا تَسَجُدُوًا لِلشَّمْسِ وَلَا لِلْقَمَرِ وَاسْجُدُوًا بِلَّهِ الَّذِيُّ حَلَقَهُنَّ إِنَّ كُنْتُمْ إِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ
8.	Al-Ra`du verse 3	وَهُوَ آلَذِيْ مَدُ الأَرْضِ وَجَعَلَ فِيْهَا رَوَاسِي وَانَّهُرًا وَمِنْ كُلِّ النَّمِرِتِ جَعَلَ فِيْهَا رَوَّحِيْنِ أَمْتَنِّنِ يُغْشِي الَّيْلَ النَّهَارَ انَّ فِيْ ذَلِكَ لَأَيْتٍ لَقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُوْنَ

sign, a phenomenon that found its meaning in the universe. The main point to be the authors' interest was about the meaning. It was defined as a complex idea, including the meaning of God for human. In the sense that there was always a complex plurality, constellation, succession, as well as co-existence that built an interpretation of meaning which was basically an art. Furthermore, no occurrence, phenomena, words, or thought that did not have various meanings. It did not mean to remove the notion of essence, but rather on rereading the notion until it has a new substantial meaning. To say the truth, not all meanings have same value. Something has as much meaning as its capacity to control it.

In the opinion of de Saussure, semiotics was a field of science that identified the role of sign as a part of social life. It referred that both sign system and social system were interrelated. Relating to this matter, Saussure has suggested two models of language analysis, language analysis as a system (langue), and language as it was used in real by individual within social communication. In the framework of langue, Saussure has defined that the sign as an inseparable unit from two fields, signed and signifier. The relation between signed and signifier based on this convention was called as significance. Hence, when one of aspect was called, the other aspects would involve in the reference and designation. This semiotic concept was named as a sign by de Saussure. The signed was a concept or meaning of sound sign, while signifier was a sound formed from related language phenomena.

4 Discussion

4.1 God's Entity: A Philosophical Study

According to the philosophy of process that became a paradigm of Alfred North Whitehead, God refers a basic principle that became a purpose of several potentials for the formation of new actual entities in concretion events [10]. God is also explained as an original embodiment or primordial actualization of creativity [11]. The motivation for the formation of new actual entity in this universe happened by God. Based on the process philosophy, [12] has positioned the actual entity as a fundamental concept that initiated reality. Whitehead has also mentioned that such actual entity was referred to God. God is a basic goal and purpose that encouraged the formation of those new actual entities.

Whitehead has distinguished two aspects of God: starting aspect and end aspect. In the starting aspect, God is a primordial nature of God. In this aspect, God initially considers many possibilities that may be realized in the universe. In the end aspect, God is known as a consequent nature of God. In this aspect, God will accommodate all kinds of realization of many actual entities along with their peculiarities.

In Islamic philosophy, God cannot be defined, since it is not identified by either definition of logical definition (*had*) and mere description (*rasm*). Also, it does not have quiddity (*mahiyah*), God cannot be seen or figured out. In Islam, God is one and none is worthy of worship but Him. He is the Proprietor of all heaven and earth, the Creator of human and gives them mind, and He is the Creator of all existences and creatures. He neither begets nor begotten, and He does not need and no God but Him (QS. Al-Ikhlas: 3-5).

In short, God is an absolute single entity, which is different from human as His creatures that occupy space and travel the relativity of time. God is definitely free from the relativity of time and space. Allah is God that will never be reached out by the relativity of reason. Only a strong and good faith will believe to His existence.

4.2 Meaning of the Sign of God's Entity and Semiotic Study of Ferdinand de Saussure

Nietzche has criticized human knowledge of God which is actually a veiled reduction of the Almighty God. Actually, human will never be able to talk about God, because the Almighty God is impossible for human reason to understand. God is not like definitions in other religions. The Almighty God must continue to be delayed in His presence, manifestation, and understanding, so human will always try to find out. God is impossible to be defined by human, because the definition of God will make the real definition of Almighty God is reduced or ended [13].

God is an essence that exists and unites in human life. He can hear and grant. He can convey life messages. God is existed in this universe with human, in some mythologies which reveal the same pattern, although the presence is in different place and time. God is present in all kind of events that seem coincidental in human life, but if it is observed, God leads human into certain things that the human really wants. God is present in sincerity of life. Although, human is the one who separated themselves from God by supposing that the occurrences in their life as God's work and will is only a coincidence. Human only put prayer as a mere request, not union with God [13].

In the paradigm of mysticism, God is totally a fundamental and central concept, it is said that in mysticism, there are attempts to know God and approach Him (*ittihad*) [14]. Essentially, the argumentative rational study about God did not really get much attention, rather emphasizing on the two-way relation between God and human, a single relation has exceeded the other concepts based on love. The true knowledge of God is not a theoretical and inferential knowledge, but knowledge (ma'rifah) and practical deed (*amaliyah*), and the purpose is spiritual vision (syuhud), illumination (*isyraq*), disclosure (*hijab*), self and lust denial, and direct identification (*hudhuri*) of God, and the approach to Him and disappear (*ma'dum*) in His existence [14].

According to semiotics, the meaning of sign of God's entity in the ontological relation with human was based on some verses above, sometimes God mentions His name by one of *Asmaul Husna* (virtuous names, such as *al-Aziz*, *al-Khabir*), by the name of Allah, third person pronoun, first person pronoun, and many other names have their own function and benefit in the perspective of meaning, as shown in Table 2.

By emphasizing on the language as langue (what we understand as language, like Arabic language) and parole (all speeches that use language), in this context is God. This statement explained that God is the Creator of universe, so He is called as "*al-Khaliq*", while His creatures in form of universe (macrocosm) and human (microcosm) are called as "*al-Makhluq*". The term of *khaliq* refers to an entity, God. Meanwhile, *makhluq* refers to all realities except Him [15, 16]. In the ontological relation, God is a superior figure, the Almighty and Supreme Ruler of the universe. Whereas, human is inferior figure that will always need God's grace. Therefore, verse in the Quran says that human is a part of God, who got the spirit of Him (QS. Shad (38): 72).

In tasawwuf study, there was another reason that these two terms "al-Khaliq" and "al-Makhluq" came up. Due to limited majesty, holiness, beauty, greatness, perfection, and power of God which is indeed impossible for human who have a low dignity to get known and interacted with the use of God's language. Because of His greatness, none can be known by human, so God introduce Himself by creating human (as His creature/al-Makhluq). As it has been explained by [17] in his tafsir book, Ruh al-Ma'ani fi Tafsir al-Quran al-Adzim wa al-Sab' al-Matsani, while he was interpreting Surah Al-Dzariyat verse 56: "And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me", it means them to recognize Me. Based on this interpretation, He has then quoted one *hadits qudsi*, "I am the hidden treasury, I long to be known, so I create creatures (universe and human), so they can acknowledge Me". Since, to know God, human cannot use the language of God, because He lowers His dignity, so that His language can be understood by human. In theological context, Allah communicates with human through His existence in forms of universe and other creatures.

The universe, both real and occult nature, is the mirror of God's infinite power, also the human; they are the mirror of God's power. In *hadits qudsi*, "whoever knows himself,

Surah	Signified	Signifier	Function
Fushilat: 53	Nahnu (first person plural).	We, to glorify Him.	Involvement, role, and contribution of human.
as-Sajadah: verse 7–9	Alladzi (conjunction) and dlamir pronoun stored in the word of ahsana, khalaqa, bada'a, ja'ala, sawwa, nafakha, and ja'ala in form of pronoun huwa (third person pronoun).	He Who and He that is stored in seven perfect verbs such as ahsana, khalaqa, bada'a, ja'ala, sawwa, nafakha, and ja'ala.	The word of Allah indicated by Alladzi needs explanation (shilah), in the form of the following perfect verb, He Who Creates the best creatures, initiate creation, give offspring, perfect the creation, and make sense organs in creatures. Therefore, the existence of God is real.
al-Hijr: 5	Nahnu (first person plural).	We, to glorify Him.	Involvement, role, and contribution of human
az-Zukhruf: 9	Al-Aziz-al-Alim (Asmaul Husna).	Almighty and Omniscient	A name other than Allah which is aimed to be introduced to the pagan Arab community, since they always involve idols in their everyday life.
ar-Rahman; 15	Pronoun stored in the word of khalaqa is huwa (third person pronoun)	Third person pronoun, He which is stored in perfect verb of khalaqa.	Emphasizing that Allah Who Creates Spirit is the same as creating human, only different from the material of original creation.
Ibrahim; 19	Allah (dzahir pronoun).	The popular name in Arabic people.	God who must be worshiped is Allah, not the god made by human, a long time ago, the community in the era of Prophet Ibrahim worship idols or statues.
al-Fushilat: 37	Allah (dzahir pronoun) and dlamir pronoun stored in the word of khalaqa, is pronoun huwa (third person pronoun).	The name of Allah and third person pronoun, He which is stored in the perfect verb of khalaqa.	Showing that the One who really creates sun, moon, and time changes is Allah, then, worship Him, not the creation of His creatures. Hence, the entity of God is real and visible on the earth.

(continued)

Surah	Signified	Signifier	Function
al-Ra'du: 3	Huwa (dlamir munfashil pronoun, third person pronoun), dzamir pronoun of huwa in the verbs of madda and ja'ala.	He, it appears in the beginning sentence, and the third person pronoun, He, stored in the perfect verbs of madda and ja'ala.	The word of Allah which is shown in the words of Huwa and Alladzi, is explained by the next perfect verbs, madda and ja'ala, He is the One Who create this earth and everything in it, and made it in pair. Thus, the entity of God is really witnessed by human.

Table 2. (continued)

indeed he will know his God". In the body of human, there are some inner elements like soul, reason, *qalb*, and *nafs*. This soul is different from physical element or other inner elements, because it is derived directly from God,"... and I have breathed into him of My Spirit ..." (QS. Al-Hijr (15): 29). Once the spirit is in a harmony, the human will achieve perfection, beauty, truth, peace, and serenity. These are the goals of all journeys in human life in order to know their god.

Semiotics is a metaphorical language transfer into many non-linguistic phenomena. So, the existence of this universe is created, which provides understanding, because of someone created all of this, Allah as al-Khaliq. The name of Allah is the most popular one in Arabic language, which refers to God as in Jews and Christians. This has been confirmed in the Quran, God has a lot of virtuous and beautiful names (QS. Al-A'raf: 180, QS. Thaha: 8). Based on that *hadits qudsi*, indeed the signified of Allah does not only have a sign that shows His supremacy as the creator of universe alone, but also because of Allah's love and grace, so Allah creates human by breathing His Spirit. Without Allah creating human, all of His supremacy will always be enclosed and cannot be seen. Through His grace, Allah can introduce Himself to human, and human can know and recognize His supremacy. This reciprocal relation is then termed as an ontological relation, which both need each other, without degrading His oneness.

This comprehension was not different from theory of unity of being (*wahdatul wujud*) by Ibn Arabi that how the whole nature of the cosmos is the emitter of various names and attributes of God, actually there is only one form, one reality, and all entities are only reflections of names and attributes of God [18]. The creation of universe and everything in it (cosmos) in Ibn Arabi's theory is a theophany concept (*tajalli*) of God's existence in empirical nature. The concept of *tajalli* is the pillar of Ibn Arabi's philosophy on unity of being (*wahdatul wujud*), because *tajalli* is interpreted as creation, the way in which many arise from one. God creates cosmos, so He is able to see Himself and show Himself. He knows Himself and introduces Himself through the existence of cosmos [19]. Ibn Arabi has used metaphorical terms a lot in describing the relation of God and cosmos, one of them is about reflection. This cosmos is a reflection of God to see Himself. The God's wish to see Himself is the goal of cosmos creation. Cosmos is a manifestation instrument of *tajalli*, the names and attributes of God [20].

Citing from [21], based on the Jewish holy book, the existence of God is recognized through the nature of His creation which depicts all of His glory, especially through human, the creature that is told as His image. In Christian, the power and divinity of Allah is seen from the thoughts of His creation since this world creation. Meanwhile in Islam, natural objects and cosmos are seen as the provision of Almighty and All-knowing God (QS. 6: 96) as the witness of God's power (QS. 30: 22–24).

Muhammad Husein Nashr has explained Suhawardi's perspective on God, which stated the super sacred emanation form is found in the conception of creatures by God, as the first manifestation of Him in the form of light essential. Mulla Shadra has also explained that no concepts of imagery, equation, and resistance for Him, no definition for Him, and no explanation that can define Him. In fact, He is the explanation for everything. No one knows more than Him, and no witness for Him. In fact, He is the witness of everything [22].

Quran has signed that the existence of Allah in every human is very clear, and that is the human nature since they were created. The word of Allah is the name of an absolute existence, worthy of worship, the Creator, the Raiser, and the Ruler of all universes. He is the Almighty God, who is worshipped and followed by all His orders. Quran does not introduce God in a shaped and limited material, mere ideas that have no reality. But, Quran introduces Him in an eternal reality that can be accepted by human reason and ratio, that God is really existed, the existence is very clear, and human can feel His existence. Shihab has also cited from Yanasir Ali's opinion that Quran as God's revelation has introduced God in its unique way. It does not literally prove the God, but show how to know God through His universe as a manifestation of His supremacy and love [22].

5 Conclusion and Suggestion

Most of verses narration in Quran which told about the entity of God in an ontological relation with human was formed in informative sentence (*kalam khabari*). Informative sentence was a sentence that contained of information, informative, explanatory and educative, stimulating, and persuasive. In Arabic literature study, this informative sentence was named as *kalam khabari*, the sentence that contained of truth or lies within that sentence itself, not on the speaker. If the sentence was in accordance with the reality, the sentence has truth value, vice versa, if the sentence was not in accordance with the reality, the sentence has lies value.

According to semiotics, the meaning of sign of God's entity in the ontological relation with human was based on some verses, sometimes God calls Himself as one of *Asmaul Husna* names (99 virtuous names, such as al-Aziz al-Khabir), with the word of Allah, the third person pronoun, first person pronoun, and the other which have their own function and value in meaning interpretation. By emphasizing on the language as langue (what we understood as language, like Arabic language) and parole (all speeches that used language), this matter was referred to God. This statement also clarified that Allah is the Creator of universe, so He is named as "*al-Khaliq*", while His creatures in form of universe (macrocosm) and human (microcosm) are called as "*al-Makhluq*". It indicated that Allah does not only have a sign to show His supremacy as the Creator alone,

but also due to His love and grace, Allah creates human and breathes His spirit into them. Without God creating human, His power and omnipotence are always covered and unseen. Moreover, through His love, Allah can introduce Himself to human, and human can recognize His omnipotence. This reciprocal relation was them termed as an ontological relation, which both of God and creature needed for each other, without humiliating His Almightiness.

To complement the result of this study, other researchers need to conduct further studies from the other disciplines, such as sociolinguistics, semantics, pragmatics, and many other disciplines, so those findings will enrich the literature of Islamic science that confirm about the entity of God in this universe to be known and believed comprehensively.

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