

Semiotic study of AL Rahman Verse Based on signifying system and semiotic theories

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Abstract

In many cultures esp. in the Islamic and Iranian culture, it might be said that scriptures, "here means the Holy Quran" are the "text of texts," the first and ultimate text, the model for all books and the font of all images of literary inspiration. "Scriptures" are the model for the organization of written words to bear numerous meanings; more than a mere narrative, the story of "scriptures" is a narrative whose full nature is regarded as diminished and confounded by the limits of human memory and speech. It is the written word elevated into a service that eliminates the lines between medium and message, only to reimpose these lines in less sacred contexts. The importance of semiotic, its effects and analysis in the modern language, literature and linguistic studies is not deniable and experts of teaching, linguists and critics of literature all somehow use semiotics in their works. This paper tries to use semiotic and sign studying for analyzing of AL Rahman Verse (Bride Of Quran) from Holy Quran and indicating to the new concepts based on signifying system and semiotic theories to show the greatness of the layers of meanings and concepts in the Holy Quran and one of its best verses (AL Rahman). Semiotics theories and different theorists' ideas such as Roland Barthes', Umberto Eco's, Sebeok's, and Lotman's have been discussed and applied on the some part of Al Rahman verse.

Keywords: Semiotics, Signifying system, Al Rahman, sign studying.

Introduction

AL Rahman Verse

به نام خداوند رحمتگر مهربان (خدای رحمان)	بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ (۱)
The Most Gracious (Allah)!	
(قرآن را یاد داد)	عَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ (۲)
(He has taught (you mankind) the Qur'an (by His Mercy).	
(انسان را آفرید)	خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ (۳)
He created man.	
(به او بیان آموخت)	عَلَّمَهُ الْبَيَانَ (۴)
He taught him eloquent speech.	
(خورشید و ماه بر حسابی [روان] اند)	الشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ بِحُسْبَانٍ (۵)
The sun and the moon run on their fixed courses (exactly) calculated with measured out stages for each (for reckoning).	
(و بوته و درخت چهره سایانند)	وَالنَّجْمُ وَالشَّجَرُ يَسْجُدَانِ (۶)
(And the herbs (or stars) and the trees both prostrate themselves (to Allah).	
(و آسمان را برافراشت و ترازو را گذاشت)	وَالسَّمَاءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ الْمِيزَانَ (۷)
(And the heaven: He has raised it high, and He has set up the Balance.	
(تا مبادا از اندازه درگذرید)	أَلَّا تَطْغَوْا فِي الْمِيزَانِ (۸)
In order that you may not transgress (due) balance	
(و وزن را به انصاف برپا دارید و در سنجش مواهید)	وَأَقِيمُوا الْوَزْنَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا تُخْسِرُوا الْمِيزَانَ (۹)
And observe the weight with equity and do not make the balance deficient.	
(و زمین را برای مردم نهاد)	وَالْأَرْضَ وَضَعَهَا لِلْأَنَامِ (۱۰)

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And the earth: He has put down (laid) for the creatures.

First, what do we mean by “scriptures” generally speaking and specifically in the case of Islam? If we classify “scriptures” under the wider rubric of cultural artifacts that are textual in nature, including originally oral utterances that became inscribed into written form, we may say that “scriptures” are a subcategory of textual artifacts that are highly saturated with power and meaning. They are texts (oral and written) that are imbued with sacred authority such that they function as templates and charters of a society’s cultural norms. God, a supernatural power, divine being, or ancestral spirit is usually the presumed author or originator of texts called “scriptures.” This claim to ultimacy is both self-referential (staked out within “scriptures”) and socially sanctioned (accorded to “scriptures” by religious specialists and believers). The avowals of absolute authority that are found in “scriptures” are thus taken to be self-evident and axiomatic by those within a scripture’s charismatic field of influence. Islamic scholars have been involved in all of the theoretical issues raised across the academy by the explorations of critical theory. Going back further, the history of the study and research on signs and semiotic on the Holy Scriptures suggests that the Holy Quran study was at the forefront of the development of logical and historical methods of scholarly interpretation. While historical and scientific studies undertaken by the Holy Quran studies surely challenged earlier understandings of faith in the holy book, comparison does something else. Comparison challenges uniqueness; it subsumes this book of books within a crowded category as one among many. Semiotics can be applied to film, theater and a host of other areas that involve or are concerned with communication and conveying of information. Some semioticians suggest that everything can be analyzed semiotically; they see semiotics as the king of the interpretive sciences, the key that unlocks the meanings of all things. Any literature can be a medium for analyzing and interpreting the conveyed and represented signs, symbols and traditions that a writer according to his situation displays and they can be considered as a mirror for his inner mode and real condition that he lives/ed. Any sciences that can show these social, religious, and cultural connections and relations is valuable to be considered by a reader and critic who tries to have deep surgery on social, religious, sexual (gender based relations) and cultural elements that are related with each other for displaying reality of situations and settings that have been presented in post/modern literary texts and they can be analyzed by using combination of semiotics with culture, history and feminism.

The semiotic theory allows to explain structural differences between genres as well as historical developments on the basis of underlying semiotic structures. Thus differences on the level of the represented semiosis account for the basic genres (romance, comedy, tragedy, irony – cf. Frye 1957) and differences in the relation between first and second order semiosis account for differences in the literary form (lyrical, dramatic, epic). In the case of literature, the approach allows to schematize three groups of literary devices:

1. Literature as mimetic representation of perception – sound and imagery (prototypes), the perspective of consciousness
2. Literature as mimetic representation of linguistic and conceptual thought – literature as representation of communication, of linguistic consciousness (dialogism), of collective beliefs (wisdom), of oral and written; new forms in post-modern visual or concrete culture; the problem of genre(s)
3. Literature as mimetic representation of thought – literature as representation of a theoretical culture (cf. Kundera on the history of the novel, among so many others), of individualism and of consciousness in modernist literature in the novel, and tragedy.

Semiosis involves the use of signs. Signs are nothing but the unchanging memories which humans practice to identify the shifting certainty they interact with. Semiotic process has been illustrated three basic types of signs:

1. One-place signs: (a friend’s thought, for instance –what he could be doing) are signs that refer to reality by representing that reality in its concreteness. They consist of just one element (which is why they are called ‘one-place’): the image of the reality referred to.

2. Two-place signs or symbols: the symbols on mediaeval and renaissance paintings) are signs that refer to reality in terms of a concept. They include of two elements: a signifier and a signified. As the signifier is always an image, the two-place sign cumulatively integrates the one-place sign.

3. Three-place signs consist of three elements: an image or signifier (the drawing of a circle), an abstract concept (the concept circle as you find it explained in an encyclopedia, which we call the 'meaning'), and, thirdly, the structure of the object the sign mentions to them.

Moriarty (1995) explains how semiotics is 'a philosophical approach that seeks to interpret visual messages in terms of their signs and patterns of symbolism'. Semiotics, according to Kress (2003:41) is the 'science of the sign, a fusion of form/signifier and meaning/signified'. Meanwhile, Irvine (2005) reports that:

All symbolic systems in a culture function like a second order language or text'. If we think about cultural signs of all kinds as a second-order language semiotic, a grammar of meaning, a repertoire of codes, acquired by members of a culture in ways similar to, but distinct from, internalizing the grammar of one's own native language.

Heusden (2010) states:

Where does the signs come from if it is not simply the results of habit formation? Perception becomes semiotic when the cognitive process involved is not only a process of perceiving but also a process of signifying (or signification). Objects in semiotics are not only perceived but also signified which means that they are recognized as an instance or token of a more stable representation or type. The semiotic process is a process of dealing with the difference between more or less stable types (the signs) on one side and ever-changing tokens (the occurrence or reality) on the other.(158)

All forms of signifying system in relationship to sacred texts are modes of engagement with the core content of a faith. If white slave masters contended that the Bible justified racial slavery, black slaves often reshaped that message. The slaves maintained the Bible as scripture; the symbols slaves create were compatible with Signifying system, as a strategy used by subalterns to resist subordination by dominant populations, is well used by dominant populations, too; signifying as a method entailing riffing and scoring to create alternative meanings is also well used by subalterns to create self-hating and self-mutilating meanings. Signifying is pathos. Signifying allows self-authorship by those enslaved to the core content of texts, sacred or otherwise.

Heusden (2013) states that:

The semiotic process is a process dealing with the difference between more or less stable types on one side and ever changing tokens (the occurrences or "reality") on the other. As humans we have only a limited number of semiotic strategies at our disposal: from simple negotiation of the difference, via the imaginative transformation of the available schemata, to the use of abstract concepts and structures. By discarding signification which is not restricted to perception we are in danger of losing our humanity: "And life is reckoned as nothing. Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife and the fear of war." A certain degree of unfamiliarity about semiotic process assures us that reality we live in does not coincide with our representations of it (reality) from our representations (signs). Semiotic cognition means dealing with difference. The greater difference, the harder the semiotic work. (158-161)

The cultures growing out of the three types of semiosis briefly sketched here have emerged gradually in the course of the evolution of human representation. Merlin Donald (2014) distinguished four stages in the development of the modern human mind:

The episodic (characterizing the primate mind, tied to concrete situations, capable of learning, but not of imagining).

The mimetic (which is as concrete as the episodic mind, but capable of representing an event independently of its real occurrence, through imitation or mimesis);

The mythical (arising with the emergence of (oral) linguistic skills, underlying the ability to conceptualize and narrate);

The theoretical (characterized by external symbolic storage, the emergence of drawing, the written alphabet, schemes and diagrams, and abstract theoretical thinking).

Semiotics

It is the shared cultural 'space' in which the production of meaning through language – that is, representation – takes place". Semiotics is thus concerned with the very basis of existence of man both as an animal being, and as a typically human being, as distinguished from other living beings, with its uniquely eminent capacity of creating a world of significances of his own called 'culture'.

Lotman's theory is usually described as an evolution from structuralism to cultural semiotics, where the later period is believed to be a sort of refutation of the earlier approach.

What is culture in terms of communication?

- What is the place of art and other modeling systems in culture?
- What are the basic elements of culture?

Signifying system practices simply refers to how, rather than what, meaning is produced and, finally, the social convention which links signs with meanings is called a code (Potts 1996, 21). The cross is coded in Christian cultures.

A central part of Eco's work is meant to "disentangle" the concept of sign "from its trivial identification with the idea of coded equivalence and identity" and restore the centrality of interpretation to what he calls the semiotic process. Eco demonstrates that the essential Eco emphasizes that something is a sign or symbol "only inasmuch as it does not stand for itself.

After Propp, the semiotician who most influenced the study of narrative was Algirdas Julien Greimas (1917-1992). Greimas expanded upon Propp's ideas, claiming that the stories of different cultures were devised with virtually the same types of characters, motifs, themes, settings, etc., which he called actants. The basic structure of narrative consists of:

A subject (the hero of the plot)

Who desires an object (a sought-after-person, a magic sword, etc.)

And who encounters an opponent (a villain, a false hero, a trial situation, etc.)

And then finds a helper (a donor)

Who then gets an object from a sender (a dispatcher)

And gives it to a receiver

And the action unfolds accordingly

Until a resolution manifests or does not manifest itself, leading to different kinds of endings. Donald's central thesis across these works is that the human capacity for symbolic thought arises not from the evolution of a language-specific mental module, but out of evolutionary changes to the prefrontal cortex affecting the executive function of the primate brain. In Donald's account, these changes amounted to the evolution of a completely novel cognitive strategy: a symbiosis between brain and culture. It has been distinguished three basic forms of semiosis: Mimetic (image), conceptual (symbol) and theoretical

(structure). It has been argued that these three forms of semiosis are cumulative: the structure presupposes the symbol, the symbol presupposes the image. All semiosis rests, upon concrete – or perceptual – representations.

Origins of the Modern Mind proposes a three-stage development of human symbolic capacity through culture:

Mimetic culture: The watershed adaptation allowing humans to function as symbolic and cultural beings was a revolutionary improvement in motor control, the "mimetic skill" required to rehearse and refine the body's movements in a voluntary and systematic way, to remember those rehearsals, and to reproduce them on command.

Mythic cultures arose as a result of the acquisition of speech and the invention of symbols. Mimetic representation serves as a preadaptation to this development.

Technology-supported culture: Finally, the cognitive ecology dominated by ephemeral face-to-face communication has changed for most of us as a result of the external memory-store that reading and writing permit.

Marcel Danesi(2004) believes that The human species is consumed by a need to unravel the reason for its existence on this planet. This has led it to create “signs” and “sign systems,” such as languages, myths, art forms, sciences.

Music and Sound Effects

Music and sound effects are used to generate certain responses in audiences esp. rhythm and meter that there are in the Holy Quran’s text and verses that make its text fluent and charming and based on these auditorial elements the Muslims hold international reciting and reading of the Holy Quran’s verses, based, in large part, on culturally acknowledged associations between given sounds and certain emotions. A musical phrase or a sound, is a signifier, and the emotion it generates is the signified; as is true for all signs, the relation between the signifier and signified is arbitrary and based on convention.

Let us consider some ways in which we can (and do) lie or, to be kinder, mislead others with signs:

Area Misleading Signs

Wigs	Bald persons or persons with different hair color
Elevator shoes	Short persons made taller
Dyed hair	Brunettes become blondes, blondes become redheads,
Falsies	Women with small breasts seem to have big ones
Impostors	Persons pretend to be doctors, or lawyers

Art, And Literature

"Semiotics and Social Semiotics differ in that the latter in particular explores the correspondence and interconnection between social practices and discourse" (Meinhof 2004: 263, cited in Yates & Yates). Meinhof believes that social semiotics take the old semiotic path from sender to message to receiver and expands it into multidimensional interactive bodies of relations. By understanding a sign can exist coincidentally when someone has interpreted something as sign, even though it was not purposely meant or communicated to him. Peirce’s ideology of sign encompasses everything whether it is created by human or not as long as it can be grasped and acknowledged by their minds (Eco, 1991).

Culture includes the arts, religion and ideology, the news, historiography and philosophy. (Van Heusden 2009). This is culture-as-awareness or ‘cultural awareness’. In European culture, cultural awareness is, or should be guided by the cultural — rational — tenets of the culture it reflects upon. Images and meanings are not entwined as a dictionary links words with their signified; while images are linked with particular meanings, allegories or images, the meaning doesn’t require a distinctly or distinct visual language. Culture without writing with its orientation towards omens, fortunetelling and oracles makes the choice of behavior something impersonal. So the ideal person will be the one who is able to understand and correctly interpret predictions, does not waver in fulfilling them, and who acts openly without concealing his or her intentions.

Analyzing

Focus upon the phenomenology of “scriptures” has not been altogether ignored in scholarship. The study of “scriptures” is and ought to be the study of textures, of gestures and power relations. The association of divinatory and textual systems of meaning is not new. As Jonathan Z. Smith argues, both textual canons and divinatory lists require hermeneutical traditions, personnel, and sensitivity to a community’s needs. What social-cultural phenomena—practices, performances, ideologies—are named in connection with the invention and uses of “scriptures”?

The three terminologies, semiotic, communication and culture have been integrated by Umberto Eco when he claimed that “to communicate is to use the entire world as a semiotic apparatus. I believe that culture is that, and nothing else” (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993, p. 17).

We can differentiate three chief categories: a first category in which it can be found all the devices that make utilize of the materiality of the signs (in literature these are acoustic and visual qualities of language), a next category that is based on the doubling of the conceptual (figurative language, the deviation from linguistic codes, and allegory), and a third category that is based on the doubling of ‘worlds’ (in literature this category would contain emplotment, fiction, ‘heteroglossia’).

A semiotic and signifying system were seen as codes, or rather as systems of rules, how could there be communication processes in which it was difficult to identify codes and layers of meanings and concepts that have been used in the Holy Scriptures or where there seemed to be a conflict between different codes? As the religious semiological view of the world: “The semiological view of the universe conceives of physical phenomena (and historical and personal events) as significant indexes that are to be interpreted and decoded as speech and writing. The religion rejects the rigid ‘nature/history’ opposition. . . . Divine providence is to creation.

Semiotics is interested in the human activity of generating meaning. Characteristic of today's semiotics is its focus on that aspect of semiosis in which man is actively involved in his capacity of 'homo significans,' and signifying system that is, of a being whose distinguished propensity it is to evaluate and assign significances and values to things and phenomena, thus creating his own environmental world filled with all kinds of significances. The semiotic structure of Al Rahman verse in the Holy Quran can be determined by showing where and how the tension is created, and with which materials (sounds, meter, characters, situations, perspectives, motifs, etc..., the range of course covers all the sacred materials).

Claudia Mitchell-Kernan states, “Signifying system . . . refers to a way of encoding messages or meaning which involves an element of indirection. This kind of signifying might be best viewed as an alternative message form, selected for its artistic value, and may occur implanted in a variety of discourse esp. in Al Rahman verse in the Holy Quran .” Interpreting of the Holy Scriptures needs decoding of the coded concepts and meanings that are very sacred for their followers. As Kernan indicates this kind of criticism, interpreting and decoding needs a language as medium is particularly suited to conceptual semiosis. The nature of signifying system come into relief when we look at phenomena like ideas of the teaching holy concepts such as praying, monotheism, the idea of personal salvation, redemption through the intervention of a personal savior, individual soul redemption, God as a creator, and resurrection and doomsday consisting of individual souls, praying, sacrificing, fasting and Man’s creation in the Holy Quran.

As many of the critics of semiotics believe and claim that most of the Holy Scriptures are artistic works due to their meter, rhythm, music and the contexts that they have been composed in that.

The structure, rhythm and meter of 10 lines of the Al Rahman verse:

1. (Allah) Most Gracious: as the first verse shows and indicates to the capacity that a creator can have. Peirce claimed that critics have to supply part of the meanings of signs. He wrote that a sign “is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity” (1977, p. 24). Understanding and analyzing of language as a signifying system in the Al Rahman verse based on the social, religious and universal context can be one of the suitable methods and mediums for a better global and individual communication is the main factor for better communication.
2. It is He Who has taught the Quran. The Revelation comes from Allah Most Gracious, and it is one of the greatest Signs of His grace and favor. He is the source of all light, and His light is diffused throughout the universe. Culture includes lived culture, recorded culture and traditional culture. The creation of culture requires ‘communication and the making of institutions’ (p. 126) which this verse indicate to it by mentioning to God’s teaching (everything esp. here symbolically the Holy Quran) to man. Kress (2010: 59) states that in a social-semiotic multimodal account of meaning, all signs in all modes are meaningful. A social-semiotic theory tends to general principles of representation: to modes, means and arrangements. Social semiotics is able to say something about the function of the modes (writing, image, color and facial expression) in the multimodal text; about the relation of these modes to each other; and about the main entities.
3. He created man. The concept and meaning of creator is somebody who can make artistically everything and gives soul and power to it. Since the man as whole of the universe is one of the most complex creation, the creator can be considered as sign and symbol of kindness, power, domination and source of life.
4. He taught him eloquent speech. The creator wanted the Man to have knowledge, science and thought for this man needs speech and speaking for communication and exchanging of his ideas, information and emotions. Stuart Hall (1997) explains, language is a representational system. This means that, “We use signs and symbols – whether they are sounds, written words, musical notes, even objects – to stand for or represent to other people our concepts, ideas and feelings” via representation, meaning is able to be produced and circulated in a culture and even across cultures. Hall sums up the nature of language and the roles of communicators in this social practice: “Language is the property of neither the sender nor the receiver of meanings. Language is not restricted to oral or written language but exists in different modes. A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable. It would be part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology. It is called semiology (from Greek semeion “sign”).

For Raymond Williams culture is a signifying system, consisting of practices through which ‘a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored’ (Williams, 1981a: 13). This means that wherever there is culture, there is communication. When we communicate, we constitute culture. We need a theory of communication in order to have some idea of how communication relates to community, how it relates to society, what kind of communication systems we now have, what they tell us about our society, and what we can see as reasonable directions for the future.
5. The sun and the moon run on their fixed courses (exactly) calculated with measured out stages for each (for reckoning). When something has a system and based on a discipline it shows that its maker, builder, and its God has a great wisdom and here this signs proves the gods great and deep wisdom for creation of the universe and other galaxies.
6. And the herbs (or stars) and the trees both prostrate themselves (to Allah). 7. And the heaven: He has raised it high, and He has set up the Balance.

Capacity to understand clearly the relation of things and to explain them. Allah has given this to man, and besides this revelation in man's own heart, has aided him with revelation in nature and revelation through prophets and messengers.

It can be studied as a main base and source of cultural, environmental (5-6, indicating to trees, herbs, sun, stars and moon) social (3, 8, 9, He has taught him speech (and intelligence). Bayan: intelligent speech: power of expression) and even religious signs, symbols and semiotics which may present new neutral, natural or so effective concepts that may change the thoughts and meanings in the society. The "balance of justice" in this verse is connected with "the Balance" in the next two verses, that men may act justly to each other and observe due balance in all their actions, following the golden mean and not transgressing due bounds in anything. But the Balance is also connected figuratively with the heavens above in three symbols: (1) Justice is a heavenly virtue; (2) the heavens themselves are sustained by mathematical balance; and (3) the constellation Libra (the Balance) is entered by the sun at the middle of the zodiacal year.

10. It is He Who has spread out the earth for (His) creatures: How can Allah's favors be counted? Look at the earth alone. Life and the conditions here are mutually balanced for Allah's creatures. The vegetable world produces fruit of various kinds and corn or grain of various kinds for human food. The grain harvest yields with it fodder for animals in the shape of leaves and straw, as well as food for men in the shape of grain. The plants not only supply food but sweet-smelling herbs and flowers. Rayhan is the sweet basil, but is here used in the generic sense, for agreeable produce in the vegetable world, to match the useful produce already mentioned.

The English, Persian literature and Holy Scriptures are full of different signs, symbols, connotations and social, political elements and features that caused so many interpretations from the different angles and point of views. These texts deal with culture, mythology, gender, politics, social ritual, discriminations and so many other problems and solutions. Different sects and religions, superstitious, coding of behaviors and decoding of used mediums for more communications in signifying systems are all going to be studied and clarified based on the different scientists, semioticians, linguists and literary critics and writers such as Eco, Lotman, Barths, and Heusden. The meaning, concepts and definitions of semiotic, signifying systems, signs, cods and culture here are presented that can clarify the framework of the projects that should be followed.

Conclusion and Discussion

The Holy Quran has been an inexhaustible font of inspiration to Muslims over the centuries. It has stimulated continuing reflection and action in the realms of Islamic ritual, aesthetics, philosophy, law, and spiritual and moral life. In addition, while this is not commonly recognized, wide-ranging and contending views and interpretations exist about the meaning and status of Islamic "scriptures" both within and outside the Muslim world. Attempting to categorize these diverse approaches to the Quran using an accessible and multivocal metaphor of Lover and Beloved to capture the complex relation between the Quran and its interpreters, the progressive Muslim scholar Farid Esack offers a six fold typology: ordinary Muslims, confessional Muslim scholars, critical Muslim scholars, participant observers, revisionists and polemicists. The typical traditional Muslim view about the Quran (which in his schema would include ordinary Muslims and confessional Muslim scholars) is summed up by Esack as follows: "For Muslims the Quran is the literal word of God. It is God speaking, not merely to the Prophet in seventh-century Arabia, but from all eternity to all humankind. The study of "scriptures," therefore, must be open to all those who would try to understand human beings—their languages, rhythms, rituals, performances, orientations, their collective psyches, power relations, their fears, pain, ecstasies, and aspirations. Scriptures, esp. the Holy Quran and here in this paper Al Rahman verse, as the normative expression of the "Great World Religions" all but ignored those cultural traditions that did not possess a tradition of writing.

This semiotic study on one of the Holy Quran's verses and its ritual language is an attempt to find out not only what prayers, the Holy Quran's readers and interpreters say but also what they do based on what they understand from these sacred texts. This paper has been an attempt to demonstration that in Islamic thought, methods of interpretation and discourse on the nature of signs were not confined to scripture and

its interpretation but extended to the world of celestial, terrestrial, and ritual things and occurrences. We have observed that Muslims looked not only to the Holy Quran for concepts but to the created world. As a result Muslims saw a complicated world of images, and animate beings, and events as potential signifiers. This conception must be considered in light of the tendency to analyze Islamic thoughts as inherently pantextual. The alternative creation myths provided a metaphysical and theological rationale for seeing the physical world as intentionally meaningful; the priestly vestments were understood to constitute a complex system of communication between Muslims and the divine realm; and the technical level of divination manuals attests as well to a well-developed and systematic hermeneutic of the natural world, which reflects a worldview expressed in legends regarding the agency of natural elements, and animals and their willingness to act out the historical roles set out for them by God.

It is common to think of Islamic thoughts as the text-centered civilization par excellence, based on the Holy Quran and its different deep and amazing criticisms and bright interpretations.

In semiotic analysis, an arbitrary and temporary separation is made between content and form, and attention is focused on the system of signs that makes up a text. The semiological framing of the universe, makes for the mediation of communication between the divine and human realms. More than this, for Faur, this view of the world is inherently and entirely textual: “For the religious meaning, signification, etc. are inseparable from text. The religious does not recognize a textual problem: meaning is a function of text.

When a culture is analyzed as a code or system (as also happens with natural languages), the processes of use are richer and less predictable than the semiotic model which explains them. Reconstructing the code of a culture does not mean explaining all the phenomena of that culture, but rather allows us to explain why that culture has produced those phenomena. Communication is classically described as an exchange of meanings that are represented by signs. Coding is the process of representing meanings systematically. Communicators can be said to encode their meanings into particular sequences of signs (e.g. strings of sounds, marks on paper, or visible gestures); recipients can be said to decode such meanings from the sign sequences they receive. A code itself is therefore the set or system of rules and correspondences which link signs to meanings. Potentially, any one meaning can be represented by any sign, arbitrarily chosen. Central to semiotic analysis, in this respect, is the recognition of how visual and material culture is coded; the social conventions which link signs with meanings. Insofar as visual and material culture is coded, meaning is not intrinsic to the image or object and not self-evident. Gestural communication is coded, only a relatively small range of gesture signs will have firmly agreed, specific significance within a community. The formal and informal coding and degrees of codification must be distinguished, Socio-cultural norms and conventions can be thought of as codes, such as dress codes, politeness codes, and institutional codes of practice. Cultural and sub-cultural groups may in fact be defined by their shared adherence to codes of this sort.

Signs and relations—these are two of the key notions of semiotic analysis. This system is generally not obvious and must be elicited from the text. Thus a meal, to stray from television for a moment, is not seen as steak, salad, baked potato, and apple pie, but rather as a sign system conveying meanings related to matters such as status, taste, sophistication, and nationality.

Perhaps it would be useful to quote one of the founding fathers of semiotics, Ferdinand de Saussure (1915/1966):

A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be a part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semiology (from Greek semeion “sign”). Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them. Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be; but it has a right to existence, a place staked out in advance. (p. 16)

Kernan suggests that signifying system is synonymous with figuration, which refers to the “act or process of creating.” Musically, figuration can be defined as “the ornamentation of a musical passage by using decorative figures.” Kernan’s use of the phrase “variety of discourse” implies that signifying can be found in other expressive forms in different cultures. Just as researchers are able to observe, analyze, and find meaning in the encoded messages of different cultures, the Holy Scriptures (such the Holy Quran) and languages, the same can be done for art, dance, and musical sound. Signifying system refers to a wide-ranging critical mode of engagement with texts, not merely an exegesis or the search for the content-meaning of texts, including sacred ones. Signifying system is intended to capture the creation of symbols, meanings, and approaches that are unsettling and made by the social categories defined as subalterns, nondominant populations, and minorities, populations on the margin of society, subordinated groups, the oppressed, and the exploited. Signifying the Quran as a divine text, word for word, has had serious

consequences for Muslims with respect to its understanding, exegesis, and uses. The theological claim makes a clear-cut and incommensurable distinction between God's Word and prophetic word.

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