

Symbols of Servitude and Purification in the Qur'an: Orientation of Ibn 'Arabī's *Waḥdah al-Wujūd* in *al-Futuḥāt al-Makkiyah*

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Abstract

The complexity of the concept *waḥdah al-wujūd* in Ibn 'Arabī understanding used in interpretation impacts the ignoring of his interpretation results leading to the essence of servitude and purification of God. The purpose of this study is the form of understanding that accentuates the meaning of the symbols depicted in verse. Tracing of Sufistic narratives in interpreting Ibn 'Arabi was carried out in this study using qualitative methods with content analysis as a data analysis technique. The content analysis model analyzes the data by looking for conceptual relations in *al-Futuḥāt al-Makkiyah* by Ibn 'Arabi about the Sufistic model of understanding. The semiotic theory of sacred texts aids this analysis process to see language phenomena in the scriptures presented through special symbols. This study found that the Sufistic interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi is wrapped in symbolic form. The dressing of symbols in the process of understanding emphasizes the identification of Sufistic models with the diversion of meanings. This identity obscures Ibn 'Arabī's method of interpretation. The symbolic form is explained by analysis of the constitutional significance of the word writing and the function of his syntagmatic. The implications of this concept emphasize the relationship between God and servant (*'abd*) implicit in each verse of the Qur'an. The result of the manifested interpretation underlines the totality of servitude and divinity, culminating in the level of the union of existence to God (*waḥdah al-wujūd*). Ibn 'Arabī embodies the symbolic aspect represented in the Qur'an as a result of the decline of the language of God into the language of man.

Keywords: *Ibn 'Arabī, Interpretation, Semiotics*

Abstrak

Kerumitan konsep *waḥdah al-wujūd* Ibn 'Arabī yang digunakan dalam penafsiran berdampak pada pengabaian hasil interpretasi yang mengarah pada esensi penghambaan dan penyucian terhadap Tuhan. Bentuk penafsiran yang menonjolkan makna simbol yang tergambar dalam ayat menjadi tujuan dari penelitian ini. Penelusuran terhadap narasi sufistik dalam tafsir dilakukan dalam penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan *content analysis* sebagai teknik analisa data. Dengan model analisis konten, data yang telah diperoleh dianalisis dengan mencari hubungan konseptual tentang model penafsiran sufistik Ibn 'Arabī. Proses analisis ini dibantu oleh teori semiotika teks sakral untuk melihat fenomena bahasa dalam kitab suci yang dihadirkan melalui simbol-simbol khusus. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa konsep tematik yang digunakan Ibn 'Arabī dalam penafsirannya yang dibalut dengan analisa simbolik. Balutan simbol dalam proses

interpretasi menekankan pada identifikasi model sufistik dengan pemalingan makna. Identitas ini yang mengaburkan identifikasi atas metode tafsir Ibn 'Arabī. Sedangkan wujud simboliknya dilakukan melalui penelusuran atas bentuk tulisan kata dan susunan kata yang membentuk huruf. Implikasi dari konsep ini menekankan pada relasi Tuhan dan hamba yang tersirat dalam setiap ayat al-Qur'an. Hasil penafsiran yang terwujud menekankan pada totalitas penghambaan dan ketuhanan yang puncaknya berada pada level penyatuan eksistensi kepada Tuhan (*wahdah al-wujūd*). Ibn 'Arabī mewujudkan aspek simbolis yang terkandung dalam al-Qur'an sebagai akibat penurunan bahasa Tuhan ke dalam bahasa manusia.

Kata Kunci: Ibn 'Arabī, Tafsir, Semiotika

A. Introduction

The revelation of the Qur'an linguistic mystery by Ibn' Arabī, which has always tended to be metaphorical and paradoxical,¹ is considered complicated,² and difficult to understand³. Ibn' Arabī elaborates on the meaning of the verse with a symbolic view of the concept of *wahdah al-wujūd* (existing unification) outlined in *al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyah*. Ibn' Arabī views the string of words of the Qur'an in the form of human language as containing signs that contain the essence and relation of man as a servant and Allah as God.⁴ The embodiment Qur'an as an earthly word is explained by Ibn' Arabī with Sufistic logic of understanding.⁵ The reason used is based on an interpretive concept known in the interpretation methodology that emphasizes esoteric⁶ meaning through the symbols revealed by language. Ibn' Arabī used the interpretation model with a symbolic mechanism that impacted his product's detailed understanding.

Researchers widely understand the interpretation mechanism of Ibn' Arabī by highlighting the esoteric side in the frame of *wahdah al-wujūd*, thus ignoring the identity of the method of interpretation used. The disclosure of the identity of the interpretation can facilitate the understanding of the results of the interpretations made by Ibn' Arabī, including the interpretations carried out in works identical to Sufism. There are three research

¹ Ashraf Said Qutb Metwalli and Mohammad El-Sebaey Zayed, "Demythologizing the Myth of Ibn Arabi in Saudi Novelist Mohammad Hassan Olwans Small Death A Postmodern Rereading," *London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences* 19, no. 2 (2019): 25.

² Saliha Osama Farid Abdelkhalek, "Being, Reification and Ritual: The Esoteric Paradigm of Ibn Arabi" (University of Exeter, 2018).

³ Fathul Mufid, "Kritik Epistemologis Tafsir Ishari Ibn 'Arabi," *Hermeneutik* 14, no. 1 (2020): 24.

⁴ Muhammad Firdaus et al., "The Qur'an and the Creation of Universes (A Study on Ibn Arabi's Thought)," in *Proceedings of the Proceedings of the 2nd International Colloquium on Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies (ICIIS) in Conjunction with the 3rd International Conference on Qur'an and Hadith Studies (ICONQUHAS)*, 2020.

⁵ Ibn 'Arabī, *Al-Futuhāt Al-Makkiyah*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutb al-'Ilmiyah, n.d.), 85.

⁶ Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīm Al-Zurqānī, *Manāhil Al-'Irfān*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1988), 78.

tendencies in studying Ibn 'Arabī. First, a study that identifies the interpretation results in the category of ta'wīl.⁷ Second, a study of Ibn 'Arabī's concept of thought in a Sufistic region.⁸ The third is a comparative study of Ibn 'Arabī's thoughts with several other thinkers.⁹ The emphasis on the form and model of interpretation in the scientific concept of interpretation can clarify the identity of Ibn 'Arabī in interpreting the Qur'an..

This research departs from the argument that the identity of Sufistic interpretation inherent in Ibn 'Arabī's interpretation is the result of a methodical system of treating verses to produce Sufistic understanding. Ibn 'Arabī saw the inherent symbol of the language of God manifested in the language of man by looking at the fundamental aspect of the verse, which is inferred from one particular concept. The Qur'an, as a divine word, contains mystical signs that need to be understood its essential meaning with symbolic understanding.¹⁰ Ibn 'Arabī's symbolic interpretation is associated with esoteric interpretation (*al-tafsīr al- ishārī*). This identification causes the ways of Ibn 'Arabī's interpretation to be complicated. The symbolic analysis used of the sacred text is an easy way representation the meaning and a part of the reader's form of reverence for the text.¹¹ Retracement of Ibn 'Arabī's way of interpreting the Qur'an can find the fundamental conception of his interpretation and identify the position of the symbol in his overall thinking.

⁷ Wahyudi Wahyudi, "Analisis Konsep Ta'wil Ibn 'Arabi Terhadap Ayat Al-Qur'an," *Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Ushuluddin* 17, no. 2 (2018): 137; Darmawan Darmawan, "Interpretasi Esoteris Jihad Dalam Tafsīr Ibn 'Arabi (Ta'wīlāt Al-Kasyani)," *Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 9, no. 1 (2020): 25–50; Zuherni Ab, "Tafsir Isyari Dalam Corak Penafsiran Ibnu 'Arabi," *Jurnal Ilmiah Al-Mu'ashirah* 13, no. 2 (2016): 131–143; Firdaus et al., "The Qur'an and the Creation of Universes (A Study on Ibn Arabi's Thought)."

⁸ Ali Akbar, "Looking at Ibn 'Arabi's Notion of Wahdat Al-Wujud as a Basis for Plural Path to God," *Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture* 4, no. 1 (2016); Saffari Ahmadabad Somayeh et al., "A Study of the Concepts of Immanence and Transcendence According to Muhi Al-Din Ibn Arabi and Their Place in the Persian Painting Space (during 9th and 10th Hegira Century)," *Islamic Art Studies* 14, no. 29 (2018): 90–115; A.A. Lukashev, "The Heritage of Ibn Arabi in the Context of the Cultural Dialog Problem," *RUDN Journal of World History* 10, no. 2 (2018): 181–191; Meghdadian Adel and Sadeghi Masoud, "The Relationship Between Watan (Homeland) and Tuma'nina (Tranquility) in Sufism From Earliest Years to Ibn Arabi," *Ayeneh Marefat* 17, no. 51 (2017): 125–147.

⁹ Masoumi Zohreh and Mohammad Fatemeh, "A Comparison of the Nature of Divine Word in Mutikallimun and Ibn Arabi," *Kheradname-ye sadra* 24, no. 395 (2019): 61–76; Bani Asadi Reza, "Pharaoh's Faith and Repentance in the Views of Imam Khomeini and Ibn Arabi," *Religious Anthropology: A Research Biannual* 15, no. 39 (2018): 207–220; Fauzi Naeim, "Metaphysics of Nothingness: Heidegger, Ibn 'Arabi and Nagarjuna," *Journal of KATHA* 15, no. 1 (December 30, 2019): 89–115; Raha Bistara, "Wahdah Al-Wujud Ibn Arabi Dalam Imajinasi Kreatif Henry Corbin," *Academic Journal of Islamic Principles and Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2020): 1.

¹⁰ Hujair A. H. Sanaky, "Metode Tafsir [Perkembangan Metode Tafsir Mengikuti Warna Atau Corak Mufassirin]," *Al-Mawarid: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 18 (2008): 58227.

¹¹ Gennaro Auletta, "From Peirce's Semiotics to Information-Sign-Symbol," *Biosemitotics* 9, no. 3 (December 1, 2016): 451–466, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12304-016-9275-2>.

This study aims to find the model and method of Ibn 'Arabī's interpretation of the Qur'an. Dialectics-symbolic contained in sacred texts with the concept of human language explained by Ibn 'Arabī to get a God message. Ibn 'Arabī described the symbolic meaning of the signs encompassing the language with the foundation of the concept of the unification of form. So, this study was compiled based on three formulations of the problem. (1) what is the form of Ibn 'Arabī's interpretation of the symbols contained in the Qur'an? (2) what is the interpretation of the symbol performed by Ibn 'Arabī? (3) what are the implications? The answer can find the conceptual foundation of Ibn 'Arabī's interpretation and unravel the complexities of symbolic understanding.

B. Research Methods

The symbolization of the relationship of God and servant in the concept of *wahdah al-wujūd* produced by Ibn 'Arabī in understanding the meaning of the Qur'an is depicted in *al-Futuḥāt al-Makkiyah*. A clear picture of servitude and purification through the symbols contained is analyzed in this study using qualitative methods. This method is based on the purpose of research that analyzes the text to find the meaning behind hidden phenomena. This method is widely used in various historical, social, and anthropological studies with a tendency to answer something that cannot be achieved using quantification:¹² primary and secondary data sources. The primary data used in this study focused on *al-Futuḥāt al-Makkiyah*. This work was chosen as the primary data source because it is directly related to the object under study.¹³ The selection of *al-Futuḥāt al-Makkiyah* is based on mystical concepts through a symbolic analysis of the thorough Qur'an. However, Ibn 'Arabī was identified as an interpreter through his work entitled *al-Bayān fī Haqā'iq al-Qur'an*, which was not used based on scholars' doubts about its existence.¹⁴ Secondary data sources in this study are based on the results of previous studies relating to the object of study.

The data that has been obtained is analyzed using three stages. In the first stage, the data will be separated based on their relevance to the main idea of the study. The Sufistic narratives of *al-Futuḥāt al-Makkiyah* are separated by explanations of the meaning of the verse so that the interpretation model is apparent. In this process, the data goes through data reduction by separating the Explanation of Sufism and interpretation. In the second stage, the data that has been sorted (reduction) is displayed to determine categories based on the

¹² John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (London: SAGE Publications, 1994), 24.

¹³ Wahyu Purhantara, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Untuk Bisnis* (Yogyakarta: Graha Ilmu, 2010), 79.

¹⁴ Al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Mufasssirūn*, 1:295.

content analysis method to produce concepts that can be generalized.¹⁵ Explanation of the meaning of the verses scattered in *al-Futuḥāt al-Makkiyah* collected and analyzed its conceptual relationships based on the text to produce the unity of ideas and concepts. The search results for the unity of ideas are used as a conclusion to implement the third stage.¹⁶ The disclosure of symbolic narratives in the interpretation of Ibn 'Arabī in this study uses a semiotic approach to scripture since religion is seen as a semiotic phenomenon, so that understanding of it can be carried out by analyzing the structure of symbols.¹⁷

C. Finding Research

The understanding of Ibn 'Arabī's interpretation of deepest secrets meaning is described in this passage. The discussion was carried out through four discussions equipped with discussions in each section. The first discussion discusses the curriculum vitae and the concept of thought of Ibn 'Arabī. This section focuses on the intellectual development of Ibn 'Arabī to the concept of *waḥdah al-wujūd*. The second discussion focused on the form of interpretation that Ibn 'Arabī pursued to produce an understanding of the Qur'an. The third discussion contains the symbolic form that Ibn 'Arabī used in understanding the Qur'an. The fourth discussion focuses on the methodical implications of the symbolic understanding of the verse.

1. Ibn 'Arabī: A Brief History

Ibn 'Arabī; the full name is Muḥy al-Dīn Abū Abd Allah Muḥammad bin 'Alī bin Muḥammad bin Aḥmad bin Abd Allah Ḥatīmī al-Ṭā'ī. He is one of the figures of Islamic mysticism who came from Murcia, Andalusia (Spain). Ibn 'Arabī was born on 27 Ramadan 560 H./1165 AD.¹⁸ He came from a devoutly religious family, and his father was an important figure in the government of Muḥammad bin Madanisy, the ruler of Andalusia at that time. As an important figure in the government, Ibn 'Arabī's father took a strategic step after the reign of Ibn Mardanisy was conquered by the Muwaḥḥidūn dynasty, so his entire family moved to Seville.¹⁹ In Seville, Ibn 'Arabī began his educational career. He studied

¹⁵ Philipp Mayring, *Qualitative Content Analysis: Theoretical Foundation, Basic Procedures and Software Solution* (Austria: Gesis, 2014).

¹⁶ Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis (a Source Book of New Methods)* (Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, 1984).

¹⁷ Paulo Barroso, "Contributions to a Semiotics of Religion: The Semiosis from Sign to Meaning," *Interações: Sociedade e as novas modernidades* 41, no. 41 (2021): 181–200.

¹⁸ Mukhtar H. Ali, "Ibn Al-'Arabi, the Greatest Master: On Knowledge, God, and Sainthood," in *A Companion to World Literature* (Wiley, 2019), 1–11.

¹⁹ William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), x–xi.

the Qur'an, hadith, Arabic grammatical science, and Islamic law.²⁰ He was known as a brilliant figure; therefore, he was appointed secretary of the governor of Seville at that time.²¹ His wife, Maryam, has the same interest in exploring Sufism.²² Although formally Ibn' Arabī studied Sufism in his 20s,²³ his beginnings in the interest in Sufism began at a young age,²⁴ when his father arranged a meeting with a famous philosopher, Ibn Rushd.²⁵ The wanderings of Ibn' Arabī Sufism occurred during his meeting with Shams and Fatimah, his spiritual teachers. Both were the spiritual mothers of Ibn' Arabī, who guided him on the Sufi path.²⁶

Many circles recognize Ibn' Arabī's ability to explore the metaphysical doctrines of Sufism. His abilities are not only in the theoretical area but also in the praxis area. In fact, in the records of R.W.J. Austin, Ibn' Arabī often performed practices or rituals that could enhance his inner experience by spending time in the grave and communicating with the spirits.²⁷ Ibn' Arabī's intelligence and authority in the field of Sufism are shown by the record of his debates with his teachers. His debate with Abū al'Abbās al'Uryani over the spiritual hierarchy led to the correction delivered by al'Uryani in Ibn' Arabī's dream. This incident made Ibn' Arabī realize he was a newbie in this field.²⁸ Ibn' Arabī's habit of contradicting everything continued until he found maturity in the world he was engaged in from a young age.²⁹ Ibn' Arabī's experience in deepening the Sufi world was carried out in a way that scholars of his time used. He went on an intellectual safari to Tunis. In this place, Ibn' Arabī is suspected of meeting a famous Sufi figure, Abū Madyan.³⁰ After leaving Tunis, he returned to Seville. Not long after, Ibn' Arabī continued his journey towards Fez. There, he encountered the victory of al-Muwaḥḥidūn's army from the Roman army. At this moment, Ibn' Arabī began interpreting using a symbolic model to understand the sacred text. This moment was also the initial moment for Ibn' Arabī to uncover the most profound mystical secrets contained in the letters in the Qur'an.³¹

²⁰ Laiya Matin Parsa, "A Comparative Study of Wordsworth and Sepehri's Poetry in the Light of Ibn Arabi's Philosophy," *International Journal of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies* 6, no. 1 (2018): 11.

²¹ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*, xi.

²² Firdaus et al., "The Qur'an and the Creation of Universes (A Study on Ibn Arabi's Thought)."

²³ R.J.W Austin, *Ibn Al-'Arabi: The Bezel of Wisdom* (New York: Pailist Press, 1981), 2.

²⁴ R.J.W Austin, *Sufis of Andalusia: The Ruh Al-Quds and Al-Darrat Al-Fakhirah of Ibn 'Arabi*, vol. 44 (London: Routledge, 2008), 23.

²⁵ 'Arabī, *Al-Futūhāt Al-Makkiyah*, 1:153.

²⁶ Austin, *Sufis of Andalusia: The Ruh Al-Quds and Al-Darrat Al-Fakhirah of Ibn 'Arabi*, 44:25–26.

²⁷ Austin, *Ibn Al-'Arabi: The Bezel of Wisdom*, 3.

²⁸ 'Arabī, *Al-Futūhāt Al-Makkiyah*, 1:186.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:45.

³⁰ Austin, *Ibn Al-'Arabi: The Bezel of Wisdom*, 4.

³¹ Austin, *Sufis of Andalusia: The Ruh Al-Quds and Al-Darrat Al-Fakhirah of Ibn 'Arabi*, 44:29.

Ibn' Arabī did not live for long in Fez because the political situation was not favourable for him. Al-Muwaḥḥidūn resisted the existence of Sufis, who were considered a threat to his rule. Therefore, he proceeded to Marrakech (Morocco) and met Abū al'Abbās. Not long after, Ibn' Arabī experienced an incident that required him to return to Fez. In Fez, he met Muḥammad al-Ḥassar and accompanied him to explore the Eastern Islamic world. When he reached Egypt, al-Ḥassar died, and he lived in Egypt for a while before he moved to Makkah. In Makkah, Ibn' Arabī experienced a phenomenal event outlined in a beautiful poem, *Tarjumān al-Ashwaq*. He also performed some special worship and rituals until he led to a mystical condition that encompassed all his Sufistic activities, *waḥdah al-wujūd*.³² At this time, Ibn' Arabī revealed his mystical experiences in *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikām* and *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyah*. He died in 1240 AD. in Damascus.³³

2. Ibn 'Arabī Form of Interpretation of the Qur'an

Ibn' Arabī's concept of interpretation is known to have a stringency from the thematic model of interpretation (*mawḍū'ī*) introduced by other scholars. Ibn' Arabī uses two thematic tendencies. First is the thematic word (*lafad*). This thematic form is done by collecting the same type of words in various verses. The practical steps taken by Ibn' Arabī are illustrated in his understanding of *al-ahruf al-muqatta'ah*. He sees the unity of symbols in these various verses, which hints at the embodiment of unification with God (*waḥdah al-wujūd*). Ibn' Arabī relates the number of *al-ahruf al-muqatta'ah* consisting of 78 letters by the hadith of the Prophet; the faith consisting of the seventies (*bid'u wa sab'un*).³⁴ The number of letters composing the verse consisting of letters indicates the degree of one's faith, which boils down to the essence of divinity and servitude.³⁵ The form of *al-ahruf al-muqatta'ah* begins with *alīf* in Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 1 and ends *nūn* in Q.S. al-Qalam [68]: 1, symbolizes the perfection of Allah represented with *alīf* and man represented as *nūn*. The perfection of Allah is represented by an alif that does not need a place (expensive) to show its existence.³⁶ At the same time, *nūn* is the symbol of imperfection with a semicircular

³² Ibid., 44:36–38.

³³ William C. Chittick, "The Disclosure of the Intervening Image: Ibn 'Arabi on Death," *Discourse* 24, no. 1 (2002): 51.

³⁴ Muḥammad bin Isma'īl Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, vol. 8 (Kairo: Dār al-Shu'ub, 1407), 11; Muslim bin Al-Hajjaj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arābī, n.d.), 63; Muḥammad bin Yazīd Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyah, n.d.), 22; Sulaymān bin Al-'Ash'ath, *Sunan Abū Dawūd*, vol. 4 (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-'Asriyah, n.d.), 219; Muḥammad bin 'Isa Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan Al-Tirmidhi*, vol. 4 (Mesir: Muṣṭafā al-Bāb al-Ḥalabī, 1975), 306; Aḥmad bin Shu'ayb Al-Nasā'ī, *Al-Sunan Al-Kubrā*, vol. 8 (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 2001), 110.

³⁵ 'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt Al-Makkiyah*, 1:97.

³⁶ Ibid., 1:98.

shape. The form of divinity and servitude through the thematically traced symbol embodies a distinctive interpretation carried out by Ibn' Arabī.

The second is the thematic sura. Ibn' Arabī carried out the explanation using this model by relating the entire meaning of the verse contained in the sura into one whole concept. This method can be seen in his interpretation of Q.S. al-Fātiḥah [1]: 1-7. For Ibn' Arabī, this opening letter shows nature's creation process. The designation of the creation process is based on the opening word, *bism Allah*, which is followed by two other Great Names (*al-asma' al-'a'dzam*), *al-Raḥmān* and *al-Raḥīm*.³⁷ The word *ba'* serves as a pointer to the beginning of an existence that separates the servant (*'abid*) and the God (*ma'bud*). The letter *ba'* accompanies the whole existence derived from the presence of Allah at the level (*maqam*) of fusion and entity (*al-jam'u wa al-wujud*). According to Ibn' Arabī, using *ba'* at the beginning of this verse, Allah wants to explain that everything happens and manifests through Me (*bi*). The letter *ba'* also occupies the position of *hamzah wazal*³⁸ found in the word *al-ism*. Hamzah, which is the symbol of *al-Qudrah* (power) which is united by a vowel with *ba'* and *sīn*, which is *sukun*, symbolizes nothingness so that the indication of meaning presented indicates the existence (*wujud*) from nothingness that is realized because of the will (*bi*) and power (*hamzah*) of Allah.³⁹ The creation process symbolized through the first verse separates the position of God and servant through a series of meanings of verses in one letter.

The separation of servant and Lord depicted in one letter is corroborated by the symbolic meaning of the next verse. *al-Ḥamd* shows the sanctity and sanctity of a servant who is side by side with the word Allah which refers to *al-Dhat al-Azali*. The word *hamdalah* shows the separation of a humiliated servant who is juxtaposed with Allah through the letter *lām* that is consecrated. *Lām* symbolizes the essence of the servant as the low and *tawadu'* object of God (*ma'lūh*). The God who cooperates with the *lām* acts as a subject worshipped with all the nature of his glory. The existence of *lām* on the word of God shows chastity through itself. The position of *lām* is considered to have the ability to occupy that position through its grammatical effect on the word of Allah,⁴⁰ who is *kasrah* (vowel (*majrūr*)).

³⁷ Ibid., 1:158.

³⁸ *Hamzah wasl* adalah hamzah yang diucapkan hanya ketika menjadi permulaan sebuah kalimat, dan dihilangkan jika didahului oleh sebuah huruf atau kata. Ia berlaku sebagai perantara atau penyambung untuk huruf mati atau sukun yang berada setelahnya.

³⁹ 'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt Al-Makkiyah*, 1:187.

⁴⁰ *Lām* sebagai bagian dari salah satu huruf *jar* menjadikan kata yang bersanding dengannya berharakat *kasrah* (*majrūr*).

“i”).⁴¹ Affirmation of the form of Allah through *al-ḥamd li Allah* (all praise is for Allah) is continued by the concept of nurturing in the form of *rabb al-‘ālamīn*,⁴² the maintenance through *al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm* and the possession of intercession with *mālik yawm al-dīn*,⁴³ Allah desires the repetition of gratitude and praise emphasized in Q.S. al-Fatiḥah [1]: 4. The statement in this verse is a form of gratitude by affirming the only supplication addressed only to Allah as an affirmation of the belief in the Oneness of God.⁴⁴ When the process of servitude and the declaration of incompetence is perfect, then the soul affirms and confirms the salvation of essence (*al-Dhat*) through the mortality of the soul with *ihdinā al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* towards godliness.⁴⁵

The two concepts of Ibn’ Arabī’s thematic interpretation in *al-Futuḥat al-Makkiyah* represent a model of understanding the unification of being (*waḥdah al-wujūd*) based on symbolic interpretation. Mis-identification of this model impacted the ways Ibn’ Arabī’s interpretation was complicated.⁴⁶ Researchers tend identification the concept of his interpretation of *al-tafsir al-ishari* (Sufism interpretation) with the unveiling (*mukashafah*) mechanism.⁴⁷ This identification excludes the scientific veil and the thematic mechanisms of his interpretations. Ibn’ Arabī analyzed signs through the unity of symbols in wording and phrasing to represent the change of God’s language (divine world) into the form of human language with a thematic mechanism. Analyzing symbols synonymous with linguistic experience in human language can reveal hidden meanings that God desires that language cannot wholly accommodate.⁴⁸ his statement is corroborated by Augustine, quoting Fitzgerald, who mentioned that signs could bring an understanding of language to a higher reality of truth.⁴⁹ This model indicates an understanding of verses containing symbols with a thematic mechanism..

⁴¹ Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt Al-Makkiyah*, 1:173.

⁴² Ibid., 1:174.

⁴³ Ibid., 1:176.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 1:177.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1:178.

⁴⁶ Mustapha Bala Ruma, “Crossing Frontiers: English Romanticism and Sufism as Literary Movements,” in *Literature, Memory, Hegemony*, ed. Sharmani Patricia Gabriele and Nicholas O. Pagan (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2018), 49.

⁴⁷ Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt Al-Makkiyah*, 1:96–97; Ruma, “Crossing Frontiers: English Romanticism and Sufism as Literary Movements,” 49.

⁴⁸ Daniel Slivka, “Hermeneutic Change of the Scientific Approach to Myths and Function of Symbols in the Cultures of the Ancient Middle East,” *Communications - Scientific letters of the University of Zilina* 20, no. 1A (2018): 63.

⁴⁹ Allan D. Fitzgerald, *Augustine Through The Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Cambridge: B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 333.

Ibn ' Arabī analyzed the God-language manifested in human language (Arabic) to reveal the deepest secrets of meaning. He claimed the knowledge of the essence of the servant's acquaintance with His God must be based on direct instruction from God.⁵⁰ The instruction is symbolically dispersed in human language as a gesture given to man. The need for symbolic analysis is due to the narrative of the Qur'an composed of metaphorical forms (61%).⁵¹ Hudgson explained the same argument that the structure of the Qur'an contained in the symbolic narrative.⁵² The effectiveness of symbolic analysis of scripture is also corroborated by Augustinus, who considers the symbolic analysis to facilitate the production of meaning and gives teaching to others about the meaning hidden in the narrative of the holy text.⁵³ Understanding God's instructions symbolically impact the disclosure of the secrets of the servant's relationship with his God.

3. The Symbolic Form of Ibn 'Arab towards the Understanding of the Verse

The search for meaning through thematic analysis was carried out by Ibn ' Arabī involving symbolic interpretation. The symbolic analysis is based on two forms—first, the characters and the shape of the letters. The relationship between servant and God focuses on interpretation and is pursued by analyzing the form of words through written characters. The structure of the writing *alīf lām mīm*, which symbolizes obedience, is explained as follows:

Picture 1. The Meaning of *alīf lām mīm*



Alīf, as a symbol of perfection, God, reveals his existence from above and ends downwards. *Alīf* ends on a horizontal line, referred to as the beginning of *al-samā' al-dunya* (the world's sky) and is the beginning of the *'alam al-tarkīb* (sensory realm).⁵⁴ The writing of *alīf* descending to the flat line indicates the decline of the oneness maqam (*aḥādīyah*) towards the maqam of the creation of beings with the nature of purification and transcendence, not the realization and likeness.⁵⁵ The uncited nature of *alīf* and in tandem with the recitation of the *amīn* after al-Fātiḥah, indicates God's incomprehensible position

⁵⁰ ' Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt Al-Makkiyah*, 1:81.

⁵¹ Dewi Suriyani Djamdjuri, Zuriyati Zuriyati, and Siti Gomo Attas, "Metaphor in Parable from the Noble Qur'an: A Corpus Based Stylistic Approach," *Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an* 18, no. 1 (2022): 59–73.

⁵² Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in A World Civilization (The Expansion of Islam in the Middle Periods)*, vol. 2 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 504.

⁵³ Margaret Cameron, "Augustine," in *Sourcebook in the History of Philosophy of Language* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 131–170.

⁵⁴ ' Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt Al-Makkiyah*, 1:99.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

except through His deeds, the owner of the instructions expected by the servant, and the cue of an absolute servitude identity to Allah.⁵⁶ Whereas *mīm* is a letter that begins its form from the line that is the end of *alīf* and *lām* descends in the best possible form (*aḥsan taqwīm*) towards the lowest place (*asfala safilīn*).

Lām served as an intermediary and became *Khāliq's* representative and a being (*makhlūq*). It became a symbol of power (*al-qudrah*) which became the cause of nature. The symbol indicated by writing resembles an *alīf's* descent from top to bottom towards a flat line. *Lām* is a mixture of *Khāliq* (Lord) and *makhlūq* (servant). He also represents God's control over his servant by turning the letter *lām* to *mīm*. This control further demonstrates God's dominion over creatures. According to Ibn' Arabī claim, symbolizing *lām* refers to Allah's goal to show that the nature of *al-Qudrah* is always connected with his being (*makhlūq*), both in high and low. The nature of *lām* falling below a flat line or equaling a flat line indicates a difference between God and being despite being in the same position. The decline in the *lām* level culminated in his encounter with *mīm*. However, the *lām* will not descend at the level of decreasing the *mīm*, which is below the flat line.⁵⁷ The decrease of the *mīm* from the finish line becomes a sign of the level of servitude that is at the low level connected by the *lām* to achieve God.

The structure of the *nūn* writing as the last letter in *al-aḥrūf al-muqaṭṭa'ah* is explained using the same way to find the symbol of meaning contained in the form of the letter *mīm*, which symbolizes the condition of servitude. The semicircular *nūn* depicts the imperfections of man in the sensory world (*alam al-tarkīb*). The perfection of the *nūn* is achieved and is in an imaginary world (*alam al-rūh*). The midpoint symbolizes the identity of *nūn* perfection in the sensory world. *Nūn* can be perfect by moving his half-circle from the imaginary to the sensory world.⁵⁸ The displacement of the half circle that *nūn* shows symbolize the opportunity to achieve perfection for man in the world by perfecting his qualities by reflecting on the nature of the godhead.

The second is the linguistic structure. The discovery of symbolic meaning resulted in Ibn' Arabī associating the function of each word and letter linguistically with the meaning desired by the verse. *Alīf*, symbolized as a divine nature in Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 1, functions in the science of *tajwid*, lengthening the *harakat* of the letter adjoining it (*mad*). The extended nature that *alīf* alters indicates the nature of relief (*al-istimdad*). The necessity

⁵⁶ Ibid., 1:100.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 1:99.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 1:98.

of *harakat fathaḥ* (openness) on the letter adjoining it indicates the representation of the nature of *al-Raḥmān* possessed by Allah.⁵⁹ The grammatical concept that occurs in the verse *bism Allah* with *ba'* occupying the position of *hamzah wasl* in the *ism* (noun) denotes the transfer of the form of *alif* as the essence of Allah to *ba'* with a period mark below it as the *hijab* (cover) of the embodiment of *alif*.⁶⁰ The attributes of the shape of letters, periods, and *harakat* that *ba'* has represented the embodiment of three realms in one form, namely *alam al-jabarūt* (the realm of intellect), *alam al-malakūt* (the realm of the soul), and *alam al-mulk* (the realm of nature).⁶¹ The description of the divine form in Q.S. al-Fātiḥah [1]: 1 explains the symbolic meaning contained through the structure of language.

The two symbolic mechanisms of Ibn' Arabī are used to unravel the cues of man's relationship with God, whose culmination manifests in the unity of the essence. This mechanism was born based on Ibn' Arabī's inclination towards the spiritual experience he had achieved. Daylight affirms the tendency of an interpreter to be influenced by the subjective experience by linguistic impression.⁶² This impression appears in any language, including the Qur'an. Moreover, the language of the Qur'an contains divine sign representation of His nature,⁶³ strengthening the impression. A similar analysis was carried out by Saepudin et al.. They emphasized the relationship of God and servant detected in the language analysis of the Qur'an.⁶⁴ Ibn' Arabī sees the inner world (*al-ma'na al-batin*) through the form of writing letters and the structure of language referring to the meaning of the outer world. The identification of inner meaning is based on the original form of the Qur'an as the word of God with the *ruhaniya* dimensions (*verbum interius*). The change of the language of God into human language does not eliminate the original essence of language manifested in the existence of symbols that Ibn' Arabī understood through two mechanisms.

Changing God's language into human language does not eliminate the essence of divinity. Ibn' Arabī, in his interpretation, shows two dimensions of the word, which are visible and hidden. The visible of a word indicates its level in *'ālam al-shahadah wa qadr* (visible world), which manifests in the pronunciation of the human language.⁶⁵ In

⁵⁹ Ibid., 1:100.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 1:159.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Russell Daylight, "Aristotle and Augustine: The Origin of the Schism between Semiotics and Semiology," *Chinese Semiotic Studies* 13, no. 4 (2017): 331.

⁶³ Tzvetan Todorov, *Theories of The Symbol*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 44.

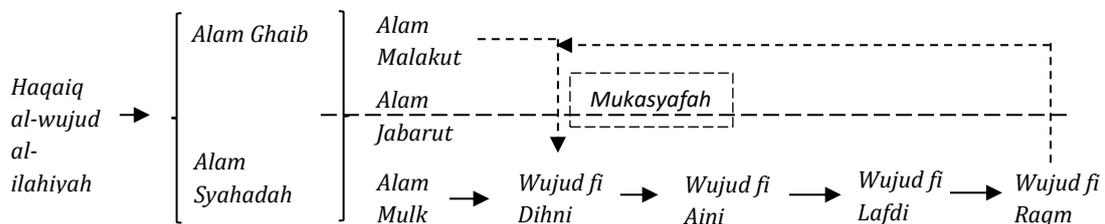
⁶⁴ Dindin Moh saepudin, Nurwadjah Ahmad, and Rosihon Anwar, "Makna Semantik Hamba Dan Saleh Dalam Alqur'an," *Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an* 16, no. 2 (2020): 233–252.

⁶⁵ 'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt Al-Makkiyah*, 1:87.

comparison, the hidden word indicates the level of the word in the *'ālam al-ghayb* (invisible world), whose nature of the word is unspoken.⁶⁶ Production of the word in the form of writing and language structure occurred in *'ālam al-mulk* (the realm of nature) as a representation of *'alam al-shahadah* (visible world) and produced by man as a product of his culture. The decline of God's language from *'ālam al-malakūt* (the realm of the soul) as part of *'ālam al-ghayb* to the sensory world adapts to the language already produced by a man so that its meaning can be immediately understood (*wujūd al-dihni*).

The existing word in the outer world corresponds with a human's understanding of language (*wujūd fī dihni*) as a product of culture. The word displays its concepts (*wujūd fī 'ainī*) in the human mind until it is spoken (*wujūd fī lafẓī*) and written (*wujūd fī raqm*).⁶⁷ The form of the word in the outer world is concealed in its essential meaning by symbols in linguistics. To know its hidden meaning, one must reach the *mukashafah* (unveiling) level to understand the inner word by its symbols. The understanding of the meaning of the Qur'an in the form of an outer word (meaning of pronunciation) does not represent the symbolic embodiment of the human-God relationship as the intended point in the concept of the language of God.

Scheme 1. Symbol of the Divinity in Language



4. Implications of Symbolic Interpretation on the Meaning of Sentences

The symbols in human language formed in the shape of letters and the structure of language embodied the identity of the relationship between God-servant in the concept of *waḥdah al-wujud* (unity of being). Ibn' Arabī argues that the representation of *alīf* and *mīm* is associated with the relationship between God and servant. This relation is connected by *lām* as a bridge between God and the servant. The union of *lām* with *mīm* is seen as the control of *alīf* (God) over his servant. The *lām* vertical line resembling *alīf* symbolizes the straight path (*ṣiraṭ al-mustaqīm*), which is the hope of every

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 1:89.

servant asked of Allah.⁶⁸ The analysis of the word order and letterforms reflects the relationship between God and servants depicted in the language structure of the Qur'an.

The concept of linking God and servant through the letters *alīf* and *mīm* is described in the explanation of Q.S. al-Fātiḥah [1]: 1. The word *bism Allah*, containing *alīf* and *mīm* is connected by *bā'* and *sīn*. The essence of servitude demonstrated by *mīm* is corroborated by *bā'* in place of *alīf*, symbolizing the perfection of a servant's faith. *Mīm* is controlled by *bā'* to establish the status of his *harakat* to *kasrah* (vowel "i").⁶⁹ If *bā'* is omitted, then *mīm* is *fathah* (vowel "a"), which indicates the attainment of the servant to *alam al-jabarūt* (the realm of intellect) as *mīm* is positioned in Q.S. al-'A'lā [87]: 1. *Mīm* is detached from the bond of *bā'* because his purification process has been perfect and revealed his *hijab* (cover) with God reaching the culmination of the *dammah* (vowel "u"), which signifies the level of the unity as in Q.S. al-Rahman [55]: 78.⁷⁰ The identity of *bā'* as the initial stage of the search for the essence of God with the form of submission (*kasrah*) is emphasized in the *sīn* by *sukun*. The position of *sīn* complements the function of *bā'*, which emphasizes one's servitude by establishing *sukun* as a gesture of disgrace, faking, and a sense of need. *Sīn* is given *sukun* (silence) to gain a correct conviction of the position of *bā'*. If the *sin* is given a *harakat* (move) before being given *sukun*, he will act arbitrarily and feel capable of mastering himself, so it is feared that he will claim his existence.⁷¹

Control over the *mīm* to emphasize the nature of servitude can occur without involving this word. Ibn' Arabī gives the concept of servitude by analyzing the symbols contained in the word *īyyāka* found in Q.S. al-Fātiḥah [1]: 5. *īyyāka*, with the structure of the letter *yā'* flanked by two *alīf*, signifies the weak and helpless nature of beings over the superiority of Allah, which encompasses them. The symbol of Oneness and godliness in *alīf* is strengthened by the existence of *kaf* as a substitute (*damīr*) of Allah; This means the compliance and surrender of servants to Allah must be carried out in totality.⁷² The totality of deity is accompanied by the word *na'budu*, which leads to the totality of worship. The totality of surrender is perfected by *īyyāka nasta'in*,⁷³ the statement of inability to do things except for the help of Allah by worship. The statement of worship and help to the

⁶⁸ Ibid., 1:99.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 1:160.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 1:159.

⁷¹ Ibid., 1:160.

⁷² Ibid., 1:178.

⁷³ Ibid.

only essence of being (Allah) perfects the status of a servant who depends on his God and always hopes for perfection for unification with Him (*wahdah al-wujūd*).

The reality of the servitude contained in the verses is the effect of expressing the implied meaning in the verse symbol. The arrangement of letters that make up words and compose verses is understood in the concept of a servant's relationship with his God. The arrangement of *alīf*, *lām*, and *mīm* is interpreted as a representation of servant and God that no other interpreter can imagine. In the general view, letters are understood through a sound component that directs meaning to a particular symbol.⁷⁴ Ibn' Arabī chose his *ruhaniyah* (spiritual) experience to identify meanings implemented in the experience of human language. Experiences about the way of writing, the arrangement of letters, and words known to society convey the concept of meaning about the relationship between God and servant spirituality (*Sufi*). The conformity of this experience became a bridge of Ibn' Arabī's contemplative experience to the essence of divinity to his reader so that the position of servitude became clearer. The bridges provided strengthen the relationship between the speaker and the listener's meaning and the listener's relationship to understand a symbol.⁷⁵

The meaning gap between the speaker and the listener is explained by a symbol in linguistic dialectically. The arrangement of *alīf lām mīm* in the listener's experience points to the reality (*res*) that the conceived word order has no meaning. Ibn' Arabī considered the meaningless arrangement of letters (*al-aḥrūf al-muqaṭṭa'ah*) to be a sign (*signa*) containing meaning. Since the sign comes from God, the concept of the sign is a sacred sign (*signum sacrum*) that leads to divinity and servitude as the essence of creation. The vertical line as an independent *alīf* structure refers to the nature of the godhead. In contrast, the *mīm*, which has a long line below the boundary of the inscription symbolizing disgrace, indicates the nature of the servant. These two signs have to do with the structure of the form of writing, similar to the properties that the sign has so that the concept contained in the sign⁷⁶ elevates the degree of language that distinguishes it from human language.⁷⁷ The Sufistic orientation in the understanding of the Qur'an is a dialectical mechanism between the text and the experience of the interpreter.

⁷⁴ Susannah Ticciati, "The Apophatic Potential of Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*: Creatures as Signs of God," in *Christian Mysticism and Incarnational Theology: Between Transcendence and Immanence*, ed. Louise Nelstrop and Simon D. Podmore (New York: Routledge, 2016), 169–170.

⁷⁵ Göran Sonesson, "Meaning Redefined: Reflections on The Scholastic Heritage Conveyed by John Deely to Contemporary Semiotics," *The American Journal of Semiotics* 34, no. 1 (2018): 65–86.

⁷⁶ Bernard Plault, *The Sacrament Sign in Augustine* (New York: Howthorn, 1963), 52.

⁷⁷ Fauzan Adim, "Konsep Tasawuf Abdurrahman Al-Tha'alibi Dalam Tafsir Al-Jawa'hir Al-H{isa>n Fi> Tafsir Al-Qur'a>n," *Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an* 17, no. 1 (2021): 19–40.

D. Conclusion

This study has not proven the tendency in Sufistic interpretation, which has been considered a unique method and tends to be challenging to understand. The Sufistic interpretation of Ibn 'Arabī by the *wahdah al-wujud's* concept takes the thematic methods in the explanation process, which is accessible to understanding. Ibn 'Arabī used two thematic models; thematic words and sura. The thematic model used differs from the thematic explanations present in most other thematic interpretations. Ibn 'Arabī used the structure of writing letters and wording in verses to detect the sign patterns used by Allah to emphasize the concepts of divinity and servitude hidden in each verse. Thus, the ultimate signified in the whole concept in the Qur'an refers to the divinity that must be found as a foundation concept understanding the relationship of a being with his God.

This study's description of Sufistic narratives with thematic patterns is produced through content analysis with a semiotic approach to scripture. Although the concept of the final map as a representative of the divine aspects detected from various verses is found, it is also that aspect that limits this research. Other aspects of the Sufistic experience described in *al-Futuhāt al-Makkiyah* and his concept of interpretation are universally abandoned in this study, thus opening up opportunities for subsequent researchers to get the whole concept in work and be relevant to the whole concept of its interpretation can be carried out.

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