Qur'anic Identity Building: A Discourse Analysis of *Asmā' al-Qur'ān*

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ABSTRACT: (Original Paper)

This paper seeks to explains the way in which the Qur'an historically established its identity through its use of *asmā' al-Qur'ān* (*al-qur'ān, al-kitāb, al-furqān,* and *al-dhikr*). In doing so, it combines the analysis of the literary feature and the historical chronology of every single use of *asmā' al-qur'ān* terminologies during its formative period. This analysis requires the use of *al-tartīb al-nuzūl* approach—that of al-Jābirī—integrated with discourse analysis to understand the process of identity building of the Qur'an. According to this study, the Qur'an language was the tool through which the Qur'an distributed its power, both explicitly and implicitly. The implicit mechanism manifests itself as the Qur'an's positional play between the traditional shi'r and earlier scriptures in order to influence the Quraysh's psychological state.

The explicit mechanism is that it clearly declares itself to be the Arabic scripture (*Qur'ānan 'arabiyyah*). *Asmā' al-Qur'ān* plays an important role in both strategies. There would be no better way to gain influence for the Arab community, which valued language and had a strong emotional attachment to it. Even though few believed in it, the identity of the Qur'an had been successfully established through both strategies in its first seven years.

KEYWORDS: *asmā' al-Qur'ān*, *tartīb al-nuzūl*, power, Arabic language

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1. Introduction

Anyone approaching the Qur'an must first answer the question, "What is the Qur'an?" The question concerns the identity of the Qur'an, and the answer is typically the definition. The Qur'an is described as *kalāmullāh al-munazzal ilā Muḥammad biwāṣiṭat Jibrīl al-mutaʿabbadu bi-tilāwatih* (the word of God which is revealed to Muḥammad through Jibrīl, whose recitation is regarded as [an act of] worship). This is the common definition given in books such as *al-Nabaʾ al- ʿAẓīm: Naẓrah Jadīdah fī al-Qurʾān al-Karīm* by ʿAbdullāh Darrāz and *Mabāḥith fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān* by Mannāʿ Khalīl al-Qaṭṭān. Other definitions are marked by additional phrases such as *lafẓ al-ʿarabī, tawātur, muʿjiz*, and so on. Al-Jābirī cites at least five traditional definitions of the Qur'an and criticizes them for describing ideological biases.

What those definitions attempt to explain is the ontology of the Qur'an. There is the alternative way to see the identity of the Qur'an. While those definitions answer the question of what, this alternative way responds to the question of how instead. I will refer it with the term self-identity, i.e., the Qur'an identifies itself. Al-Jābirī (2006: 31) himself has already introduced the same way, somehow he simplified it, by only providing five verses of the Qur'an (Qur'an 26:192-196). However, there is a chance to solve this problem. Here I refer to the theory of *Asmāʾ al-Qurʾān*; list of words that are considered as the names of the Qur'an. Among several theories of *Asmāʾ al-Qurʾān*, I refer to one of the oldest which are proposed by al-Ṭabarī (1958: 94-96). For him, there are four names of the Qur'an, i.e., *al-Qurʾān* (Qur'an 12: 3), *al-furqān* (Qur'an 25:1), *al-kitāb* (Qur'an 18:1), and *al-dhikr* (Qur'an 15:9). Unlike the traditional elaboration to this theory,[1] this paper will explore the role of *Asmāʾ al-Qurʾān* in the context of the attempt of the Qur'an to establish its identity in its formative period.

This paper is an effort to describe the identity-building endeavour—self-identity—of the Qur'an through *Asmā al-Qurʾān*. It is a report

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1. *Asmāʾ al-Qurʾān* is of the important chapters in *ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān* as it almost exists in every book in this genre such as *al-Burhān fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān, al-Itqān fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*, exegesis works such as *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āyi al-Qurʾān*, or other references on *ʿIlm al-Qirāʾāt*. The elaboration on this theory is typical. It contains the lists of words, one or two example from Qur'anic verses, and the reason such term is classified as *asmāʾ al-qurʾān*. This vast attention somehow leaves three significant weakness: (1) there is no definitive criteria, (2) they are not properly elaborated, and (3) tend to be repetitive from one book to the other (See al-Zarkashī 2006: 93-96; al-Suyūṭī 2006: 336-339; al-Ṭabarī 1958: 94).

of analysing every single use of *Asmā al-Qur'ān* terminologies in the Qur'an. This research applies historical approach. Our emphasis is on the actual use of the terms of *Asmā al-Qur'ān* historically within each term's formative period. This stance implies the use of *tartīb al-nuzūl* approach—the one used is the theory of al-Jābirī —to know the relation between Muḥammad, socio-cultural circumstances, and the actual use of *Asmā al-Qur'ān*, integrated with the theory of the order of discourse introduced by Michel Foucault, to understand the process of identity building of the Qur'an. However, considering the limited space, I shall not provide the detailed analysis on every use of *Asmā' al-Qur'ān*; all I can write down here is the general conclusion of them. Above all, the central question to discuss here is how was the actual use of *Asmā al-Qur'ān* as the self-identity of the Qur'an? To answer the question, the elaboration of this article is based on two principles, the axiom of Qur'an as process (Sinai, 2010, 407) and the *sūrah* as unity (thematic *sūrah*).

2. Pre-Qur'anic Context

This section will provide a brief overview of the historical setting in which the Qur'an developed its self-identity. The pre-Qur'anic religions and the pre-Qur'anic Muḥammad will be the two topics to be discussed.

The majority of pre-Islamic Arabs held to the belief that stars and other natural phenomena possess metaphysical force. Their tribe names, such as *al-Kalb*, *al-Ṣawr*, and *Thaʿalabah*, are totemic. They worshipped idols like *Wadd* for the moon, *Lātt* for the sun, and *ʿUzz* for the flowers, each of which represented their faith in natural force (Ḍaʿīf 2002: 1:89).[1]

According to Joseph Henninger, the religion of the Arabic nomads predated that of the urban population. He continued by stating that there were three main aspects of Arab people's early religions: (1) their belief in Allah as the highest and undisputed Lord; (2) their worship of astral deities, which was a manifestation of His power; and (3) their reverence for ancestors and the *jinn* (Henninger 1998: 112-121). Jews and Christians are considered to be the two main religions of urban residents. The propagation of both religions was aided by missionaries and traders on the one hand, and by the Byzantium and the Abyssinian imperium on the other (Lapidus 1999: 26). Before Muḥammad, Jews

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1. Information on those idols is available within Islamic references such as *Kitāb al-Athnām* (al-Kalbī 1995: 8-20) and *Sīrah Nabawiyyah* (Ibn Hishām 2009: 39).

and Christians coexisted in Taima', Fadak, Khaybar, Wadi al-Qura, and Yathrib, respectively (Amin 1968: 45).

There were also a few individuals who did not identify themselves as Jew or Christians, or pagans. They were called *ḥanīf* (Rubin 1998). Ibn Hishām mentions four names: Waraqah ibn Nawfal, 'Ubaydullāh ibn Jaḥsh, 'Uthmān ibn Khuwayrith, and Zayd ibn 'Amr ibn Nufayl. Some of Qur'anic verses also mention them with the very same terminology, such as Qur'an 2:135; 3:67; 3:95, 4:125. According to historical writings, these people aspired to follow the unadulterated monotheism of Abraham (Ibn Hishām 2009: 105; Abū Zayd 2000: 63; Rahman 1998: 187). Additionally, there were people who claimed to be prophets, such as al-Aswad in Yaman, Musaylimah in Yamāmah, Ṭulayḥa ibn Khuwaylid from Asad tribe, Abū 'Āmir, and Sajāḥ (Makin 2010: 172; 2008; 2013).

Regarding the scripture, those faiths can be divided into two groups: those that have it and those that does not. The first category includes Jews and Christians, whereas the second category includes everyone else. The first category is referred to as *ahl al-kitāb*, whilst the second is named *ummī*. The term *ummī* is a designation by which *ahl al-kitāb* called the Arabs because the latter did not have a scripture. This fact made the former feel superior to the Arabs, as the latter also felt inferior under the former. Because *ahl al-kitāb* had scriptures, they believed that they were more learned than the pagan Arabs.

These categories and the exact same terminology are used in the Qur'an as well. For instance, Qur'an 3:75 explains how *ahl al-kitāb* felt about Arabs. It claims that some members of the *ahl al-kitāb* should never have been trusted; even though this is not true of all of them. They did so out of disrespect for the Arabs, claiming that their scriptures allowed them to act haughtily against them (the *ummī*) (al-Ṭabarī 1958: 5:511). According to Qur'an 7:157-158, the *ahl al-kitāb* were familiar with the term "*ummī*" from their scriptures (Ibn Kathīr 2000: 6:407). Qur'an 3:75 mentions *ummī* in plural, *ummīyīn*, and in Qur'an 7:157 Muḥammad is referred to as *al-nabī al-ummī*, which literally translates to "the prophet of the *ummī* people." Here, it is clear that *ummī* represents the Arabs to whom Muḥammad was sent. The same could be inferred from Qur'an 62:2 and 3:20. The sense of antonym within both terminologies implies that the Arabs were called *ummī* because they did not have a scripture as *ahl al-kitāb* did (al-Ṭabarī 1958: 6:281; al-Zamakhsharī 1998: 1:539).

According to the verses mentioned above, Muḥammad was one of the *ummī*s, which meant that he did not have access to earlier scripture, just like the rest of Quraysh. Thus, when were the Quraysh, particularly

Muḥammad, aware of the Qur'an as Holy Scripture? Had Muḥammad recognized that Qur'an96:1-5, which he received in Ḥira', were the holy scripture since that early revelation event? Whole Muslims may find it very easy to identify the Qur'an as the Holy Scripture since it names itself *al-kitāb* on its very first page, in Qur'an 2:2. But as things accelerated quickly, the Arabs started to realize that their history was changing in ways that no one could have predicted.

3. The Qur'an: The Symbol of Power

Islamic tradition generally accepts that the Ḥira event marked the beginning of Muḥammad's prophecy (*nubuwwah*). The incident served as a resolution to Muḥammad's questions about reality, so that he worshipped God in the religion of Abraham (*ḥanīf*). He was visited by Jibrīl, who gave him the command to read and disclosed to him five verses, namely Qur'an 96:1–5. The tradition (*ḥadīth*) also mentions how difficult Muḥammad found the experience. He had no idea what had transpired. He was aware that the poet, or *khin*, was typically the one to receive revelation in this manner. Jibril approached him as he was at a loss, making his way back home and informed him, "Muḥammad, I am Jibrīl, and you are the Prophet." He stated it three times (Ibn Hishām 2009: 111-112; al-Ṭabarī 1976: 2:298-299).

Muḥammad's prophecy begins with Qur'an 96:1–5. In this respect, there are two pertinent questions. When the verses were first revealed, did Muḥammad and the Arabs recognize that they were a part of what would subsequently be known as the Qur'an? Did Muḥammad and the Arabs recognize his prophetic status at that time? I answered the first question at the conclusion of the preceding segment. Regarding the second query, on the other hand, we can infer from the preceding sentence that Jibrīl had informed Muḥammad that he was the Prophet. There were some other Quraysh who may have been aware of it beforehand. Khadījah was the first to discover it, and Waraqah ibn Nawfal confirmed it through his knowledge of his scripture (Ibn Hishām 2009: 111). Long before it happened, the Christian monk Baḥīrah, whom Muḥammad met during his trading journey with Abū Ṭālib, predicted the coming prophet, and he was confident enough that it could be Muḥammad (Lings 2014: 53). It implies that aside from Muḥammad, the only person who could potentially know his prophecy is *ahl al-kitāb*. That is not always the case for Arabs, the *ummī* community.

We can conclude that Muḥammad lacked authority prior to the revelation of the Qur'an. Given that he had it at the end of his life, it implies that Muḥammad had already passed the vast attempt to create such authority. Such authority was established between two communities: the *ummī* and the *ahl al-kitāb*. The Meccans experienced something strange soon after the news of the Ḥīra' event spread. First and foremost, the Quraysh assumed that what Muḥammad was saying was no different from what they had heard from other figures such as Quss, Umayyah, Waraqah, and so on. They thought the Meccans would finally return to their traditional faith, regardless. They, however, misjudged Muḥammad. The Qur'an and Muḥammad were completely different because they had a far greater impact than anyone could have predicted. It resembled traditional poem (*al-shi'r al-jāhilī*) but was apparently different. It had the similar mechanism of revelation as traditional *al-shi'r*; however, it proclaimed higher authority. It came from the master of *'arsh*. Muḥammad received it from *rasūl karīm* instead of the *jinn*.

The Qur'an brought Muḥammad instant local fame. If the Quraysh initially respected him as something reflected by the predicate *al-amīn*, they were perplexed as to how to treat him afterwards. Al-Walīd ibn Mughīrah, a powerful Quraysh figure, was unsure how to address Muḥammad with his words (Ibn Hishām 2009: 123-124). Since he was revealed beautiful words, known as *al-shi'r* in their tradition, Muḥammad has been known as the poet. However, because the message contained within his words were strange and alien, he was labelled a deranged person. We can see here that the existence of the Qur'an had put Muḥammad in a specific situation. As the attention and popularity of Muḥammad grew gradually and intensively, he eventually had enormous influence in its society. I would refer this situation as the power. The Qur'an is, therefore, the symbol of power for Muḥammad.

What I mean by the Qur'an serving as a symbol of power for Muḥammad is that if he had spoken without the Qur'an, he would have been ignored. He would have been regarded as the common Monk or Monotheism claimant in their society. He spoke alongside the Qur'an in some way, and it did have an effect on something more. He had earned a lot of attention. With the Qur'an, Muḥammad rose to prominence. He controlled the Arabs' discourse and knowledge of theology, prophecy, and scripture with the Qur'an in the same way that a man controls a horse. The initial reaction could be wild, tough, and unpredictable. However, history revealed that in only 23 years, the power of Muḥammad was

recognized not only by the Quraysh of Mecca, but also by the Medinans and the entire population of the Arabian Peninsula.

The symbolic relationship is arbitrary and is based on convention (Chandler 2007: 39). The Qur'an was certainly new at the time, and it was attempting to gain recognition for its existence and identity. If that were the case, how could the Quraysh community's convention that the Qur'an was a symbol of Muḥammad's power has been possible, given that the Qur'an itself was not strong enough? The convention did not happen by chance; it did not emerge from thin air. It was shaped by the Arabs' traditional convention on *al-shiʿr* and previous scripture. Before the Qur'an was revealed to Muḥammad, the poet was regarded as the intellectual in Arab culture. The Arabs also considered *ahl al-kitāb* to be superior in terms of the knowledge they gained from their scripture. Both of these are Arab conventions. In fact, when the Qur'an was first promoting itself and attempting to gain identity recognition prior to *al-shiʿr al-jāhilī*, their traditional convention surrounding *al-shiʿr al-jāhilī* cascaded to the Qur'an. Afterward, when the Qur'an was placing itself among the family of scriptures, the second convention also cascaded to the Qur'an. It was from both conventions the symbolic relation between the Qur'an and the power of Muḥammad had emerged.

4. Language as the Tool of Power

We have already discussed how the Qur'an was a symbol of Muḥammad's power. In this case, I would argue that this power used language as a tool to control the discourse. If anyone in the Arab peninsula desired a radical change in the seventh century, language was a very effective tool. The position of language within the Arab culture has allowed the Qur'an to impose a specific psychological effect on their people. According to Hitti (2014: 112), no people in the world have a greater appreciation for language and derive more emotional influences from it than the Arabs. Their eagerly controllable psychological state becomes the portal through which the Qur'an enters their rational and psychological spaces. When the Qur'an used language to control the Arabs, it effectively distributed its power to them.

The first time the Qur'an introduced itself, it used the term of *al-dhikr* (Qur'an 81:27). The term *al-dhikr* has two etymological meanings: *dhikr bi al-lisān* and *dhikr bi al-qalb*. According to Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (n.d.: 179), this word refers to a condition in which humans are capable of keeping

something they know—similar to the meaning of *al-ḥifẓ*—or presenting something abstractly in the heart (*qalb*) or verbally (*qawl*). Ibn Manẓūr (n.d.: 1507) agrees, explaining that this word meant to recall something (*al-ḥifẓ li shay' tadhkuruhu*) or to mention/recite something verbally (*al-shay' yajrī 'ala al-lisān*). In this context, the proper meaning of these two basic meanings appears to be the second, verbal recitation (*dhikr bi al-lisān*). This meaning is chosen because it was the first identification of the Qur'an and occurred in the very early period in Mecca. In other words, the Qur'an identified itself as something familiar with a cultural element of the Quraysh people, who had a strong connection to the poem (*al-shi'r al-jāhilī*). Because at that time the most common form of poetry was verbal, the Qur'an first identified itself as something verbal, *al-dhikr*, in order to tempt Quraysh to accept its existence. However, the fact that it did not directly identify itself as *al-shi'r* indicates that while it was included within the cultural context of Quraysh, it was not the *shi'r*.

In Qur'an 81, the Qur'an argued that what Muḥammad received through *rasūl karīm* from the master of '*arsh* was Divine revelation. The term *rasūl* in the nineteenth verse deserves closer examination. This word indicates the mechanism of the revelation of *al-dhikr*. According to Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, the Arabs believed that a supernatural being, *jinn*, was capable of bridging the metaphysical and empiric worlds. These *jinn* can listen to the secret message from the sky to reveal it to the poet. This kind of belief provides the cultural context for the Quraysh people to accept the Qur'an. "It is not the existence of the Qur'an," Abū Zayd says, "that they deny rather than the content of it." The relationship between the secret message, the *jinn*, and the poet explains how the Quraysh perceive the relationship between the Qur'an, *rasūl karīm*, and Muḥammad. That explains why they are tempted to classify this revelation, *al-dhikr*, as the poem, even though they appear uncertain, as demonstrated by the story of al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah mentioned above (Abū Zayd 2000: 32-41).

While the Qur'an's introduction of itself as something resembling traditional *al-shi'r* in terms of revelation mechanism is genius, given the cultural state of the pagan people who found itself tightly bound to traditional *al-shi'r*, the Qur'an also imposed its uniqueness. The traditional revelation mechanism was appropriated, but not without modification. The Qur'anic self-identity in *Sūrah*s *al-Takwīr* (Qur'an 81), *al-Raḥmān* (Qur'an 55), and *al-Burūj* (Qur'an 85), evidence that Muḥammad's revelation is a new category distinct from *al-shi'r*.

The Qur'an does not call itself *al-qur'ān* for the first time; instead, it employs a rather ambiguous term, *al-dhikr*. In this early period,

Sūrah al-Takwīr also makes no mention of the Qur'an coming from God/Allah. This *sūrah* said that it is the word of *rasūl karīm*, whose position was special before *dhī al-'arsh.* In other words, the Qur'an does not immediately declare that it is from God, but rather from a very close intermediary to God (*rasūlin karīm, dhī quwwatin 'inda dhi al-'arsh makīn*). The Qur'an firstly called itself *al-qur'ān* in *Sūrah al-Raḥmān.* Not only calling itself *al-Qur'an,* this *sūrah* also proclaims that it is God himself, the *al-Raḥmān* (the Most Merciful), who teaches the Qur'an to Muḥammad. Thus, the Qur'an—earlier called *al-dhikr* and now *al-qur'ān*—despite resembling the traditional *shi'r* in this regard, is not *shi'r*. The use of the distinct name in this context, *al-qur'ān,* is to proclaim its uniqueness. Furthermore, to emphasize this unique quality, the Qur'an deconstructs and modifies some terminologies introduced with the Qur'an. From our perspective, this explains why the Qur'an is in the process of developing new discourse for the Arabs who have never read the Holy Scripture. The Qur'an now appears as an authentic discourse, a revelation that dazzles the Quraysh with its peculiarities. We can see how the Qur'an introduced its novelty here.

The Qur'an eventually broke down that first category after introducing itself with such novelty. It destroyed the authority of traditional *al-shi'r* from its very foundational aspect, namely the origin. It has been said earlier that *jinn* was the source of a particular kind of *shi'r* for the Arab pagan people. In light of this, *Sūrah al-Raḥmān*[1] addressed the *jinn* and human on an equal term. Anybody approaching *Sūrah al-Raḥmān* will see a sentence repeated even for 31 times, *fabi ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukaẓẓibān* (*So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*). In my opinion, the depiction of *jinn* here has a clear mission: to challenge the Arabs' traditional beliefs about *al-shi'r.* As the Arabs believe that certain people with certain qualities are capable of communicating with *jinn* who receive stolen secret messages from the sky. *Sūrah al-Raḥmān*

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1. Qur'an commentaries say that the communicants of *fabi ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukaẓẓibān* are the human being and *jinn*. Repetition of the verses marks the communication is happening intensively for the communicants who are not ready to accept the delivered message. Al-Zamakhsharī said that the language style of this *sūrah* tended to be soft with the content about the graces from the Merciful God. Al-Islāḥī affirmed it, saying that unlike the other Meccan *sūarah*s such as *al-Qamar* (Qur'an 54), *al-Raḥmān* holds the communication with the Quraysh in a unique way, emphasizing the gloriousness of God, and the Qur'an is revealed within this glorious condition. Unlike al-Zamakhsharī and al-Islāḥī, I argue that *al-Raḥmān* is not less raucous nor harsh discursively. (See al-Ṭabarī 1958: 22:189; al-Zamakhsharī 1998: 6:5; al-Islāḥī 2015).

radically undermines this belief, placing *jinn* as much as human beings as communicants. The Arabs who are very close to *al-shi'r al-jāhilī* should immediately detect strange things in this discourse.

Furthermore, *Sūrah al-Jinn* (Qur'an 72) conveys that *jinn* no longer had the ability to sit on the sky and listen to the revelation of the sky. *Sūrah al-Jinn* begins by commanding Muḥammad to inform the Arabs that the revelation revealed something to him (*qul ūḥiya ilayya*). It is said that a community of *jinn* heard the Qur'an and were astounded when they realized it contained the truth. *Sūrah al-Jinn* is more radical than *Sūrah al-Raḥmān* in that it clearly violated the Arabs' traditional belief in *al-shi'r al-jāhilī*. The sixth to tenth verses clearly depict the Arabs' belief with regards to the *jinn* in a negative tone. According to the ninth verse, the *jinn* used to be able to reach a location in the sky where they could steal the secret message, but that has changed since Muḥammad's prophecy. The revelation of Muḥammad deconstructs the sacredness of *al-shi'r al-jāhilī* and even commands him to inform the Quraysh of the decline of the *jinn*'s capability (See al-Ṭabarī 1958: 23:310; al-Jābirī, 2008, 1:234).

When the Meccan people began to recognize the existence of the Qur'an, they were tempted to compare it to the scriptures of *ahl al-kitāb*. The Quraysh were shocked with the monotheist teaching of the Qur'an and said that such teaching was absent even within the earlier religions, viz., Judaism and Christianity (Qur'an 38:7), saying *mā sami'nā biḥāzā fī al-millah al-ākhirah in hāzā illā ikhtilāq*. They, therefore, questioned the validity of the Qur'an. Interestingly, they questioned it in the manner of a comparison. Consequently, the Qur'an then dealt with the second category, *ahl al-kitāb*; it was the time when the Qur'an for the first time identified itself as *al-kitāb*, the scripture, in *Sūrah*s *Ṣād* (Qur'an 38) and *al-A'rāf* (Qur'an 7). The Qur'an answered them, introducing itself as *al-kitāb* in Qur'an 38:29 for the first time, an equal scripture to that of Judaism and Christianity. Here we understand the motive of Biblical material within the Qur'an as well as Qur'anic self-identity using the term *al-kitāb*. They are not to have a dialog with *ahl al-kitāb* but rather the Meccan Quraysh, and the use of Biblical material and such self-identity are to strengthen the authority of the Qur'an; the Arabs feel inferior under *ahl al-kitāb* due to their scripture, and therefore, could affect the effectivity of monotheist proclamation.

Up to this point, we can see an interestingly gradual process of the Qur'an's introduction of itself using *asmā' al-qur'ān*. From *Sūrah al-'Alaq* (Qur'an 96) to *al-Qamar*, the Qur'an focused more on positioning

itself before *al-shiʿr al-jāhilī*, an important cultural element of the Arab pagan people. Following that, from *Sūrah Ṣād* until *al-Aḥqāf* (Qur'an 46), it focused more on placing itself before the earlier scriptures, the *ahl al-kitāb* scriptures. The intensity of Qur'anic self-identity then shifted to a focus on itself. From that point on, the Qur'an began to introduce itself, i.e., its nature, character, attributes, and functions, with little reference to *al-shiʿr al-jāhilī* or previous scriptures. It declared its nature as a revelation to Muḥammad (Qur'an 40:2; 45:2; 46:2; 76:23; 32:2), with some characteristics such as *ḥaqq, ḥakīm, mubīn, hudā*, and so on (Qur'an 31:2; 39:1; 42:17; 16:64 & 89; 14:1; 2:2 & 185).

Sūrah Ṣād (Qur'an 38:8) presents an intriguing case. In this verse, the Qur'an for the first time uses a composition in which the Quraysh is placed as the subject when using *asmā' al-qur'ān* terminologies (it says *a'unzila ʿalayhi al-dhikr min bayninā*). Following that, it occurred again in *al-Furqān* (Qur'an 25:34) (*wa qāla alladhīna kafarū law lā nuzzila ʿalayhi al-Qur'ān jumlatan wāḥidatan*). In other words, these compositions convey the Quraysh's reaction to the Qur'an. The interesting point here is that the Quraysh's identification of the Qur'an uses *al-dhikr* first and then *al-qur'ān* second, just as the Qur'an identified itself for the first and second time in the Qur'an (Qur'an 81:27 & 55:2). When the Qur'an mentions Quraysh identifying itself in the same way it identified itself, it is natural to conclude that the Qur'anic self-identification project has already achieved some success. To begin, the Quraysh identify it as *al-dhikr*, which means that they acknowledge Muḥammad's revelation from Allah/*al-Raḥmān* through *rūḥ al-amīn* (Truthful Spirit) is a verbal recitation, similar to *al-shiʿr al-jāhilī*. Furthermore, the Qur'an reports that Quraysh identified itself as *al-qur'ān*, implying that they already had a new knowledge of the existence of something strange—it is similar to *al-shiʿr al-jāhilī*, but somehow proclaims difference, that verbal recitation (*al-dhikr*) is not *al-shiʿr*, but *al-qur'ān*. It means that the quest for self-identity has already introduced a new knowledge to the Arabian Peninsula; the Arabs have acknowledged its existence even if they do not fully understand it.

In *Sūrah Saba'* (Qur'an 34:31), the Qur'an uses the same linguistic style as in Qur'an 38:8 & 25:34, placing the Quraysh as subject; *wa qāla alladhīna kafarū lan nu'mina bihādhā al-Qur'āna walā billadhī bayna yadayhi* (*The faithless say, 'We will never believe in this Qur'ān, nor in what was [revealed] before it.'*). The verse refers to the Quraysh's challenge, and there is an indication that they already recognized the existence of the Qur'an, which is no longer related to *al-shiʿr al-jāhilī*, but rather

to the earlier scriptures. Here, we can see that the Quraysh had already elevated the Qur'an to the position of *ahl al-kitāb*, to which they felt inferior and envious. In other words, the Qur'an was already successful in establishing a new discourse/knowledge in the Arabian Peninsula centred on Holy Scripture. The Arabs, who only had *al-shiʿr al-jāhilī* in their history instead of a sacred scripture like *ahl al-kitāb*, are now acknowledging the existence of a new holy scripture around them, even if they still do not have faith in it. Within *tartīb al-nuzūl* framework, *Sūrah Sabaʾ* was revealed in the 57th, in the fourth phase of the Meccan *sūrah*s where Muḥammad was facing the coming tribes into Mecca for pilgrimage. The verse was revealed prior to the Quraysh's socioeconomic boycott in the seventh year of Muḥammad's prophecy. As a result, we can conclude that in the seventh year of Muḥammad's prophecy, a new era of history based on Holy Scripture begins in the Arabian Peninsula.

There were two strategies used by the Qur'an while introducing its identity in the seventh century. The first is authorship. It is of the most important strategy in the discourse of Qur'anic identity. Within *Sūrah*s *al-Takwīr* and *al-Raḥmān*, the Qur'an clearly identified itself as relating to *dhī al-ʿarsh*, on one hand, and the *al-raḥmān*, on the other hand. Both terminologies are about God. *Al-Takwīr* did not clearly state that the *qawl* that was revealed to Muḥammad was from the Master of the *ʿarsh*; instead, it is the words of *rasūl karīm* whose position is extraordinary by the side of *dhī al-ʿarsh*. Unlike *al-Takwīr*, *al-Raḥmān* did it clear enough, that it was God who taught Muḥammad the Qur'an. It means that the *qawl* brought by *rasūl amīn* (trustworthy messenger) was not from himself, but rather it is God who taught Muḥammad. Not only is this authenticity proclamation the main point of division between the Qur'an and traditional *al-shiʿr*, but also it raised up the position of the Qur'an because its origin is God, rather than the *jinn* as the traditional *al-shiʿr* used to recognize it.

Authorship was the strategy by which the Qur'an continuously and consistently conducted. I argued before that the Qur'an gradually faced *ummī* with traditional *al-shiʿr* and then *ahl al-kitāb* with the scriptures to introduce its existence as well as identity. Here I say that authorship was conducted all over that period. After *Sūrah*s *al-Takwīr*, *al-Raḥmān*, and *al-Burūj*, the Qur'an successively utilized the strategy of authorship in *Ṣād*, *al-Aʿrāf*, *Yāsīn* (Qur'an 36), *al-Furqān*, *Fāṭir* (Qur'an 35), *Ṭāhā* (Qur'an 20), and so forth for the Meccan period, and *al-Baqarah*, *al-Nisāʾ* (Qur'an 4), *al-Ḥashr* (Qur'an 59), and so forth for the Medinan

period. The key terminologies of this strategy were *anzala*, *nazzala*, and *awḥā* whose subject were God.

The continuous and consistent emphasis on authorship had the role to claim the superiority of the Qur'an over the traditional *al-shiʿr* and to place itself equal to the previous scriptures, which the Arabs at that time believed to be the revelation of God as well. A careful look at these phenomena will reveal that this was the implementation of the other limitation strategy, namely commentary. Within this strategy, one Qur'anic verse depicts, explains, and interprets the other verses. In the chronological approach that I employ, the verses revealed later continuously described the first discourse of the Author in *al-Takwīr* and *al-Raḥmān*.

It is hardly new in conventional *ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān* and *tafsīr* literature. There is a principle named *al-Qurʾān yufassiru baʿḍuhū baʿḍa* (one part of the Qur'an interpreting the other) that is also referred to as *tafsīr al-āyah bi al-āyah* (one verse interpreting the other). In *ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*, it deals with the method by which the Qur'an deliver its message. Sometimes it says something concisely (*ijāz*), and, on the other hand, it says something else at length, sometimes generally (*ijmāl*), and the other times in detail (*tabyīn*). Those, which are stated in general shape in a particular place, will be conducted at length in the other place. Therefore, compiling verses within the unity of a theme would necessarily give a comprehensive understanding (al-Dhahabī 2000: 1:31).

However, the commentary which is performed by the Qur'an in order to create a novel discourse on the existence of a new scripture in Arabic, i.e., the Qur'an, establish as well as sustain its identity, has a particular. The role of *tafsīr* in terms of explaining or giving the more definitive elaboration on a particular thing only happens in case of *al-Takwīr* and *al-Raḥmān*; the former does not clearly state that the Qur'an came from Allah, while the later explicitly says it is taught by *Al-Raḥmān*, i.e., God. Other than that, the commentary on this authorship does not appear to be the confirmer or the more detail information on this rather than to emphasize its early notion. This commentary discursively is the effort to sustain the discourse of authorship.

While emphasizing that it, too, was a scripture, the Qur'an employed some unique language formulations, namely *aḥruf al-muqaṭṭaʿah*. During the third phase of the Meccan *sūrah*s, when Muḥammad was openly confronting paganism, the Quraysh increased their resistance. Many weak people, whether in secret or in public, are said to have converted to Islam while Muḥammad was preaching it, but not the men of

note among the Quraysh. They denounced and censured him as they walked past Muḥammad's forum, saying, "How dare this grandson of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib argue that he received revelation from the sky!?" The condemnation remained verbal until Muḥammad confronted their gods openly and said, "Woe to the worshippers of idols, and may they die in an infidel state." Since then, the intimidation has turned physical (al-Jābiri 2008: 1:200).

The *sūrah*s revealed in this phase, those revealed in the 47th in the revelation order successively to the 53rd, *al-Shuʿarā* (Qur'an 26), *al-Naml* (Qur'an 27), *al-Qaṣaṣ* (Qur'an 28), *Yūnus* (Qur'an 10), *Hūd* (Qur'an 11), *Yūsuf* (Qur'an 12), and *al-Ḥijr* (Qur'an 15), are opened by *aḥruf al-muqaṭṭaʿah* (*ṭā-sīn*, *ṭā-sīn-mim*, and *alif-lām-rā*) followed by Qur'anic self-identity. *Al-Shuʿarā*, *al-Qaṣaṣ*, and *Yūsuf* are opened by *tilka āyāt al-kitāb al-mubīn*, while *al-Naml* consists of *al-Qurʾān* as the addition word: *tilka āyāt al-Qurʾān wa kitābin mubīn*, and *al-Ḥijr* places the words in a reversed order: *tilka āyāt al-kitāb wa Qurʾānin mubīn*. *Yūnus* is opened with *tilka āyāt al-kitāb al-ḥakīm*, while *Hūd* with *kitābun uḥkimat āyātuhu thumma fuṣilat min ladun ḥakīmin khabīr*. The phenomenon occurred again when Muḥammad, his followers, and Banū Hāshim were subjected to an economic and social boycott. The *sūrah*s revealed in this period, *al-Ghāfir* (Qur'an 40), *Fuṣṣilat* (Qur'an 41), *al-Shūrā* (Q.42), *al-Zukhruf* (Qur'an 43), *al-Dukhān* (Qur'an 44), *al-Jāthiyah* (Qur'an 45), and *al-Aḥqāf* (Qu''an 46) were consistently opened with *ḥā-mīm*. Here we see the consistent pattern of the Qur'an using Qur'anic self-identity following *aḥruf al-muqaṭṭaʿah* in fourteen *sūrah*s. However, that are not all. There are only three *sūrah*s out of the total 29 which are opened with *aḥruf al-muqaṭṭaʿah*, which are not directly followed by Qur'anic self-identity, viz., Maryam (Qur'an 19), *al-Ankabūt* (Qur'an 29), and *al-Rūm* (Qur'an 30).[1]

We can find an extensive analysis on *aḥruf al-muqaṭṭaʿah* within the book of Bint al-Shāṭi', i.e., *I'jāz al-Bayāni lil-Qurʾān wa Masāʾil Ibn Azraq*. She evaluates previous experts' theories and concludes that *sūrah*s with *aḥruf al-muqaṭṭaʿah* were revealed during a period when Muḥammad and his followers were being intimidated by the Quraysh. The intimidation

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1. This statement is attributed to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. However, Bint Shāṭi' objects to it; she agrees with Ibn Kathīr who said that all of the *sūrah*s opened by *aḥruf al-muqaṭṭaʿah* relate to the notion on the Qur'an. The difference is that al-Rāzī sees the direct notion on that after the *aḥruf al-muqaṭṭaʿah*, while Bint al-Shāṭi' says that even though the second verses of *Maryam*, *al-ʿAnkabūt*, and *al-Rūm* do not directly mention the Qur'an, the identification appears in the other part of these *sūrah*s (see Bint al-Shāṭi' 1999: 159).

came up for him both personally and in relation to the Qur'an. They labelled Muḥammad as insane, a poet, or a shaman. In response to such intimidation, *sūrah*s with *aḥruf al-muqaṭṭa‘ah* were revealed. It contained an argument on the existence of the Qur'an that refuted those accusations (Bint al-Shāṭi' 1999: 179-180). I agree with Bint al-Shāṭi' that the intensity of *sūrah*s with *aḥruf al-muqaṭṭa‘ah* is found within *sūrah*s revealed in two very difficult conditions, namely open confrontation with paganism (*al-Shu‘arā'* [26] up to *al-Ḥijr* [15]) and social boycott (*al-Ghāfir* up to *al-Aḥqāf*).

Faisol Fatawi expands on Bint Shāṭi''s conclusion. He claims that there was a concept of *saj' al-kuhhān* in Arab tradition. It was a set of words that no one could understand except the poet who wrote it. This does not, however, imply that the composition was meaningless in the communication. The structure worked pragmatically rather than semantically. It entered the Arabs' psychological state rather than their cognitive state. *Saj' al-kuhhān* did not convey meaning; instead, it conveyed emotion. We can see the historical roots of *aḥruf al-muqaṭṭa‘ah* here. *Aḥruf al-muqaṭṭa‘ah*, like *saj' al-kuhhān*, urged the Arabs to feel something in their hearts and push them to accept the message (Fatawi 2009: 129), which in this case is the Qur'anic self-identity. In fact, the very existence of *aḥruf al-muqaṭṭa‘ah* silently spread the psychological effect on the Arabs, i.e., the first generation of the Qur'an's audience. Because the Qur'an used the commonly recognized mechanism of revelation as traditional *al-shi‘r*, the Qur'an also influenced the psychological state of the Arabs through the strong composition of words, from which the Arabs could do nothing but be amazed at the Qur'an's strength.

Another strategy is that the Qur'an distributes its power through language in an explicit way. Here I refer to the Qur'anic proclamation that it is an Arabic revelation (*qur'ān ‘arabī*). The Qur'an states it several times (Qur'an 20:113; 26:195; 12:2; 39:28; 41:3; 42:7; 43:3; 46:12). Al-Ṭabarī (1958: 13:6; 17:643; 20:196; 20:469) and al-Zamakhsharī (1998: 4:415; 5:366; 5:394) provide hermeneutical nuance in their interpretation of these verses that the Qur'an uses the Arabic language because it is revealed to the Arab people by which they can understand the meaning of it. Some others emphasize it as the identity of the Qur'an. Al-Zamakhsharī

provides two theories; one regards the whole words of the Qur'an as Arabic, and the other says that several words are not necessarily Arabic.[1]

The question becomes more complicated in the context of Qur'anic self-identity discourse. It is certain that the Quraysh recognized the Qur'an as Arabic the moment they heard it. Why would it then emphasize its Arabicness (*qur'ānan 'arabiyyan*)? If it is only for hermeneutical purposes, that it is so for them to understand the Qur'an, emphasizing its Arabicness is pointless. It demonstrates, in my opinion, that the Qur'an made every effort to proclaim its identity through language. The Qur'an claims to be a scripture, despite the fact that it is written in Arabic, a reference to the Arabs' lack of scriptural experience prior to Muḥammad. Furthermore, because the Arabs value language, it fully utilized the potential psychological effect of language. What Hitti says appears to support our contention that no people on the planet have a greater appreciation for language and derive more emotional influence from it than the Arabs (Hitti 2014: 112). To build its identity, the Qur'an distributed its power through language.

5. Conclusion

The article points to three conclusions. The first is that Muḥammad was one of the Quraysh people. As a result, he was an *ummī* who had no experience with the scripture. For that matter, the Qur'an for him in the first place was as strange as it was for the other Quraysh. Muḥammad did not notice that Qur'an 96:1-5 is the Qur'an during its revelation event at Ḥira', not until the Qur'an itself told him so. The second says that Muḥammad had a good reputation in his society, as referred to by the term *al-Amīn*. He had also been a *ḥākim* when the Ka'bah was renovated. However, the Qur'an made him the Prophet (*nabī*). Consequently, without the Qur'an, Muḥammad was just an honoured Quraysh. With

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1. The first said that all words of the Qur'an are Arabic. Allah makes the Qur'an as *mu'jiz* to Prophet Muḥammad as the proof of his truth. In Qur'an 12:2, the Qur'an says, *innā anzalnāhu qur'ānan 'arabiyyan* and in Qur'an 41:44 it says, *walaw ja'alnāhu qur'ānan a'jamiyyan*. Both verses imply a notion that there will be no word within the Qur'an other than Arabic. This perspective is held by al-Shāfi'ī, Abū 'Ubaydah, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, Qāḍī Abū Bakr, and Ibn Fāris. The second perspective that is held by Abū Ḥanīfah, says that some words of the Qur'an originated from other languages. There was Arabisation before the Qur'an uses them. Of the words within this category are *al-ṭūr, ṭafiqā, al-qisṭ, al-sijl, al-raqīm, tawrāt, injīl*, etc. (see al-Zarkashī 2006: 201).

the Qur'an in his hand, he had something more, referred to here as power. The Qur'an was then the symbol of Muḥammad's power. The third concerns language. The Qur'an utilized language as the mechanism to spread its power. It was in two ways: implicit and explicit. The implicit strategy was to give a psychological effect to the Arabs in a silent mode through the sequential use of *asmā' al-qur'ān*, while the explicit way was to declare and emphasize that the Qur'an was the scripture that used the Arabic language. Using language as the mechanism of power was the genius strategy of the Qur'an to establish its identity.

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