

Allegorical Language in the Holy Quran A Semiotic Interpretation of Surat Al-Hujurat

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Abstract

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Scholars, including both Muslim and non-Muslim philologists and anthropologists, tend to agree that the Muslim holy book, Al-Quran, is not an easy text to read, understand and interpret, much more so than any other holy text available, say The Torah or The Gospel. However, for an open-minded scholar, to interpret Al-Quran is to experience either pleasant or unpleasant encounters with all that it holds. Hence the variety of textual analysis relative to the various levels of understanding of the original message embedded in the allegorical language shaping it. In this context, reading Al-Quran can be viewed as an exercise in semiotics. This paper presents a panoramic view of this holy Book, but it dwells, more particularly, on exploring the taxonomy of interpretation of the probable messages underlying chapter XLIX, *Surat "Al-Hujurat"*. Using a semiotic stance to touch upon some issues ingrained in the sign language of this specific text, this paper uncovers the composite fabric of the Muslim communal system which also sounds universal in an application when it comes to the shaping of healthy communities as regards the issues of divinity, righteousness, faith, ethics, humanism, justice, and accountability.

INTRODUCTION

Arabic is the language of the Muslim holy Book. Arabic poetry, in particular, was the bedrock of culture in the pre-Islamic period in the Arabian Peninsula for one merit, namely the mastery of language which distinguished poets from the rest of the tribal community members. Al-Quran demonstrated that mastery of language by addressing a broad spectrum of issues the tribal life in Mecca and Medina knew nothing or little about. Hence the challenge on the one ground they shared: poetic Arabic language and its semantic riches. It is important to note here that the language of Al-Quran is distinguished for its prosody, rhythmical sentence structure and signs. Hence the first

divine message carrying the challenge: READ/RECITE. As a matter of fact, the first *surah* [chapter] ever revealed to [Prophet] Mohammad through Angel Gabriel is *Al-Alaq* [Blood Clot]¹ in which Gabriel requests that the newly proclaimed messenger listen and recite what is being orally communicated as the Revealed Word of *Allah* [God].

“**Recite** in the name of thy Lord. He who created ... created man from a blood clot. **Recite**: and thy Lord is the Most Generous Who taught by the pen, taught man that which he knew not” (XCVI: 1-5) [Bold is mine].

Apart from the literal meaning of the verb ‘recite’, which means read and/or rehearse, the five verses quoted above are quite suggestive. They underscore the message implied by the divine command (recite) to learn and do your best to further education and knowledge. In almost every *surah* in *Al-Quran*, there is an unalienable distinction between those who know (the knowing) and those who do not (the ignorant). This issue is constantly endorsed in the oral statements made by Prophet Mohammad in his *Hadith*². One of those statements elucidating the *Quranic* text describes the position of the scholar as follows: “Scholars are most favored in the eyes of Allah” (Abu Dawoud, Bk 5). Hence there is a need for this type of Muslim scholar to interpret the Holy Book. In more than one place in the *Quran*, *Allah* keeps motivating the believers to think of what they read, use logic to understand what they read, and weigh which is which as they come across allegorical texts and narratives revealed through the word of God. In short, God makes a clear preference between the educated and the uneducated, favoring the former type as in *Surat Az-Zumar*:

“Say, are those who know equal to those who do not know?” (XXXIX, 9)

As a matter of fact, the *Quranic* corpus of texts poses a challenge for interpreters at the linguistic level and beyond, to do research and find out what message/s word of God carries and transmits. This challenge is clearly stated in *Surat al-Shu'araa* [The Poets] as follows:

¹ Blood Clot is the union between human sperm and ovum to make the first gestation of human life in the womb of a woman during prenatal period. This *surah*, however, is not arranged in the *Quran* as chapter one. It is arranged as chapter 96. It describes how man was created and taught by *Allah* [God], the greatest Creator and most bountiful Lord, how to read and understand what is read in order to act and live accordingly.

²*Hadith* is the Arabic term for the bulk of all speech, talk, guidance, and oral statements, transmitted and collected by Prophet Mohammad’s close circle of followers, by way of showing Muslims the practical side of the *Quranic* text, which should be implemented round the clock.

“If **We** willed, **We** could have sent down to them a *sign* from the sky for which their necks would be humbled” (XXVI: 4) [Bold is mine].

Except for *Surat Yousuf* [Joseph] XXII³, which was revealed as one piece for a complete narrative, the rest of the *surahs* were revealed in form of bits and pieces in more than one geographical place and over various spans of time. Hence the need for a stitch-up and an academic search for the linguistic connectivity of ideas which none other than the learned could do. Attention of scholars is more particularly brought to that distinction between the two types of *Ayaat* (signs): *al-Moh'kamat*⁴, which are the backbone of Islamic *Shari'a* [jurisdiction] and *al-Mutashabihat*⁵, which are presented figuratively to touch issues of human life on earth and in the Hereafter. It is the latter type over which interpreters are likely to divide due to various levels of reading, including that queer reading done by the Jihadists⁶. Thus reading the *Quranic* text entails the existence of an interpreter fully versed in more than one field of knowledge to be able to decipher the message/s transmitted in the texts in which allegorical language is predominant. It is this semiotic perspective of the reading of the holy Book, as sign language, that this paper is trying to elucidate. *Surat Al-Hujurat* [House Chambers] tolerates both types of *ayaat*, hence this paper showcases the two types of interpretation: the exoteric and the esoteric.

Literature Review

As an academic tool used to explore and create the meaning of words and texts through interpreting linguistic and visual signs, semiotics is defined as 'thinking in signs' (de Saussure, 1977). More particularly, it is a set of theories and analytical practices concerned with the production of meaning and representation ... where a sign "can stand for something else" (Eco, 1976; Deely, 2004) and has meaning in "a continuing process of interpretation" (Peirce, 1994). Hence, semiotics is anything that is used to tell or communicate some meaning. In textual analysis, using semiotics as an approach to

³ In *Surat Yousuf* XXII, the recurrent mention of the shirt, as a sign, defines the narrative unity of the tale, for *Yousuf's* shirt is mentioned at the beginning, in the middle and at the end.

⁴ Verses carrying one precise meaning and may not need any interpretation.

⁵ Verses, mostly allegorical, tolerating open levels of interpretation, pending variety of readings.

⁶ Those Muslim extremists who use force, kidnap innocent civilians and explode themselves to make a horrible scene, only to pass some ideological message. Such Jihadists are by all means terrorists led by extremist Muslim scholars. They are terrorizing the world now, and you can see them in Afghanistan (Taliban), in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), in Nigeria (Boko Haram), and in Somalia (al-Shabab), etc.

produce meaning, the notion of sign is central (Adamo, 2015). Based on these remarks, sign language is likely to produce a variety of interpretations, in as much as the context of situation assumes an interpreter/observer vis-à-vis a text. This academic notion, in turn, gives rise to semiotic exegesis as an off-shoot of textual interpretation.

Semiotic exegesis, for a narrow definition, is the application of semiotic paradigms to critical studies, more especially that of religious texts. The path of semiotic analysis as applied to the critical study of the Bible, for example, spanned the last third of the Twentieth Century (Adamo, 2015). However, Muslim scholarly *Quranic* text exegesis goes back as early as the 30-year rule of the Four *Rashidun* Caliphs⁷ who succeeded Prophet Mohammad after his death in 633 A.D. As a matter of fact, however, Muslim scholarship began with the rise of Muslim philosophy which appropriated and excelled Aristotle and other Greek philosophers. The study of texts [*dirasat an-nusus*], including *Quranic* texts, turned out to be an approach predominant in the Islamic scholarly tradition⁸.

Muslim scholars discussed semiotic language for many centuries before it became part of general linguistics. The *Quranic Ayaat* was interpreted as God's signs that would work as signification (meaning-making) based on signs as the basis of human cognition, communication, and culture. Unlike Eco and de Saussure, who elaborated on semiotics as a theory, Al-Ghazali⁹ (1058-1111) argued that philosophy embeds the relationship of objects or things to the content of knowledge in some sort of non-arbitrary, causal representation. In other words, "Words consist of segmented letters, posited by human choice to indicate individual things" (Berisha, 2017). Hence Al-Ghazali's hypothesis: standard signification model bears multi-layered implications. All of that was prompted by the *Quranic* text using providential signs that urge believers to ponder upon, learn, and act accordingly. In the Holy Book, the following *Surats* "*Sad*, *Hud*, and *Smoke*", to mention only a few, point to this divine urge.

⁷ This term refers to the rule of the four successors of Prophet Mohammad (632-661 A.D), namely Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, Omar Ibn El-Khattab, Othman Bin Affan and Ali Bin Abi-Taleb. During that era the *Quran* was collected, verified and transcribed into a complete holy Book. *Hadith* transmitted was also checked for authenticity and interpreted for practical need. It is in this context that textual exegesis takes effect.

⁸ Most renowned of those Muslim philosophers who appropriated and excelled ancient Greek philosophy are Ibn Sina [Avicenna], Al-Ghazali and Ibn Rusd, to mention only a few names.

⁹ A prominent and influential Arab Muslim philosopher, theologian, jurist and mystic in the Middle Ages.

A blessed Book sent down so that they [humankind] may ponder upon its signs (VIII VIII: 29).

Had thy Lord willed, He would have made mankind one nation; but they continue in their differences (XI: 118).

And We did not create the heaven and earth and all that between them in vain (XLIV: 38).

The Muslim scholarly approach to sign language does not only deal with the authoritative religious texts (*Quranic verses*), but it also deals with scholarly works¹⁰ aimed at elucidating those texts. In this context, textual analysis includes the study of the history of the text, its oral or written features, its transmission, its social and cultural role, and its universal resonance as well as reception by an increasing number of adherents to Islam across other, non-Arabic¹¹ cultures. In this vein, Goran Sonesson (2008) argues that the practice of semiotics can facilitate an apprenticeship in reading and how to read in order always to face the 'unknown.' To this effect, approaching a text using semiotics is a complex task, for semiotics is not only about what something means but also about how something means. Hence the taxonomy of interpretation.

Interpretation is an act of co-creation of text. It is in no way a replication of text, however. That is, interpretation is, by all means, heterogeneous as regards its object, goal, and scope. This does not negate the fact that there is some fundamental unity underlying this variety. The main point for having a semiotic approach to interpret allegorical and/or controversial texts is to be able to act for the disparities and not for the similarities of various types of culture-related meaning. In this context, using semiotics as an approach to study the *Quranic* text sounds quite relevant to this study for one reason. Translation from Arabic into any other language produces various versions¹² of the one original text. Granted the benefit of doubt, those translators who

¹⁰ Reference is made to those Muslim scholars (across Arab and non-Arab cultures) who tried to interpret *Ahadith* of Prophet Mohammad, recognized as part of the prophet's legacy, *Sunnah*.

¹¹ The word **Islam** means "submission," and it calls on human beings to submit to God (Allah) by following the teachings of the Qur'an. Interpretation and textual exegesis of *Quranic* text and *Hadith* are part of this body of Islamic teaching whose end-users are all believers, including those from different cultures.

¹² Examples are countless as we compare and contrast any original *Quranic* text with a number of versions translating the same text.

have vowed to adhere sincerely to the spirit and content of the original text, tend to do that in different ways when it comes to syntax and semantics.

The Quran describes the meaning in its own articulated signs as resulting from both differentiation and integration.

“A book whose signs are *uhkimat* [precisely tailored] and then are *fussilat* [distinguished] from One who is Wise and Acquainted”
(XI:1).

The process of excavating these meanings from the articulated signs of Allah is a science the traditionalist Muslim scholars introduced over centuries under the name *Uloom at-Tafseer* [Science of Interpretation]. The vast majority of work in exegesis deals with understanding the signs through the process of differentiation; namely, breaking passages down into individual elements, sentences, and words, and detailing the meaning of each individual component to arrive at a conclusion. In this context, Ibn al_Qayyim¹³ has reduced the entire intellectual pursuit of truth to a quest to simply distinguish and discriminate (Berisha, 2017).

It should be noted here that the Muslim Holy Book, *Al-Quran*, addresses one holistic and identical message (irrespective of time and space) to all humankind and to all races, let alone languages and cultures. Prophet Mohammad was proclaimed the last Messenger of God on Earth to spread the word of God and the divine message, not only in the locality of the Arabian Peninsula but also across the globe. Hence the universality of Islam as a divine message. It is true that Arabic is the language of the Holy *Quran*, and Arab believers follow in the footsteps of their prophet and recite *Quranic* texts in Arabic. However, it is also true that all Muslim believers, irrespective of race, language, and culture, use Arabic when they perform prayers and when they read the Holy Book. However, reading in the *Quran* is something and understanding the meaning of what is being recited is something else. Hence, there is a need for a semiotic interpretation of the original text in an attempt to narrow the linguistic and cultural gaps among all races who adhere to Islam as their own spiritual and divine faith.

¹³ A reverent Muslim scholar and Imam (1292-1350)

Surat Al-Hujurat as Text

Background of Revelation

Surah Al-Hujurat is a Medinite¹⁴ Revelation arranged as chapter 49 in the Holy Quran. The name of the *surah* refers to the house chambers which the wives of Prophet Mohammad took as shelter to live in. This *surah* consists of 18 *Ayaat* [verses/signs]. Let alone the ethical and spiritual significance of this chapter, there is some solid evidence that this *surah* was revealed to explain a particular incident, the year of deputations, which took place in the early period of Mohammad's prophecy (Siddiqui, 1975). The Year of Deputations (632 A.D) marked the end of the era of ignorance and ushered in the era of knowledge, human kindness, and mutual social relationships. Deputations from every Arabian tribe streamed into Medinah in order to pay homage to Islam and to the last Prophet¹⁵ in person.

Prior to the arrival of those deputations, Prophet Mohammad had sent letters to the rulers within the country and to kings and emperors of neighboring areas, requesting their voluntary submission to Islam as the new faith. A deputation of some Arab tribal chiefs, headed by the Tamims¹⁶, visited Prophet Mohammad to declare before him that they had embraced Islam, thus doing him a favor. This tribal visitation would clearly contradict two socio-cultural facts observed by the desert Bedouins in the Arabian Peninsula. The first is that a new phase in power relations had started, where Prophet Mohammad and his followers were growing in power; thus he was seen by Qoreish¹⁷ and other Arabian tribes as a serious threat to their pre-Islamic pagan religion, their political positions, and their socio-cultural stature. The second is that during that year, famine struck the Arabian Peninsula, and those tribal chiefs might have just come to collect provisions from the Monetary House of Muslims¹⁸.

Furthermore, because the Quranic text enjoys a high level of connectivity as regards the word of God and His message articulated through a high level of linguistic

¹⁴ This refers to Medinah, the city to which Prophet Mohammad migrated after the Meccan tribes threatened to kill him during the first year of his proclamation as prophet.

¹⁵ *The Holy Quran* introduces Mohammad as the last of the divine prophets on Earth (XXXIII:40).

¹⁶ *Tamim* tribe was one of the most influential Arab tribes in the Arabian Peninsula then.

¹⁷ An affluent and influential tribe in Mecca

¹⁸ This House stands for the Muslim Fund, offering aid to the needy.

features that embrace themes and key events, the following verses add clarity to the causes of Revelation concerning *Surat al-Hujurat*.

"When Allah's triumph and conquest come and you see mankind
Entering the religion of Allah in troops" (CX : 1-2).

It is through this revelation that the Prophet of Islam is informed in advance about the Year of Deputations when tribe after tribe would convert from paganism to Islam in his presence. *Surat An-Nasr* above speaks of the victory of the Muslims in the battlefield. However, as victory brings about laxity, *Surat al-Hujurat* denounces the vices of such a society that is engrossed in comfort and ease. Based on all of these events, this *Surah* assumes a considerable degree of significance, as it ushers in a new turn in the life of the Arabian Peninsula and beyond at all levels.

Synopsis

Surah Al-Hujurat (see Appendix) is an eighteen-verse text addressing both believers and non-believers, men and women, through a clear-cut set of directives. In other words, it describes a bundle of timeless instructional issues, all of which spell out guidelines for Muslim believers to live by anywhere they build a Muslim community. Some guidelines set out proper social etiquette, good mannerism, moral and ethical values, justice, righteousness, tolerance, universal solidarity, and above all the act of showing veneration for Prophet Muhammad. Other guidelines function as an injunction against domestic wars and violence and warn against acting promptly on unverified news and reports, false allegations, sarcastic remarks, backbiting, and suspicion. In brief, *Surat al-Hujurat* shows how to deal with one another by setting out specific prompts to lead a harmonious communal life. It is a call for building a peaceful and reconciled world.

The following section showcases two types of interpretation applicable to *Surat Al-Hujurat* (See Appendix), which is the substance of this research paper. The first type of text interpretation is exoteric or literal, the other esoteric or semiotic.

Interpretation

The Exoteric Interpretation

As one type of interpretation taxonomy, the exoteric, literal analysis uses the face-value level of meaning through interpreting the various linguistic features of the text in accordance with contextualized word-spotting. In other words, the text is what the text apparently says. As a starting point, the name *Surat Al-Hujurat* is taken from the same word in verse 4 of the text, and it means house chambers or rooms. As to subject matter, this *Surah* is a series of divine directives addressed to all Muslims, irrespective of gender, on what makes a true believer.

A true believer should strictly observe upright manners as part of worshipping Allah and revering His Messenger. It is about the cultivation of order and discipline in the life of a true Muslim. In more specific terms, a true Muslim should not stand or walk ahead of the Messenger but behind him, should not raise their voice higher than his, and should not shout to him across chamber walls (XLIX: 1-5). This part makes the public place and position of Prophet Mohammad distinct from the rest of his followers.

Another set of directives addressed to a true Muslim belongs to the reception of news and reports. It is not commendable to believe in every news received promptly and react to it without due thought. Such a reaction is likely to be regrettable. Consult the Prophet's way of receiving news, for he alone is entrusted with the word of God (6-8).

The third set of directives calls for peace-making. If two factions of believers are involved in a fight, a true Muslim should not sit back and watch from afar; a true Muslim should stand in between, call for a dialogue and reconcile the two belligerent groups. If one of them goes insolent, a true Muslim should use the sword and fight until order is restored, for God loves peace-makers who do justice and safeguard brotherhood (9-10).

The fourth set of directives is concerned with misconduct and suspicious behavior. A true Muslim should avoid the act of bullying, nicknaming, backbiting and suspicion, for these are all punishable in the eyes of God, but if avoided, then God confers repentance and favors on the true Muslim (11-12).

The fifth set of directives goes beyond the locale to embrace the universal. It is a call for an inter-cultural dialogue with the other, for God had created man from male and female and made them into various tribes and peoples only to know one another. The most pious of all is the most honored by God (13).

The last set of directives in *Surat Al-Hujurat* is focused on Islamic faith and true belief. Addressing the Messenger on how to gauge and accept the faith professed by the desert Arabs, God pinpoints what makes true faith. It is the belief in Allah, as the only Creator of everything, and in Mohammad as his Messenger, together with obeying them as believers go about their livelihood and observe the Islamic precepts on daily basis. Those who profess Islamic faith to impress or do a favor to the Prophet are just doing it as an act of lip service. By so doing, they are hypocrites who feign faith and therefore they should not be considered true believers (14-18).

In conclusion, *Surat Al-Hujurat* outlines a number of directives and instructions as regards the making of a true Muslim. These directives are all addressed to be adopted and followed by all those who accept to embrace Islam, provided that the life of Prophet Mohammad and his *Hadith* are considered as the edifying force and reference for Muslims to copy and follow in practical terms.

The Esoteric Interpretation

It should be noted that the *Quranic* text, whether narrative, descriptive, advisory, etc., often recalls events and objects outside the text itself as edifying signs. Thanks to the semiotic approach to *Surat Al-Hujurat*, the esoteric interpretation of the 18 verses comprising this text goes further than the face-value message. Thus the process of producing meaning from this text needs the mental capacity exercised by reader-as-critic, who, as a meaning-maker, is more likely than an ordinary reader, to come up with a different version of interpretation. In this regard, the following key issues underlying the text are addressed for their discursive potential to cause both reflection and deliberation.

The key issues underlying *Surat al-Hujurat* traverse the local borders of the Arabian Peninsula to reach all human beings of the world at large. Thus the outreach of this *Quranic surah* is universal. These issues acquire significance since they provide

mankind with guidelines that pertain to the code of good conduct which functions as the basis of communal life, irrespective of time and space. A semiotic study of the 18 verses touches upon the following seven issues: allegiance to Allah (God) and reverence for His Messenger (XLIX: 1-5); verification of reports (6-8); peace and reconciliation (9 – 10); condemnation of ill manners (11-13); and accountability (14 – 18). Viewed as separate items or in unison, these issues define the way of life a Muslim¹⁹ should follow.

As for allegiance to Allah, as Creator, and reverence for Prophet Mohammad, it is made clear and emphasized throughout the holy Book that Allah confers on Himself unique characteristics, none of which is shared by any other entity, and this is the essence of true faith that makes the five pillars²⁰ of Islam. Reverence for Prophet Mohammad is another pre-condition ascribed to true faith. This issue must be strictly and honestly observed, otherwise, the so-called adherent to Islam should be viewed as hypocrite. No concession in this regard. This is made quite clear in *Surat al-Ahzab* [The Clans] as follows:

Allah and His Angels pray for the Prophet. O believers, do the same: pray for him and bless him with peace. Those who do harm to Allah and His Messenger – then Allah hath cursed in the present world and the Hereafter, and hath prepared for them a humbling chastisement (XXXIII: 56).

As regards news and reports (6-8) communicated or received, orally or in writing, believers should do enough verification of the sources lest they act upon that news rashly and do harm to others. By implication, this verse is resonant enough in the world of media today, where fake news is likely to brainwash masses, cause regional and global wars and raise the death toll dramatically²¹. In this context, these verses in *Surat A-Hujurat* do not only warn the mostly ignorant desert Arabian tribes about fake

¹⁹ Prophet Mohammad defines the term Muslim as such: "A Muslim is that person who does harm to nobody, be it by hand or by heart." In this context, *al-Quran* introduces prophet Ibrahim as a Muslim "Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was a Muslim, sound in the faith" (Al-Imran III: 67).

²⁰ Five Pillars of Islam are Profession of Islam [Shahadatein]; Daily Prayers [Salat]; Alms Giving [zakat]; Fasting in Ramadan [Seyam Ramadan]; and Pilgrimage if affordable [Haj to Mecca], all made mandatory, except for the last pillar, pilgrimage.

²¹ Reference to the war on Iraq (2003) when Colin Powell, U.S. Secretary of State then, lied to the United Nations Security Council by fabricating evidence about the Iraqi chemical weapons, thus expediting war on Iraq and causing the death of more than 500,000 lives. In his book *It Worked for Me*, published in 2017, Powell blames himself for having falsified documents about the Iraqi WMD and for having caused that huge number of Iraqi and non-Iraqi deaths.

news, but they speak to wider contexts as well, irrespective of place and time. In this context, Prophet Mohammad defines a true Muslim as a person “who does harm to nobody, be it by hand or by the tongue” (Bukhari).

Concerning the issue of peace-making and reconciliation (9-10), a true Muslim should intervene and play the mediator between any two belligerent factions of believers for the sake of peace. If out of insolence and tribal pride, one of the two factions chooses not to listen to the voice of peace, then Muslims must fight that insolent faction until it surrenders and accepts to negotiate terms of mutual reconciliation. The meaning implied by these two verses foreshadows problematic relations and conflicts of interest thereof, thus heralding the need for defining the terms of peaceful international relations and cooperation²². As a matter of fact, during the lifetime of Prophet Mohammad, there was no war at all between Muslim factions, whosoever. That is why the discursive resonance of the verses in question is timeless as regards its potential weight for legal and lawful regulations based on dialogue.

Concerning the Muslim attitude towards ill manners and misconduct, verses (11-12), make it clear that such an act should be condemned. Muslims are exhorted to safeguard against the evils that corrupt community life and spoil mutual relationships. Mocking and taunting each other, calling others by nicknames, creating suspicions, prying into other people’s affairs and backbiting are not only sins in themselves but they are also corruptive of social stability. Exhortation to avoid such unlawful misconduct is also mentioned, separately, in a number of *Quranic Surahs*. Today, one of the gravest ill manners, viewed as impolite and punishable, is bullying. In modern Western society, bullying is considered as an unlawful act targeting helpless people: poor and colored school children, some girls and women, some races, and the like. The Holy *Quran* has addressed this issue as evil and warned against it for almost fourteen centuries.

A call for a dialogue between and among various races and factions is implied by the verse 13 in *Surat al-Hujurat*. It cuts the root of evil by stating that all men are descendants of the same one pair (Adam and Eve) and their division into tribes and communities is only for the sake of recognition, not for any type of racial or gender superiority. There is no lawful basis of one man’s superiority over the other except on the

²² The birth of The League of Nations and The United Nations was caused by World Wars I & II.

basis of moral excellence. Prophet Mohammad, in his Farewell Pilgrimage, has put it more clearly than the Paris International Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).²³

O people, be aware: your God is One. No Arab has any superiority over a non-Arab, no non-Arab any superiority over an Arab, no white one has any superiority over a black one, and no black one any superiority over a white one, except on the basis of taqwa (piety). The most honorable among you in the sight of Allah is that one who is the most pious and righteous of you. Say if I have conveyed the Message to you? And the great congregation of the people responded, saying: Yes, you have, O Messenger of Allah. Thereupon the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: Then let the one who is present convey it to those who are absent (Bukhari).

The last extended issue underlying *Surat Al-Hujurat* (14-18) is accountability. A true Muslim is held accountable for any act done or intended to be done²⁴. In an impressive *hadith* [talk], collected by Tabari (n.d) during the 9th century, the Prophet holds accountable every adult Muslim, irrespective of gender, occupying a position whatsoever, be it domestic, family, or a public office. The last verses of *Surat Al-Hujurat* epitomize the cornerstone position of accountability as part of a true Muslim code of good conduct. The implication of this issue is universal. Accountability has become an intrinsic element in any system, starting with family management and ending with the various departments of the State.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that a semiotic approach to the *Quranic* text is likely to yield a richer spectrum of meanings if compared to the literal level of textual analysis. This activity only needs an insight into how meanings of words and sign language are created. However, this activity does not necessarily need a linguist to do it. Everybody can do semiotics, for everybody is constantly, though unconsciously, interpreting the signs filling the space around them. *Surah Al-Hujurat*, approached in this paper through a semiotic stance of interpretation, is replete with Islamic values which go beyond the

²³ Since the Declaration of Human Rights issued in Paris on December 10, 1948, the United Nations have not acted or taken steps to observe this declaration, more especially when it comes to the Right of Return of the Palestinian people who were forced out of their homeland in Palestine in May 1948 and have been considered refugees in countries neighboring Palestine until now.

²⁴ As regards one's intention and if it is the same as one's deed, reference is made to Prophet Mohammad clarifying this point. "If the swords of two Muslim fighters meet in an unjustified fight, then the two belligerents are placed in Hell." When asked by the audience why see the two belligerents punished equally, the Prophet replied "... because each one of them had the intention to kill the other" (*Hadith*, Tabari).

closed world of the desert life of the Arabian Peninsula to address the international community at large. In brief, *Surat Al-Hujurat* starts with defining the firm foundation of the Islamic faith in a particular geographical location, but it ends up addressing basic universal issues and values shared by all human beings and cultures across the globe.

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