

# Application of Charles Sanders Peirce's Semiotics Theory in Naming the al-Baqarah and the al-Ankabut of the Qur'an

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**Abstract** Fauna is an essential part of the universe's biological diversity. The Quran however, acknowledge human beings as superior to the fauna. The Quran is divided into 30 *Juz'* and 114 *surahs*, among the 114 *surahs* there are six *surahs* names that are derived from the animal species names such as *al-Baqarah* (The Heifer or Female Cow), *al-An'am* (The Cattle), *al-Nahl* (The Bees), *al-Naml* (The Ants), *al-Ankabut* (The Spiders) and *al-Fil* (The Elephants). This study examines the Symbolism of Fauna in Naming Surah in the Qur'an from the perspective of the Semiotic Studies. The purpose of this study is to describe the symbols found in the *al-Baqarah*, *al-An'am*, *al-Ankabut*, *al-Nahl*, *al-Naml*, *al-Ankabut* and *al-Fil*. This research is a qualitative study, which is a study conducted to explain and describe a phenomenon with utilizing a meticulous data collection strategy. The study objective is to analyze and describe the symbolism of fauna contained in the naming of the surah in the Qur'an. In this case, the researcher classifies the verses contained in the surah that borrow the name of fauna in the Qur'an then sorts them according to several types prior conducting analysis on the verses using the study of semiotics.

**Keywords:** al-Qur'an, al-Baqarah, al-Ankabut, Symbol

## 1. Introduction

Fauna is an essential part of the universe's biological diversity. The Quran however, acknowledge human beings as superior to the fauna. Despite of the human's superiority, the mankind are held to responsibility to treat animals with compassion and not to abuse their welfare. It is because all God's creatures including animals also live to praise Him although not in the manner similar to the human's method of praising God. The holy book of the Islam is the Quran, it becomes the ultimate source of guidance to the entire human race on this earth. If the individual does not adhere to the guidance and the Law of the Quran, then Allah likens them to animals [1]. As in the Quran, al-A'raf: 54:

“Indeed, your Lord is Allah, who created the heavens and earth in six days and then established Himself above the Throne. He covers the night with the day, [another night] chasing it rapidly and [He created] the sun, the moon, and the stars, subjected

by His command. Unquestionably, His is the creation and the command blessed is Allah, Lord of the worlds". (al-A'raf: 54) [2]

The Qur'an has a rich variety of language styles. The other side of the effect of various styles of Qur'an language is the emergence of various approaches in analyzing verses of the Qur'an [3]. The Quran is divided into 30 *Juz'* and 114 *surahs*, among the 114 *surahs* there are six *surahs* names that are derived from the animal species names such as *al-Baqarah* (The Heifer or Female Cow), *al-An'am* (The Cattle), *al-Nahl* (The Bees), *al-Naml* (The Ants), *al-Ankabut* (The Spiders) and *al-Fil* (The Elephants). Besides from borrowing the fauna names in the *Surah's* name, the fauna species name becomes a symbol used in Allah's analogy within the verse such as what can be seen in *al-Ankabut* verse 41 :

"The example of those who take allies other than Allah is like that of the spider who takes a home. And indeed, the weakest of homes is the home of the spider, if they only knew." (al-Ankabut : 41)

Fauna is associated with the Quran verses and to think of that means that there should be an effort to examine the relation between fauna symbols and their significance in proving the oneness, the knowledge, and the power of God. As in Qs. al-Nahl: 69 :

"Then eat from all these fruits and follow the ways of your Lord laid down [for you]." There emerges from their bellies a drink, varying in colors, in which there is healing for people. Indeed in that is a sign for a people who give thought." (al-Nahl:69)

The above verse reveals that the bee's guts contain healing properties for humans and can cure various diseases, the healing properties are contained most in the honey which can be found in various colours from white to yellow and other shades depending on what the bees feed upon and where they are domesticated.

The idea above becomes the reason the researcher takes interest in taking a study on this subject. Research on fauna in the Qur'an has been rife, yet this time the researcher takes the opportunity to examine the symbols contained in the naming of the *surahs* of the Qur'an by using semiotic studies.

## 2. Research Method

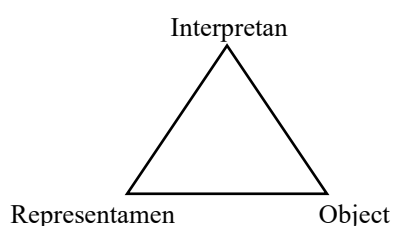
This research is qualitative descriptive study, which aims to analyze icon, index, and symbol by using Peirce's semiotic theory in naming the *surah* in the Qur'an. The focus of this research is on naming *surah* al-Baqarah and al-Ankabut. Data collection techniques in this study use the note technique used to record and sort out the verses contained in *surah* al-Baqarah and al-Ankabut then the data obtained are analyzed based on icon, index and symbol.

Data in this study were obtained through recorded techniques to be analyzed using descriptive methods, in which this study was conducted only based on the phenomena and facts that exist by classifying verses that became icon, index and symbol in naming *surah* in the Qur'an then identifying the meaning of the icon, index and symbol, then draws a final conclusion [4]

## 3. Results And Discussion

### Peirce Semiotics Analysis On The Naming Of Surah In The Qur'an.

The initial step of the analytical framework in this study is to classify the surah in the Qur'an which are named after fauna names. The researcher places more emphasis on the fauna symbol found in the naming of the surah in the Qur'an. Besides from finding the fauna symbol in the surah names, there will be analysis on the use of fauna as symbols with in the surah. As for the source of the data in this study, the research takes scriptures of Quran and the related commentaries to sort and classify the surahs based on the type of fauna. After sorting and classifying the names of the surahs that are named after fauna, the researcher analyzes the surah using the Peirce semiotic method. Peirce is famous for his triadic triangle which consists of three main elements namely 'Representamen', Interpretan and Object.[5]



A Sign (**representamen**) represents thing in a way that individuals perceive in various manner depending on certain capacity. This variety of manner in perceiving thing is called interpretant. (**Interpretant**) is a concept of thought used by an individual whom later pass the idea (derivation of the concept) and may conjure up another idea in someone's mind with an intention to refer to a certain real (**object**) Thus, a sign or representamen has a direct relation with interpretant and object in creating **signification**

For Peirce, a sign is something that represents something for someone. The sign itself is an example of equality and the object is a second, and the interpreter is a third person. [6]. According to Peirce, sign is divided into three categories : Symbol, Icon and Index. **Symbols** (agreed by consensus), **Icons** (referring to the physical representation of the reference) and **Index** (created from cause-effect relationships). This reference sign is called an object. An object is a social context that the sign refers to. Semiotics is the science of analyzing signs that train us to be able to think and reason about the signs that are around us. Signs are naturally a form of non-verbal human communication, the sign will work if it is associated with elements that are in their environment. [7]

In Arabic the word 'semiotics' has similar meanings to the word *Sima*. [8]. As in the word of God in QS. al-Fath: 29

سِيمَاهُمْ فِي وُجُوهِهِمْ مِنْ أَثَرِ السُّجُودِ

"Their mark is on their faces from the sign of prostration".

The word *sima* in the above verse can be interpreted as a prostration on the face

With this method the researcher will analyze the fauna symbol found in the surah of the Qur'an named after fauna by using semiotic studies.

One of the proofs that fauna is a symbol prevalent to the Quran is found in the *al-Ankabut* which is translated into "spider", the surah is classified as Meccan Surah (Makiyyah). It is the 29th surah in the Quran which has 69 verses and 7 *ruku'* in it. The discussion on 'the spider' does not take place in the entire verse, though. However, it is revealed in the verse 41 that the

most probable reason the surah is named *al-Ankabut* is because Allah warns mankind in this verse that nobody should take shelter in the 'home of spider' since the weakest of homes is the home of the spider as the spider web does not give a strong protection and other significant benefits either.

As in al-Qur'an surah *al-Ankabut* verse 41 which reads:

“The example of those who take allies other than Allah is like that of the spider who takes a home. And indeed, the weakest of homes is the home of the spider, if they only knew.”

The example that God made for the Muslims was made for the people who took refuge to other than Allah for their help and sustenance when they were in distress. Their condition is similar to that of a spider's house when it is seen from its weakness and fragility, when one who worships a god other than Allah, as if they are holding onto the spider's web which is unfortunately unable to optimally provide protection [9]

Then Allah's words in the Qur'an surah *al-Ankabut*: 43 read as follows :

“And these examples We present to the people, but none will understand them except those of knowledge.”

The meaning of the verse above is that no one understands it except for those who have deep knowledge and insight.

In the explanation above, the icons, indexes, and symbols can be found in this Quranic surah *al-Ankabut* as follows:

**a. Icon**

Humans who seek refuge to other than Allah are said to be 'living in a spider web'. The spider web arguably makes a very weak shelter, it cannot give a shade that protects against the scorching heat during a day and cannot provide warmth during the night either. [10] After the female and the male finished the copulation, the male will hatch the eggs and then often times kill the female. The spider web is essentially not a home, it is rather a place for the spider to feed upon insects caught inside the adhesive web. In addition, the adhesive power of the spider's web also only last for a day, after that the web becomes fragile and powerless. This is rather analogous to the difference between the word "house" and the word "home" in English which are used interchangeably yet have different meanings. The word 'house' refers to its physical form of the building; roof, its walls, its doors, its rooms and so on, the mental image elicited from the word is a place to rest and relive exhaustion. In contrast, the word 'home' refers to the emotional aspect such as family relationship with father, mother, sister, and so on.

**b. Index**

The group of people who ask for protection from other than Allah just like the Quraysh idol worshipers have been likened to creatures who are hiding under a spider web, the God emphasizes that the idols have no divine nature and have no protection nor can they provide protection. Whereas in the *al-Ankabut*: 43 it is explained that the analogy is meant for the men. No one understands it unless they are knowledgeable.

**c. Symbol**

Based on the explanation described above, it can be confirmed that the message of the surah reminds us that those who seek protection from other than Allah are likened to sheltering under a very weak spider web. This analogy made by the God itself is the background to the name of the the *al-Ankabut*, the 29<sup>th</sup> surah which is named after 'the spider'.



[11]

The *al-Baqarah* which is the second surah in the Quran is translated into “the Heifer” or the “female cow”. Verse 67-71 which reads:

“And [recall] when Moses said to his people, "Indeed, Allah commands you to slaughter a cow." They said, "Do you take us in ridicule?" He said, "I seek refuge in Allah from being among the ignorant." They said, "Call upon your Lord to make clear to us what it is." [Moses] said, "[Allah] says, 'It is a cow which is neither old nor virgin, but median between that,' so do what you are commanded." They said, "Call upon your Lord to show us what is her color." He said, "He says, 'It is a yellow cow, bright in color - pleasing to the observers.'" They said, "Call upon your Lord to make clear to us what it is. Indeed, [all] cows look alike to us. And indeed we, if Allah wills, will be guided." He said, "He says, 'It is a cow neither trained to plow the earth nor to irrigate the field, one free from fault with no spot upon her.'" They said, "Now you have come with the truth." So they slaughtered her, but they could hardly do it.”

In the verse above, the explanation of icons, indexes and symbols are described as follows:

**a. Icon**

Verses 85-91 explained that the group of people which the prophet Moses left began worshipping calf statue as their new idol, the people are called Samiri. The statue of the calf was made of jewellery which used to be worn in their hands, then they threw the jewels into a dug hole for being liquefied and mold into the shape of calf. Then one day Samiri created a calf statue made of gold.

*Al-Baqarah* verses 67-71 tell a story about the children of Israel who are commanded by the God to slaughter a cattle, they however ask their apostles too many questions on the type of cattle they should kill. Until the very end, God had made them more difficult condition by ordering them to slaughter cows that were neither old nor young, and never plow the fields. The characteristics mentioned are exactly the same as the calf statue made by Samiri, which is made of gold and worshiped by the prophet Moses' people afterwards.

**b. Index**

The Israelites were only ordered to slaughter the cows without any conditions, but they made themselves a burdensome situation by not being decisive on choosing type of cow they should slaughter.

Asking too many questions to the point where it troubled you is despicable. Verily, Allah hates you in three things: 1) People who ask too many questions for issues in which the answer is too obvious. 2) abusing or wasting the wealth and 3) people who love to speak lies or gossips

c. **Symbol**

Based on the description above, the reason behind the naming of the *al-Baqarah*, the second surah of the Quran which is translated into ‘The Heifer’ has been explained [13].



[12]

#### 4. Conclusion

The language of the Qur'an is rich of material that can be explored using the semiotic studies as there are plenty of set of signs that refer to variety of symbols, meanings, and messages. There are six surahs that are named after animal species names such as *al-Baqarah* (The Heifer or Female Cow), *al-An'am* (The Cattle), *al-Nahl* (The Bees), *al-Naml* (The Ants), *al-Ankabut* (The Spiders) and *al-Fil* (The Elephants). In the surah *al-Baqarah* there are 5 verses that talk about the cow, Surah *al-an'am* has 4 verses that talk about cattle, surah *al-Nahl* has 1 verse that talks about bees, surah *al-Naml* has 1 verse that discusses about ants, surah *al-Ankabut* has 1 verse that talks about spiders and in surah *al-Fil* there is 1 verse that talks about elephants. The symbolism of the fauna described in the Qur'an is used as a metaphor for the people who disobey Allah's command and those who do not take refuge in Allah as suggested in *al-Ankabut* and those who do not worship idols instead of Allah in the *al-Baqarah*.

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