

## EPISTEMOLOGICAL PEACEBUILDING IN MOHAMMED ARKOUN'S DIALOGICAL ETHICS: FROM CLOSED REASON TO OPEN REASON

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Article History:

Received:

30 March 2026

Revised:

10 May 2026

Accepted:

26 May 2026



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**Abstract:** *Religious conflict in plural societies is often addressed through value-based approaches that emphasize tolerance, harmony, and moderation. However, these approaches do not sufficiently explain the epistemological structures through which religious truth is produced, authorized, circulated, and defended. This research reconstructs an epistemological peacebuilding model from the perspective of an Islamic philosopher, namely Mohammed Arkoun, by examining how reasoning closed religious reasoning generates exclusion and how open reason can support dialogical peace. The study applies a qualitative critical-philosophical method with a historical-hermeneutic orientation to Arkoun's major works, especially Critique of Islamic Reason, The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought, and Rethinking Islam. The analysis focuses on la raison close, la raison ouverte, l'impensé, orthodoxy, and interpretive authority. The analysis shows that religious conflict becomes epistemological when interpretive authority is monopolized, inherited interpretations are treated as final truth, and alternative voices are excluded from legitimate discourse. Conversely, la raison ouverte enables peacebuilding by reopening religious reasoning to historical critique, epistemic humility, dialogical recognition, and ethical public reasoning. This article proposes an epistemological peacebuilding model comprising the diagnosis of closed reason, the deconstruction of absolute claims, and the dialogical construction through open reason. Peacebuilding should therefore be understood not merely as a moral appeal or a procedural conflict-resolution technique, but as a transformation of the epistemic conditions that shape religious truth, authority, and recognition in plural societies.*

**Keywords:** *Epistemological Peacebuilding, Interpretive Authority, La Raison Ouverte, Mohammed Arkoun, Religious Conflict.*

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**Abstrak:** Konflik keagamaan dalam masyarakat plural sering ditangani melalui pendekatan berbasis nilai yang menekankan toleransi, harmoni, dan moderasi. Namun, pendekatan tersebut belum cukup menjelaskan struktur epistemologi yang melaluinya kebenaran agama diproduksi, diberi otoritas, disirkulasikan, dan dipertahankan. Penelitian ini merekonstruksi model pembangunan perdamaian epistemologis dari sudut pandang tokoh filsafat Islam, yaitu Mohammed Arkoun dengan cara mengkaji bagaimana penalaran keagamaan tertutup menghasilkan eksklusi dan bagaimana nalar terbuka mendukung perdamaian dialogis. Studi ini menggunakan metode kualitatif kritis-filosofis dengan orientasi historis-hermeneutik terhadap karya-karya utama Arkoun, khususnya *Critique of Islamic Reason*, *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, dan *Rethinking Islam*. Analisis berfokus pada *la raison close*, *la raison ouverte*, *l'impensé*, ortodoksi, dan otoritas interpretatif. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa konflik keagamaan menjadi bersifat epistemologis ketika otoritas interpretatif dimonopoli, tafsir yang diwariskan diperlakukan sebagai kebenaran final, dan suara-suara alternatif dikeluarkan dari wacana yang sah. Sebaliknya, *la raison ouverte* memungkinkan pembangunan perdamaian dengan membuka kembali penalaran keagamaan terhadap kritik historis, kerendahan hati epistemik, pengakuan dialogis, dan penalaran publik yang etis. Artikel ini merumuskan model pembangunan perdamaian epistemologis yang terdiri atas diagnosis nalar tertutup, dekonstruksi klaim absolut, dan konstruksi dialogis melalui nalar terbuka. Karena itu, pembangunan perdamaian perlu dipahami sebagai transformasi kondisi epistemik yang membentuk kebenaran, otoritas, dan pengakuan keagamaan dalam masyarakat plural.

**Kata-kata Kunci:** *Keagamaan, La Raison Ouverte, Mohammed Arkoun, Otoritas Interpretatif, Pembangunan Perdamaian Epistemologis.*

## Introduction

The relationship between religious truth, interpretive authority, and social recognition has become a central problem in plural societies. Religious conflict does not arise only from differences in doctrine or belief, but also from struggles over identity, symbols, authority, recognition, and social legitimacy in the public sphere. Religion in plural societies cannot be understood merely as private doctrine or ritual practice. It also functions as a cultural system through which communities construct collective identity, define moral boundaries, and evaluate the legitimacy of others (Astor and Mayrl 2020, 220; Verkuyten and Yogeeswaran 2017, 95; Kasno and Fata 2023, 430). From this perspective, religious conflict often emerges not simply from doctrinal incompatibility, but from the use of religious meaning to create symbolic boundaries, monopolize moral authority, and classify other groups as socially or theologically inferior.

This issue is particularly significant because interreligious conflict is not only a matter of social tension, but also a problem of meaning, authority, and recognition. Religion may contribute to peacebuilding, yet it may also intensify conflict when religious identity becomes attached to exclusive truth claims, collective victimhood, and social legitimacy. Interreligious peace should therefore not be defined merely as the absence of violence, but as a condition marked by reduced hostility, lower perceptions of threat, mutual trust, and cooperation between religious communities (Muhtar 2023, 204–21; Najib and Fata 2020, 120). Peace processes also contain an epistemological dimension because they involve the recognition of local knowledge, lived experience, and marginalized interpretations

that are often filtered or controlled by dominant actors (Billerbeck et al. 2024, 39–58). Thus, religious conflict in plural societies must be understood as both a social and epistemological problem: a problem concerning whose interpretation is recognized, whose experience is trusted, and whose truth claim is allowed to enter shared public life (Izzuddin and Fata 2020, 171–202).

This article examines that epistemological problem through the Islamic philosophical thought of Mohammed Arkoun. Arkoun provides an important framework for understanding how religious truth can be transformed into a closed system of authority. His critique does not reject religion as a source of meaning; rather, it questions the epistemic closure that occurs when historically formed interpretations are treated as final and unquestionable truth. Arkoun argues that Islamic thought must be examined historically, critically, and interdisciplinarily because religious interpretation is always shaped by language, power, history, and human understanding (Arkoun 1984c, 129–54). His concept of *la raison close* refers to a form of closed religious' reason that freezes interpretation into final truth and separates religious meaning from its historical and social conditions of production (Arkoun 1984a, 7–42, 1994a, 77–79). In this condition, religious interpretation no longer functions as an open search for meaning, but becomes an absolute authority that rejects questioning, criticism, and interpretive plurality.

Arkoun's critique is particularly relevant for understanding the epistemological roots of religious conflict. In *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, Arkoun explains that every religious tradition contains areas of the unthought, namely questions, possibilities, memories, and interpretations that are excluded from dominant systems of religious knowledge (Arkoun 2002b, 170). These exclusions are not merely intellectual; they are also connected to authority and power, because certain institutions, scholars, or communities gain legitimacy to determine which interpretations are orthodox and which are deviant (Arkoun 2002a, 155–92). In this sense, religious conflict is not only a clash of doctrines, but also a struggle over epistemic authority, interpretive legitimacy, and the right to define religious truth. Contemporary studies similarly show that religious authority operates not only through textual transmission, but also through normative reasoning that guides communal action (Farahat 2021, 5–28).

Approaches based on tolerance, harmony, and religious moderation have made important contributions to peaceful coexistence. However, these approaches remain limited if they stop at normative appeals. Tolerance can reduce open hostility, but it does not automatically transform the deeper epistemic structures that produce exclusion. Studies on religiosity and prejudice show that intergroup hostility is shaped by social identity, perceived threat, intergroup emotion, value conflict, and system justification (Rowatt and Kire 2021, 86–91). Moreover, tolerance can be passive or active. Passive tolerance merely means refraining from disturbing other groups, whereas active tolerance requires recognition of the rights, dignity, and public legitimacy of other communities (Adelman et al. 2022, 745). From this perspective, peace requires more than coexistence; it requires the transformation of how religious communities recognize the truth claims and lived

experiences of others.

The limitation of tolerance becomes clearer when examined through the concept of epistemic injustice. Epistemic injustice occurs when certain groups are denied credibility, when their testimony is distrusted, or when their experiences are reduced by dominant social narratives. In the case of Muslim communities, epistemic injustice may occur when religious identity is persistently associated with violence, extremism, or social threat, thereby narrowing the possibility for Muslims to appear as legitimate knowers and moral agents in public discourse (Sandberg and Colvin 2020, 1588; Fauzan and Fata 2020, 255). This shows that religious peace cannot be built solely through tolerance, harmony, or moderation. It must also address how religious truth is produced, how authority is distributed, and how communities are either recognized or silenced within public epistemic space.

The relevance of Arkoun's thought becomes more urgent in the digital era. *La raison* close now operates not only through traditional religious institutions, clerical authority, or formal religious education, but also through digital platforms. Contemporary religious communication is increasingly mediated by social media, algorithmic visibility, influencer culture, and networked publics. Digital religion research shows that emerging technologies reshape religious practice, religious authority, community formation, and the circulation of religious meaning (Campbell and Evolvi 2020, 5–17). Muslim influencers, for example, participate in renegotiating religious authority by combining visual performance, personal branding, religious messaging, and platform-based credibility (Zaid et al. 2022, 335–50; Febrian 2024, 1–19). Therefore, religious authority in the digital era is no longer produced only through classical institutions, but also through visibility, virality, affective appeal, and algorithmic amplification.

This digital transformation strengthens the significance of Arkoun's critique. Closed religious reasoning may now be reinforced by echo chambers, algorithmic filtering, and selective exposure to similar religious narratives. Echo chambers function as closed communicative systems in which users repeatedly encounter beliefs that confirm their prior assumptions and exclude alternative voices (Cinelli et al. 2021, 1–8). Such systems can increase polarization because emotionally charged out-group narratives tend to generate stronger engagement on social media (Rathje et al. 2021, 1–11). Moreover, algorithmic systems may reproduce religious bias, including anti-Muslim associations and stereotypical representations that link Muslim identity with violence (Abid et al. 2021, 461). Thus, *la raison* close in the digital age is not merely a theological problem, but also a technological and communicative problem.

Despite the growing scholarship on religious moderation, interreligious peace, epistemic injustice, and digital religion, a significant conceptual gap remains in explaining religious conflict as a problem of epistemological closure. Existing approaches often emphasize behavioral coexistence, institutional dialogue, or value-based tolerance, but they do not sufficiently examine how truth claims become closed, how interpretive authority is monopolized, and how excluded

meanings remain outside legitimate discourse. This article seeks to fill this gap by reconstructing Arkoun's transformation from *la raison* close to *la raison ouverte* as a conceptual foundation for epistemological peacebuilding. The central research question is: how can Arkoun's transformation from *la raison* close to *la raison ouverte* be reconstructed as an epistemological peacebuilding model for plural religious societies?

This study employs a critical-philosophical qualitative method with a historical hermeneutic orientation. This method was selected because the article does not aim to empirically measure religious attitudes, but rather to reconstruct a conceptual model based on Mohammed Arkoun's critique of Islamic reason. The primary corpus consists of Arkoun's major works, particularly *Pour une critique de la raison islamique*, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, and *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought*. These works are analyzed through their conceptual, argumentative, and epistemological structures, especially the concepts of *la raison* close, *la raison ouverte*, orthodoxy, authority, historicity, revelation, and the unthought.

The analysis proceeds in four stages. First, the study identifies Arkoun's key concepts related to closed and open reason. Second, it interprets the relationship among these concepts in order to understand how Arkoun explains the closure of religious reason. Third, it connects Arkoun's critique with contemporary problems of religious conflict in plural societies, especially epistemic injustice, interreligious distrust, digital religious authority, algorithmic visibility, and echo-chamber dynamics. Fourth, it reconstructs the transformation from *la raison* close to *la raison ouverte* as the foundation of epistemological peacebuilding. Through this approach, the article contributes to Islamic philosophy, philosophy of religion, and peace studies by positioning peace not merely as the management of conflict or the preservation of harmony, but as an epistemological transformation that opens space for critique, recognizes interpretive plurality, and distributes religious authority more justly within plural societies and contemporary digital spaces.

## **Epistemological Structure of Conflict**

Epistemological Structure of Conflict. Operationally, this article understands *la raison ouverte* as an open structure of reason that enables religious truth claims to be examined historically, critically, and ethically. This concept is not identical to relativism. Relativism weakens the distinction between truth, interpretation, and moral responsibility, whereas *la raison ouverte* maintains the seriousness of truth while recognizing that human access to truth is mediated by history, language, institutions, power, and social experience. Within Arkoun's framework, open reason does not negate religion; rather, it releases religion from dogmatic fixation that turns a particular interpretation into final and unquestionable truth. Arkoun argues that Islamic thought must be opened to historical, anthropological, linguistic, and social-scientific inquiry so that revelation, tradition, authority, and interpretation are not detached from their historical conditions of formation (Arkoun 1984b, 65). This epistemological orientation is important because

contemporary conflicts often intensify when information, identity, and moral certainty become fused in closed communicative environments (Törnberg 2022, 1–11; Kubin and Sikorski 2021, 188–206; Berman and Katona 2020, 296–316).

The transformation from *la raison close* to *la raison ouverte* should therefore be understood as a transformation in the structure of religious reasoning. Closed reasons do not simply mean strong religious commitment. A person or community may hold strong religious convictions while remaining open to historical reflection, ethical accountability, and dialogical encounters. The problem begins when religious interpretation is removed from its interpretive history and protected from critique. Arkoun explains that Islamic reason becomes closed when orthodoxy freezes interpretation, narrows the field of legitimate questions, and prevents the emergence of new meanings (Arkoun 1984a, 7–42). In contemporary epistemological terms, such closure resembles an epistemic bubble, where communities do not merely disagree with external voices but become structurally insulated from them (Nguyen 2020, 141–61). It also resembles cultural attraction to simplified narratives, in which ideas spread not because they are critically examined, but because they fit pre-existing cognitive and social expectations (Acerbi 2020, 15).

Thus, religious conflict becomes epistemological when a community treats its interpretation not as a historically situated reading, but as the only possible truth. The issue is not only what a group believes, but how belief becomes authorized, defended, and distributed. When interpretive authority is monopolized, religious difference is no longer approached as a field of hermeneutical plurality, but as deviation, threat, or disobedience. Arkoun's discussion of authority is central here because he insists that religious authority must be read in relation to history, language, institutions, and power, not as a neutral possession of truth (Arkoun 1994b, 19). Recent studies of polarization show that group-based identities can turn disagreement into affective hostility, especially when people interpret the other group as morally dangerous rather than merely different (DellaPosta 2020, 507; Westwood et al. 2022, 1–10; Mernyk et al. 2022, 1–9). In religious life, this mechanism explains why doctrinal difference can become social antagonism when truth claims are merged with collective identity.

The concept of *l'impensé*, or the unthought, deepens this analysis. For Arkoun, the unthought refers to questions, experiences, memories, and interpretive possibilities excluded from dominant religious discourse. These exclusions are not accidental; they are produced by systems of authority that determine what may be spoken, what must remain silent, and whose experience counts as religious knowledge (Arkoun 2002b, 170). The unthought is therefore not simply an intellectual gap. It is a field of suppressed possibility. In plural societies, the unthought may include minority religious narratives, women's experiences, local religious practices, heterodox interpretations, or painful historical memories that official discourse refuses to recognize. Studies on public reasoning show that social groups often maintain conflict not only through false beliefs, but through selective exposure, motivated trust, and unequal access to credible voice (Boulianne 2020,

997; Tokita et al. 2021, 1–9; Bail et al. 2020, 533).

This epistemological structure also operates through emotion. Religious conflict is rarely sustained by abstract propositions alone. It is sustained by fear, resentment, humiliation, moral outrage, and the affective experience of being threatened by another group. Contemporary research on moral contagion and digital emotion shows that emotionally charged narratives travel faster and become more persuasive when they activate collective identity and moral evaluation (Brady et al. 2020, 978; Goldenberg and Gross 2020, 316). In religious conflict, this means that closed reason does not merely produce rigid arguments; it also produces emotional certainty. A community may feel that questioning an interpretation is equivalent to betraying God, tradition, or collective dignity. This affective structure explains why critique is often received not as intellectual engagement, but as aggression.

The digital era intensifies this condition because religious truth claims now circulate through platform architectures that reward visibility, speed, repetition, and emotional intensity. Religious authority is no longer produced only through classical institutions, clerical hierarchy, or formal education. It is also shaped by search engines, recommendation systems, influencers, viral videos, and platform publics. Studies on algorithmic systems show that curation mechanisms can shape exposure, reinforce preference-based selection, and make certain narratives appear more dominant than they actually are (Robertson et al. 2023, 342; Milli et al. 2023, 1–10; Berman and Katona 2020, 296–316). In this context, *la raison close* becomes digitally amplified. Closed interpretation is not only defended by institutions; it is circulated, repeated, beautified, and emotionally intensified by media infrastructures.

Therefore, the epistemological structure of conflict must be diagnosed at three interrelated levels. First, at the interpretive level, conflict emerges when one interpretation is treated as final truth. Second, at the institutional level, conflict deepens when authority determines who may speak and who must remain silent. Third, at the communicative level, conflict is amplified when digital systems distribute religious meanings through visibility, virality, and affective engagement. Research on digital publics shows that online participation may increase voice, but it can also fragment publics, intensify symbolic conflict, and privilege performative certainty over reflective reasoning. For that reason, peacebuilding cannot focus only on interpersonal tolerance; it must also examine how truth is produced, mediated, and legitimized.

From this point, epistemological peacebuilding should be directed toward the opening of reason, the critique of interpretive monopoly, and the redistribution of epistemic authority. Dialogue must become more than symbolic harmony. It must become a process in which religious subjects examine the historical formation of their own claims, recognize the limits of human interpretation, and encounter others as credible participants in shared truth-seeking. Applied to religion, this means that interreligious dialogue must not only invite different groups into the same space; it must transform the epistemic hierarchy that determines whose voice

is heard, whose interpretation is considered legitimate, and whose experience is permitted to shape the shared understanding of conflict.

In this model, the transformation from *la raison close* to *la raison ouverte* becomes the foundation for building peace that is historical, critical, ethical, and dialogical. Peace is not merely the absence of violence or the performance of harmony. It is an epistemological transformation in which religious communities learn to examine their own certainty, recognize the plurality of interpretation, and distribute authority more justly. Contemporary studies on social trust, institutional legitimacy, and civic reasoning show that durable coexistence requires credible institutions, inclusive communication, and the capacity to evaluate claims beyond tribal loyalty (Devine et al. 2021, 274; Grimes 2020, 1–4). Therefore, an Arkounian model of peace requires both philosophical critique and practical epistemic discipline. Its central contribution is to distinguish religion as a source of meaning from closed reason as a source of exclusion. Religion can provide moral orientation, solidarity, hope, and a language for suffering and salvation; however, when interpretation is monopolized and shielded from critique, religion can become a mechanism of exclusion. *La raison ouverte* offers another path by opening truth to history, critique, recognition, and ethical responsibility.

### **Reconstructing Arkoun's Dialogical Ethics**

An Arkounian ethics of dialogue begins from the transformation of religious reason itself. In this article, *la raison ouverte* is understood as an open structure of reason that enables religious truth claims to be examined historically, critically, and ethically. This concept is not identical to relativism, because relativism tends to dissolve the distinction between truth, interpretation, and moral responsibility. By contrast, *la raison ouverte* maintains the seriousness of religious truth while requiring believers to acknowledge that human understanding of truth is always mediated by language, history, institutions, social experience, and power. Arkoun argues that Islamic thought must be opened to historical, anthropological, linguistic, and social-scientific approaches so that revelation, tradition, authority, and interpretation are not read a historically, but are examined as part of the production of religious meaning (Arkoun 1984b, 67). In this sense, open reason does not weaken religion; it prevents religion from being reduced to a closed ideology.

The ethical significance of *la raison ouverte* lies in its capacity to transform dialogue from a ceremonial encounter into an epistemological practice. Dialogue is not merely a polite exchange between religious communities, nor is it only an institutional mechanism for maintaining social harmony. It is a disciplined process in which religious subjects examine the assumptions, historical inheritances, and power structures that shape their own truth claims. This is important because contemporary polarization research shows that conflict becomes more destructive when identity is fused with moral certainty and when outgroups are imagined as irrational, dangerous, or morally corrupt (Finkel et al. 2020, 533). Hate speech research also demonstrates that derogatory language can gradually normalize

exclusion and intensify intergroup hostility (Bilewicz and Soral 2020, 3–33). Therefore, the ethics of dialogue must go beyond mutual respect and address the epistemic conditions that make some groups unable or unwilling to hear others as legitimate subjects of knowledge.

Within Arkoun's framework, the opposite of dialogical ethics is *la raison close*. Closed reason appears when a particular interpretation is detached from its historical formation and transformed into final, unquestionable truth. The problem is not religious commitment itself, because religion may still function as a source of moral orientation, social solidarity, identity formation, and existential meaning. The problem begins when religious commitment is organized through epistemic closure. In this condition, interpretation is no longer treated as a human effort to understand revelation, but as an absolute authority that cannot be questioned. Arkoun calls attention to this closure by showing how Islamic reason can become imprisoned within inherited structures of orthodoxy, authority, and unexamined assumptions (Arkoun 1984c, 129, 2002b, 170). Contemporary studies on intergroup toleration similarly show that peaceful coexistence requires more than passive endurance; it requires the recognition of difference as socially and morally legitimate (Verkuyten and Yogeeswaran 2017, 95).

This point is central for reconstructing dialogue as an epistemic virtue. Open reason requires intellectual humility, not in the sense of abandoning conviction, but in the sense of recognizing the limits of one's own interpretive position. In the digital misinformation literature, the capacity to revise beliefs is strongly related to careful reasoning, attention to accuracy, and resistance to identity-driven belief defense (Pennycook and Rand 2021, 388–402). Misinformation persists not only because people lack information, but because false or one-sided narratives often become tied to identity, emotion, repetition, and social belonging (Ecker et al. 2022, 13–29). In religious life, the same mechanism can occur when communities protect inherited interpretations not because they have been critically examined, but because they function as markers of loyalty. Thus, *la raison ouverte* requires religious subjects to distinguish faithfulness to religion from defensiveness toward inherited interpretation.

Arkoun's concept of *l'impensé*, or the unthought, deepens this reconstruction. The unthought refers to questions, memories, experiences, and interpretive possibilities that are excluded from dominant religious discourse. These excluded elements do not disappear; they remain as latent tensions that may return as social resentment, symbolic resistance, or conflict when marginalized voices demand recognition. Arkoun argues that religious traditions often restrict what may be thought, said, and debated, thereby producing zones of silence within the official structure of knowledge (Arkoun 2002a, 155–92). This insight is relevant to contemporary debates on epistemic injustice, because exclusion is not only social but also epistemic: certain subjects are denied credibility because of their identity, social position, or association with stigmatized groups (Sandberg and Colvin 2020, 1858; Bacevic 2023, 1122). Therefore, an Arkounian ethics of dialogue requires the reopening of the unthought as a condition for peace.

Epistemic recognition is the core of this model. Recognition does not mean that all interpretations are equally valid. Rather, it means that religious subjects should not be excluded from dialogue before their claims are heard, examined, and evaluated through rational, historical, and ethical criteria. This is crucial because prejudice often operates through perceived threat, moral anxiety, and the belief that the other group endangers one's values or identity (Rowatt and Kire 2021, 86–91). In plural societies, such threat perception can transform doctrinal difference into moral panic. When a community sees another community not merely as different but as an existential danger, dialogue becomes almost impossible. Open reason responds to this problem by requiring each group to examine how threat narratives are produced, circulated, and legitimized.

The digital era makes Arkoun's framework more urgent. Religious authority is no longer produced only through classical institutions, clerical hierarchy, or formal religious education. It is also shaped by algorithmic visibility, platform affordances, influencer culture, and the emotional economy of social media. Digital religion research shows that emerging technologies reshape religious practice, authority, community formation, and public religious expression (Campbell and Evolvi 2020, 5–17). Muslim influencers, for example, participate in reconfiguring religious authority by combining religious messaging, visual performance, personal branding, and platform-based credibility (Zaid et al. 2022, 335). This means that the closure of reason can now be amplified by digital systems that reward certainty, emotional intensity, and simplified identity narratives.

Social media research shows that online environments can intensify epistemic closure when users are repeatedly exposed to like-minded narratives. Echo chambers can create communicative spaces in which alternative views are excluded, and prior beliefs are continuously reinforced (Cinelli et al. 2021, 1–8). Outgroup-hostile content may generate higher engagement because social media platforms often reward emotionally charged expressions that intensify group identity (Rathje et al. 2021, 1–11). Algorithmic amplification may also increase the visibility of political or identity-based content in ways that shape what users perceive as socially dominant or morally urgent (Huszár et al. 2022, 1–6). In this sense, *la raison close* in the digital era is not only a theological problem; it is also a platform-mediated epistemological problem.

This digital closure affects interreligious peace because it changes how communities encounter one another. People do not merely meet other religions through face-to-face interaction, formal dialogue, or theological texts. They increasingly encounter them through viral clips, algorithmic recommendations, politicized images, and emotionally charged narratives. Research on misinformation exposure shows that unreliable information is often consumed by specific clusters of users with strong preferences for attitude-consistent content (Guess et al. 2020, 472). Field experiments also suggest that social media news consumption may shape polarization depending on platform design, user selection, and the structure of exposure (Levy 2021, 831). Thus, religious dialogue cannot be separated from the digital conditions under which religious meanings are circulated.

The danger is that digital religion may produce what can be called algorithmic closed reason. In this condition, religious truth claims are not only defended by institutions, but also popularized through repetition, virality, and algorithmic recommendation. Fake news and misinformation research shows that people may share content not only because they believe it, but because sharing itself functions as identity performance, group loyalty, or partisan signaling (Osmundsen et al. 2021, 999). Accuracy-nudge studies show that redirecting attention to truth can reduce misinformation sharing, but such interventions are limited when identity and affect dominate the communicative environment (Pennycook et al. 2021, 590–95). Applied to religious conflict, this means that peacebuilding must cultivate not only tolerance but also epistemic responsibility in digital communication.

An Arkounian ethics of dialogue therefore requires four movements. First, it requires historical critique. Religious truth claims must be returned to the historical and linguistic conditions through which they were interpreted, institutionalized, and transmitted. This movement follows Arkoun's insistence that Islamic thought must be studied through the tools of history, anthropology, linguistics, and the social sciences (Arkoun 1984c, 131). Second, it requires critique of authority. Religious authority should not be treated as a neutral possession of truth, but as an epistemic structure that determines which voices are recognized and which are excluded (Arkoun 1994b, 31). Third, it requires recognition of the unthought, especially suppressed memories, minority experiences, and alternative interpretations (Arkoun 2002b, 170). Fourth, it requires digital epistemic responsibility, because contemporary conflict is shaped by algorithmic visibility, misinformation, and affective polarization (Mosleh and Rand 2022, 1–9).

This model also shifts the meaning of peace. Peace is not simply the absence of conflict, nor is it only the coexistence of groups under a fragile social contract. Peace becomes an epistemological process through which communities learn to examine their own certainty, recognize the limits of interpretation, and encounter others as participants in truth-seeking rather than as threats. Research on misinformation resilience shows that prebunking, media literacy, and cognitive tools can improve resistance to manipulation, but such tools must be connected to broader ethical practices of reflection and accountability (Kozyreva et al. 2020, 103; Linden 2022, 460–67). Similarly, fact checking may correct false claims, but deeper transformation requires changes in how communities evaluate authority, trust, and evidence (Walter et al. 2020, 350).

In this sense, epistemological peacebuilding does not replace tolerance, moderation, or interreligious harmony. Rather, it deepens them. Tolerance without epistemic transformation may only produce passive coexistence, while closed reason remains intact beneath the surface. Moderation without critique may reduce violent expression without dismantling the interpretive monopolies that sustain exclusion. Harmony without recognition may make marginalized experiences for the sake of social order. Arkoun's contribution is to show that peace requires the opening of reason itself. The transformation from *la raison close* to *la raison ouverte* creates a foundation for dialogue that is critical, historical,

ethical, and plural. It allows religious communities to maintain truth claims while resisting the absolutization of interpretation, the monopoly of authority, and the exclusion of the unthought.

Therefore, the main contribution of this model lies in distinguishing religion as a source of meaning from closed reason as a source of exclusion. Religion can provide moral orientation, social solidarity, hope, and a language for suffering and salvation. However, when interpretation is monopolized and shielded from critique, religion can be turned into a mechanism of exclusion. *La raison ouverte* offers another path: it opens truth claims to historical examination, distributes epistemic authority more justly, and enables dialogue as a practice of mutual accountability. In plural societies and digital publics, this transformation is not optional. It is a necessary condition for building a peace that does not merely suppress conflict but transforms the epistemological structures that produce it.

### **Epistemological Peacebuilding Model**

The epistemological peacebuilding model developed in this article is formulated through three interrelated stages: diagnosis, deconstruction, and construction. These stages are necessary so that the model does not remain an abstract theoretical formulation but can function as an analytical framework for examining religious conflict in plural societies. The model begins with the assumption that religious conflict does not arise only from differences in doctrine, belief, or ritual practice, but also from the epistemological mechanisms through which religious truth is produced, authorized, circulated, defended, and institutionalized. In this sense, religious conflict is not merely a problem of social hostility; it is also a problem of epistemic closure, interpretive monopoly, and unequal recognition. Contemporary studies on polarization, misinformation, and intergroup hostility show that conflict intensifies when truth claims become fused with identity, loyalty, moral certainty, and distrust toward outgroups (Finkel et al. 2020, 533; Bilewicz and Soral 2020, 3–33; Pennycook and Rand 2021, 388–402). Therefore, peace cannot be built solely through moral appeals to tolerance or harmony. It must begin with an examination of the epistemological conditions that allows one interpretation to become dominant while other interpretations are marginalized.

The first stage is diagnosis. At this stage, the researcher identifies how *la raison close* generates conflict through the monopoly of authority, interpretive rigidity, and the exclusion of the realm of the unthought. Diagnosis does not aim to blame religion as the source of conflict. Rather, it distinguishes religiosity as a source of meaning from closed reason as an epistemic structure that transforms interpretation into final truth. In *Pour une critique de la raison islamique*, Arkoun explains that Islamic reason must be read historically and critically so that it is not frozen by orthodoxy, which closes off the possibility of new questions (Arkoun 1984c, 129). In *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, Arkoun also shows that conflict in thought emerges when tradition restricts what may be thought and what must remain outside the space of discourse (Arkoun 2002b, 170). This diagnostic stage is strengthened by current studies showing that

people often maintain or circulate questionable claims not simply because they lack information, but because such claims serve identity-protective, affective, and group-loyalty functions (Osmundsen et al. 2021, 999; Pennycook et al. 2020, 388–402, 2021, 590–95).

The diagnostic stage also requires attention to the digital transformation of religious authority. In plural societies, religious interpretations no longer circulate only through classical institutions, formal religious education, or clerical structures. They are also shaped by digital platforms, algorithmic visibility, online influencers, and networked publics. Digital religion research shows that emerging technologies reshape religious practice, public religious expression, and the formation of authority within online communities (Campbell and Evolvi 2020, 5–17; Zaid et al. 2022, 335). At the same time, social media environments may intensify epistemic closure by repeatedly exposing users to similar narratives, emotionally charged content, and outgroup-hostile messages (Cinelli et al. 2021, 1–8; Rathje et al. 2021, 1–11). Therefore, diagnosis in epistemological peacebuilding must examine not only theological claims, but also the infrastructures through which religious meanings are amplified, simplified, and converted into identity-based antagonism.

The second stage is deconstruction. This stage examines how absolute claims are historically formed, institutionally protected, and socially normalized. Deconstruction does not mean destroying religion or weakening belief. Rather, it means uncovering the social, political, linguistic, and institutional processes that make certain interpretations appear as though they have no history. Arkoun's critique of Islamic reason is central here because he refuses to treat orthodoxy as a purely doctrinal phenomenon. For him, orthodoxy must be examined through the relation between text, power, institution, language, and historical memory (Arkoun 1994b, 112, 1984a, 7–42). Deconstruction therefore asks: who obtains the authority to speak in the name of religion? What makes one interpretation appear natural, universal, or final? How are minority interpretations silenced before they can be heard? This stage is supported by studies on epistemic injustice and recognition, which show that exclusion often operates by denying certain groups credibility as legitimate knowers (S. Sandberg and Colvin 2020, 1858; Bacevic 2023, 1122; Rowatt and Kire 2021, 86–91).

Deconstruction also exposes the relationship between religious interpretation and broader systems of communicative power. In contemporary public life, epistemic authority is not only maintained by formal religious institutions, but also by repetition, visibility, platform design, and social validation. Research on digital media and democracy shows that online environments can reorganize public reasoning by altering what becomes visible, credible, and emotionally salient (Lorenz-Spreen et al. 2023, 74; Bak-Coleman et al. 2021, 1–10; Kango et al. 2024, 97–113). Algorithmic amplification may increase the visibility of political and identity-based content, thereby shaping perceptions of social consensus and moral urgency (Huszár et al. 2022, 1–6; Guess et al. 2023, 398; Khamdan et al. 2025, 211). In religious conflict, this means that interpretive dominance is not produced only through doctrine, but also through communicative infrastructures that

repeatedly privilege certain voices and marginalize others (Sopyan et al. 2021, 31). Deconstruction is therefore necessary to reveal how authority becomes naturalized through both religious and digital systems.

The third stage is construction. At this stage, the model builds ethical dialogue through *la raison ouverte*, epistemic recognition, and deliberative public reasoning. Construction does not require all parties to abandon their truth claims. Rather, it requires every truth claim to be examined through textual responsibility, historical awareness, rational argumentation, and ethical accountability. Arkoun's *la raison ouverte* provides the conceptual basis for this movement because it opens religious reasoning to criticism without reducing religion to relativism. Open reason allows believers to maintain commitment to truth while recognizing that human interpretation is historically situated and therefore must remain open to examination (Arkoun 1984b, 65–100). This constructive stage is consistent with current studies on intergroup toleration and misinformation correction, which show that peace and epistemic resilience require active recognition, reflective judgment, and the capacity to evaluate claims beyond identity-based defensiveness (Verkuyten and Yogeewaran 2017, 95; Walter et al. 2020, 350; Linden 2022, 460–67).

Within this framework, dialogue is not understood as an ordinary moral conversation or an institutional ceremony that merely displays symbols of harmony. Dialogue is an epistemic practice that enables participants to examine the conditions under which certain voices are regarded as authoritative while others are positioned as marginal. Dialogue does not only aim to produce social agreement; it also seeks to transform the mechanisms through which authority, interpretive legitimacy, and the distribution of truth are produced within the religious public sphere. In Arkoun's framework, this form of dialogical practice is consistent with the transformation from *la raison close* to *la raison ouverte*, namely a shift from reason that freezes interpretation to reason that opens truth claims to historical, critical, and ethical examination (Arkoun 1984b, 65, 2002b, 170). Studies on misinformation and cognitive resilience further show that epistemic openness requires more than access to information; it requires tools for reflection, resistance to manipulation, and the cultivation of accuracy-oriented reasoning (Kozyreva et al. 2020, 103; Roozenbeek et al. 2022, 1–11; Ecker et al. 2022, 13–29).

Epistemic recognition is a central element of this dialogical ethic. Epistemic recognition does not mean that all interpretations have equal validity. Rather, it means that participants should not be excluded from the dialogical space before their arguments are heard, examined, and evaluated through mutually agreed criteria of reasoning. This distinction is important because epistemological peacebuilding must avoid two opposite dangers. The first is relativism, in which all claims are accepted without critical assessment. The second is dogmatism, in which one interpretation claims immunity from critique. The model therefore requires a non-dominative process of reasoning that allows religious subjects to appear as credible speakers without suspending rational, historical, and ethical evaluation. Research on prejudice, threat perception, and digital misinformation confirms

that public reasoning becomes fragile when communities treat disagreement as existential danger and when claims are accepted mainly because they confirm identity-based commitments (Douglas 2021; Levy 2021, 831).

This model differs from value-based peacebuilding. Value-based approaches usually begin with moral appeals such as tolerance, harmony, and moderation. These values remain important, but they become transformative only when the interpretive structures and authorities that produce exclusion are also addressed. Tolerance may reduce open hostility, but it does not necessarily change the epistemic hierarchy that determines who may define truth, whose testimony is trusted, and whose interpretation is dismissed as deviant. Peacebuilding therefore needs to move from symbolic inclusion to epistemic transformation. Studies of collective behavior, digital democracy, and online communication show that social stability is fragile when communities lack mechanisms for accountable truth production, inclusive participation, and critical evaluation of authority (Bak-Coleman et al. 2021, 1–10; Lorenz-Spreen et al. 2023, 74). In this sense, epistemological peacebuilding does not replace tolerance; it deepens tolerance by addressing the structures of knowledge that make exclusion possible.

This model also has ethical limits. Opening orthodoxy to critique may generate anxiety, resistance, or accusations of relativism. Therefore, *la raison ouverte* must be guided by textual responsibility, historical awareness, rational argumentation, and ethical accountability. Openness does not mean accepting every claim without evaluation. Rather, openness means providing a space in which every claim can be examined through a non-dominative process of reasoning. This is why epistemological peacebuilding must combine critique with responsibility. Critique without responsibility may become destructive skepticism, while responsibility without critique may reproduce closed authority. Arkoun's model avoids both extremes by insisting that religious thought must remain faithful to the seriousness of truth while also being exposed to history, language, and the humanities (Arkoun 1984b, 65–100, 2002a, 155–92). Contemporary research on misinformation, bias, and algorithmic authority shows that such responsibility is increasingly urgent in digital societies, where religious meaning can be rapidly amplified, distorted, or politicized (Abid et al. 2021, 461; Mosleh and Rand 2022, 1–9).

Thus, epistemological peacebuilding offers a model of peace that moves from diagnosing closed reasons, to deconstructing absolute claims, and finally to constructing dialogue through open reason. Its main contribution lies in distinguishing religion as a source of meaning from closed reason as a source of exclusion. Religion can provide moral orientation, solidarity, hope, and a language for suffering and salvation. However, when interpretation is monopolized and protected from critique, religion can become a mechanism of exclusion. *La raison ouverte* offers another path by opening truth claims to historical examination, distributing epistemic authority more justly, recognizing the unthought, and enabling dialogue as a practice of mutual accountability. In plural societies and digital publics, peace is not merely the absence of violence or the performance of harmony; it is an epistemological transformation in which religious communities

learn to examine their own certainty, recognize the limits of interpretation, and encounter others as legitimate participants in the shared search for truth.

**Table.** Structure of Epistemic Dialogue in Epistemological Peacebuilding.

<b>Elements of Epistemic Dialogue</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Function in the Model</b>
<b>Dialogue as an epistemic practice</b>	Dialogue is not merely a moral conversation, but a space for examining how authority and truth are constructed.	To dismantle the mechanisms through which authority and interpretive legitimacy are produced.
<b>Emancipatory dialogue</b>	Dialogue must transform the structure of conversation, rather than merely bringing different groups into the same forum.	To enable marginalized groups to gain equal epistemic influence.
<b>Epistemic recognition</b>	Participants should not be excluded before their arguments are heard, examined, and evaluated.	To ensure that religious subjects are treated as bearers of knowledge.
<b>Prevention of relativism</b>	Not all interpretations are considered equally valid; every claim must still be examined.	To maintain rational, historical, textual, and ethical standards.
<b>Prevention of dogmatism</b>	No interpretation should be allowed to close itself off from critique.	To open a shared space for examining truth claims.

The data presented in the table above indicates that the core of epistemological peacebuilding lies in epistemic dialogue. Dialogue does not merely function to bring different parties together in the same institutional forum; rather, it transforms the conditions that determine who is recognized as authoritative, credible, and interpretively legitimate. In many plural societies, dialogue often remains procedural: representatives of different groups are invited, symbolic statements of harmony are produced, and public tension is temporarily reduced. However, such dialogue becomes fragile when it does not examine the deeper epistemic structures that determine whose interpretation is heard, whose suffering is recognized, and whose claim to truth is treated as legitimate. Contemporary studies on disinformation, public reasoning, and democratic communication show that communicative spaces may reproduce exclusion when they privilege visibility, affective intensity, and strategic persuasion over reflective judgment and shared inquiry (Freelon and Wells 2020, 145). Within Arkoun's framework, this problem must be understood through the transformation from *la raison close* to *la raison ouverte*. Closed reason freezes historically situated interpretations into final truth, whereas open reason requires religious communities to examine truth claims through history, language, power, and ethical responsibility (Arkoun 1984a, 7–42).

The data presented in the table also emphasizes emancipatory dialogue and epistemic recognition. Dialogue becomes emancipatory when it transforms the structure of conversation rather than merely gathering different groups in one forum. A marginalized group may be physically present in an interreligious forum, but still epistemically excluded if its experience is treated as secondary, emotional, local, or insufficiently authoritative. Emancipatory dialogue therefore requires a redistribution of epistemic influence: participants must not only be allowed to speak but also be heard as credible contributors to shared understanding. Studies on democratic listening, public deliberation, and participatory communication show that inclusion becomes meaningful only when participants can influence agenda-setting, interpretive framing, and the criteria by which claims are evaluated. Epistemic recognition does not mean that all interpretations must automatically be accepted as true. Rather, it means that no participant should be excluded before their argument is heard, examined, and evaluated through fair criteria of reasoning. Arkoun's concept of *l'impensé*, or the unthought, clarifies this problem because it refers to memories, questions, and interpretive possibilities excluded from dominant religious discourse (Arkoun 1984b, 85–100).

Thus, this model avoids two extremes: relativism and dogmatism. It rejects relativism because every claim must still be examined through rational, historical, textual, and ethical standards. It also rejects dogmatism because no interpretation should be allowed to close itself off from critique by claiming final authority over religious truth. Arkoun explains that religious authority must be examined in relation to history, language, institutions, and power (Arkoun 1994b, 87). Therefore, epistemological peacebuilding should be understood as a model of peace that operates at the level of knowledge production. It moves from the diagnosis of closed reason to the deconstruction of absolute claims, and finally to dialogical construction through *la raison ouverte*. Its strength lies in distinguishing religion as a source of meaning from closed reason as a source of exclusion. The model does not reject tolerance, harmony, or moderation; rather, it deepens them by adding an epistemological dimension. In Arkounian terms, peace becomes possible when religious communities move from monopolized truth toward shared examination, reopen the unthought, and transform dialogue into a practice of epistemic justice (Arkoun 1984b, 69, 2002a, 155–192).

## Conclusion

This article has argued that religious conflict in plural societies cannot be understood only as a problem of doctrinal difference, social tension, or lack of tolerance. It must also be examined as an epistemological problem concerning how religious truth is produced, authorized, circulated, and defended. Through Mohammed Arkoun's critique of Islamic reason, this study shows that conflict becomes deeply rooted when *la raison close* transforms historically situated interpretations into final and unquestionable truths. In this condition, interpretive authority is monopolized, alternative voices are excluded, and religious difference is treated as deviation or threat. Arkoun's concepts of *la raison close*, *la raison ouverte*,

*l'impensé*, orthodoxy, and authorities therefore provide a critical framework for understanding the epistemological roots of religious exclusion.

The epistemological peacebuilding model proposed in this article consists of three stages: diagnosis, deconstruction, and dialogical construction. Diagnosis identifies the operation of closed reason; deconstruction reveals the historical, institutional, and political processes that make certain interpretations appear absolute; and dialogical construction builds peace through *la raison ouverte*, epistemic recognition, and ethical public reasoning. This study concludes that tolerance, harmony, and moderation remain important, but they become more transformative when supported by epistemological critique. The practical implication is the need to develop dialogical institutions that do not merely manage religious conflict, but also transform how communities listen, interpret, recognize, and evaluate one another's truth claims.

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