

THE MYSTERY OF THE DROWNING OF KAN'ĀN, THE SON OF NŪḤ: CRITICISM OF SHAHRUR'S THOUGHT

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Abstract: *Muḥammad Shahrur is a Muslim thinker who has many controversial works. This article describes Shahrur's thoughts about Kan'ān during the flash flood tragedy at the time of Prophet Nūḥ. He made a study using intertextual theory. He thought that Kanān's drowning during the flood was because he was not the biological child of the Prophet Nūḥ, but the son of his wife's adultery with another man without Prophet Nūḥ's awareness. This article found Shahrur's misinterpretation of the personality of Kan'ān because in interpreting the verses of the Quran about the story of the family of Prophet Nūḥ, he prioritizes the intertextual's approach with modern sciences, such as semiotics and hermeneutics, and ignores credible interpretation methods such as those are used by the scholars of interpretation, both classic and modern. Besides that, this article is a literature study that compares Shahrur's interpretation with classical and modern scholars of interpretation.*

Keywords: *Kan'ān; Nūḥ; Shahrūr; Quran; Interpretation.*

Abstrak: *Muhammad Shahrur adalah pemikir Muslim dengan banyak karya kontroversial. Artikel ini mengurai pemikiran Shahrur tentang Kan'an saat tragedi banjir bandang di masa Nabi Nuh. Shahrur membuat kajian dengan teori intertekstual. Shahrur berpandangan tenggelamnya Kan'an saat banjir disebabkan karena ia bukan anak biologis Nabi Nuh, melainkan anak hasil perzinahan istrinya dengan laki-laki lain tanpa diketahui oleh Nuh. Artikel ini menemukan kesalahan penafsiran Shahrur tentang sosok Kan'an karena dalam menafsirkan ayat-ayat Quran tentang kisah keluarga Nabi Nuh ia lebih mengutamakan intertextual's approach dengan ilmu-ilmu modern seperti semiotika dan hermeneutika dan mengabaikan metode penafsiran yang kredibel seperti yang dilakukan oleh para ahli tafsir, baik klasik maupun modern. Artikel ini adalah studi kepustakaan yang membandingkan penafsiran Shahrur dengan para ahli tafsir klasik dan modern.*

Kata kunci: *Kan'an; Nuh; Shahrur; Tafsir; Al-Qur'an.*

Introduction

Kan'an was the only child of Nuh who was not on board of the ship during the great flood (*Tufan*). He thought that he could save himself by climbing to the highlands as described in the Quran in Surah Hud [11]: 43. Nuh prayed to Allah so that his son could be saved from the flood. However, his prayer was not answered, even Allah said in Surah Hud [11]: 46: "Allah replied, "O Nuh! He is certainly not of your family—he was entire of unrighteous conduct. So do not ask Me about what you do not know of! I warn you so you do not fall into ignorance."¹ Allah's response when Nuh asked for his son to be saved as stated in the verse above is a puzzle to be discussed. The question that arises regarding Surah Hud [11]: 46 is what is the meaning of the verse so that textually there is a view, including Shahrur's view, that the drowned child of Nuh is not his biological child. Even in the next verse, Prophet Nuh seems surprised and does not realize whether the child is his son or not. This can be understood from Surah Hud [11]: 47: "[Nuh] said, "My Lord, I seek refuge in You from asking that of which I do not know. And unless You forgive me and have mercy upon me, I will be among the losers."²

If the problem with the drowning of Kan'an is that he disobeyed against the teachings of Prophet Nuh as explained in the article written by Idam Mostofa³ and included in the category of Surah Nuh [71]: 26: "Nuh said, "My Lord, do not leave of the unbelievers a single dweller on earth"⁴ then a new question arises: why did Nuh's wife could be safe from the flood, even though she is one of the antagonist women in the Quran as explained in the article written by Muhammad Hasnan Nahar.⁵ The antagonism of Nuh's wife is explained in surah al-Tahrim [66]: 10: "God illustrates an

example of those who disbelieve: the wife of Nūḥ and the wife of Lot. They were under two of Our righteous servants, but they betrayed them. They availed them nothing against God, and it was said, “Enter the Fire with those who are entering.”⁶ Regarding the story of the drowning of Kan'ān, Muhammad Shahrur explained that Kan'ān was not the son of Prophet Nuḥ. By using an intertextual approach, Shahrur said that Kan'ān is the result of adultery. It is said that Nūḥ was unaware that his wife had committed adultery with another man.⁷ Shahrur dared to think so, based on the verse of the Quran Surah al-Taḥrīm [66]: 10, right on the sentence “*both wives betrayed their husbands*”, he interpreted that the wife of Prophet Nūḥ betrayed the sacred bond of marriage by committing adultery with another man, so that children resulting from adultery in the perspective of fiqh scholars, should not be related to their biological father.⁸

From the explanation above, it is interesting to study and re-examine the causes of the drowning of Kan'ān in the Quran from Shahrur's perspective, after reviewing that Kan'ān is the only Nūḥ's family who did not survive the flood tragedy at that time. Especially when Alī al-Wāḥidī (d. 468 H) explained that Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī also argued that Kan'ān was the result of adultery.⁹ Even though Nūḥ had asked Allah to save all his family from the calamity that was about to happen. If the argument for Kan'ān's unsafety is his statement, “I will take refuge on a mountain—it will protect me from the water” as explained in Surah Hūd [11]: 42, then what must be considered is the message of the Prophet Nūḥ to his son, “don't be with the disbelievers.” In Shahrur's perspective, Nūḥ's wife is also an unbeliever. If there were only believers on board Nūḥ's ship, then Nūḥ's wife should not have been on the ship.¹⁰ In addition, research on Shahrur's views and criticisms of his arguments have been widely studied by researchers. However, regarding Shahrur's view of the child of Nūḥ (Kan'ān) who drowned during the flood, none of the researchers discussed it. Recent research on Shahrur's thoughts is more dominated by the hudūd theory such as the article written by Hanani with the title: “*Eksekusi Mati di Indonesia: Perspektif Teori Hudud Muhammad Shahrur*” (Death Executions in Indonesia: Perspectives on Muhammad Shahrur's Hudūd Theory),¹¹ Fuad Mustafid entitled: “*Pembaruan Pemikiran Hukum Islam: Studi tentang Teori Hudud Muhammad Shahrur*” (“Renewal of Islamic Legal Thought: A Study of Muhammad Shahrur's Hudūd Theory”),¹² Mohammad Rasyid Ridho with the title, “*Kritik terhadap Teori Hudud Muhammad Shahrur dan Implementasinya dalam Ayat-ayat Hudud*” (Criticism of Muhammad Shahrur's Hudūd Theory and Its Implementation in Hudūd Verses).¹³ Regarding polygamy, there are articles written by Abdul Jalil with the title,

“*Wanita dalam Poligami: Studi Pemikiran Muhammad Shahrur*” (Women in Polygamy: A Study of Muhammad Shahrur’s Thoughts),¹⁴ and Toni Pransiska with the title, “*Rekonstruksi Konsep Poligami ala Muhammad Shahrur: Sebuah Tafsir Kontemporer*” (“Reconstruction of the Concept of Polygamy in Muhammad Shahrur: A Contemporary Interpretation”).¹⁵ Regarding Milk al-Yamn, there is an article written by Mukhammad Nur Hadi with the title, “*Muhammad Shahrur dan Konsep Milkul Yamin: Kritik Penafsiran Perspektif Ushul Fiqih*” (Muhammad Shahrur and the Concept of Milkul Yamin: Criticism of the Interpretation of Ushul Fiqh Perspectives).¹⁶

Moreover, there have been many studies that discussed the story of Prophet Nūḥ in the Quran, starting from his age, ship, *tūfān*, and Nūḥ’s figure as an exemplary father, to the comparison of Nūḥ’s story from the perspective of the Quran and other holy books. In 2015, for example, an article written by Rahmi was published with the title, “*Tokoh Ayah dalam al-Qur’an dan Keterlibatannya dalam Pembinaan Anak*” (Father’s Figure in the Quran and His Involvement in Child Development).¹⁷ Next, in 2017 there was an article that is discussing the Prophet Nūḥ written by Muhammad Rusydi with the title, “*Makna Kisah Nuh AS dalam al-Qur’an (Perspektif Hermeneutika Filosofis)*” (The Meaning of the Story of Nūḥ AS in the Quran (Philosophical Hermeneutics Perspective)).¹⁸ In the same year, an article with the title, “*Setilistika Dialog Qur’ani dalam Kisah Nabi Nuh AS*” (Setilistics of the Quranic Dialogue in the Story of the Prophet Nūḥ) was published, written by Asep Sopian.¹⁹ Then, in 2018 another article was published with the title, “*Komitmen Orang Tua dalam Pendidikan Anak: Refleksi Kisah Nabi Nuh AS dan Kan’an*” (Parents’ Commitment in Children’s Education: Reflections on the Story of Prophet Nūḥ AS and Kan’an) written by Idam Mustofa.²⁰ In 2019, an article written by Ulumuddin was also published with the title, “*Kisah Nabi Nuh dalam al-Qur’an: Pendekatan Intertekstual Julia Kristeva*” (The Story of Nūḥ in the Quran: Julia Kristeva’s Intertextual Approach).²¹

Based on the previous studies, it appears that the mystery of the drowning of Kan’an in the Quran has not been discussed by a single researcher, especially regarding Shahrur’s perspective and arguments for this story. The mystery of the drowning of Kan’an often escapes the researchers of study of the Quran, even though this mystery is important to review when discussing the story of Nūḥ, in particular regarding Shahrur’s interpretation which explains that Kan’an is the result of adultery. Therefore, I raised this theme to reveal the story from Shahrur’s perspective by using a critical analysis based on the interpretations of classical and modern interpreters.

In this article, I also explore the interpretation of al-Ṭabarī who is claimed to be a mufassir who agrees with Shahrur about the figure of Kan‘ān.

Furthermore, this article is qualitative research using the library research method.²² If it is viewed from the level of explanation, this article is a descriptive study. It aims to broadly open Shahrur’s opinion about the Kan‘ān lineage in the Quran. And also, the data analysis method used in this article is the critical discourse analysis (CDA) method.²³ It serves to dissect and criticize Shahrur’s argument regarding Kan‘ān which is claimed to be the child of adultery. With this method, I hope that a clear and distinctive understanding will be found regarding Shahrur’s interpretation of the causes of the drowning of Kan‘ān in the Quran and the validity of his arguments and comparisons with the perspectives of the Muslim (*mufasssirūn*).

The Mystery of the Drowning of Kan‘ān on Shahrur’s Perspective

There are two works written by Shahrur when discussing the story of the Prophet Nūḥ in the Quran. First, a book entitled *al-Kitāb wa-al-Qur‘ān Qirāah Mu‘āṣirah*, which was published in Damascus by the publisher al-Ahālī li-al-Ṭibā‘ah wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī‘. It consists of 814 pages. This book is familiar to academics. It is also often used as a reference for researchers, especially when studying issues of ḥudūd, family, knowledge of the Quran, hadith, and other things. Second, a book that specifically discussed stories in the Quran. The book entitled *al-Qaṣaṣ al-Qur‘ānī Qirāah Mu‘āṣirah*, that consists of two volumes. The first volume discusses the introduction to the story in the Quran which also discusses the story of Adam, while in the second volume the discussion starts from the story of Nūḥ to Yūsuf. The two works of Shahrur can be said to be complementary to each other, although there is some repetition of explanation when discussing Kan‘ān.

There are five verses from Surah Hūd which leads to the conclusion that Kan‘ān was not the biological son of Prophet Nūḥ. Those are in verses 40, 42, 45, 46, and 47. Meanwhile, to strengthen his argument, Shahrur added one verse from surah al-Taḥrīm verse 10. If traced back from Shahrur’s interpretation of the cause of the sinking of Kan‘ān, it can be seen from the beginning of the interpretation of Surah Hūd: 40. Right in the sentence “everyone in pairs” Shahrur interprets, “what enters the ship Nūḥ is every living creature that has a partner (male and female) whether human or animal.”²⁴ Shahrur’s perspective, from the sentence above, which became a barometer of human safety at that time was not because of faith but limited to having a partner.²⁵ Shahrur’s interpretation

of the sentence cannot be blamed, because the verse itself does not provide special requirements in the form of faith. The word of faith stated in the verse is one of three groups that can participate in the ship. The absence of faith requirements for people who have a partner is in line with the interpretation of the majority of scholars. This can be proven when al-Māwardī interprets the verse which gives the impression that the calamity of the time of Nuh did not happen to three groups: 1) those who have a partner, 2) Nuh's family, 3) those who believe.²⁶

Furthermore, Shahrur explained that all of Nūḥ's family both from biological children (Sām, Ām, and Yāfath), his son-in-law, and his wife survived the flood disaster. The salvation of the Nuh's family is following God's promise in His word "and your family".²⁷ Because Allah had promised to save all of Prophet Nuh's family, Shahrur argued that the wife of Prophet Nuh was one of the survivors of the disaster that occurred.²⁸ Even though it is known that Nuh's wife is an infidel²⁹ as explained in Surah Al-Taḥrīm [66]: 10. The safety of the wife of the Prophet Nuh is an indication that faith is not an indicator of salvation for Nuh's family.

When Nūḥ's wife who did not believe in N's teachings was able to survive the disaster, a question arose, why did Kan'an who claimed to be Nūḥ's son even Nūḥ called him "*yā bunayya*" in the Quran drowned during the flood? If Kan'an belongs to the family of Nūḥ, but he does not survive the calamity, then Allah does not keep His promise. Allah can't break the promise as described in three verses in the Quran: al-Zumar [39]: 20, al-Ra'd [13]: 31, and Alu 'Imrān [3]: 9. Regarding Kan'an which is claimed to be Prophet Nuh's biological son but did not survive the disaster, Shahrur explained that Kan'an was included in the sentence category "except for those who have made their vows".³⁰ Thus, Allah does not break His promise. However, from this, the question arises why Kan'an falls into this category of sentences? It is this question that Shahrur is trying to answer.

In the next verse, namely Hūd [11]: 42, Shahrur interprets that when the flood hit, from the ship, Nūḥ called Kan'an to get into the ship immediately. However, Kan'an refused and thought he could survive in his way, namely by climbing the highlands.³¹ From this verse, Shahrur sees that the location of Nūḥ is a lowland surrounded by highlands. Therefore, in the verse after Hūd [11]: 43 it is explained that Kan'an will save himself from the flood by climbing to the highlands. After the flood and Nūḥ's ship began to land, Nūḥ began to look for Kan'an who had been considered his biological son. Nūḥ's anxiety about Kan'an's safety was raised to Allah who had promised to save all of Nūḥ's family as stated in Hūd [11]: 45. After the flood, Nūḥ did not know that Kan'an had died in the water.

In Hūd [11]: 46 and 47 Shahrur finds the answer behind the sinking of Kan'an. Shahrur interprets the two verses, "after the flood, Nūḥ did not know that his son had drowned. He demanded God's promise of the salvation of all his family. However, Allah gave the news that Kan'an was not the biological son of Nūḥ. Nūḥ did not realize Kan'an was a child born of adultery. This can be proven from verse 46, "Indeed he is not from your family".³² Furthermore, Shahrur reveals that "He had unrighteous deeds" indicating that Kan'an was a child born of unjustified actions (i.e. Nūḥ's wife committed adultery with another man).³³ According to Shahrur's view, the revealing of Kan'an's identity does not violate God's promise, because what is promised to survive the flood is Nuh's biological family.³⁴ To strengthen his argument, Shahrur pointed out that Nūḥ's wife who was a disbeliever was able to survive the calamity, so why couldn't Kan'an survive? Faith is not a barometer of safety when the flood disaster occurred at that time.³⁵ To emphasize that Kan'an was the child of adultery, according to Shahrur, Allah advised Nūḥ by saying, "Do not ask me for something that you do not know the essence of. I advise you so that you are not one of the fools."

Nūḥ's ignorance of Kan'an's status as an adulterous child was only revealed after the flood. Then, in verse 47, Nūḥ admitted his ignorance and asked Allah for forgiveness for his negligence. Shahrur explained in this verse that there are two possibilities, namely: first, sometimes Kan'an was classified as an infidel and Nūḥ did not know it. Second, sometimes Kan'an was a child of adultery and Nūḥ did not know it. If the cause of Kan'an's drowning was because he was an infidel, then it cannot be justified, because in Nūḥ's ship there was an infidel, namely Nūḥ's wife. Thus, according to Shahrur, it is certain that Kan'an was drowned by Allah because Kan'an was a child of adultery or did not belong to Nūḥ's family.³⁶

From Shahrur's interpretation above, it is clear that Shahrur's interpretation model in the context of the Kan'an story was more inclined to textual interpretation. He rejected the arguments of scholars who tried to interpret by using an approach that is more relevant to the prophetic context. Through Shahrur's interpretation of the story of the drowning of Kan'an when it is examined carefully can lead us to find its weakness. Although Shahrur's interpretation of the stories of the prophets contradicts many of the scholars, in many ways, it cannot be blamed because Shahrur has his method of interpreting the stories of the prophets in the Quran.³⁷

Interpretation of Surah Hūd [11]: 46 on *Mufasssirrūn's* Perspectives

Al-Wāḥidī stated that there are two major arguments regarding the status of Kan'an. Firstly, Kan'an was the result of adultery from the perspectives

of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan, and al-Sya‘bī. Secondly, Kan‘ān was the biological child of Nūḥ as stated by Ibn Abbās, Ikrimah, al-Anbārī, and others.³⁸ From al-Wāḥidī’s explanation, it is clear that Shahrur’s argument regarding Kanān’s lineage did not violate the scholars’ interpretation, because there are still some scholars who argued that Kan‘ān was a child of adultery. Shahrur repeated from the previous scholars only.

Even though al-Wāḥidī argued so, the thing that is worrying is whether it is true that there are scholars who explained that Nūḥ’s wife committed adultery with another man? Is it true that al-Ṭabarī thought that Kan‘ān was the child of adultery? These two questions need to be answered. In general, many books of tafsir, both classical and modern, which explained that Kan‘ān was the biological son of Nūḥ. This can be proven when al-Syafī‘ī (d. 204 H) interpreted Surah Hūd [11]: 45 and 46, that Kan‘ān has “went out of Nūḥ’s family because he was one of those who associated partner with Allah. Allah ordered Nūḥ to take all his family except Kan‘ān because he was a sinner”.³⁹

Moreover, Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 373 H) interpreted the verse by quoting the narrations of Ibn Abbās, Mujāhid, and Ikrimah which stated that Kan‘ān was the biological son of Nūḥ, but he did not follow the behavior and practices of his father. Furthermore, al-Samarqandī explained by quoting the wisdom that, “when the child did not follow something that is done by his father, then the child was cut off from the father. Likewise, if a people did not follow the practice of their prophet, then it was feared that the people will be cut off from their prophet.”⁴⁰ Not different from his predecessors, al-Tha‘labī (d. 427 H),⁴¹ al-Jawzī (d. 597 H),⁴² Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 H),⁴³ and the scholars who lived in the modern era argued that Kan‘ān was a biological child of Prophet Nūḥ. The cause of Kan‘ān’s drowning and not being included in the category of Nūḥ’s family who survived the disaster was his disbelief and not following the practices of his father (Prophet Nūḥ).

So, if there is an attribution of opinion to Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī who is classified as a scholar who argued that Kan‘ān was a child of adultery, then the attribution is a big mistake. Because none of al-Ṭabarī’s statements indicated that Kan‘ān was a child of adultery. Al-Ṭabarī favored the narration that explained Kan‘ān as the biological son of the Prophet Nūḥ. Kan‘ān was drowned because of his disbelief and did not believe in his father’s teachings.⁴⁴ The misunderstanding in concluding al-Ṭabarī’s opinion is what happened when discussing the cause of the drowning of Kan‘ān. Al-Ṭabarī explained the different narrations regarding the Kanān lineage. In his work, al-Ṭabarī divided his opinions into two major

arguments regarding the Kan'ān lineage. 14 narrations explained that Kan'ān was the child of adultery⁴⁵ and 20 narrations explained that Kan'ān was the biological child of Nūḥ.⁴⁶ In the end, al-Ṭabarī concluded and favored a narration which explained that Kan'ān was the biological son of Nūḥ. In addition, there was a history that strengthens the arguments of the scholars said that Kan'ān was the biological son of the Prophet Nūḥ. The narration appears from Ibn Abbās who asserted that the wife of a prophet can't commit adultery with another man.⁴⁷

Furthermore, when the scholars interpreted the sentence that “for his conduct is unrighteous” showed two interpretations. The two interpretations arise due to differences in reading. This is as explained by al-Baghawī (d. 510 H). First, if it is read with “*innahū 'amila ghayra ṣaliḥ*”, it means that his son's actions in the form of disbelief and lying to his father's message our bad deeds. This reading method followed al-Kisā'ī (d. 189 H) and Ya'qūb (d. 250 H). Second, it is read as stated in the Uthmāinī muṣḥaf, i.e. “*innahū 'amalun ghayru ṣaliḥ*”, then it means the prayer of the Prophet Nūḥ who asked Allah to save Kan'ān even though he had bad deeds.⁴⁸ Al-Hurairī explained pronoun *hā'* contained in the sentence structure that “the return of pronoun is to the child of Nūḥ (Kan'ān). Thus, it means that Nūḥ's son was misbehaving because he did shirk behavior and denied his father.”⁴⁹ In addition, al-Hurairī emphasized that it is not justified if the pronoun *hā'* returns to another word such as Nūḥ prayer, because there will be coercion on the understanding of God's words.⁵⁰ From al-Hurairī's explanation, it can be concluded that the pronoun was not allowed to be referred to the child of Nūḥ as a child of adultery.

Some of the interpretations of the scholars above indicated that Kan'ān was the biological son of Nūḥ. Al-Ṭabarī who was referred to as one of the scholars who stated that Kan'ān was the child of adultery must be criticized because after being studied until the end of his explanation, al-Ṭabarī preferred the history that explains Kan'ān was the biological child of Nūḥ. This argument is preferred by both classical and modern scholars, even the scholars blame the views and arguments which stated that Kan'ān was the child of adultery.

Criticizing Shahrur's Argument that Nūḥ's Wife Committed Adultery

Shahrur's argument that Kan'ān was the child of adultery was built on four important points: 1) the redaction of the Quranic verse suggested that Kan'ān was not part of the family of Prophet Nūḥ as stated in Surah Hūd [11]: 46, 2) Prophet Nūḥ's wife was a treacherous woman as explained in Surah al-Taḥrim [66]: 10. This betrayal was in the form of adultery with

another man, 3) because Kan‘ān was not the biological child of Nūḥ, so that he is not safe when the flood hits, 4) faith is not the main condition for surviving the disaster as stated in Surah Hūd [11]: 40. This can be proven that Nūḥ’s wife survived the calamity even though she was classified as a person who did not believe in the message of the prophet Nūḥ. These four points become the focus of criticism of Shahrur’s argument when interpreting the story of Nūḥ in the Quran as follows:

First, the Quranic verse indicates that Kan‘ān was not included in the family of the Prophet Nūḥ as stated in Surah Hūd [11]: 46. There is nothing wrong with Shahrur’s interpretation that said that Kan‘ān does not belong to the family of Nūḥ, even the scholars agreed on that. This can be proven from the explanations of scholars such as Muḥammad Alī al-Ṣābūnī (b. 1930),⁵¹ Muḥammad Maḥmūd al-Ḥijāzī (d. 1972),⁵² Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333 H),⁵³ al-Ḥasan bin Muḥammad al-Naysabūrī (d. 850 H),⁵⁴ al-Marāghī (d. 1371 H),⁵⁵ Abd al-Karīm Yūnus al-Khaṭīb (d. 1390 H),⁵⁶ Ibn ‘Āshūr (d. 1393 H)⁵⁷, and others. However, what distinguishes Shahrur’s argument from other scholars is in the discussion that Kan‘ān does not belong to the family of Nūḥ, because Kan‘ān was a child of adultery. The scholars did not agree with this statement, although there are narrations that agreed with Shahrur. It was this minority argument that Shahrur brought back. He ignored the narration of Ibn Abbās which explained that the wives of the prophets could not commit adultery with other men. In addition, Shahrur in interpreting this verse did not seem to understand the redaction of the word *ahl* (family). This misunderstanding leads to the assumption that Kan‘ān was the child of adultery.

Regarding the editorial meaning of the word *ahl*, there is an interesting explanation from al-Syanqīṭī (d. 1973) who said, “People wonder about the truth of Kanān’s lineage on Nūḥ. Verily Allah has guarded the wives of the prophets to protect the glory of the prophets. Kan‘ān was Nūḥ’s biological son. Therefore, when Nūḥ begged Allah as recorded in Surah Hūd [11]: 45 by using the word “*ibnī lī*”. This word has two possibilities to interpret, i.e.: 1) attributed to the meaning of biological child of Nūḥ, 2) attributed to the meaning of family Nūḥ. To eliminate these two possibilities, it is found in Surah Hūd [11]: 46 which is “*innahū laysa min ablik*”. This explanation excludes the second possible meaning and establishes the first possible meaning. Therefore, in verse 46 their word which is used is *ahl* instead of *ibn*. The word *ahl* in Arabic is more common than the word *ibn*.”⁵⁸

From al-Syanqīṭī’s explanation above, it can be understood that the word of “*innahū laysa min ablik*” does not mean Kan‘ān was the child

of adultery, but he was not part of Nūḥ's family who believes in the Prophet Nūḥ and he did not behave well. Thus, Kan'an's status is still Nūḥ's biological son but was not included in the family because he did not believe in Nūḥ's teachings. This is reinforced by the firm rejection of Abd al-Karīm al-Khaṭīb (d. 1390 H) to those who thought that Kan'an was the result of adultery. He explained, "Those who doubted Kan'an was Nūḥ's biological son and argued that Kan'an was his mother's son (as a child of adultery), I don't know how they could accept that opinion. Even though there has been a lot of evidence that showed Kan'an was the biological son of Nūḥ and this evidence cannot be doubted. If Kan'an was not Nūḥ's biological son, then how could Nūḥ asked Allah to save Kan'an from this calamity. This could not have been done by Nūḥ without being related by blood."⁵⁹

On the other hand, when it is viewed from various recent studies regarding Nūḥ's children, especially Kan'an, all refer to the opinion that Kan'an was Nūḥ's biological child. In addition, Muḥammad Rusydi explained that in the Islamic tradition, the considered relationship is "a relation of faith" and not "a biological relationship". Therefore, even though Kan'an was Nūḥ's biological son, he did not survive the calamity that occurred.⁶⁰ Idam Mustofa also revealed that the emphasis on the content contained in the story of Nūḥ contained in Surah Hūd [11] 42-46 is the relationship between father and son and the urgency of moral education from an early age.⁶¹ Not unlike the opinion of other researchers, Abdel Rahman Mitib Altakhaineh asserts that Kan'an was the biological son of Nūḥ. He explained this when discussing the interaction between Nūḥ and Kan'an when the flood happened.⁶²

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that Shahrur's interpretation which said that Kan'an was the result of adultery does not have a solid foundation both in terms of linguistic understanding and history. Thus, the arguments built by Shahrur are more rational arguments than arguments based on the history and tradition of the scholars (*mufasssīrūn*).

Second, since Kan'an was not Nūḥ's biological son, he did not survive the flood. Because Shahrur thought Kan'an was not the biological son of Nūḥ, Kan'an was not included in the "your family" category (*wa ahlaka*) listed in Surah Hūd [11]:40. Thus, Kan'an was not safe from calamity and included in the category of the word of Allah "*illā man sabaqa 'alayh al-qawl*". In Shahrur's perspective, Kan'an was classified as a person who has been decided by Allah not to be saved, because he was not part of the family and was the child of adultery. If Kan'an was the biological child

of Nūḥ, then Kan‘ān could be saved even though he did not believe in the teachings of Nūḥ as was the wife of Nūḥ who did not believe but still survived.

Shahrur’s argument above clearly contradicted other Muslim scholars. For example, Alī al-Ṣābunī in his work explained that Kan‘ān belongs to the category of “*illā man sabaqa ‘alayh al-qawl*” this is because he is a disbeliever and deviates from the treatise brought by his father. To strengthen his interpretation, al-Ṣābūnī quoted a narration from Ibn Abbās which explained that Kan‘ān was the son of Nūḥ, but he deviated from the teachings of his father.⁶³ Sa‘īd Hawwā (d. 1989 AD) also explained a similar interpretation to al-Ṣābūnī with the additional explanation that the wisdom of this verse is that blood relations can be defeated by religious ties.⁶⁴ Muḥammad Sayyid Ṭanṭāwī (d. 2010 AD) emphasized the understanding of the combined sentence “*illā man sabaqa ‘alayh al-qawl*” is an exception from the Nūḥ family. If it is interpreted, then it has meaning except for the family of Nūḥ who has been determined by Allah for his unsafeness caused by his disbelief and not believing in the message of Nūḥ.⁶⁵

Gabriel Said Reynolds (2017) also agreed with the explanation of Sa‘īd Hawwā and other Muslim scholars who explained that in Islam kinship relations can be defeated by religious relations. Religious relations are more important than just kinship relations.⁶⁶ This is by the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad which explains that Muslims are like brothers and Muslims to one another are like the composition of one body. If one part of the body is sick, then the other part of the body feels pain too. Furthermore, the interpretations of the scholars still do not violate God’s promise to save Nūḥ’s family, because the words of the verse indicate that not all Nūḥ’s family can be saved. This can be proven by the existence of exceptions (*adat al-istithnā’*) which returns to the words of the Nūḥ family. Nūḥ’s son, that is Kan‘ān belongs to Nūḥ’s family who had been excluded from a family that could not survive the flood. One question that has not been explained by Shahrur is how he could interpret that all of Nūḥ’s family was saved by Allah so that the drowned Kan‘ān was not included in the family ties of Prophet Nūḥ? If this question cannot be answered by Shahrur, then it is not wrong if Shahrur’s explanation of the Kan‘ān lineage is still very ambiguous.

Third, the wife of the Prophet Nūḥ was a treacherous woman as described in Surah al-Taḥrīm [66]:10. There is nothing wrong with the interpretation that Nūḥ’s wife is a traitor woman. This is confirmed by the Quran in Surah al-Taḥrīm [66]: 10. However, what is doubtful about

Shahrur's interpretation is not only about the betrayal of Nūḥ's wife and not believing in Nūḥ's teachings, but about the affair behind Nūḥ. The interpretation written by Shahrur has quoted narrations from classical Muslim scholars such as al-Ḥasan, al-Sya'bi, Mujāhid, and the narrations of Ibn Jurayj. Those who claim Kan'an as a child of adultery interpreted the word Khātana in Surah al-Taḥrīm as adultery. According to Alī al-Wāḥidī, Surah al-Taḥrīm verse 10 is the basis of argument for people who think that Kan'an was the child of adultery.⁶⁷

The interpretation of Shahrur and the minority group of classical scholars was later refuted by the majority of other scholars, from both classical and modern scholars. This is due to an explanation that explicitly rejected the possibility of a prophet's wife committing an affair, especially committing adultery. Moreover, there is a verse that emphasizes that it is impossible for a prophet who is a man chosen by God to get a partner with a female prostitute. This explanation can be taken from surah al-Nūr [24]: 26. If the wife of a prophet is a female prostitute, then her prophethood will be doubted. If it then happens, for example, a prophet has a partner who is not good, then it is clear that Allah is wrong in His statement. God can't violate His statement. Regarding the correlation between surah al-Taḥrīm [66]: 10 and al-Nūr [24]: 26, al-Naysābūrī also mentions this in his commentary.⁶⁸

Therefore, the scholars when interpreting the lafadz khiyānah (betrayal) in the surah cannot be separated from 4 interpretations as explained by al-Sam'ānī (d. 489 H)⁶⁹, namely: 1) disbelief, 2) wickedness, 3) slander/fight against each other, 4) spread to his people that the Prophet Nūḥ was a madman. When it is examined again, the pronunciation of khiyānah in the Quran has five meanings as explained by Umar bin Alī al-Dimasyqī (d. 775 H)⁷⁰, i.e: 1) an error/sin in Islam as in Surah al-Anfāl [8]: 27, 2) stealing, as in Surah al-Nisā [4]: 105, 3) breaking the agreement, as in Surah al-Anfāl [8]: 58, 4) infidel/deviating as in surah al-Taḥrīm [66]: 10, 5) adultery, as in Surah Yūsuf [12]: 52. Although it has five meanings, it is not very appropriate if the pronunciation of khiyānah in surah al-Taḥrīm is interpreted by adultery as explained and strengthened by the interpretation of the scholars. Thus, it is certain that Shahrur made a misinterpretation when the word khiyānah was used as the only argument that the wife of the Prophet Nūḥ's wife committed adultery and gave birth to Kan'an.

Fourth, faith is not the main condition for surviving calamities as stated in Surah Hūd [11]: 40 with the argument that Nūḥ's disbelieving wife remained safe from the flood. Another fatal error of Shahrur's interpretation in the discussion of Nūḥ's story is that faith is not the main condition

and Nūḥ's disbelieving wife survives the calamity. Based on the fragment of Surah Hūd [11]: 40: "*qulnā -ḥmil fihā min kullin zawjayn ithnayn*". According to him, this sentence is general and does not distinguish between disbelief and faith, because it only provides criteria for each person who has a partner. The argument is strengthened by the next word, namely "and your family" (*wa-ahlaka*). He explained that Allah's promise to save Nūḥ's family did not provide a requirement of faith. Therefore, Nūḥ's wife, who was a pagan, was able to survive the flood disaster that occurred at that time.

To criticize Shahrur's argument above, it must first be understood that there is no definite explanation from the Quranic verses regarding whether Nūḥ's wife survived the disaster that happened or not. The verse of the Quran in Surah Hūd [11]: 40 is limited to providing an explanation of the three groups that can board the boat of Nūḥ, namely: 1) having a partner, 2) Nūḥ's family, 3) the believers. In addition, an explanation of whether Nūḥ's wife survived or not can be found from the interpretations of both classical and modern scholars. The interpretation model of the scholars from time to time is more inclined to the opinion of Nūḥ's wife who is not safe, because Nūḥ's wife is a person who does not believe in Nūḥ's message as stated in Surah al-Taḥrīm [66]: 10.

After conducting an in-depth search of the literature of scholars of interpretation on whether or not Nūḥ's wife survived the flood, none of the scholars stated that Nūḥ's wife survived the disaster. This is because Nūḥ's wife is included in the category of the sentence "*illā man sabaqa 'alayh al-qawm*". From the perspective of the scholars, what falls into this category of sentences are Nūḥ's wife and son, Kan'ān. Mujīruddin al-Muqadasī (d. 928 H) explained by dissecting the letter "*illā*" in the form of the letter 'exception/istithnā'. According to him, this letter was an exception from the Nūḥ's family who survived the flood. Thus, the meaning of the sentence structure is that all of Nūḥ's family survived the calamity except for the Nūḥ's family who had been ordained by God to be unsaved, namely Kan'ān and Wā'ilah, that was Nūḥ's wife.⁷¹ In contrast to al-Muqadasī, Muḥammad al-Nāṣrī (d. 1994 AD) explains that the exception letter is not only an exception to the Nūḥ's family but in the composition of the previous two sentences. Thus, it means that all who have a partner and family of Nūḥ are safe from the calamity except for those who have been ordained unsaved by Allah.⁷² The reason why the Nūḥ's people did not survive the calamity was those who were unjust and did not believe in the religious teachings brought by Nūḥ.

Despite the controversy over the return of exceptions to this sentence,

it must be specifically understood that the unsafeness of two people from the Nūḥ family was caused by their injustice and disbelief. Therefore, in Surah Hūd [11]: 37 and al-Mu'minūn [23]: 27 Allah reprimanded the Prophet Nūḥ, why did he pray for the unjust people to be saved?⁷³ Based on this verse, the scholars agree that the wrongdoers and unbelievers are not safe from the flood, including Nūḥ's wife. This issue of faith is very important in the Quran. The only scripture that explains that Nūḥ's wife survived is the Torah. Moreover, Shahrur when interpreting the stories in the Quran uses the theory of intertextual's approach which is a branch of post-structuralism semiotics.⁷⁴ Shahrur's opinion about Kan'an not being a child of Nūḥ uses the intertextual's approach. Therefore, Shahrur's view is in line with the explanation from the previous holy book, namely the Torah which explains that the Prophet Nūḥ only had three children.⁷⁵

Conclusion

Shahrur's interpretation that faith is not a condition of someone's safety by providing proof that Nūḥ's wife can survive a disaster, if using the perspective of many (majority of *mufasssirūn*), then that interpretation is a fatal error. Shahrur's mistake was prioritizing intertextual's approach with sciences such as semiotics and modern hermeneutics and ignoring credible interpretive methods as practiced by *mufasssirūn*. The right step in interpreting the Quran is to use the explanation of the Quran itself. As I see in Shahrur's interpretation there are many "interpretations" outside of the "explanation by the Quran itself". The next step in interpreting the Quran is to use the hadith of the Prophet and the explanations of the Prophet's companions (sahabah). If you only rely on modern auxiliary sciences such as semiotics, linguistics, and hermeneutics in interpreting the Quran, you may fall into a fatal error. This fatal mistake was made by Shahrur in interpreting the Quran, in particular the discussion about the story of the family of Nūḥ.

Endnotes

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4. Departemen Agama RI, *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya*, 574.
5. Muḥammad Hasnan Nahar, "Antagonist Figures in the Quranic Stories", *Jurnal Afkaruna*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2019, 268.
6. Departemen Agama RI, *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya*, 561.
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 10. Muḥammad Shahrur, *al-Qaṣaṣ al-Qur'ānī Qirāah Mu'āshirah* (Bairūt: Dar al-Sāqī, 2012), 2/53.
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 23. Amri Hamzah, *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan: Library Research*, 9.
 24. Shahrur, *al-Qaṣaṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 43.
 25. Shahrur, *al-Qaṣaṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 46.
 26. 'Alī bin Muḥammad bin Muḥammad al-Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-al-'Uyūn* (Bairūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, t.t.), 2/472.
 27. Shahrur, *al-Qaṣaṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 46.
 28. Shahrur, *al-Qaṣaṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 46. Shahrur's argument was also shared by Altajdeed Cultural & Social Society in one of his research results which stated that all of Prophet Nūḥ's family including his wife survived the flood. Altajdeed Cultural & Social Society, *ufān Nūḥ bayn al-Ḥaqīqah wa al-Awhām* (Bahrain: Iwan Publishing House, 2009), 51.
 29. Nahar, *Antagonist Figures*, 268.
 30. Shahrur, *al-Qaṣaṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 46.
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 35. Shahrur, *al-Qaṣaṣ al-Qur'ānī*, 46.
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