

## Roland Barthes' Semiotic Analysis of the Meaning of *Al-Mā'* in QS. Al-Anbiyā' [21]: 30

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### Article Info

#### Article History:

Received: 29 November 2025

Revised: 24 January 2026

Accepted: 28 February 2026

Published: 13 March 2026

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#### Keywords

### Abstract

Water in the Qur'an occupies a very important position, not only as a physical element but also as having sacred spiritual and theological dimensions. Amid the global ecological crisis and advances in reproductive bioethics, the meaning of water is often reduced to a mere economic commodity or a passive biological object. This study aims to deconstruct the shift in the meaning of *al-mā'* in QS. Al-Anbiyā' [21]: 30 using Roland Barthes' semiotics to reveal the layers of meaning contained within literal, symbolic, and ideological that are relevant to the contemporary context. The method used in this research is qualitative-hermeneutic, focusing on Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis technique which is capable of dissecting the text into three layers: denotation, connotation, and myth. The results show that at the denotation level, *al-mā'* signifies water as a vital element of life and sperm as the biological origin of humans. At the connotation level, water transforms into a symbol of God's grace, a sign of cosmic origins, spiritual purity, and the continuity of generations. At the myth level, *al-mā'* represents the ideology of biological sustainability, ecology, and "green theology". It also represents the responsibility of humans as *khalifah* (stewards) to protect a divine trust. Furthermore, the Qur'an offers a "counter-myth" against a modernity that deadens water and exploits nature. Water is a theological mandate, not merely a limitless commodity to be freely exploited. This research provides a significant contribution by asserting that water conservation is a *tawhid* (monotheistic) obligation rather than just an ethical choice.

Meaning of *Al-Mā'*, Roland Barthes, Semiotics, QS. Al-Anbiyā' [21]: 30.

### Abstrak

Air dalam Al-Qur'an memiliki posisi yang sangat penting, bukan hanya sebagai unsur fisik tetapi juga memiliki dimensi spiritual dan teologis yang sakral. Di tengah krisis ekologis global dan kemajuan bioetika reproduksi, makna air seringkali tereduksi menjadi sekadar komoditas ekonomi atau objek biologis pasif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendekonstruksi pergeseran makna *al-mā'* dalam QS. Al-Anbiyā' [21]: 30 menggunakan semiotika Roland Barthes untuk mengungkap lapisan makna yang terkandung di dalamnya baik secara literal, simbolik, dan ideologis yang relevan dengan konteks kontemporer. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah kualitatif-hermeneutis dengan teknik analisis semiotika Roland Barthes yang mampu membedah teks kedalam tiga lapisan: denotasi, konotasi, dan mitos. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pada tingkat denotasi, *al-mā'* bermakna air sebagai unsur vital kehidupan dan sperma sebagai asal biologis manusia. Pada tingkat konotasi, air bertransformasi menjadi simbol rahmat Tuhan, lambang asal usul kehidupan kosmik, kesucian spiritual, dan kesinambungan generasi. Pada tingkat mitos, *al-mā'* merepresentasikan ideologi keberlanjutan biologis, ekologi dan *green theology*. Ia juga merepresentasikan tanggungjawab manusia sebagai khalifah untuk menjaga amanah ilahi. Al-Qur'an juga menawarkan 'kontra mitos' terhadap modernitas yang mematahkan air dan eksploitasi alam. Air merupakan mandat teologis, bukan sekedar komoditas yang tak terbatas dan bebas di eksploitasi. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi penting dengan menegaskan bahwa konservasi air adalah sebuah kewajiban tauhid, bukan sekedar pilihan etis.

**Kata Kunci:** Makna *Al-Mā'*, Roland Barthes, Semiotika, QS. Al-Anbiyā' [21]: 30

## INTRODUCTION

Water - in Arabic *al-mā'* - has a very important position in the Qur'an, this can be evidenced by its repeated appearance 63 times in 42 surahs. In the Qur'an the word water is only mentioned in the singular form (*mufrad*) i.e. (ماء) *Mā'* and is not mentioned in the plural form (*jama'*) like the word (امواه) *Ammāh* or (مياه) *Miyāh* (Baqi, 1981). The word *mā'* in the Qur'an does not mean all that is meant in the form of physical elements consisting of oxygen elements and hydrogen elements. In the Qur'an, the word *mā'* has several functions, namely: *First*, the source of the creation of the universe or as one of the conditions for the realization of the universe. *Second*, the creation of man as in several verses that mention that man was created from *mā'*, *mā'in dāfiq*, and *mā'in mabin*. *Third*, the pleasure given to the inhabitants of heaven. Fourth, the punishment for the inhabitants of Hell as mentioned in Surah Ibrahim verse 16 and Al-Kahfi verse 29 which explains that the inhabitants of Hell will be given boiling water that burns their faces (Imamudin, 2012).

Water is an essential element for all forms of life on earth. Allah created water as the source of all forms of life and because of the existence of life on this earth, without water all living things would die. In QS. Al-Anbiyā' verse 30 of Allah affirms "We made out of water all living things", this shows that water is the foundation of the diversity of beings and life itself. This verse also explains and affirms that all living things are made up of water. Water is an intermediary for the creation of living things, water contains minerals and substances needed by living things, without water living things will die (Afifah, 2022).

Classical scholars generally interpret the verse with a double meaning, namely water as a real physical element and as a sperm that is the origin of human creation (Syakir & Syakir, 2019). In today's era, water has a more complex and multidimensional meaning, including the issue of global water crisis, ecology and reproductive bioethics (Shihab, 2005). As the existence of clean water becomes increasingly scarce and polluted, its existence must be understood not only as a biological necessity but also as a symbol of life and environmental sustainability (Wardani, 2021).

As a source of life, water is needed by humans, animals and plants. Without water, there could be no life on this earth. Water is also an important factor in developing technology and culture. Even so, sometimes humans do not care about the availability of water and how to take care of the purity of water on this earth (Musarofah, 2021). In addition, water also plays a role as a support for the sustainability of life, both in the context of global ecology and human food security, so that in this case water not only functions as physical resistance, but also as a very vital element for the balance of the universe (Alvin, 2024).

Currently, in the midst of the progress of modern civilization, humans are faced with two fundamental crises that are interrelated but often seen separately, namely the ecological crisis in the form of clean water scarcity and the bioethical crisis related to the origin of life. In fact, in Islamic theology, water occupies a very sacred position, not only a purifying tool, but an ancient material that supports the throne (*'Aryy*) of God before the creation of the universe (Haddade, 2016). However, although the meaning of water in the Qur'an is very important, the study of its semiotic meaning is still very limited. Most of the new research discusses other words in the Qur'an such as the word *yijā'* in QS. Al-Isrā' verse 82 is examined using Barthes' theory, which shows how the medical and symbolic meanings of the word are interrelated and interact in the sacred text (Wijaya,

2021). *Libās* says in QS. Al-Baqarah verse 187 is also researched using Barthes' semiotic analysis which found that the verse contains a meaning that is far from its textual meaning, namely emphasizing married couples to have fidelity and reciprocity between the two (Hakim, 2024). Said *nahl* in QS. An-Nahl verses 68-69 are also examined using Barthes' semiotic analysis which shows that the bee ecosystem described in the Qur'an contains a moral message about the importance of following Divine guidance in life (Amin, 2024). However, some of these studies have not specifically touched on the word *al-mā'* in QS. Al-Anbiyā' verse 30, even though the word has great potential to be explored in a way using semiotic theory, given its multi-layered level of meaning and relevance to the current social and global context, as well as a deep understanding of this meaning is expected to open up new insights in contemporary interpretation, especially related to the issue of environmental sustainability and bioethics.

The trend of water studies has recently begun to expand into more complex interdisciplinary approaches. Recent studies on water biosemiotics in QS. Al-Anbiyā': 30 which shows that in the molecules of water there are microorganisms that reflect the evolution of life (Chaer et al., 2023). Meanwhile, other researchers highlighted the ethical dimension of water conservation in purification rituals in response to the global water crisis (Asrori et al., 2025). However, there has been no research that specifically uses Roland Barthes' Semiotic framework to deconstruct the shift in the meaning of water from a mere biological object to an ideological 'myth' of resistance to the exploitation of nature. This research is here to fill the gap by offering a new perspective that has not been touched from previous studies. This article argues that QS. Al-Anbiyā' verse 30 is not only presenting scientific facts about the aquatic origin of life, but is deconstructing the "modern myth" that kills water. Through the reading of Roland Barthes' semiotics, water is reconstructed from a passive object to a subject that has purity.

This study chose Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, because it was able to open the layers of meaning in a sign. Barthes divides the analysis of signs into three interrelated levels of meaning, namely denotation, connotation, and myth. The first level, denotation, is the literal or literal meaning of a sign, i.e. the meaning that is immediately accepted by the reader or listener without further interpretation (Aulia, 2022). The second level, connotation, includes the cultural or symbolic meaning constructed by the social, cultural, and historical experiences inherent in the sign (Mulyazir & Fadhillah, 2023). While the third level, myth, is an ideological meaning that is formed as a second-level meaning system, which is often part of the dominant narrative or belief that is widespread in society. With this gradual analysis, the meaning of a sign in a sacred text can be understood as a dynamic and complex phenomenon (Adiansyah et al., 2023).

## METHOD

This research uses a qualitative-hermeneutical approach that focuses on understanding the text contextually and interpretively. This type of research was chosen to explore the multidimensional meaning of scripture by considering cultural, theological, and social contexts. Through this strategy, researchers can explore the depth of the meaning of the text not only from one point of view, but through diverse layers of interpretation, both classical and contemporary. Hermeneutics also provides space for understanding layered interpretations, in accordance with the principles of semiotics adopted from Roland Barthes.

The main source of data in this study is QS. *Al-Anbiyā'* verse 30, especially in the exploration of the word *al-mā'*. The data is analyzed using the original Arabic text to maintain purity and ensure a proper understanding of the word and its context in the verse. Or; In addition, this research involves various references to interpretations as secondary data, ranging from classical interpretations by Al-Ṭabarī, Al-Qurṭubī, and Ibn Kathīr, to contemporary interpretations such as Tafsir Al Misbah by Quraish Shihab to obtain diverse perspectives.

The analysis technique applied is Roland Barthes' semiotics which dissects meaning into three layers: *First*, denotation refers to literal or physical meaning, in this context water as the element of life and sperm as the origin of human creation. *Second*, connotations are symbolic meanings that develop in society, for example water as grace, purity, and sustainability of life. *Third*, myths, namely ideological meanings or second-level value systems, reveal the layers of ecological sustainability and modern bioethics that are related (Rohmaniah, 2021). To ensure the validity of the findings, this study uses the source triangulation technique by combining the analysis of the original text, classical and modern interpretations, and semiotic theory. This process ensures the validity of the data and the objectivity of interpretation to avoid a single bias (Sakinah, 2023). In this way, the results of the research are expected to represent an honest and scientific understanding.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Semiotics: From Linguistics to Ideological Criticism

Etymologically, the word semiotics comes from the Greek word *semion* which means sign, so it can be concluded that semiotics means the science of studying a sign. While the sign itself is interpreted as something that symbolizes something or something that is the name of something. Semiotics is a branch of linguistics that studies a sign and its meaning in various forms of communication, both visual, verbal, and symbolic (Efendi et al., 2023). Semiotics is also defined as a sign or tool to interact through communication which is then refined into a literary model where there is a responsibility as a tool in communication that is typical of social life (Fadhliyah, 2021).

The semiotic theory was originally proposed by Ferdinand De Saussure (1857-1913) who argued that signs are divided into two main components, namely signifiers and signified. A marker is considered a physical form that can be recognized through its appearance, whereas a marker is considered a meaning that is revealed through the concepts, functions, and values contained in it. Saussure's semiotics focuses on the relationship between markers and signs based on conventions, which is often called significance (Dayu & Syadli, 2023). This concept later developed with great influence from semiotic figures such as Roland Barthes and others.

Important figures such as Charles Sander Peirce developed a model of signs by adding three concepts, namely icons, indexes, and symbols, thus enriching the relationship between signs and meanings. According to Peirce, a *peisti* sign contains these three concepts, namely icons, indexes, and symbols, because they are a unit that cannot be separated (Pramaskara, 2022). Meanwhile Roland Barthes developed Saussure's semiotic thought into a more critical and interpretive study. He brought semiotics to various cultural phenomena as the basis of the argument that all texts are constructed through signs in a social context. This concept is known as the order of signification,

which includes denotation, which is the actual meaning in the dictionary, and secondary signification, which is the meaning born from cultural or personal experience (Prasetya, 2022). He also emphasizes that there are layers of meaning that are not directly visible, which he calls the layers of myth or ideology.

Over time, semiotics was not only used in the study of linguistics, but also penetrated into the fields of culture, media, art, to religion and sacred texts. Within the scope of contemporary Qur'an studies, various approaches in interpreting the Qur'an can be done. Semiotics was initially only used in the study of literature. But it does not stop there, semiotics can also be used in other studies such as the study of the Qur'an. If semiotics is a science that studies signs, then the Qur'an actually has basic units called verses (Rohman, 2021).

In the context of Qur'anic study, semiotics is adapted to reveal the hidden meanings behind sacred texts. This approach does not only stop at the literal meaning, but also touches on the symbolic, contextual, and ideological aspects of the signs in the verses of the Qur'an. This semiotic approach allows us to understand the message of the Qur'an from various layers of complex and profound meaning, according to the dynamics of the times and the needs of contemporary humans. Furthermore, Barthes's semiotics are used specifically in the analysis of signs in the Qur'an because of his ability to compose meanings from three levels: denotation, connotation, and myth. This approach is particularly relevant in the study of sacred texts, as it allows researchers to unravel the more subjective and symbolic layers of meaning behind the original text.

Using Barthes' theory of semiotics, an analysis of the word *al-mā'* in QS. *Al-Anbiyā'* verse 30 will be taken to a richer and more multidimensional level of interpretation. The signs in the verse can be studied in more depth so that they not only serve literally as a depiction of water, but also as a symbol of sustainability, spirituality, and a critique of today's social and ecological inequalities (Khikmatiar, 2019).

### **Roland Bathes and Semiotics of the Qur'an**

Roland Barthes was a French philosopher, literary critic, and semiologist who lived from 1915-1980. He is one of the most widely known important figures in the development of modern semiotic theory. Barthes developed the idea of semiotics from Ferdinand de Saussure's basic concepts and expanded them with more critical and reflective ideas. If in Saussure's theory only stops at the meaning of denotation or the first stage, then Barthes adds the meaning of connotation to the myth or second stage (Malia & Atmi, 2023). Barthes identified the stages of semiology into two stages. First, the linguistic stage which is the process of searching for denotations and connotations consisting of signs, signifiers, and signified. Then after knowing the meaning of denotation and connotation, the next step or the second step, namely the myth stage, is to find the meaning of mythology. The following is an overview of Barthes' semiotic model:



**Figure 1.** Schema Semiotika Roland Barthes

Barthes's semiotic approach highlights that signs have not only literal meaning, but also connotative and mythological meanings hidden behind the surface of the sign itself. According to him, signs consist of two main stages, namely denotation and connotation. Denotation is the direct or literal meaning of a sign, for example the word "water" which means transparent liquid. While connotation is the cultural or emotional meaning attached to the sign, such as water which is considered a symbol of holiness or grace from God (Wijaya, 2021).

Barthes continued with the concept of myth, which is the third layer of meaning which he called the second-level system of meaning. Myths are a way of signs used to convey certain ideological values, social norms, and cultural beliefs that are hidden but have a great influence on the formation of people's understanding. For example, water is not only a living fluid, but a universal living myth that gives meaning to the ideology of sustainability and ecological spirituality in the modern era.

Barthes' method of semiotic analysis is carried out through a multi-layered reading of the marks in a text. First, the researcher looks at the denotative or literal meaning of a sign as it appears in the original source text. Second, the researcher explores connotative meanings that contain cultural symbolism and nuances based on the prevailing social context and traditions. Third, the analysis is aimed at the meaning of myth as a value system or ideology hidden in signs, which reflect a particular worldview and ideological power. In addition to these three layers of meaning, Barthes also emphasized that signs and myths have a dual function, namely, as a secondary communication tool and as a tool for ideological confirmation that is often not realized by society. Therefore, Barthes's semiotic analysis is often critical and ideological, not merely descriptive. This analysis opens up a wider and deeper space for text interpretation (Wijaya, 2021).

In its application to sacred texts such as the Qur'an, Barthes' method is very useful for analyzing how the signs in a verse can explore literal meaning as well as symbolic and ideological meanings that may not have been revealed in traditional interpretation. This approach provides a new dimension in understanding sacred texts as a living and relevant communication to the social context and contemporary times. Through Barthes' semiotic theory methodology, researchers can decipher the meaning of the word *al-mā'* in QS. *Al-Anbiyā'* verse 30 starts from the literal meaning as water and sperm, then the symbolic meaning as grace and purity, to the mythical meaning as an ideology of sustainability and social criticism. Thus, Barthes' semiotics provide a conceptual tool capable of integrating textual understanding and social context in a complete and critical manner (Amin, 2024).

Overall, Roland Barthes' semiotics provides a dynamic and critical new perspective for reading texts, especially complex texts such as Qur'anic verses. This approach brings interpretation to a broader dimension of meaning, symbolic, and ideological, while making an important contribution to the study of modern interpretations that are responsive to contemporary issues in society and science (Barthes, 1972).

### **The Meaning of the Denotation of *Al-Mā'* in QS. *Al-Anbiyā'* [21]: 30**

The first stage of Barthes' semiotics begins with the meaning of the denotation or literal. Lexically, the basic meaning of *al-mā'* is the commonly known fluid, the fluid that lives and plays a role in life. According to Ibn Manzur, it means a liquid substance that is soft, diffuse, flowing, adapting to the place, and quenching thirst (Manzhur, 1968). Meanwhile, according to Ibn Faris, the meaning is everything that has a fluid and moving nature that becomes the essence or foundation of something (Zakariyyā, 1979). As for the denotative meaning of the word *al-mā'* in QS. *Al-Anbiyā'* verse 30 refers to the literal meaning, namely water as the most vital element for the life of all living beings (Ashraf, 2015). The water here is not just an ordinary liquid, but the main source of all living things. Biologically, the literal meaning of water is very clear, given its fundamental role in the process of life in both humans, animals, and plants. In the study of classical interpretation, water is often understood as this physical element that is the means of creating and maintaining life on earth (Syakir & Syakir, 2019).

In terms of the language above, the choice of words in the Qur'an often holds a depth of definition that goes beyond the dictionary definition. When the Qur'an uses the word *al-mā'* in Surah *Al-Anbiyā'* verse 30, it is not referring to one specific type of water such as rainwater or river water. Linguistic analysis shows that the word *al-mā'* is used 63 times and is spread across 42 surahs in the Qur'an and interestingly, always in the singular (*mufrad*) form (Sawaluddin & Sainab, 2018). The use of this singular generic form suggests that water is a fundamental entity that encompasses everything from the vast oceans, the rain that nourishes the soil, to the microscopic fluids that are the origin of human creation (Alvin, 2024).

In addition to the meaning of water in general, the word *al-mā'* in QS. *Al-Anbiyā'* verse 30 also contains a denotative meaning in the form of sperm or semen, as the main biological source of human creation. The *Tafsir al-Qurṭubī* affirms that the water in question is not only ordinary water, but also semen which serves as the origin of human life. This meaning becomes very important in the context of complex human creation as well as as evidence of God's power in regulating all aspects of biological life (Qurṭubī, 1933). So it can be understood that the word *al-mā'* in QS. *Al-Anbiyā'* verse 30 literally has two main meanings, namely as the water of life in general and as the semen of man.

Ibn Kathīr said that the verse reminds humans that survival depends on the element of water, is a sign of Allah's infinite oneness and power. Through this interpretation, the meaning of the denotation of *al-mā'* is emphasized as the foundation of the life of all beings that is real and can be witnessed directly. By giving the reason for the creation of water, he emphasizes that all creatures come from a single source created and governed by God alone (Katsir, 2005). This context shows how the literal meaning of *al-mā'* plays a role in conveying both theological and scientific messages in the Qur'an. This verse contains the power of rational arguments that prove creation and monotheism.

According to Al-Ṭabarī, the universe was initially in a state of *rātq* (tightly closed, fused without gaps), then Allah opened the heavens and the earth so that space and time were created. Water was the first element that motivated the birth and development of living things after the separation of heaven and earth (Syakir & Syakir, 2019). This interpretation places water as an existential element that is the starting point of life and sustainability of the world. This clear literal meaning becomes a solid foundation for subsequent analysis. While the commentary of al-Qurṭubī explains in detail that “*al-mā'*” is believed to be water containing sperm, which represents biological processes and their role as the source of human creation. This interpretation affirms the close connection between water and sperm, two meanings that are literally attached to the word (Qurṭubī, 1933). This interpretation reinforces the view that the text of the Qur'an contains a multidimensional literal meaning that explains the biological and physical aspects of creation.

In Ibn 'Ashur's interpretation, the denotative meaning of water is the source of origin of all living beings, and water is considered to be the primary element that reflects Allah's power in creating and governing the universe ('Asyur, 1984). This interpretation reemphasizes the literal and universal aspect of the word *al-mā'* which reveals the basic content of the verse scientifically and theologically. This clarity of meaning is important as a foundation for interpreting other aspects of the verse.

### **The Meaning of the Connotation of *Al-Mā'* in QS. *Al-Anbiyā'* [21]: 30**

The connotative meaning of *al-mā'* in QS. *Al-Anbiyā'* verse 30 extends far beyond the literal meaning of water as a commonly known physical element as well as sperm. The connotation of water can also be understood as a symbol of the origin of cosmic life. In classical and contemporary interpretations, water is attached to the concept of the continuity of the universe as a whole. Water in QS. *Al-Anbiyā'* verse 30 is a metaphor for the energy of life that flows not only on the earth but also in the order of heaven and earth. Ibn 'Ashur interprets water as the connecting element between the cosmic and micro dimensions, a vital symbol that knits the existence of all beings in the universe ('Asyur, 1984). This connotative meaning opens up space to view water as the universal foundation of life that is comprehensive and touches all aspects. The symbol of generational continuity is also reflected in the connotative meaning of *al-mā'* which refers to semen as a medium of genetic inheritance and human survival. The interpretation of the Qurṭubī emphatically attributes this symbolic meaning to the biological explanation in which semen is the main element in the process of human reproduction. This symbolism has a deep cultural meaning, concerning the continuation of human life, the continuity of lineage, and spiritual heritage between generations. So that water, which has a meaning as sperm, also symbolizes an unbroken chain of life.

In addition, *al-mā'* also has a symbolism that is closely related to purity and purification in the Islamic tradition. Water in this context is commonly used in the ritual of *ṭabarab* (purification) which is an important requirement in worship and daily life of Muslims. This symbol of purity is reflected in classical and modern interpretations that understand water as a purifying medium that symbolizes inner and physical cleanliness (Shihab, 1996). This connotation emphasizes the function of water not only as a nurturer of biological life, but also as a spiritual tool that allows humans to draw closer to God. In Ibn Kathīr's commentary, water as the grace of Allah describes Allah's constant concern in preserving this nature. Water is not only an element of life, but also a sign of

divine affection that reaches all beings. This meaning emphasizes the harmonious and compassionate relationship between the creator and creation. Thus, water as a symbol of grace also has a moral aspect that calls humans to always be grateful and maintain the preservation of these blessings.

The symbolism of water as the source of cosmic life also contains philosophical and spiritual meanings. This meaning affirms that life is not only material, but also related to divine power. It is an invitation to contemplate creation and to acknowledge man's dependence on indirect but fundamental sources of life. This symbolic meaning invites humans to expand their understanding of the nature of life and the role of water in natural sustainability. Water in a connotative sense can also be interpreted as a symbol of continuity and regeneration that never stops. The universe and the life cycle of things continue to run thanks to biological and ecological processes rooted in water. Contemporary interpretations emphasize that water as a symbol of regeneration provides a critical understanding to maintain environmental sustainability, as well as human social responsibility. In this context, water is a symbol of hope and continuity of life that must be preserved (Wardani, 2021).

The symbolic meaning of water as purity contains a strong social and cultural dimension. Purification rituals for Muslims are not only able to cleanse the body, but also become a symbol of inner transformation and cleansing of the soul from sin and moral impurities (Shihab, 1996). This connotation shows how water plays a very important spiritual purification medium in Islamic religious practice, making it a symbol of holiness inherent in the lives of the people. In addition, the connotative meaning of water contains ethical and ecological messages that are relevant to the modern world. Water as a symbol of grace and life requires humans to act wisely in utilizing and preserving it. Modern interpretations expand the meaning of *al-mā'* as a symbol of ecological responsibility that connects spiritual and social values, so that the people are invited to protect and manage water as a very valuable mandate of God. This connotation is the entrance to the discourse on environmental ethics in the context of religion.

### **The Meaning of the Myth of *Al-Mā'* in QS. *Al-Anbiyā'* [21]: 30**

The meaning of myth in Roland Barthes' semiotics refers to the layers of signs that carry ideological meanings or second-level systems of meaning that prevail in social and cultural contexts. In the context of the word *al-mā'* in QS. *Al-Anbiyā'* verse 30, the meaning of this myth can be understood as a universal myth of life that represents biological and ecological sustainability. Water as a basic element of life is not only the material of the existence of creatures, but has become a symbol of ecology and green theology that emphasizes the need to maintain the balance of nature and the survival of all living things on earth. This meaning provides the perspective that water represents life in a holistic and sustainable way (Barthes, 1972).

In the context of modern reproductive ideology, water as a myth also symbolizes bioethics that is rapidly evolving with the advancement of medical technology. Water, which in the literal sense contains sperm, has become an important symbol in IVF technology, genetic engineering, and assisted reproduction. The dependence on water as a basic element to create life scientifically has become a new myth that has penetrated into the ethical and social realms. This myth invites us to reflect on the moral and social implications of technological advances that make water the center of bioethical controversy.

The meaning of the myth of *al-mā'* is also related to ecological spirituality which emphasizes humans as caliphs who have the mandate to protect creation. Water is not only a physical product, but a symbol of divine trust that must be preserved and accounted for. In this ecological spirituality, water is a medium to develop religious awareness that invites humans to maintain a balance between the use and preservation of natural resources (Shihab, 1996).

Furthermore, the meaning of the water myth contains criticism of modern civilization which is characterized by a global clean water crisis, privatization of water resources, and distribution inequality. This crisis is a tangible manifestation of how water, which was once a source of life, has now turned into an object of conflict and social injustice. From a semiotic perspective, this condition is a negative myth that criticizes the imbalance in natural resource management due to the dominance of economic and political interests. This criticism is a call to return to the values of justice and sustainability. The myth of water as the sustainability of life is in harmony with the global green theology movement that prioritizes harmonization between humans and nature based on religious values. Green theology views water as a sacred element that must be maintained so that the life and sustainability of the ecosystem are maintained (Nasr, 1969). This turns water into a symbol as well as a myth about the sustainable and responsible relationship between humans and nature.

In the context of modern bioethics, the mythical meaning of water also confirms the role of assistive reproductive technology and genetic manipulation as new social and scientific phenomena. Here, water is no longer just a natural liquid, but also an ethically controversial biotechnological material. This myth raises profound questions related to the nature of life and the interpretation of religious values in interpreting the increasingly complex concept of creation. Water as ecological spirituality also emphasizes the importance of education and appreciation of religious values that invite people to protect natural resources. This value is the foundation for building a collective awareness that water is a Divine mandate that must be guarded together. This spirit of environmental maintenance is part of the practice of worship that connects the spiritual dimension with social actions in protecting nature. This mythical meaning gives new meaning to the relationship between man and creation (Amirudin et al., 2023).

The water crisis that occurs in various parts of the world today is a bitter realization of the negative myths that criticize the mechanisms of modern civilization that often override the value of sustainability and social justice. The privatization of water and unequal access between communities are an important symbol of social inequality and disparities between community groups. This criticism raises the awareness that water is not only an economic commodity, but a source of life that must be managed fairly and sustainably. Water crises in Muslim-majority countries often occur due to a loss of ecological awareness, so that water is treated as a mere commodity (Asrori et al., 2025).

## CONCLUSION

Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis of the word *al-mā'* in QS. *Al-Anbiyā'* verse 30 reveals that there is a fundamental shift in the meaning of *al-mā'* from initially just a material object to an ideological subject. *First*, at the denotation stage *al-mā'* has a double meaning, namely water as the most vital element that sustains the life of all living beings, and sperm as the biological source of

the origin of human creation. *Second*, the connotation stage, the meaning of *al-mā'* if it refers to pakda its literal meaning as water, transforms into a symbol of God's grace, a symbol of the origin of cosmic life, and a symbol of purity and spiritual purity that binds man's spiritual relationship with God. If referring to its literal meaning as sperm or semen, the meaning of *al-mā'* transforms into a symbol of generational continuity that symbolizes the continuity of the unbroken chain of life. *Third*, at the mythical stage, the meaning of *al-mā'* is transformed into a representation of biological sustainability, an ecological symbol and green theology that prioritizes harmonization between humans and nature based on religious values. In the context of modern reproductive ideology, *al-mā'* which has the literal meaning of sperm, it has become an important symbol in IVF technology, genetic engineering, and assisted reproduction. The myth of *al-mā'* is also related to ecological spirituality which emphasizes that humans as caliphs must be responsible for maintaining and preserving water as a divine mandate.

*Al-mā'* in QS. *Al-Anbiyā'* verse 30, in this study is studied using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, so that it is able to explore the layers of meaning contained in a text more deeply and focus on one verse making this research more comprehensive. However, the limitation of this research also lies in its focus on only one verse, namely QS. *Al-Anbiyā'* verse 30, so he has not yet photographed the construction of the meaning of water in other verses. So that the recommendations for further research development are to use the critical discourse analysis approach to see how verses about water are used in public policy or natural resource conflicts in various countries today. Especially in countries where the majority of the population is Muslim.

## DECLARATION OF USING AI

The authors used ChatGPT to improve language and readability. The authors reviewed and edited the output and take full responsibility for the content.

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