



# **On the Idea of European Islam**

## **Voices of Perpetual Modernity**

By

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## Abstract

This work raises and deals with the following question: is European Islam possible? Following the methodology adopted in studying the selected texts, I argue that it is possible, theologically and politically. To corroborate my argument, I assist myself with three sub-questions that correspond to three cognitive and methodological stages of work. In the descriptive stage, I tackle this question: what is European Islam? I select four projects that advocate what I refer to as the “idea of European Islam.” These projects are advanced by Bassam Tibi, Tariq Ramadan, Tareq Oubrou, and Abdennour Bidar. Despite their differing approaches, I use textual analysis approach in reading the main aspects and concepts of their projects, which I later use for comparative purposes and conceptualization of the idea of European Islam.

Subsequently, I enter the comparative stage so as to better understand what European Islam brings new. This stage deals with the following question: what is new in European Islam? Here, I revisit three scholarly generations from the Islamic tradition as a way of finding out what they share, or not, with European Islam. I refer to the Mu‘tazila rationalist theological tradition, with major reference to the example of Qadi Abd Aljabbar. I then refer to some iconic figures of the “early reformists” of the Arab-Islamic Renaissance (*nahḍa*), and “late reformists” or contemporaries.

The third and final stage is evaluative. It deals with this question: is European Islam a “reasonable comprehensive doctrine”? This analytical stage uses two philosophical frameworks, one theological and the other political, one “Islamic” and the other “Western” to use common differentiating markers: Taha Abdurrahmane’s framework of theological renewal for innovative modernity, based on his *The Spirit of Modernity* (2006), with reference to “humanization-historicization-rationalization” innovative plans, and John Rawls’ “idea of overlapping consensus,” based on his *Political Liberalism* (1996).

The “idea of European Islam” as I conceptualize it is “revisionist-reformist,” or “traditional-modern,” in the sense that it embraces modernity values and legitimizes them theologically-politically. It “sacralizes” man, “divinizes” modern values, and “perpetuates” modernity. It does not deny the divine but works with it as the ultimate source of ethics and meaning. The “Muslim Prometheus” as an heir of the universe does not antagonize with God. Man becomes a “co-worker” with God. In summarizing statements that correspond to “world-society-individual” comprehensive framework I adopt in this project, I argue that European Islam 1) “humanizes the world through divinely willed inheritance for cosmic wellbeing,” 2) “historicizes revelation through fiqhology (or practical fiqh) for social wellbeing,” and 3) “rationalizes individual faith through the principle of ethical liberty for individual wellbeing.” This makes it confidently “*inlandish*” in liberal constitutional democracies, as those of Western Europe.

## **Preface**

### **Transliteration**

Arabic terms are transliterated according to the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) transliteration system. Frequently used words such as Muslim, Muhammad (the Prophet), Quran, Sunna, Sharia, Shahada, hadith, fiqh, kalam, falsafa madhab, umma, ijihad and jihad, appear without diacriticals; they also appear unitalicized, and in the upper or lower case as just listed. They are not italicised either. Transliterations, especially those with diacriticals, are italicised. An apostrophe is used for the letter hamzah. A superscript comma is used for the ‘ayn letter instead of <sup>c</sup>ayn. The exceptions in the transliterations that occur in this work are due to the different styles the studied scholars and citations use, which I cannot change. For example, “Sharia” will be found written in four forms: “Sharia” (in upper case), “sharia” (in lower case), “Shari‘ah” and “shari’a” (either in upper or lower case, besides the apostrophe of the Arabic letter ‘ayn). “Shahada” will be found also written as “Ash-Shahada.” “Jamal Eddine al-Afghani” will be found also referred to as “Jamal Ed-dine Afghani” or simply “Afghani.” Titles of books and sentences in Arabic do not start in upper case, except for terms like kalam, falsafa and fiqh that occur as titles of (sub-)sections.

### **Translation**

All the translations from Arabic and French are mine, unless otherwise indicated. Referencing notes and titles of books are either in English, or in French, after their original titles are provided. Arabic original titles are provided in brackets when they are first referred to, and the subsequent citations from these titles are to the English translation, for ease of reference. The bibliography also provides the non-English titles translated and transliterated, instead of providing the Arabic scripts or listing the Arabic titles in a different category. “Primary sources” in the bibliography refers to the major texts studied in this work, and is not limited only to texts on “the” European Islam examined here; it also includes the supportive texts I have used, as my “methodological concerns” in the main introduction explain.

### **Abbreviations**

Abbreviations in the acronym format are not used. Instead, shortened titles are opted for, to avoid the confusions titles bearing similar words may invoke. For example, Tibi’s *Islam’s Predicament with Modernity: Religious Reform and Cultural Change* is abbreviated as *Islam’s Predicament* in the repeated references to the same work.

## **Bibliography and Index**

The “secondary sources” category in the bibliography lists some classic titles that are “primary” like al-Ghazali’s and Ibn Khaldun’s, or contemporary titles like al-Qaradawi’s. But since I refer to them just in passing or in a note, they appear in “secondary sources” list. Al-Attar’s *Islamic Ethics*, on the other hand, appears “primary” because I have used it substantially for the scholar it treats: Qadi Abd Aljabbar. I also provide an index for a detailed table of contents that lists sub-sections and entries that the introductory table of contents does not.

## **Key Words**

Islam in Europe, European Islam, Euro-Islam, European Islamic Thought, European Muslims, Contemporary Islamic Thought, Arab-Islamic Renaissance, Reform, Kalam, Mu‘tazila, Reason, Islamic Ethics, Sharia Law, Sharia Objectives, Social Justice, Islamic Modernity, Spiritual Modernity, Perpetual Modernity, Revelation, Political-Theology, Theosophy, Heir of God, Reasonable Comprehensive Doctrine, Overlapping Consensus, Reasonable Pluralism, Political Liberalism.

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## Introduction

This work raises and deals with this question: is European Islam possible?<sup>1</sup> The question was raised at the end of a presentation I delivered in a seminar during my research stay at the Center for European Islamic Thought, at the University of Copenhagen, in April 2012.<sup>2</sup> A colleague then asked me, following my own question that I have included at the end of the handout which he had, “so, is European Islam possible or not?” I replied “Theologically, it is possible; politically, it depends!”<sup>3</sup> I was aware that my answer could raise more questions than providing a clear answer. My answer could look more like that of a diplomat who prefers ambiguity, or a religious scholar or a believer who defends his own faith in light of unwelcoming politics. By “politically, it depends!” I had the current *status quo* in mind; that is, the European diverse political responses to the Muslims’ demands and Islam’s presence. My answer was partly sociological, and not theoretical. Now, in this work, I deal with texts, and I am bound by a theoretical framework. Briefly here, this work argues that European Islam, in light of the texts studied here, is possible theologically and politically.

To reach a detailed answer to the above guiding question I go through three cognitive, or methodological, stages, and each of them matches a supportive question. First, I clarify what European Islam stands for. This stage corresponds to the following supportive question: what is European Islam? I study four scholars that defend “the idea

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<sup>1</sup> For the format of the question, I am inspired by the Indian-Pakistani poet-philosopher Mohamad Iqbal’s seventh lecture, entitled “Is religion possible?” in his widely read work *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (London: Oxford UP, 1934). Iqbal adopts the question format from Immanuel Kant’s “How is Metaphysics in General Possible?” (1783) found in the latter’s work; Paul Carus, ed. *Kant’s Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (Chicago, Open Court Publishing Company, 1912) 1-163. The Iranian philosopher Abdulkarim Soroush delivers a lecture in Harvard in 1996 bearing the same question format, “Is Fiqh Possible?” Soroush, *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience: Essays on Historicity, Contingency and Plurality in Religion* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009) 96.

<sup>2</sup> The title of the presentation was “European Islam and the Idea of Religious Pluralism: Reading Tariq Ramadan,” 26 April 2012. I am grateful to the participants in this seminar, mostly from the Center for European Islamic Thought and Systematic Theology Department, for their fruitful feedback.

<sup>3</sup> Overall, I take theology to mean the “contemplation of religion” (*ṭadabur* in Arabic) in both its physical and metaphysical matters, and politics to mean the “management of world affairs” (*ṭadbīr*). I have borrowed the terms “contemplation” and “management” from Taha Abdurrahmane’s *rūḥu addīn [The Spirit of Religion]* (Beirut and Casablanca: al-markaz ath-thaqāfi al-‘arabī, 2012) 509. I say more on this especially in Part IV, Sections 1a-b, 2a-c, when I refer to Islamic theology (*kalam*) and Abdurrahmane’s framework I adopt in my evaluation of the idea of European Islam.

of a European Islam”<sup>4</sup> (Bassam Tibi, Tariq Ramadan, Tareq Oubrou and Abdennour Bidar). I use “textual analysis” method of approaching texts, which is common in religious studies, as I explain further in due time. I refer to this as the descriptive stage.

Second, I compare European Islam with some classical and contemporary Islamic scholarly tendencies as a way of finding theological grounds to European Islam from within the Islamic tradition. This work corresponds to the following supportive question: what is new in European Islam? I refer to the classical school of the Mu‘tazila and its rationalist ethical theory. I also refer to some distinguished Islamic reformists who I see supportive of what European Islam is moving to, i.e., the “rationalization of ethics.” I refer to this stage as the comparative stage, since it makes reference to other classical and contemporary Islamic trends. It is at this stage that I claim that there is an interesting kalam (Islamic theology, or religious dispute) legacy being slightly and differently revisited in European Islam, and there appear significant signs that some of the Mu‘tazila rational perceptions of ethics advocate. That is why I refer to European Islam’s reformism as “revisionist-reformist;” it builds on the tradition, and does not “kill” God; it just negotiates His revealed social laws and relegates them to the moral sphere, and gives man the rational means to translate that morality into adequate human-made laws. My emphasis on the perception of ethics in European Islam stems from my belief that there could be no reform in Islam – assuming that such a reform is needed – without a developed ethical theory that answers the needs of Muslim believers in their daily life, when revealed texts are “silent,” “not detailed enough,” “controversial,” or “inadequate” for a particular time and place.

Third, and finally, I evaluate European Islam based on two frameworks, one “Islamic” and one “Western.”<sup>5</sup> From this stage onwards, I start using my triadic

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<sup>4</sup> The term “idea” is used as a general term mean general theoretical content of the subject referred to, here European Islam. I use it as synonymous of “concept,” though “idea” is broader in scope. I also note that I sometimes use the following phrases interchangeably: The idea of European Islam, the concept of European Islam, European Islamic thought, European Islamic discourse. When I introduce John Rawls’ framework of overlapping consensus, I add “doctrine” to European Islam to mean its theological general content. In this sense, I am borrowing Rawls’ definition of “idea” and “concept.” Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1996) xxxvi, n. 2. All references to *Political Liberalism* are from the same edition.

framework of analysis “world-society-individual” to understand the comprehensiveness and newness of European Islam.<sup>6</sup> I subsequently substantially use the framework of the Moroccan philosopher Taha Abdurrahmane, and his corresponding analysis of reading the Quran and modernity – innovative “humanization-historicization-rationalization.” His framework is of paramount importance in examining new theological propositions in the studied projects of European Islam. Ultimately, I evaluate the idea of European Islam by opening it up to the political framework of John Rawls, with main reference to his “idea of overlapping consensus.”<sup>7</sup> This stage matches the following question, using Rawls’ terms: is European Islam a “reasonable comprehensive doctrine”? I name this the evaluative stage; it is evaluative in the sense that it deduces the “political” from the “theological” or “doctrinal” to scrutinize it in light of the constitutionally liberal and democratic framework of a recognized theory as that of Rawls’ “political liberalism,” overlapping consensus in focus.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, the guiding question and the three stages I have devised end with constructing the idea of European Islam. The latter has been present in the literature of Islam and Europe without a serious attempt at arguing for it more comparatively, theologically-politically. This is what I advance in this work, which I claim to be innovative.

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<sup>5</sup> I use these terms now for methodological clarity, though the idea of European Islam, as will be made clear by the end of this work, tries to go beyond these differentiations of “Islam” versus “West.” I use the terms here simply because the two major frameworks adopted are from scholars that clearly adhere to the “Islamic religious worldview,” and that is the case with Taha Abdurrahmane, and to the “Western liberal worldview,” which is the case of John Rawls. There is no doubt that juxtaposing “religious” with “liberal” is not adequate, because a religious worldview can be liberal, and the liberal worldview can be religious, though on different levels and degrees. The point I should stress here is that my use of the “Islamic” and “Western” frameworks does not mean an opposition, which is “commonly” taken to be so when these terms are brought together, nor does it mean that there are no differences. This project, at the end, is about this issue of compatibility or not. My use of the terms and their corresponding frameworks is primarily for methodological and comparative reasons. This will become clearer as I proceed.

<sup>6</sup> I have thought of “world-society-individual” triadic axis to methodologically clarify the aspects of newness in European Islam. This framework portrays the comprehensiveness of a world religion like Islam. Its utility becomes clearer when I start using the more substantial evaluative framework of Abdurrahmane, which I also use in my integration of Rawls’ idea of overlapping consensus.

<sup>7</sup> I use new terms in inverted commas when they are first introduced. I drop them as I proceed, assuming that the reader now follows and understands their origins and meaning. Sometimes I do put them in inverted commas again in the middle of this work or by its end to stress the concept.

<sup>8</sup> When I use “political liberalism” in lower cases, I do not mean the “title” of the book but its “idea.”

In presenting this work I first outline this “extended introduction” in four technical *sections*.<sup>9</sup> I have opted for a “long” introduction to avoid making the “historical sketch” part of the main argument in the main text reserved to the studied scholars on European Islam. Without this contextualizing introduction my main argumentation may not be clear enough. In the first section of this introduction, I say some words on my interest in the studied subject studied here. Then I introduce the remaining three sections, which go as follows. Second, through a “historical sketch,” I contextualize my broad approach and how I have come to construct my understanding and reading of the subject under focus. Third, I outline my methodological concerns about the topic and how I have come to select the four studied scholars for this project, in light of the broad debate on Islam and/ in Europe. Finally, fourth, I outline the content of the four parts of this dissertation, the way I have structured it out, for what purpose, and the outcomes of my approach. Each of these three technical stages will be explained further below, in this introduction, and more so in each part of the text.

### **1. On Personal Interests in Understanding Islam in the Modern World**

This work falls within my broader interest in understanding Islam in the modern world. I have in mind Bernard Lewis’ “historical” question - *What Went Wrong?*<sup>10</sup> However, I am not so much keen on understanding what went right or wrong directly from a historical perspective. I am more interested in understanding “what is going on with Islam in the modern world.” If this question is answered, the previous one could be explained. Though thoughts on such questions started to take shape early in my academic career in different disciplines as a student in a society (Morocco) which has been oscillating between “tradition and modernity,” and seems to identify itself in this midway position, it is Islam in Western Europe that has taken primacy in this broad project, because it is here, in Western Europe, that the question of religion in society is tense and more controversial. Not to put too fine a point on it here, I considered it

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<sup>9</sup> I use “stages” for the cognitive, methodological, approach of reading the texts studied here; I use “parts” to refer to the space given to each scholar, separately. I use “sections” for the technical division for the introduction.

<sup>10</sup> Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2002).

important and interesting to change contexts and study Islam in the world that is already “modern” while keeping my interest in Islam in the countries in transition at the backstage for awhile. The so-called Arab Spring unprecedented events, which started in December 2010 in North Africa and the Middle East (MENA), need time to show which socio-political pathways the concerned societies opt for, seeing that religion still plays an important role in these societies daily life. There is no doubt that I belong to a generation of MENA region that has experienced various internal and external intense debates and pressures in which religion and/in politics figures as a major theme for socio-political change. This issue has travelled to Europe through immigration. Being myself driven by intellectual migration, I have found myself travelling from North Africa to Europe with these thoughts in mind.

As a graduate in both Postcolonial Studies and later on in European Studies, I first started my interest in Islam in Europe from immigration perspectives. I studied how the EU treats the subject of its immigrants, as well as its “new Europeans” (European nationals of immigrant descent), with a focus on the case of Muslims after the terrorist events of 9/11, 2001. I found out that the EU immigration policies since the late 1990s are reactions to events, as if there were no vision, and no futurist planning about the new arrivals to Europe and how to treat them, and “integrate” them.<sup>11</sup> Reading records about the first waves of immigrants of the 1950s and 60s, and how the European Community Member States, and later as EU, have reacted to that through various policies, I reached the contemporary debate of, first, political Islam, Islam in Europe, and then European Islam. “Political papers” on Islam seemed to lack “something” for me, for a better understanding of the issue; they became repetitive, if not in the manner (approach), then in the matter (content). I had to find my own approach of reading Islam in Europe. I decided to trace the intellectual origins of the term “Euro-Islam” (of Bassam Tibi) and then “European Islam” (of Tariq Ramadan).<sup>12</sup> I had to compare their thoughts, make them

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<sup>11</sup> Mohammed Hashas, *EU Immigration and Integration Policies: Facts, Achievements and the Challenge of the Muslim Question* (Saarbrücken: LAP Lambert, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Studying the intellectual history of the term “European Islam” is not enough, seeing that the debate is, in historical terms, recent. Maybe the future generations may find it interesting to research the topic from such a perspective since, by then, more versions of the idea of European Islam would have developed; at least, that is a factually based assumption.

speak to each other, and compare them to some other “Islamic reformist” voices, inside Europe, and at times outside Europe. I have then settled down with the idea that discussing Islam in Europe solely politically is not enough. Attempts should be made to probe more theological issues, which political Islam, violent fundamentalists, radical secularists, and Islamophobists avoid either because it serves their ideological-political agenda or because it serves to cover their intellectual ignorance of other aspects of the matter they pretend to defend or refute. I am certainly not saying that I am myself avoiding the political while researching European Islam. Rather, I try to examine the other side of the story which is not very much shown, by bringing some theological-philosophic insights to the front, for a better understanding of the issue.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. On Islam in Europe: *Inlandish* or *Outlandish*?<sup>14</sup>

Jorgen Nielsen speaks of four stages of the Muslim presence in Europe. The first is the period of Islamic Spain and Muslim rule in Sicily; the first was ended by the

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<sup>13</sup> The Austrian-American historian and Arabist Gustave E. von Grunebau (d. 1972) expresses in a good passage the thoughts and dilemmas a researcher and intellectual faces in the onset of his work. Such a passage explains a lot of the failures that research on Islam in Europe in particular has faced. I explain this point when I refer to Methodological Concerns on Studying Islam and/ in Europe.” The passage, which opens Grunebau’s article, reads as follows:

The theologian like the intellectual and social historian and the historian of religions faces the predicament of having to reconcile the internal consistency of his data with the internal consistency, true or apparent, of the attitude and expectations permeating his several audiences. The urge to communicate with one’s public beyond the mere purveying of information is not only strong but legitimate. Contact with one’s own period may be the mainspring of that eternal renewal of scholarship which is one of its principal justifications; and to cast results in language effectively meaningful to the reader is the precondition of any opening of the gates to the hidden and alien. At the same time, concessions of phraseology and style tend to be exceeded, and ties are developed, more or less surreptitiously, between the author’s drives and real or imaginary drives of the public he hopes to influence or has decided to play up to. And it is too readily forgotten that intellectual systems of whatever kind - are in danger of obsolescence less for their primary thought experiences than for the extraneous doctrines, the political and scientific verities of the day, or their formulation, which suffer alike from progress and shifts of concern and becloud the factually impeccable with that aura of the archaic and the irrelevant which truckling to the fashions of the moment was meant to dispel. In brief, the surest guaranty of early obsolescence is veiled apologetics. Stylistic skill and discretion, not to speak of technical competence, promote acceptance but degenerate into the embarrassment of suspect persuasion the moment the outlook of the audience changes, a turn of affairs always more imminent than the author expects.

Gustave E. von Grunebau, “Approaching Islam: A Digression,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (May, 1970) pp. 127-149.

<sup>14</sup> By “Islam is *inlandish*” I refer to the work of the Italian sociologist Stephano Allievi, “The International Dimension,” in Brigitte Maréchal, et al., eds. *Muslims in the Enlarged Europe: Religion and Society* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003) 449-488.

*reconquista* in 1492, and the second by the Normans in the early 13<sup>th</sup> C. AD. The second dates the spread of the Mongol armies who later converted to Islam in the 13<sup>th</sup> C. and left Muslim communities like the Tatar in Russia, along with others between Poland and Ukraine, and in the Caucasus and the Crimea. The third records the Ottoman expansion in the Balkans and Central Europe. The fourth is the current phase of post-WWII.<sup>15</sup> This means that Muslims have been in Europe for centuries, and a post-1945 immigration wave is but a new phase in different intellectual, economic and political circumstances.

Historical antagonisms and relations, however, still harbor around the subject of European Muslims.<sup>16</sup> Europe seems to have forgotten or not to have paid enough

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<sup>15</sup> Jorgen Nielsen, *Towards a European Islam* (London and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1999) 1-2. Niselsen's historical reference is to the Muslim presence in Europe. This precision aside, I also have the historical relations between the European lands and Arab-Islamic lands of Western Asia and North Africa in mind. A deeper understanding of the relations between these two geographies and worldviews influenced by two world religions (Christianity and Islam) is a requisite. Though I cannot detail my idea here, I would like to put my project into a broader historical perspective. I subscribe my project on European Islam to three main stages that I tentatively consider to characterize the relationship between the so-called "Islamic world" and the current "West" and "Europe" in particular: 1) the medieval relations stage, 2) the modern relations stage, and the 3) contemporary relations stage. The three have their dark and bright sides (meaning wars and socio-political, economic and intellectual exchanges), which make the history of "Europe" and the "Islamic world" largely interdependent. Richard Bulliet describes this reciprocal influence well: "The past and future of the West cannot be fully comprehended without appreciation of the twinned relationship it has had with Islam over some fourteen centuries. The same is true of the Islamic world" (Richard W. Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (New York: Columbia UP, 2004) 45). I locate the medieval relations stage from the advent of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, mainly 1492. I locate the second stage, the modern relations stage, between 1492 and 1945. The third stage is post-1945. It is still in the making; it could be labelled post-modern, or post-Orientalist. It could also be labelled post-religious, meaning post-classical-religion and rational faith. It could also be a the "second stage of the axial age." This does not mean that "-isms" and "centrisms," be they religious, secular, or atheist, would disappear. With the third stage, there seems a growing move away from the Islam vs. Europe, or Europe vs. Islam, dichotomous mindset. It is the stage of more hybridization between the two worldviews, the Western and the Islamic, the modern and traditional, the secular and divine, the physical and metaphysical. I am not trying to "do dialogue" here. I am more concerned with intellectual exchange, mostly driven by socio-political and economic leitmotivs, when I speak of fertilizers. As will become clearer in this work, I see "European Islam" as a new "idea" that tries to bring these histories and traditions together. I should note that the idea presented in this historical sketch has to be argued for in length as a historical approach, which I do not intend to argue for here. My point is that this sketch is my personal understanding of relations between the Arab-Islamic world (more precisely, Western Asia and North Africa (WANA)) and Europe as I have been studying them from various angles in my interdisciplinary academic career. It is presented here as an intellectual opinion that needs further details to make of it a full-fledged argument. I intended this to be read as an additional introductory note to my general framework of approaching the religion of Islam in Europe.

<sup>16</sup> The literature on the subject is beyond listing. I allow myself some general remarks that help in contextualizing my approach. I cite more influential contemporary works as I proceed, while these historical sketches are my summary of my consideration of this literature.

(academic) attention to its “indigenous Muslims”<sup>17</sup> that have inhabited its soil prior to 1945. The Muslim world also seems to have forgotten that Muslims as a minority around the world and in Europe in particular have long been there, and not much attention was paid to them, and thus not much has been learnt from their experiences of theological and political adjustments.

In light of these historical notes, three further remarks can be inferred from the current stage of relations between Europe and its Muslims. These remarks revolve around three main questions: 1) which Europe is meant in European Islam? 2) Does the West differ so much from (Western) Europe when considering it in “West vs. Islam” dichotomy? 3) Is there only one European Islam?<sup>18</sup> I allow myself just some notes to briefly underline why “European” Islam is substantially different from “Western” Islam. I say more on researching European Islam on the sections devoted to methodology.

First, which Europe is meant in “European Islam”? It is Western Europe that is mostly referred to when the issue of Islam in Europe is discussed for various reasons: historical, political, economic, and philosophic. It is Western Europe that entered into conflict with the Muslim world in the past, and vice versa, and has been seen as the heart of Christianity, and the heir to Greco-Roman, and Judeo-Christian, legacy. It is also the part of Europe that is more developed, and thus the one that first sent for workers post-1945, and thus the one able to set up the work permits, citizenship controls, immigration policies, etc. It is also liberal and secular, and thus more challenging to the religious and conservative Muslim mindset. It is Western Europe that has been characterized by its homogeneity, until the Two World Wars obliged it to welcome immigrants from the Third and Islamic Worlds to re-build the continent; its homogeneity is being challenged now, and so are its secular and liberal ideals. Less heated is the debate in Eastern Europe,

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<sup>17</sup> I refer to H. A. Hellyer's section entitled “Indigenous Muslims: A Model from Within” in his “When the “Other” Becomes “Us”: The Future of Muslims and Islam in Europe,” *Comparative Islamic Studies* 2.1 (2006) 67–78.

<sup>18</sup> More questions can be raised here, like: which authority defines the scope of the debate and its agenda? What discipline is responsible for that: philology, Middle Eastern studies, Oriental studies, etc.? See, for instance, H. A. Hellyer, *Muslims of Europe: the “Other” Europeans* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2009) Introduction 1-12.

which has a substantial centuries' old minority of Muslims and non-Muslims; still, this does not make it immune from the debate.<sup>19</sup>

Second, does the West differ so much from (Western) Europe when considering it in "West vs. Islam" label? In this project, I assume that there is a difference. The liberal and secular Americas, as well as Australia and New Zealand, are part of the "West." But the historically long "homogeneity" of Western Europe and its past dominance by, and later on conflicts, with the Church is not replicated, for example, in the USA. The non-European part of the West first emerged as colonies of the old Europe, dissidents and religious conservatives (the Puritans in the US), and most importantly as immigrants, thus "heterogeneous." Henceforth, what distinguishes them is that they have developed into multicultural and liberal entities that share the core values of modernity as they first sprung in Europe, but, unlike the "homogeneity" of the latter and its religious wars, they seem more accommodative of religion.<sup>20</sup>

If the models seem to differ because of history, why are the Muslims the "question/problem" also in the Americas, mainly in the US? Two reasons can be advanced here. First, since the 1960s and 1970s, the USA has started to intervene heavily in the Middle Eastern issue of Palestine/Israel, and that has caused an intense inner anger against the US foreign policy. The 9/11 events, Afghanistan and Iraq wars escalated this feeling among Muslims, but this feeling would be even greater in the US, and around the world, against Muslims. "Islamic terrorism" is not just for the terrorists, but nearly "every" Muslim got the label "tagged" to him. Mahmood Mamdani came up with the phrase "good Muslim, bad Muslim" to explain the *status quo* from the US perspective. Islamophobia in the US seems more political than cultural-religious.<sup>21</sup> Second, the reason

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<sup>19</sup> Amir Mirtaheri, "European Muslims, Secularism and the Legacy of Colonialism," *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies* EJEPS 3 (2010) 73-86.

<sup>20</sup> To give a simple example as a marker of the place of religion in politics between two different liberal societies of the West, in secular/*laïc* France, no president of the Republic can ever speak of his religion in public or in campaigns. In the USA, "In God We Trust" is stamped on the Dollar banknotes, and "God Protect America" is in the tongue of every USA president. There is no record of an atheist US president. Another example that can be given is that while in Western Europe religiosity is hardly expressed in public by ordinary citizens, the Americans are on the contrary more open to say they are religious. For more differences and similarities on this point, see, for instance, José Casanova, "The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms," in Craig Calhoun, et al., eds., *Rethinking Secularism* (New York: Oxford UP, 2011) 54-73.

<sup>21</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism," *American Anthropologist* (2003) 104(3): 766-775; *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and*

why Islamophobia in the Americas seems more political is the fact that most of the Arab-American community enjoys a better socio-economic status. This is not the case in Europe. Most of the first immigrants to Europe in the 1950s and 1960s (and few earlier) were illiterate, very poor, and with no professional skills. They came to Europe to work, save some money, and go back, but their plan could not be realized in few years, and they had to stay, invite their families to join them, and settle down once and for all. These early immigrants lived a traditional life in their slums, ghettos, and HLMs, and the only main contact with the modern European society was their workplace. This has impacted their status on various levels – socio-economically, politically, and culturally.<sup>22</sup>

Third, what is a European Muslim?<sup>23</sup> Is he (or she) very different from the Arab Muslim, Sub-Saharan Muslim, American Muslim, or Asian Muslim? In 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini met a group of Saudi Arabian students in Tehran on the occasion of the Bairam, *Eid al-Adhā*, and among what he said was this: “Muslims have to find Islam again.”<sup>24</sup> Are European Muslims trying to find Islam again? Or, are they trying to find a new (European) Islam, with the same old spirit but new interpretations and forms? Such questions, and the label “European Muslim” it carries within it, seem immensely important in the age of global movement and multiculturalism, for at least two main reasons, each divided into two sub-reasons, derived from Islamic theology. These are ontological and historical reasons.<sup>25</sup>

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*the Roots of Terror* (New York: Three Leaves Press/Doubleday, 2005); Vartan Gregorian, *Islam: a Mosaic, Not a Monolith* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2003) Preface and Introduction;

<sup>22</sup> Abdulkader H. Sinno, ed., *Muslims in Western politics* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2009) See chapters 2 and 5.

<sup>23</sup> This question is actually part of the main or more important question that Akeel Bilgrami interestingly raises, and to which he finds no one clear answer, because various factors define the identity of one person, and not only his religiosity as he thinks of it: Bilgrami, “What is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity,” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 18, n. 4 Identities (Summer 1992) 821-842.

<sup>24</sup> Ayatollah Khomeini, “Muslims must find Islam,” in Andrew Rippin and Jan Knappert, eds. *Textual Sources for the Study of Islam* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1990) 191-192.

<sup>25</sup> I borrow these two reasons from the Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina Mustapha Cenic who calls for a single European Muslim authority to face the challenges of the current age. He calls for a third way in which European Muslims live both their Eastern and Western identities and values in harmony and in more understanding attitudes. I will raise after a while the issue of religious authority and its possibility or impossibility in Europe, as in the rest of the Islamic world. See for instance: Mustafa Ceric, “The Challenge of a Single Muslim Authority in Europe,” *Centre for European Studies, European View* (2007) 6:41–48.

Ontologically, first, the Quranic invitation of man, and acceptance of the latter, of the message of Islam as a monolithic message (*hamlu arrisalah*) has made the contract between the divine and the non-divine perpetual and universal, carried by humankind, and not only by Muslims, and thus applicable anywhere and everywhere, despite geography, language, or political differences. Human beings in general are supposed to invoke the divine with which they have an ontological bond. Second, it is the person that is most concerned with it, with no mediation between him/her and God. This makes this “divine/spiritual link” based on personal responsibility and free choice, initiated into by Shahada (Testimony) of Tawhid (Oneness). Historically, first, the task of the Muslim is then is to derive human perpetual peace with the rest of humankind despite its difference. The world is seen *a priori* diverse, and its diversity has to be perpetually established. Second, and seeing that the phase spoken about here is that of Muslims in Europe, the ontological and the historical intertwine, not to push the person to be divided between either a divine message or a non-divine/secular message, but to find the perpetual contract that the person has towards God and the inhabitants of this universe - Europe in this case. The challenge is to live both at the same time and place, and not to escape one or the other – that again being based on religion as a choice.

Despite these two (ontological-historical) reasons that are supposed to shape the Islamic mindset and worldview universally, difference in interpreting them is quite evident even in the majority Islamic countries. Diversity in interpretation then has been part of the core of the Islamic ideal worldview, despite its seemingly unifying creed. The Islamic worldview is shared by Muslim believers, at the ontological level – theological/philosophic diversity at that level is also present. However, interpretations of part of Islamic law are very diverse geographically because of the historical aspects that characterize these geographies. Not to go into details here, it is enough to see that the Islamic majority countries have adjusted the Islamic worldview, especially the jurisdictional part of it, according to society’s socio-cultural and historical specificities. Islam as a belief is the same in Morocco and in Asia, or in Sub-Sahara and Europe, but its practices are various. The same applies to Islam between Eastern and Western Europe, and within Western Europe as well.

Therefore, attention has also to be paid to the potentially various meanings of European Islam. Which Europe is meant here and by implication what European Muslim? Western Muslims is vague as a label as is European Muslims, unless one is satisfied with generalizations. Mustapha Cenic, a leading voice of Balkan Muslims and Islam, speaks of a single Muslim authority in Europe, where mainly the Sunnite and Shiite, and some other sects, can join efforts, forget about their ethnic backgrounds, sects and languages and live in Europe a truly universalist and pluralist Islam which has been homogenized for centuries. Cenic refers to three categories of Muslims in Europe: the “indigenous Muslims” that have been in Europe for centuries; “emigrant Muslims” of post-1945 era; and “native Muslims,” and he means the “new Europeans,” the offspring of the emigrants; they are born in Europe and they consider themselves European of Muslim faith or background; the new converts are also in this category. The three categories still face different challenges, and make speaking of one European Islam a challenge to be studied and considered.<sup>26</sup> Cenic makes it clear that the idea behind this single authority is to organize Muslims better and make them aware of their Europeanness, and able to contribute to national, regional, and world peace, security, and prosperity.<sup>27</sup>

My reference to Mustapha Cenic’s idea here about European Muslims’ categories in history (indigenous, emigrants, natives) and his call for a single authority among Muslims just makes my point of diversity of Muslim voices and Islamic practices clearer and corroborates the idea that European Muslims, and most of their representatives, either institutionalized or not, speak of a problem, the problem of being here in Europe but not feeling at home, mostly because they say the host country, which is now theirs, is still considering them different because their religion is “foreign” and their values do not match with the current Western secular and liberal values. As to those among them who feel at home, the indigenous Muslims, they also feel a kind of malaise because their

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<sup>26</sup> Cenic, “Single Authority,” 42.

<sup>27</sup> Cenic says, “It is now time that we seriously consider a way to institutionalize the presence both of Islam as a universal religion and Muslims as global citizens.” He adds, “It is not enough that Europe recognizes the presence of Islam on its territory. Muslims deserve more than that [...]; Muslims in Europe need a single Muslim authority,” Cenic, *ibid.*

common perception of European Islam is now being confused with the European Islam being debated in Western Europe.

Though the “indigenous Muslims,” like those of the Balkans and parts of Russia and the Baltic (Tatars), seem to be trying to feel that their past history and their old presence in Europe can help in enriching the current debate on this issue and thus contribute to solidifying the idea of European Islam, Western Europe does not seem to have invested much in this direction, nor do the Muslims in Western Europe seem to have learnt from their coreligionists in the same Continent. Bugarel argues that “The study of Balkan Muslim diasporas underlines some major differences between Balkan Muslim populations and the other Muslim populations present in western Europe [...]; one has to consider European Islam not as an existing fact, but as an ongoing process.” This complicates the idea of one European Islam, and makes researching it academically fertile.<sup>28</sup>

### **3. Methodological Concerns on Studying Islam in Europe**

Who defines European Islam and European Muslims, and what institutions and representatives are able to do them service is then one of the main issues that European Islam as a topic has to face as well. This is not to say that much research is not done on Muslims in Europe for the last three-four decades. On the contrary, there is an overwhelming research interest in the field, 1) politically, 2) sociologically, and 3) anthropologically.

Politically, much fusion and confusion has taken place over Islam in the Middle East and Islam in Europe. There are various reasons behind that, which cannot be detailed here. The point to stress, however, is that scholarship on the Middle East has given itself the authority to speak of Islam in Europe, and ultimately of European Islam, with utter neglect of the socio-political and historical situation between the two spaces that require different scholarly approaches. Much of the classical Orientalist and essentialist trends have been passed on from Middle Eastern issues to issues of Islam and Muslims in

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<sup>28</sup> Xavier Bugarel, “Balkan Muslim Diasporas and the Idea of a “European Islam,”” in Tomislav Dulić et al., eds., *Balkan Currents. Essays in Honour of Kjell Magnusson*, Uppsala: Uppsala Multiethnic Papers 49, 2005, 147-165.

Europe. These trends have grown in intensity when merged with the securitization approach adopted in most European countries, particularly since 9/11.<sup>29</sup>

Sociologically and anthropologically, three prime remarks make my consideration of sociological and anthropological work not enough for me to understand European Islam. First, current studies of Muslims in Europe have built on Orientalist scholarship, and that impacts research findings and perceptions. The sociology of Islam<sup>30</sup> hardly developed as a discipline in contemporary Islamic societies, nor did it attract early European sociologists.<sup>31</sup> With such a void, scholars would depend on Orientalist Middle Ages texts that methodologically cannot be relevant in the study of the contemporary societies, and even in understanding Muslim communities in Europe.<sup>32</sup> Maxime Rodinson, the French renowned scholar, describes this as the “continuance of the past impetus.”<sup>33</sup> Joselyne Cesari, a French expert on Islamic studies, says that the current anthropological and sociological studies have used Orientalist scholarship in their disciplines, and that has affected the current study of Islam and Muslims in the West:

In the West, the study of Islam began as a branch of Orientalist studies and therefore followed a separate and distinctive path from the study of religions.

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<sup>29</sup> I refer here to some works that fall within this category and deal with “political Islam” and “radicalization.” I do not mean that these works are “anti-islamist” or “Islamophobic”: Gilles Keppel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2004) chapter 7; Abdulkader H. Sinno, ed. *Muslims in Western Politics* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2009) mainly Chapters 8 to 12; Tahir Abbas, ed. *Islamic Political Radicalism: A European Perspective* (Edinburgh UP, 2007) mainly part I and II; Michael Emerson, et al., eds., *Political Islam and European Foreign Policy* (Brussels: Center for European Policy Studies, 2007) chapter 10; Samir Amghar, et al., eds., *European Islam: Challenges for Public Policy and Society* (Brussels: Center for European Policy Studies, 2007) part A, chapter 1 to 3; Joselyne Cesari, “The Securitisation of Islam in Europe,” Challenge Research Paper, no. 14 / April 2009.

<sup>30</sup> See the recent work of Tugrul Keskin, “The Sociology of Islam,” in Keskin, ed. *Sociology of Islam: Secularism, Economy, and Politics* (Winchester: Ithaca Press, 2011) 1-20.

<sup>31</sup> The Iranian sociologist and theologian Ali Shariati (d. 1977) tried to theorize “Islamic sociology” but I cannot see his theory to have been taken seriously by scholars in the Islamic world. See, Ali Shariati, *On the Sociology of Islam*, trans., Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1979) chapter 6 and 7; Max Weber’s “sociology of religion,” for instance, does not give much space to Islam. Max Weber is believed to have developed interest in Islam not as a religion but as an antithetical element to capitalism. Overall, his work on Islam was left unaccomplished. The British sociologist Bryan S. Turner says that “sociologists are either not interested in Islam or have nothing to contribute to Islamic scholarship,” so the sociological study of Islam remained weak or inexistent for long. See, Syed Anwar Husain, “Max Weber’s Sociology of Islam: A Critique,” University of Dhaka, n.d., available at: <http://www.bangladeshsociology.org/Max%20Weber-Anwar%20Hosain.htm>

<sup>32</sup> For a clearer idea of what I mean, see, Gabriel Marranchi, *The Anthropology of Islam* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2008) chapter 3 and 6; Nissim Rejwan, *The Many Faces of Islam: Perspectives on a Resurgent Civilization* (Gainesville: Florida UP, 2000) Part IV.

<sup>33</sup> Maxime Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*, trans. Roger Veinus (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1987) 99-104.

Even though the critique of Orientalism has been central to the emergence of the study of Islam in the field of social sciences, tensions remain strong between Islamicists and both anthropologists and sociologists. The topic of Islam and Muslims in the West is embedded in this struggle.<sup>34</sup>

Second, these two fields seem to have been influenced and guided by the political rhetoric. Much of the fieldwork, for example, targets Muslim minorities alone, and does not advance that level of academic inquisitiveness to other minorities for a better understanding of the issue. Comparative studies could have been more fruitful than when they target one religious minority, which the political and media discourse already targets.<sup>35</sup> The increasing scholarships on Muslims in Europe illustrates the fact that research on this particular minority is not purely academic, but is also politically driven, some of which is being politicized. That is, some of the conducted research on Islam and Muslims in Europe is used by political parties and ideologies when that suits them in some political campaigns, preparations for elections, and alike manners. I am not saying that academics should always find topics of research that are not problematic. Researching the unproblematic may be nonsensical. What is being said here is that a number of critical researchers who belong to these fields in particular have publicly denounced the exaggerated focus on Muslims in Europe, especially when this focus is driven by the political discourse, which the media and right wing parties, for instance, (mis-)use.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Joselyne Cesari, "Islam in the West: From Immigration to Global Islam," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 8 (2009) 148–175.

<sup>35</sup>The Swedish theologian Goran Larssen calls for studying Muslims as any other minority, and proposes comparative religious studies for a better, unbiased, understanding of religiosity among Muslims, and thus Islam in the modern world. Goran Larssen, "The study of Islam and Muslims in Europe: a Critical Evaluation," (review essay), 2008, available at: <http://imiscoe.socsci.uva.nl/publications/workingpapers/documents/CommentsbyGoranLarssonGoteborgUniversity.pdf>

<sup>36</sup>For the last two years, I have taken part in a number of workshops and conferences around Western Europe, and I have noticed that there is a growing tendency among a number of scholars to agree on "finishing" with studying Islam as a security issue/ threat of Europe, and to distance themselves from the political and media rhetoric. Birgitte Schepelern Johansen and Riem Spielhaus are publishing an interesting evaluative work on polling Muslims in Europe to show the methodological risks involved quantifying specific populations with a focus on Muslims in Europe. The project has been presented in a number of workshops in 2011 and 2012 in the Center for European Islamic Thought in Copenhagen University, and Austria University, among other workshops. Among the findings of this report-text, which studies a number of polls produced in various European countries for the last decade, are as follows: the manner of posing questions by the pollers (sociologists) focuses on particular "controversial" issues of religious

Third, academic dependence on the political discourse could harm immensely the framework of research. Research on Muslims in Europe can turn quickly into research on Islam, and here the shift occurs, consciously or unconsciously, from fieldwork based research on Muslims to inferences about Islam as a religion, without a methodologically sound match. This is not to say that the behavior of Muslims is not Islam; rather, the link between the two requires a clear discipline of interpretation, which may not often be found in one scholar, or scholarly discipline on this religion. This mostly happens when the sociological data extrapolated from fieldwork is misused by a particular political discourse and essentialist academic line of thought.

Overall, what I could see in the literature is that Muslims in Europe are studied in one of three ways. One, they are studied in light of Middle Eastern Islam, which makes European Muslims themselves unsatisfied with the approach and the results. Two, the emerging European Islam projects are studied in isolation, without an attempt to match them with the sociological-anthropological work done in the field. The gap remains between European Islam in theory and European Muslims practices. Three, which follows from point one and two, there is no thorough “intra-comparative study” that is conducted on European Islam projects as a way of examining what they contribute to the debate, in light of their Islamic tradition as well as European modern liberal-and-secular tradition. Nor is there an “inter-comparative study” in which European Islam projects are compared with some projects theorized about in the Islamic majority countries to see where differences and/or similarities lie. Certainly there are minor attempts in that direction, but the ones most heard of or circulated are of two types: 1) the ones that are

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practices (like violence, terrorism, and polygamy); sometimes the informants are not given choices in answering questions, and are bound to answer “yes or no” though the question may have other answer options; some confusion of religious sects and names is detected, which shows lack of knowledge on the religion that is investigated; and moral issues of religion are hardly investigated; focus is put on the issues that are politically and “mediatically” controversial. While waiting for the book release, reference could be made to this article that summarizes the argument: Birgitte S. Johansen and Riem Spielhaus, “Counting Deviance: Revisiting a Decade’s Production of Surveys among Muslims in Western Europe,” *Journal of Muslims in Europe* (2012) Vol. 1, Issue 1, 81- 112. On the media representation of Muslims in Europe, see for example: Wasif Shadid and Pieter S. van Koningsveld, “The Negative Image of Islam and Muslims in the West: Causes and Solutions,” in Shadid and van Koningsveld, eds., *Religious Freedom and the Neutrality of the State: The Position of Islam in the European Union* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002) 174-196; for a specific country sample, see Andreas Zick and Jörg Heeren, “Muslims in the European Mediaspace,” London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, German Report, 2011, retrievable from: [http://www.strategicdialogue.org/Muslim\\_Media\\_Report\\_-\\_German\\_Academic2.pdf](http://www.strategicdialogue.org/Muslim_Media_Report_-_German_Academic2.pdf)

either Islamophobic, by anti-Muslims or ex-Muslims, or highly Eurocentric though they keep the Islamic label stamped on their discourse; and 2) the most conservative, and especially the violent fundamentalists, or extremists.<sup>37</sup>

The above contextualizing notes are purposefully generic, for the introduction cannot allow more than that, and I do not intend to deal with them again in the argumentation-text again. To move to clarify my project, I refer to two distinguished scholarly trends/ examples of socio-political approaches to European Islam, and based on them my project can be better understood and contextualized. The first of these two examples claims that European Islam is not grounded theologically (Olivier Roy), while the second example claims it is grounding itself on that (theological) level (Jorgen Nielsen and Felice Dassetto). The two, however, do not go into theoretical elaborations on that, for they argue from socio-political perspectives. As will be made clearer as I proceed, I stand on the side of the second trend, and try to develop my argument from theological bases that the scholars I study refer to, before the political bases of this argument are also met. I briefly present the two trends first.

The renowned French scholar Olivier Roy writes in his *Vers un islam européen* [*Towards a European Islam*, 1999] that there is no theological new input to Islam among Muslims in Europe. He believes that there is no rethinking of the religious dogma among Muslims in Europe. All he sees is the age of “post-Islamism,” characterized, among other aspects, by “individualization,” “privatization,” and “deterritorialization” without theological re-interpretations. I quote him in length:

We see then that the minority fact does not necessarily bring about a theological or jurisprudential *aggiornamento* but rather a disconnection between the theological debate and the creativity of a religiosity which is centered on the individual. [...] It [i.e. individualized European Islam] is not a reformed Islam because not only the dogma but also the corpus of interpreters and jurists remain uncontested. [...] European Islam is deterritorialized, deprived of institutions that

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<sup>37</sup> Salafists are commonly wrongly depicted as extremists and violent; actually only a minority of them are. Salafists are generally peaceful though they stick to the literal interpretation of the Islamic main sources, the Quran and Sunna. They are also referred to in the media generally as fundamentalists, but not every fundamentalist is extremist and terrorist. It is one of the terms that has been misused. A fundamentalist is classically the one who goes back to or refers to the fundamental sources (Quran, Sunna, and consensus, *ijmā'*). Now, mostly in the media, a fundamentalist is someone who is ready to use violence, change the political system into an “Islamic” one, and alike connotations. I use “extremism” to refer to “violent fundamentalism,” and “extremists” to refer to “violent fundamentalists” or “violent Salafists.”

could impose norms. [...] *We are certainly wrong to wait for a theological reform, or a theological voice, for the liberalization of practices (like the veil, food, etc.) which would allow to the Muslims to adapt to Occidental norms.*<sup>38</sup>  
[Emphasis added]

According to Roy, the resurgence of Islam among Muslims in Europe, and in the Islamic majority lands, are broadly “anti-intellectual” especially among fundamentalists and salafis. This is the case for religion in general in the 21th century.<sup>39</sup> He calls this “sainte ignorance” (sacred ignorance).<sup>40</sup> In *Globalized Islam* (2004), Roy does not change his mind. He still views Islam in the West in general to be looking through the Western lenses, “The issue is not Western versus Muslim values. [...] The debate occurs within a single “cultural” framework: that of the West.”<sup>41</sup> Due to the fact that it works “within” the Western framework, Roy then sees no Islamic theology being revisited or developed, “Islam in the West is Western not to the extent it changes its theological framework, but because it expresses that framework more in terms of values than of legal norms, whatever the content of those values.”<sup>42</sup> What Roy considers to be changing is not the dogma, but simply the practice of believers, “What is changing is not religion but religiosity,” and he ascertains this since the “liberal thinkers do not meet the demands of the religious market.”<sup>43</sup> His conclusion then, as quoted in length above, is that European Islam “is not a reformed Islam because not only the dogma but also the corpus of interpreters and jurists remain uncontested.” As a political scientist and sociologist of religion, Roy’s views cannot be so much contested, but his conclusions on the theological level need revision. My work here goes against his conclusions about European Islam.<sup>44</sup> I

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<sup>38</sup> Olivier Roy, *Vers un islam européen [Towards a European Islam]* (Paris: Esprit, 1999) 89; 90; 91.

<sup>39</sup> Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia UP, 2004) 31; 35. Roy uses the term “anti-intellectualism;” “anti-intellectual” is the adjective I have derived from it.

<sup>40</sup> Roy, *La sainte ignorance: le temps de la religion sans culture [The Sacred Ignorance: The Age of Religion without Culture]* (Paris: Seuil, 2008) 189.

<sup>41</sup> Roy, *Globalized Islam*, 335-337.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31.

<sup>44</sup> The political scientist Jytte Klausen has conducted 300 interviews with Muslim association leaders, politicians, businessmen and intellectuals in seven European countries (Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands, Great Britain, France, and Germany) between 2003 and 2005, and arrived to the conclusion that there is an emerging European Islam. In her data analysis, and in a comment on Roy, she sociologically states what I am arguing for in this dissertation theoretically-theologically. She says “I have more fundamental disagreements with Roy. He sees no evidence of any serious rethinking of religious dogma among European Muslims. I am convinced, on the contrary, that a “European Islam” is emerging upon a new

see European Islam emerging, and from theological and intellectual perspectives. In this sense I am closer in views to the Danish scholar Jorgen Nieslen.

At the time when Roy published his book on European Islam in French, Nielsen did the same, with a work bearing the same title in the same year in English, *Towards a European Islam* (1999). In the main, Nielsen imbues his sociological study of Muslims mostly in Britain with a historical touch. Though, like Roy, he does not go into deep theological investigations into the matter, he still sees “grounds for optimism” in what concerns the integration of Muslims in Europe and Europe’s ability to respond positively to that, if it brings up its past heritage of pluralism and tolerance, away from “restrictive and sometimes oppressive forms of nationalism.”<sup>45</sup> In *Muslims in Western Europe* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2004), Nielsen sees the young Muslims, born and educated in Europe, as being influential in leading their community of believers, and in giving shape to new forms of expressing and practicing Islam, forms and priorities “relevant to their European situation.”<sup>46</sup>

Nielsen notes that there is a lively intellectual debate going on within the Islamic community, and less attention is given to it. He compares it to the formative Islamic intellectual era: “less is being paid to the internal debates taking place. Here there is a range of philosophical and theological discussions, which in many ways remind one of the debates which ranged among Islamic theologians in the formative periods of the eighth–eleventh centuries.”<sup>47</sup>

In different wording, Nielsen believes that Muslims in Europe “are being watched” by their co-religionists in the Islamic majority countries, as if there were a shift in theological balance. In forwarding Tariq Ramadan’s *To Be a European Muslim* (1999), Nielsen states the following: “The irony of the situation has become that living on the margins of the Muslim world has taken European Muslims back into the theological centre. In doing so they are being watched also from the geographical center [i.e. the

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epistemology of faith and a new hermeneutics of textual interpretation.” Jytte Klausen, *The Islamic Challenge: Politics and Religion in Western Europe* (Oxford UP, 2005) 204-205.

<sup>45</sup> Jorgen Nielsen, *Towards a European Islam* (London and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1999) 10.

<sup>46</sup> Nieslen, *Muslims in Western Europe*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Edinburgh UP: 2004) 172.

<sup>47</sup> Nielsen, “The Question of Euro-Islam: Restriction or Opportunity?” in Aziz Al-Azmeh and Effie Fokas, eds. *Islam in Europe: Diversity, Identity, and Influence* (Cambridge UP: 2007) 34.

Muslim world].<sup>48</sup> This makes it clear that European Muslims “are asking fundamental questions about Islam”; fiqh (which focuses on legal matters) is being questioned, and theology (which focuses on morality) is being given more weight.<sup>49</sup> Some reputed sociologists and anthropologists on Muslims in Europe are in accord with the argument of Nielsen. In *La Construction de l’islam européen* [*The Construction of European Islam*, 1996], the Belgian sociologist Felice Dassetto, recognizes a “growing new Islamic rhetoric”<sup>50</sup> - meaning a religious discourse that tackles theological matters - which makes of Western Europe “a land of Islam.”<sup>51</sup> In a recent work, *Discours musulmans contemporains* [*Contemporary Islamic Discourses*, 2011], Dassetto includes Europe as a field which is experiencing diverse Islamic intellectual dynamisms.<sup>52</sup>

In light of these preliminary notes, I contend that a new approach of studying European Islam has yet to develop, and my approach here is an attempt in that direction. I am certainly not claiming that my approach covers the critique I have advanced above. This work here is putting the first building blocks of further elaborations and

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<sup>48</sup> Nielsen, Forward, in Tariq Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim* (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1999) xi-xiv.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., xi-xiv.

<sup>50</sup> Dassetto uses the term “Islamist rhetoric” in French which I translate as “Islamic rhetoric” to avoid misunderstanding him by the reader as suspicious of this growing rhetoric. His use of the term “Islamist” is not negative, as is common especially in Western media and among some other scholars who distinguish between “Islamist,” which they mean to be violent or at least ideologist, and “Islamic” which refers to religion as a doctrine. Felice Dassetto, *La Construction de l’Islam européen: approche socio-anthropologique* [*The Construction of European Islam : Socio-Anthropological Approach*] (Paris and Montreal: L’Harmattan, 1996) 237.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 11. Here, too, by Western Europe as a “land of Islam” Dassetto does not mean the “conquest of Europe” and its annexation to the land of Islam, as some journalists-writers affirm when they use the term “Europe as a land of Islam.” Dassetto’s view is also shared by Stephano Allievi who studies Islam as “a European fact”; “Islam is *inlandish*,” in his terms. Allievi, “The International Dimension,” in Maréchal, et al., eds. *Muslims in the Enlarged Europe*, 449-488. Overall, Dassetto is closer in perspective to Nielsen; their close perspectives are echoed in their co-authored piece, among others, which frames the variety of outlooks of Islam and Muslims in Europe, Felice Dassetto and Jorgen Nielsen, “Conclusion: Past, Present, Future,” in Maréchal, et al., eds. *Muslims in the Enlarged Europe*, 531-542.

<sup>52</sup> Dassetto categorizes contemporary Islamic thought, since the mid-19 century, into four tendencies: 1) the “literalist foundationists,” or early salafī reformists, 2) “adaptive foundationists,” 3) “symbolic foundationists,” and 4) “deconstructionists,” or hermeneutists). He mentions Tariq Ramadan, Tareq Oubrou and Abdenour Bidar (who I study in this work) among the contemporary voices of Islam of the third category, “symbolic foundationists,” since they mix the mystical and individualist experience of Islam with its doctrinal teachings. Dassetto uses the term “foundationists” instead of “fundamentalist” or “salafist” because the latter terms have been, according to him, misused especially by the media. See, Felice Dassetto, coord. *Discours musulmans contemporains* [*Contemporary Islamic Discourses*] (Louvain: Harmattan, 2011) 1-28.

comparisons for future research. So, as I delve into the debate myself, I open up territories of research which have been present in previous as well as contemporary works in Islamic thought in the Islamic majority countries, but which have been generally neglected among the current research on Islam in Europe for numerous reasons, summarized in the preliminary historical notes above.

#### **4. Methodological Concerns on Conceptualizing European Islam**

##### **Research Question: Is European Islam Possible?**

As put in the outset of this introduction, my research has been driven by the following main question: Is European Islam possible? In developing an answer I have divided this question into three cognitive stages – that correspond to three methodological ones. Each stage corresponds to a sub-question.

One, What does European Islam mean? This question corresponds to the first cognitive/ methodological stage in which I describe four projects on the topic. This makes the descriptive stage. As will be further illustrated below, European Islam here is not inclusive of all voices of Islam in Europe. Focus is on scholars who have a reputation and audience, either among ordinary believers, or academia, and sometimes both.

Two, what is new in European Islam? This question corresponds to the second cognitive/ methodological stage termed the comparative stage, since it refers to some trends in the Islamic tradition, mainly the Mu‘tazila, besides some modern (or what I refer to as “early”) and contemporary (or “late”) reformist voices. The rationale behind referring to this legacy, even in short, is to find comparative grounds of theological justification for the emerging European Islam. With these references, this stage argues that European Islam aims at “rationalizing ethics.” That is, it introduces arguments that support the making of an (Islamic) ethical theory that clearly differentiates between morality and law, without denying the divinity of these ethics. It is a kind of “civil Islamic reform(-ation)” without the act of “killing” or “denying” God/ Allah. Because of the “rationalization of ethics” European Islam advances, in the footsteps of the late Mu‘tazila theology, and other contemporary reformist voices, I call such an advancement “revisionist-reformist” since it is not a breakthrough in Islamic thought, though it could

be considered so for European Islamic thought that is still in the making. European Islam, henceforth, continues a tradition, and renews its reasoning aspects. It is also reformist in the sense that it adopts modernity values and argues for them “from within,” for theological legitimacy of the renewal.

Three, is European Islam a “reasonable comprehensive doctrine”? This question corresponds to the evaluative stage in which the conceptualization and findings of theological grounds for European Islam are measured in light of Abdurrahmane’s innovative modernity framework and the Rawlsian political framework of overlapping consensus. The three sub-questions end with the conclusion that European Islam is possible theologically, and politically. I further explain the content of each of the three stages (descriptive, comparative, evaluative) in “Content Outline” below, after the “Five Criteria of Selection.”

### **Speakers of European Islam: Five Criteria of Selection**

Such an intellectual enterprise, which is in its early stages of scrutinizing the emerging European Islamic thought, requires, in my view, a comparative and interdisciplinary approach. One or multiple texts that are very similar in approach, and come from the same academic background, do not serve the rationale of this research that targets comprehending the very idea of European Islam, as differently advanced by the scholars studied here (to be referred to below). For this purpose, a circle of four scholars are selected. The four come from different backgrounds and thus develop different approaches to their idea of European Islam. Their background difference is what this work uses to advance part of its thesis, i.e. the emphasis on Islamic ethics by the four scholars, slightly the way kalam theologians did in the formative years of Islamic thought. The selected scholars are as follows: Bassam Tibi (b. 1944), Tariq Ramadan (b. 1962), Tareq Oubrou (1959), and Abdennour Bidar (b. 1971). Each of the four calls for a particular version of European Islam. Tibi presents political justifications for “Euro-Islam”; Ramadan presents both political/public and theological justifications for

“European Islam”; Oubrou is close to Ramadan, though, as I read him, he tries to be even more theological; and Bidar presents the theosophic<sup>53</sup> reading of European Islam.

My selection of the studied scholars, and their texts, is based on five criteria. First, the scholar should speak from “declaration” and not from “conjecture” perspective, using Rawls’s terms.<sup>54</sup> They should have an Islamic background, and speak from within the religion or doctrine studied, i.e. Islam. The fact that they are Muslim makes them more aware of the issues Muslims in Europe in particular face, be they positive or negative. A non-Muslim scholar or ex-Muslim could have been chosen, but that would not contribute much to my approach; I am looking for scholars that are engaged in discussing the matters of their faith, and not the ones who speak against it because of particular circumstances they have gone through themselves as Muslims at a particular age, and which drove them to leave it, and speak against it later, as is the case with intellectuals like the Somali-Dutch Ayan Hirshi Ali, the Iranian-Dutch Afshin Ellian, the Iranian-Dutch Ihsan Jami, and the Indian-British Ibn Warraq.<sup>55</sup> Simply, I want to listen to Muslim voices, or at least those who claim they are, so that I can integrate the version of reform they propose from within. The methodology of this work requires this criterion.

Second, the scholar should be living, or should have lived, in Western Europe. Living in the Americas or in Eastern Europe may not help the scholar to have a thorough understanding of the delicate questions Muslims face in Western Europe, which has a different history with both the Christian religion and the Islamic religion in particular. Though multicultural as it may seem in reality, Western Europe’s policies towards the religious minorities, the Muslims in particular, are not homogeneous and are not considered equal compared with its “native” religions (Christianity and Judaism). This

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<sup>53</sup> By “theosophic approach” I mean “theological philosophy” or “rational theology,” and not only the Eastern and Islamic mystic tradition. I clarify my note when introducing the work of Bidar.

<sup>54</sup> The terms are Rawls’, introduced in “The Idea of Public reason Revisited.” They are types of “justification” that a particular doctrine is compatible with the concept of the political. Reasoning from a “declaration” position is a view conveyed by a believer, from within; that is, he belongs to this doctrine, as is the case with a Muslim believer or scholar who gives justifications of compatibility of his religion with the political concept of “justice as fairness” As to reasoning from “conjecture,” it is carried out from outside, by someone not believing in or member of this doctrine, as is the case with a non-Muslim scholar who presents Islam as compatible with the concept. Rawls, “The Idea of Public reason Revisited,” *The University of Chicago Law Review*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (Summer, 1997), 765-807.

<sup>55</sup> Various associations of ex-Muslims are founded in countries like France, Germany, Britain, the Netherlands, and Australia. The councils and their manifesto are available on line, like the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain, at [www.ex-muslim.org.uk](http://www.ex-muslim.org.uk) .

makes Western Europe a particular secular and liberal case that very much challenges classical conceptions of religion, including the “newly arrived” Islam. As is required of Muslim religious scholars/ ulema to live or at least be well immersed in the daily issues that face their co-religionists, the same could be said of scholars and intellectuals not trained in religious classical seminaries, and who speak of the Muslim question and Islamic reform in Europe.

Third, which is a continuity of the second criterion, the intellectual biography of the scholar is taken into account, since it impacts his intellectual itinerary. By intellectual biography is meant the way the personal or family background and the academic training of the scholar have impacted his vision of Islam in Europe, and his thought on European Islam. Without a consideration of the spacial-temporal conditions in which the scholar has developed his argumentation, his theses could be read out of their context, and could be dangerously generalized about other situations and contexts of Islam and Muslims. The European condition then has to be kept in mind. That is why I refer to the biography of every scholar studied here.

Fourth, the public presence of the scholar is considered, though not emphasized. In treating texts and measuring their potential influence on the public and politics, considering their public presence and circulation is important. This comparative work is not based on fieldwork; it is theoretical, but its choice of the selected scholars stems both from their presence on the ground as well as the potential impact they may still have in the future on European Islamic thought, seeing that they are among the pioneering texts of this label “European Islam.” All the scholars selected here have a remarkable presence in the public debate over Islam and Muslims in Europe especially in their corresponding countries of residence. Most of them have an international audience as well.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Yet, this work cannot say that they have the same audience. Tibi and Bidar may have more audience among Muslim and non-Muslim intellectual believers, secularists and liberals; Bidar is both a philosopher and a mystic/ Sufi in his approach, which intellectual and “liberal Muslims” may find more interesting, while Ramadan and Oubrou may have a religious audience, composed mostly of practicing believers, besides non-Muslim sympathizers. I do not mean that practicing believers are not intellectual; a good number of the second and third generations of Muslims in Europe are both practicing and of higher education; their daily practices may be liberal, but they may not call themselves so, since they practice; for them, a Muslim liberal generally does not practice, but only believes, or is Muslim by culture only, and not by conviction.

Fifth, and despite their different backgrounds, the scholars studied here all bring to the fore the ethical message of Islam and stress it in their version of European Islam. As will be argued in this thesis, they all tend, though not systematically, to rationalize ethics, which the late Mu‘tazila school of thought, mostly culminated in the work of the renowned rationalist scholar Qadi Abd Aljabbar (d. 1025), pioneered between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. I do not aim here to raise a profound discussion on Islamic ethical theories. The aim in this work is to see some characteristics of Mu‘tazila rational thought in European Islam, and how that can impact some of the socio-political Islamic issues that are unresolved yet in Europe. Some modern (“early”) and contemporary (“late”) reformist scholars based mostly, but not all, in the Islamic majority countries tend, too, by means of their various approaches, to rationalize the divine message, *à la* Mu‘tazila, despite the fact that they do not mention this classical school by name since it has been tarnished and defamed by some orthodox scholars and political regimes since the *mihna* (“Inquisition-like”) of the school in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>57</sup>

The selected scholars then do stress the ethical question in Islam in light of not only the current socio-political situation in Europe, but also in light of the socio-political changes and challenges that the Islamic majority countries mainly of the broad Middle East have been facing for about the last two centuries. What I see these scholars to be doing is to re-ground the Islamic ethical message in the liberal-secular European context. It is here that the theological and the political intertwine to a large extent. Because of the political pressure over the religious in Europe, and equally because of the religious challenge of the political status quo, I have found myself building a historical link

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<sup>57</sup> I will say more on the Mu‘tazila and refer to the *mihna* the school went through in the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century. This form of inquisition the school went through was a reaction, a result, since the political regime aimed at establishing the Mu‘tazila tenets by force, and after about three decades, the dominant Ash‘ari came back and retaliated in what is termed *mihna*. Since then, the Ash‘ari, which adopts Divine Command Theory in approaching reason and revelation, has dominated Islamic thought and political regimes that govern most Muslim majority countries. Scholars have ever since avoided affiliating themselves to the rationalist Mu‘tazila for fear of being called “apostates” or “deviants.” Only recently more openness has been noticed towards invoking the school. I do not translate *Mihna* as Inquisition, as some tend to do, since *Mihna* in Islamic history is a political decision issued and imposed by the Caliph, a political authority, and it was not a single religious authority that issued it, as was the Inquisition of the Church in Europe. Similarities aside, this distinction of single authority is important in my perspective to avoid confusing traditions and histories.

between the present and the past in Islamic thought so that European Islam can be better understood in its efforts to present theological justifications for its “existence” in Europe.

More clearly about this potential historical parallelism, I should say that my understanding of the contemporary socio-political circumstances of the debate over European Islam brings to the fore early socio-political circumstances that were raised especially during the reign of the third and fourth Caliphs, Othman and Ali, which ultimately influenced the politico-theological paths of Islamic thought in general afterwards. I am referring here to the socio-political issue of who had the right to govern, on what basis, and the main theological and political divisions that developed out of that feud: Sunnites, Shiites/ Shi‘a; Kharijites, Murji’ites, and later on Mu‘tazila, and Ash‘arites/ Ash‘aria, to list these among other sects and schools. An overview of these trends of thought will be briefly provided in due time, in Part IV, Section 1, with more focus on the Mu‘tazila. That is to say, theological, and ultimately philosophical, disputes flourish when the political situation is tense and requires “argumentation” to find out theological justifications and political solutions to various issues. That is the task the kalam legacy contributed to Islamic thought. Without saying much here, kalam theology discussed issues that belong to the field of what is known now as political theory and philosophy of ethics, besides issues of divine nature (like the attributes of God).<sup>58</sup> Thus, symptoms of kalam renewal in Europe could be detected in European Islam.

The current socio-political situation of Islam in/and Europe does correspond, mildly if not largely, socio-politically to the early formative period that brought about political and theological changes to the Islamic community. Still, and again in light of the previous historical notes, I contextualize my reading in the intellectual labour that Islamic thought has been in for nearly the last two centuries, chiefly since the beginning of the

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<sup>58</sup> There is a tendency to see kalam differently from Christian theology. Kalam seems to include both theological and philosophical debates, and is not only synonymous with Islamic theology and its counterpart Christian theology. Islamic theology, when it is used as Islamic theology, includes traditions like the one of the rationalist Mu‘tazila. In this sense, it does not deal only with issues of divinity and salvation; it also deals with secular issues generally (secular) philosophy deals with. That is, the *Mutakallimūn*, practitioners of kalam, were both theologians and philosophers. In this perspective, I follow the work of George Hourani’s *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1985), Majid Fakhry’s *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), and Mariam Al-Attar’s *Islamic Ethics: Divine Command Theory in Arabo-Islamic Thought* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2010). I say more on this in Section 1, Part IV, where I refer to their work in more length.

Arab-Islamic Renaissance of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Various reformist trends have developed since, but symptoms of return to the ambiance of the formative intellectual debate, which flourished mainly between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, are very visible. There is revision in the reform being advocated in contemporary Islamic thought, including the emerging European Islamic thought. European modernity opens space to Islamic thought to revise its own past, and rethink its conception of religion in light of the modern changes. (More on this will be said below, when referring to the idea of European Islam as both European and Islamic concept.)

The age of kalam will not return in the same way as it first developed, but some of its main themes are being revisited in contemporary Islamic thought. Discussing the fundamentals of Islam, and rebuilding an updated understanding of religion and re-contextualization of the message of the Prophet Muhammad are being heavily discussed by the Muslim reformist ulema/ religious scholars, and philosophers. European Islam is not immune from this debate. Though it may develop its own path of understanding and practicing the message of Islam, European Islam, as I will illustrate in this work, is part of the current debate, which in turn has its roots in the formative era of Islam. European Islam in this sense, as I will recurrently mention, is both revisionist and reformist. It is revisionist since it keeps relations with the founding sources; it is reformist since it tries to build on them in light of the European modern achievements and context.

As a matter of fact, my selection aims at making European Islam speak to itself more dialectically for the sake of an intellectually religious dispute and argumentation (kalam), besides answering the criterion of what the scholars have in common in raising Islamic reform(-ation) for European Islam. I have not come across a work that presents what European Islam is about in a comparative study where some scholars that claim the idea of European Islam “talk to each other” or “listen to each other.” The selected scholars hardly mention each other in their works, and when they do, they do so without a thoroughly analytical argument that either supports or refutes the other's views. Ramadan, for instance, hardly mentions any of the three scholars studied here; yet, he refers to

“some scholars” as advocates of “light Islam,” and Tibi is considered one of them.<sup>59</sup> Tibi, on the other hand, just labels Ramadan a “fundamentalist in disguise,” distances his version of Euro-Islam from Ramadan's, and does not go into any analytical critique of the latter's thoughts. Oubrou and Ramadan meet in person often in conferences and have got engaged in the debate over their interpretation of Islam and secularism in Europe, but still that is not written and analyzed; that remains in conferences, keynote speeches, and public debates. Bidar has appeared lately in the francophone public and intellectual context; he is, for example, not receptive of Ramadan's work either, and like the others, he just expresses that as if it were a mere opinion, and does not engage in full comparisons. There is an indirect intellectual exchange among them, and this comparative study makes it more direct to find out commonalities and differences that form the emerging European Islamic thought.

### **What “This” European Islam Does Not Include: Reply to Five Objections**

These methodological notes being made, and before moving to outlining the content of the work, the question of “intellectual modesty,” to call it so, has to be raised to avoid essentialisms and silencing of other European Islam voices: do the scholars studied here represent European Islam in all its varieties and possible versions? That is, does what is left out through the criteria outlined above harm the outcome of this research? The brief answer is as follows: this research does not claim to represent but to present a version of European Islam; it is not all inclusive, but it is not exclusive as well. The arguments presented by the scholars and the way I read them make my argument and version of European Islam advanced here inclusive of diverse voices, which may not be represented directly but still can find their ideas hereby expressed.

The previous five criteria of selection seem to exclude five main categories of voices to the debate. The objections to such a methodological exclusion may be expressed as follows: 1) the European Council for Fatwa and Research is referred to only

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<sup>59</sup> In a conference on democracy and the Arab world LUISS university hosted in Rome, on 21 January 2011, I asked Ramadan about why he does not refer for example to Tibi in his critique of “other” versions of European Islam, and he simply said he does not necessarily have to. As I will also note in Part II in which I read his thoughts, Ramadan generally does not name the scholars he disagrees with; they are generally labelled as “liberal,” or “conservative,” or “salafists,” etc.

in passing; 2) the Shi‘a voice, the second major sect of Islam after the Sunnis, is not referred to at all in “this European Islam”; 3) the traditionalist non-violent salafies as well as their small fraction that calls for violence or the establishment/ restoration of the Islamic state; 4) women in terms of gender representation seem absent; and 5) voices from other geographical parts of Western Europe are not underlined. (As to the “wide Europe,” I already mentioned that the issue discussed here is more heated in consolidated liberal democracies, and is not so (yet) in Europe post-1990.) Below I respond to each of these five objections.

First, I do not make much reference to the European Council for Fatwa and Research, which was established in Dublin in 1997 and is headed by the “global Mufti” Youssuf al-Qaradawi,<sup>60</sup> primarily because it is an institution, composed of a board of scholars who have different approaches to Islam, and Islam in Europe, and thus variety of views is bound to be found within it and no one clear view on European Islam may easily be made clear in light of this variety. This is the case particularly because a lot of the scholarly committee members are not European, or at least originally not European, which makes European Muslim scholars like Ramadan and Oubrou consider the Council more Arab than European.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, though it publishes various texts on Muslim codes of conduct, ethics, etc.,<sup>62</sup> the Council has mainly remained tied to issuing fatwas (non-binding legal opinions) instead of working out a thoroughly new reconsideration of the traditional sources in light of the European context.<sup>63</sup> Some of its published works

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<sup>60</sup> Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen and Bettina Graf, eds. *The Global Mufti: The Phenomenon of Yusuf al-Qaradawi* (Columbia UP, 2009).

<sup>61</sup> As of 2011, the scholarly committee composed of thirty eight members were from the following countries: Qatar, Lebanon, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Mauritania, Egypt, Kuwait, UAE, Pakistan, Germany, Norway, Belgium, UK, Ireland, France, Spain, Bosnia, Switzerland, Holland, USA, and Canada. More could be found at the council’s webpage: [www.e-cfr.org/en](http://www.e-cfr.org/en).

<sup>62</sup> Two texts are well read on minority jurisprudence (*fiqh al-aqalliyāt*): Youssuf Al-Qaradawi, *fi fiqh al-aqalliyāt al-muslima [On Muslim Minorities Jurisprudence]* (Nasr: Dar Ashuruq, 2001); Taha Jabir al-Alwani, *Towards a Fiqh for Minorities* (London and Washington: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2003).

<sup>63</sup> The issuing of fatwas is done in a scholarly manner; scholars study the issues raised by ordinary Muslims, in light of the traditional sources, and in consultation with the European Muslim experts in the field concerned, e.g. health, economy, family issues. For a case of a woman who converted to Islam, but whose husband remained non-Muslim, whether she should stay with him or ask for divorce, the Council stayed without a solution for two years, and at the end it gave various options, and left the final decision to the concerned woman. Alexandro Caeiro, “Transnational Ulama, European Fatwas, and Islamic Authority,”

call for new “civilizational fatwa” paradigm (*iftā’ ḥadārī*),<sup>64</sup> in light of the modern geographical and political rapprochement beyond the classical divisions of the abodes,<sup>65</sup> and encourage Muslims for full and active participation in their European countries of residence.<sup>66</sup> Most of these works, besides the specific theme they tackle, they also keep the tone of da‘wa/ proselytization alive, but they stress that it should be peaceful, based on Muslims ethical behaviour, and within what the laws permit in Europe.

Henceforth, in my reading of the literature of ECFR, I see that though it tries to be more receptive and positively responsive to the problems the Muslims face in (Western) Europe, it still considers them a minority that has to protect itself from melting into the mainstream society which is generally not religious. The ECFR indirectly claims authority over the Muslims of Europe, tries to keep them within the classical jurisprudential premises that are not different from those in the Muslim majority countries. For this reason I have not opted for selecting one of its scholars, or its overall “mission,” for my study here. More clearly, in Section 2, Part IV of this work, I try to show that European Islam has legitimate views to consolidate John Raws’ overlapping consensus, while I see that the ECFR could be used only for a *modus videndi* frame of work.

Second, for the case of the Shi‘a, especially three arguments could be advanced here. One, the Shi‘a are a minority in Europe, reflecting their status within the Islam faith at large. Most of the Muslims in Western Europe are of Sunni origin, migrating from North Africa and the Middle East. The Sunni dominance is reflected, for example, in the membership of the European Council for Research and Fatwa (ECFR). Its scholar

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in Martin van Bruinessen and Stefano Allievi, eds. *Producing Islamic Knowledge: Transmission and Dissemination in Western Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011) 121-141. For Fatwas, two main volumes have been published, and are available online at: [http://e-cfr.org/ar/index.php?cat\\_id=337](http://e-cfr.org/ar/index.php?cat_id=337) , besides periodical short fatwa announcements or articles. The council also produces scholarly papers, which can be found at: [http://e-cfr.org/ar/index.php?cat\\_id=341](http://e-cfr.org/ar/index.php?cat_id=341)

<sup>64</sup> Abdel Majid Annajar, *fiqh al-muwātana li al-muslimīna fi ūrupā* [Citizenship Jurisprudence for Muslims in Europe] (Dublin: ECFR, 2009) 77-88.

<sup>65</sup> Abdullah Ben Youssef Al-Judai, *taqsīmu al-ma‘mūra fi al-fiqh al-Islami wa atharuhu fi al-waqi’* [World Division in Islamic Jurisprudence and its Actual Impacts] (Dublin: ECFR, 2007) Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

<sup>66</sup> Hussam Shaker, *moslimou urupa wa al-mosharaka as-siyassiya* [Muslims of Europe and Political Participation] (Dublin: ECFR, 2007) chapters 1, 7, and 8; Faysal Mawlawi, *al-muslimu muwātinan fi ūrupā* [The Muslim as a Citizen in Europe] (al-ittihad al-‘alami lil ‘ulama’ al-moslimin, 2008) Chapters 3 and 4.

members are Sunni, and none of them originates from, say, the Shi'a Iran.<sup>67</sup> Still, the work of the Iraqi top Shiite cleric Marje Ayyatollah al-Ssistani (b. 1930) has a wide circulation among some Muslims in the West; he urges them to obey the laws of the countries they reside in, as manifested in his Fatwa in 2006, without neglecting their religious duties. His book *A Code of Conduct for Muslims in the West* (2012) develops this argument.<sup>68</sup> Second, the Shi'a diaspora of Iranian descent tend to be less religious or not religious when they are in Europe, most probably because of the Islamic Republic oppression they experience at home, which they no longer want to be associated with when they are abroad. So, their religious presence in Europe, and the West in general, is "silent" or "invisible," compared to the Muslims of Arab origin who tend to have a more affirmative affiliation with their religion.<sup>69</sup> Third, the previous two arguments may well explain why the scholars of Islam in Europe are themselves either of Arab origin and thus of Sunni background and are attracted to dealing with the mainstream Islam, Sunni Islam, or they are aware of the classical differences between Shi'a and Sunni Islam orthodoxies and in their reform agendas they, in my view, on purpose, try to overcome those sectarian distinctions by focusing on the main theological aspects that they share.

Third, the majority non-violent salafies are not directly referred to in my study. Salafies generally do not claim that there are various Islams, European, Arab, Asian, etc. Politically, and theologically, they do not believe in such a paradigm of thought. They do not defend or claim the idea of European Islam. They practice Islam in Europe, respect Europe's laws, but still think of themselves as "*muhajirun*" (migrants to un-Islamic lands), and what they can do is to live Islam as they perceive it, and hope to help others convert, or at least guide their "deviant" co-religionists. Moreover, a lot of their ideas are

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<sup>67</sup> The Shi'a scholars have their own council/ Majlis, which was founded in Europe in 1992. For more, check their webpage: <http://www.majliseulama.org/>

<sup>68</sup> Ayyatollah Assestani, *A Code of Conduct for Muslims in the West* (Freebooks, 2012). Part One of the book focuses on migration (hijra) to non-Islamic lands. For the Fatwa, it received a lot of media attention particularly in Canada: CBC News, "Obey your country's laws, Iraqi cleric urges Muslims," June 14, 2006, available at: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2006/06/14/fatwa-muslim.html>

<sup>69</sup> The Turkish/ Anatolian Alevi, who are of Shiite origin, are religious, and have found ways to receive recognition in Germany where they make a large community, Krisztina Kehl-Bordogi, "Alevi in Germany On the Way to Public Recognition?" ISIM Newsletter 8/01, 9, available at: [https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/17497/ISIM\\_8\\_Alevi\\_in\\_Germany\\_On\\_the\\_Way\\_to\\_Public\\_Recognition.pdf?sequence=1](https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/17497/ISIM_8_Alevi_in_Germany_On_the_Way_to_Public_Recognition.pdf?sequence=1)

indirectly voiced by the studied scholars. Tibi devotes a lot of space to debunk violent (international) fundamentalism, while Ramadan argues against the literalist salafies.<sup>70</sup>

Fourth, the same applies to the question of gender representation: the scholars presented here defend gender equality. This work cannot be said to be gender-biased since it represents no female scholar on the subject. It may have been more interesting to integrate a female voice that argues for European Islam, but my five criteria outlined above have disadvantaged this option. If I were studying Western Islam, I could have then integrated some of the following female scholars mostly based in the USA: Leila Ahmed, Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, or Saba Mahmoud.<sup>71</sup>

Fifth, as to whether geographical representation is considered in the selection made in this study, it should be born in mind that this is neither a sociological nor an anthropological fieldwork; it is theoretical and thus able to be expanded to various secular-liberal societies where the political system has developed differently. It should also be born in mind that the five selection criteria make it equally expandable and applicable to various Western societies. As to the fact that France dominates the debate, and its internal discussions are quickly disseminated throughout the West, that is explained by the fact that religious sensibilities and the lines between the Church and the state are historically clearly designed, and have become an iconic representation of “radical secularism,” (French *laïcité*), to use Tariq Modood’s description.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Salafism and Fundamentalism are not necessarily violent or extremist; they simply advocate a return to the Prophetic model of life, especially in its personal behavior; only a small fraction of them advocates violence and hope for the “return” of the Islamic State. I generally avoid the terms for the confusion that has afflicted them after terrorist attacks conducted by Islamists in the last few decades. For they categories of Salafies, see Roel Mejer, ed. *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (New York: Columbia UP, 2009) Introduction 1-32. For the violent or militant salafism, see Frazer Egerton, *Jihad in the West: the Rise of Militant Salafism* (Cambridge UP, 2011) Chapter 1.

<sup>71</sup> I refer to Fatema Mernissi and Amina Wadud among the female reformist voices in Part IV. Some of the major works of the scholars mentioned here include: Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) ; Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford UP, 1999); Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006); Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran* (University of Texas Press, 2002); Saba Mahmoud, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005).

<sup>72</sup> Tariq Modood, “Moderate Secularism and Multiculturalism,” Political Studies Association, Politics: 2009 Vol (29) 1, 71-76, available at: [http://www.tariqmodood.com/uploads/1/2/3/9/12392325/moderate\\_secularism\\_and\\_multiculturalism.pdf](http://www.tariqmodood.com/uploads/1/2/3/9/12392325/moderate_secularism_and_multiculturalism.pdf) . For the debate on French secularism and “French exceptionalism” read, for instance, Maurice Barbier’s

Besides, the size of the Muslim population in the country, France, should be taken into account. It is estimated to be around five-six millions, the highest in Europe, after Russia, and most of it is composed of Muslims of North African descent, that is, mostly Arabs and Berber that are also Arabic speaking. This means that there are strong ties and affinity between Muslims of France and Muslims in good parts of the Arab world. More importantly, this fact may have impacted the development of a serious debate in France, and all around Western Europe, in the early years of WWII and the immigrants arrival to the Continent as guest workers. The latter were not thinking of settling down once and for all in Europe, nor were the plans of the receiving countries to receive them once and for all. So, culturally and religiously, the immigrants stayed closely in touch with their countries of origin and did not think profoundly of adjusting their religious beliefs to the new context. Seeing that France in this case was the country that received most of the Arab guest workers means that the North African-Middle Eastern conception and practice of religion was also received with them, unlike Germany which received mostly Turks, and the UK which received guest workers dominantly from Asia. This explains, besides the French internal strong secular metabolism, the involvement of French Muslims now in reading their Islamic tradition in light of their French secular-liberal ideals – which Western Europe also shares.

These factors noted, the debate in France then does not seem to concern France alone, but also impacts the other secular-liberal countries, and the Arab world as well; this makes the French debate theoretically at least “exportable” and intellectually “consumerable.” Even Tibi’s notion of Euro-Islam first came out in a conference in The Institute of the Arab World (*L’institut du monde arabe*) in Paris in 1992.<sup>73</sup> Despite his German long sojourn, which has given him a picture of the problems Muslims and Islam face in Europe, he is more 'laïc' in his approach. Ramadan is Swiss, and it is from within

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article, which was translated into a number of languages, “Towards a Definition of French Secularism,” *Le Débat* n. 134, March-April 2005, available at: <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/0205-Barbier-GB.pdf> ; on the same issue, read the interesting thoughts of Talal Assad, “Trying to Understand French Secularism,” in Hent de Vries, ed. *Political Theologies* (New York: Fordham UP, 2006). The chapter is also available online at: <http://www.iasc-culture.org/THR/archives/AfterSecularization/8.12IASad.pdf>

<sup>73</sup> BassamTibi, “Les conditions d’un ‘euro-islam’ [“The Conditions of a ‘Euro-Islam’”], in Robert Bistolfi and Francois Zabbal eds., *Islams d’Europe: integration ou insertion communautaire? [Islams of Europe: Integration or Communitarian Insertion?]* (Paris: L’Aube, 1995) 230–4.

the French debate that his ideas and some of his controversies, flourished; the same applies to Oubrou and Bidar. Despite this heavy presence of the French contextual influence, all these scholars have become more transnational and international, for the debate is not only French at the end.

### **Research Methodology: Content Analysis Textual Method**

With these methodological notes on the scholars, I now speak of the approach implemented in reading their texts. According to Chad Nelsen and Robert Woods, Jr. content analysis approach is more common in religious studies, since it targets decoding meanings, more than linguistic structures that discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis target. Nelsen and Woods argue that content analysis is first and foremost used to describe and explain characteristics of messages embedded in texts. This goes through a systematic summary of the texts examined so as to provide valuable historical and cultural insights into the subject dealt with. The analyst decodes the text, generates content categories or structure, according to the aim he has framed in mind, and tries to reach to “latent content,” beyond the “manifest content” of the text.

Content analysis method of reading texts takes into account the various internal and external factors that contribute to the interpretation of a text or multiple texts. It recognizes the epistemological basis upon which the research and the results stand. Principally, it recognizes that the search for meaning/ content in a text is not only discovered in the process but is also constructed for two main reasons. First, as the analyst/ reader starts a project of interpretation and reading, he often already has aims in mind, which influence, minimally if not maximally, the outcome or the way he/ she constructs it. This is so since reading a text is necessarily linked to external reasons, past or futurist, hidden or experienced, etc. Simply put, the context influences the production of the texts, their readers/ interpreters, and the outcome, since the audience perceptions, and the effects of interpretation are also generally taken into account by either the text

itself or the interpreter or both.<sup>74</sup> For content analysis then, as I see it, there is an epistemological reservation stated at the beginning of any intellectual project that attempts producing knowledge. My choice of this textual methodology matches the historical review as well as the selection criteria and the notes made researching Islam and/in Europe.

As to the functions of content/ textual analysis, which work as a structure for work, they could be summarized as follows. They target 1) identifying developments and changes in a particular phenomenon or research area (This corresponds to Parts I, II, and III, besides this introduction; 2) finding commonalities and differences between the texts analyzed, as well as the texts related to this phenomenon or subject, and comparing the results with standard classical texts of the subject studied (This corresponds to Part IV, Section 1); and 3) referring to other variables of the same or related phenomenon in another or same context for evaluation and judgment (This corresponds to Part IV, Section 2).<sup>75</sup> This methodological structure of textual analysis is followed in this work, as shown above, and will be further outlined below.

The texts of the four scholars are read *text-by-text* and not *point-by-point* for two reasons. One, in this initial phase, point-by-point comparative analysis does not serve the aim of comprehending the way the projects on European Islam have developed, on what basis and for what purposes. It simply misses the context. Second, on the other hand, text-by-text analysis provides the background, achievements, challenges, as well as the horizons each text opens up to the studied subject.

However, not all the texts studied here are considered for *substantial use*. Tibi's project of Euro-Islam ends up being considered for *instrumental use*, while the three other projects remain substantial. It is the methodological apparatus adopted here that reads him so. That is, Tibi paves political grounds for the theological debate that takes more space in this work, especially with reference to Taha Abdurrahmane's framework (to be further explained below). Tibi is used instrumentally because his project ends in

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<sup>74</sup> Chad Nelsen and Robert Woods, Jr. "Content Analysis," in Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011) 112.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 109-119.

what I refer to as “Euro-modernity,” and does not attempt theological justifications of his idea. As I will explain in due course, though he calls for the revival of Islamic classical rational heritage, he does not present the argument in more theological terms to support his political claims of Euro-Islam, according to Abdurrahmane’s framework. Though a pioneering voice of Euro-Islam, and after comparisons with the other studied scholars following the established methodological framework, Tibi’s project appears less innovative. As to Ramadan and Oubrou, they are substantially used because they make heavy reference to the Islamic sources in light of the European context. Their approaches stand in between Tibi’s and Bidar’s. Concerning the latter, also substantially used, he presents solid grounds for his approach by means of the way he reads the Quran and modernity, which makes him the most innovative among the comparisons the adopted analytical framework attempts to establish in this study.

### **Content Outline: Three Stages for Understanding “This” European Islam**

The content of this dissertation is methodologically divided into three *stages*, and technically into four *parts*. Following the broad functionality of content analysis, I have divided this work into three stages: 1) descriptive, 2) comparative, and 3) evaluative. The first stage takes more space in this work. The first three parts of this work are descriptive of four different projects on European Islam. The three parts are descriptive, but not just so. There is a substantial component of contextual and textual analysis already in this part of work. The comparative and evaluative stages are both condensed in the fourth part. The comparative stage takes the first section of the fourth part, and it is where I build a link between European Islam as examined here and parts of the Islamic tradition, past and present. The second section of the fourth part, the evaluative and most analytical stage, adopts two frameworks, one theological, and “Islamic,” based on Taha Abdurrahmane’s *The Spirit of Modernity* (2006), and the other political, and “Western,” based on John Rawls *Political Liberalism* (1996).<sup>76</sup> More on each of these parts follows below.

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<sup>76</sup> I reiterate the note that the labels “Islamic” and “Western” correspond to the background and philosophies of the scholars referred to, Abdurrahmane and Rawls. Both clearly claim that their references are Islamic and Western histories and philosophies, respectively. They also claim that they are open, and able to be inclusive of difference, which is why I have found them relevant to my study. Their claims as

## **The Descriptive Stage: Four Projects on European Islam**

The descriptive stage – which corresponds to Parts I, II and III - aims at catering for the following considerations. Initially, the intellectual biography and the way the scholar has entered the debate and shaped his thoughts on the issue are traced. This is followed by underlining his views on the Islamic accumulated tradition, and the way he considers it in the European context; his considerations of the major sources of the Islamic tradition (Quran, Sunna, and Islamic schools of thought when applicable) are underpinned; if a change in his considerations of the tradition transpires, it is noted with reasons; then this is ended by his conception of European Islam and the way he conceives of it to take place. This is done with each scholar, with details. At times, if the literature is less on a particular scholar, this is then done briefly, as is the case with Oubrou, while if the scholar is prolific, and has gone through a particular intellectual journey and development, then this is emphasized and thus more space is given to it; this is more so with Ramadan. Each part on these scholars is sporadically filled in with my own remarks. The structure followed in reading their texts is mine, and it broadly follows the textual analysis method described above.

The first part is devoted to Tibi and his political justifications for Euro-Islam. Tibi is Syrian-German (he has lived and worked in Germany for about 44 years. He is a political scientist, expert in international relations (IR), religious fundamentalism, and the Middle East; he is an advocate of introducing religion as a branch of study in IR. He is the first scholar to use the term “Euro-Islam” in a conference in Paris in 1992. Tibi is selected as an advocate of Euro-Islam particularly from a political perspective in which security and the securitization of Islam have played a pivotal role in influencing the public and intellectual debate over Islam and its necessity for reform in Europe. Besides the earlier five criteria of selection, the choice of Tibi for this fourfold circle of scholars stems from the fact that his project is pioneering in calling for “Euro-Islam,” and is very much politically driven. That is, his reform agenda that ends in Euro-Islam answers so much the political needs than the theological in-depths or justifications. But since

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well as their relevance will be made clearer, and simultaneously indirectly examined, as their frameworks are both explained in isolation, and subsequently applied to the European Islam texts examined here.

theological changes are most often pushed by socio-political factors, Tibi's voice remains important in the field. His ideas, at the end, are defended by the three other scholars, too, but the way they do that is significantly different. At a certain evaluative stage in this work, Tibi's approach is put aside and referred to as immersed in what I refer to as "classical dichotomous thought," following my deductions based on Abdurrahmane's analytical framework.

Ramadan fills in the gap Tibi leaves "unfilled" on what concerns the theological input for European Islam. Ramadan, a Swiss of Egyptian origins (the grandson of Hassan al-Bana, the founder of the Muslim Brothers) has pursued a literary-philosophic education in his early university studies, before he moved to work on Islamic jurisprudence, which has become his major field of expertise, and based on that he calls for "radical reform." He is a prolific writer, engaged scholar, worldwide lecturer, and public intellectual. He is an icon for European Islam, and for the European Muslim youth. Among the four scholars, Ramadan is a prominent "political/ public theologian." This is so since his reading of the Islamic sources in Europe comes as an engagement in the political/ public debate over the compatibility of Islam with secular and liberal values of Europe, and the West in general.

Ramadan tries to find a midway where politics and theology work together for social justice political stability, based on ethics that both need. More particularly, he makes Islam accommodative of the political context where it grows, and vice versa. He uses his theological knowledge in light of the human socio-political developments achieved in Europe. His theology is political in the sense that it keeps itself abreast of human developments, without breaking with the divine. At the same time, his political attitudes are theological, in the sense that they find their justifications, and at times refutations, in the theological. Saliently, and clearly, he has gradually changed his theologico-political attitudes from antagonism (as will be shown in Part II) into a more harmonious outlook that opens doors of reconciliation between the two within his "radical reform agenda" that stresses ethics and considers the Universe another Book of Revelation, equal to the written Book of Revelation, the Quran. Oubrou is close to this framework.

Oubrou was born in Moroccan. He has been living in France for the last three decades. He is director of the Bordeaux Mosque, and ex-president of the Association of the Imams of France. After he had left biology and medicine studies, he pursued religious studies, and has become a self-made theologian, and public intellectual, besides his profession as an *imam*. Though Oubrou also gives ample space to answer some of the recurrent political challenges posed on Islamic theology, he, more than that, tries steps further by digging into theological matters of faith, like the attributes of God on which he is producing ten volumes, the Day of Judgment and free will. Oubrou's attempt tries to go beyond the political constraints, though they are the push factors behind such religious revisions. His philosophy of religion tries to reground Islamic faith in a secular world where man's anthropological life is different from the classical religious life that experienced the first manifestations of Sharia during the Prophetic era. He proposes the secularization of Islamic thought through geotheology, and Sharia of the minority apparatuses.

Bidar, a young French philosopher, fills in the fourth piece that closes the circle made for this study. Immersed in Western philosophy, Bidar opens out theosophically to the Islamic tradition. Most importantly in his contribution to European Islam are his concepts of Self Islam, Islamic existentialism, the immortality of man, and the overcoming of religion. Owing to his philosophical background, Bidar's approach stands among the most innovative and challenging in the emerging European Islamic thought. His approach merges the Sufi tradition and the philosophic one, and implicitly answers some of the political controversial questions about religion in the public sphere in light of modernity three principles – liberty, equality, and fraternity – which he sacralises.

### **The Comparative Stage: Developing Benchmarks for Conceptualizing the Idea of European Islam**

In this cognitive stage – which corresponds to Section 1, Part IV - I go into the second methodological step of my work, which is referred to as the “comparative stage.” This stage aims at answering the following question: What is new in European Islam? The answer is a statement of threefold: European Islam (1) “rationalizes ethics,” and in so

doing it is (2-3) “revisionist-reformist,” or “traditional-modern.” Nonetheless, this is not yet the place where I provide my analytical answer to the question. This comparative stage precedes my analysis (which comes in Section 2, Part IV) because the answer I provide cannot be understood without being familiar with the classical and contemporary scholarship contributions to Islamic thought and theology in particular. “Newness” in European Islam cannot be first raised as an issue, and second cannot be detected, if revisiting the classical contributions as well as the contemporary debate are not examined even briefly. To avoid any short-sighted conceptualization of European Islam, I revisit three scholarly traditions in Islamic thought: 1) the medieval Mu‘tazila, 2) the “early reformists,” known as modernists, of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and 3) the “late reformists” or contemporaries.

The Mu‘tazila, the rationalists of Islamic theology (kalam), make the first generation in Islamic scholarship that I refer to in tracing continuity in Islamic thought, for their emphasis on the ability of human reason to objectively differentiate between the right and wrong in ethical values. For some of them, revelation is but a promulgation of what reason achieves. My reference to this rational heritage is for two methodological reasons. First, this reference shows that the questions of ethics and reason are old in Islamic thought, and revisiting them show that the debate in contemporary Islamic thought in general is serious and intense; it resembles in its intensity the kalam early debates. Second, this reference is a theological justification that European Islam is not uprooted from the tradition and is consequently not a simple mimicry of Euro-modernity, though the latter’s degree of influence is certainly high (I argue for that in length in Section 2a, Part IV). This noted, I claim that the Mu‘tazila heritage is not what European Islam wants to bring back; rather, it is a rational tradition that it builds on, though it often hardly refers to it directly.

In this comparative stage I also refer to the second and third generations of scholarship in Islamic thought which I see European Islam building on. The second generation is that of the “modernists” of the Arab-Islamic Renaissance that I call “early reformists.” This generation is marked by some distinguished reformists who emphasize the role of reason in reviving the tradition, but remain limited in their scope of revival by

the Sharia classical prescriptions. I refer to Jalal Eddine al-Afghani, Mohamed Abduh, and Rachid Rida. The third generation I refer to with emphasis in Islamic scholarship is the contemporary one, which I call “late reformists.”<sup>77</sup> I tentatively classify the late reformists I refer to into three main categories: 1) “hermeneutists,” or “ethicists-textualists” (exemplified by the work of Fazlur Rahman, Mohamed Arkoun, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and Hassan Hanafi), 2) “egalitarianists-legalists” (Fatema Mernissi and Amina Wadud, and Abdullahi Ahmed An’aim), and 3) “neo-rationalists” (Mohamed Abed Aljabri and Abdulkarim Soroush). More on this classification will be said in due time.<sup>78</sup> Not to go into details here, they, however, all claim not to deny the divine in their reform projects. They all emphasize the place of human agency and reason. They give ethics the primal place among the classical Islamic sciences and branches of approaching and studying texts. European Islam emerges in this context, with these scholarly generations that precedes it. European Islam’s claims of defending human agency, the faculty of reason, and endorsement of modernity values in light of religious ethics, without denial of the divine, are the aspects that make it revisionist or traditional, and thus continuous of previous reforms in Islamic scholarship.

### **The Evaluative Stage: Is European Islam a “Reasonable Comprehensive Doctrine”?**

This is the most critical stage in my work. It corresponds to Section 2, Part IV. It uses all the material introduced in the previous two stages. It is here that I conceptualize the idea of European Islam, and evaluate it based on the two frameworks of Aburrahmane and Rawls, one mainly theological and the other political - or one “Islamic” and the other “Western” to use the dichotomy with reservations - respectively. Ultimately, this stage revolves around the third supportive question of this project: is European Islam a “reasonable comprehensive doctrine?” According to frameworks followed, the answer is “yes, it is,” which qualifies this project to answer the guiding question also positively: “is

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<sup>77</sup> I note some major differences between the two in Section 1c, Part IV.

<sup>78</sup> The main reason behind this tentative classification is methodological. It groups the scholars referred to in terms of the content of their approaches. Their closeness then is content-based. See more on this in Section 1d, Part IV.

European Islam possible?” “Yes, it is.” Now, I introduce the two frameworks I use for my evaluation.

### **Why Using Abdurrahmane’s Spirit of Modernity in Understanding European Islam?<sup>79</sup>**

My aim is to study the main theoretical advances European Islam makes. Thus, for example, in my conceptualization of European Islam I do not use the “five pillars” of late modernity as conceived by the American theologian Harvey Cox in his widely read *Religion in the Secular City: toward a Postmodern Theology* (1985).<sup>80</sup> Nor do I use the “five dilemmas” of modernity as formed by the sociologist of religion Peter Berger in his classic *Facing Up to Modernity: Excursions in Society, Politics, and Religion* (1979).<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> I mean the idea of the book when I use the title in an un-italicized form.

<sup>80</sup> See Harvey Cox, *Religion in the Secular City: Toward a Postmodern Theology* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984). Cox, briefly, advances five pillars of modernity late manifestations. One is the emergence of sovereign national states as independent political entities. With that goes the democratic chain of the rule of law, individual human rights, equality, constitutionalisation, etc. Two, technology based on science has become a primal source of modern life and the opening up of its other possible ways of living it. Three, modern life needs order and good management of its affairs. Bureaucratic rationalism is the key for that. Institutions become the channel of managing modern affairs, and this has its costs on the individual (i.e. feelings of alienation), as Berger also puts it clearly when speaking of the dilemmas of modernity. Four, the quest for profit maximization becomes the way out for distributing as well as reproducing of goods and services. Both socialism and capitalism share this aspect. Five, secularization and trivialization of religion culminate the picture of modern life. Religion and its institutions are weakened, and in the best shapes used for secular purposes (Cox, 183). In “The Secular City after 25 Years” Cox sees no escape from secularism in the modern world, despite the risks it holds within it. Among the reasons that has enhanced the prevalence of secularism is Christian theology which makes the other world the focus of man, and this worldly matters are neglected. Cox, “The Secular City after 25 Years,” *The Christian Century*, November 7, 1990, 1025-1029, available online at <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=206>

I see a lot of similarities between Cox’s approach of Christian theology and that of, for example, Hassan Hanafi in the Islamic world, and Abdennour Bidar, who is studied here, in Europe.

<sup>81</sup> Peter Berger, *Facing Up to Modernity: Excursions in Society, Politics, and Religion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979) 71-79. The five key dilemmas of modernity, which are also its elements, that Berger offers are briefly as follows: 1) abstraction (the abstraction of society is that process of institutionalization that characterizes the modern society through the capitalist market, the bureaucratic state, technologized economy, high level of urbanization and the media of mass communication; these factors cause “homelessness” of the individual), 2) futurity (the modern man becomes a “career” in the making, lives the present but his aspirations are in the future), 3) individuation (it is the status of separating the individual from any religious, tribal, or ethnic belonging; the individual now belongs to the productive city and society that thinks of the future, profitability, and entertainment), 4) liberation (here the individual is convinced of his right as well as ability to choose a new life, a different life, mostly in contradistinction with that the one he lived traditionally; fate and social order are challenged; gradually both individual and collective life become uncertain; fear of chaos emerges and becomes scary), and 5) secularization (it is seen to have grown to be antagonistic to the dimension of transcendence in the human condition). Berger, 71-79.

Instead, as a benchmark for my critique of each of the studied scholars, I use Taha Abdurrahman’s critique of the “modernist” Quranic approaches, which he deals with in *The Spirit of Modernity: an Introduction to Founding Islamic Modernity* (2006).<sup>82</sup> Abdurrahmane’s critique is directed to some “reformist/ modernist” scholars of Islam in the Muslim majority countries, like Mohamed Arkoun, Hassan Hanafi, and Nasr Hamed Abu Zayd – I study these scholars’ main arguments for reform in this work, in the comparative stage (Section 1, Part IV). Broadly, Abdurrahmane does not consider their approaches to be originating from within the Islamic tradition. That is why he has devoted his project to re-ground Islamic theology-philosophy on its own traditional sources, using his methodological tools of logic and linguistics to generate Quranic concepts that solidify the Islamic worldview of ethics. Abdurrahmane develops a unique approach to reason and ethics and the way religion fuses them both in works like *The Question of Ethics: a Contribution to Ethical Criticism of Western Modernity* (2000), *The Spirit of Religion* (2012) and *The Question of Practice* (2012).<sup>83</sup> This is a critical stage in my work. I allow myself lengthy space below to introduce my project more clearly.

Abdurrahmane’s three main points of criticism of modernist Quranic studies that I use are considered in his terminology as “plans” or “strategies” (*khuṭaṭ*) that target desacralizing the sacred. For him, they are “mimetic” plans, borrowed from European history without a genuine study of the Islamic different history and its harmonious

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<sup>82</sup> Taha Abdurrahmane (b. 1936, Morocco) is considered as one of the leading contemporary philosophers in the Islamic world. He has been developing his own project of renewing Islamic philosophy from the 1970s. He is not read yet in the West. Taha Abdurrahmane, *rūḥu al-ḥadātha: nahwa al-ta’sis li ḥadātha islāmīyya* [*The Spirit of Modernity: An Introduction to Founding an Islamic Modernity*] (Casablanca and Beirut: al markaz athaqāfi al’arabī, 2006). His critique of the modern Quranic studies are summarized in Book Two, Chapter Four, “Modern Study of the Quran and Incessant Creativity,” in the same work, 175-207.

<sup>83</sup> Abdurrahmane, *su’ālu al-akhlāq: musāhamatun fi an-naqd al-akhlāqī liḥadātha al-gharbiyya* [*The Question of Ethics: a Contribution to Ethical Criticism of Western Modernity*] (2000), *rūḥu addīn* [*The Spirit of Religion*] (Casablanca and Beirut: al markaz athaqāfi al’arabī, 2012), and *rūḥu al-’āmmal* [*The Question of Practice*] (Casablanca and Beirut: al markaz athaqāfi al’arabī, 2012). Abdurrahmane has also theorized for an Islamic and Arab philosophy in works like: *al-ḥaq al-’arabī fi al-ikhtilāf al-falsafi* [*The Arabic Right to Philosophical Difference*] (Casablanca and Beirut: al markaz athaqāfi al’arabī, 2002), and *al-ḥaq al-islami fi al-ikhtilāf al-fikrī* [*The Islamic Right to Intellectual Difference*] (Casablanca and Beirut: al markaz athaqāfi al’arabī, 2005). In these works he argues against what he sees as the hegemonic Eurocentrist philosophy that argues for the universalism of its achievements, which are historical and local, while it deprives other cultures and civilizations of thinking for themselves. Western philosophy, for him, has developed into a form of paternalism that denies what he refers to as “multiple modernities.” In my shortened citations to his titles/ works, I use the English translations, which are mine, for ease of reference.

approach of religion and politics through man's ontological freedom entrusted to him in the metaphysical world on his creation, as well as on his descent to earth.<sup>84</sup> These "mimetic plans" are the "humanization plan," the "rationalization plan," and the "historicization plan."<sup>85</sup>

Against their "mimetic" and de-divinization aspects, Abdurrahmane proposes "innovative/creative" outlook of the Quran and the tradition, for there is "no entrance to modernity for Muslims without a new reading of the Quran."<sup>86</sup> For him, unlike the European "innovation" (modernity) which came as a result of conflict with religion, and is thus labeled "discontinuous innovation" (*ibdā' mafsul*), since it cut ties with the divine, he proposes "continuous innovation" (*ibdā' mawsul*), for there has not been a strong conflict with religion in Islamic history.<sup>87</sup> Abdurrahmane is not against the "humanization, rationalization, and historicization" approaches of the sacred texts, but is against degrading to the extent of forcing oblivion of the divine. That is one of the main reasons why his critique is relevant to my reading of European Islam. The latter differently adopts such approaches and plans but equally calls for an innovative way of preserving the sacred, humanizing the divine without massacring God. For such a goal Abdurrahmane proposes "innovative humanization plan," "innovative rationalization plan," and "innovative historicization plan."

These three benchmarks for "continuous innovation" (*ibdā' mawsul*) correspond to three concepts that I infer from my reading of European Islam (They are detailed in Section 2a-b, Part IV). Summarizingly here, Abdurrahmane's 1) "innovative humanization" corresponds to the "inheritance of the universe" as deduced from European Islam; 2) "innovative rationalization" corresponds to "ethical rationalization" or "rational faith"; and 3) "innovative historicization" corresponds to "practical fiqh" or "fiqhology." Each of these three concepts, in turn, takes as its praxis one of the following axes, respectively: the world, society, and the individual. There is no need to note again

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<sup>84</sup> Abdurrahmane, *The Spirit of Religion*, 449.

<sup>85</sup> Abdurrahmane, *The Spirit of Modernity*, 175-207. I explain these terms and use them as a framework in analysing European Islam texts in Sections 2a-b-c, Part IV.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

that this conceptualization builds on the studied texts; for their full development, these concepts need more space than devoted to them in this introduction. My inferences aspire to ultimately understand European Islam as a “reasonable comprehensive doctrine” within particular frameworks, “Islamic” and “Western,” religious/ theological and political. As I will try to show below, the final framework to be used is John Rawls’s overlapping consensus for the stability of pluralist constitutional liberal democracies. I go back to clarifying my three inferred concepts ( 1) “inheritance of the universe,” 2) “ethical rationalization,” and 3) “practical fiqh” or “fiqhology.”)<sup>88</sup>

First, for the inheritance of the world, the universe, earth in focus, is considered as a Book, like the revealed book of the Quran, and so it can be interpreted differently, as is the Quran, and most importantly, it is a given, a gift, from God to His heir, man; it is an inheritance; man is given nearly infinite powers to invest in it, using the attributes of goodness, justice, and mercy that he has inherited from the soul of God. This means that the universe is part of the sacred, and not outside of it. If man is the heir, an eternal Caliph, and there is no other revelation to be expected –always according to Islamic perspectives – then God has sacralized everything, man and the universe, and each deserves contemplation and respect as part of the divine, besides the guiding book of the Quran. Islam becomes a “Sharia,” a way of being in the world, and not a mere law. The sacredness of the world is maintained through man’s “trust” (amāna) and “spiritual responsibility.” (Ramadan, Oubrou, and Bidar emphasize the same idea, differently. See the part dealing with each scholar.) For example, modernity itself is part of the sacred, because both the universe and man are sacred entities, and so is modernity which is a philosophy that links the two as a worldview. However, when some of the consequences of modernity are measured, and their consequences do not serve the ethical message of religion, then only that particular aspect of modernity is not sacred (This is mainly Bidar’s view).

Second, ethical rationalization builds on the inheritance of the world. The individual is its center. If the world is man’s, then he has but to use his reasoning faculty

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<sup>88</sup> I drop the inverted commas of the various used concepts as I proceed. When they are put in inverted commas again later on, that means an emphasis.

to live in it ethically and to unfathom its mysteries as a second Book of revelation. (Ramadan, Oubrou and Bidar are very close on considering the world a Book). The rational way of doing so is to constantly seek the “good” that human reason can realize, and which revelation general ethical guidelines approve. Rationalization here does not belittle metaphysical aspects of religion. Rather, they are another field of study, for more thinking. Intuition is not neglected. The individual is free, and is burdened with responsibility. His deeds, very rational as they may be, are challenged with moral responsibility that requires a minimum of consistency, so that rationalism and autonomy do not lead to bigotry and whimsical adventures that dehumanize man. With ethical rationalism, the individual believer practices “Self Islam” with immense awareness of the energy he is allowed to discover within himself to exercise it in the world, ethically, and responsibly. Ethics and practice, faith and work, are not fields apart.

Third, by practical fiqh, or fiqhology, I mean that Islamic Sharia law is considered positive, secular, and for this inherited world, where man is the Caliph. This concept centralizes society and its well-being. The classical distinction the Mu‘tazila, for example, made between moral theology and positive law is being stressed by European Islam. Sharia law, with some of its strict, and controversial sanctions like the penal code (the *huddud*), are examined in their historical context; the conditions of their applicability are measured in light of the message of Islam, which is internal peace (Tibi’s Islam of tolerance, and Bidar’s Self Islam are examples) and social justice (mainly Ramadan’s view, though shared by the other scholars, too). The market of literalist fatwas (religious legal non-binding opinions) and the emphasis on Islamic legal aspects, instead of understanding the intent and objectives of the Lawgiver confuse the modern Muslim believer who wants to keep his faith and at the same time live in a constitutional democracy that respects basic human rights and equality of genders and people. The classical distinction between legal theories (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and positive law (fiqh) are invoked so as not to separate the two (i.e. the spheres of laws that the religious doctrine dictates and the ones the state implements), but so as to fuse them as much as possible (Oubrou’s Sharia of the minority is an example). With European Islam, fiqhology becomes more pluralist in the sense that it recognizes its limitations in the political arena,

and admits its epistemological modesty. That is, it arrives to the fact that religious law, if it does not metamorphose itself according to its believers needs, loses parts of its “comprehensiveness” and is consequently obliged to admit both inter-and-intra-diversity. Overall, the three concepts intertwine in giving the individual theological justifications to lead a good life. These are conclusions derived from the methodological framework outlined earlier.

### **Why Using Rawls’ Political Liberalism in Understanding European Islam?**

By now it should be clear that this project is still struggling with its leading question: is European Islam possible? What has been examined until now is mostly theological. Having conceptualized the idea of European Islam, following a clear methodological line, I now have to make a “founded assumption” so that the passage from “Islamic theology” to “Western liberal politics” stands feasible and tenable. The assumption goes as follows: European Islam is a comprehensive theory of the good.

Having assumed that European Islamic theory of the good is comprehensive, in light of what has been advanced until now, after having described its selected voices, and compared it to others from within the Islamic tradition, now is the stage to evaluate it, by opening it up further to a “Western” political framework that claims to be embrative of reasonable pluralism. In my assumption, a theory of the good has to face at least two main challenges to pass the test of evaluation, considering the multicultural aspects that colour liberal societies in Europe: 1) How far is the theory able to preserve the good it theorizes when society is multicultural, and other theories of the good are bound to push for space in the same society? 2) How far is the theory able to prove that it is good if it does not prove that it can also be right, and thus open to be endorsed by others who might have ignored or distrusted it in the past, or never heard of it before?

These two assumed challenges are actually more theoretically argued for by John Rawls’ two, say, “complementary”<sup>89</sup> worldwide influential works, *A Theory of Justice*

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<sup>89</sup> I am aware of the fact that there is a debate over the shift of Rawls’ work from the first to the second book. I do not get into that debate here. On this point, see, for instance, Sebastiano Maffetone, *Rawls: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).

(*Theory* in short, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1971, rev. ed. 1999), and *Political Liberalism* (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1993, 1996). Very briefly and simplistically put here, in the first work he theorizes the way for a just society, and in the second he defends it further for the sake of its stability in a world characterized by pluralism and different theories of the good, be they religious, philosophical, or moral. In introducing *Political Liberalism*, he says that his work has been driven by the following question, which, I believe, every ordinary human society wishes to have an answer to:

How is it possible that there may exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable though incompatible religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines? Put another way: How is it possible that deeply opposed though reasonable comprehensive doctrines may live together and all affirm the political conception of a constitutional regime? What is the structure and content of a political conception that can gain the support of such an overlapping consensus?<sup>90</sup>

The framed questions above answer the reason behind my use of Rawls's "idea of overlapping consensus," developed as one of the pillar ideas of *Political Liberalism*.<sup>91</sup> The idea of European Islam will be examined in light of the framework of "overlapping consensus" that aims at finding moral grounds for political stability in a "well-ordered-society." Case studies like sexual liberty, gender equality, worship rituals, and jihad will be referred to. The integration of overlapping consensus as an evaluative framework of the idea of European Islam makes the last sub-section of Part IV, which closes this work. It stands as an "attempt" in this research project, compared to the substantial use of Abdurrahmane's framework.

In clearer terms, what this project seeks behind the use of overlapping consensus framework is to understand how European Islam offers an internally pluralist theological

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<sup>90</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xx

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-172. Rawls already spoke of overlapping consensus in 1987 as an article/ lecture, before *Political Liberalism* was published, and in the article he says that it aims at defending "reasonable faith" and "stability for the right reasons," meaning "justice as fairness." I mostly stick to *Political Liberalism* as the main reference on Rawls; I refer to *Theory*, Overlapping Consensus version of 1987, and The Idea of Public Reason Revisited of 1997 only when they contain an elaboration that is not available in *Political Liberalism*. It is not my aim to go through the intellectual history of Rawls, nor through his critique. See: *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999); "The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* (1987) 7(1): 1-25; "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," *The University of Chicago Law Review*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (Summer, 1997) 765-807.

doctrine out of which a reasonable European Muslim believer may successfully reconcile his normative commitments to European Islam as a comprehensive theory of the good with his political commitments to the liberal constitutional society in which he lives. This fundamental idea is derived from the previous descriptive, comparative, and evaluative stages. It is what the reformist aspects of European Islam revolve around. I do not go into details in introducing the major concepts that go with Rawls' overlapping consensus here. That is done amply enough in the text in due space. I suffice myself now with defining overlapping consensus and some basic terms that are essential for its realization.

An overlapping consensus is the answer to the above crucial question of how it is possible to establish and preserve unity and stability given the pluralism that characterizes current societies. It searches for "stability for the right reasons." It is realized when a number of reasonable comprehensive doctrines consent to a set of "political" principles – referred to in his work by "justice as fairness" - and support these principles on moral grounds, each from its own comprehensive background. The groups in an overlapping consensus use their respective reasonable comprehensive doctrines only in order to justify a given set of principles; they do not have to use their doctrines to shape the principles. This is mainly done through three stages of justification (*pro-tanto*, full, and public justification). An overlapping consensus targets stability, and not mere political agreements that may be aborted by a group or many in cases of power shifts. The main principles agreed upon are supposed never to be overthrown or changed by one group that is in power.

Overlapping consensus is different from *modus vivendi* which is an agreement on certain principles, but which are vulnerable to change when the balance of power among the concerned groups changes to the advantage of one or some, against the others. Overlapping consensus, though difficult to realize as it may seem compared with *modus vivendi*, is a "realistic utopia."<sup>92</sup> It is so since it supposes a profound agreement on the "basic structure of society" as a "fair system of cooperation" among "reasonable" and

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<sup>92</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 158

“rational,” free and equal citizens.<sup>93</sup> Such a conception of overlapping consensus, to be explained further in Part IV, allows religious, philosophic, and moral “reasonable comprehensive doctrines” to keep their belief in the truth of their doctrine, on metaphysical or other grounds, as long as they can come to the “political” with justifications from their own beliefs, to the extent that the political becomes part of their doctrine. Rawls sees most influential religions in the world as “reasonable comprehensive doctrines.”<sup>94</sup> Being reasonable means endorsing the idea of “reciprocity” in admitting fair terms of cooperation in a society of free and equal citizens, whereby these terms are willingly accepted, without priority to self-interest, since all participants agree to them and respect them reciprocally. Reasonableness targets groups interests, a form of prioritizing the common good. A reasonable person accepts the “burdens of judgment,” (i.e. “the sources, or causes, or disagreements between reasonable persons,”<sup>95</sup> and consequently recognizes the reasonableness of other comprehensive doctrines. “Reasonable pluralism” grows out of this circle of argumentation. It is different from “mere pluralism.” Reasonable pluralism admits reasonable and yet incompatible comprehensive doctrines; it is a space for diversity of doctrines to be united under one just political system that *Political Liberalism* in general proposes. That is, it “does not attack or criticize any reasonable view.”<sup>96</sup> *Political Liberalism* does not advocate any system of truth or good. What it advocates is the “political” stability of a “fair system of cooperation.”<sup>97</sup> I stop referring to more Rawlsian concepts here and the details of overlapping consensus. What I do next is that I justify my selection of this framework.

Three main reasons stand behind my selection of Rawls’ overlapping consensus as an evaluative framework of the idea of European Islam.<sup>98</sup> The first reason is that

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 149

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 170

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 55

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., xix

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 15-22

<sup>98</sup> By evaluation I simply mean measuring how the latter can be successful in a constitutionally well ordered liberal society from the lenses of liberal political theory. I could have used other frameworks to evaluate European Islam from (Western) political theory perspectives. Prominent projects relevant to the idea of European Islam could have been used here, like Will Kymlicka’s liberal multiculturalism, Charles Taylor’s philosophy of religion and revision of secularism, Chandran Kukathas’ critique of Kymlicka, or Phiku Pareth’s rethinking of multiculturalism which sees limitations in the way multiculturalism and

Rawls' *Political Liberalism* is a "revolutionary" work within the modern Western liberal political philosophy. If *Theory* tries to depart from the dominant utilitarian philosophies, his *Political Liberalism* tries to depart from the "comprehensive doctrines of liberalisms such as those of J.S. Mill and Kant," as Rawls emphasizes.<sup>99</sup> Rawls distances his political liberalism project, which is historically based on the "Reformation" era<sup>100</sup> from "Enlightenment project."<sup>101</sup> The latter seems to have aspired for a secular world, without religion, while the former reconciles religion with other nonreligious doctrines. Rawls roots his *Political Liberalism* in the Reformation, "the historical origin of political liberalism (and of liberalism more generally) is the Reformation and its aftermath,"<sup>102</sup> since it is the first base for religious and nonreligious reasonable pluralism, which *Political Liberalism* develops further.

While the comprehensive liberalisms of Kant and Mill propagate (and universalize) their version of the good, Rawls' *Political Liberalism* stands "impartial," since it does not have such an ambition – though some scholars like Bhikhu Parekh suspect it. European Islam – and other various Islamic projects in the Islamic world – is, as I see it, more open to the political liberalism of Rawls, than to classical comprehensive liberalisms that belittle or neglect the religious mindset and other versions of the good. That is so because European Islam's version of the good seems substantively

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pluralism (of especially Rawls and Kymlicka) is tied to liberalism as a by default fact of the modern age. Not to make a long argument here, I think that Rawls' political liberalism project is more convenient to my project for the main reason that European Islam does aim at securing community rights that may block reforming contemporary Islamic thought in general and Islam in Europe in particular. European Islam is reformist, and aims at fusing the political and the theological, as will be illustrated with examples, and I see Rawls' framework more accommodative of such an endeavour than the others. For the cited projects, see for example: Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991), *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995); Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining The Politics of Recognition* (Princeton UP, 1994), *A Secular Age* (Harvard UP, 2007); Kukathas, *The Liberal Archipelago: A Theory of Diversity and Freedom* (Oxford UP, 2003); Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2006); *Europe and the Muslim Question: Does Intercultural Dialogue Make Sense?* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP-ISIM, 2007)

<sup>99</sup> *Political Liberalism*, xxxvii, 78, 145, 149, 199, 200, 211, 375, 400

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* xxii

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii. This passage is illustrative: "Political liberalism is not a form of Enlightenment liberalism, that is, a comprehensive liberal and often secular doctrine founded on reason and viewed as suitable for the modern age now that the religious authority of Christian ages is said to be no longer dominant. Political liberalism has no such aims" (*Ibid.*, xxxviii).

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiv

accommodative of the political aims of *Political Liberalism*: social justice, and stability, or what could be referred to as “perpetual peace.”<sup>103</sup> The opposite seems also to match such a contention: liberalism in its Rawlsian version has opened up to the religious. This means that it does not make much sense if one studies Islam (in Europe) and projects modern/ liberal theories on it, and says “you see, Islam is compatible with liberalism!”<sup>104</sup> Liberalism’s comprehensiveness failed to find ways to the Islamic majority countries, to the extent that up to now the notion of “liberal(-ism)” does not resonate well in the ear of many believers, simply because classical liberalism tells them that what they believe in “is useless” or “is not good” – to put it in these simple terms. That is because liberalism was hegemonic in its “classical” version(s). Thus, if European Islam is accommodative of

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<sup>103</sup> These are concepts/conclusions that European Islam, as studied following Abdurrahmane’s framewok, underlines.

<sup>104</sup> A number of Muslim scholars who have studied disciplines besides, or sometimes outside, “classical Islamic sciences” argue for the need of reforming or updating the understanding of Islam. The idea of looking at Christianity and Europe, Reformation and Enlightenment, are not absent from these scholars’ reform agendas. Generally, there is a tendency to learn from the experience of Europe and Christianity without total projection, since the history of the Church differs from the history of religious authority in Islam. Titles binding Islam to Reformation and Enlightenment are numerous. For example, in the 1930s, the renowned Mohamed Iqbal wrote that Protestant reformation was an event to learn from to avoid losing the ethical message of Islam in the modern world; its political drive should not make Muslims oblivion to its ethical significance:

We are today passing through a period similar to that of the Protestant revolution in Europe, and the lesson which the rise and outcome of Luther’s movement teaches should not be lost on us. A careful reading of history shows that the Reformation was essentially a political movement, and the net result of it in Europe was a gradual displacement of the universal ethics of Christianity by systems of national ethics. The result of this tendency we have seen with our own eyes in the Great European War [...]. It is the duty of the leaders of the world of Islam to-day to understand the real meaning of what has happened in Europe, and then to move forward with self-control and a clear insight into the ultimate aims of Islam as a social polity. (Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 155)

Nader Hashemi sees in the contemporary resurging violent Islamism a way for the emergence of Islamic secularism, a form of Islamic Reformation à la Catholic-Protestant Reformation wars, Nader Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies* (New York: Oxford UP, 2009); Olivier Roy sees also in “post-Islamism” and the fundamentalist resurgence of Islam a form of Islamic Reformation, Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia UP, 2004) 5-6. Some other titles that bear the term “Reformation” and Enlightenment” include An’naim, *Towards an Islamic Reformation* (New York: Syracuse UP, 1990); Hesham A. Hassaballa, “Does Islam Need a Reformation?” 07 May 2009, available at: <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=31922> ; Hakan Yavuz, *Toward an Islamic Enlightenment: The Gulen Movement* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012); Malek Chebel, *Manifeste pour un islam des lumières: 27 propositions pour réformer l’islam [Manifesto for an Islam of Enlightenment: 27 Propositions to Reform Islam]* (Paris: Hachette, 2012); Ibrahim Kalin, “Does Islam need enlightenment?” 27 August 2009, available at: <http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist-185246-does-islam-need-enlightenment.html>;

Rawls' *Political Liberalism*, it is because the latter is also accommodative of religious doctrines like the former. This leads me to the next point.

The second reason behind opting for the Rawlsian framework is a “historical necessity.” Historical relations between “Europe” and “Islam” post-1945 seem to enter a new phase. It is not a question of dialogue among religions here. It is a historical era, characterized by multiculturalism and pluralism, fed by the immigration flows especially from the religious Islamic world to Europe. The plural landscape seems to be affecting both “Europeans” and “Muslims” alike.<sup>105</sup> It seems then that concepts like “reasonable pluralism” and “rational faith” are necessary for the sake of the preservation of social justice and stability or perpetual peace. The four studied scholars on European Islam also believe that the current historical moment requires a framework that accommodates modern values and belief.<sup>106</sup>

In introducing this work, I said that there are signs of reviving kalam (Islamic theology). The age of kalam grew up in a socio-political context of diversity characterized by a seemingly open space for freedom of conscience.<sup>107</sup> European Islam has not gone into some profound theological issues as did the early kalam theologians, but it is mostly the political context that is relevant in my comparison here. The rational advances of European Islam resemble in a number of ways the achievements of rationalist Mu‘tazila scholars that prioritized reasoning in understanding revelation instead of being bound by literary interpretations.<sup>108</sup> What I want to convey is that the

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<sup>105</sup> I am using these labels on purpose, but with high level of reservations, because they are full of historical tension, and, if critically considered, are incomparable: Europe is a geography, while Islam is a belief system. One can contain the other, and vice versa. Assuming that a geography cannot contain/accommodate a faith, or the contrary, is illogical. A European can be Muslim, and a Muslim can be European.

<sup>106</sup> Tentatively I have noted three main historical stages of relations between “Islam” and “Europe”: the medieval stage that ended in 1492, the modern stage that ranges from 1492 and 1945, and the contemporary one that started in 1945. Revise a section entitled “On Islam in Europe: *Inlandish* or *Outlandish*?” in this introduction. Abdenmour Bidar in particular defends the idea that “Islam and Europe” are entering a new historical stage of hybridization.

<sup>107</sup> These freedoms should not be expected to be identical with the modern freedoms. Centuries of age and the difference they impact on human intellect should be born in mind, otherwise one falls into methodologically serious mistakes.

<sup>108</sup> There is no need to say that I am not romanticizing the Mu‘tazila legacy. They are an example that deserves mention. They, but not all of them, were rational but not liberal in the sense the moderns use it now. They were liberals in their time, if I can say so, since they urged the use of reason in understanding

diversity of the European context has contributed fundamentally to the emergence of European Islam, a fact which resembles a past reality in Islamic history. This also brings about the Reformation era of Europe when one considers Rawls' *Political Liberalism*. The Rawlsian scholar Sebastiano Maffetone affirms this view in his study of Rawls, "In some ways, the situation in which classical liberalism was born is repeated today. As was once the case for religion, today politics is divided by bitter conflicts, sometimes not so different from the religious ones of the past."<sup>109</sup>

The third reason behind using Rawls' overlapping consensus framework is that the so-called reformist voices of Islam, and European Islam advocates in this study, have not been included in the few but remarkable works that study the Islamic tradition, with reference to Rawls' work. Until now, to my update, four scholars have published such works: Mohamed Fadel, Andrew March, Hamid Hadji Haidar, and Mehmet Favzi Bilgin.<sup>110</sup> None of them has dealt directly with what I have tried here – European Islam. Haidar studies Mill's and Rawls' liberalisms and their accommodation or not of the Shiite tradition, and arrives to the idea that "liberalism cannot lead Muslims at home."<sup>111</sup> As to what the Shiite Muslims can benefit from the liberal state, in the case of being a minority, Haidar says it is religious education which Rawlsian liberalism offers, unlike Mill's.<sup>112</sup> Bilgin, on the contrary, argues that Rawls' *Political Liberalism* is very

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revelation, which could partly be matched with the right of "freedom of conscience" as known now among the moderns. I refer to Section 1a, Part IV for more on the Mu'tazila.

<sup>109</sup> Maffetone, *Rawls*, 264

<sup>110</sup> I mean scholars who have produced texts on the issue in English. Raja Bahlul has also produced a text on the limitations of Rawls' idea of "public reason;" he suggests an "Islamic public reason" that is more accommodative of religious arguments in a conservative society. (Bahlul's "Islamic public reason" is close to An'naim's "civic reason" introduced in *Islam and the Secular State*, 2008; Raja Bahlul, "Toward an Islamic Conception of Democracy: Islam and the Notion of Public Reason," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* (Spring 2003), 12(1), 43–60)

<sup>111</sup> Hamid Hadji Haidar, *Liberalism and Islam: Practical Reconciliation between the Liberal State and Shiite Muslims* (New York and Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) 3.

<sup>112</sup> In Part III, "The Liberal State and Shiite Muslim Citizens," he says "One significant point that results from this comparative examination is that what Rawls's neutral liberal state offers to Shiite Muslims is little more than what Mill's secularist liberal state offers them. The major privilege of the list of protections, freedoms, and opportunities that the Rawlsian state provides to Shiite Muslims is the availability of religious schools with public funds to Shiite Muslim Children." Haidar, *Liberalism and Islam*, 159.

applicable in religious societies, since it gives good space to religious doctrines.<sup>113</sup> The two, Haidar and Bilgin, do not work on the Islamic minority in Europe, nor do they refer to the scholars I refer to. They work on the Islamic majority countries, with a focus on Shi‘a in the case of Haidar.<sup>114</sup>

My work is closer to what Fadel and March have probed. They have both focused on Muslim minorities in the West. While Fadel has produced various articles on the matter,<sup>115</sup> March has put that into a distinguished work that may open new horizons in comparative political theory, in addition to a number of articles on the theology of Tariq Ramadan.<sup>116</sup> The work of these two scholars has been inspiring to my work here. However, two significant reasons have encouraged me to try a new pathway that these scholars have not tried, and I consider them important and have to be recalled for a better understanding of this study-approach.

First, especially with Fadel and March who deal with Muslim minorities in the West, they do refer to the Islamic classical texts produced over the centuries until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that is, before the colonial era which influenced the intellectual contribution of

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<sup>113</sup> Bilgin says: “I mainly argue that political liberalism presents an account of political morality that should be agreeable to most citizens of faith” (p. 3). Fevzi Bilgin, “Political Liberalism and Inclusion of Religion,” *Rutgers Journal of Law and Religion* 7, 2 (2006). This view is further developed in his book, *Political Liberalism in Muslim Societies* (Oxon and New York, Routledge, 2011) 1-7. See Chapter 3 and 4.

<sup>114</sup> Meysam Badamchi has produced an interesting dissertation in which he reads Rawls’ *Political Liberalism* as applicable to Muslim majority countries, with reference to the Shi‘a tradition. Badamchi, “Political Liberalism for Muslim Majority Societies,” unpublished PhD dissertation (LUISS University of Rome, 2012).

<sup>115</sup> Mohamed Fadel, “The True, the Good and the Reasonable: The Theological and Ethical Roots of Public Reason in Islamic Law,” *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2008, 1-65, available at: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1085347> ; Fadel, “Political Liberalism, Islamic Family Law, and Family Law Pluralism: Lessons from New York on Family Law Arbitration,” *Legal Studies Research Series*, No. 09-05, 2009, 1-82, available at: [http://ssrn.com/abstract=\[1421978](http://ssrn.com/abstract=[1421978) ; Fadel, “Muslim Reformists, Female Citizenship and the Public Accommodation of Islam in a Liberal Democracy,” University of Toronto, Faculty of Law, The Social Science Research Network, 2010, available at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1727457>

<sup>116</sup> Andrew March, “Liberal Citizenship and the Search for an Overlapping Consensus: The Case of Muslim Minorities,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 34, no. 4 (2006); March, *Islam and Liberal Citizenship and the Search for Overlapping Consensus* (Oxford UP, 2009). For the articles he devotes to the theological thought of Tariq Ramadan, see: “Reading Tariq Ramadan: Political Liberalism, Islam, and “Overlapping Consensus,” *Ethics & International Affairs* 21, 4, 399–413, Winter 2007; “Law as a Vanishing Mediator in the Theological Ethics of Tariq Ramadan,” *European Journal of Political Theory* vol. 10 issue 2 (April 2011) 177-201; it is also available at New York Law School webpage at: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1478910>; “The Post-Legal Ethics of Tariq Ramadan: Persuasion and Performance in Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation,” *Middle East Law and Governance* 2 (2010) 253–273.

Muslim scholars. Fadel and March mainly argue that their choice stems from the fact that Muslim believers would not “listen” and “give credibility” to scholars who (may) seem influenced by Western education; Islam for Muslim believers seems authentic only through the classical texts, so Fadel and March follow this assumption to show that even in such a case, classical texts prove open to political liberalism and able to be morally engaged in “fair terms of cooperation,” to use Rawls’ terms, with liberal democracies. They affirm that if that is successfully illustrated, then that implicitly means that the reformist voices of Islam, which they broadly do not study but sometimes merely refer to *en passant*, are equally able to be morally engaged with political liberalism. Simply put, they say that Islam’s “predicament” has to be solved in the past; the past legacy is pluralist enough to teach the contemporary-modern Muslims. I certainly agree with them. But someone has to study the moderns as well! Here comes my second point.

The second reason behind my reference to the contemporary reformists is to give space to new voices of Islam. They may whisper new thoughts in Islamic thought, and think of the “unthought in Islamic thought” using Mohamed Arkoun’s terms.<sup>117</sup> My point is this: the search for overlapping consensus should not blind us, researchers, from thoughts that may call for “something” beyond mere moral commitment to the conception of the political in a liberal democracy. Islamic thought should not be blocked from renovating itself on various levels, and not only on the legal level which seems the focal point of the study of many. A constitutional liberal democracy is not governed just by pure political conceptions. Liberty and equality allow citizens to think beyond the political, to live the good life they envision. European Islam, which is growing up in the middle of such a world of liberty and equality then must allow a vast space of free thinking for its believers, including the ones who claim the faith but are not practicing or are practicing in their own way, as is the case with, say, Bidar’s Self Islam, or Oubrou’s Sharia of the minority.

As to saying that European Islam is not Islam, or is not like the “common”/ “orthodox” Islam, it is like saying Rawls’ *Political Liberalism* is not liberal(-ism) – some

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<sup>117</sup> Mohammed Arkoun, *The Unthought in Islamic Thought* (London: Saqi Books, 2002).

may object to such a comparison. *Political Liberalism* has grown out of – rather against – classical and comprehensive doctrine of classical Christianity and classical liberalism. European Islam, too, has grown out of – rather against – both literalist Islam and classical liberalism. If there are voices that theorize European Islam from within liberal democracies, then most possibly their theorizing is “reasonable,” and is also most likely, if not surely, to be “liberal.” Scholars of the Islamic tradition then should not obfuscate such voices. Maybe in the medium or long term, applying overlapping consensus (and public reason) on the Islamic tradition would no longer be needed, since the new reformist voices would have won the hearts of most believers! Scholars like Bhikhu Parekh, from “conjuncture” perspective, may then say “That is exactly what “the hidden agenda” of political liberalism is about! It converts non-liberals into liberals!”<sup>118</sup> I would say that a believer has to be allowed his freedom of conscience and freedom of expression, and has to be allowed to learn, through the school, to have access to the teachings of his doctrine (be it religious or not), and the future decision about “what to be” and “how” is up to him (to be liberal or not, or something in-between) as long as the “fair terms of cooperation” are respected by all, and stability and social justice are granted. It is for this reason that studying post-19<sup>th</sup> century Muslim scholars is important, even though their reputation as “authentic” is not (yet) as established as the pre-19<sup>th</sup> scholars’ is.

Therefore, while I use the framework of political liberalism (overlapping consensus in focus), I am at the same time integrating new voices of Islam, as long as they are not scholars or intellectuals notorious for blasphemy or ex-Muslimness. I would not study, for example, Ayan Hirsi Ali as a reformist scholar, because she is ex-Muslim (thus her view moves to “conjecture” perspective, and is no longer a “declaration”),<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2006) 88. Only the phrase “hidden agenda” is Parekh’s; the rest is my formulation.

<sup>119</sup> The terms are Rawls’. They are types of “justification” that a particular doctrine is compatible with the political concept. Reasoning from a “declaration” position is a view conveyed by a believer, from within; that is, he belongs to this doctrine, as is the case with a Muslim believer or scholar who gives justifications of compatibility of his religion with the political concept of “justice as fairness” As to reasoning from “conjecture,” it is carried out from outside, by someone not believing in or member of this doctrine, as is the case with a non-Muslim scholar who presents Islam as compatible with the concept. Rawls, “The Idea

and more importantly she attacks the doctrine itself; so, how can she speak of reforming it if she belittles and defames its pillars and symbols? Tibi, Ramadan, Oubrou and Bidar, on the other hand, claim to be Muslim, respect Islam, and their reform voices, whatever be their level and premise, do not attack the “sacredness” of religion or its “belief” *per se*, but parts of its comprehensiveness. Their “authenticity” comes from their allegiance to the concerned faith, and their view, henceforth, is “declaratory” - from “declaration” position, namely from within as Muslim believers.<sup>120</sup>

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of Public Reason Revisited,” The University of Chicago Law Review, Vol. 64, No. 3 (Summer, 1997) 765-807.

<sup>120</sup> In a note, Rawls, from “conjecture” position, considers the project of Abdullahi An’aim “a perfect example of overlapping consensus” (Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 783-784, n. 46). An’aim, later, introduces his concept of “civic reason” in his project of reform, a concept very close to Rawls’ “public reason.” I introduced An’aim when studying some contemporary reformist prominent projects outside Europe; see Section 1d, Part IV. Such a project, from within the Islamic tradition, should not be denied a study simply because Muslim believers may not accredit it or accept it. Like him, and others, the European Muslim scholars studied here, should be considered as part of this tradition as long as they prescribe to it, instead of limiting scholarship to pre-19<sup>th</sup> century period, as the previous scholars, like March, do.

## Part One: Bassam Tibi

### Political Justifications for Euro-Islam

As a Muslim, I ask myself why most of my co-religionists fail to acknowledge this predicament in order to find solutions. The answer that comes to mind was given to me when I was at school in Damascus. At the age of ten I dared to ask: “Why are the conditions we live under not in line with verse 3/110 in the Qur’an: You are the “*umma* community” that has ever been raised up for mankind.” The question was supported by reference to media coverage by a young Muslim boy who had discerned that the Europeans and Americans were more advanced than his own community: “So, why this, if Allah says we are superior to all non-Muslim parts of mankind?” My teacher replied without any hesitation: “We are in a “*mihna/crisis*” and Allah is examining us.” To me, as a ten-year old, this answer was neither satisfactory nor convincing. I moved to the West at the age of eighteen for my academic training. That story has never left my mind. It has been the background of my desire, throughout my years of study in the West and the ensuing decades of academic research in the Islamic world itself, to get a better answer. The related thinking dominates the present book. I felt compelled to look for a more satisfactory explanation than I received in Damascus. A Muslim is better qualified than are Western postmodernists to address these issues. I state this without any Saidian [Edward Said] bias.

Bassam Tibi, *Islam’s Predicament with Modernity*, 2009: 46.

## 1. Islam's Predicament with Modernity

In this part of my work I sketch out the thoughts of Bassam Tibi on Euro-Islam. Before doing that, I should note that Tibi does not dedicate his academic career of five decades just to the development of the concept of Euro-Islam since 1992, the time when he started using it. Basically, Tibi belongs to the International Relations (IR) discipline, but his works on the Middle East, Arab nationalism, political Islam, fundamentalism, and civilizational dialogue have allowed him to develop an interdisciplinary approach that works heavily on culture, society, and religion. This to say that in reading Tibi one has to take the whole pile of his writings into account and re-arrange them according to the approach designed for such a reading. That is what I try to do here. About twenty of his German books are not included in this compilation I work on. I depend heavily on his books written in English, besides his journal articles, book chapters, edited books, published lectures, and interviews. While seeking some guiding lines about my research, Tibi recommended that I make use of his last book, *Islam's Predicament with Modernity: Religious Reform and Cultural Change* (2009), since it makes the detailed summary of all his academic career and approach. Besides this work, I certainly go back to his beginnings, i.e. his earlier works: *The Crisis of Modern Islam: A Preindustrial Culture in the Scientific-Technological Age* (first published in German in 1981, and in English in 1988), *Islam and the Cultural Accommodation of Social Change* (1990), *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder* (1998), *Islam between Culture and Politics* (2001), and *Political Islam, World Politics and Europe* (2008).<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> *The Crisis of Modern Islam: A Preindustrial Culture in the Scientific-Technological Age*, trans. Judith von Sivers (Salt Lake City: Utah UP, 1988); *Islam and the Cultural Accommodation of Social Change* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1990); *Arab Nationalism between Islam and the Nation-State* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997) The first edition of the book goes back to 1980; *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder* (Berkeley: California UP, 1998); *Islam between Culture and Politics* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave and Weatherhead Center for International Affairs Harvard University, 2001); *Political Islam, World Politics and Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2008); *Islam's Predicament with Cultural Modernity. Religious Reform and Cultural Change* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009). I do not use abbreviations for the titles of the books, because that could be so confusing, seeing similarities of wording in titles in this field. I avoid abbreviations in all this work. Rather, I use shortened titles, i.e. I take the first part of the title instead of repeating all of it.

I note that my first contact with Tibi, via email, goes back to 30 June 2011. It is during this first contact that he recommended focusing on his synthesizing work *Islam's Predicament*. In a recent contact, 10 October

The idea behind going through the intellectual career of Tibi is not to write his personal biography. Rather, it is to trace the beginnings of his idea of Euro-Islam, after going through his perception of the Islamic current socio-political and intellectual status. Focusing just on his later writings does not put the debate in context, for Euro-Islam is the outcome of a series of events in the Middle East, North African, and the rest of the Islamic world, before it becomes a European issue. This fact of regional and international politics are what have driven, as will be seen, a scholar of International relations into the debate of reforming Islam and consequently ending up with Euro-Islam. This peculiarity in approaching religion from International Relations (IR) lenses seems particular in Tibi's work, and there is no doubt that this aspect has made him a leading voice in calling for including religion, especially Islam in this case, in the IR discipline. Later in my analysis I will categorize his approach among the scholars who study the resurgence of Islam from within 'security based approach' instead of opening up to studying Islam from "theological perspectives," as Tariq Ramadan, for example, tries to do.

### **From Damascus to the World**

In most of his writings, Tibi does not tire from stressing his background in Damascus, and how that contributed to shaping his later academic career, in which he tries to be innovative and reformist. Tibi belongs to a noble Damascene family (*Ashraf Banu al-Tibi*) that traces back its origins to the Prophet of Islam.<sup>122</sup> As a child he was introduced to Quranic studies. At school, he remembers very well to have asked his teacher about the causes behind the contemporary misery of the Arab and Islamic world. The reply he received would be stuck in his mind ever since, and would push him later in his career to seek answers. The answer the teacher gave him was that the Arab-Islamic

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2012, Tibi has published two other books in English, summarizing his intellectual career on Islam and Islamism. These two books are *Islam and Global Politics: Conflict and Cross-Civilizational Bridging* (Routledge, 2012), and *Islam and Islamism* (Yale UP, 2012). These last two books are not examined in my work on Tibi, seeing that they come out late, just few months before the time due for submitting my work to the university. However, from the books outlines and introductions, I can confidently say that these books do not introduce another Tibi, to put it so. The six books dealt with in my study already discuss the issues the last two books deal with. The difference could be in depth or/and case studies. Repetition is unavoidable, to respectfully word it so.

<sup>122</sup> *Islam between Culture and Politics*, xiii

world was in crisis (*mihna*) as an examination from Allah.<sup>123</sup> The kid did not swallow the answer, and in the West, to which he travelled for academic training, he would dig into this “*mihna*” and try to fix it. His philosophical training takes its shape at Frankfurt School with Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and later on Jurgen Habermas (b. 1929), “Thanks to my Western academic education, and in particular to the philosophical reasoning studied in the Frankfurt School of Theodor Adorno (1903 – 1969) and Max Horkheimer (1895 – 1973), I have acquired the detachment needed for pursuing a scholarly non-apologetic approach, as well as for related unbiased thoughts.”<sup>124</sup> “But beyond this the Frankfurt School gave no further guidance,” since it “was not helpful for a proper understanding of religion.”<sup>125</sup> After an inspiring encounter with the Jewish-German philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885 – 1977), who was knowledgeable of Medieval Islamic philosophy and had written on Ibn Sina’s rationalism (*Avicenna and the Aristotelian Left*, 1963). Such a contact leads the young scholar of Damascus to publish his first book *The Arab Left* (1969), while still a 25 years old PhD student. This book brings him in touch with Edward Said (1935-2003), who invites him to speak of the Arab Left as part of his book *The Arabs of Today: Perspectives for Tomorrow*, 1973.<sup>126</sup> Tibi keeps friendship with Said but soon departs from him academically afterwards, for the reason that neither Orientalism nor Orientalism “in reverse”<sup>127</sup> do help in solving international tensions, which Tibi tries to placate with his inter-civilizational dialogue approach.

Tibi bears in mind the idea of Ernest Bloch (1885 – 1977) that the study of religion would be reductionist if tied solely to the economic machinery and social

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<sup>123</sup> The Moroccan sociologist Mohammed Guessouss calls it “azmatology,” from “azma,” meaning “crisis” in Arabic. See, Kevin Dwyer, *Arab Voices: The Human Rights Debate in the Middle East* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) 15.

<sup>124</sup> *Islam between Culture and Politics*, xiii; *Islam’s Predicament*, 46

<sup>125</sup> *Political Islam*, Preface, xxi

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi, 16

<sup>127</sup> *Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse (al-istishraq wa al-istishraq ma’qusan*, in Arabic) is the title of a booklet/long essay of Sadik Jalal al-‘Azmeh in his reaction to and disagreement with Edward Said’s influential work of *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Sadik Jalal al-‘Azmeh, “Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse,” in Alexander L. Macfie, ed. *Orientalism: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000) 217-238

conditions. Tibi, like Bloch, saw this as a “vulgar expression of Marxism.”<sup>128</sup> Instead, Tibi strongly sees religion as a cultural system which a variety of factors influence. Besides acknowledging the influence of Emile Durkheim (1885-1917) who sees religion as a “*fait social*” (social fact),<sup>129</sup> he does not settle as Durkhemian for he is “wary of reducing religion to a social context.”<sup>130</sup> It is with Clifford Geertz (1926 - 2006), the influential American anthropologist (1926-2006), that he most sympathizes intellectually, “The reader will clearly find out how much I lean on Clifford Geertz’s cultural anthropology, but consistently with an attempt to go beyond his approach.”<sup>131</sup> There is a need to stop for a while at Geertz’s ideas to understand Tibi better.

In his work *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), Geertz defines culture as “a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.”<sup>132</sup> In his fieldwork in the Islamic world, Geertz finds out that the “elusiveness of the subject matter” of religion is the most challenging item while researching as an anthropologist in religious societies, and this challenge becomes worse as one moves from describing it to finding it, “Our problem, and it grows worse by the day, is not to define religion, but to find it.”<sup>133</sup> This quest of “finding religion,” according to Geertz, starts with and ends in looking at it as a cultural system. That succinctly put means that Islam, with which Geertz is concerned, does not seem to flourish in one context and thus to have one cultural variety which can be exported or similarly lived all around the Islamic world. There are versions of Islam that have to do with culture. That makes Fred Inglis (b. 1937), a reader of Geertz, wonders about the “mysteries of Islam,” “What is Islam? A religion? A civilization? A social order? A form of life? A strand of world history? A collection of spiritual attitudes connected only by a common reverence for

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<sup>128</sup> *Political Islam*, xxi

<sup>129</sup> For more see Emil Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method and Selected Texts on Sociology and Its Methods*, ed. and intr. Steven Lukes, trans. W.D. Halls (New York: MacMillan, 1982) Chapter 1 “What is a Social Fact?” 50-60

<sup>130</sup> *Islam between Culture and Politics*, 16

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 25

<sup>132</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 2000). The first edition appeared in 1973.

<sup>133</sup> Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1968) 1.

Muhammad and the Quran?”<sup>134</sup> Inglis ends up speaking of the “venture of Islam,” coloured with world cultures diversity, adopting and conforming by thus the three volumes work of the American scholar of the history of Islam, Marshal G.S. Hodgson (1922 – 1968), *The Venture of Islam* (first published in 1961). This Geertzian perspective, to which Tibi refers to again and again when dealing with Islam’s Predicament with modernity, envisions a variety of “Islams” that are coloured with different cultural systems. This aspect is what makes Tibi relevant to the study of European Islam and the development of a European Islamic culture, after religion has gone through a process of reform which the culture in which it grows adopts cultural modernity. More of this becomes clearer as I proceed.

The emphasis on culture in the production of religious meaning is rooted in Tibi’s attempt to dig deep into the distinction between religion in substance as “a spiritual belief and an ethics” and religion “in its role as a political ideology.” The first requires “divinity studies” while the latter requires “cultural analysis.” He is concerned with the latter, without totally putting aside the former. His study revolves around Islam and its oscillation between culture and politics.<sup>135</sup> In crude terms, religion here is a cultural system.

When Tibi moved to Germany as a young man of 18 years old, this distinction was not clear in his mind yet, and he had to work it out. His academic training, along with the European worldwide know scholars, he frequented and came in touch with, made him realize that the Middle East he belongs to by birth and early education has a particular reading of Islam, so much Arabocentrist, socio-culturally affected, and narrow in its perspective. In his research and professorship tours around the world, Tibi was affected by the way Islam was indigenized, adapted and adopted socio-culturally especially in Africa and Asia, to produce Afro-Islam, and Indo-Islam.<sup>136</sup> This pushed him to read Islam in light of the cultural system in which it is practiced. This implies that it can bear interpretations according to space and time, and the *mihna* (crisis) he

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<sup>134</sup> Fred Inglis, ed. *Clifford Geertz: Life among the Anthros and Other Essays* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 2010) 71.

<sup>135</sup> *Islam between Culture and Politics*, 25

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 26

experienced as a child and also as a Muslim scholar and citizen in Europe can be, for him, remedied through a reading, a reinterpretation and revisit of the past to overcome the current crisis, thus be able to speak of Euro-Islam.

#### **a. Islam as a Cultural System**

Starting from his Geertzian perspective, Tibi does not tire from repeating that Islam is a cultural system. He also does not tire from repeating that he is a pious and yet liberal Muslim. To be clear, he does not deprive this religion from its divinity. The divinity he questions revolves around the cultural aspects this same divine religion has been clothed with in various geographies and locations of the world. The divinity and universality of Islam is not questioned; what is questioned are the ways both divinity and universality have been used to the extent of freezing their utility for the human being to which they are destined. In other words, divinity and universality of Islam have not been studied in historical perspectives and in context; rather, they have been imprisoned in history and in the same way the religion was first revealed in the seventh century BC. Apart from its five pillars, Tibi is against any aspect of essentializing Islam; it is that which has caused a cultural stagnation, according to him, in the Muslim world and mind. In contradistinction to any essentialism, he tries to answer the common, and yet difficult question, “What is Islam?”

To answer this pivotal question, Tibi does not work on the metaphysical worldview of Islam. Instead, he contends that no religion stands in isolation from wo/man and society. That is, Islam, and like any other religion, makes sense in society, “religions represent cultural systems, which are both influenced by processes of social change and are themselves able to affect them.”<sup>137</sup> To study Islam, then, he had to look at its development in society; he had to consider it as a cultural system, “We ask what Islam really is if, in the Geertzian sense, we are to speak of the Islamic religion as a single cultural system.”<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> *Accommodation of Social Change*, 1

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 7

Cultures adopt religions since they shape their world view, as much as that religion may later on be shaped by the culture that has adopted it. Tibi's most interesting borrowing he has made from Geertz's cultural and symbolic anthropology shapes considerably his study of Islam, namely religion as a "model of" and "model for" reality. The former simply means that religion makes part, only part of a certain cultural system, while the latter, which is more important here, does shape this culture. Models of reality relate to the representation of objects like those in nature, which means that they are "concrete, displaying structural congruence with the depicted object." Unlike them, models for reality "apply to concepts of things, such as human activity," and are abstract "theories, dogmas, or doctrines for a reality with which they are not in structural congruence." They "relate, either metaphysically or rationally, to human perceptions of reality and their character; they cannot be penetrated experimentally, only interpretatively."<sup>139</sup> At this metaphysical, abstract, and interpretative level, one enters the symbolic level of religion in society and culture.

According to Geertz, a religion is "[1] a system of symbols which act to [2] establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men [3] by formulating concepts of a general order of being and [4] clothing these concepts with such an aura of factuality that [5] the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."<sup>140</sup> Tibi explains this in the Islamic context by arguing that there is a need to study the religious symbols in the Islamic context to scrutinize the way Muslims understand the Texts (Quran and Sunna/Hadith) through their behavior. The idea is to "to observe how people perceive these texts and how they create their religiocultural symbols in this context, so as better to understand the Islam of today as a social reality and a cultural system,"<sup>141</sup> after centuries from the date of revelation. The observer, the anthropologist in this case, can notice that "the moral insight," the symbol, becomes unequal to the "moral experience," i.e. real life behavior. For Tibi, such a difference between perception and reality is conducive to crisis, and sometimes encourages militancy to bring the moral insight into reality and the world that seems different into the same picture the symbol

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<sup>139</sup> Qtd in Tibi, *Accommodation of Social Change*, 8, originally in Geertz, *Interpretation*, 93.

<sup>140</sup> Qtd in Tibi, *Accommodation of Social Change*, 10-11, originally in Geertz, *Interpretation*, 90.

<sup>141</sup> *Accommodation of Social Change*, 12

institutes in the mind of the believer. Such a crisis in interaction with the text, in living what is being believed in, happens because the ordinary believers do not raise questions, nor do they use common sense and reason in dealing with religious symbols.<sup>142</sup> This happens while the Muslim elite are torn between appeals to the great Islamic tradition they know to be popular and the secular political institutions that tend to weaken that tradition.<sup>143</sup> Tibi exemplifies for this by the term of *umma* (commonly translated as the Islamic nation): while the Texts refer to the Muslims as a community of believers in its abstract manifestation, the masses tend to concretize this symbolic concept and see it in reality. The frustration of the fundamentalists and their aim to build a political community out of this *umma* concept shows the misunderstandings that occur in interpreting and living a concept, and how that affects some believers to the extent of acting to “restore” or “build” it anew, even militarily. Tibi also refers to what Walter Zenner calls “behavioral lag”: as an anthropologist, he conducted a fieldwork among Muslims in Morocco and found that they do not necessarily follow what they believe in when it comes to certain religious sanctions and ordinances. Tibi, in a not much different context, refers to the practice of *hiyal*, or legal tricks, in centuries past among the Muslims in commerce as a way of evading strict laws. The intention behind citing these examples is to demonstrate that Muslims behavior is also constrained by socio-cultural and economic factors, which affect the interaction with the religious Texts.<sup>144</sup>

The perception of religion as a cultural system imbued with symbols that do not seem to change in time and yet not always followed fully in practice brings about the question of truth in Islam and its place in history. In orthodox Islam truth is one and is complete, with the Seal of Prophets, Muhammad, and the revelation of the Quran. It is valid for all times, religions, and for all humanity. Such a truth is ahistorical. This understanding raises the main issue of progress and development, and Tibi wonders if these issues ever existed or were discussed before the encounter with the developed West. (Later he affirms that such concepts existed during the Hellenized era of High Islam, of the Abbasid era (750-1258). This is to be clarified when Tibi’s reform propositions are

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.,12-13

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 190

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 12

studied. In this beginning, Tibi is still trying to raise thorny questions to problemize the predicament further). The metaphysical absolute truth seems to reign and prevent the “cultural accommodation of social change,” a change which human societies normally experience:

If these conceptions are unalterable *per se*, as in the case of Islam, even though reality is changing continually, then we are bound to ask whether Islam presents an obstacle to change, [and...] whether Islam as a cultural system demands absoluteness and nontemporality, and is therefore hostile to history and an impediment to change, or whether Muslims have developed their own ways of circumventing this absoluteness in their daily practice, without ceasing to believe in it [i.e. Islam as a cultural system].”<sup>145</sup>

To break away from a historical imprisonment, Tibi, though not a historian by training, tries to revisit Islamic history in its main stages and later political divisions to corroborate his idea of the impact of culture on Islam, and consequently his perception of it as a cultural system.

Tibi believes that the contemporary Islamic cultural system is very much impacted by the Arab culture and political ideology.<sup>146</sup> From the early years after the advent of Islam, the Arabs, to whom the Prophet Muhammed belonged by blood, would dominate the Islamic political community, and affect it culturally as well. The first division that lives up to now was based on tribal belonging: the Shi‘a, partisans of Ali the fourth Caliph, wanted to pass governance from the Quraish Arab tribe (to which Ali himself belonged) to Ali’s side, believed by Shi‘a to be the first Imam and vicegerent of Allah, and they believe that the Prophet nominated him a Caliph even before the three other Caliphs, Abu Bakr, Umar, and Ottman. The Battle of the Camel in 656 between Aisha, wife of the Prophet, and Ali, the Fourth Caliph, and subsequently the Ummayyads” coming to power in 661 to guard the Quraish Arab tribe in power was a turning point in Muslims history. It was what divided the Muslim world into its two main denominations,

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 9, 14

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 17

the majority Sunni and the minority Shi'a, i.e. partisans of Ali.<sup>147</sup> Besides the period of establishing Islam by the Prophet from revelation date in 610 to his death in 632, the four Caliphs reigned for about thirty years in all (632-660); three of them were killed, Abu Bakr, Umar, and Ali. The Prophet's period as well as the Caliphs' one are commonly referred to as the most glorious and just period in Islamic history. The Ummayyad Dynasty would take over from 660 to 750, which would be overthrown by the Abbasids who would rule from 750 to 1258, which marked "the zenith of Islam's development."<sup>148</sup> The Ottomans kept the Islamic empire dominant, mainly militarily but stagnant culturally, from 1453 up to the First World War and the abolishment of the Caliphate in 1924 by Kemal Attaturk. The Muslim Spain and Sicily kept their political and intellectual independence during this period, and had their first rulers from the Umayyads, but later on from North Africa, mainly from Morocco, which was never under the Ottoman rule. The Persians were not under the Ottomans either. This diversity in political ruling was stamped by the socio-cultural environment of the regions ruled and the dynasties that reigned.

Equally, in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, Muslim societies seem generally not to have undergone the same tribal or ethnic political rivalry that the Arab Peninsula underwent. Henceforth, their cultural interaction with Islam as a religion differs,

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<sup>147</sup> *Accommodation of Social Change*, 17-22. A short note here: The renowned Iranian-American Seyyed Husseyn Nasr sees the issue not necessarily as political but as that which has to do with the qualities of the governor of the Muslims:

Shi'ism was not brought into existence only by the question of the political succession to Muhammad as so many Western works claim (although this question was of course of great importance). The problem of political succession may be said to be the element that crystallized the Shi'ites into a distinct group, and political suppression in later periods, especially the martyrdom of Imam Husayn-upon whom be peace-only accentuated this tendency of the Shi'ites to see themselves as a separate community within the Islamic world. The principal cause of the coming into being of Shi'ism, however, lies in the fact that this possibility existed within the Islamic revelation itself and so had to be realized. Inasmuch as there were exoteric [Zaheri] and esoteric [Bateni] interpretations from the very beginning, from which developed the schools (madhhab) of the *Sharia* and Sufism in the Sunni world, there also had to be an interpretation of Islam, which would combine these elements in a single whole. This possibility was realized in Shi'ism, for which the Imam is the person in whom these two aspects of traditional authority are united and in whom the religious life is marked by a sense of tragedy and martyrdom... Hence the question which arose was not so much who should be the successor of Muhammad as what the function and qualifications of such a person would be.

Qtd in Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *Shi'ite Islam*, trans. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: State University of New York Press, 1975) Preface, 11.

<sup>148</sup> *Accommodation of Social Change*, 17-18

according to Tibi. For example, “the African marabouts, who in the absence of a priesthood in Islamic doctrine, represent a functional equivalent to clergy in African Islam, are not only religious leaders, but also magicians and soothsayers, thereby retaining numerous magical forms of pre-Islamic African cultures.”<sup>149</sup> Among the Berbers, the natives of the Maghreb, the Muslim chief has the authority to bestow divine blessing (*baraka*).<sup>150</sup> In India and most Asia where the Muslims have always co-existed as a minority with other religions, the Muslims have adopted a number of local practices, to the extent that even the Indian caste system was projected and copied by the Muslims for hierarchy. In Indonesia and Malaysia, which have a big impact on Tibi’s development of the notion of Euro-Islam, he witnessed an “open Islam” that adopts the local tradition, or at least is open to it.<sup>151</sup> During his fieldwork and contact with scholars and social activists in Muslim societies and communities around the world, Tibi has found that the ordinary Muslim does cohabit with the cultural geography where s/he belongs, and there is not much tension between the Texts and the practices, “In the mind of the average Muslim, however, this tension does not exist, and most Muslims believe that they live in accordance with Islamic law.”<sup>152</sup>

Shi‘a Islam, which has developed its own Islamic cultural tradition seems very much different from the Arab version of it. That is so much the case in Iran where it is majority Shi‘a . Shi‘a Islam is Persian according to the Arabs, and is considered just a deviation from the true Sunni Islam, which the Wahhabi movement tries to widespread. For instance, the Ashura festival is celebrated by the Shi‘a to commemorate the death of Husseyn ibn Ali at the hands of the Ummayyad in the Battle of Karbala in 680. Husseyn is one of the grandchildren of the Prophet Muhammad, and a son to Ali the non-dynasty fourth Caliph, and thus a Shi‘a Imam. Ashura corporal practice is considered a sin, haram, by the Sunnis because it climaxes with a ritual flagellation.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> *Islam between Culture and Politics*, 48

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 48

<sup>151</sup> *Accommodation of Social Change*, 22

<sup>152</sup> *Islam between Culture and Politics*, 45

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 41

According to Tibi, certainly the above mentioned examples all make part of the Islamic civilization, but they belong to different cultures. They belong to the same civilization that has shaped the world with a new and different perspective since its birth, but has equally been diversified by the cultures and societies it has reached. Besides typical practices in different cultural settings, there is Sufism (mysticism) that is common to all these cultures and makes an unavoidable contribution to Islamic thought and practice as a whole. For Tibi, Sufism is the heart of Islam in the sense that it leaves no way to ideological or theocratic orders and consequently permits numerous ways to God. It deals with the believer as a person, and it is him or her that is most concerned with religion. Sufism develops many ways, *tariqas* (*tariqa*, a way), of practicing Islam.<sup>154</sup>

The cultural practices widespread in Muslim societies make Tibi ascertain that there is a difference between the “*tariqa* Islam,” and the “legal Islam” commonly referred to as Sharia. The former is the “popular Islam” as practiced by the believer masses; the latter is what literally the Texts (Quran and Sunna) describe. Tibi puts it this way: “The Islam of everyday life differs in many ways from that of the ulema (scribes), who see themselves as the guardians of the Shari’a.”<sup>155</sup> “Islam as a cultural system has been adopted by non-Arabs and integrated into non-Islamic, indigenous, previously existing symbolic systems.”<sup>156</sup> These perceptions of Tibi influence his formation of the concept of Euro-Islam as another *tariqa* to live Islam in Europe, as later sections of this work will show, “[...] my concept of Euro-Islam, that is, of a European understanding of Islam, which I have analogously developed in relation to Afro- and Indo-Islam.”<sup>157</sup> In brief, the cultural practices challenge the ulema who “essentialize Islam in putting it above history, social and cultural change.” Tibi goes so far as to compare this essentialization to the work of Western Orientalists, “On these grounds, the Islamist notion of “true Muslim” resembles in a bizarre way that of the *homo islamicus* as presented by biased Western Orientalists.”<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> *Accommodation of Social Change*, 24; *Islam between Culture and Politics*, 46.

<sup>155</sup> *Islam between Culture and Politics*, 49

<sup>156</sup> *Accommodation of Social Change*, 22

<sup>157</sup> *Islam between Culture and Politics*, 26

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 26

## **b. Politics in Islamic Lands between the Profane and the Sacred**

If Islam as a cultural system can reform itself and adopt itself to new contexts and circumstances, then its potential for impacting social life are higher, including the political life. To the question “what went wrong with Islamic politics?”<sup>159</sup> Tib focalizes the interior weakening circumstances. He speaks against the dependency theory; i.e. the deterioration of the situation in Islamic societies because of the Western dominance alone. The Western formation of the world market, as well as its secular institutions, plays just a part in the worsening of the Muslim countries. Stopping this dominance or withdrawing from the world market does not solve the problem. Facing it with socio-religious changes is the outlet. Tibi does not give much attention to the debate started by the Oxford historian Roger Owen (b. 1935) who wonders whether the underdevelopment in the Arab Muslim world is only noticeable because it is compared to the developed West.<sup>160</sup>

The socio-economic as well as intellectual gap between the governing elites in the Muslim world and the masses aggravates the debate on social change and pushes the blame of underdevelopment to the external factors. The failure of the governing and Western educated elite to urge quick socio-cultural reforms angered the masses and made them aware of the North-South divide on the standards of life. The masses do not see that their elites and their socio-cultural conditions are also to blame for their economic underdevelopment. All they see is the West as the main factor, for which hatred grows. Here grows a “need to have an indigenous medium of articulation in order to express these intensifying anti-Western attitudes. Islam is the best form of articulation for this purpose.”<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> He adopts the question of the reformist Shakib Arsalan (1869–1946), voiced in *Our Decline: Its Causes and Remedies*, first published in the 1930s: “why are Muslims backward, while others have developed?” The answer he provides is that Muslims have deviated from Islam and the practice of *ijtihad*. Qtd in *Accommodation of Social Change*, 124

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 127

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 128

If the social structures (sociogenesis) changes in Europe took place in tandem with the norms and value systems (psychogenesis) changes,<sup>162</sup> the case is different in the Arab-Muslim world because their history with religion is different from Europe's history with its religion. In contemporary history of the Arab Muslim world, as in the past centuries, religion has hardly been seen as an enemy to people; on the contrary, it is a source of identity and relief to them. This is seen more clearly when politics fail to answer their needs, as is the case with Arab Muslim societies after independence that is being discussed here. The recourse to religion in an evolving society that tries to find its way between tradition and modernity occasions a dilemma, or what was referred to earlier as a "behavioral lag." That is, "the parallel existence in the same society of norms and values of a no longer existing historical formation along with newly evolved social structures." Such is the case because "norms and values do not change as fast as structures do."<sup>163</sup> This state of "in-betweenness" applies to societies that either lack updated political philosophies and theories that ease the political life of people or to societies that undergo social changes exerted from outside, as in conquests and colonialism. The Muslim societies are a case in point: they lacked updated political philosophy since the fourteenth century (after Ibn Khaldun),<sup>164</sup> and experienced European imperialism from the eighteenth century, and the Mogul and Turkish dominance earlier. Under such a pressure of being exposed to the West without a clear and updated socio-cultural system, the Muslim individual living in this state of transition falls in "need for religion to maintain identity in the process of change."<sup>165</sup> The problem Tibi worries about is not the recourse to religion *per se* by the individual, but it is its politicization to face change and block it that worries him, "Islam as a system of belief has never lost significance for its adherents. [...] The current reemergence of Islam as a political ideology is not therefore to be defined as re-Islamization, but more accurately as political revitalization, or as the *repoliticization of the sacred*."<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 129

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 129

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 132

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 130

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 123

Tibi goes selectively through some historical stages in Islamic politics to argue that Islam is not a political system, as first argued Ali Abderraziq, a scholar of al-Azhar in 1925, at the moment of the dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate. It is a cultural system that merges the religious and the social. He refers to detailed case studies from the current Arab world to exemplify for his point that Islam is adjusted to the socio-cultural history of the geography it governs, and thus there is no one clear-cut political model in Islam: Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, etc. The Prophet's life as a leader of the Muslim community could be divided into two stages: The Mekka era (570-622) and the Medina one (622-632). The first ranges from the birth of the Prophet, passing by the descent of revelation upon him at the age of forty, and his start of disseminating the message of Islam mainly focusing on "establishing new ethical foundations for an Islamic embracing of individual human rights."<sup>167</sup> Tibi, like some reformists *à la* Muhammad Mahmoud Taha (1909 - 1985) and his student Abdullahi An-Naim (b. 1946) to whom I make reference in due time (in Part IV), asserts that "in early Meccan Islam, before the founding of the first Islamic polity at Medina, in a Bedouin culture hostile to state structures, one fails to find Qur'anic precepts related to war and peace."<sup>168</sup> Mecca Islam is considered to be focused on the humanist and universal aspects of Islam, and not on legal matters.

Regarding the second Prophetic stage, the Medina period, it is during which that the Prophet established the Muslim community and entered into political treaties with the non-Muslim communities who had their denominational rights as *dhimmi*s (People of the Book) under the Muslims' rule. For some, the Medina Document prepared by the Prophet in consultation with the allying tribes of Muslims and non-Muslims in 622, which marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar, is the first constitution in world history. For Tibi, however, the Medina Document/Constitution and era, constitutes not only the beginning of a new religion, but also the beginning of a new civilization around a central and organized authority.

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<sup>167</sup> *Political Islam*, 43

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 43

Tibi adopts Reinhard Bendix's (1916 – 1991) term that the early years of Islam can be said to be ruled by a “charismatic prophecy” which is unparalleled to any other ordinary political experiences. “The Prophecy is unique and cannot be either passed on or repeated,” adds Tibi.<sup>169</sup> During this “charismatic prophecy” political era, the terms of ‘state’ or “Islamic state” (*dawla Islamiya, nizam islami*) were never used by the Prophet nor were they employed in the language of the Qur'an. The term “Islamic state” is a recent invention,<sup>170</sup> and has to be distinguished from the “Prophetic Era,” to mean both Mecca and Medina periods of the Prophet, from the rest of early Islamic history.

After the Prophetic Era, the pre-Islamic tribal tendencies about governance and authority would come into sight again. This led to the division between the Sunnite and the Shi'a, and few other minor sects. The former would form the history of the Caliphate, and the latter that of the Imamate. The first four Caliphs were chosen after consultation among the elders of the tribes; the later ones would designate themselves as leaders of the Muslim community, after dynasties took the rule over, starting from the Umayyad, the Abbasids, the Fatimid, etc. up to the Ottomans. The ruler here had to follow the Sharia, though despotically, and the Muslim jurists (*faqih*s and *ulemas*) had to obey him and make people follow him in the form of *bay'a* (collective consent and loyalty to the Caliph on behalf of the people). In rare histories of Muslim societies were they independent. Tibi says that “the political ideals of Islam were not practiced because of a lack of appropriate institutions,” which turned the Caliphs/Sultans rule into a ‘sultanic form’ (*al-hukm assultānī*), more shaped by the ruler's willings, a form which does not correspond to the basic rulings of Sharia and Islamic ethics.<sup>171</sup> As to the Shiite version of authority, the Imamate, it is the charisma of the ruler that matters most, and this cannot be of ordinary posture, for it depends on the succession of the imams that is allegedly affiliate with the *ahl al-bayt*, the People of the House of the Prophet. According to Tibi, Shi'a Islam in general was hardly involved in direct politics, until the Safavids reign (1501-1722), and the current Ruhollah Khomeini's theory of *wilayat al-faqih* (clerical authority) which has brought them to the center of politics since the Iranian Revolution in

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<sup>169</sup> *Accommodation of Social Change*, 120-121.

<sup>170</sup> *Political Islam*, 44

<sup>171</sup> *Accommodation of Social Change*, 121.

1979. That brought to politics the voice of theocratic Muslim jurists.<sup>172</sup> This re-politicization of Islam in Iran and elsewhere is contemporary and is a distortion of the ideals of Islam which have hardly had a suitable institutional platform to be applied, except from cases the Prophetic era and Hellenize Islam highlight.

Tibi's reference to particular historical periods in Islamic countries politics aims at discrediting the claim that such a history has seen a harmonious marriage between Islamic ideals and politics. Again, he is not denying the presence of Islam, but he is shedding light on the way it has been used, and sometimes abused, which made its ideals remain theoretical. Building on the notions most controversial nowadays in international relations and European contexts, Tibi discusses in different contexts some concepts that are attributed to Islamic history out of context. He does so to refute the "Islamic new disorder" the Islamist fundamentalists try to construct wrongly basing themselves on the past. The terms he sees troublesome are *umma*, *da'wa*, *jihad*, and *nizam islami*, which all contribute to the making of *dar al-islam*, the abode of Islam, versus *dār al ḥarb*, the abode of war.

### **Sharia and Shariatization of Religious Concepts: Umma, Da'wa, and Jihad**

Tibi argues that the political "imagined umma"<sup>173</sup> "is no longer of any significance for existing realities in our contemporary world."<sup>174</sup> The Quranic verse (sura al-Imran 3:110) which speaks of the Muslims as the best community of the faithful (*khayr umma*) is wrongfully associated with the European notion of "nation" for the "nation-state." So, a wrong analogy is formed to refer to a community of believers as a political community. The issue of faith is politicized by dint of projecting a modern European concept on an Islamic notion of faith, which is universal. The universal aspect of Islam and the Muslim faith is henceforth seen as a world political community, with imagined territories.

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 121

<sup>173</sup> *Political Islam*, xiii

<sup>174</sup> *Islam between Culture and Politics*, 91

The umma originally was not political but based on faith.<sup>175</sup> Being it based on faith, it knows no geographical nor racial or ethnical boundaries. In his historical reading of the Prophetic tradition, Tibi considers that the first Islamic political community (umma) was not a state but an umma of the faithful, as the Qur’anic verses revealed between 622 and the death of the Prophet in 632 all speak of.<sup>176</sup> The umma “recognises neither limitations nor exclusivity. Any person who converts to Islam becomes a member of this umma, while Christians and Jews can live as *dhimmi* (protected minorities) under Islamic tutelage.”<sup>177</sup> Tibi recognizes that “we come across tensions between the religious precepts of equality and the very realities standing in contrast to it.”<sup>178</sup> Later on, when the politicization of the community took shape, *dhimmitude* took a pejorative sense for the minority of Jews and Christians. That has resulted in the viewing the umma as the superior community among the divine religions.

For Tibi, the diversity in Islam has been an accompanying characteristic in its development since its advent. He sites, among others, the testimony of the preeminent German scholar of classical Islam, Josef van Ess (b. 1934), about the transformations of the social meanings of the umma concept:

In early Islam people acted as members of collectivity and thought along these lines. This collectivity was the framework of belonging to a social group. In fact, the notion of the umma which in modern times enjoys great references barely played a role in early Islam.<sup>179</sup>

In the formative year, despite the faith that united them, “the tribes had each their own mosques” and “people dismissed the idea to pray behind an Imam who does not belong to one’s own tribe,” continues Josef van Ess.<sup>180</sup> In light of this historical background, Tibi questions the meaning of “umma” the homogeneity of the “Muslim society.” For him, the latter is mostly “used in plural and sometimes as a synonym for ‘societies with a Muslim population or culture.’” The term then “basically applies only to those societies whose

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 133

<sup>176</sup> *Political Islam*, 44

<sup>177</sup> *Islam between Culture and Politics*, 91

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 91

<sup>179</sup> Qtd in *Islam between Culture and Politics*, 129.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

members profess Islam.” From this follows that “once we become aware of the cultural diversity in Islam it is easy to see that the attribute “Islamic” cannot at all be applied to any existing cohesive entity.”<sup>181</sup> Tibi cites Leonard Binder (b. 1927) to corroborate his point:

The concept of the umma served as a referent for the identity resolutions of individual Muslims throughout Islamic history. But [...] identity was a religious and not a political category of concern until recent times. It is with the politicisation of identity and the posing of the problem of the individual and the political community that Islam and politics have had to be reconciled within a new framework.<sup>182</sup>

With these historical notes Tibi goes back to his perception of the cultural in the religious symbols. The concept of the umma moves from being a metaphysical concept related to faith pure and simple to becoming an identity benchmark for the individual and for the group, the community of believers in the same faith. And seeing the cultural diversity of the umma, Tibi believes that it in no way can be united or be considered as a political unity, “When it comes to culture, Muslims differ greatly despite the belief of belonging to one umma.”<sup>183</sup> The believers who confuse the symbolism of umma and its realization in factuality can lead the fundamentalists among them to act militarily to restore an order that do not see but only think of.<sup>184</sup> Such a perception of “the Islamic community (umma) thus denies all forms of plurality and comprehends itself as the core of that proportion of mankind united by monotheistic faith.”<sup>185</sup> This supremacy that nurtures itself by faith for political reasons, ignited by societies in a status of “a defensive culture,” leads us, writes Tibi, “to assume that there is “a psychological barrier” among Muslims to learning from other cultures, to which they feel superior. Islamic rationalists in medieval Islam were in a position to overcome this barrier, but contemporary Islamists are not!”<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 129

<sup>182</sup> Qtd in Ibid., 129-130. The text he refers to is Leonard Binder, *The Ideological Revolution in the Middle East* (New York: Wiley, 1964) 131.

<sup>183</sup> *Islam between Culture and Politics*, 38

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 35

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 51

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 184

The umma concept is problematic for both the Muslim communities in Muslim majority countries as it is for the Muslims in Europe, viz. European Muslim, which is the final focus of this work. It is here that the umma issue becomes controversial and “into conflict with citizenship inasmuch as Islam is also the basis of a civilisational identity.”<sup>187</sup> Caught between European racism and Islamists’ supremacism, “Migrants who really want to become citizens are caught between rejection and the pressure to join a cultural umma-ghetto.”<sup>188</sup> For Tibi, it is high time the umma notion takes back its original meaning as a community of the faithful, and not of supremacists and political ideologues, for its politicization just widens the gap between *dar al-islam* and *dar-alharb* or *dar-alahd*, which are also cultural and political constructs.

The fundamentalists’ attempt to concretize politically the concept of umma explicitly means that there are other “ummams” (non-Muslim communities also translated commonly as nations) which are supposed to be different. The fact that the Muslim umma is believed to be the “best” and the ‘superior’ among the rest of ummas means, in the literalist meanings of the Text the way the fundamentalists interpret it, that they should be invited to Islam through da‘wa, proselytizing. “Jihad stood always in the service of da‘wa/proselytization.”<sup>189</sup>

In Tibi’s analysis, “Islam’s image of itself is to be the religion of peace.” The Muslims are asked to disseminate this da‘wa / mission worldwide. The da‘wa as an invitation to Islam is supposed to be peaceful, but the non-Muslims usually hinder the peaceful spread and completion of this mission. This process is known in Islamic history as *futuhat*, openings, and not as conquests. “In the classical doctrine, the use of force for the spread of Islam is not war but rather jihad, in the worst case a “defensive war,” for jihad is not an aggression.”<sup>190</sup> In the case non-Muslims submit to Islam through conversion or subjugation, this da‘wa can be pursued peacefully. If they do not, Muslims are then obliged to wage jihad-war to subdue them. “It is only in this meaning that jihad is understood as a defensive action of violence.” In Islam, peace entails that non-Muslims

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 213

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 201

<sup>189</sup> *Political Islam*, 42

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 54-55

surrender to the call of Islam by conversion or by accepting the status of a religious minority of dhimmi, which has to pay an imposed tax/jizya for its affiliation with the Muslim community; the dhimmi receive protection, and, as a pay back, they do not take part in the wars. This “privilege” of “dhimmitude” applies, however, exclusively to Christians and Jews.<sup>191</sup>

As for the non-monotheist religions, they are considered to be *kafirun*/ infidels. Concisely put, “World peace is perceived as the result of successfully carrying out the da‘wa, being the Islamic proselytization, leading to the submission of all humankind to Islam, thus mapping the entire globe.”<sup>192</sup> This means that the da‘wa had to travel east and west, north and south by means of the *futuh*. The latter, though normatively peaceful, history says otherwise, according to Tibi. The *futuh* carried with them violence, despite the normative ideals behind them, and the jihad was not purely non-violent in realization:

In apologetic Islamic writings we often read that jihad-wars were not violent. This is presumptuous, because Islamic jihad-wars were violent. In history, non-violent warfare does not exist. Despite the high ethical standards imposed by the classical doctrine, Islamic jihad-wars were also related to blood-letting. The distinction between the normative and the historical level in the study of jihad reveals many self-deceptions most Muslims continue to believe in.<sup>193</sup>

Tibi draws distinctions for more clarifications in light of a historical reading of Islamic history of jihad. Tibi differentiates between “classical jihad” and “modern jihadism.” To this I turn now.

Classical jihad goes back to the Prophetic era referred to earlier. Especially in the Mecca period, the divine message does not mention war though the small Muslim community was surrounded by hostile tribes. In the Medina period, which is seen as the first Muslim political community, the Muslims opened lands and asked people to either convert or surrender to Muslims rule for protection. Yet, after the Prophet’s life it was not always an ideal process of *futuh*. The notion of the land of Islam and the land of war started early and it did not break down until Vienna defeat in 1683. It deteriorated after

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 46-47

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 47

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 52

Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, to be followed later by the European expansion of empires. Tibi is clear about the fact that generally there was hardly a process of jihad without violence: "It is true that the religious doctrine of jihad determines the attitude of common Muslims and that there is, except in Sufi Islam, no Islamic tradition of non-violence. However, the violent jihad as a war has never been glorified in Islam."<sup>194</sup>

Jihad in Classical Islam, in Tibi's description, has rules that were advanced taking their historical period into account. It could be compared to the current term of war, it was then a regular, in the sense of regulated, war. For example, No war could be waged without peaceful negotiations and call of the other communities to enter peacefully under the banner of Islam. Under the banner of Islam, they receive protection but they pay taxes. If the negotiations fail, then a war is announced, and not entered into unawares. The elders, women, animals and plans have to be protected in war. Prisoners' treatment has to be decent. Agreements and contracts have to be kept.<sup>195</sup> "It is therefore wrong to describe Islam in general as a "religion of the sword."<sup>196</sup> With this perception of jihad, the Crusades were faced and the futuhat made under the dynasties that took over the reign in Islamic history. During the colonial period, liberation movements took the religious understanding of jihad as their push-factor. It is "anti-colonial jihad" that was started by reformist and influential figures like al-Afghani, Abduh, etc.<sup>197</sup>

With the subjugation under European outreached empires, the Muslim's notion of jihad in its Classical version within the umma dichotomy came to be adjusted. Tibi cites the Moroccan Islamic Moroccan scholar Ahmed bin Khalid al-Nasiri (1835–97) whom he sees as the pioneer in adapting the Islamic classical notion of superiority to that of adaptation and conformism to the new European supremacy.

No one today can overlook the power and the superiority of Christians. Muslims [...] are in a condition of weakness and disintegration ... Given these circumstances, how can we maintain the opinion and the politics that the weak

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 147

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 152

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 47

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 53

should confront the strong? How could the unarmed fight against the heavily armed power?<sup>198</sup>

According to Tibi, al-Nasiri does not cancel the idea of jihad but just suspends it according to the Muslims' necessity, *maṣlaḥa* – like the IR realist approach that advances national interests.<sup>199</sup> This attitude of adaptation to the modern international politics would be adapted by most al-Azhar scholars. Yet, with the failing political reforms in the Arab Muslim worlds since the nineteenth century, and chiefly after independence, resurgence of jihad has come back in a distorted manner, out of its temporal and spacial context.

The twentieth century would experience the rebirth of jihad as a means to reclaim the liberation of the Islamic lands. In 1928, Hassan al-Banna (1906 - 1949) established the Muslim Brothers in Egypt. "The Message of Jihad," "*risālat al jihād*," became, in Tibi's reading, one of the pillars of this movement.<sup>200</sup> Al-Banna is for many, including Tariq Ramadan as will be seen later, a social activist, anti-Zionist and anti-colonial activist, and not a jihadist in the way fundamentalists understand him.<sup>201</sup> The jihadism that has been attached to the Muslim Brothers goes mainly to Sayyed Qutb (1906-1966) who became the inspiration of the movement after al-Banna was killed in 1949. Besides *Social Justice in Islam* (1949), *World Peace and Islam* (1951), *In the Shade of the Qur'an* (30 volume commentary on the Qur'an, 1954) and other theological and literary writings, Qutb is mainly known for his *Milestones or Signposts on the Road, ma'ālim fī at-tarīq*, published in 1964, after 10 years on imprisonment under Nasser's regime, which culminated in his hanging in 1966. Qutb is said to have influenced international jihadists like Ayman al-Zawahiri (b.1951), Oussama Ben Laden (1957-2011), and Anwar al-Awalaqi (1971-2011). The Pakistani Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi (1903-1979) is another figure of high authority in the politicization of jihad. It is him who coined the terms the "Islamic state," "Islamic revolution," "al-hakimiyya," and "al-jahiliyya," (which Qutb borrows from him) in many writings, mainly voiced in *The Islamic Law and Constitution*

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 55

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 55

<sup>200</sup> *Islam between Culture and Politics*, 3

<sup>201</sup> Taibi says: "Tariq Ramadan, presents his grandfather not only as an "anti-colonialist" but also as one of the major sources of *Renouveaux musulman*. This is utterly wrong." *Political Islam*, 5

(1941), and disseminated also through Jamaat-e-Islamic, Islamic Party, which he founded in Lahore in 1941. Tibi argues that with such influential figures, “Jihad is back as jihadism.”<sup>202</sup> That is, jihadism targets the world system, which jihadists describe as “jahili” (based on the ignorance of God), and they aspire to replace it by an Islamic State and *hakimiyat Allah* (Allah’s rule).

Over and again, Tibi clarifies his points of differentiation between jihad and jihadism, and between ordinary Muslims, and the Islamist jihadist fundamentalists. He feels sorry that such confusion in world politics during the “war on terror” era took place after 9/11. It is the Islamists, not the ordinary Muslims, though as they are on many issues, that do think of restoring the “Islamic State” and build a *Pax Islamica*, as a “revolt against the West.”<sup>203</sup> Tibi goes back then to his main idea of the failure of cultural change in Muslim societies and how that affects not only national and religious politics, and world politics as well. The jihadists agenda is a case in point. To overcome this malaise of projecting classical concepts on politicized religion, Tibi goes on with his call for reforms that touch religious understanding. Cultural modernity is the way out; theocracy, Islamic democracy, and nationalist secularism have been tried; they simply do not work, in Tibi’s analysis. “Post-secular society,” in Habermas’ sense, is not the answer either.<sup>204</sup>

### **c. Islamic Scripture: Divinization of Language and Religious Education**

Since the descent of revelation and the writing of the Quran during the third Caliph’s reign, Arabic has been considered also a sacred language, the linguistic medium of Sharia,<sup>205</sup> and has henceforth been “immortalized.”<sup>206</sup> Cultural change affects language as much as language development affects cultural change. The cultural change occurs when linguistic change consequentially affects the heart of change in society: law. Language of the Quran here is instructive and not only expressive. Despite the development throughout history of Islamic schools, maddahib, and flexibility in interpretation, the general tendency in orthodoxy for centuries has been nonreformism in

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid, 48

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 6, 22.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>205</sup> *Accommodation of Social Change*, 63

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 82

Islamic law; does this mean that this non-change affects language similarly?<sup>207</sup> For Tibi, ‘social change affects “extralingual” situations.’ During the High Islam era, Arabic was able to adapt the new changes in Arab Islamic civilization. Yet, “the basic grammatical structures of “arabiyya have hardly altered at all in centuries.”<sup>208</sup> In this situation, “how can Muslims perceive change culturally if their perception is shaped by an “*arabiyya* that is ostensibly not subject to change?” It is the “eternally valid” commitment of Arabic to the Quran as the ultimate divine revelation that keeps it unchangeable, as the revelation is.<sup>209</sup>

Tibi is for the constant change of language to accommodate the cultural change of its speakers. The Hellenization period in which the Arab Muslims took and developed Greek philosophy makes part of High Islam, in Tibi’s wording. In this period, Arabic was open to accommodate the new terminology and philosophical concepts. It was able to be the language of science during the Middle Ages, though some schools (of Kufa and Basra for instance) expressed fear of the sacred language and suspected its advocates from the philosophers. The latter, like the Greek philosophers, did not appreciate the genre of poetry and the work of poets.<sup>210</sup> Language would develop hierarchally according to the circles to which it belonged: 1) Islamic sciences (related to the Quran and Sunna), sciences of the ancients (Greek philosophy), and literary sciences (*ulumu al-adab*).<sup>211</sup> The high time of Arabic began to collapse with the decrepitude of the Abbasid empire, and the issuing territorial states, to be followed by the Ottoman times in which (Persian and) Turkish, as well as territorial dialects would develop at the expense of the Standard Arabic.<sup>212</sup>

During the encounter with the developed Europe in the eighteenth century, Arabic was found to be unable to contain the variety of scientific and socio-philosophic achievements of Europe. Among the battles taken for liberation was a linguistic one taken

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 76

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 78

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 79

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 83

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 97

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 85

to free the Arab Muslim societies from the weakness that has touched even language. Al-Tahtawi was critical of the way language was focused just on exegetical matters and commentaries, instead of being also used in the sciences which he saw Europe doing well in. The Syrian-Lebanese Arab *avant-guardists* of nationalism esteemed very much the power of language in both cultural and political revival. Sati‘ Al-Hursi (1882–1968), the spiritual father of popular Arab nationalism, and Salama Mussa (1887–1958), the early Arab nationalist-socialist, for instance, saw that language renewal goes hand in hand with socio-cultural and civilizational change.<sup>213</sup>

Tibi does not stop at blaming politics alone about the linguistic problems that have impacted cultural progress in general. He also deals with the classical methodologies the educational systems adopted throughout the centuries, basing his ideas on the work of the historian George Makdisi (1920-2002), among others. Tibi is critical of the focus given to religious studies that have been at the forefront of the educational system (at the famous al-Qarawitine in Morocco, al-Qayraouane in Tunisia and al-Azhar in Egypt for instance) at the expense of the exact sciences and philosophy. The former depend on rote learning which do not develop critical thinking, while the latter depend on informal learning groups which do not have many adherents, since they are mainly privately funded, which limits their expansion.<sup>214</sup> Importantly, for Tibi, the Islamic *madrassa* is not concerned with a process of investigation and inquiry but with “a learning process in the sacral sense,” unlike its European counterpart which is reason and empirical based:

The Muslim education system is characterized by a lack of conscious cultural reception of change, for in Islam man, as a *makhlūq* (creature of God), is supposed to live solely according to the unalterable divine commandments proclaimed in the Islamic revelation.<sup>215</sup>

Seeing that revelation ranks superior to any other previous revelation or human produced knowledge, such an educational system blinds the Muslims from recognizing

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 90-97. (See part II of Tibi’s *Arab Nationalism* which is devoted to the political theory of Sati’ al-Husri, 123-158.)

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 105-110

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 114

the realities that “do not correspond to this self-image, and therefore also deprives them of the ability to cope with those realities and to contribute substantively to their change.”<sup>216</sup> It is the “psychological barrier” of supremacy that should be overcome. Since the nineteenth century, the time of contact with the modern West, the educational systems in the Muslim world have tried to cope with secularized and semi-secularized education, but have not overcome the same old problem. The idea of taking from the West just the sciences without values, for Tibi, is not a solution, for modern sciences go with certain values.<sup>217</sup>

#### **d. Islamism: Globalizing Fundamentalism**

For Tibi, the current crisis Islam and Muslim societies experience is basically cultural. To surmount it, “cultural modernity,” which is his main term to express religious reform and social change, has to be adopted, to replace the old orthodox and patriarchal readings of religion, which are very much culturally overloaded and burdened. Cultural modernity, always in Tibi’s view, is the answer to Islam’s Predicament with modernity, and it is that which is required to facilitate the development of Euro-Islam afterwards.

This cultural inability to adopt modernity is the result of internal and external factors. For the internal factors, which will be dealt with throughout this section, it is the centuries of intellectual stagnation and excommunication of reason that have handicapped development in the Arab-Islamic world. That has affected religious interpretation of the Texts (Quran and Sunna), philosophy (*falsafa*), theology (*kalam*), the arts, culture in general, besides politics and economy. It is all a chain of effects that spill over. Tibi tries to go to these factors and raise their importance and need for reform and change. To these I return in detail in the coming sections. As to the external factors, I refer to them in passing here as a way of contextualizing the argumentation of reform and change.

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 117

There is a tendency in Tibi's thought to say that Islam's Predicament is the Arab's predicament.<sup>218</sup> He is for sure very against Arabocentrism, but the location of the Arab world in the heart of the Islamic world, makes the issue look like more Arabized. Since Napoleon's conquest attempts of Egypt in 1798, the Arab-Islamic world has been ever since open to colonial powers, from the 1820s up to the independence in the 1950s and 1960s, with the continuous pressure from the US from the 1990s Gulf War, Afghanistan invasion in 2001, and Iraq invasion of 2003. The chain of these historical events have substantially affected not only the region but also the international politics, thus the necessity to develop an approach that could be workable for the required changes in the region as well as the one required in the international arena. Tibi uses his political science background and international relations expertise to face a cultural issue that is tied to religion.

Tibi believes that the international pressure of the West on the region enticed its intellectuals and politicians to suggest solutions and reforms. The first attempts of Muhammad Ali of Egypt (1769 – 1849) failed, after Napoleon's three years of conquest, because they focused on machination and the military to counter Europe, instead of deep reform of culture and society. Yet, in his attempt to open up the cultural life to the European world, Muhammad Ali sent in 1826 a group of students for studies in Paris. At the head of the delegation, as an imam of the group, was Rifa Rafi Attahtaoui (1801-1873). In Paris, Attahtaoui would be amazed by the modern life, its society, women liberty, the sciences and the educational system. His Paris Diary was influential for the modernist attempts that developed by the end of his life. With that grew the modernist movement from the 1870s to the 1930s-1940s, with the acclaimed names like Jamal Eddine al-Afghani (1838 - 1897), Muhammad Abdu (1849 - 1905), Qassim Amin (1865-1908), Rashid Rida (1865 - 1935), Muhammad Iqbal (1877 – 1938), etc. For Tibi, the reformist attempts of such scholars were selective in the sense that they did not go deeper in questioning the historicity of the cultural and religious norms, including the Sharia prescribed legal sanctions (hudud) for instance. The disappointment of these intellectuals,

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<sup>218</sup> Tibi refers in *Arab Nationalism* to Fouad Ajami's *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice since 1967* (Cambridge, 1981). Tibi, *Arab Nationalism*, 215.

and their successors, with European Enlightenment would emerge before, but mainly during, the fight for liberation in the 1950s and the 1960s which would open the way for another wave of ideas in connection with the *tiers mondialists* (*Third Worldists*). A kind of intellectual and political effort took different paths and failed to make one force.

*Arab Nationalism: between Islam and the Nation-State* (first printed in 1981) is a well-circulated reference and one of the most successful books of Tibi, a fact which explains its republication in 1990 and 1997.<sup>219</sup> In the book, which is a contribution to postcolonial attempts towards Arab enlightenment along with other Arab leftist intellectuals like Saddiq al-Azmeh (b. 1947), Tibi argues that “Arab nationalism succeeded in de-politicizing Islam for more than half a century.”<sup>220</sup> The Arab-Muslim reformists targeted mainly the European colonial presence as well as the Ottoman dominance over the Arab-Islamic world. The modernist movement subscribed to resistance, and thus became more nationalist in spirit than truly culturally reformist. The Wahhabi movement, started by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792) subscribed to the same idea of resistance first, and made it close to the modernists in terms of political agenda. Such a marriage of convenience between the two did not banish religion from politics, and did not reform the culture, which feeds itself by religion. This continued even after the coming of the secularist Free Officers to power in Egypt, for example, led by Gamal Abd e-Nasser on 23 July, 1952.

According to Tibi, the Arab national secularists effort “to destroy the Islamic revitalization movement [i.e. Wahhabism] did not mean that its theoreticians had abandoned Islam entirely.” Rather, “they denied its claim to be an all-embracing system, and relegated it to a cultural sphere where it could only form *a part* of Arab national culture.”<sup>221</sup> What was missing in the Arab nation State “dream” or myth,<sup>222</sup> using his terms, was the substance the nation State of Europe was based on, that is, individual

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<sup>219</sup> The book is originally his PhD thesis presented to Goethe University in Frankfurt Main in 1970. In the introduction of the second edition, Michael Hudson says that the book “fills a need that has not been met thus far in the English literature.” *Arab Nationalism*, 3.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, preface to 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., x- ix.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

liberties and popular sovereignty, or *la volonté générale* (the general will), using J. J. Rousseau's term. There was a failed projection of what the nation State is on a traditional Arab society that tried to secularize without liberalizing. That hybrid socio-political construction was "a rhetoric based on the reality of the Arab's common traditional cultural heritage projected into the modern model of nation-state."<sup>223</sup> This qualifies them to be merely "nominal States,"<sup>224</sup> unable to stand strong because the change was not democratic.<sup>225</sup> Otherwise said, "It is rather the problem of *cultural accommodation of social change*."<sup>226</sup> Such a change is bound to the cultural structure that religion influences. Briefly put, "the problems are related to the incompatibility of Islamic universalism with the modern secular nation-state."<sup>227</sup>

Much worse for the Arab nominal States is their defeat in the Six Days War against Israel in 1967. Before 1967, the Sinai crisis of 1956 had already weakened the popularity of Nasserism. From Tibi's perspective, this marked a turning point in regional and international politics.<sup>228</sup> The war revealed much about the failing structures and planning's of the secular nationalist States. More importantly, it gave space for the emergence of political Islam<sup>229</sup> which ideologizes a universal faith for universal dominance,<sup>230</sup> chaos and disorder.<sup>231</sup>

For Tibi, political Islam was in the making since the 1920s, after the glamour of European Enlightenment ideas started to lose their charm, and at the time when the Palestinian issue, along with the liberation movements, started to become a regional and later on an international issue. The creation of the Muslims Brothers by Hassan Albanna (1906 –1949) in 1928 would make the Islamist voice more appealing, at first by taking part in the liberation movements. For Tibi, the early seeds of destruction of politics in the Arab world, were the use of religion in political liberation movements. Pan-Arabism and

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 23

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 23

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 65

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 26

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 226

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 23

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 217

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 220

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 233

Islam seemed to go together, to win liberation from the Ottomans, but especially from Europe.

After 1967 Six Days War defeat, the intellectuals in the Arab world, chiefly the secular-liberals, would find themselves “torn between the tyranny of political regimes and the threat of being slain by Muslim fundamentalists.”<sup>232</sup> Sadiq Jalal al-Azmeh, with his two influential books *Self-Criticism after the Defeat (1968)* and *Critique of Religious Thought (1969)*, occasioned space for direct and open criticism both to the failed nationalist secularism and religious non-reformism.<sup>233</sup> Over and again, the reason lies in the fact that “an Islamic cultural understanding of the nation-state and a corresponding new world view of Muslims is unfortunately still lacking.”<sup>234</sup>

After the modernists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Tibi goes on afterwards to refer to some contemporary reformists and their projects to which he does not agree without going into details into why. Abdullahi An`naim was invoked earlier and no need to refer to him here again. Tibi refers also to the famous Mohamed Arkoun (d. 2010) who calls for “Rethinking Islam,” a title of one of his books, and developing new scientific methods of Quranic studies. Tibi says that Arkoun “claims to deliver gold and he wants to be seen as the Islamic Immanuel Kant.” He acknowledges that he “is certainly a significant thinker on contemporary Islamic civilization, but he lacks the intellectual vigor of Kant in his addressing of the issue.” “He coins nice terms, addresses important issues, but barely goes beyond idealistic thinking and is – as Robert Lee puts it – unlikely to muster general support.”<sup>235</sup> He adds, “A rethinking of Islam is something other than the rhetoric of Mohammed Arkoun.”<sup>236</sup> I will refer to Arkoun, and other contemporary scholars in Part IV later in this work, but I just say here that Tibi does not present the work of such scholars he criticizes in details not does he say in what exactly he disagrees with them, which remains a flaw point in his approach of contemporary reformists, as I will argue in

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., xiv

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 214

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 26

<sup>235</sup> Tibi says: “I do not claim this for my own work and hope only to be successful in vigorously rethinking Islam so as to provide a basis for a debate on innovative cultural change and religious reform in contemporary Islam.” *Islam’s Predicament*, 308.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 310

due space (Part IV, Section 2b). For Sadiq al-Azmeh, the Syrian philosopher, he, according to Tibi, has ‘a rather poor knowledge of Islam’ and ‘the ulema used this flaw to disqualify him’ and his critical discourse of the religious discourse. As to, Hamid Abu Zayd (d. 2010), he is briefly described as being ‘less courageous’ in his reform proposition.<sup>237</sup> It is only Mohamed Abed Aljabri (d. 2010), the Moroccan philosopher who conducts a reconstruction of Arab and Islamic thought from within, that appears to the only contemporary scholar to win the appraisal of Tibi because he is very Averroist and rationalist in his approach. It is from him that Tibi gets the formula: “the future can only be Averroist!”<sup>238</sup> – namely, the future cannot be but reason-based.

Nonetheless, it is the return of the fiqh mind-set in contradistinction to rationalism that characterize especially the last three-four decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Like the medieval Islam which saw the competition and at the end prevalence of the fiqh over reason school, the current Muslim world sees the same historical process being relived, i.e. fundamentalists versus reformists. The latter, for Tibi, are less heard than the former. However, even among the reformists Tibi does not feel satisfied. What is lacking in these contemporary reformist discourses is, for Tibi, a big move that would shift the paradigm of thoughts towards cultural modernity.

### **Fundamentalism: Globalizing Jihadist Islam**

The resurgence of political Islam, used by Tibi interchangeably to mean fundamentalism and Islamism, does not solve the crisis the Arab-Islamic world is in. Rather, it is but another diversion from the real problems and questions that should be asked, as Tibi argues. The situation in the Arab-Islamic world, as broadly depicted here, does affect regional and international politics, “we cannot separate what happens in the Middle East from the respective international environment.”<sup>239</sup>

It is mainly in *The Challenge of Fundamentalism (1998)*, and *Political Islam, World Politics and Europe (2008)* that political Islam is pictured to have global effects,

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 262

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 262

<sup>239</sup> *Arab Nationalism*, 23

which have to be faced by working on cultural change as well as religious reforms. In *The Challenge of Fundamentalism*, Tibi clarifies his distinction between Islam as a faith and Islam as a political ideology. Because of his direct criticism of socio-cultural aspects of the Muslim societies and well as his focus on Islamism as a field of study in international relations, Tibi must have encountered suspicion about his perception of the religion of Islam *per se*. To pose himself in a clearer frame of work, the reader finds him making such clarifications: “My experience in Germany of being deliberately misunderstood on this point compels me to reiterate that I direct my criticism not toward Islam as a faith I as a Muslim adhere to, but toward fundamentalism as an ideology.”<sup>240</sup> For him, as a liberal, moderate, and reformist Muslim, labels he uses to describe himself, Islam itself, being a tolerant religion, is not and cannot be a threat, and it is a disservice to world peace to speak of Islam, one of the world’s major religions, in terms of “threat” and “confrontation”:

My religion is an open-minded faith, neither an intolerant political ideology nor a concept of world order, as Islamic fundamentalists and some in the West—so fiercely contend. The Qur’an unmistakably commands: “[There is] no compulsion in religion” (Qur’an: *surat al baqarah*, 2:256).<sup>241</sup>

Especially in the two books just mentioned, Tibi theoretizes for a discipline of studying fundamentalism as a “new world disorder.” This discipline is Islamology. Neither space nor the theme I am concerned with here allows a detailed description of this part of IR work of Tibi. However, certain aspects of this discipline are relevant to the project undertaken here, for without a distinction between Islam and Islamism, the idea of European Islam remains a risk to be rejected from the very beginning.

In Tibi’s IR theory, Islamism is a political world order that uses the Islamic religious rhetoric to replace the Western hegemony. It was seen earlier how the modernist attempts as well as the secular nationalist projects failed and gave way to political Islam from the 1970s. There are two varieties of Islamism: 1) a world order based fundamentalism, and 2) an nationally based fundamentalism. In brief terms I refer to the

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<sup>240</sup> *The Challenge of Fundamentalism*, 19

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, x

second type first for two reasons: first because it has to do with the socio-cultural reform religion as a cultural system has to undergo, as Tibi contends, and second because it indirectly rekindles the rhetoric of the internationalized fundamentalism, and makes the internal and external relations look at it with suspicion, if not with total unease. This territorial fundamentalism, according to Tibi, sees the West as an opponent to Islamic reawakening and to Muslim societies liberation and development. Main examples of this type include Iran and Sudan; their Islamist governments make the organized version of Islamism take place, a reality which aborts any social change and religious reform. Minor examples include Hizbullah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine, and the Algerian Islamist Front of the late 1980s and early 1990s. These national fundamentalisms do take sometimes nationalist or ethno-fundamentalist look; such a kind of religious-based fundamentalism, and is similar to Serbian and Hindu fundamentalism. Though chaotic and violent, these national fundamentalist movements and governments are not a big threat to world politics as the international Al'Qaeda is, yet their danger is felt in negating change and religious reform, which perpetuates the crisis nationally, and affects the international arena.

As to international Islamic fundamentalism, it aims at replacing the current world order. After the demise of the Soviet Union, and especially the Afghan War against the Soviets, Islamism just widened its horizon and begun to overthrow the West from leading the world order, "Why not defeat the West, too?"<sup>242</sup> Islamic fundamentalism uses the religion of Islam as rhetoric to draw attention of the world to the miseries of the Arab-Muslim world, and thus justify its world scale agenda. Tibi tries to dismantle this rhetoric from within, in the sense that he brings his Islamic background into the front and compares it with political Islam discourse. In doing so, he does not fall into the trap of being apologetic. On the contrary, as the later sections will show, his call for the religious reform and the adoption of cultural accommodation situates him far from the apologetics.

Now, I sketch out some elements that characterize political Islam or Islamism, always in the eyes of Tibi. First, the socio-economic gap between the West and the rest of

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 16.

the world has created a sense of cynicism about the Western values of modernity, among which are human rights, equality, and justice. The fundamentalists, like the rest of the Third Worldists, reject the values that dominate them and put them in an unprivileged position. This has a lot to do with the idea that globalization as an institutional structure has succeeded in dominating the world, and that includes the labor markets, the banking systems and administrations. But globalization as a cultural system, i.e. as a container of Enlightenment values, could not be exported, nor could it be adopted easily. This has affected the post-colonial world, and the Muslim world in particular. This was made worse by the failing projects of the Arab secular nationalists. This has created a cultural fragmentation that seeks “allegedly authentic, local, cultural roots.”<sup>243</sup>

Second, the fundamentalists are selective in their political agenda. They adopt the technological side of modernity and Western achievements. At the same time, they adopt cultural and religious elements that identify them with a particular culture and civilization, in this case the Islamic civilization. Further than that, while in their concrete communities, they mobilize kinship and ethnic commitments.<sup>244</sup> “At issue in each case is a political ideology, not the religion so cynically linked with that ideology.”<sup>245</sup> This way, “Fundamentalism does not address religious beliefs, but rather a sociopolitical worldview [...] based equally on an equally selective and arbitrary politicization of religion.”<sup>246</sup>

Third, the fundamentalists plan to reshape the world order by adopting Allah’s rule, (*hakimiyyat Allah*), which “is recent, and that one fails to find it either in the Qur’an or in the hadith tradition of the Prophet, the only two authoritative sources of Islam recognized by all Muslims.”<sup>247</sup> Allah’s rule is composed of three main traits that made part of the classical Islamic discourse, but are adopted out of context for pure political reasons: these traits are the concepts of the umma, the jihad, and the da‘wa. For the Islamists, the umma means the international mass of Muslims as a political block, while in origin it was first used by the Arab nationalists to mean the geographical Arab

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 14, 22.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 19

societies, including the Christians, and it excluded the Turks and Persians. The fundamentalists do project the notion of the nation on a religious precept which is universal, i.e. the Islamic umma of faith.<sup>248</sup> The same mis-adoption has occurred to the term jihad. For Tibi, it is difficult to convey to Western readers the Islamic meaning of jihad, which they wrongly translate as “holy war.” “Jihad is simply a religious duty Muslims must fulfill in carrying out Allah’s message.” The reinterpretation of the term stands for the “jihadization of Islam,” for “in the classical doctrine, there is no justification for the slaying of individuals. The Qur’an forbids assassination and ambush attacks.” As to da‘wa/ call to Islam [or proselytization] like Christian evangelism, Tibi believes that it is supposed to be peaceful.<sup>249</sup>

Fourth, and I limit myself to these four religious idiosyncrasies here, the fundamentalist assert that be it the last divine message, the “*nizam Islami*” (Islamic order) has to rule and dominate the world, and replace the Westphalian European model. And seeing that the West is the one that is in the lead, instead of the Islamic world which is following, they feel “hurt” and “humiliated.” The supremacy aspect is taken politically, and is not interpreted in its spiritual aspects. “The concept of the *nizam Islami* / Islamic order does not exist in the Qur’an, nor does it in the hadith of the Prophet.”<sup>250</sup> For Tibi, “This is not a religious but a civilizational issue; the clash is between two universalisms—one secular, one divine—each claiming global validity.”<sup>251</sup> Tibi concludes that “The turath / Islamic heritage includes no concept of world order, as Muslim fundamentalists prefer to believe. Their quest for an Islamic world order is simply a reading of modern thinking into classical Islamic concepts.”<sup>252</sup>

These characteristics gathered from various fieldwork research and theoretical conceptualizations of Tibi are conducive to a number of remarks, from which I select the following. First, Islamic fundamentalism is simply one variety of a new global phenomenon in world politics; there are other religious fundamentalisms that have

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 54

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 59

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 62

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 62

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 34

resurged especially after the end of the Cold War to counter the Western hegemony; Islamic fundamentalism plays the tone of a “defensive culture”<sup>253</sup> in this point. Second, the movement, though skillful in being totalitarian, and in adopting “irregular war,”<sup>254</sup> lacks the capabilities and resources necessary for achieving its agenda, but belittling this challenge as a rhetoric is erroneous, for it has already a remarkable presence in Algeria, Afghanistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and some other places, including the secular Turkey whose Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Tibi describes as “fundamentalist.” Third, “any promotion of hostility to Islam itself in the guise of a clash of civilizations would unwittingly play into the hands of the fundamentalists in their efforts to antagonize the West.”<sup>255</sup> Fourth, last but not least, fundamentalism has become an issue affecting Western societies in the search for models for the Islamic migrant communities: communitarianism, ghettoization, or integration as individual citizens.<sup>256</sup> To counter the Islamization of Europe, which is disseminated by global jihadism, Euro-Islam comes as the answer Tibi envisions, “Europe and its Muslim migrants need a Euro-Islam opposed to the diaspora ideology of Islamism that produces jihadists like those who ignited the violent events of Madrid, Amsterdam, Paris and London between 2004-6.”<sup>257</sup>

## **2. Cultural Modernity for Religious Reform and Cultural Change: towards Euro-Islam**

Tibi repeatedly says that there is only one modernity. Multiple modernities is/are ‘semi-modernity.’ He defends the idea that modernity is universal though it is born in Europe. Other cultures and civilizations can adopt it somewhat differently, but they cannot think of “multiple modernities,” and thus multiple differences in its outcome, i.e. multiple sciences, etc. “Just as there are no multiple modernities, there can be no multiple sciences.”<sup>258</sup> Tibi makes it clear that modernity ‘is secular, not Christian,’ to make modernity a universal phenomenon that could happen to any religious society, and thus

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<sup>253</sup> *Crisis of Modern Islam*, 139.

<sup>254</sup> *Political Islam*, 123.

<sup>255</sup> *The Challenge of Fundamentalism*, xii

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>257</sup> *Political Islam*, 125.

<sup>258</sup> *Islam's Predicament*, 256

can be applicable to Muslims, too. He also makes it clear that ‘commitment to cultural modernity is not an Orientalism’ but is a commitment to ‘freedom for the people of Islam.’<sup>259</sup> Cultural modernity then is an invitation to continue with the Islamic medievalist heritage which was rationalist for some time and which was, more importantly, open to borrowing from the other, mainly the Greeks in philosophy matters. Without an honest endorsement of this old tradition, anything else leads nowhere, in Tibi’s thought:

If that Islamic medieval rationalism that recognized the universality of knowledge continues to be declared a heresy, and if authenticity is narrowed down to a polarization of the self and otherness, then Muslims of the twenty-first century will continue to be unsuccessful in embarking on modernity.<sup>260</sup>

The utmost fear Tibi nurtures after about a century and half of attempts of reform is the idea of ‘semi-modernity.’ The latter means borrowing modern technology and its administrative mechanisms without delving into the core of modernity, based on individual human rights, the rule of law, rationality, and secularization. Modernity goes along with cultural changes and a reformed worldview, unlike semi-modernity which hosts orthodox ideas of supremacy and ‘nostalgia’ for an ideal Islam that is not pluralist. Semi-modernity is a failing ‘dream’ that depicts Islam’s ongoing predicament with modernity.<sup>261</sup> Otherwise said, “Islamic modernism is in fact not really modern, because it does not contribute to a rethinking of the dogma. It is rather, an illusion of semi-modernity.”<sup>262</sup> In his agenda of cultural modernity, Tibi emphasizes three main aspects: secularization, subjectivity and pluralism, and rationalism. Both civil Islam, for Muslims in Islamic majority countries, and Euro-Islam, for European Muslims, build on these features.

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 309-312.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 54-202.

### a. Politics: Secularizations vs. De-secularization

Tibi's project of cultural modernity is modern, secular, and reason-based. "Cultural modernity is a project based on the recognition of the primacy of reason."<sup>263</sup> Behind it lies his claim "to reconstruct the Shari'a."<sup>264</sup> It is "an aspiration toward innovating the Shari'a."<sup>265</sup> As a reminder, Tibi takes Sharia to mean Islamic law. Such an endeavour in reforming religion within the premise of cultural modernity "is not alien to Islam," argues Tibi. Rather, "cultural roots of modernity existed in Islamic thought."<sup>266</sup> Tibi takes religious reform as pivotal for cultural reforms for the concerned Muslim majority countries, but equally for world peace which he calls for, from his position as an IR expert. As noted earlier, reference to IR here is not my focus; I refer to it just when I see it fits and to highlight certain points. Here, for example, IR reference is relevant because Tibi sees that Sharia, Islamic law, should be reformed to take into account the current world system and international relations treaties, conventions, and protocols. It is also relevant because reforming Sharia would draw a clearer distance between the Muslims and Islam, the Islamists and Islamism. A reformed Islamic law, in brief, builds a pluralist culture and society which affects positively the world at large, for the Muslims and Islam are all over the world.

For Tibi, the term Sharia, which occurs only once in the Quran (sura 45, verse 18), holds an ethical, not a juridical meaning. The juridical meaning is a construction, "Historically, I maintain that the Sharia, as a legal system, is a post-Koranic construction."<sup>267</sup> It "is the work of religious fiqh-scholars in Islam;" "it is not God's revelation." Still, the fact that it has not undergone change for centuries "is viewed as a divine law revealed by God, even though it is purely a human interpretation."<sup>268</sup> The faqihs have been able to establish themselves as the guardians of the Sharia. They have

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>264</sup> *Accommodation of Social Change*, 63.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>266</sup> *Islam's Predicament*, 7.

<sup>267</sup> *Islam between Culture and Politics*, 148.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 154.

been “closer to political power than to God and thus they reached high standing as legitimators of the rulers throughout Islamic history.”<sup>269</sup>

Though Sharia has written records, it is an interpretative and not a codified law. Traditional Sharia, for Tibi, is not a law for the state, for it is in effect a civil law that focuses on human relations such as marriage, divorce, inheritance and the like, “shari’a was restricted to civil law.”<sup>270</sup> In the domain of state politics, during Medieval Islam, the Caliphate was considered to be governed by the Sharia. However, the distinction between politics, *siyassa*, as a domain of the caliph, and Sharia, as a domain of the ulema, amounted to a separation between religion and politics. It is just after the politicisation of this cultural pattern by Islamic fundamentalists in the second half of the twentieth century that Sharia becomes a law for creating the political order of an Islamic state.<sup>271</sup>

Historically, Tibi adopts Noel Coulson’s (d. 1986) division of Sharia and its development into three phases, and adds a fourth according to his reading. The first phase, which ranges from the post-Quranic era to the 9<sup>th</sup> century, is the formative phase during which an Islamic legal system was developed. The second phase, which ranges from the tenth to the twentieth century, tells the rigidity of this law which claims to be valid as divine truth for all times and does not change as history moves on. The third phase takes form in the twentieth century, with the introduction of the European institutions of the secular nation-state into the Muslim world. Such a happening justifies itself because Islamic law has been unable to face the European legal and political model. the gates of *ijtihad* opened once again during the encounter with the West. The fourth phase, which Tibi adds to Coulson’s division, is portrayed as “anti-Western fundamentalism.” This phase aims at “de-Westernisation of law” and “Islamization of law.”<sup>272</sup> More importantly for Tibi is the fact that “the Islamic definition of an

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 63

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 155

international law lays claim to an imposition of Islam on the entire world,” which is an unconcealed opposition to the ideal of worldwide cultural pluralism.<sup>273</sup>

Tibi argues that Islamic imperial states, which were not Islamic states but simply received religious legitimation, are historical examples of secular orders. They were rationalist in their advocacy of the sciences and capitalist economy. He goes so far as to say that if the rationalists of High Islam as well as the Sufists managed to stay longer and impact society and power, they could have anticipated modernity centuries ago. He refers to the work of the Syrian philosopher Tayyeb Tizini (b. 1934) about the Muslim secular rationalists:

The political and social content of those ideas of Arab-Islamic thinkers [...] is expressed in a hostile attitude to the dominant feudal intellectual position. The social basis for this attitude was to be found in the then considerable vertical and horizontal development of commodity production and in economic activities generally, and it went hand in hand with the development of natural sciences such as chemistry, astronomy, medicine and mathematics.<sup>274</sup>

Similarly, the Sufists, besides the visible Islamic rituals, they basically worked on the inner side of the Self, known as “*batiniyya*/ inwardness.”<sup>275</sup> Unlike these historical examples that support his secular order thesis, Tibi broadly blames the ulema/ faqihs for having mediated between man and Allah, and also between man and the ruling elite. The ulema have created a clergy though supposedly there is none in Islam that calls for it. This makes him believe that ‘the ideal of Islam does not match the reality, whether in the past or in the present.’<sup>276</sup>

Failure to reform Islamic law to keep up with historical social changes and development brings about frustration and fundamentalism, as seen earlier. Despite the hijacking of Islamic law by fundamentalists, classical fiqh scholars still have not dared to make remarkable changes because for them the Sharia is divine. This attitude is held though ordinary people do deviate from the legal norms of this same Sharia, and some of

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 158

<sup>274</sup> Qtd in *Islam's Predicament*, 197.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 197

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 196

its sanctions, *hudud*, are not practiced in most Islamic societies, like the stoning and the cutting off of the hands:

Clearly, the behaviour of people who believe in an immutable dogma must in the course of the centuries deviate from that dogma, if it is not newly formulated and adapted to suit new conditions. But because that dogma claims not to be historically conditioned, and because it conceives of itself as eternally valid, a rethinking of it would contradict its essence and runs the risk of being involved in a heresy. This is the substance of the great centuries-old gulf between legal philosophy and practice in the history of Islam.<sup>277</sup>

Tibi contends that the Sharia which influences the cultural mode in Muslim life does not correspond to the modern legal theories. The latter consist of a logical and linguistic dimension, a sociological and psychological dimension, and ultimately an ethical or political dimension.<sup>278</sup> In Tibi's view, the Sharia has yet to be clarified and reformed accordingly, for it is not codified and it is the divinity of the Quranic text that defines its instructive text and inscriptions of the *ḥalāl* and the haram, the permitted and the forbidden.<sup>279</sup>

Tibi is critical of the classical interpretation of Islamic law. Though most of it was developed after the Prophet and canonized in different jurisprudence schools, *madahibs*, with time it was elevated to the status of divinity, as the Quran is. Accordingly, Sharia is also immutable and eternally valid, and consequently cannot, with time, help people shape their socio-cultural life. The jurist becomes an interpreter of eternal laws and does not go much beyond them. The legal norm, then, ends up in building an existence for itself in theory, while the practice of people develops according to the social needs; the theoretical diverges from the practical,<sup>280</sup> which creates a psychological dilemma in the mind of the believer, a fact which modern law does not lead to. The "behavioural lag" and "legal tricks/hiyal" anthropologists note when studying Muslim societies behavior and its correspondence with the Sharia norms are examples of the gap between Sharia

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<sup>277</sup> *Islam between Culture and Politics*, 156

<sup>278</sup> *Accommodation of Social Change*, 60

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 61

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 69

and society's evolutionary practices, which need to be studied again in light of modern challenges and legal advancements.

Tibi advocates the revival of the tradition of *ijtihād* (intellectual exertion) in the Islamic tradition. After the four main jurisprudence schools took hold of the Islamic tradition, they have been honored and built up on, without going back to the original Quranic Text and Prophetic hadiths. This is known as deduction by analogy, *qiyās*. Solving legal issues without referring to the original texts, and being satisfied with the *qiyās*/analogy or mimicry/*taqlid*, is said to have closed the gates of *ijtihād* for centuries.<sup>281</sup> That heritage of *ijtihād* is what Tibi calls for again, “it is possible to find intellectual plurality in Islamic history [...].The Koran contains general principles that are intended to be understood as an Islamic ethic and that also allow for varying interpretations within the *ijtihād* tradition.”<sup>282</sup>

Tibi introduces some modern legal techniques into Islam (Islamology) to revive the *ijtihād* practice. They mark part of “juristic hermeneutics”: “topic thinking,” and “flexibilization.” For “topic thinking” or “topics,” it is a technique of thought which focuses on problems.<sup>283</sup> “Topical discourse” serves the discussion of focused legal problems. The adoption of this method would mean that law derives from the problems Muslims face in daily life and not from the Texts of Quran or Sunna or madahib accumulated archive. This entails deriving meanings in new contexts from old texts without damaging or neglecting them.

As to “flexibilization,” it is a technique used mainly in German jurisprudence to convey “the nonrigid handling of legal norms.” Unlike the *hiyal*/tricks legal tradition in Muslim societies that experience a gap between the philosophy of law and its practice, flexibilization aims at incorporating that mode of social change without nullifying the rigidity of Islamic law.<sup>284</sup> This way, the *ijtihād* that implicitly means that the Texts are open to interpretation does not differ from the idea of law as an “open texture” in Herbert

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 64-71

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 71

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 71. Tibi is quoting the definition of the German legal philosopher Theodor Viehweg.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 70

Lionel A. Hart's (1907- 1992) terms.<sup>285</sup> With topic thinking and flexibilization, the problem at stake does not wait to be solved or be influenced by historically old contexts, but it carries itself to the Text and contextualizes itself therein. Such a process allows for Islamic law to be up to date, in parallel with the social needs, and henceforth contribute to the development process. There is no dynamism without law reformation.<sup>286</sup>

Again, Behind Tibi's project of cultural modernity profoundly lies the secular project, as he acknowledges. "This book [*Islam's Predicament with Modernity...*] is, in substance, a secular project."<sup>287</sup> Tibi differentiates between secularism and secularization, and he claims that it is he who first introduces this distinction in Islamic thought, because it draws on "the precious tradition of Islamic rationalism."<sup>288</sup> "This is a new approach in Islamic thought, which I claim to have established."<sup>289</sup> Otherwise said, Tibi calls for secularization instead of the "Shariatization" of Islam, and at the same time he distances himself from the European ideology of secularism. Secularization for Tibi is a universal 'social process that could take place in any society,'<sup>290</sup> and for Islamic thought it is but a continuity of a process that started and ended in the medieval rationalist ages.

There is a trilogy that Tibi puts on the table to clarify his project of secularization. This trilogy is: secularity, secularism, and secularization. Using his words,

Secularity is a state of affairs in a modern society where religion no longer determines all aspects of life in a quasi-organic manner, but is not abolished [...]. *Secularity* is a state of affairs in society; *secularization* is a social process; and finally *secularism* is an ideology.<sup>291</sup>

Otherwise said, secularity is the conditionality in which a secular order rules; the secular here does not mean non-religiosity (*la-diniyya*), but takes its original Latin meaning of 'worldly' (from *saeculum*), i.e. that which is concerned with world affairs.<sup>292</sup> Tibi is against the imported ideology of secularism because he believes that reform should come

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 70

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 74-75

<sup>287</sup> *Islam's Predicament*, 178

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 183

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 187

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 189

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 182

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 188

from within and not from without. Instead, he advocates secularization which can take place in any developing society in history; it is a 'prerequisite for modern societies, regardless of their civilizational background.'<sup>293</sup> Unlike the tradition that may hamper progress, secularization encourages it, and without it no development occurs. Secularity as a new social order does not abolish religion, but makes it just part of the new social order in which other elements become equally important. "This does not mean abolition of religion,"<sup>294</sup> since "the process of secularization can and do occur in societies in which people draw on Islam for their faiths and ethics."<sup>295</sup>

Tibi argues that "shari'a and democracy are incompatible."<sup>296</sup> Sharia for him has never been a constitution or a law of a state. "In the Quran "shari'a means morality, not law," and the Prophetic period which experienced the "Medina Constitution" is but a modern reading of the Islamic past;<sup>297</sup> i.e. that was not a law of a state, but a code of morality that is specific to the "Prophetic charisma." As a code of morality, Tibi makes it clear that it should remain a private matter, as it is in Europe. He brings to the fore the "Protestant ethic" (developed by Max Weber) as a model, which the future of Islam will end in; it is only when privatized that Islam can embrace secularization and industrialization, and finally development. He recognizes that Reformation was not only individual focused for self-piety, but was also interested in ruling the world from a religious perspective; he takes the Weberian understanding of the Protestant ethic and its potential for the nourishment of socio-cultural change and capitalism. In *The Crisis of Modern Islam* (1988), Tibi writes the following:

In Europe the Industrial Revolution and the technological-scientific culture it produced have not led to the extinction of Christianity in spite of this culture's rational underpinning. But religion is secularized and, as an ethic, is primarily relegated to the internal sphere. Afghani [the reformist] makes a vigorous appeal to Luther and uses his Reformation as a model for the Islamic people; he ignores, however, the crucial fact that the Protestant ethic has been primarily domiciled within the sphere of interiority and that, for Luther, the religious man, as a

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 189

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 197

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 180

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 97

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 116

personally accountable Christian individual, is dependent upon himself. *The future of Islam seems to lie in a parallel direction.*<sup>298</sup> [Emphasis added]

Tibi is aware of the fact that the secularization he has in mind is the harbinger of a 'complex social evolution' that can have crucial repercussions on the religious system which becomes a 'part system of society.' It is evolutionary after the will for it comes to people, and it is not evolutionary in the sense that it is a natural historical phase. It becomes so just when it is pushed for from within and from below, 'The secularization of society is neither an evolutionary nor a determined process. The process can only take place in society if the people involved want it and engage in action for it. Otherwise, it will never be successful, or will simply not occur.'<sup>299</sup>

Besides, Tibi argues that next to cultural change, 'industrialization is also a requirement for secularization.'<sup>300</sup> This leads him to say that development, based on secularization and individual endeavors, is human and universal, and not purely European or Occidental/Western. Here, he distances himself from mimicking the European model, "The secularization of Islam cannot come about along the lines of the Western pattern,"<sup>301</sup> and adds that "Muslims can create their own Oriental Islamic variant of this stage of civilization [development] in which Islam would be reduced to a subsystem of the greater, whole social system: that is, to a religious ethic."<sup>302</sup> Such a process of secularization and perception of religion happened in societies and civilizations before in ancient African, Asia, and Latin America, and it is happening in the West now. Development can happen to any society, as does secularization and industrialization.<sup>303</sup> This certainly touches on the issue of human's mastery of nature for their needs. The link between the two depends on the degree of rationality of the concerned society. Where it leads is based on the rational process and the proximity society makes between the

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<sup>298</sup> *The Crisis of Modern Islam*, 139

<sup>299</sup> *Islam's Predicament*, 191

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 193

<sup>301</sup> *The Crisis of Modern Islam*, 145

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 148

<sup>303</sup> *Islam's Predicament*, 192

sacred, the profane and the political; and broadly this proximity if grounded on harmony, it does not end in mastery, but on affinity and reciprocal reflection.<sup>304</sup>

Over and above, according to Tibi, what some call “Islamic modernity” since al-Afghani up to the secular nationalists” period failed to embrace modernity because they undermined its cultural values, true secularization, and opted for ideological secularism and technological modernity. Islamic modernity failed to rethink the “religious dogma” and satisfied itself with the “illusion of semi-modernity.”<sup>305</sup> At the heart of modernity, cultural modernity in Tibi’s terms, is the question of secularization, the banning of religion from playing a direct role in politics but allowing the visibility of its morality and spirituality, which is a bold step that Muslim societies should develop and endorse culturally. Besides secularization, Tibi advocates the adoption of the modern conception of subjectivity and individual freedom, and the re-adoption of rationalism of Islamic *falsafa*/philosophy as ways of overcoming the predicament of modernity.

#### **b. Individual Rights and Pluralism vs. Islamic Supremacism**

For cultural modernity to work, it has to be based on individual freedom. Subjectivity is primary. It upholds individual agency and promotes pluralism in society. This is not the case with Sharia and the concept of umma that bind the individual to the community. This be the case, the Islamic cultural system then becomes unable to meet up with modernity in its entirety. Without individual rights, modernity is met half-way, and Islam, like all religions, becomes entangled in an impasse, termed here predicament.<sup>306</sup> Tibi argues that Sharia is in conflict with individual human rights as adopted internationally since 1948 through the UDHR. He further believes that it does contain the Huntingtonian thesis of “clash of civilizations,” for the individual is effaced in the place of the community, which in turn is considered as superior to any other religion or man-made philosophy. Tibi says:

Let it be said candidly: the Shari’a – believed to be superior and pure, according to the worldview of Salafists and Islamists – establishes fault lines – like those of

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 202

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 28

Huntington's *Clash of Civilization*. Individual human rights have no legitimacy whatsoever in the Shari'a. [...] Individual human rights have no legitimacy whatsoever in the Shari'a.<sup>307</sup>

In Islam, Muslims, as believers, have "fara'id/ duties" vis-à-vis the collectivity of the "umma-community," but no individual rights in the sense of entitlements.<sup>308</sup>

He adds that the Islamic Declaration of Human Rights of Cairo in 1982 is not enough and does not comply with the modern standards of human rights that centralize the subject. "There can be no specific Islamic human rights in the name of authenticity."<sup>309</sup> But taking into account that there are international needs for "universal morality," Muslims can find in Hellenized Islam sources to back up their support for a shared morality.<sup>310</sup> The latter is the "only thing" that "could unite humanity," seeing the differences in world cultures.<sup>311</sup> While he calls for the adoption of human rights by everyone, particularly the Muslims, here, he frequently warns against understanding this as a Westernization or universalization of the Western values, "I am not playing with words when I opt for universality of values and at the same time criticize the ideology of universalism."<sup>312</sup> Western universalism would denigrate the right of non-Westerners, "a sweeping Western universalism is not the solution," that is the reason why the adoption of individual human rights should be developed from within.<sup>313</sup> When the individual is values, pluralism reigns, and supremacism vanishes.

"Cultural modernity provides a concept of pluralism."<sup>314</sup> The pluralism Tibi has in mind is "universal" and goes against any religious narrow doctrine; "it is a segment of secular cultural modernity." If secularization accommodates religion without abolishing it, as seen earlier, here, pluralism opens up to not just one religion, but to as many as

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 140

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 142

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., 142

<sup>311</sup> Tibi states: "In our age near the end of the 20th century, recently described as an age of a "clash of civilizations," there is a tremendous need for morality based on a common set of norms and values shared by the entire international community. If the underpinning of this needed international morality is not basically human rights, what else could unite humanity?" Tibi, 277, in "Islamic Law/Shari'a, Human Rights, Universal Morality and International Relations," *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (May, 1994), 277-299. p277

<sup>312</sup> *Islam's Predicament*, 145

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 209.

society is fraught with. Pluralism ‘stems from the political theory of democracy, which places all parties on an equal footing.’<sup>315</sup> Though it originates in political science since it relates to the political culture of parliamentary democracy, pluralism now is required to be upheld by any ideology or philosophy or religion, “democracy and pluralism have neither Islamic nor Christian nor any other religious roots.”<sup>316</sup> Islam, like any other component and party in society, has to adopt this idea of pluralism, against the supremacist view it has of itself as “the final revelation” and “the only true religion.”<sup>317</sup> Such an enterprise “can only be successful in the spirit of an “open Islam” that goes beyond scriptural confines.”<sup>318</sup> Tibi believes that Islam can accommodate pluralism, while its counterpart, i.e. Islamism, cannot because it aims at establishing a supremacist Islamic order.

Islam already accepts diversity, but it is pluralism that has to be rethought of from within. Diversity is not enough; it is a component of pluralism paradigm. “Islam accepts diversity, but not pluralism.” The latter is a normative concept that goes beyond the concept of umma to accommodate ‘a set of basic values, norms, and rules to be shared with non-Muslims’, while the former is a state of affairs, a description of what is there.<sup>319</sup>

In Tibi’s thought, it is the Sharia’s weak stance when compared with international law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the liberal democratic values that challenges the Muslims to rethink particular issues of their religion to accommodate pluralism. Legal aspects of Sharia law stand as the main barrier in the reform Tibi, and other reformists, calls for:

For scholars such as myself, living and working as Muslims in a state of tension between Western and Eastern culture, the question arises whether Islamic legal discourse, with the great steps forward made by Europe in its own legal sphere, can be fertilized without at the same time sacrificing Islamic authenticity.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 210-13.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 233

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 214

<sup>320</sup> *Accommodation of Social Change*, 84

The main legal issues concern individual and collective rights. They can be numerated as follows: 1) the place of the non-Muslim monotheists (Jews and Christians) as dhimmis, i.e. protected minorities instead of being considered equal, 2) the place of the other non-Muslim non-monotheists (Hindus, Buddhists, etc.) as unbelievers/*kāfirūn* in Islamic thought, 3) the consideration of the Shi‘a as heretics, and vice versa, 4) the place of the Muslim or non-Muslim reformists who are at times convicted of apostasy and death through *takfir* doctrine, 5) the discrimination against all religious minorities within Islam (Baha’i, Ahmadiyya, etc.), and 6) discrimination against women.<sup>321</sup>

The adoption of pluralism is needed because there is a lot from religious legacy that has been either not updated to keep up with the historical changes of societies or because the politicization of religion has taken a fundamentalist guise as seen before. The Islamic world order, *hakkimiyat allah*, the umma, jihad, Shariatization of law, and proselytization are among the main concepts that belittle the importance of pluralism and abort reforming Islam:

For Islam to achieve an accommodation of pluralism of religions and cultures, which is possible, Muslims need to have an honest willingness to rethink inherited Islamic concepts of the non-Muslim other, and thus to change their worldview. In short, they need to go beyond apologetics and scriptural interpretations. Put in plain language: in a world of pluralism of religions there is no room whatsoever for supremacy.<sup>322</sup>

The supremacy that is discussed here is at the theoretical and normative level, which is found in a number of classical texts. Tibi admits that those texts have to be historically contextualized and that tolerance and respect is very much emphasized in the Quran and some Hadiths. His fear is with the return of religion the way it is advocated by some theologians like al-Mawdudi, Qutb, Anwar Aljundi, Muhammad Zaibaq and Ali Jarisha who speak of the supremacy of Islam. Such political theologians refuse dialogue because it (dialogue) equates ‘the last true revelation’ with Christianity and Judaism.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> *Islam’s Predicament*, 128

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, 221

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 211, 223. (See also *The Challenge of Fundamentalism*, 153)

Tolerance, *tasamuh*, in classical Islam subdues the People of the Book as a minority and considers the non-monolithic non-Muslims as infidels. At its time, it was an advanced model; it gave the human being his/her dignity despite colour, race, or gender. However, the modern standards of tolerance are higher, and diversity has to elevate to the status of considering the 'othered' non-Muslim other as an equal person, equal citizen in a democratic society, this applies to man as much as it applies to woman, despite their religious or philosophic or ideological affiliations. Tibi sometimes seems puzzled with Islamic history, its diversity, and various interpretations and models it has taken, 'There is an inner contradiction in Islam.'<sup>324</sup> By way of illustration, the notion of umma for him is supposed to be universal and able to accommodate even the non-Muslims within the Muslim community, if Islam is truly universal. Here, the umma is 'inclusive, not exclusive.'<sup>325</sup> Yet, the resurgence of the notion of the umma has narrowed down its scope and made of it a negative religio-political term.

So, though he claims that pluralism the way he advocates it cannot be extrapolated directly from Quranic texts, Tibi still believes that there are references that can uphold it as it upheld the past tolerance and diversity achievements. Pluralism as held here then does not find all its ingredients in the Islamic texts, simply because the historical conditions were different. Religious legitimacy is needed for his approach, and he backs it up with verses that call for tolerance and respect of religious differences. Tibi writes the following:

The concept of pluralism definitely does not exist in the Quran, nor was there ever a corresponding reality in Islamic history.<sup>326</sup> [...] No scriptural approach could ever provide a promising avenue. Nevertheless, I refer in this inquiry to the scriptural approach for the sake of establishing a religious legitimacy for pluralism in Islam. One can use Quranic references in pursuit of this – however, with an awareness of the limits of the approach.<sup>327</sup>

Among the Quranic verses Tibi invokes are the following: "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256), "You have your religion and I have mine" (109:6), "Allah does not

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid., 219

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 219

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 215

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 223

change people unless they change themselves” (13:11).<sup>328</sup> The pluralism aspired to nurtures “open” and “civil Islam.” Pluralism in Islam would affect Muslims in Islamic majority countries, Muslims in Europe, and wherever they are. That would also contribute to inter-religious, inter-civilizational, as well as intra-religious dialogues for world peace.

### **c. Knowledge: Rational Falsafa vs. Fiqh-Orthodoxy**

Cultural modernity cannot stand if knowledge is not reason-based. This does not happen if the heritage of Islamic falsafa/philosophy is not revived to make rationalism alive again from within. This is among the other levels of reforms Tibi proposes. Two sub-arguments underpin his proposal. The first one is his belief that knowledge based on reason is universal, and does not stop at some geographies or cultures, and the second is that High Islam, though short-lived, was based on reason and open to other cultures and civilizations. The scriptures argue for the use of reason as well, “The scriptures [...] have left ample room for rationality.”<sup>329</sup> With these two main arguments rethinking Islam can overcome its impasse. Tibi refutes the idea of the Islamization of knowledge and science. He also belittles the idea of multiple modernities advanced by postmodernists, postcolonial theorists, Islamists, and some anthropological studies.<sup>330</sup>

Based on reason, the idea of authenticity and ‘purification’ of thought disappears. ‘Enlightenment applies to all humans and could thus be shared by most cultures.’<sup>331</sup> Tibi defends the idea that the Hellenized period of medieval Islam shows that ‘borrowing’ was never a problem for the early Muslims:

To be authentic is to maintain the self while borrowing/learning from the other. According to this understanding, Islamic ‘falsafa/rationalism’ can be viewed as authentically Islamic. In this sense, reference to Western theories and approaches in order to grasp and conceptualize Islam’s predicament with cultural modernity

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<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, 128

<sup>329</sup> *Accommodation of Social Change*, 84

<sup>330</sup> *Islam’s Predicament*, 26; 256

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 239

cannot be dismissed as “unauthentic,” as is done by postmodernists and Islamists. To engage in borrowing from other cultures is an authentic Islamic mindset.<sup>332</sup>

Enlightenment at the era of Hellenization occurred because the “Muslim mind” followed the Quranic and Sunna tradition that encourage learning. The Prophet’s words that encourage to pursue learning even from distant lands, ‘even from China,’ is common among Muslims, but the contemporary Islamists are far from adopting it, argues Tibi.<sup>333</sup>

In his work on the comprehensive intellectual history in Islam,<sup>334</sup> Tibi finds that in medieval Islam, science ranked high.<sup>335</sup> For the medievalist rationalists, ‘the rational legacy of Hellenism was not an ‘Aristotelian imperialism.’<sup>336</sup> The Abbasid era is the most thriving and rationalist era in Islamic history. Harun al-Rashid (reigned from 786 to 809) and his son al-Ma’mun (reigned from 813 and 833) who set *Dar al-Hikma*, the House of Wisdom, are shining examples of the investment in the sciences and translation of the works of the Greeks into Arabic and from Arabic into Latin. Cordoba and Toledo (Tulaytila in Arabic) centers are another example from Islamic history.<sup>337</sup> Tibi repeatedly states that the worldview that characterized Hellenized Islam (High Islam) was secular in the sense that it did not reject the divine view from its reasoning. The Muslim distinguished philosophers from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 14 centuries are the main reference for Tibi when it comes to the compatibility of reason and divinity. Alkindi (801–873), al-Razi, Rhazes in Latin, (854-925), al-Farabi, al-Farabius, (872-950), al-Ghazali, Algazel, (1058–1111), Ibn Rushd (1126–1198), known as Averroes in Latin, Ibn Sinna, known as Avicenna, (980-1037) up to Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), besides the school of the whole Mu’tazilite from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> century, are the frequent names Tibi refers to as the

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 243

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 26-27

<sup>334</sup> This work is available in German, which I could not access directly because I do not master the language. He refers to this work frequently here and there when he speaks of rationalism in Islam. For an elaboration of the two rival traditions in Islamic intellectual history, i.e. fiqh versus falsafa, see Tibi, “*Politisches Denken im klassischen und mittelalterlichen Islam zwischen Fiqh und Falsafa*,” in “Iring Fetscher and Herfried Muenkler, eds., *Pipers Handbuch der politischen Ideen: Das Mittelalter*, vol. II (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1993) 87–140; See also part II in Tibi, *Der wahre Imam* (referenced in note 36), as noted in *Political Islam*, endnote 62, p. 247.

<sup>335</sup> *Islam’s Predicament*, 245

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 249

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 252

rational era-makers as defenders of reason in early Islam. He calls for the revival of this lost heritage, which is hardly included in Muslim educational systems.

Tibi believes that during the high days of Islam, rationalists and their defenders were a small community and faced strong opposition from the orthodox schools. The Ash'arite opposition of the Mu'tazilite is very known and decisive in Islamic history, but the problem is that the Mu'tazilite heritage is not taught in educational systems in the Muslim world.<sup>338</sup> The Islamic fiqh orthodoxy controlled the Islamic system of education. In his study of the Islamic intellectual history, Tibi finds that 'The fault lines in classical Islam were not between the 'self' and the 'other,' but rather within its civilization, i.e. between rational knowledge and sacral fiqh-jurisprudence.'<sup>339</sup> He compares this antagonism between the rationalist and the orthodox scholars with the current trends and antagonism between the reformists and the fundamentalists.<sup>340</sup>

Tibi says that if the rationalists were accommodated and their ideas institutionalized, modernity could have taken shape in the Islamic world before Europe. Here are his words:

Just as Europe had its Descartes and Kant, Islam had its Farabi, Ibn Sina/Avicenna, and Ibn Rushd/Averroes. They were rationalists of the same caliber. In Europe, however, the thinking of Decartes was institutionalized and thus developed into a cultural Cartesianism, with the result that, as a reason-based (*res cogito*) philosophy, it was able to shape the prevailing European worldview. In contrast, Muslim rationalists were prevented from doing so. They were denied the opportunity to determine the course of Islamic civilization and its worldview.<sup>341</sup>

For Tibi, it was reason and not fiqh that raised Islamic philosophy of the time, and it was philosophy based on reason that these Muslim philosophers contributed to Europe. "The contribution of Islam to Europe on the eve of the Renaissance was *falsafa*, and certainly not fiqh."<sup>342</sup> It is based on this heritage that Tibi corroborates his argument of cultural modernity and gives it an Islamic aura, "The Islamic rationalism of Averroes is a cultural

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 253

<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 240-44

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 254

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 242.

heritage that makes modernity authentic for Muslims.”<sup>343</sup> Averroes makes a special contribution in Tibi’s argument because he, Averroes, speaks of the ‘double truth,’ *alḥaqiqa al-muzdawaja*, which succinctly advances the compatibility and complementarity of the two world views in search for the truth, the divine and the worldly, the reasonable and metaphysical-reasoning, which can be taken to mean that secularization does not abolish religion, and vice versa.<sup>344</sup> The flourishing of Islamic philosophy took place because the spirit of cultural opening to the world and learning from other cultures and civilizations were characteristics of early Muslims. The Hellenization of Islamic philosophy did not make the rationalists look less Muslim nor did it affect their identity as religious individuals.<sup>345</sup> This capacity of learning from the other is what Tibi brings up to reform Islam. The fact that his cultural modernity project refers to Western theories does not make his approach “unauthentic,” first because he refers to Islamic past history and philosophy, and second because this heritage itself kept its authenticity though it borrowed a lot from Greek philosophy and other cultures, which in turn was used/borrowed when the Europeans took it back from Renaissance.<sup>346</sup>

After Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), the last main Islamic philosopher of high caliber, and the founder of the science of sociology and historiography according to the great historian of civilization Arnold Toynbee’s (1889-1975) testimony, the Muslim world collapsed into an intellectual stagnation and taqlid (mimicry of the past, without intellectual exertion). Internal and external constraints would contribute to that. The internal constraints could be summarized in the weight fiqh schools gained through politics and educational systems at the expense of the demising rational tradition. Since then, the gates of ijtiḥad ‘nearly closed’ and built just on the main jurisprudence schools, madhahib, instead of practicing the ijtiḥad in a more genuine basis by getting into the founding texts in the Quran and the Sunna themselves and contextualize them according to new needs. As to the external constraints, it is the division of political power in the *Machreq* as well as in the *Maghreb*, including Spain, and the focus of the Ottoman

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 239

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., 251

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 241

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 243

Empire on the development of the military and jihad instead of science that the cultural life deteriorated.

#### **d. Euro-Islam: Modern, Secular, and Pluralist**

I reiterate that in my approach I argue that Islam in Europe, being discussed here in its historical, political and intellectual development as European Islam in these initial decades of establishing itself in the continent, goes on with the debate of modernity and its challenge of, and being challenged by, Islam. The reform agenda of Tibi falls within the scope of my research approach. Muslims in Europe, with the many issues over their (said failed or at least difficult) integration, are still part of the political and theological debate that concerns their co-religionists in general either in the communities where they make a majority or significant minority worldwide. Reform projects are discussed in the East as much as they are discussed in the West, in Europe in particular. Many scholars involved in this endeavor are based in the West or even come from it, as is the case with the two main scholars I refer to.

Muslims in the diaspora, like their co-religionists in the Muslim majority countries, carry with them the impasse of Islam in the face of the modern Europe. Signs of the continuity of what Tibi calls “darkness” phases in Islamic history are echoed in Europe and can be seen in the fundamentalization of some Muslim youth and their inability to differentiate between the two worldviews, the divine and the profane, the public and private in religion. The Muslims’ burning of *The Satanic Verses* of Salam Rushdie in 1989 reminds Tibi of similar events in Islamic history, i.e. the burning of the works of Muslim medieval rationalists and their indictment as heretics and apostates.<sup>347</sup>

The various issues Tibi raises when discussing his Islam reform agenda repeat themselves when the Muslim diaspora in Europe is invoked. However, since Western Europe is already liberal, democratic, and secular in various ways according to each country and its history, some issues like democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and secularization take a secondary position. Priority in Euro-Islam goes to the aspects of

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 249-50

pluralism in (the reformed) Islam and the manifestations that either denigrate or solidify its modernity.

Tibi is clearly against any consideration of Europe as a land of Islam or a land of da'wa. He is a strong opponent of fundamentalist Islam made diffuse among the Muslims in ghettos and suburbs. Even the Muslim Brothers networks and their said moderate presence in Europe are dangerous for him. They ghettoize Muslims even in their moderate views. He considers Tariq Ramadan one of them, and clearly opposes his version of European Islam and his notion of Sharia as dar-ashahada. Proselytizing leads to ethnic ghettoization and alienation. He gives the examples of the Muslim bombers that took place in London, Madrid, the killing of Van Gogh in Amsterdam, and includes the Paris *banlieue* riots of 2005 in this category; he calls it "French Intifada."<sup>348</sup> The fear of Islamizing Europe through the concept of hijra and da'wa, proselytizing and call to Islam through migration, is very much opposite to the idea of Euro-Islam and its various values, among which is the freedom of the individual.

Tibi is equally critical of multiculturalists and group rightists. For him, that too just exacerbates ghettoization and gives more space for encroaching on the values of liberal democratic societies by both the fundamentalists and the European multiculturalists, as is the case of the German Orientalist Tilman Nagel (b. 1942). According to the reading of Tibi, Nagel aims at alienating the Muslim immigrants by keeping them as 'others' in Europe by means of the 'protected minorities' scheme.<sup>349</sup> Tibi invokes case studies he conducted in India and the serious repercussions of "minority rights" policies have on society overall politics:

given the already existing evidence of a growing hatred toward foreigners and the dreadful right-wing radicalism, we should be very cautious in discussions on collective minority rights and also need to discern the Muslim hatred ignited in some mosques against "Jews and crusaders." "I have misgivings that any granting of minority privileges and special collective rights to cultural and

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<sup>348</sup> *Political Islam*, 187

<sup>349</sup> Tibi, "Muslim Migrants in Europe: between Euro-Islam and Ghettoization," in Nezar Al Sayyad and Manuel Castells, eds. *Muslim Europe or Euro-Islam: Politics, Culture, and Citizenship in the Age of Globalization* (Boulder, New York and Oxford: Lexington Books, 2002) 31-52. 38

religious groups would be counter-productive, leading to similar results as in the case of India.<sup>350</sup>

Minority rights would just fuel Right Wing as well as “ghettoized” minorities and solidify the gap between the two.

Postmodernists and relativists are all the same for Tibi. They call for cultural difference without being aware of the risks and repercussions of alienation of the groups studied, ‘There are blind Europeans who fail to see that such an Islamization would result from their idea of ““multi-cultural discourse,”“ a romantic ideology directed against cultural pluralism that combines cultural diversity with a consensus over core values.’<sup>351</sup> Tibi goes further, as would postcolonial critics do though he is critical of their critique, too, and states that “European multiculturalists look at other cultures with a sense of romantic-eccentric mystification, following the Euro-centric tradition of viewing aliens as *bons sauvages*.”<sup>352</sup>

Broadly, for Tibi, ‘multi-culturalism is based on cultural relativism,<sup>353</sup> which is not the same as ‘cultural pluralism’ which is based on modern values that everyone should endorse in Europe, including the Muslims. For example, Tibi is against the naming of mosques founded by German-Turks after the Ottoman Sultan Fatih (1432 – 1481) who conquered the European soil during his expansion, because, for him, that is an abuse of multiculturalism.<sup>354</sup> For him, this shows that the mindset of ‘religious imperialism’ still harbors in the mind of multiculturalist communitarians and proselytizer neo-absolutist Muslims, who could be supported by undemocratic regimes in the south of the Mediterranean. Tibi summarizes the point in this passage:

The granting of multi-cultural minority privileges to Muslim migrants in Europe could prove to be a double-edged sword with far-reaching harmful consequences. On the one hand it could facilitate the unwanted interference of Islamic-Mediterranean, mostly undemocratic governments in the affairs of Muslim migrants in Europe, which happens already. On the other, it could also lead to the

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<sup>350</sup> *Political Islam*, 212

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*, 212

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, 211

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, 211

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, 211

minorities in Europe being used as the ghetto, hijacked by the self-proclaimed representatives of political Islam acting in exile and operating as a transnational movement.<sup>355</sup>

Otherwise put, minority mindset does not work for Euro-Islam. The European Muslims would still feel alienated, and the European natives would still feel centrist towards the others, the Muslims. Even the moderate Imams and Muslim scholars who speak of Europe as the abode of testimony widen the gap between citizens in the same society, and their discourse rekindles the idea of “religious imperialism”:

More peaceful Imams, like Zaki Badawi of London or the Swiss-born Tariq Ramadan, present themselves as moderates, but the fact that they label Europe as a part of dar al-Islam/abode of Islam is an offense to the idea of Europe. Cultural-relativist multi-culturalism accepts these offenses as examples of cultural communitarianism and fails to see the religious imperialism that is included within this neo-absolutist universalism.<sup>356</sup>

Tibi dismisses any idea of considering the abode of Europe part of the abode of professing Shahada (testimony) as Tariq Ramadan, for instance, does in his project (to be dealt with later). “Reformist Euro-Islam, as I present it, is not what Ramadan claims to be a European Islam,”<sup>357</sup> for “despite its Muslim population, Europe is not dar al-Islam.”<sup>358</sup>

Like the Muslims who are working on reforming Islam, the Europeans also have to revise their heritage, especially their perception of the historic Muslim “Other.” Tibi believes that the idea of Europe with all its values of liberal democracy and human rights is experiencing a crisis in its identity. Its *esprit de corps*, in Montesquieu’s terms, “is characterized by uncertainty, oscillating between vanishing Christianity and crumbling secularity” There is a need for an open Europe, as much as there is a need for an open Islam, “If Europeans do not change, they risk the Islamization of Europe.”<sup>359</sup> The idea of “remaking the Club,” the Club of Europe, alone without giving space to the ‘other’ does not solve integration issues. “Both [Europeans and Muslims] need to

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<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 215

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 210

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 127

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., 201

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 198

change”<sup>360</sup> to build an open society. For that to take place, Europe needs to reconstruct its asabiyya, i.e. its *esprit de corps*. Tibi borrows the term asabiyya from the Muslim Philosopher Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) and his pioneering work on sociology and historiography, *ilm al-‘umran*, in *al-muqaddima/ Prolegomena*:

For Ibn Khaldun [...] each vivid civilization is based on a spirit of asabiyya, best translated with Montesquieu’s term ““*esprit de corps*,””<sup>361</sup> as already mentioned. The rise and decline of civilizations is related by Ibn Khaldun to the state of asabiyya: if this is strong, then a civilization thrives; when it weakens, then the decay begins. As a Muslim immigrant living in Europe, I believe I can see a very weak European asabiyya facing the strong self-assertive sentiments of Muslim newcomers.<sup>361</sup>

Cultural pluralism, which Europe has the credential to accommodate, is what a new *esprit de corps*, a new asabiyya is about. The well standing of Europe needs that all its citizens, whatsoever be their religion and philosophy of life, feel it (i.e. Europe) by heart, “Europe needs a combination of self-awareness (asabiyya) and tolerance to come to terms with the Islamic civilization.”<sup>362</sup> “From a dialogic Euro-Islamic perspective,” Tibi adds, “it is a healthy sign if a common European asabiyya can be shared.”<sup>363</sup> European asabiyya makes ‘citizens by heart’ and not “citizens by passport.”<sup>364</sup> That applies to all Europeans, including the Muslims who have to enhance a “Euro-Islamic asabiyya.”<sup>365</sup>

“Euro-Islamic asabiyya” is a core concept in Tibi’s idea of Euro-Islam. Before coming to its manifold meanings, two options have to be mentioned as a rationale behind Tibi’s version of Islam in Europe: option one is the Europeanization of Islam; option two is the Islamization of Europe. Euro-Islam constructs the first option because it contributes to the idea of Europe without discrimination, ethnicization, or Islamization. Euro-Islam constructs the identity of Muslims where they feel that they belong to the same polity

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<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 209

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 167

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 95-96.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 159

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 192

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 167

with their European patriots.<sup>366</sup> “The idea of a multiple identity determines the concept of Euro-Islam, inspired both by the idea of Europe and by the historical experience of the Hellenization of Islam in the better days of Islamic civilization.”<sup>367</sup> By the “idea of Europe” he means “an inclusive concept of freedom and citizenship” that finds its roots in the Enlightenment.<sup>368</sup>

Tibi’s idea of Euro-Islam is rooted in his project of cultural modernity. If cultural modernity is for all Muslims wherever they may be, Euro-Islam is mainly destined for the Muslims of Europe, the European Muslims. When tackling the concept of Euro-Islam, one still has to bear in mind Tibi’s earlier views of religion as a cultural system. His reference to Afro-Islam, Indo-Islam, and Arab Islam helps in understanding his vision of Euro-Islam.<sup>369</sup> Unlike the common mediatized view of Islam as monolithic in manifestation and practice by Western media, Tibi defends his idea and says that Euro-Islam is “intended to provide a liberal variety of Islam acceptable both to Muslim migrants and to European societies, one that might accommodate European ideas of secularity and individual citizenship along the lines of modern secular democracy.”<sup>370</sup> It is also reason-based, “Muslims in the diaspora are advised to embrace the rational view of the world.”<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 198

<sup>368</sup> Tibi, “A Migration Story from Muslim Immigrants to European “Citizens of the Heart?” The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs, vol.31:1 winter 2007, 147-168

Tibi defines the idea of Europe and integration in clear terms as follows:

The idea of Europe based on values of secular democracy, individual human rights, pluralism, civil society and the enlightenment culture of tolerance could be accommodated in a Euro-Islam consonant with cultural modernity. In the present situation, there can be no half-solutions for the competing options: either a “citizenship of the heart” or citizens by passport; not real members of civil society, but rather nominal Europeans living in enclaves, “in the West, but not of it,” not only because of the lack of a will to integrate, but also because they are denied equality and membership in the polity – even if they cross the threshold related to Islam. (*Political Islam*, 192)

<sup>369</sup> What he means by these varieties of “Islams” is that religion cannot be dissociated from the cultural context in which it grows. See above: “Islam as a Cultural System” (Part I, Section 1a).

<sup>370</sup> “Muslim Migrants in Europe,” 37

<sup>371</sup> *Islam’s Predicament*, 249

Tibi drives to the idea that Euro-Islam is the very same religion of Islam, although culturally adjusted to the civic culture of modernity.<sup>372</sup> A long citation gives Tibi space to speak his idea clearly:

The major features of Euro-Islam would be *laicite*, cultural modernity, and an understanding of tolerance that goes beyond the Islamic tolerance restricted to Abrahamic believers (People of the Book, *ahl al-kitab*). In addition, by acknowledging cultural and religious pluralism, Euro-Islam would give up the claim of Islamic dominance. Thus defined, Euro-Islam would be compatible with liberal democracy, individual human rights, and the requirements of a civil society. It would also contrast sharply with the communitarian politics that result in ghettoization. To be sure, the politics of Euro-Islam would not allow complete assimilation of Muslims. Yet it could enable the adoption of forms of civil society leading to an enlightened, open-minded Islamic identity compatible with European civic culture.<sup>373</sup>

Euro-Islam thus described is the modern face of “Hellenized Islam.” It is “open,” “civil,” and “pluralist,” to use Tibi’s preferred terms, “inspired both by the idea of Europe and by the historical experience of the Hellenization of Islam in the better days of Islamic civilization.”<sup>374</sup> It denotes multiple identities, but not multiple modernities.

Let it be said without ambiguity: It is not an exaggeration to state that the future of Europe will be determined by the ability of both Europeans and Muslim immigrants to establish peace between themselves. They need to forge a pattern of Euro-Islamic identity based on the core values of Europe, described as the idea of Europe endorsed by a liberal and reformed Islam. A polity for people of different religions can only be a secular one, and the idea of Europe is secular, not Christian. The value-conflict between Islamism and the idea of Europe is not a conflict between Islam and Christianity, nor is it a clash of civilization.<sup>375</sup>

Because Euro-Islam targets the Muslims and the non-Muslims alike in Europe, Tibi proposes the development of a “civic culture” based on “intercultural ethics.”<sup>376</sup> Otherwise said, “civic culture” builds on “enlightened Islamic education” and “a real inter-civilizational dialogue aimed at establishing multiple identities, a cross-cultural

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<sup>372</sup> “Muslim Migrants in Europe,” 37

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38

<sup>374</sup> *Political Islam*, 198

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, 215

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, 207-208

consensus,” over “individual human rights.”<sup>377</sup> While the Europeans have to revise their centrist views of the other, and their multiculturalists and postmodernists beware of the risks of minority rights they advocate, the Muslims, on the other hand, have to adopt the idea of Europe and what it means, without this being an invitation to assimilation. By consenting to the idea of Europe, Muslims, despite their diversity in Europe, have to disconnect their understanding of Islam from Sharia, the legal conception of Islamic law, and have thus to abandon jihad and da‘wa/proselytization.<sup>378</sup> “Enlightened Islamic education,” within “civic culture” scheme, “is a means of maintaining an Islamic identity, but not if it serves segregationist ends.” “The proposition here is that Muslims become members of the European body politic they live in, without giving up their Islamic identity or rejecting the identity of Europe.”<sup>379</sup>

### **Recapitulation**

In this part of my work I have tried to sketch out the main features of Bassam Tibi’s agenda of cultural modernity to reform Islam, and to make it accessible in theory and practice to the Muslims in the Islamic lands and in Europe. I have opted for outlining his agenda as an example of a liberal Muslim scholar from political science perspectives. It should be noted that the reform focuses on the legal aspects of Islam. I do not intend to be analytical here, but merely recapitulative. I leave my analytical part to Part IV of this work. In the first section of this part I have shown how Tibi considers Islam in society as a cultural system that is influenced by a number of society’s internal and external enrichments and weaknesses. As Tibi argues, apart from the Prophetic period and the Abbasid flourishing era, the Muslim world and mind has ever since fallen into mimicry (taqlid) of its predecessors instead of exerting ijtihad for renewal.

From the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, up to the eighteenth century, the time of the first major encounter with the modern West, the Muslim world just stagnated on all levels. In its early attempts of modernization after this encounter, it, however, failed to make a breakthrough in its reform, because the dogma condensed in Sharia law was still

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<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 207-209

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., 202

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 207

considered divine, as if it were the word of God itself. The secularist attempts after them failed both for internal and external reasons. And that gave space to the frustrated fundamentalists to rise up, and replace the reform endeavours of religious scholars with obscurantist agenda to overthrow the West from its hegemonic stance. That brought back religious historically-old concepts into modern revival, without taking into account the world socio-political changes and economic interdependencies that bind the Muslims and non-Muslims. Fundamentalism then obscured the enlightened aspect of the religion of Islam. To overcome this predicament, adopting cultural modernity with its main aspects of secularization, rationality, and subjectivity seems a historical necessity for an “open Islam.” Islam in Europe, in its version of Euro-Islam that adopts the same modern features, answers the dilemma of European Muslims and makes their residence unproblematic.

## **Part Two: Tariq Ramadan**

### **Theologico-Political Justifications for European Islam**

For years, in the course of my work on law and jurisprudence, I have been reading and analyzing reference works on the fundamentals of Islamic law (*usûl al-fiqh*) and their concrete and practical implementation in different historical periods (fiqh), with the aim, of course, of finding new answers to the new challenges faced by contemporary Muslims—and, among them, Western Muslims. Many fields have been investigated by contemporary Muslim scholars, many proposals have been drawn up and the reform of reading and understanding as well as the exercise of *ijtihâd* have been a continuous practice. Today, however, we seem to have reached a limit, so that we shall have to ask ourselves precisely not only what meaning we give to the notion of reform [...] but also what its objectives must be. To put it clearly, what reform do we mean?

Tariq Ramadan, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation*, 2009: 27.

The discourse<sup>380</sup> of Tariq Ramadan on European Islam is different from that of Bassam Tibi both in content and form. This part of the work is devoted to presenting this discourse, its beginnings, developments, and aims. As I did with Tibi, I go briefly through the intellectual biography of Ramadan to link it with the development of his discourse. I do not get engaged in the controversy that the French media has built around him, but I refer to it for its convenience to the topic whenever I see the need for that. I also consider it convenient to state as early as this stage, before the comparative and evaluative stages which come later, that I will study Ramadan not chronologically but thematically, as I have done with Tibi. However, it is important to note two points at this stage, to be born in mind: first, there has been a shift, a development in Ramadan's discourse on reforming Islam, especially in its legal aspect, which can certainly impact the understanding of European Islam, and contemporary Islamic thought debate in general. My focused research on Ramadan started mainly in 2009, before his *Radical Reform* (2009) came out. The shift I will refer to concerns this book and its subsequent, *The Quest for Meaning* (2010). I was not surprised to read, about two years later, in November 2011, the review of Andrew March about *Radical Reform*, in which he describes the shift as an "explosion."<sup>381</sup> Second, this shift noted in *Radical Reform* does not affect his whole contribution in the debate of contemporary Islamic thought and its concentration on European Islam, and that shows how consistent his arguments are when it comes to issues of human rights and ethics for example. These two notes make my thematic study of Ramadan match to a large extent the chronology of his writings. In the outset, I note then that I prefer to speak of "development," instead of "explosion" in Ramadan's thought. Speaking of "early Ramadan" and "late Ramadan" is possible. This will be gradually explained in the coming sections of this part, Part II, and more of it will be discussed in the analytical Part IV.

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<sup>380</sup> By "discourse" I simply mean the argument of Ramadan as developed in various texts and on various political-theological issues.

<sup>381</sup> March, "Law as a Vanishing Mediator in the Theological Ethics of Tariq Ramadan," 177-201.

In this overture, I just need to mention the books I will be focusing on. As noted earlier, Ramadan has penned about 30 books, some short and some long, besides countless public lectures worldwide and opinion articles for newspapers, on line websites and his personal website. In my selection, I make use of his major works that date from the 1990s up to 2010: *Les musulmans dans la laïcité* (1994), *Aux sources des renouveau musulman: d'al Afghani à Hassan al-Banna – un siècle de réformisme islamique* (1998), *Islam, the West, and the Challenges of Modernity* (2001), *To Be a European Muslim: A Study of Islamic Sources in the European Context* (1999), *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (2004), *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad* (2007), *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation* (2008), *What I Believe* (2009), and *The Quest for Meaning: Developing a Philosophy of Pluralism* (2010). Among his minor works I consult - besides some of his videoed lectures, TV encounters, and articles - *Muslims in France: The Way towards Coexistence* (1999) *Musulmans d'Occident: construire et contribuer* (2002), *Entre l'homme et son Coeur: la voie de l'unique* (2004), *Quelques lettres du coeur* (2008), and his long interview with Aziz Zemmouri, *Faut-il faire taire Tariq Ramadan?* (2006).<sup>382</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> *Les musulmans dans la laïcité [Muslims in Laïcité]* (Lyon: Tawhid, 1994), *Aux sources des renouveau musulman: d'al Afghani à Hassan al-Banna [To the Sources of Islamic Revival: from al-Afghani to Hassan al-Banna]* (Paris: Bayard Editions, 1998), *Islam, the West, and the Challenges of Modernity* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2001), *To Be a European Muslim: A Study of Islamic Sources in the European Context* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1999), *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), *What I Believe* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), and *The Quest for Meaning: Developing a Philosophy of Pluralism* (London: Penguin, 2010). Among his minor works I consult - besides some of his videoed lectures, TV encounters, and opinion articles - *Muslims in France: The Way towards Coexistence* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1999) *Musulmans d'Occident: construire et contribuer [Muslims of the Occident: Building and Contributing]* (Lyon: Tawhid, 2002), *Entre l'homme et son Coeur: la voie de l'unique [Between Man and His Heart: The Way of the Only]* (Lyon: Tawhid, 2004), his long interview with Aziz Zemmouri, *Faut-il faire taire Tariq Ramadan? [Should Tariq Ramadan Be Silenced?]* (Paris: L'archipel, 2005), and *Quelques lettres du coeur [Some Letters from the Heart]* (Lyon: Tawhid, 2008). As I do with all the scholars I study, I avoid using abbreviations (acronyms), and prefer to use shortened titles. All the subsequent citations are from the same references.

## The Beginnings: From Geneva to the World

The physical journey of Ramadan to Europe could be traced back to the activism of his grandfather, from his maternal side, Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brothers (shortened as MB) in Egypt in 1928. His father, Said Ramadan, himself, too, an activist and prominent intellectual within the MB married Wafa al-Banna, a daughter of Hassan al-Banna. Said Ramadan had to escape from President Gamal Abd Nasser's Egypt, after the Muslim Brotherhood was banned in 1954: a Muslim Brother was accused of trying to kill Nasser. Said exiled himself, for security, in Switzerland in 1954, where Tariq was born, in 1962. His father, Said, was active in international Islam; he founded the World Islamic League in Saudi Arabia, and established the Islamic Center in Geneva in 1961.

On the personal level, the young Ramadan faced questions of religion around the age of sixteen, and that did not take a form of revolt, as he says; rather, he was determinate to make his own choices, without internal or external pressure. He says he had questions about and to God, but no doubts.<sup>383</sup> That coincided with the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and the repercussions of which he did not like. The revolution represented religion as an oppressive worldview by which personal choices have little space where to be articulated. As early as that age, he says he felt the need to speak up for religious liberty of expression.

When asked how his observance of religion was considered among his peers, especially that he was travelling in Latin America, India, and Africa, he says that wherever he went his choices were respected, and never met with any disdain. About ten years later, Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988) in the UK, and the headscarf affair (*l'affaire du foulard*, 1989) in France would raise the freedom of expression and religion in the public sphere to unprecedented levels of tension inside and outside Europe. As the debate intensified, Ramadan could hardly see beacons of reasoning and profound

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<sup>383</sup> Ian Buruma, "Tariq Ramadan Has an Identity Issue," 04 February 2007, available at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/04/magazine/04ramadan.t.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/04/magazine/04ramadan.t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

analysis, but mere emotional politics in the forefront, from Muslims and non-Muslims alike, as he narrates to Aziz Zemmouri.

These three main events (the Iranian Revolution, the Rushdie Affair, the Headscarf Affair) pushed him to work on his Islamic background more seriously to get involved in the debate for an enlightened dialogue and understanding. In retrospect, he tells Zemmouri in the interview, ‘At a certain moment in my life, I felt the need to know better the meaning of what I believed in, and the need to deepen its substance and be able to tell myself: ‘this is what I believe in.’<sup>384</sup> His family background, and more importantly its exile, had a say in shaping his worldview, ‘exile of my family, the suffering that resulted from it, and the up-rootedness all played an undeniable role in my life.’<sup>385</sup> The quest for justice and resistance to any unjust discourse, be it ideological, religious, or philosophic, Western or non-Western, are among the lessons his family exile has taught him.<sup>386</sup>

As the youngest of six children, not all his brothers are religious – one of them even revolted against religion, but his brother Hani, who is in charge of the Islamic Center in Geneva, is religiously active, and Ramadan publicly distances himself from his methodology of interpreting religious texts, a point that Ramadan’s detractors invoke when his family genealogy is put on the table, which is often done. He affirms that there was freedom within this religious family context:

It was not easy, growing up in a committed Muslim family while dealing with people outside who were drinking, and all that. But I was protected on ethical grounds, as a religious person, first of all by playing sports, every day, for two hours or more — football, tennis, running. And reading, reading, reading, five hours a day, sometimes eight hours. My father warned me that life was not in books. But it meant that even though I stayed away from drinking, I got respect from the people around me. I was known as “the professor,” “le docteur.”<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Zemmouri, *Faut-il faire taire Tariq Ramadan?* 105-107

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>386</sup> Buruma, “Tariq Ramadan Has an Identity Issue,” available online; see above.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*

As an adolescent, and later as a young teacher and dean at the age of twenty-four in College de Saussure, active in sports and solidarity work inside and in the third world, he was elected as one of Geneva personalities in 1990.<sup>388</sup>

Ramadan university studies in French literature and philosophy culminated in the writing of a PhD dissertation on Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 - 1900), entitled *Nietzsche as a Historian of Philosophy* (published in 1998 as *De la souffrance: etudes Nitzscheenne et islamique (On Suffering: Nietzschean and Islamic Studies)*). Along with Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821 –1881), the Russian renowned literary figure, the two philosophers would become “my universal frame of reference.” Despite his immersion in European philosophy, he still “felt lonely in Europe, facing racial discrimination, and all that. So I idealized Egypt. My body was in Europe, but my heart was over there. I wanted to go back “home.” The young Ramadan went to al-Azhar university in Cairo in 1991, with Iman, his wife, a Swiss convert, and their kids, to profound his command of the Islamic sciences, mainly Islamic jurisprudence, in a one-on-one intensive training for a curriculum of five years, which he condensed in fourteen months, “I resigned both from my post as a dean and as president of the Helping Hand Cooperative [...]. I needed change and to return to the sources of my faith and spirituality.”<sup>389</sup> The sojourn in Egypt empowered his comprehension of Islam and “turned him into a convinced European.” In his encounters with Iam Buruma, a renowned Dutch-American journalist and writer, he says, “I felt I had been misled” and adds:

The philosophical connection between the Islamic world and the West is much closer than I thought. Doubt did not begin with Descartes. We have this construction today that the West and Islam are entirely separate worlds. This is wrong. Everything I am doing now, speaking of connections, intersections, universal values we have in common, this was already there in history.<sup>390</sup>

Ramadan followed his early life activism later in his academic life. “I want to be an activist professor,” he told Buruma in an interview. As an activist professor, since the early 1990s after his return from al-Azhar, Ramadan built strong networks with the

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<sup>388</sup> *What I Believe*, 8-11

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, 14

<sup>390</sup> Buruma, “Tariq Ramadan Has an Identity Issue,” available online.

Muslim community in his country, but mainly in Lyon, the French city closest to him geographically, where he would lecture constantly, sometimes to spectators that numbered 1500, up to 3000, while holding lectureship at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland from 1996 to 2003. His work with The Union of Young Muslims and the Tawhid bookstore and publishing house in Lyon contributed to building his career as a brilliant communicator, sermon giver, lecturer and advisor of especially the young Muslims in France. *Le Monde*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and *Polis* magazine, besides Tawhid bookstore, would push his name into the public, with videocassettes, *Islam, le face à face des civilisations: quel projet pour quelle modernité* (1994), *les Musulmans dans la laïcité* (1994), and other edited books. In 1995, France denied him entry, but petitions flooded, and the ministry of interior soon released an error statement.

Ramadan's work at the grassroots level alarmed mostly the French left-wing politicians, journalists, and intellectuals who have both contributed to his further engagement in the debate as well as to the controversy they have built around him: 'the double speak of Tariq Ramadan,' as the journalist Caroline Fourest entitles her book on him, *Brother Tariq: The Brother Speak of Tariq Ramadan* (first published in French in 2004; and translated in the US in 2008). This book seems to have dictated the beginning of any debate with Ramadan, which most journalists and scholars have to go through when reading about him. The book, in brief, is critical of Ramadan, and labels him as fundamentalist, anti-modernist, anti-secularist, and anti-feminist, a member of the Muslim Brothers, and an advocate of their agenda of Islamization of Europe. Ramadan, in a TV encounter with Fourest few years later told her that she had misquoted him about 200 times.<sup>391</sup> Sadri Khiari lately enters the debate and reverses the discourses against Fourest. His *Sainte Caroline contre Tariq Ramadan: le livre qui met un point final à Caroline Fourest* (2011) argues that Fourest's couple of works on Ramadan,

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<sup>391</sup> Frederic Taddei, «Tariq Ramadan vs. Caroline Fourest» *Ce soir ou jamais* (France 3 TV programme), 16 November 2009, available at : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPRNhRZGLjw> .

immigration, and political Islam are narcissist, Eurocentrist, and feed the Huntingtonian thesis of clash of civilizations.<sup>392</sup>

Most of the published books on Ramadan are written by French journalists and public intellectuals, a reality which shows how tense the debate has been in France, mostly about certain points Ramadan raise or those that his detractors feel suspicious about him, without going into a real theological debate with him. Lionel Favrot would follow the same writing method of Fouest in *Tariq Ramadan dévoilé: Enquête sur ce islamiste qui sévit dans les banlieues* (2004). He goes through the family genealogy of Ramadan, the MB networks, the Islamization of the banlieu, the internationalization of Islamism, Ramadan's "integrist" and anti-modern preaching,<sup>393</sup> anti-semitism,<sup>394</sup> and his doublespeak.<sup>395</sup> Favrot's work is prefaced by Soheib Bencheick, the grand-mufti of Marseille, who says that Ramadan is "by no means a moderate," and calls for the Republic to defend its values against "integrist" and "communitarism" that islamists like Ramadan preach.<sup>396</sup> In the prelude by Lyn Mag' director in chief, Phillippe Brunet-Lecomte says that Ramadan is a bomb that is exploding soon, if his 'ambiguous double speak' is not revealed quick.<sup>397</sup> Paul Landau would go so far as to argue in *Le Sabre et le Coran: Tariq Ramadan et les Frères musulmans à la conquête de l'Europe* (2005) that Ramadan fills in the Islamist line of Hassan al-Banna (d. 1949), founder of MB, Sayyed Qutb (d. 1965), the spiritual father of the militant MB, Ruhuallah Khomeini (1902-1989), the spiritual leader of the Iranian Revolution, and Youssef al-Qaradawi (b. 1926), head of the Muslim Scholars League and famous for Aljazeera TV programme *asharia wa al-hayāt* (Sharia and Life).<sup>398</sup> The ideology of Ramadan, Landau adds, is not different from

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<sup>392</sup> Sadri Khiari, *Sainte Caroline contre Tariq Ramadan: le livre qui met un point final à Caroline Fourest [Saint Caroline against Tariq Ramadan : the Book that Puts an End to Caroline Forest]* (Montreuil: La Revance, 2011)

<sup>393</sup> Lionel Favrot, *Tariq Ramadan dévoilé: Enquête sur ce islamiste qui sévit dans les banlieues [Tariq Ramadan Unveiled : Investigation on this Islamist who Ruins the Banlieues]* (Lyon: Lyon Mag' hors série, 2004) 229-232

<sup>394</sup> Ibid., 260

<sup>395</sup> Ibid., 157

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., Preface by Soheib Bencheich, 13-15

<sup>397</sup> Ibid., Prelude by Phillippe Brunet-Lecomte, 10

<sup>398</sup> Paul Landau, *Le Sabre et le Coran: Tariq Ramadan et les Frères musulmans à la conquête de l'Europe* (Monaco: Rocher, 2005) 227

that of Ben Laden, 'In fact, the aim pursued by Qaradawi and Ramadan is the same as that of Ben Laden: propagate political Islam on earth.'<sup>399</sup> The conquest of Europe is among the Islamists aim of Ramadan, whose first name, Tariq, brings to mind the name of Tariq Ibn Ziyad, the first Muslim conqueror of Spain in 711 AD, and whose name is marked by Gibraltar, Djebel Tariq in Arabic.<sup>400</sup> Landau adopts this interpretation from Fourest.<sup>401</sup>

With Aziz Zemmouri and Ian Hamel, Ramadan is not 'demonized,' but merely subjected to critical questioning and suspicion, especially with Zemmouri. The latter's work, *Faut-il faire taire Tariq Ramadan? Suivi d'un entretien avec Tariq Ramadan* (2005), introduces the controversies around the Swiss scholar, and then gives him a large space to reply in a long interview between the two. Ramadan takes the occasion to clarify his discourse over many issues, since he started his activism up to 2006. As to Hamel, he spends two years in an attempt to comprehensively study Ramadan, his family roots, networks, and discourse in *La vérité sur Tariq Ramadan: Vers un lobby musulman en Europe?* (2007). He finds out that Ramadan, as a skillful speaker, preacher, intellectual, politician,<sup>402</sup> and ideologue who rethinks European Islam,<sup>403</sup> and who suits to be labeled as 'the Arabo-Muslim Malcom X'<sup>404</sup> does not hold a double speak.<sup>405</sup> Instead of double speak, Hamel simply suggests 'Ramadanic message' to describe Ramadan's discourse.<sup>406</sup> He also deculpabilises Ramadan of anti-Semitism,<sup>407</sup> anti-laïcisme,<sup>408</sup> and frees him from the accusations of belonging to MB. For Hamel, Ramadan does not only

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<sup>399</sup> Ibid., 211

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>401</sup> Caroline Fourest, *Brother Tariq: The Double Speak of Tariq Ramadan*, trans. I. Wieder & J. Atherton (New York: Encounter Books, 2008) 53.

<sup>402</sup> Ian Hamel, *La vérité sur Tariq Ramadan: vers un lobby musulman en Europe?* (Paris: Favre, 2007) 23.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid., 192

<sup>404</sup> Ibid., 10

<sup>405</sup> Ibid., 189. « Deux ans d'enquête m'ont convaincu que Tariq Ramadan ne tenait pas de double discours » [Two years of investigations have convinced me that Tariq Ramadan had not pursued a double discourse] 189.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid., 22

<sup>407</sup> Ibid., 342

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 188

have no links with the MB, but his discourse goes even in its contrary direction.<sup>409</sup> Nevertheless, Hamel says that the Ramadanian message still poses questions and raises problems.<sup>410</sup> The main point that Ramadan seems to embody is that which makes of him look like the axis that builds the “first Muslim European lobby” that does not antagonize with the West and secularism, but works within it to influence this same West, in turn, that has influenced its making.<sup>411</sup>

The media has also contributed substantially to bringing Ramadan into more light. Ramadan’s TV shows with French public intellectuals, journalists, and politicians fueled the debate in France around him, against him when it comes to his detractors, and for him when it comes to the audience he has behind him. His debate with Nicolas Sarkozy, Minister of Interior at the time, in 2003 still resonates in the ear of many. When pushed out of the subject of debate by Sarkozy to denounce the hudud sanctions in Islam, Ramadan, did not reply promptly by denouncing these hudud but reiterated his proposal of the moratorium, and tried to explain instead of answering directly, which was taken against him. Later, in the long interview with Zemmouri, he explains his points, and reveals the TV Channel complicity when it comes to time that was allowed to him. That may be the most widespread and controversial debate Ramadan has ever had, and may ever have.

On Octobre 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2003 Ramadan wrote an article entitled, *Les (nouveaux) intellectuels communautaires*, which French newspapers *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* refused to publish. Oumma.com did publish it. In the article he criticizes a number of French Jewish intellectuals and figures such as Alexandre Adler, Alain Finkielkraut, Bernard-Henri Lévy, André Glucksmann and Bernard Kouchner – and erroneously included Pierre-André Taguieff who is not Jewish - for allegedly abandoning universal human rights, and giving special status to the defence of Israel. Ramadan was accused, in

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<sup>409</sup> Ibid., 176-177, 188. Hamel says that he talked to a member of the MB of high ranking in Egypt, while studying Ramadan for two years, and they told him that they do not consider Ramadan among the 50 influential Muslims scholars in the Muslim world, 192.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 189-190

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 24.

return, of having used inflammatory language that is publicly anti-semitic and communitarist.<sup>412</sup>

Beyond the borders of France, Ramadan seems welcome politically and intellectually, with critics *à la française* in the scene as well. His activism would first lead him to The Islamic Foundation in Leicester, where he studied to write in 1996–97 his *Muslims in France* booklet, but more importantly his book *To Be a European Muslim*, in 1999, and *Islam, the West, and the Challenges of Modernity* in 2001, reprinted in 2004 and 2009. It is within these books than the first phases of Ramadan's work can be found, along with his first work, *Musulmans dans la laïcité*. In October 2005, he began teaching at St Antony's College at the University of Oxford on a Visiting Fellowship. In September 2009, Ramadan was appointed to His Highness Hamad Bin Khalifa al-Thani Chair in Contemporary Islamic Studies at Oxford University where he is still based. Politically, in September 2005, he was invited to join a task force by the government of the United Kingdom during Tony Blair's premiership. Ramadan was also an advisor to the EU on religious issues and was sought for advice by the EU on a commission on "Islam and Secularism" in 2008. Among the Muslim community he is the current president of the European think tank: European Muslim Network (EMN) in Brussels.

The Dutch context welcomed Ramadan, too. Leiden University, distinguished for Islamic studies, welcomed him but he declined the offer for professional reasons. He accepted the professorship of Identity and Citizenship at Erasmus University in Rotterdam, till August 2009 when the City of Rotterdam and Erasmus University dismissed him from his positions as "integration adviser" and professor, stating that the program he chairs on Iran's Press TV, *Islam & Life*, was "irreconcilable" with his duties in Rotterdam. Ramadan described this move as Islamophobic and he charged them. He defended himself in "Open Letter to My Detractors in the Netherlands."<sup>413</sup> He again

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<sup>412</sup>Sandro Magister, "Tariq Ramadan's Two Faced Islam: The West Is the Land of Conquest," n.d., retrieved on 10 January 2011 from <http://www.think-israel.org/magister.ramadan.html>

<sup>413</sup> Ramadan, « Lettre ouverte à mes détracteurs aux Pays Bas » ["Open Letter to my Detractors in the Netherlands"], 18 August 2009, available at: <http://www.tariqramadan.com/Lettre-ouverte-a-mes-detrateurs.html#forum39215> .

received international support from academia against the decision of Rotterdam University and Municipality.

In Italy, Ramadan is present, too, even though the Muslim community second generation there is still taking shape. Islam does not seem to be a priority in the media and public debate, but this has not made it immune from criticism. The legacy of Oriana Fallaci (1929 - 2006) and her islamophobic writings had their audience. In recent years, Giuliano Ferrara, director of the newspaper “Il Foglio” and known as a “neo-con” and defender of the Judaeo-Christian roots of Europe, along with the vice-director of the “Corriere della Sera,” Magdi Allam, were among the main public critics of Ramadan, who they accused of “anti-Semitism and collusion to terrorism.” Lately, Ferrara seems to have changed his mind on Ramadan and moderate Islam. He invited Ramadan to appear on his television programme, and he warmly welcomed the letter which 138 Muslim “sages” wrote to Benedict XVI after Germany’s speech in 2006 in which he referred to Islam as a religion that widespread by the sword. The book of Nina zu Fürstenberg *Chi ha paura di Tariq Ramadan? l’Europa di fronte al riformismo islamico (2007) [Who is Afraid of Tariq Ramadan? Europe in the face of Islamic Reform]* is an objective account of the ideas of Ramadan, written in the form of interview between the writer and the scholar. Among its merits is that it raises the issue of ‘hidden discourse of Ramadan’ and answers it by saying that if the discourse takes a different non-reformist path, there is no need of exaggerated fear since the democratic voices will rise up then to face him! In a seminar on the book, Lilli Gruber, a Euro ex-MP and journalist, says that “Tariq Ramadan is a real motor of change, who knows everything about us, whereas we know nothing about him.”<sup>414</sup>

In North America, Ramadan has a favourable status as well, though detractors à la Fourest are present, too. In February 2004, he accepted the position of Professor of Religion, Conflict and Peace Building at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, at the University of Notre Dame in Notre Dame, Indiana, in the United States, but he faced visa problems from the US State Department under the “Patriotic

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<sup>414</sup> Qtd in Daniele Castellani Perelli, “The Debate Continues: a New Book on Tariq Ramadan,” 18 December 2007, at: <http://www.resetdoc.org/story/00000000652>

Act” for ‘ideological reason,’ which were dissolved later. He was charged of having donated some money to “terrorist organizations” in Palestine. It was only under Obama administration in September 2010 that he was allowed entrance to the US. This incident also brought wide academic support for him. Prof. R. Scott Appleby, the man who did his best to bring Ramadan to Notre Dame, was fascinated by the engagement of Ramadan as a scholar. He told Ian Buruma that it is the likes of Ramadan that the world needs to bridge gaps between the West and the Islamic world for more understanding:

He’s doing something extraordinarily difficult if not impossible, but it needs to be done. He is accused of being Janus-faced. Well, of course he presents different faces to different audiences. He is trying to bridge a divide and bring together people of diverse backgrounds and worldviews. He considers the opening he finds in his audience. Ramadan is in that sense a politician. He cultivates various publics in the Muslim world on a variety of issues; he wants to provide leadership and inspiration. The reason we wanted him is precisely because he’s got his ear to the ground of the Muslim world.<sup>415</sup>

The Canadian Gregory Baum sees in Ramadan a Muslim reformist, and not a radical, in *The Theology of Tariq Ramadan: A Catholic Perspective* (2006).<sup>416</sup> Charles Taylor (b. 1931) also does not see security problems in Ramadan’s work. In 2007, the New York Time Magazine features him among the most 100 innovators of the 21st century. In 2009 and in 2010 an online poll provided by the American *Foreign Policy* magazine placed Ramadan on the 49th spot in a list of the world’s top 100 contemporary intellectuals. Ian Buruma wrote a long profile for The New York Time Magazine, entitled “Tariq Ramadan Has an Identity Issue.”<sup>417</sup> He speaks favorably of him. Stephanie Gery did the same when asked to review Ramadan’s *In the Footsteps of the Prophet Muhammad* (translation of *The Messenger* in the USA), and considered the book to be of help in reconciling the Muslim world with the Western liberal societies. This popularity has its exceptions.

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<sup>415</sup> Buruma, “Tariq Ramadan Has an Identity Issue,” available online.

<sup>416</sup> Gregory Baum believes that Ramadan, as a reformist who clings to the tradition, has made especially his French detractors accuse him of “double speak.” He says “Ramadan is not a radical.” Gregory Baum, *The Theology of Tariq Ramadan: A Catholic Perspective* (Toronto: Novalis Publishing, 2006) 147.

<sup>417</sup> Buruma, “Tariq Ramadan Has an Identity Issue.”

Paul Berman, who supported the invasion of Iraq in 2003, is the American version of Caroline Fourest. In his book, *The Flight of the Intellectuals* (2010), that contains not a single footnote or endnote, he considers Ramadan a reformist in disguise, not himself an extremist, but his discourse can nurture extremism especially among the youth, “even some of the most attractive of thinkers tend, if they have come under an Islamist influence, to have a soft spot for suicide terrorism” and “a soft spot for anti-Semitism.”<sup>418</sup> Ayan Hirsi Ali, the Somali-Dutch ex-Muslim Islamophobe, is his favourite. Dwight Garner describes the book as “devastating in its content.”<sup>419</sup> For Anthony Julius, Berman “regards Ramadan as a sinister figure with a sinister agenda.” When Breman says that there is “a dark smudge of ambiguity” which “runs across everything he [Ramadan] writes on the topic of terror and violence,” he means that “Ramadan cannot be trusted to know his own mind, and therefore cannot be trusted when he claims to speak it,” continues Julius. For the latter, it is not Ramadan’s admiration which he receives that is misplaced, but it is the reading of Breman that is so.<sup>420</sup> Andrew March in his review of Breman’s work echoes what a number of critics say of Ramadan in France in particular, “A reader of Berman will get no sense of Ramadan’s overall intellectual project or objectives.” Berman’s “big mistake,” according to March, is the link he makes between Ramadan’s family genealogy and Muslim Brotherhood, and his criticism of Ramadan for not denouncing the ideas of Hassan al-Banna and Islamic penal code publicly and directly:

In Berman’s view, Ramadan was not only born into a kind of original sin but has never atoned for it. [...] Berman’s big mistake is to suggest that Ramadan invites an "esoteric" reading that shows his failure to break decisively with the Muslim Brotherhood. By a decisive break, Berman means an open, bold declaration. But the real break is right under his nose. [...] According to Berman, we must tell Muslims, “Either you are pro-Enlightenment or you are soft on stoning.”<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>418</sup> Julius Anthony, “The Pretender” (Book Review), May 14, 2010, at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/16/books/review/Julius-t.html?ref=ianburuma&pagewanted=2>

<sup>419</sup> Dwight Garner, “In Pursuit of Prey, Carrying Philosophy,” May 2, 2010, retrievable from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/03/books/03book.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>420</sup> Julius, “The Pretender,” available online, see above.

<sup>421</sup> Andrew March, “Who’s Afraid of Tariq Ramadan?” *The American prospect* 2, 2010, available at: <http://prospect.org/article/whos-afraid-tariq-ramadan-0>

March means that the content of Ramadan's work is the indirect break from traditional Islamic thought, without a denunciation that Breman and his alike need to hear to trust Ramadan, or at least to listen to him without defaming him and his discourse that they do not approach seriously.

As an engaged academic, Ramadan has contributed substantially to the debate on contemporary Islamic thought and its revival, especially in Europe. He is active both at the academic and grassroots levels lecturing extensively throughout the world on theology, Islamic law and jurisprudence, applied ethics, social justice, economy, politics, inter-faith and intracommunity dialogue. His words summarize his engagement:

I mean to build bridges between two universes of reference, between two (highly debatable) constructions termed Western and Islamic "civilizations" (as if those were closed, monolithic entities), and between citizens within Western societies themselves. My aim is to show, in theory and in practice, that one can be both fully Muslim and Western and that beyond our different affiliations we share many common principles and values through which it is possible to "live together" within contemporary pluralistic, multicultural societies where various religions coexist.<sup>422</sup>

Ramadan's engagement has always had a political touch. In Europe, and the West in general, he has been very critical of certain governmental policies, like the banning of the veil in France, the banning of Minarets in Switzerland, and has also attempted to attenuate the tension of the debate during the Cartoon crises all around Europe in 2006, and also around Charia Hebdo issue in France in 2011.

In the regional and international level, he is critical of the US and EU stance towards the Israeli-Palestinian issue, their late intervention in Bosnia war, and their damaging Afghanistan and Iraq wars, Gaza War of 2008, up to their recent biased treatment of Arab Spring differently, quick intervention in Libya and slow negotiations with Syria and Yemen. His political criticism of the old regimes in the Arab world was

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<sup>422</sup> *What I Believe*, 21. Ramadan says: "It is possible to be completely Muslim and completely European. [...] The European culture is not less Muslim than the Egyptian culture. In Egypt, in my culture of origin, many things are contrary to my ethics, and I know that many things in the European culture are instead very close to my ethics." Daniele Castellani Perelli, "The Debate Continues: a New Book on Tariq Ramadan," 18 December 2007, at: <http://www.resetdoc.org/story/00000000652>

behind banning him from entering Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Libya, and Saudi Arabia. He has good relations with research institutes mainly in Morocco and Doha. He is a Visiting Professor in Qatar (Faculty of Islamic Studies), where he inaugurated on 15 January 2012 the Research Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics based on his work *Radical Reform*; he is also a visiting lecturer and professor at Mundiapolis University in Morocco. His frequent opinion articles are commentaries on the socio-economic, political, cultural, and religious implications of the events concerned. His very recent work, *L'Islam et le réveil arabe (Islam and the Arab Awakening, 2011)* is part of his engagement in the changes taking place in the Arab world. In Asia, he is Senior Research Fellow at Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan.

This biographical sketch on the concerned scholar does not claim to have exhausted the controversy around him everywhere nor does it claim to have referred to all his activities. I have generally referred to the books that deal with his figure and family background more than with his ideas. Hundreds of short articles are also written on him, but I do not refer to every small piece on that, for the books above bring up the general points small pieces invoke about him. Rather, this biographical sketch explains my interest in the study of his discourse in a more serious form, beyond the journalistic debate that remains superficial, and in most cases biographical. The above biographical sketch as well as the coming condensing of his project and its development will be compared to that of Tibi and with other selected Islamic reformist approaches to see where Ramadan holds tradition, ambiguity, and newness.

## **1. Renewing the Islamic Sources of Law: From Adaptation to Transformation**

The coming sections introduce Ramadan the traditionalist, or “early Ramadan one,” and the reformist, or “late Ramadan.” I do not mean he has held a “double speak”; I mean, as will be explained gradually, that his reading of the Islamic tradition moves from a stage to another; namely, it develops. In the first section of this part I introduce Ramadan’s early criticism of modernity in the face of the Islamic worldview of Tawheed, the Oneness of God. Then I refer to his reading of the Prophetic tradition, and its humanist, and universalist teachings. The first section ends with reference to the latest

development in the scholar's thought, summarized in what I refer to as "Ramadan reform agenda." The latter is his testimony that reform has reached limits in Islamic thought, which has been trapped in "adaptation" instead of moving to "transformation reform" whereby Islamic thought becomes a contributor to world change, and not a mere consumer and adaptor. "Radical reform," or "transformation reform," questions both Islamic classical jurisprudence and formalistic formalism as well as modernity and its limitations, and 'soulless liberation.'

**a. In the Beginning: Islam, Modernity, and the West**

The fundamental question Ramadan raises here is this: "Can The Muslim world accede to modernity without denying some of the fundamentals of the Islamic religion?"<sup>423</sup> *Islam, the West, and the Challenges of Modernity* is chiefly a study of the current "face to face" encounter between the "West" and "Islam," and what makes the difference between the two very clear: the modern, or modernity. In my reading, I present this book as the most critical of modernity and the West in Ramadan's thought. Critique of the Muslim world and Islamic traditional thought comes later.

Initially, Ramadan's take on Islam is not that of a "pure" political scientist, sociologist, or anthropologist who fears the critique of neutrality or subjectivity. Both as a believer, and a scholar in what he believes in, Ramadan makes Islam present in every aspect of life he tackles: personal, social, cultural, economic, political, or philosophic. He is a theologian. Though his scholarly training trajectory is not traditional in the way Muslim theologians in the Muslim lands are, he still manages to mix his modern training with philosophy and literature. He is a new genre of theologians, one would say the first one of a renowned stature in the European soil. Briefly, Islam and the universe are indivisible, and inseparable, "The universe of creation is a universe of signs whose elements are sacred because they are reminders of the presence of the Creator."<sup>424</sup> In the same book, Ramadan narrates and interprets the traditional link between man (and of course woman as well), God/Allah, and the universe, in chapters entitled "At the Shores

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<sup>423</sup> *The Challenge of Modernity*, 1.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, 261

of Transcendence: Between God and Man,” and “The Horizons of Islam: Between Man and the Community.” “Man is born innocent,”<sup>425</sup> and his gerency, *al-khilafatu fi al-ard*, on earth is originally marked by permission in action (*al-ibaha al-asliyya*), except for what is marked as limits, rights of God, *huddud Allah*. With the general limits of God known in Quran, man is then free to act for or against this gerency on earth. For the concerned believer, the relation with God is permanent, and its manifestation is man himself and the universe in which he lives and acts. Ramadan says:

Man lives in a universe whose entire elements are signs wherever he remembers God. The elements are sacred as soon as the memory of faith is invoked. They become profane by forgetfulness and negligence. This shows how great is man’s responsibility. In addition to the trust of faith, he should give account of his management of the world.<sup>426</sup>

To make his life and freedom a daily witness of this responsibility, and thus a daily expression of his belief, the believer acknowledges the divine limits and plays in the premises of agency in which he has more freedom, but responsibly. The feeling of responsibility comes from the submission to God and acceptance of liberty with its limits, and these limits become the framework of reference and agency of man. The idea that “the whole of Creation is sacred”<sup>427</sup> is at the heart of belief in Islam. This is what makes the creed of *tawhid*:

The central notion of *tawhid* and the daily expression of the *rabbaniyya* have consequences on *the concept of life which renders the world of Islam necessarily and irremediably resistant to the evolution and influence of Western culture*. Faith and reference to God, the idea that the sacred is not uniquely in rituals, but rather in any act that preserves alive in one’s conscience remembrance of the Creator, all these nourish the daily existence of women and men and give strength and meaning to their spirituality.<sup>428</sup> [my emphasis]

*Tawhid* then shapes all relations of man: man to man, man to God, and man and the universe, more closely, man and nature. This is what seems to stand in the way of the modern in its European definition of what can be termed the “Muslim mind,” which

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<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 21

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., 19

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 19

<sup>428</sup> Ibid., 233

(“European modernity”) Ramadan challenges, and leads him to consider “Islamic modernity” as an alternative, at least at this stage of thought.

This broad line of relations enshrined in the creed of *tawhid* falls within the name of Sharia, the Way, in Ramadan’s synonymous definition of Sharia, and not mere legal prescriptions of social relations. The objectives of Sharia, *maqāṣid asharia*, are what are supposed to frame the premises of these relations for the good of man, and that is what he calls “social Islam,” in contrast with the “*façade* of Islam” of penal codes.<sup>429</sup> Because these objectives are both temporal and spacial, they need constant change and constant interpretation. That is the role of *ijtihad* and human agency that Ramadan says is needed to reform Islamic thought. To arrive at these points, each in some detail, a path has to be walked in, which I try to trace below, always following the signs of Ramadan in this part. At this stage, I satisfy myself with this to introduce Ramadan’s attitude towards modernity, seeing that reform in Islam is commonly said to be driving to adopt or be compatible with the principles of modernity to facilitate Islam’s accommodation of world changes first, and second to be a modern lived religion in secular and liberal European societies.

Being European by birth and philosophical training, Ramadan is aware of the challenges of modernity to the “Muslim mind” and to the traditional Muslim societies in Muslim majority countries as well as to the Muslim communities and minorities elsewhere, especially in Europe, the land where modernity first saw inception. So, the work he conducts does not seem to just answer the requirements of adapting Islam to modern societies, but tries to revise the fundamentals in his religion. He is not attempting reform to please the moderns; he is critical of this same modern which he does not see as the last model of thought to stop at. In his own terms, he opens the debate, the critique of Islam, as well as the critique of modernity. Without doing that, one would miss his emphasis on ethics and spirituality later on. He establishes the conditions of the debate on equal terms in the following:

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<sup>429</sup> Ibid., 46

A dialogue without prevarication must establish itself, and perhaps it should centre around the question of modernity. This notion has become the banner which is held by all overt progressists, and seems to attract to its ranks only a few Muslims who want to remain loyal to their religion and their culture.<sup>430</sup>

“The right path, at the heart of Modernity” is “our spirituality, in our heart” in this age of modernity.<sup>431</sup>

The critique Ramadan launches on modernity and the West in this stage stems from the fact that Islam and its message is not represented, and only stereotypical depictions are what one comes across when Islam is invoked:

For some years now, one has noticed the daily coverage of Islam by the Western media: fundamentalism, the situation of women, freedom of speech and human rights being the subjects that are almost exclusively dealt with. Of Islam as such nothing of substance is known. Orientalists have given way to political scientists and ‘social researchers’ who, through an almost legitimate lack of professionalism, confuse the essence of the Quranic Message with the contingencies of its manifestations that are, often, its most spectacular ones. [...] The world of Islam appears to us through the most repelling events and, hence, one cannot help believing that it is, fundamentally, an enemy of the West. Anything that confirms this conclusion is “true”; and anything that disturbs the superficiality of this analysis is ‘suspect.’<sup>432</sup>

This one-sided vision of Islam in the Western mind, according to Ramadan, is most importantly rooted in academia and research, which he sees not to have studied the other side of Islam:

Western intellectuals and researchers may well be able to develop the most scientific analyses, display the greatest logic and the most experimental local approach. But they will give only a partial account of the Islamic phenomenon if they do not tackle the special rapport that Muslims, whether practicing or not, have with the Quranic message -and with the religious and sacred in general. There is, therein, something specific which is not reducible to the understanding of the “religious” in the universe of Euro-American culture. It is high time this fact was realized [...].<sup>433</sup> Nothing, or almost nothing, is said about these aspects of

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<sup>430</sup> Ibid., 3. Ramadan says: “To say things clearly is not tantamount to conceding; rather it is making accessible for the other one’s own cultural universe and identity in order to better walk along together.” Ibid., 248.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., xx

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 201

<sup>433</sup> Ibid., 227-228

Islamic culture because there is a difficulty in thinking that something positive can come forth from a universe that is presented through images of “bearded men” and “veiled women.”<sup>434</sup>

At some point of his description of the specificity of the Islamic worldview, based on tawhid and perception of God in every act and view of the universe, Ramadan uses the term “Islamic Culture.”<sup>435</sup> By the term he means the core that makes the religion of Islam, and not the behavior of its believers studied by anthropologists and social scientists. The Islamic Culture is what he sees unstudied, or understudied. His enterprise is to give this “Culture” of tawhid a new interpretation, to be studied in the coming stage of his thought. Before going into that in the next sections, his understanding of modernity and its difference from “Islamic Culture” broadly outlined above follows now.

Ramadan makes a difference between modernity and modernism. Modernity is that ‘spirit’ of change that occurred in Europe over the centuries since the fifteenth century, passing by the Renaissance, Reformation, and reaching the age of Enlightenment, and the French Revolution. It was an economic, political, religious and social movement in Europe against the European Middle Ages (approximately from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century) practices and understandings. (Islamic Middle Ages, from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, are the prosperous times of the civilization.) Modernity is equated with modernization as a way of liberation in process, and he uses the terms interchangeably:

Modernization is a liberation, the breaking of the chains of all intangible dogmas, stilted traditions and evolving societies. It represents accession to progress. Within this, reason, science and technology are set in motion. Finally, it is also man brought back to his humanity, with the duty of facing up to change, to accepting it and mastering it. [...] These principles are its opposition to any tradition, any established order, against any sacredness or inquisitive clergy, against any revelation or imposed values; it is the affirmation of man as an individual, the claim of freedom, the defense of reason and, by extension, an appeal to science and progress.<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 234

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 228

<sup>436</sup> Ibid., 3-5

This era in Europe, the birth of modernity, “was in itself a revolution,” Ramadan writes in agreement with Alain Tourain (b. 1925).<sup>437</sup> This revolution “has given everything to man in the West: from liberty to knowledge, from science to technology. In short, it restored him to his humanity and to his responsibilities.”<sup>438</sup> Reason has become the engine that man uses to understand the world, and man has thus become the one who establishes limits for himself, beyond any other (religious and divine) authority, “Without any other authority, except its spirit, and without any other norm except the real, it was apt to establish values and fix limits for the good of humanity.”<sup>439</sup>

The problem is not with modernity, but with modernism. Ramadan states that “As with all revolutions, this one [i.e. modernity] has not escaped excesses. [...] Rationality has become the truth and progress the meaning and value; with the advent of our century was born a new ideology: modernism.”<sup>440</sup> Modernity gave the European man “his humanity and responsibility.” However, there are now qualities that are being denied him by modernism that is void of meaning, limits, and is thus turning less pluralist. As the last words of the following statement read, Ramadan believes that the modern man who assumed his subjectivity at a certain period of time is now a mere object of what he has produced without limits:

The rationalization which is elevated to the rank of an infallible doctrine marks its own limits, and man, who was supposed at the beginning to become the master of the game, is outrun by the logic which he set in motion. The forces of attraction combined with efficiency, productivity, growth, investment and consumption have dispossessed man of his humanity. Without reference, in search of new values (ethic), he is subjected to the meaning of progress and the march towards the future, more than he decides them.<sup>441</sup>

Otherwise put, modernity has reached an “abyss” (his term). Ramadan tries to find an explanation behind this modern drift to irreligiosity, conflict with God, and tension inside the modern Western mind. In a section entitled “Prometheus and Abraham” in *Islam, the West, and the Challenges of Modernity*, Ramadan argues that the tragedy of Prometheus

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<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 4; 6

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 5

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 6

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., 6

<sup>441</sup> Ibid., 7

has substantially shaped Greco-Roman, Christian, and modern European thought, and contributed to severing the relation man has with God. When Prometheus tries to deceive Zeus, conflict between man and god begins; when he steals fire from heaven and gives it to mortals, he is punished, condemned to have his liver devoured by the eagle. “Prometheus sacrificed himself for me by defying the gods.”<sup>442</sup> Though he at times was given heroic portrayals, “Prometheus is responsible for the present decade,” Ramadan quotes Hesiod<sup>443</sup> (Greek poet, lived between 750 and 650 BC). Socratic dialectic, Aristotelian syllogism and their political, rational, and metaphysical reflections, for Ramadan, are “coloured” by the Promethean challenge.

Ramadan believes there is a kind of similarity that can be built here between this act and the Judeo-Christian perception of the act of pride that led to disobedience of God and then the commitment of the original sin, and the feeling of tension that brings about lifelong. Relativity of Morality in the realm of politics in the fifteenth century as portrayed by Niccolo Machiavelli (1469 – 1527) goes in the same line of bashing the divine from politics, and the assertion of freedom and innocence in place of the original sin, rejection, and Salvation. This tension for freedom from the divine finds its way to the “modern Prometheus,” Zarathustra of Nietzsche, poetry of Arthur Rimbaud (1854 – 1891), Gerard Nerval (1808-1855), Paul Verlaine (1844 –1896), Johann Goethe (1749 – 22 March 1832) , Charles Baudelaire (1821 – 1867), Baruch Spinoza (1632 - 1677), David Hume (1711 –1776), and Emmanuel Kant (1724 – 1804), though differently and conciliatory, etc. up to the age of the existentialists Soren Kierkegaard (1813 – 1855), John Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Albert Camus (1913 - 1960), and other skeptics, and revisionists of the modern. “Metaphysical rebellion,”<sup>444</sup> “existential malaise,”<sup>445</sup> and “existential doubt” are “omnipresent either to consecrate faith or to reproduce God. Western history since the Renaissance, and after the re-reading of the Greco-Roman legacy [in light of the Promethean tension], has been nourished by the culture of criticism and doubt.”<sup>446</sup> Ramadan concludes that “The Greco-Roma and Judeo-Christian traditions

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<sup>442</sup> Ibid., 204

<sup>443</sup> Ibid., 205

<sup>444</sup> Ibid., 210

<sup>445</sup> Ibid., 207

<sup>446</sup> Ibid., 207

are marked by this concept of inaccessible harmony. To believe and to assert oneself, in the same breath, seems clearly impossible.”<sup>447</sup> “The modern Western world is a godless world.”<sup>448</sup>

What is left for religion after this “metaphysical rebellion” is the private space. The latter is where “Modern faith” is expressed, and with time hardly expressed, for it vanishes because the individual is not given much choice between religiosity and non-religiosity. Through biased politics, institutions, especially the school, the modern individual, always according to Ramadan, is not given the orientation nor is s/he given the chance to live in public and “witness” religion and the divine. This makes the moderns “forget” religion, and with time see it as the abnormal. He writes:

The modern Western world is a godless world. [...] “Modern Faith” has no need any longer for witnessing, very often we believe in private, alone, and at a distance from public space whose objectives seems to be making us “forget.” [...] Under the pretext of “neutrality of public space,” religious education has disappeared or been reduced to one or two hours a week. The ensuing result is an ignorance, increasing in importance every year, of religious history and its main figures. Freedom and ignorance have been confused with one another, whereas in ignorance there is no longer real freedom. Public space, and particularly school, instead of being neutral, expresses from now on a real bias. This consists of evacuating the question of the Divine and meaning, making it an auxiliary and secondary problem. The youth of today, the adults of tomorrow, will at best doubt; more naturally, they will neglect anything that is of a “religious” character. [...] Skepticism is the rule nowadays.<sup>449</sup>

The “Modern Faith” that is tolerated mostly when invisible speaks of the rupture that the meanings of the divine instill in the minds of the believers, whose number decreases gradually because they are “lost” in their search, under “intense psychological and inward torture,” for a system that gives them meaning. Ramadan brings back the story of Prometheus and the eagle in the following way:

Everything leads one to believe, in front of this sense of modernity, that we have reached, at the end of the twentieth century, the culmination of the Promethean experience [...]. The eagle’s torment seems to be consuming the inwards of an important number, increasing daily, of men and women who want to know what

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<sup>447</sup> Ibid., 207

<sup>448</sup> Ibid., 220

<sup>449</sup> Ibid., 220

sins they have committed that inflict on them such an intense psychological and inward torture. They did not make a choice, but they are assured that they are free.<sup>450</sup>

For Ramadan, there is a lack of pluralism in the ideology of modernity, i.e. modernism, and this is mostly remarked, according to him, in its encounter with the Islamic worldview and the Muslims in the West. This will be dealt with again later on, but just to build links here I quote this passage:

The West is used to dealing with sources possessing a restrained, traditional culture such as the Indians of North America and the Aborigines of Australia. These ethnicities do not endanger the supremacy of rationalist and modernist points of reference. For the first time in two centuries, and in a more “confrontational” manner, that even the Chinese and Japanese horizon could not pose, the Islamic world contests the universality of Western values either by relativizing or questioning them.<sup>451</sup>

The awareness that modernism has turned Europe and the West into a global hegemony that tries to colonize the minds<sup>452</sup> of the rest through various means is what he refers to as “Occidentalization” and “Westernization.”<sup>453</sup>

Ramadan claims that “our epoch is one of torture” and ‘spirituality is a trial.’<sup>454</sup> Ramadan cites a number of contemporary Western intellectuals and poet-philosophers who have spoken of this crisis and are critical of modernity in its ideological version. Frederick Nietzsche, Arthur Rimbaud, Serge Latouche (b. 1940), Alain Touraine (b. 1925), Roger Garaudy (b. 1913), and Edgar Moran (b. 1921) are some of them. The malaise of the West Ramadan refers to has to do with two aspects: social morals and the ethics of productions that he sees unlimited, which have widened the gaps between the rich and the poor, the developed North and the developing South. On social behavior and morality, Ramadan sees an excessive liberty that has broken ties with the transcendent and moral compass. Family break-ups, single-family parents, women liberation which is marketed as a body, sexual liberty, youth delinquency, drugs, AIDS, unprecedented

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<sup>450</sup> Ibid., 221

<sup>451</sup> Ibid., 202

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 295. “This somber colonialisation of minds is the real peril that the West should face: no other danger threatens it in so profound a fashion; neither communism, Islam nor the “barbarians.”” Ibid., 295.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., 258

<sup>454</sup> Ibid., xvii

consumption, and related issues are the results of the modern model. These are symptoms of “alienation” and “limits” of the Western understanding of the modern: ‘such a liberation is a deception and the Western model certainly carries within it alienations which leave little to be envied, this despite real progress in the matter of rights.’<sup>455</sup> He, however, acknowledges that “The West is not reducible to this picture, but it would, however, be hypocritical not to admit that we are living under the reign of new cults of money, sex, and pleasure in general.”<sup>456</sup>

The “mega-machine” of the West, for Ramadan, is harder on Muslims whose value system is different, and whose societies are still going through socio-cultural, political, and economic changes and challenges. In the Muslim majority countries, he is very critical of the Westernization domineering presence on cultural, political and economic levels. He is especially concerned with the ethical aspect that guides these influences and presence in communities that have a different conception of man, nature, and God.

Ramadan is equally critical of both Muslim and Western intellectuals who speak of modernity without being critical,<sup>457</sup> for mere projections do not help in understanding of the real problems of both modernity and of Muslims societies as well as Muslim minorities in the West, or anywhere else. The way the Western model is exported and publicized, chiefly through the media, is among what makes Ramadan very critical:

When one encounters Western culture through publicity, broadcasting, films or a short stay, then it is impossible to measure the human and psychological consequences of this modernity. A fortiori everything, in the discourses and achievements through which the West presents itself, is destined to put ahead the modern, progressist, in vogue and liberated character of this culture. The Western style feeds itself by and through seduction in order to awaken man’s most natural and primary instincts and desires: social success will-power, freedom, sexual desire, etc. the recent evolution of the morals –as also the principles- of the liberal

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<sup>455</sup> Ibid., 255-6

<sup>456</sup> Ibid., 256

<sup>457</sup> Ibid., 265, 289. He clarifies his point by saying “This does not mean that the west, in itself, is the enemy.” Ibid., 289

economy, which are little linked to moral considerations, has led to the situation that we know today with an inflation of violence, money and sex.<sup>458</sup>

These aspects, in the words of Roger Garaudy which Ramadan quotes, picture a world of “decadence” void of meaning and happiness that man expected from progress.<sup>459</sup> “The principle of human rights, the notion of democracy and the ideal of freedom are, in practice, emptied of their content.”<sup>460</sup> He also quotes Latouche a couple of times.<sup>461</sup> Latouche considers the current stage of the post-industrial society in the West a dead stage. He goes so far as to say that “*the historical failure of the West*,” due to its market and mechanical values, seems a necessity to re-question the current model of the good that has renounced the ideals of Enlightenment. He says: “*The historical failure of the West*, and therefore of its values which carry progress, is the only possibility in order that the question of “good” be re-posed within human societies [...]”<sup>462</sup> This salvific attitude of Latouche is not endorsed fully by Ramadan, at least in his wording. He is certainly as critical of progress and modernity as Latouche is, but he does not go so far as to suggest the ‘salvific failure’ and ‘self-destruction’ of the West. Ramadan does not want the Muslim societies and communities to adopt the modern rupture with the transcendence, for that has dire repercussions that he is critical of in the West now, i.e. irresponsible rationality and liberty, and they all revolve around values and meanings in relation with the transcendent, the divine.

To regain meaning and pluralism in the modern world, Ramadan calls for “critical consciousness,” “resistance,” and “a small intellectual revolution” which “entails ceasing to suppose that the USA and Europe are culturally advanced and others are trailing.”<sup>463</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> Ibid., 268

<sup>459</sup> Ibid., 259

<sup>460</sup> Ibid., 273

<sup>461</sup> He quotes Latouche’s critique of the current stage of modernity :

The drama of modern technique is not so much in the technique as it is in the modern, that is to say in society. The fact that the society born of the Enlightenment, emancipated of all transcendence and tradition, has truly renounced its own autonomy and let itself be abandoned to an outlaw regulation of automatic mechanisms in order to be subjected to the laws of market and the technician system, this society now constitutes a mortal danger for the survival of humanity.

Latouche, *La megamachine, raison techno-scientifique, raison économique et mythe du progrès* (Paris : La Découverte, 1995) 21-22, in Ramadan, *The Challenge of Modernity*, 302

<sup>462</sup> In Ramadan, *The Challenge of Modernity*, 302

<sup>463</sup> *The Challenge of Modernity*, 271

He warns that such criticism and resistance “is not, once again, tantamount to being anti-Western,” for “it is an opposition not to its [Western] being but rather to its manner of being.”<sup>464</sup> This ‘small intellectual revolution,’ for its success, has to take part both in the minds of the Westerners and in the minds of the Muslims, be they in the Muslim majority countries or in the West as a minor community.<sup>465</sup>

This description and critique of modernity in its later ideological version does not stand without a counter proposal from an Islamic perspective. As a Muslim intellectual and reformist who is developing a line of rethinking the Islamic tradition, at this stage he proposes an “Islamic modernity” that is, for him, not similar to the current “Western model” though it shares with it certain basic values, away from the current practices that he critiques, as seen above. This presupposition has its start in a passage that I see accommodative of the ideals of European modernity:

To accept *the principles of liberty, autonomy of reason* or the *primacy of the individual* is something, but it is something else to identify these solely with Western history which has seen their accession to the social field being done after a conflict whose extent and consequences on mentalities is still unappreciated. *The West has given us a particular form of modernity*, it partakes of its history and points of reference. *Another civilization can, from within, fix and determine the stakes in a different fashion.* This is the case of Islam at the end of this twentieth century.<sup>466</sup> [My emphasis]

The first underlined principles of modernity that Ramadan cherishes in Western modernity are defended here briefly and more thoroughly in his later works that are going to be discussed as we proceed. At this stage, it is the general proposal he makes of “Islamic modernity” that is of interest. By that he brings the Islamic presence to the forefront of modernity and its challenges as well as changes that go with it.

Ramadan asserts that “The experience of Faith in Islam is not, up until now and even with Muslims living in Western capitals, of a similar nature,”<sup>467</sup> i.e. is not the way faith is lived in the West, as “Modern Faith,” reserved only for the private sphere and not

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<sup>464</sup> Ibid., 271

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., 288

<sup>466</sup> Ibid., 7-8

<sup>467</sup> Ibid., 202-221

very much present in schools for example. Faced with his idea that “The Western horizon does not seem to propose, in the facts, great projects of meaning, value, and hope”<sup>468</sup> especially for Muslims, he proposes “Islamic modernity.” From the outset, he is critical of the slogan “Islam is the solution.” For him, that too, needs rigorous analysis, and an intellectual revolution.<sup>469</sup> Details apart, his assertion of the Islamic faith at the heart of his discourse makes modernism “by essence, incompatible with the cult of the means that has today become the rule” in the West.<sup>470</sup> In some passages he clearly rejects modernity in its latest forms: “If there is no other modernity except that of the model of actual Westernization - which is questionable and without doubt erroneous – then one must reject modernity.”<sup>471</sup> The model that evaluates the Western one is the Prophetic model, “Muslim culture, by reference to the Prophet (peace be upon him), is based on the concept of the model, or moral comportment, of sociability.”<sup>472</sup> More clearly, the social aspect of Islamic model opposes the current modern model in behavior and sociability, “The Islamic concept of man, love and sexuality prevents the Muslim world from following the track of this model of Westernization.”<sup>473</sup> This does not mean the Muslim societies are ideal and need no reform, “We do not deny that today’s Muslim societies are not models of balance and wellbeing.”<sup>474</sup> Muslim societies, too, are going through feelings of “malaise,” bitterness,” “complex structural and moral crises.”<sup>475</sup> My emphasis on Ramadan’s biography of the Prophet, to be referred to a section below, falls within the scheme of bringing the Islamic reference as a model for ethical human behavior.

Reiterated somewhat differently, Ramadan sees in the “awakening of Islam” an opportunity to revisit certain models in both the West and Islamic lands to give back meaning to a world that seems to lack them. (There is no surprise that ten years later Ramadan writes *The Quest for Meaning*, 2010, just to raise the same issue in a universalist way. Again, I will be back to this in due space). The West is searching for

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<sup>468</sup> Ibid., 256

<sup>469</sup> Ibid., 287

<sup>470</sup> Ibid., 234

<sup>471</sup> Ibid., 205

<sup>472</sup> Ibid., 251

<sup>473</sup> Ibid., 257

<sup>474</sup> Ibid., 251

<sup>475</sup> Ibid., 287

meaning.<sup>476</sup> After it has achieved unprecedented progress on all levels, “*laïc morality*” is “unable now to cope with” this very same “progress revolution.”<sup>477</sup> And because the two worlds of the West and Islam are merging by means of globalization and immigration, “mutual enrichment,” based on awareness and critical analysis, has to be seen as part of this *rapprochement*:

The *awakening of Islam* may bring a *contribution*, hitherto unsuspected, to a *real renaissance* of the spirituality of the women and men of our world. Again one should avoid presenting the encounter between Islam and the West under the terms of conflict, but see it instead in the perspective of *mutual enrichment*.<sup>478</sup>  
[Emphasis added]

Ramadan is here giving Islam a historical role to play again, after centuries of absence. “Islam should continue to bring a consequent contribution to the transformation of the world.”<sup>479</sup> He even compares the current revival of Islam to that of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the time of its inception, “The world of Islam is vibrating in this end of the twentieth century as it was vibrating at the beginning of the seventh.”<sup>480</sup> What is expected of this awakening, he adds, is that Islam must evolve the same way the Western model evolved. There is an expectation of a “cultural revolution” or “*aggiornamento* of Islam.”<sup>481</sup> At this stage, Ramadan is very much against this view, especially for the Muslim majority societies, because that would simply mean severing faith from daily life, which he thinks Islam cannot bear, for faith in Islam is a daily witness and remembrance, through the creed of Tawhid, as shown above.

Islamic modernity is based on “finalities,”<sup>482</sup> “decency,” “dignity” of man and woman,<sup>483</sup> and “harmony” with nature. “Islamic modernity can avoid the crisis that the West is today going through and whose process of modernization ended up by

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<sup>476</sup> Ibid., 296

<sup>477</sup> Ibid., 241

<sup>478</sup> Ibid., 311

<sup>479</sup> Ibid., 236

<sup>480</sup> Ibid., xvi

<sup>481</sup> Ibid., 228

<sup>482</sup> Ibid., 262

<sup>483</sup> Ibid., 255

instrumentalizing everything.”<sup>484</sup> As long as the religious is not put aside, nothing in Islam opposes modernity:

*Nothing in Islam is opposed to Modernity* and we can firmly state that the Muslim thinkers and ‘*ulama*’ (savants) who are opposed to this notion and to the idea of change and evolution that it covers often confuse it with the model which is current in the West. Clearly, they confuse *modernity* with *Westernization*. Thus, they justify an attitude versed in traditionalism and forms which are sometimes somber and rigorist, and which presents Islam as opposed, by essence, to any social or scientific progress. Hiding behind the ‘drifts’ of the West, they deduce that faithfulness to the Message is achieved by an ‘absolute’ and definitive interpretation of the sources.<sup>485</sup> [First emphasis added]

This then is the form Islamic modernity takes in the work of Ramadan: it is founded on faith practiced in public, and broadly open to the principles of modernity: liberty, individual autonomy, and rationality. The West in itself is not an enemy, but its perception of modernity in its ideological format, modernism, is what makes it open to especially religious critique based on finalities. What are the theological references Ramadan stands on in his theses? How is his perception of an Islamic modernity able to answer the details secular and liberal societies force on the Muslim practices? Does Islam in modernity lived in Muslim majority countries differ from the one lived in Western societies or it is the same? These questions and others are attempted in the other works of Ramadan that I refer to in the coming sections.

## **b. Reading the Past: Integrating the Beautiful in the Tradition**

### **The Prophet’s Biography: an Ethical Model**

The above outline of the creed of Islam summarized in Tawhid makes the first part of the first pillar in the Islamic worldview. Its details come along. The second part of the first pillar is the belief that Muhammad is God’s Messenger, and the last one in the line of monolithic religions (Pillar1, 1a: There is No God but God (Tawhid), and 1b: Muhammad is His Messenger). In his project, Ramadan centralizes the personality of the Messenger and Prophet of Islam in *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life*

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<sup>484</sup> Ibid., 309

<sup>485</sup> Ibid., 307

of *Muhammad*, and makes it among the sources of law to be always considered and learnt from.<sup>486</sup>

In his introduction to the biographical work on the Prophet, Ramadan admits that he does not aim to provide a thick scholarly work because “countless biographies of the Prophet Muhammad already exist.” He says the work is for both Muslim and non-Muslim readers, and it is based mainly on the authoritative biography of Ibn Hicham (based on the accounts of Ibn Ishaq), *as-sirah an-nabawiyab* of the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries. Though the “Muslims do not consider the Messenger of Islam a mediator between God and people,” for “each individual is invited to address God directly,” Muhammad’s life aids in understanding the message of God and its interpretation in new contexts. When Aisha, the wife of the Prophet, was once questioned about the Prophet’s personality, she answered: “His character [the ethics underlying his behavior] was the Quran.”<sup>487</sup> Two main ideas are behind writing on the Prophet: first, drawing out the Prophet’s “timeless spiritual teachings,” “The Messenger’s biography points to primary and eternal existential questions, and in this sense, his life is an initiation;” second, drawing out “the historical events that filled the Prophet’s life.”<sup>488</sup> What I do below is that I select just some of the features that correspond to these two main reasons that have stimulated Ramadan to write a lucid, eloquent, and easy to read biography.

Spiritually, the Prophet is first depicted to have accepted revelation with quietude and without doubts. Though some fear at the very first moment of contact with the divine through the Angel Gabriel stirred him, because the burden weighed heavily on him, he soon shared the message with his first wife Khadija and his close friend Abu Bakr and they assured him that what he had experienced must be true and they believed him without doubt. He was known as the “candid” before his prophecy. The quietness with which he receives the divine message has its roots in his early life style before revelation.

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<sup>486</sup> Muhammad is both a Prophet and a Messenger. In Arabic-Islamic literature, there is this distinction: a prophet, *nabi*, has a divine message, but he is not required to disseminate it, as is the case with prophets like Job, Joseph; a messenger, *rasul*, is first a prophet and is also required to disseminate the message and not only live it for himself; this is the case with Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad for example. In English, the common term that is used is “prophet” to mean both. I use the terms interchangeably.

<sup>487</sup> *Muhammad*, xi

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.*, x-xi

This makes the picture of a man, an ordinary human being with human qualities of higher caliber.

The Prophet's welcome of the message of God is quiet, because it is preceded by years of contemplation in solitude, in communion with the infinite portrayed in the desert as signs of His Greatness:

The desert is often the locus of prophecies because it naturally offers to the human gaze the horizons of the infinite. [...] The universe is pregnant with signs that recall the presence of the Creator, and the desert, more than anything else, opens the human mind to observation, meditation, and initiation into meaning.<sup>489</sup>

Sings of the infinite reflected the Infinite, one of the names of God, in the mind of the young Muhammad, and taught him, among other lessons, how to tame his ego, and how to soften his heart for the spiritual.

Certitude in the Oneness of God and His message is accepted, and there is no sense of "original sin" to live with on earth:

All the messengers have, like Abraham and Muhammad, experienced the trial of faith and all have been, in the same manner, protected from themselves and their own doubts by God, His signs, and His word. Their suffering does not mean they made mistakes, nor does it reveal any tragic dimension of existence: it is, more simply, an initiation into humility, understood as a necessary stage in the experience of faith. [...] From his birth to his death, the Messenger's experience - devoid of any human tragic dimension - allies the call of faith, trial among people, humility, and the quest for peace with the One.<sup>490</sup>

The encounter with God in Islam is serene, unlike its version in Christianity and the way it has evolved in Western thought, as Ramadan argues. Ramadan builds on the story of Abraham and Isaac in the Jewish and Christian traditions and its counterpart in Islam, with Abraham and Ismail:

Indeed, the prophets' stories, and in particular Abraham's, are recounted in an apparently similar manner in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions. Yet a

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<sup>489</sup> Ibid., 12

<sup>490</sup> Ibid., 7

closer study reveals that the accounts are different and do not always tell the same facts nor teach the same lessons.<sup>491</sup>

I referred earlier to the Promethean idea Ramadan is critical of, and I do not see a need to reiterate it here, though he does refer to it in this biography of the Prophet as well, in sections like “The Trial of Faith: Doubt and Trust,” and “A Tragic Experience?”<sup>492</sup> Briefly, for Ramadan, the encounter with God in Islam answers the primary existential questions and builds the first tries with revelation without doubt.

The connection with the divine is based on active spirituality, where the religious rituals have to be taken into account to make belief enacted physically, to give it meaning. The Prophetic lived experience exemplifies mediation not between God and man but between the divine and the human. There is no *ijtihad* with the creed of Islam, composed of the five pillars: *Shahada* (testimony of the Unity of God and Prophethood of Muhammad), *aṣalāt* (the prayer five times a day), *as-siyam* (fasting the month of Ramadan one month a year), *azzakāt* (social tax paid annually), and *al-haj* (pilgrimage to Mecca once in life for those who can afford it financially and physically). The rituals “require that believers should accept their form as well as their substance.”<sup>493</sup>

The obligation of the daily prayer, *aṣalāt*, as the second pillar of Islam elevates to being the first pillar of faith as a spiritual practice. Its importance stems from the fact that it is the only pillar that was prescribed during the ascendance of Muhammad to meet God in *Miraj* Journey from Jerusalem to Heaven, after having prayed with all the previous Prophets in Jerusalem in *Isra*’ part of the Journey. In *Miraj*, Muhammed meets and talks from behind a curtain to God who prescribes to him the duty of prayers. Muhammad’s ascendance to Heaven is both physical and spiritual, and the command of daily prayers

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<sup>491</sup> Ibid., 6

<sup>492</sup> “This tragic solitude of the human being facing the divine underlies the history of Western thought from Greek tragedy (with the central figure of the rebel Prometheus facing the Olympian gods) to existentialist and modern Christian interpretations as exemplified in the works of Soren Kierkegaard. The recurrence of the theme of the tragic trial of solitary faith in Western theology and philosophy has linked this reflection to questions of doubt, rebellion, guilt, and forgiveness and has thus naturally shaped the discourse on faith, trials, and mistakes.” *The Challenge of Modernity*, 6

<sup>493</sup> Ibid., 73

marks this event this way as a manner of remembrance of God through spiritual belief and spiritual exercise which takes place physically. Ramadan words it this way:

Unlike the field of social affairs (*al-muamalat*), which calls for the creative mediation of people's intellect and intelligence, human rationality here submits, in the name of faith and as an act of humility, to the order imposed by Revelation: God has prescribed requirements and norms that the mind must hear and implement and the heart must love. Raised to receive the injunction of ritual prayer, the Prophet and his experience reveal what prayer must in essence be: a reminder of and an elevation toward the Most High, five times a day, in order to detach from oneself, from the world, and from illusions. The miraj (the elevation during the Night Journey) is thus more than simply an archetype of the spiritual experience; it is pregnant with the deep significance of prayer, which, through the Eternal Word, enables us to liberate our consciousness from the contingencies of space and time, and fully comprehend the meaning of life and of Life.<sup>494</sup>

The prayer then is a reminder of the fact that Muhammad is the seal of all Prophets; he leads the prayer with them in Jerusalem. The Muslims first prayed towards Jerusalem as their qibla (prayer orientation), but the Prophet changes it later towards Mecca, believed to be the first and oldest sacred shrine, to differentiate Islam from Judaism and Christianity. It is also a physical reminder of the link that binds the believer and God at least five times a day. That gives meaning and order to the life of the believer.<sup>495</sup>

The daily life of the Prophet makes part of the spiritual for believers. As a teacher to his Companions, his behavior counts as a model to be followed, unless he indicates himself that such a behavior is exceptionally for him and not allowed to be replicated. Socially, though he is born into Banu Hashem distinguished family that is respected in the tribe of Quraysh in Mecca, he still grows as an orphan child whose father dies before he is born, and loses his mother, then his grandfather, his protector. He does not use his family lineage to reach some social status. He interacts with people; excels in commerce, and builds a name for himself by his ethical demeanor. He becomes to be known as the *sadiq*, and *amin*, the "truthful" and "trust-worthy." In tribal disagreements or personal disputes, he would be summoned to give his judgments, for the tribe believed he would

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<sup>494</sup> Ibid., 73-74

<sup>495</sup> Ibid., 99-101

not be biased. He never worships gods of the pagan tribe, nor drinks; he never gambles nor goes after women from his early age.

Muhammad's generosity is unrivalled, before being a Prophet and much more when he becomes so. At times he would have nothing to eat at home because he has given everything to the poor. In a hadith he says "True wealth is the wealth of the soul."<sup>496</sup> His respect for the elderly, and women is emphasized. Though he never shakes hands with them, women would either go ask him for help or consultation in the mosque or in his house or in public. Though he married many wives, he never beats any of them, and his wives testify to his generosity, and equal treatment among them. At home, he plays with his kids, and helps his wives in the household, a behavior which was not common among the Arabs at the time. With the orphans, he is generous; he gives them time and plays with them. His adopted son, Zayd ibn Thabit, who was his assistant, speaks high of his treatment. For the slaves that were common to have at the time, he buys none for himself, and treats the others equally, without regard to race, colour, or tribal affiliation. His humane relations would touch also the environment, animals and birds, for they are all signs of Creation, and they teach divinity and not respecting them equals not respecting the divine.

Like earlier Prophets before him, when he starts at the age of forty to spread the revealed message of Islam, most of his tribe rejects him, menaces him, calls him names, and belies the message of Islam and its divinity. He refuses the wealth the prestige the tribes of Quraysh give him to renounce his faith. His solitude grows, his love for God solidifies, and his patience and mercy over those who hurt him becomes his solace. Prayers, fasting, and contemplation in solitude are lifelong aspects of his life to interact with the divine more closely, but in tough times of sadness, death of a relative, or a feared attack from the "infidels" over his small community of believers in its early stage they become his consolation. At a certain point, he prefers exile to the Medina for his early companions, as a way of resistance and patience, to avoid a confrontation with the Meccans.

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<sup>496</sup> Ibid., 102

Historically, the Prophet acted both as a human being and as a Prophet. In this aspect, I select three main aspects that characterize his life as lessons for Muslims and human behavior, among others that Ramadan refers to. These three aspects are related to 1) jihad, 2) polygamy, and 3) his “three mistakes” that the Quran admonishes him for having committed. For the concept of jihad, Ramadan goes back to its first appearance in the Quran and finds that it means “making an effort” and “resisting” oppression and persecution with recourse to the Quran: “Therefore do not obey the negators, but strive against them [*Jahidhum*] with the Quran with the Utmost resistance [*Jihadan kabira*]” (Quran, 25: 52). God here is demanding of Muhammad to resist the ill-treatment, insults, and assaults of the Qureyshi opponents of the message of message of Islam by referring himself to the Quran, the miracle and the word of God, which has some answers for them and their inquiries about the truth of the message. For Ramada, the first use of the concept of jihad is ‘spiritual and intellectual.’ Jihad here stands for persevering in the protection of the new message that holds a new worldview, based on social justice, where this life and its worldly pleasures of wealth and power are just a passage, a test, towards the After Life, and divine just judgment.<sup>497</sup>

Persecution and assaults on the early small community of the Muslims would rise and the believers would ask Muhammad constantly of a way out, of possible fight back, but he had to be patient, and wait for divine ordainments. The process of waiting for Ramadan is part of “patience, resistance, pain” and the manifestation of “jihad fi sabili Allah.” It was part of the teachings of the new religion: to resist the status of the world with tight belief in a new “revolutionary” message for the community and the world, “By calling for recognition of the One God, for the rejection of former idols, for Life after life, for ethics and justice, Muhammad initiated an outright revolution in mentalities as much as in society.”<sup>498</sup> Muhammad refused the offers given to him by the elders of the tribes that opposed his message; he refused being crowned a king, and refused their wealthy offers, at the expense of dropping the idea of spreading Islam.

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<sup>497</sup> Ibid., 53

<sup>498</sup> Ibid., 56

Revelation would command that the small community of believers emigrate first to Abyssinia, which was ruled by a just Christian king (who converted later to Islam), for protection, and from then to Mecca where Muhammad would establish the first city for the Muslims, with a clear document (the Document of Medina) that protects the rights of minorities and the roles of the non-Muslim allies, pagan, Jews, and Christians. The latter two formed what is called *dhimmis* since they are People of the Book, *ahl al-kitab*: for community protection and non-participation in the war, they had to pay the *al-jizya* tax. For the first time Muslims of Mecca (*Muhajirun*) and of Medina (*Ansar*) would know pacts of brotherhood as taught by the Prophet, and respect of personal beliefs would manifest in the ideals of the Prophet who speaks of Islam but forces no one to convert, as a number of stories illustrate. He lived the idea of “Let there be no compulsion in religion” (Quran 2:256).<sup>499</sup>

In Medina, the Muslim community made allies and grew in number and order, and the Quraysh watched from afar, made allies, and started to attack the allying tribes of Muhammad. Here, revelation descends to allow jihad for defense: “Permission [to fight] is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully waged - and verily, God has the power to succor them - those who have been driven from their homelands unjustly for no other reason except that they say: "Our Lord is God!"(Quran, 22:39-40).<sup>500</sup> Ramadan considers this armed version of jihad as another form of resistance:

To the jihad of spirituality and intelligence, which had consisted either in resisting the darkest attractions of the ego-centric, greedy, or violent self or in answering the pagan contradictors” arguments through the Quran, a new possible form of jihad was now added: *al-qital*, necessary armed resistance in the face of armed aggression, self-defense against oppressors. All the forms of jihad are, as can be seen, linked to the notion of resistance. On the level of *qital*, armed fighting, it is so as well.<sup>501</sup>

With this permission to go into war for defense went a number of conditions, that revolve around justice and remembrance of God, “let not the hatred of others to you make

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<sup>499</sup> Ibid., 90, 116.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid., 98

<sup>501</sup> Ibid., 98

you depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety” (Quran, 5:8).<sup>502</sup> I collect here the main conditions of jihad as a defensive war in the Prophetic period, for they appear throughout the biography and not in one setting. One, contracts have to be respected with the allying tribes, and have to be annulled only if they are made invalid by the very same allying tribe. Two, peaceful resolutions to confrontation have to be advanced, before going to war, “But if they incline toward peace, do you [also] incline toward peace, and trust in God,” (Quran: 8:61).<sup>503</sup> Three, for the ethics of the war, the elders, women, and children have to be spared. Captives, war prisoners, have to be respected and well-treated. Mutilation is not allowed. Animals and the environment have to be respected, and vandalism is not allowed. A Prophetic teaching, re-iterated by his Companion, the first Caliph, Abu Bakr, reads as follows:

Do not kill women, children, and old people. [...] Do not commit treacherous actions. Do not stray from the right path. Never mutilate. Do not destroy palm trees, do not burn houses and cornfields, do not cut down fruit trees, and do not kill livestock except when you are compelled to eat them [...]. As you move on, you will meet hermits who live in monasteries and serve God in seclusion. Leave them alone; do not kill them and do not destroy their monasteries.<sup>504</sup>

As to the idea of proselytization, *da'wa*, through jihad, this does not occur during the life of Muhammad; he never waged a war to convert its people by force. Rather, Muhammad sends letters of testimony to some main kings and emperors of the time (to Negus, king of Abyssinia, Chosroes, the king of Persia; to Heraclius, the Byzantine emperor; to Muqawqis, the ruler of Egypt, etc.) to invite them to Islam, and to hold them responsible before God of their choice if they refused it.<sup>505</sup>

As to the question of the polygamous life of the Prophet, Ramadan does not go into a legalist discussion in this biography. He does that in other works. Rather, he considers the case of the Prophet an exception, knowing that he married nine to eleven women, depending on situations and for different reasons (some of his wives were

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<sup>502</sup> Ibid., 90

<sup>503</sup> Ibid., 108

<sup>504</sup> Ibid., 201

<sup>505</sup> Ibid., 161

widows, divorced, or converts). First, Ramadan says that polygamy was common and unrestricted in Arabia at the time, and the Quran came to restrict it to four “with strict conditions to be respected when marrying a second, third, or fourth wife.” Second, “the Prophet’s situation was the exception, since he had remained monogamous for twenty-five years,”<sup>506</sup> [i.e. from the time he married Khadija at the age of twenty-five before his prophethood life, till she died when he was about fifty]. Among the reasons of the ‘singularity’ of the private life of Muhammad lies in the following: “his wives were reminded that they were “not like any of the other women” (Quran, 33:32). Henceforth, they were to cover their faces and speak to men from behind a screen (*hijab*), and they were informed that they could not marry again after the Prophet’s death.”<sup>507</sup>

This prophetic and historical singularity apart, Ramadan draws attention to the ethical behavior of the Prophet with his wives, which remains the basis for man and woman, husband and wife relationship. It was based on love, respect, and understanding of the role of Muhammad as a husband and as a Messenger. In an incident, the wives would feel jealous of each other or a new wife, but they would soon understand the prophetic reasons. In a case of doubt that was a rumored about his wife Aisha, Muhammad felt hurt but soon revelation edited his innocent wife. These were examples of ordinary feelings in a household, but what was not ordinary was the spiritual ethical patience that overcame them. He was just among them, and never beat any of them. At home, he would help them in the household, play with them and the kids. His always spoke in a calm voice. In public, he integrated them in the social, political, economic, and military sphere.<sup>508</sup> One of his wives narrates that they used to compete in race in the desert and she would defeat him in that. Aisha, one of his wives, reports that Muhammad’s ethics were the ones prescribed in the Quran, “His ethics were the Quran.”

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<sup>506</sup>Ibid., 75. “The practice of polygamy was widespread and unrestricted as to the possible number of wives. The Quran prescribed a limit of four wives, with strict conditions to be respected when marrying a second, third, or fourth wife,” explains Ramadan, n. 6, 277.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid., 136

<sup>508</sup> Ibid., 120

The other example I select, which Ramadan refers to in different chronological orders in the biography, is threefold. It concerns errors of judgment or behavior of the Prophet, and about which he receives divine reproach, which in turn becomes, for Ramadan, lessons for believers and humankind. One, when he started to reveal the message in public, the Prophet faced sarcasm and disbelief from the elders of Quraysh. The latter would go to rabbis in Yemen to ask them of ways to test the prophecy of Muhammad, seeing that rabbis were familiar with the prophethood of Moses, about which Muhammad himself spoke to the Qureyshi. The latter posed their questions<sup>509</sup> to the Prophet, and feeling sure God would help him in this, he instantly answered: "I shall answer your questions tomorrow!" Two weeks passed, and the Prophet felt God had left him; he was embarrassed, in immense fear of his deed; the Qureyshi mocked him and confirmed their claim that he was not a Prophet. After the second week, revelation descended to answer the Prophetic test questions, and reprimanded him to be more thoughtful and mindful of the knowledge of God and his presence. That was the story of the saying *Insha Allah*, If God wills it. In his interpretation, Ramadan reads it this way:

*Insha Allah*, "If God so wills": it expresses the awareness of limits, the feeling of humility of one who acts while knowing that beyond what he or she can do or say, God alone has the power to make things happen. This is by no means a fatalistic message: it implies not that one should not act but, on the contrary, that one should never stop acting while always being aware in one's mind and heart of the real limits of human power.<sup>510</sup>

The rationale behind the story then is to remember God in whatever decision or action one makes, for that teaches humility in action and modesty of knowledge that humankind has no perfect control of.<sup>511</sup>

The second "error" for which the divine reprimands the Prophet concerns his "polite but unacceptable" neglect for an old blind man. In its early years, the small Muslim community received harassment that escalated to torture and murder. The Prophet was approaching the chief of a tribe to ask him to protect his community by

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<sup>509</sup> "The first question involved the knowledge of a story of a group of young men's exile from their people; the second was about a great traveler who had reached the confines of the universe; the third was a direct request to define *ar-ruh* (the soul)." Ibid., 57

<sup>510</sup> Ibid., 57-58

<sup>511</sup> Revelation gave the answer to these questions. Ibid., 58

forbidding the tribe from assaulting the Muslims. In this meeting, an old blind man (who had converted to Islam earlier) asked the Prophet to recite to him some of the Quran to ease his passion for Islam. The Prophet ignored him politely. The old man insisted, and the Prophet got irritated in that instance. The chief of the tribe ignored them all. Revelation descends and reproaches the Prophet for his behavior with the old man, though that behavior was aiming at protecting the whole community.<sup>512</sup> This becomes a lesson as well, in Ramadan's explanation:

Seeking the protection of a person of distinction, socially and politically useful, Muhammad had neglected a poor man, apparently of no significance to his cause, who was asking for spiritual solace; this mistake, this moral slip, is recorded in the Quran, which through this story teaches Muslims never to neglect a human being, never to turn away from the poor and needy, but rather to serve and love them. The Prophet was never to forget this teaching, and he repeatedly invoked God, saying: "O God, we implore You to grant us piety, dignity, [spiritual] wealth, and love of the poor."<sup>513</sup>

The third example in the Prophetic trilogy of errors concerns the war ransoms. In the early years of their making, when they were allowed to defend themselves in Jihad, the Muslims won their first major encounter with their opponents in Badr expedition (Ghazwat Badr). Among seventy captives of the war, Muhammad and his close Companions decided to spare them free, except for two notable men of high status for whom the Prophet intended to ask high ransom. Revelation later admonished the Prophet for this decision that aimed at profit for the community, "It is not for a prophet to have captives [of war]" (Quran 8:67).<sup>514</sup> Disputes among Muslim soldiers would happen at times about war loot especially when the Prophet is not with them, but the revelation above would be remembered in later expeditions and wars, and would affect his decisions later.<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>512</sup> Ibid., 48

<sup>513</sup> Ibid., 27

<sup>514</sup> Ibid., 106

<sup>515</sup> Ramadan explains this further and says:

Revelation allowed him later to fight strongly those who keep complotting against the Muslim community – "If you gain mastery over them in war, deal with them so as to strike fear in those who follow them, that they may remember" Quran, 8:57 – but the Prophet still dealt with his worst captive enemies mercifully. The ransom for captives sometimes took a different

In between these Prophetic spiritual and historical lessons stands another type of Prophetic lessons in which the spiritual and the historical intertwine. I refer to the experience of exile (hijra), the Companions agency, and the story of Muad ibn Jabal as agency's remarkable example. One, the event of exile (hijra) to Medina - [the first hijra was to Abyssinia] – was both historical and spiritual. For Ramadan, it stands for the historical rejection and hardships Muhammad and the first Muslim community went through, as happened to previous Prophetic messages like Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The hijra was a historical rupture from oppression, injustice, and “the exile of the conscience and of the heart from false gods, from alienation of all sorts, from evil and sins,”<sup>516</sup> towards the liberation of the soul. Through that historical event, the Muslims would learn to make a fundamental distinction between the fundamentals of Islam and the Meccan cultural customs that were connected to it:

The community of faith, following the Prophet's example, had to distinguish between what belonged to Islamic principles and what was more particularly related to Meccan culture. They were to remain faithful to the first while learning to adopt a flexible and critical approach to their original culture. They even had to try to reform some of their attitudes, which were more cultural than Islamic.<sup>517</sup>

That means that the Muslims had to learn the spiritual fundamentals of their faith, and would understand that faith is neither temporal nor spacial in limits. That goes to the core of existence and meaning faith brings guidance to:

The experience of spiritual exile [...] brings the individual back to him - or herself and frees him or her from the illusions of self and of the world. Exile for the sake of God is in essence a series of questions that God asks each individual being: *who are you? What is the meaning of your life? Where are you going?* Accepting the risk of such an exile, trusting the One, is to answer: *Through You [God], I return to myself and I am free.*<sup>518</sup>

Exile for the sake of God, in God's vast space, was an assessment of spiritual patience, resistance, and ability to remain the same in faith despite time and space differentials. It

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aspect. For instance, the captured warrior to win his liberty had to teach a number of Muslims how to read and write.” Ibid., 109

<sup>516</sup> Ibid., 87

<sup>517</sup> Ibid., 85

<sup>518</sup> Ibid., 87

was an opportunity also to “reform” the understanding of the universal aspect of faith in a more pluralist society like Medina.<sup>519</sup> For instance, when the Prophet heard that the Ansar Muslims, the people of the Medina, were having a wedding ceremony, the Prophet asked that two singers be sent to them because the people of the Medina were more used to this kind of entertainment and the Prophet respected their customs that did not trespass the core limits of faith.<sup>520</sup>

Two, the Prophet, through his agreements and encouragements, allowed responsible agency and independent intelligence in the Muslim community. That was the case with women and men equally. For women, he encouraged their social and political engagement as nurses, merchants, learners, and warriors. For men, he welcomed their suggestions as consultants. He allowed the Companions to take part in discussions over the issues of the community, and they could make a difference between revelation that was not questioned and his ideas as a human being. His suggestions were sometimes contrasted, and he welcomed them.<sup>521</sup> The call for prayers, *al-azan*, is an example here. As seen earlier, the prayer was prescribed in Heaven, and some of its other details like the number of kneeling and ablution were part of the Prophet’s prescriptions. For the *al-azan*, he was still considering what shape it could take, something like bells or horn, and Abdullah Ibn Zayd suggested it the way it is now, and Muhammad approved it, and asked Bilal, a black liberated slave, the first *muezzin* to call for it.<sup>522</sup>

Three, it is the dialogue that took place between the Prophet and his Companion, a young judge that was heading to Yemen for his job, that is most exemplary for Muslims beyond time and space. The story goes as such:

The Prophet asked: Muadh ibn Jabal, whom he had named as a judge in the new environment of Yemen, “Through what will you judge?” Muadh

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<sup>519</sup> “In effect, exile was also to require that the first Muslims learn to remain faithful to the meaning of Islam’s teachings in spite of the change of place, culture, and memory. Medina meant new customs, new types of social relationships, a wholly different role for women (who were socially far more present than in Mecca), and more complex intertribal relations, as well as the influential presence of the Jewish and Christian communities, which was something new to Muslims.” Ibid., 85. See a similar interpretation in *Lettres*, 48-53.

<sup>520</sup> *Lettres*, 50

<sup>521</sup> Ibid., 101-103

<sup>522</sup> Ibid., 93

replied: “Through the Book of God.” Muhammad then asked, ““And if you find nothing in the Book of God?” Muadh went on: “I shall judge according to the tradition [*Sunna*] of God’s Messenger.” Muhammad further asked, “And if you find nothing in the Messenger’s tradition?” Muadh answered confidently: “I shall not fail to make an effort [*ajtahidu*] to reach an opinion.” This answer satisfied the Prophet, who concluded: “Praise be to God, who has guided His Messenger’s messenger to what satisfies God’s Messenger.”

Ramadan’s commentary on the story above is his interpretation of it as well as his broad message behind writing a biography of the Prophet: sticking to the fundamentals, intelligently, and reading them according to time and space. The creed and the ethics that go with it are not changeable, but the social affairs that accompany them are open to human agency and interpretation, as long as they are founded on unbroken communion with God:

The gradation in Muadh ibn Jabal’s answers contained the essence of the Prophet’s teaching and offered the means for the community to follow him and to remain faithful to him through the ages: the Book of God - the Quran - and the whole body of traditions (*ahadith*) of the Prophet (collectively referred to as *as-sunnah*) were the two fundamental references, and when faced with new situations, the keepers of those teachings were to make use of their critical intelligence, their common sense, and their legal creativity to find new answers that remained faithful to Islamic principles but fit the new context. The fundamentals of Islam’s creed (*al-aqidah*) and ritual practice (*al-‘ibadat*) were not subject to change, nor were the essential principles of ethics, but the implementation of those ethical principles and the response to new situations about which scriptural sources had remained vague or silent required answers adapted to particular circumstances.<sup>523</sup>

Ramadan takes Muhammad’s life as a model for spiritual initiation, “For myself, this book has been an initiation.”<sup>524</sup> In his spiritual reflections and memories collected in *Quelques lettres du coeur* (*Some Letters from the Heart*, 2008), *Entre l’homme et son Coeur* (*Between Man and His Heart*, 2009), Ramadan invokes the Prophetic example and his teachings on love, compassion, solidarity, self-understanding, and activation of spirituality at the age of modernity.<sup>525</sup> Muhammad is pictured never to have resorted to

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<sup>523</sup> Ibid., 199-200

<sup>524</sup> Ibid., viii

<sup>525</sup> *Entre homme*, 79.

spirituality as an escape,<sup>526</sup> but as an engagement in the world for “interior liberation”<sup>527</sup> and world justice.<sup>528</sup> The Prophet’s model, for Ramadan, is a means to access the spiritual world of Islam, “pragmatic” and “active,” in the face of the challenges of modernity and its instrumentalized liberty and humanity that knows no limits.<sup>529</sup>

### **Development of Early Islamic Politics and Sciences: Overview**

Revelation, which formed the Islamic world view based on Tawhid, and the Prophet’s life in its different stages in Mecca and Medina became the two main sources that guided the first community of believers after Muhammad’s death. The four Righteous Caliphs (al-khulafa’ ar-Rashidun, 632-661 CE) that followed as rulers of the Muslim Community based on shūrā (consultation) would follow the Prophetic model. But it was at the period of the third Caliph (Ali) that division and turbulence started to take place amidst the Muslim community, and would lead later to the establishment of the Sunni and Shiite division. In his account, Ramadan says that the early Companions based their decisions on Revelation memorized by heart by believers, as well as the hadiths, words and deeds, of the Prophet. Yet, there was a tendency to stick to the literal meaning of Revelation especially during the second Caliph’s reign, Umar. With conflicts later on, which resulted in the death of a number of Revelation memorizers (*hufaz*), the fourth Caliph ordered the writing of Revelation, which was until then mostly memorized by heart, into one copy upon which there was agreement, [but not total consensus]; that copy became the Quran as known today, compiled in *Mushaf*.<sup>530</sup>

Moreover, the coming of the first dynasty, the Umayyad (661-750) to ruling, some major changes took place in the political management of the Community affairs, influenced by tribal customs, Persian, Byzantine, and Indian cultures. For instance, the office of Caliph was converted into a hereditary kingship, and the Treasury (Bayt al-Mal) was turned into the dynasty’s property. The religious scholars considered this against the rulings of the shūrā, consultation and social participation, and habits of the earlier Guided

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<sup>526</sup> Ibid., 33, 49.

<sup>527</sup> *Lettres*, 12-13

<sup>528</sup> *Entre homme*, 47-49, *Lettres*, 63-66

<sup>529</sup> *Entre homme*, 48, 79

<sup>530</sup> *European Muslim*, 31-33

Caliphs. As a result, some of the revelation learners left the capital Damascus either willingly or in disagreement with the new authorities, and that made the *hufaz*, memorizers of revelation as well as hadith, get dispersed. That left space for the risk of fabrication and mis-narration of the tradition. This made the writing of hadith equally necessary, as was the writing down of Revelation into one version. With these collections being made, some would reserve themselves to strictly studying the Quran and the Sunna, as was the case with Ibn Umar in Media; they were known as *Ahl al-hadith* [People of the Hadith]. In Kufa, Ibn Masud and his adherents used reasoning and analogy in interpreting case studies, in light of the two main sources, the Quran and Sunna. They were known as *Ahl al-Ra'ý*,<sup>531</sup> [People of Opinion].

If the Ummayyad challenged the Muslim community with new questions and situations, it were the Abbasid that would pave a solid ground for the age of flourishing and consolidation for the Islamic sciences (750-1258). With Caliphs themselves scholars or interested in scholarship (like Harun ar-Rashid, al-Mansur), development of the Quranic and Sunna into various sciences led to the emergence of influential schools (*madhahib*), and the birth of Islamic theology, *'ilm al-kalam* or simply *kalam*. That was very much aided by learning from especially Greek philosophy and Christian theology.<sup>532</sup>

Following a Prophetic conversation with the angel Gabriel, a division in faith was established (Islam, Iman, Ihsan),<sup>533</sup> and that broadly influenced, according to Ramadan,

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<sup>531</sup> Ibid., 33

<sup>532</sup> Ibid., 34-41, 65. (*'Ilm al-aqida, the science of faith*, which is sometimes called theology, by analogy with Christian studies (Ibid., 41). This is explained in note page 54 as follows: "The first generations of Muslims were not involved in theoretical debates concerning God, His names and attributes or the nature of Faith [...]. The Muslims' new proximity with other civilizations (particularly with Greek books, and the proximity of some Christian scholars), slowly modified this disposition and led several 'ulema to initiate theological and theoretical debates within the Islamic tradition [...] provoked a reaction from those Muslim scholars who were aware of the risks [...]." Ibid., 65.

<sup>533</sup> Islam in this division means to testify that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, to perform the prayers, to pay the Zakat, to fast in Ramadan, and to make the pilgrimage Mecca if one is able to do so. Iman is to believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Last Day, and to believe in divine destiny, both the good and the evil thereof. This level is more theoretical than the first level of Islam, and is also higher in the perception of faith. Ihsan is the highest of the three levels of faith and the closest to God. It is to worship Allah as if you are seeing Him. While you do not see Him, He truly sees you. Then, Ihsan means that a Muhsen is sure that Allah is seeing him/her in everything he/she says or does. Therefore, a Muhsen does his/her best to say and do only what pleases God and conforms to His

the development of corresponding sciences: 1) The science of worship, *al-'ibādāt*; 2) the science of creed, *al-aqida*; and 3) the science of ethics and Sufism, *attaṣawuf*, though more derivative branches generated from each.<sup>534</sup> Otherwise said, the worship would develop into *uṣūl al-fiqh*, the principles of jurisprudence, which determine the methodology of deduction and induction of laws from the two main sources, the Quran, and the Sunna, followed by the practice of *ijtihād*, *ijma'*, *qiyās*, etc. This branch developed into worship rituals studies, *'ibadat*, and social affairs studies, *mu'amalat*. Events case by case, as well as the study of methods of communicating and transmitting Islam to others were also branches that developed out of the principles of jurisprudence, named *fiqh al-waqi'* and *fiqh al-awlawiyat*, Jurisprudence of the Context, and Jurisprudence of Priorities, respectively. As to the science of creed, though in the early formative years of the Muslim community was not debated, it was brought into study later on, and developed into *'ilm al-kalam*, theology, based on reasoning. The science of ethics, on the other hand, concerns the individual and his/her and interaction in family and society; within the same science grew Sufism in which the individual is most concerned to understand God and march towards Him.<sup>535</sup> It is the search for *al-al-ḥaqīqa*, Truth.<sup>536</sup>

Ramadan goes through the main aspects that characterize especially the four dominant Sunni jurisprudence schools (*madhahib*), the differences and similarities, and their *ijtihād* methodologies. He also explains the conditions of practicing *ijtihād*, the various terminology of each school in making analogy before reaching a fatwa, the various types of fatwa, and numerous numerations of the developments of these jurisprudential practices – which I do not mean to go through here.<sup>537</sup> In the main,

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commands. This is the level of righteousness, the level of perfection, the level of doing and saying the ultimate good, the level of *Ihsan*.

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*, 31

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.*, 40

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.*, 45

<sup>537</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-99. There is no unanimity upon one definition of *ijtihād*, and that implies that scholars did not have one methodology of practicing it, and thus did not have similar distinctions. Yet, a general review of the classical main texts can lead to a broad view on its typologies. *Ijihād* is seen by many scholars as the third source of law, if the Quran or Sunna do not provide a direct or clear answer to some case or situation that needs a legal opinion, fatwa. Broadly, *ijtihād* is practiced for *zani* texts, i.e. texts that are not clear in their meaning, and that gives the scholar, if he answers the high conditions of practicing *ijtihād*, to give a

Ramadan affirms that “The sciences of Islam [...] since the 7<sup>th</sup> century [...] have had only one purpose: how to maintain a vivid Faith and yet remain faithful to the Quranic and Prophetic teachings in new historical, social and political situations?”<sup>538</sup> At least for five centuries (750 -1258 CE), these sciences were not formalistic and purely legalist; rather, they took time and space into account. The four main scholars of the main madhahib were mostly based in different locations, and little time differential between them, and that still allowed them to reason each according to his context, and his criteria, which were rigorous, but also flexible. The ijtiḥad they practiced took space and time into account. They equally took the common good (*maṣlaḥa*) into high consideration in their jurisprudential rulings. The common good / *maṣlaḥa* (*pl. maṣaliḥ*) were initiated into legal debates by the Maliki school, enshrined in the maqāṣid (objectives) of Sharia initiated by Imām al-Haramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) and developed by Abu Hāmed al-Ghazzālī (1058–1111). The common good (*maṣlaḥa*) raised a debate among scholars at the time because some, for instance, used it to allow interest in bank dealing (*ribā*) which a clear (*qat’i*) text of the Quran forbids. This led al-Gazali to formulate five main objectives (maqāṣid) of the Sharia:

What we mean by maslaha is the preservation of the objective [maqāṣid] of the Law [*shar*], which consists in five things: the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. Whatever ensures the protection of these five principles

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ruling on the matter concerned, without this matter being abiding for everyone and everywhere, because the scholar builds on his own references, and his opinion, fatwa, remains a reference, but not abiding for everyone. About five categories of ijtiḥad were known in the classical period: ijtiḥad qiyāssi: done on analogical reasoning which takes into account the effective cause, *’ila*, of a ruling extracted from the sources; ijtiḥad zanni: practiced in the case when it is impossible to refer to a known effective cause; ijtiḥad istislahi: it is based on *maṣlaḥa*, interest, and aims at deducing a ruling in light of the general purpose of Sharia; ijtiḥad mytlaq, absolute ijtiḥad, in which the mujtahid scholar depends on his own formulations in studying the sources; ijtiḥad muqayyad, limited ijtiḥad, is madhabi, i.e. confined to a particular school and ijtiḥad has to be practiced following the school’s methodology. Among the conditions of practicing ijtiḥad are the following: high knowledge of Arabic, the Quran, the ahadith, the circumstances of revelation and ahadith, the objectives of Sharia (summarized by Al-Ghazali in five as *alkuliyat or ad-daruriyat al-khams*: Life, intellect, religion, lineage and wealth ) the differences among the main schools, knowledge of the socio-political context during the interpretation, and righteousness and piety of the scholar. The ruling of the mujtahid gives a legal opinion, called fatwa, and it is generally of two types: one based on the two main sources and thus works as a reminder to the believer(s), and the second is based on the ijtiḥad of the scholar for a particular case in particular context (time and place), and thus it cannot be transferrable the way it is; it cannot be binding, but remains an opinion that others can refer to. The difference between these types of fatwa makes the difference between a mujtahid (the scholar who exercises ijtiḥad) and the mufti (the scholar who gives legal opinions, fatawa). See, *Ibid.*, 82-99, and 108, n. 89.

<sup>538</sup> *Ibid.*, 41

[uṣūl] is *maslaha*; whatever goes against their protection is *mafsada*, and to avoid it is *maslaha*.<sup>539</sup>

These five objectives (*maqāṣid*) led to other categorizations of the common good (*maṣaliḥ*), and scholars have debated that differently.<sup>540</sup> Ramadan develops more objectives from these five objectives and categorizes them differently. I refer to that when dealing with *Radical Reform*.

The early intellectual dynamism of the Muslim scholars did not restrict itself to the Islamic sciences of the Quran and the Hadith, but equally integrated the humanities and the hard or exact sciences. This aspect is not separately and clearly dealt with in *To Be a European Muslim*, but finds some space in *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, in a section entitled “Faith, Science, and Ethics.” Here, Ramadan recalls “the extraordinary contribution Muslims have made historically to scientific development and progress” and adds the “fact that they –more than any other civilization- have advanced the sciences to a higher level,” and “deeply influenced” [...] “European Renaissance, humanism, and the Reformation.”<sup>541</sup> He asserts that the classification of religious studies into various branches, as broadly depicted above, impacted all the sciences related to man (i.e. mankind) for “at least three reasons”:

First, because the Qur’an and the traditions invited the human spirit to study and understand the world; second, because the religious sciences themselves very often referred to scientific discoveries (in medicine or astronomy, for example) to work out an aspect of practice; and third, because the framework of reference was so nourished by religion that the connection between ethics and science was immediate and natural and necessarily less at risk at that time because few situations were recognized as delimited.<sup>542</sup>

This Islamic worldview is based on the concept of Tawhid that touches all aspects of life and human interaction with man and the universe. Despite such a strong link between different disciplines established by Tawhid, each discipline developed its independence

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<sup>539</sup> Qtd in *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>540</sup> See more on this debate among early scholars in *Ibid.*, 76-82. The same debate is invoked in *Western Muslims*, 38-43.

<sup>541</sup> *Western Muslims*, 55-56.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*, 56

methodologically. Accordingly, two major lessons can be withdrawn from the classical period:

1. The unity of the Source (God as revealed in the Texts), which is where ethics finds its coherent foundation, never implies a similarity of approaches or a uniformity of methodologies.
2. Varieties of methodologies are constructed rationally, taking as the starting point the object of study, not the relation to the Transcendent or to a system of knowledge that He has preordained.<sup>543</sup>

Methodology apart, it was consistency in the ethical and moral attitudes that the sciences followed that made them Islamic, and not the scientific studies/methodologies themselves which are “in themselves morally neutral.”<sup>544</sup>

However, this dynamism in Islamic sciences would stagnate for internal and external reasons. For the internal reason that is the focus for revival, Ramadan believes stagnation is due to the fact that Sharia was, by time, summarized into and dominated by jurisprudence, instead of it being comprehensive of all the Islamic sciences, as well as the exact sciences that developed along with them. Though there were attempts in 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries by Ibn Taymiya (d. 1328), his disciple Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawwziyah (d. 1350), and al-Shatibi (d. 1388)<sup>545</sup> to revive the spirit of early scholars, they failed, either because the criteria of being a scholar and thus to practice *ijtihad* were high and thus hardly no one could produce some colossal work again, or because the scholars themselves or their political rulers did not see a need for that; they depended on the existing schools, and solved the new legal cases basing their solutions on the premises of the four main schools which they did not try to reinvigorate or go beyond.<sup>546</sup> It was no longer the spirit of *ijtihad*, but of *taqlid*. Though the Quran contains just 250 verses that

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<sup>543</sup> Ibid., 58

<sup>544</sup> The phrase “in themselves morally neutral” appears between brackets in the original text. To be faithful to the text in which it appears, I quote it here the way it is: “The message then is to remain consistent with the ethical message of religion, The universal and comprehensive message of Islamic ethics penetrates all the sciences without exception, calling for moral consistency, but it does not confuse the latter with the autonomy of scientific methods (in themselves morally neutral).” Ibid., 60

<sup>545</sup> *European Muslim*, 88-93

<sup>546</sup> Ibid., 86-89

specify certain legalist rulings, in a sum of 6632 verses,<sup>547</sup> the legalists have managed for centuries to make law the only manifestation and meaning of Islam and more particularly of Sharia. The latter lost its inclusive definition, “*a way leading to the source,*” which embraces all aspects of Islam: *aqida* [creed], *fiqh* [jurisprudence], and *tasawwuf* [Sufism].

<sup>548</sup> In a critical summary of the Islamic sciences, Ramadan says:

These sciences and their typology should have been a foundation, a vivid source for further studies. Unfortunately, it [i.e. the early Islamic framework of research] has, however, very often been like the walls of an intellectual prison preventing the *ʿulema* from providing or imagining original, but still faithful, Islamic solutions to contemporary problems [...]. Muslims have followed the path of blind imitation (*taqlid*) without being able to find again the genuine and dynamic Message contained in the Quran and the Sunna.<sup>549</sup>

“Blind imitation” went on until contact with the modern West took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the time when the Ottoman Empire would start to lose its power as a guardian of the Islamic Caliphate. The re-assertion of *ijtihad* and reform had to wait until the 1870s to take place in the Islamic main lands, at the hands of the pioneers of the Arab Renaissance (Arab *nahḍa*).<sup>550</sup>

### **In the Footsteps of Islamic Reformists**

It is especially in *Aux sources de renouveau musulman: D’al-Afghani à Hassan al-Banna - un siècle de reformisme islamique* (*The Sources of Muslim Revival: From al-Afghani to al-Banna – A Century of Islamic Reformism*, 1998) that Ramadan articulates the first symptoms of where he stands in the modern and contemporary Islamic thought. However, the main rationale behind the book is actually to situate the legacy of Hassan al-Banna in its reformist but non-violent tradition. al-Banna culminates a number of figures that preceded his socio-political activism and involvement from a religious perspective into the political scene of the liberating Arab-Islamic societies. The figures Ramadan studies in the text are among the main ones in the Arab-Islamic reformist

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<sup>547</sup> Ibid., p59

<sup>548</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid., 42

<sup>550</sup> Ibid., 44, 93.

movement of the *nahḍa*, without this being the only list common in reading the *nahḍa* legacy: Jamal Eddine al-Afghani (1838 - 1897), Muhammad Abduh (1849 – 1905), Rashid Rida (1865 - 1935), Said an-Nursi (1878 – 1960), Abd al-Hamid Ibn Badis (1889 - 1940), Muhammad Iqbal (1877 – 1938), and Hassan al-Banna (1906 - 1949). I prefer to leave Ramadan’s evaluation of these reformists to the coming section where I also refer to his evaluation and criticism of the literalists and the liberals. Here I content myself with condensing his reading of al-Banna’s legacy as a reformist and advocate of ‘social Islam’ (for social justice, and not for socialism).

Ramadan’s reading of al-Banna’s published and unpublished works lead him to the conclusion that his grandfather belongs to the “*fundamentalist reformist*” school which al-Afghani and Abduh initiated.<sup>551</sup> “*Fundamentalist*” here means that the scholar relates his research and approach to the fundamental sources of religion, i.e. Quran and Sunna. In a radio interview in French, Ramadan identified himself as ‘salafist and fundamentalist.’ This was used against him, because it was understood in its current political context as radically violent.<sup>552</sup> In the book (a volume of 479 pages), Ramadan argue for a historical reading of al-Banna’s heritage. The rereading of al-Banna comes at the time when studies of political Islam and extremism refer to Muslim Brotherhood and its founder al-Banna without distinguishing between the ‘social Islam’ of the movement under the leadership of its founder, and its recourse to violence under the Nasserist oppression when Sayyed Qutb became the spiritual leader of the movment, after the death of al-Banna; the two men never met and Qutb moved from literature to religious activism after his visit to the US and experience of the Western life, his disappointment by its hegemony and “*jahiliyya*” (ethical decadence and ignorance). Worst was his imprisonment for ten years in Egypt.<sup>553</sup>

According to Ramadan, the two leaders (al-Banna and Qutb afterwards) framed two separate religious and political orientations for the Muslim Brotherhood. One, from 1928 to 1949, the movement was engaged in socio-political change peacefully, through

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<sup>551</sup> *Renouveau musulman*, 23.

<sup>552</sup> Zemmouri, *Faut-il faire taire Tariq Ramadan?* 102.

<sup>553</sup> *Renouveau musulman*, 448

resistance to colonial powers especially in Palestine, and through education and social services in Egypt. The target was the grassroots level, and there was no idea of establishing an Islamic state.<sup>554</sup> The aim was to “realize” an “Islamic society” that knows well its tradition and the message of its religion, and not the seizure of power “from below,” while the Iranian revolution opted for seizing it “from top” as Gilles Kepel argues in *La revanche de dieu (The Revenge of God, 1991)*.<sup>555</sup>

Two, after the assassination of al-Banna by the Nasserist regimes that suspected the work of the Muslim Brothers, oppression of the movement started. From the 1960s and 70s, the leadership in the movement would change its social priorities and target the state level, violently, and call for the “reversal of the regime” into an “Islamic state.”<sup>556</sup> For Ramadan, this was a “grave and naive political blunder.”<sup>557</sup> Such a fundamental distinction in leadership and orientation does not appear in the Western literature on the movement and al-Banna. More than that, al-Banna is not studied as a social reformist that is influenced, as he himself says, by al-Afghani and Abduh.<sup>558</sup> Ramadan affirms this: “The thought of Hassan al-Banna is badly known in the West, though his name is commonly invoked,”<sup>559</sup> “It is necessary to render justice to the thought of al-Banna, and with him, to all the reformist tradition: al-Banna is not the father of “contemporary Islamism,” the manifestations of which are violent or take reductionist and shallow anti-Western positions.”<sup>560</sup>

After this clarification, Ramadan makes it clear that he does not deny his lineage to al-Banna. Rather, seeing that al-Banna’s ‘social Islam,’ and the reformers’ revival enterprises before him, all attempt a kind of reform, which Ramadan acknowledges as

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<sup>554</sup> Ibid., 448, 449, 455

<sup>555</sup> Ibid., 29

<sup>556</sup> Ibid., 28, 458. Ramadan believes that radicalization falls within one of the four tendencies of the Muslim societies experienced after independence in the 1960s. He sees four tendencies towards the State since the 1960s in Muslim majority countries: the very traditionalists, sometimes supported by the State, and the closed spirit of which is just little frustrating because they do not mingle into politics; the Occidentalized intellectuals; the legalist reformists like the ones that figure in this volume; and the minute minority of radicals that uses violence against the State.” Ibid., 29

<sup>557</sup> Ibid., 451

<sup>558</sup> Ibid., 25. See also note 12 on p. 25, and n. 4, 5, and 6 on p. 450.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid., 26

<sup>560</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

substantial in its time, but is now part of what he calls “adaptation reform” in *Radical Reform* as will be seen. Without a big rupture with this tradition, he moves to propose “transformation reform.”

### c. Radical Reform: from Adaptation to Transformation

What I have tried to do until now is that I have presented the three stages of reading the tradition in the Ramadani texts in my own way. First, I have broadly presented the way he introduces the basics of Islam, particularly the comprehensive notion of Tawhid, the biography of the Prophet and its lessons. Second, I have given his broad view of the Islamic sciences and their dynamism, though my presentation of that is very sketchy and does injustice to his work, but it is not my intention to delve into the details but in his mere methodology as well as my methodology of reading him, gradually, to reach his reformist ideas. Third, I also sketchily introduced Ramadan’s reading of the Arab-Islamic Renaissance pioneers, including his grandfather al-Banna. These readings of the tradition cannot be isolated from the idea of reform Ramadan has in the background in this stage of his work. I underline this idea here before I enter into the next section that speaks of his “radical reform” to anticipate my later analysis that argues that Ramadan’s project is gradual and not abrupt or unexpected.

Already in the early texts that introduce the Islamic sciences and the situation of Muslims in the European and Western context, Ramadan frequently states that the message of Islam is universalist, humanist, and pluralist, and thus applicable to any space and time particularities as long as reading it in light of new circumstances is done seriously and from within the same tradition. For instance, his very early work *Les musulmans dans la laïcité* is an attempt to study the Islamic presence in the laïc France. In the book, he finds that the problems are not always related to rights, which the Muslims enjoy, but of discrimination and radical interpretation of laïc laws of 1905. In *To Be a European Muslim*, Part II of the work is about European Muslims and how they should consider their religion in Europe. Here he, for example, already engages in expanding the meaning of Sharia to mean *the Way*, proposes the concept of “*The Abode of Testimony*” (*dār ash-Shahada*) instead of “*The Abode of War*” (*dār al ḥarb*), and

suggests priorities for social engagement in Europe as European Muslim citizens. In this same work a call for “radical change” is already present (before it is deepened in his *Radical Reform*):

A radical change in our state of mind is needed if we want to face, as we must, the world around us. To be a consistent and balanced Muslim today is difficult because the world around us and the parameters, in the Islamic or in the Western space, are no longer coherent.<sup>561</sup>

In *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, the first part of which is reproduced from *To Be a European Muslim*, Ramadan asserts that his approach is both conventional and new: “the approach I propose is anchored in the Islamic tradition and amplified from within it;” “it is both classical and radically new.” Yet, he admits that there has been a constant work on his project since his earlier work (i.e. *Les musulmans dans la laïcité*). Such a development, he says, was enriched by three dimensions: 1) “deepening reflection on the sources,” 2) “bringing them face to face with the realities on the ground,” and 3) “analyzing the local dynamics in accordance with meetings and ex-changes with Muslim association groups” in the West (Europe, North America, Mauritius, Reunion, Singapore).<sup>562</sup>

The project Ramadan is working on in these early texts can lead to “a true “intellectual revolution”” *à la Kant* “when he spoke of “Copernican revolution”” if more intellectual effort is exerted:

Our sources help us in this if we can only try hard to reappropriate for ourselves the universality of the message of Islam, along with its vast horizon. This reappropriation should be of a depth that will enable it to produce a true “intellectual revolution” in the sense intended by Kant when he spoke of the “Copernican revolution.”<sup>563</sup>

The last paragraph in his Introduction to *Western Muslims* is revealing, and confirms my methodological reading of him, i.e. his gradual reading of the tradition and work on reform:

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<sup>561</sup> *European Muslim*, 130

<sup>562</sup> *Western Muslims*, 3

<sup>563</sup> *Ibid.*, 53

This book is only one step more toward the building of the Muslim personality in the West and doubtless in the modern era, too. It will not be the last. Other works, insha Allah, must continue to trace the path back to the beginning. I have humbly tried to draw the theoretical and practical outlines of a vision for the future, full on. I want to engage with this in practice, and already, across all the countries of the West, this vision is being accomplished. The road is still long [...].<sup>564</sup>

The main work that comes after this note, five years later, is *Radical Reform*, supported by *The Quest for Meaning*. This section introduces them and the advanced development they contain.

In his Introduction to *Radical Reform* Ramadan keeps stating that the work comes after “limits have been achieved” in the study of the classical and contemporary reform attempts in Islamic studies. The road towards this work has been “long and sometimes very difficult;” “we are now at a loss” and the need to “go further” is the way:

Becoming reconciled to that rich past is the best way of devising new paths toward the future. For years, in the course of my work on law and jurisprudence, I have been reading and analyzing reference works on the fundamentals of Islamic law (*usûl al-fiqh*) and their concrete and practical implementation in different historical periods (*fiqh*), with the aim, of course, of finding new answers to the new challenges faced by contemporary Muslims—and, among them, Western Muslims. Many fields have been investigated by contemporary Muslim scholars, many proposals have been drawn up and the reform of reading and understanding as well as the exercise of *ijtihâd* have been a continuous practice. Today, however, we seem to have reached a limit, so that we shall have to ask ourselves precisely not only what meaning we give to the notion of reform [...] but also what its objectives must be. To put it clearly, what reform do we mean?<sup>565</sup>

Based on his earlier works, Ramadan seems to have gone through the ordinary path of a scholar in Islamic studies. From reading the Quran and the Sunna, to the classical schools methodologies, and reaching the *naḥḍa* reforms and contemporary debates, Ramadan feels “this is not sufficient.”<sup>566</sup> The Copernican “true intellectual revolution” referred to in *Western Muslims* is developed here to face the “growing complexity of the real.” What further reform is needed and for what objectives are questions to be dealt with here. The

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<sup>564</sup> Ibid., 7

<sup>565</sup> *Radical Reform*, 27

<sup>566</sup> Ibid., 3

background for that will be re-stated briefly, initially, and case studies will be left for the next sections.

To present his “radical” step, Ramadan again goes through some main scholars of early Islam to present the dynamic *ijtihād* that culminated in the foundation of various legal schools. In his synthesis of the Prophet’s Companions period, and the flourishing legal schools that developed from the 9<sup>th</sup> up to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, which culminated in the school of objectives of al-Shatibi, fed by high knowledge of the sources, perfect knowledge of the sciences of the time as well as the socio-political context. So, their legal opinions went in parallel with society’s evolution.<sup>567</sup> High understanding of the objectives (*maqāṣid*) of the Sharia, and real proficiency of deduction and extraction methods were, following al-Shatibi’s argument, the main pillars of *ijtihād*. These objectives were/are generally summarized in the protection of human life, religion, the intellect, honour, and property, were guided by strong faith, dynamic and autonomous reason.<sup>568</sup> The context was always taken into account, but was not centralized, as part of the fundamental sources of jurisprudence, *uṣūl al-fiqh*.<sup>569</sup>

The *naḥḍa* period since 1870 tried to shake the stagnation of about five centuries. *Ijtihād* was revived to keep up with the rapid changes that had taken place after the encounter with the West. Since *naḥḍa*, Ramadan recognizes three categories of scholars of religion that try either to progress or regress, by being protective. These three categories are 1) the reformists of the *naḥḍa* - as well as some contemporary reformists - a category to which he feels close to, 2) the literalists that he distances himself from, and 3) the liberals whose methods of research he questions. These three categories are not referred to all in one text, but are found mainly in *Aux sources du renouveau musulman* and *Radical Reform*. I outline his views of the three in the following paragraphs.

First, for the literalists, according to Ramadan, they have three failures to overcome. The first is the failure to distinguish between what is immutable (*ṭabīʿī*), transhistorical, and what is changeable (*mutaḡhayyir*). Pillars of Islam and pillars of faith

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<sup>567</sup> Ibid., 77-80

<sup>568</sup> Ibid., 73-75

<sup>569</sup> Ibid., 77-80

are immutable. The Medina state model is historical and thus the state model for Muslims is changeable. Even the immutable can have different manifestations in their implementation. The second concerns the confusion between principles and models, between a rule and its form. For instance, decency in clothing is the prescription for both men and women, but its form is left open for personal choices according to the context. The Salafists who see the Arabian clothing style of the Prophetic era as the only suitable attire do mix the rule and the form. The third concerns the inability to distinguish between legal methodologies related to the creed (aqida) and worship (ibadat), and social affairs (mu'amalat). The basic principle in social affairs is permission (*al-asl fil al-ashya' al-ibaha*), and not "only what is written can be done."<sup>570</sup> These literalists fear reform, lest it 1) changes the message of religion, 2) loses its substance as has Christianity done, and 3) loses its timeless teachings that, the literalists claim, are relevant for all times and places.<sup>571</sup>

Second, for the "fundamentalist reformists," or "*mujaddidun wa islahiyyun*" of the *nahḍa*, the Quran, the Sunna, and the *ijtihad* are their fundamental references of reform.<sup>572</sup> These reformists, from al-Afgani to al-Banna, as studied in *Aux sources renouveau du musulman*, can be featured in three moments and characteristics. One, al-Afghani and Abduh: they are the pivotal axis of the modern thinking in Islamic thought; profoundly, they have "renewed the intellectual dynamic" at the time of colonialism and fight for liberation. All those who come after them refer to their "theoretical" contribution. For instance, al-Afghani refused to stick to the main Islamic legalist schools/*madahib* that developed in the formative years of Islam and fall into the mistake of formalism and *taqlid*; he preferred to go directly to the sources and practice *al-ijtihad* anew, though its gates for him were never closed.<sup>573</sup> Though he searched for a way as a unifying force to uphold liberation from colonialism, and back up reforms, he still considered the umma as united spiritually and not simply politically.<sup>574</sup> In science, he saw the revival and role of philosophy, "the mother of science," as that of guidance,

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<sup>570</sup> Ibid., 17-21

<sup>571</sup> Ibid., 11

<sup>572</sup> *Renouveau musulman*, 22

<sup>573</sup> Ibid., 51, 76.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid., 57

consciousness, and its revival as the revival of nations. Reason and faith for him go along and solidify each other for human liberation from material dependency.<sup>575</sup> Abduh, the disciple of al-Afghani, known for some as a ‘salafi rationalist’<sup>576</sup> focused on education as a priority over politics; “education is everything;” he was very critical of al-Azhar educational system, and when he became a Mufti he implemented substantial reforms to revive the tradition of reasoning and opening up to the modern sciences. For him, the Quran was not a historical nor a scientific book, but a guiding book. Sharia for him was “the way.” Socially, he saw a needed reconsideration of the situation of women, and was critical of the authority of man over women in certain hadiths. Economically he took the view of allowing interest banks.<sup>577</sup>

Two, Rashid Rida, an-Nursi, Ibn Badis, Iqbal: this group expresses a “real reformist evolution,” reflected in ‘social and political action.” Rida, the disciple of Abduh, Ibn Badis, influenced by Rida, and an-Nursi were more into the social and political activism for liberation, and against the cultural European influence. Besides the exegeses and newspapers they wrote and disseminated, with frequent references to their predecessors al-Afghani and Abduh, they gave much attention to the language as well, Arabic, for its importance in reforming education, and impacting understanding of the Quran. From India-Pakistan, the poet-philosopher Iqbal called for the revival of the spirit of dynamic *ijtihad* as a way for a reconstruction of Islamic thought. The democracy he envisioned for Islamic countries was a ‘spiritual democracy” where an “active spirituality” accompanies modernity, unlike the European model where the ethical has distanced itself from progress.<sup>578</sup> Three, al-Banna stands as a figure that epitomizes ‘social Islam” which caters for the grassroots level aspirations, through social services and education, always based on the religious reference.<sup>579</sup>

In synthesizing the reformists past references and practices, Ramadan outlines six features: 1) permanent reference to the Islamic sources in light of the sociopolitical

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<sup>575</sup> Ibid., 63-65

<sup>576</sup> Ibid., 117

<sup>577</sup> Ibid., 107, 113-116, 123

<sup>578</sup> Ibid., 166-67

<sup>579</sup> Ibid., 24-26

context; 2) liberation of reason to stimulate new answers through *ijtihad*; 3) the attempt to unite the Muslim societies despite the differences that characterize them and their religious school/madhab reference; 4) sensitization of people socially and politically; 5) respect of peoples' choices in politics through the *shūrā* principle of consultation; 6) refusal of submission to foreign powers politically, economically, socially, and culturally.<sup>580</sup>

Third, for the liberals, Ramadan names some of them in *Aux sources du renouveau musulman*. They are also depicted as the ones that approach the West, use its civilization, culture, and values to reform Islam for a renaissance as that which the West went through; they expect an Islamic *aggiornamento*. For Ramadan, Qasem Amin (1863-1908), Ali Abd ar-Razeq (1888-1966), Taha Hussein (1889-1973), Mohamed Arkoun (1928-2010), Abd Allah Laroui (b. 1933), Hassan Hanafi (b. 1935), and others, are examples of scholars that have tried to modernize Islam in light of Western history of ideas. "These scholars benefit from a favourable readership in Europe and the US" because they are the ones made and helped to be heard. "They use the same rational categories, the same terminology, the same rapport to the sciences and rigorous deduction and found their authority on applied rationalism, away from the manifestations of faith and the respect of the overall sacred."<sup>581</sup> They claim to save Islam from fanaticism. They, too, like the Western literature on political Islam, use socio-political approaches, and not historical ones in understanding the intellectual history of modern and contemporary Islam.<sup>582</sup>

In *Radical Reform*, which comes ten years after *Aux sources du renouveau musulman*, Ramadan develops his criticism of the liberals, without mentioning names (maybe because he realizes that some of the scholars he earlier called "liberal" are not very much so, and are not "Westernized"! ). So, in his new critique he finds that the liberals are present in the debate over reforming Islam in three basic points. These points manifest their different conception of 1) the Quran, 2) the Sunna, and 3) the claim of

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<sup>580</sup> Ibid., 129

<sup>581</sup> Ibid., 20-21

<sup>582</sup> Ibid., 19-22.

one's ability to practice one's own *ijtihad*. The first point concerns the scriptural sources, the Quran and the Sunna, which Ramadan strongly sticks to. In this first point he first refutes the idea of reading the Quran as a human text, as some Muslim and non-Muslim scholars tend to do, mostly influenced by Protestant Reformation and Vatican II proceedings, to solve its legal issues in which it is wrongly summarized. Such scholars expect "a real *aggiornamento*, or update, of Islam."<sup>583</sup> He also faces these claims by presenting the classical methodologies as a form of "applied hermeneutics" that integrated the scholar, the context, as well as the divine text in the reading. For Ramadan, as for any concerned Muslim, it is one of the pillars of faith to believe that the Quran is the Word of God and the Last Revelation, and considering it as a human text betrays this teaching and pillar. As to the Sunna, the second note, he equally stresses its importance as a secondary source, besides the Quran, and disagrees with those who call for doing without it in reforming Islam.<sup>584</sup> For the last note, which is the practice of free *ijtihad*, individually, with no methodological constraints, here, too, he disagrees, and defends the idea that *ijtihad* is not unrestricted.<sup>585</sup> Below I try to elaborate on these three points: the Quran, Sunna, and *ijtihad*.

For the first point, Ramadan stresses the idea that the real problem is not the Quran, and thus it is not in studying Quran as a human text that will solve the problem. He labels this intellectual enterprise as a "dangerous shortcut":

People tend to believe that dogmatic or literalist approaches are caused by the nature of the Quranic text, and that ascribing a human origin to it would suffice to open the way to a historical and contextualized reading. However, this statement involves two dangerous shortcuts.<sup>586</sup>

The first "dangerous shortcut" in such a reading is the assumption that reading the text alone will determine the approach in interpretation. He believes that such free interpretation has historically brought about dogmatic ideologies and in contemporary Islam this freedom of interpretation has led fundamentalists to read the text in a way far

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<sup>583</sup> *Radical Reform*, 14

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*, 16

<sup>585</sup> *Ibid.*, 23

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*, 15

from its objectives. His fear is that the interpreter will take the text to where he wants by projecting his own ideas on it:

The first [dangerous shortcut] is in assuming that the status of the text alone determines its readers' mode of interpretation, although this is far from obvious or inevitable. The history of religions and ideologies is filled with examples of texts produced by guides or thinkers, texts that have been, and still are, read in a dogmatic way by their adepts or followers. The status of the text can indeed influence the modalities of reading, but in the end, it is the mind and psyche of the reader interpreting it that project its categories and the modalities of its interpretation onto the book.<sup>587</sup>

The way out of this first risk is to take a number of elements into account: the attitude of interpretation, psychology, and the frame work of interpretation the interpreter has in mind: "What must be assessed and questioned is often the outlook, the psychology, and frame of reference of interpreting scholars, and the debate over the status of the text falls far short of resolving the issue of historical and contextualized interpretation."<sup>588</sup>

The second "dangerous shortcut" concerns the projection of the Christian theological development on the Islamic one which is different. Unlike its Christian counterpart, which integrated the human source early in its scriptural production, the Islamic revelation developed its own methodology of being read in context, though it is a divine text. That is to say, the Word of God remains untouchable, while the interpretation was understood according to the context in which it descended, and later on according to the various methodologies of interpretation which remain human. More clearly, the divine and the human remain separate though interdependent. This long passage clarifies it in Ramadan's wording:

The other shortcut is methodologically more serious and its consequences are far more harmful. It consists in importing the experience of Catholic theology into the Islamic tradition: because the historicocritical approach was only possible in the Christian tradition, after the human source of the New Testament had been acknowledged, it is assumed to be the same—by natural induction—for the Islamic legal tradition. However, this exogenous imported viewpoint fails to do

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<sup>587</sup> Ibid., 15

<sup>588</sup> Ibid., 15

justice to the great legal tradition of Islam that has never, since the beginning, linked the status of the Quran (as the “eternal word of God”) to the impossibility of historical and contextualized interpretation. Indeed, quite the contrary has occurred: from the outset, the Prophet’s Companions (*as-sahâba*), the following generation (*at-tâbi”ûn*), then the scholars, the leading figures of the various sciences and schools of law, kept referring to the context, causes (*asbâb*), and chronology of revealed verses. The sciences and commentaries of the Quran (“*ulûm al-Qur”ân* and *at- tafâsîr*), the study of the Prophet’s life (*as-sîra*), and the classification of Prophetic traditions (“*ulûm al-hadîth*) are areas of study that were set up while taking into account the historicity of the revealed Word as well as of the Prophet’s speech and action.<sup>589</sup>

What is said above, besides the clear cut distinction between the divine and human, is that “Human intelligence alone, then, can determine the contents of the timeless principle drawn from the text, while necessarily taking into account its relation to the social and historical context of its enunciation.”<sup>590</sup> In more contemporary scholarly terms, the human interpreter of the divine is an old practice in the Islamic tradition, and is a form of “applied hermeneutics.”<sup>591</sup> What went wrong with time is not this very approach, which takes the context into account, but “the norms and limits of such contextualizing.”<sup>592</sup> (Integrating the context again falls within Ramadan’s reform. This will be explained after these preliminary notes.)

As to the Sunna, the second point, some liberals want to do without it in reading the tradition and fundamentals of fiqh. For Ramadan, the Sunna “remains an essential source to determining Islamic norms and practices” and disqualifying it will simply be rejected by most Muslims, because the Prophetic tradition explains a lot of the divine messages. The prayer pillar, for example, is not explained in detail in the Quran and only the Sunna does. For Ramadan, these two main sources “are by no means obstacles to a historical, contextualized, and critical reading.” What is important to be done “is to determine categories and norms that must make it possible to remain both faithful to the creed as such and coherent as to the questions raised by intelligence when faced with the

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<sup>589</sup> Ibid., 15-16

<sup>590</sup> Ibid., 16

<sup>591</sup> Ibid., 16

<sup>592</sup> Ibid., 16

evolution of sciences and of societies.”<sup>593</sup> But these norms of intelligence and faith to be developed do not have to go unrestrained, through an *ijtihad* that ignores rigorous methods that stem from faith and does not deviate from it. This makes the third point, which Ramadan rejects from the liberals.

*Ijtihad* as an intellectual process for the interpretation of the scriptures has always been practiced following ‘strict, and indeed legitimate, conditions’ from the outset of Islamic sciences. It could “only be carried out in the light of knowledge of the general message, of its various levels of enunciation, of the categories of the sciences (*“ulûm*) and methodologies, and of the rules (*qawâ’id*) applied to scriptural texts, grammar (*nahw*), semantics (*ma’nâ*), and morphology (*sarf*.” Thus, it “has never been considered a free interpretation of texts, open to the critical elaboration of individuals with no knowledge of Islamic sciences nor of the conventions and norms that text specialists and their procedures are bound to follow.”<sup>594</sup> *Ijtihad* has always been based on two fundamental bases, as the earlier story of Muad Ibn Jabal and the Prophet for example illustrates: 1) it could be practiced only if the scriptures do not have clear answers and are silent about certain issues; 2) reasoned and reasonable *ijtihad* has always been founded on the idea of remaining faithful to the message of religion, despite time and space differentials in which it is practiced. Its other conditions, related to the scholar and methodology as well as mastery of various sciences, all revolve around these two fundamentals.<sup>595</sup>

In contemporary debate on reform, three tendencies about *ijtihad* could be outlined. One tends to proclaim that *ijtihad* is part of faith and should be practiced constantly. The other tends to forbid it for fear of deviating from the scriptures, and as a way of admiration for the early guiding schools. The third tends to deny its legitimacy since it is seen as a kind of rigid literary reading. The majority falls within the first tendency which sees *ijtihad* as “indispensable” to face contemporary challenges. Ramadan also belongs to this category. He is for constant *ijtihad* practice for reform, “necessary “renewal” and constant “reform” thus lie at the very heart of the requirement

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<sup>593</sup> Ibid., 17

<sup>594</sup> Ibid., 23

<sup>595</sup> Ibid., 24

of faith and faithfulness that accompanies the believing conscience through life and through history.”<sup>596</sup>

Ramadan argues against the literalists and equally against the “progressists” in their perception of *ijtihad*.<sup>597</sup> Ramadan cautions against making of *ijtihad* an easy process in the hand of every ordinary reader who has not followed training in Islamic sciences. He puts their claim in the following: “the “reform of Islam” will only be possible when every Muslim (whatever his or her degree of knowledge in the matter) has the right to exercise their own *ijtihad* [...]” He then comments, warningly: “The laudable intention to “democratize” Islamic thought here takes on a *dangerous aspect* of downward leveling that disqualifies the basic conditions associated with the legal understanding of a text and the elaboration of its possible interpretations” [Emphasis added].<sup>598</sup> Ramadan believes that more “open,” “progressive,” and “modern” readings, “one’s own *ijtihad*,” can be misleading, and dangerous. Some current violent extremism in interpretation are an example.<sup>599</sup>

The critique Ramadan launches on both the literalists and liberals, and softly on the reformists, is rooted in tradition. The concepts of reform and *islah* (innovation), and basically their moral meanings, are referred to in Quran and the Sunna. They were revived during the *nahḍa* as *tajdid* (revival, innovation) and *islah* (renovation). This double critique does not aim at dissociating Muslims from their past, “Neglecting such a fundamental [i.e. *ijtihad*] would be not only disrespectful but also, above all, a sort of guilty madness, cutting off Muslims from their heritage under the pretext of having them “move forward” toward the “modern” [...] in the name of an illusory progress removed

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<sup>596</sup> Ibid., 23

<sup>597</sup> He means a circle of liberals, ““progressive” circles” in his words in this context. He does not use the term “liberal” himself here. It is my understanding of his readings, since he is arguing both against the literalists and the promoters of free readings equally, and that concerns Muslim and non-Muslim scholars equally, as referred to earlier when dealing with the perception of Quran and Sunna. He uses the term in *Renouveaux musulman*, and avoids it in *Radical Reform*.

<sup>598</sup> *Radical Reform*, 23

<sup>599</sup> Ibid., 23

from its roots.”<sup>600</sup> He reaches with his critique the idea of modernity that he critiqued in earlier books:

If modernity, progress in any era, means “breaking away from tradition,” then such modernity may very well be the euphemistic expression of a state of being that has no landmarks, no history, no principles, no vision. A modernity that rejoices in its situation without really knowing what it is. That is madness, alienation.<sup>601</sup>

It is by dint of remaining faithful to this tradition that “the best way of devising new paths toward the future” becomes unavoidable.<sup>602</sup> “Radical reform” tries to build on this tradition but still goes beyond what the reformists have been calling for since the 1870s. “We have reached limits.”<sup>603</sup> “I am not, therefore, speaking about the same reform.”<sup>604</sup> I below go on exploring what I call Ramadan’s “radical reform agenda.”

### **“Radical Reform Agenda”**

“Radical reform agenda” contains three basic propositions. One, the Muslim world, including the dispersed minorities, has to recognize the modalities of reform, and differentiate between “adaptive reform” and “transformation reform”: the first entails religious, legal and philosophic reform to adapt to the scientific evolutions of the world; the last entails spiritual and scientific reform to “act on the real, to master all fields of knowledge, and to anticipate the complexity of social, political, philosophic, and ethical challenges.” Two, the geography of the sources of *uṣūl al-fīqh* have to be reconsidered; this means that scholars of the context (*ulama’ al-waqi’*), of various sciences have to be integrated in the reading of the sources, along with the scholars of the text (*ulama’ anusus*), to establish together the ethical grounds of Islam’s message in the world. Three, which is the outcome of the first two propositions, means that scholarly authority that studies the maqāṣid and their ethical message have to be shared by the two types of

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<sup>600</sup> Ibid., 27

<sup>601</sup> Ibid., 27

<sup>602</sup> Ibid., 27

<sup>603</sup> Ibid., 30

<sup>604</sup> Ibid., 34

scholars; this shifts “the center of gravity of authority” from the text scholars to the center, where it is shared by both types of scholars.<sup>605</sup>

### **From “Adaptation Reform” to “Radical Reform”**

In light of the three categories that receive criticism from Ramadan, I could infer that the reformists, to whose line of thought he says he belongs, are softly criticized, and that the move ahead has to be envisioned. I then believe that when he speaks of “adaptation reformists” he speaks of the reformists. For him, the reformists have attempted to revive the objectives of the Sharia, by being close to the real, but that reformism reached limits, because it kept just adapting, in Ramadan’s view. That era of adaptive *ijtihad* has to be overcome:

Centuries of referring to *ijtihad* certainly did make things progress, but this remains highly inadequate because crises are still there and are even getting deeper, and Muslims seem to be at a loss for a vision and projects for the present and future. [...] <sup>606</sup>

Why does recourse to *ijtihad*, so long called for, fail to produce the expected renewal? Why has the innovative, bold, creative spirit of early times given way to timid approaches that only consider reform in terms of adapting to the world and no longer with the will and energy to change it? How can we explain this divide, this huge gap between the “Islamic sciences” (or ‘sacred sciences’) and all the “other sciences,” defining distinct and well-secured fields of authority, but making it impossible to respond adequately to the challenges of our time? <sup>607</sup>

The inability of contemporary *ijtihad* and *tajdid* enterprises to reground the Islamic sciences and incapacitate them for contribution, instead of mere adaptation “challenge[s] us to go back to the roots of problems, [...] the fundamentals and sources of *usûl al-fiqh*.”<sup>608</sup>

For Ramadan, “adaptation reform” is passive in coping with the world challenges. It has the capacity and attitude to keep abreast of reality changes, but it ““adapts” to what

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<sup>605</sup> Ibid., 3-4

<sup>606</sup> Ibid., 2

<sup>607</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>608</sup> Ibid., 3

the world is becoming as if that were fated.” So, adaptation scholars try “to protect one’s ethics in the face of an evolution one acknowledges without going so far as to dispute the very nature of that evolution.” It does not raise fundamental questions about the changes it keeps up with, but merely responds passively to protect its ethical traits. Its “protective posture” is limited in scope: ““Adaptation reform” is indeed imperative, but its scope is limited: it means observing the world, noting its changes then coming back to the texts to suggest new readings, alleviations, or exemptions in their implementation.”<sup>609</sup> With this attitude, scholars keep adjusting the limits of religion to the status quo of the world, by enlarging the formalistic permissions and prohibitions, *al ḥalāl wa al ḥarām*:

The ethical demand is trapped inside legal elaboration alone (with its formalism and technicality), and is reduced to the formulation of *fiqh*, and timid judgments (*fatwâ*), formally conservative and often marginal. The inspiration of the ethical demand that, moved by faithfulness to conscience, questions the world’s order and human practices in the name of respect for nature and for men, in the name of justice and coherence, seems to have lost its energy or to have simply disappeared from a reformism that keeps adapting and eventually ends up acknowledging the very terms pointing to its own disqualification.<sup>610</sup>

With adaptation reform, the dimensions of ethics and justice that the message of religion is about become lost in “protective postures” because the world order status is taken for granted and its basics are not questioned to be changed. Adaptation means that “Islam and Muslims are expected to adapt and not to contribute and propose their own answers.”<sup>611</sup> At the same time, Muslims themselves find themselves unable to contribute a “deep and constructive “criticism of modernity, or of “postmodernity,” and in utmost cases they “attempt to Islamize it,” in case they don’t reject it.<sup>612</sup> “Contemporary *tajdîd* looks for solutions to the problems raised, it follows, answers, and adapts, but it fails to anticipate and project into the future and it thus has neither the purpose nor the means of transforming reality.”<sup>613</sup> Adaptation reform ends in becoming an “intellectual

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<sup>609</sup> Ibid., 33

<sup>610</sup> Ibid., 35

<sup>611</sup> Ibid., 37

<sup>612</sup> Ibid., 37

<sup>613</sup> Ibid., 34

assimilation” that surrenders its intelligence “to the decrees of the prevailing order,” headed by Western elites.<sup>614</sup>

On the other side of adaptation, Ramadan suggests “transformation reform” which is more dynamic, more demanding, and contributive to the debate of world change based on ethical dimensions. Among its definitions goes this one:

“Transformation reform” is more exacting, in that it adds a further step, and condition, to the whole process. *It aims to change the order of things* in the very name of the ethics it attempts to be faithful to, in other words, to add a further step going from the texts to the context to act on the context and improve it, without ever accepting its shortcomings and injustices as matters of fate (to which one would simply have to adapt).<sup>615</sup> [Emphasis added]

The fact that transformation reform aims at “changing the order of things” requires that it acquires high knowledge of the context, as well as human and exact sciences that are available. “Reconciling conscience with science is imperative.”<sup>616</sup> With such an opening, a “new reading of the text” becomes possible. Otherwise said, transformation reform touches the fundamentals: “Transformation reform thus involves questioning not only the practice of fiqh but also, more essentially, the sources and fundamentals of that fiqh (*usûl al-fiqh*).”<sup>617</sup> When the text and the context – or conscience based on faith, and science based on ethics - converge, “a reform aiming to change the world” becomes feasible.<sup>618</sup> This reform will open up to the scholars of the context, instead of being based on the scholars of texts only, affect authority, and fundamentally trace new Islamic ethical objectives. These elements are discussed next.

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<sup>614</sup> Ibid., 37

<sup>615</sup> Ibid., 33

<sup>616</sup> Ibid., 38

<sup>617</sup> Ibid., 34. Ramadan says, “It is now clear that the reform we intend questions the established geography of the fundamentals of Islamic *usûl al-fiqh* as well as the limited—and sometimes counter-productive—implementations of contemporary *tajdîd* and *islâh*. It is an appeal to reconsidering the sources through their necessary reconciliation with the world, its evolution, and human knowledge. Thus reconciling conscience with science is imperative.” Ibid., 38

<sup>618</sup> Ibid., 33

## “New Geography of the Sources of Law and Jurisprudence”

Transformation reform is based on a “new geography of the sources of law and jurisprudence.” This new geography has a mindscape impact on the understanding of the Way (Sharia) and its objectives (maqāsid). And since the authority of interpretation is still in the hands of classical *ulema*, scholars of the text, Ramadan starts from there in outlining his project. He proposes three prerequisites for transformational reform: 1) the integration of the Universe as a second Book of reference, 2) the integration of context expert scholar in the interpretation of the sources, 3) and the recognition of his/her specialization as equal to the text scholar in authority. I start with these prerequisites in reverse (3<sup>rd</sup>, then 2<sup>nd</sup>, then 1<sup>st</sup>) to structure them according to my reading, which will end up with the first prerequisite as the leading one in outlining further ethical objectives of Sharia.

For authority, and since transformation reform is supposed to be radical, hierarchical reading authority of the scriptures is no longer supposed to be monopolized by the classical *ulema* who are experts on the so-called “Islamic sciences” that focus on the Quran, the Sunna, and the other developed schools of law and methodologies of research. These scholars lack knowledge on the complexities of the new social and exact sciences:

The new geography of the sources of law that I suggest clearly and deliberately entails *shifting the center of gravity of religious and legal authority* in contemporary Muslim societies and communities. We can no longer leave it to scholarly circles and text specialists to determine norms (about scientific, social, economic, or cultural issues) while they only have relative or superficial, second-hand knowledge of complex, profound, and often interconnected issues.<sup>619</sup>

Authority here will not move from one axis to another. It will be shared by at least text and context scholars. Ramadan does not limit this authority to Muslim scholars alone, or to the ‘secular’ or ‘neutral’ scholars alone. Because the idea is to be contributive to the world at large, non-Muslim experts are also welcomed to take part. More than that, the

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<sup>619</sup> Ibid., 124

ordinary Muslims themselves have to contribute by opening up to the new interpretations and use of dynamic intelligence.

For the second prerequisite, which merges the third and the first, that text scholars (*'ulamâ' an-nusûs*) as well as context scholars (*'ulamâ' al-wâqi'*) are expected “to participate on an equal footing in elaborating ethical norms in the different fields of knowledge.”<sup>620</sup> Text scholars have to go beyond classically defined objectives of the Sharia and work together to draw out and conceptualize new higher objectives that correspond to the complexity of sciences and broad knowledge which context scholars have to be expert in. This means that both have to develop double specializations, each has to get to know more about the expertise of the other, so that they could understand the levels of the debate they are involved in.<sup>621</sup> They have to devise “a dynamic fiqh”<sup>622</sup> through “applied ijtihad.”<sup>623</sup>

As to the first and guiding prerequisite, it requires the inclusion of the Universe as a second complementary Book to the Book of Revelation. This is the case since the Universe imposes itself on the human intelligence as a book, with its rules, laws, principles, semantics, grammar, and signs,” and thus it becomes imperative to include it on equal footing with the Book of Revelation, as a fundamental source of law.<sup>624</sup> Clearly said, Ramadan says:

The point is then to clearly place the two Books, the two Revelations, the text, and the Universe on the same level—as sources of law—and consequently, to

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<sup>620</sup> Ibid., 121

<sup>621</sup> Ibid., 127. A long passage illustrates the point:

While the textual scholars might shoulder most of the responsibility for this, scholars of the context—clinical scientists and social scientists—and the Muslim general public are not entirely blameless either. Like the jurists, these scholars focus on their particular field of knowledge and lack religious education beyond the basics so that they too often compartmentalize their lives and knowledge. They seem to have internalized the notion that their knowledge being outside of the “Islamic sciences” is thus irrelevant to Islamic legal deliberation and reform. They wait to be invited as experts rather than demanding a place of full participation at the table of deliberation. The Muslim public also fails its role to demand more of scholars of text and context and often seems to be content with adaptive tactics that comfort them rather than acting as agents of transformation in a world that constantly challenges the global ethics of their faith. Ibid., 118-119

<sup>622</sup> Ibid., 131

<sup>623</sup> Ibid., 144

<sup>624</sup> Ibid., 120

integrate the different universes of the sciences and their various areas of knowledge and specialties into the formulation of legal rulings about very specific scientific, social, or economic issues.<sup>625</sup>

The inclusion of the Universe as a pillar, and not simply as complementary element, in a reformed comprehension of the Islamic Revelation and Sunna, is the main contribution in Ramadan's work. It is his "Copernican Revolution." He targets revising the very fundamental tenets of the sources of law in Islam. Ramadan admits that early classical schools took the Universe as their guidance in interpreting the scriptures, but adds that their success in their interpretation was due to their mastery of the limited social and scientific complexities. This is no longer the case with the contemporary modern world which is beyond mastery of scholars of the texts alone. Social and exact sciences are vast in their horizons and understanding them needs new methodologies:

The Universe, the social and human context, has never been considered as a *self-standing* source of law and of its production. It is this status, this qualitative differentiation in authority—between the text and the context—that to my mind is a problem today. Early scholars were intimately familiar with the environments in which and for which they made the laws, and this is why they were so confident, creative, and pragmatic. The world has grown more complex, local practices are connected to the global order, all the spheres of human action are interdependent and interconnected, and it is impossible for scholars today to grasp this complexity with the same confidence as early scholars.<sup>626</sup>

Ramadan goes back to the sources to solidify his project from within. "We should therefore go back to the beginning and ask ourselves what scriptural sources ultimately tell us about the role of the Universe, creation, and the human and social contexts in the elaboration of law and jurisprudence."<sup>627</sup> He heavily uses Quranic verses and Prophetic hadiths to argue that the Islamic faith is based on a profound conversation with the universe. This conversation is called for through the contemplation of creation, nature, and humankind, and through the understanding of the idea of Tawhid, history of previous

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<sup>625</sup> Ibid., 120. As referred to earlier, the idea was already present in previous books, and especially in *Western Muslims*; similar wording could be found, see pages 50-60 which I quote at the end of Section 2, Part II.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid., 82

<sup>627</sup> Ibid., 86

nations and prophets, willed diversity among nations and cultures, and the need to understand them as His ‘signs’ (ayat) to understand Allah and his omnipresence:

The Universe is a space that speaks to the mind and heart and reveals the meaning of Creation. [...] The Heavens and the Earth, night and day, space and time, testify to the presence and infinite generosity of the One who has laid out the Universe like an open book pervaded with ‘signs’ offered to people’s minds and hearts. The notion of ‘signs’ (*âyat*, sing. *ayah*) is essential and from the very beginning it establishes a correspondence between orders.<sup>628</sup> [The order of the written Revelation and the Revelation of Universe]

Though he stresses that “The written Revelation is a teaching,”<sup>629</sup> Ramadan simultaneously stresses that the fact that the universe is an open book that the written one complements “is not, however, a teleological approach where the world’s supposed goals would confirm, *a posteriori*, the existence of divine intents.” Though it contains certain scientific and historical references, Ramadan denies that the written Revelation, the Quran, could be considered a book of science or history. It is a book of guidance. It “neither stifles nor directs the mind, it liberates it at the heart of the Universe: the world speaks by itself, autonomously, and it is human intelligence’s task to understand its language, its vocabulary, its semantics, its rules, its grammar, and its order.” What the written Book strongly recommends is that “it calls on the human mind to engage all its critical, analytical, and scientific potential in its quest for knowledge.”<sup>630</sup> The first word of revelation on the Prophet was “iqra’” (read). With this reading of the universe, Ramadan moves away from the orthodox idea of Islamic sciences that prove, *a posteriori*, what the written Revelation contains. This is a practice of adaptation reform; it goes from the scientific findings that the universe reveals with time, adopts them, and Islamizes them. He considers these readings “inoperative,” “counter-productive,” “dangerous” in the long run, and are a failure.<sup>631</sup> What harmonizes the two orders and Books is the ethical reference.

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<sup>628</sup> Ibid., 88

<sup>629</sup> Ibid., 88

<sup>630</sup> Ibid., 91-92

<sup>631</sup> Ibid., 110

The “ethical reference” in Islam is based on the harmony of the same orders invoked above, the two Books. The “ethical conscious” reconciles the “why” the ethical heart raises and the “how” the intelligent mind invokes.<sup>632</sup> Ramadan admits certain possible confusion between orders and how to proceed, but proposes a way out. It “of course establishes *a priori causes*, called *postulates* in philosophical terminology,” but that does not mean it creates barriers to research; its postulates aim at preventing dangerous consequences and manipulation of its achievements (e.g., genetic manipulations).<sup>633</sup> For clarity, Ramadan suggests methodological separation at work in various fields, but union in prospecting the outcome, which should be ethical:

There are, properly speaking, no “Islamic sciences,” nor “Islamic medicine,” nor “Islamic economics,” but “Islamic ethics” assists in the treatment of texts, study of the human body, or in the conduct of commercial affairs. To avoid being misled by formulations that connect without harmonizing, it is imperative to distinguish ethical goals from scientific methods, not to *divorce* them but to *unite*—to reunite—them as we should, in an approach that integrates higher objectives and scientific techniques while avoiding the dangerous and counterproductive confusion of the religious, ethical, and scientific orders.<sup>634</sup>

The integration of the universe as “an autonomous and complementary source of legal elaboration”<sup>635</sup> has positive consequences on the list of the objectives the Sharia has to account for in its reform.

Ramadan is not satisfied with the five-six main objectives of the Sharia which first came into use by al-Juwaiy, al-Ghazali, Imam Malik, and later by al-Shatibi, as referred to before. This dissatisfaction was echoed already in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century. For instance, The Maliki jurist, Shihab ad-Din al-Qarafi (1228–1258) added a sixth to the list of the five objectives of Sharia, namely the protection of *‘ird* (honor). Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328) was probably the first scholar to depart from the notion of confining the maqāsid to a specific number. Ibn Ashur (d. 1973) has opened the scope of the maqāsid to include the preservation of the social order, promotion of the wellbeing and

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<sup>632</sup> Ibid., 99-100

<sup>633</sup> Ibid., 128-131

<sup>634</sup> Ibid., 128

<sup>635</sup> Ibid., 102

righteousness (*ṣalāh*) of the community, preservation of the family, etc. The renowned contemporary scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi (b. 1926) has extended the list of the maqāsid to include human dignity, freedom, social welfare and human fraternity among the higher maqāsid of the Sharia. Ahmed Raysuni (b. 1953) develops others, and calls for “ethical necessities” (*aḍarūriyāt al-akhlāqiyya*). Ramadan acknowledges these early and current developments.<sup>636</sup> Still, for his project, he distinguishes between two axes of objectives: a vertical axis that distinguishes objectives according to their global or more specific character; and a horizontal axis that establishes a separate list of objectives for each level established on the vertical scale.<sup>637</sup>

On the first level, “the most important purpose and objective of the Way” is twofold: “the protection both of *ad-dīn*—in the sense of a conception of life and death stemming from recognition of the One and of the Way—and of *al-maslahah*—in the sense of the common good and interest of humankind and of the Universe.”<sup>638</sup> This, all in all, makes of the Way a holistic approach to life and death. On the second level, which makes the pillars of the first, it is composed of “three fundamental objectives”: respecting and protecting Life (*hayāh*), Nature (*khalq, tabī’ah*), and Peace (*salām*).<sup>639</sup> If the first two could be understood from the details provided above, the pillar of Peace is added to emphasize that without it neither *dīn*/ religion nor the common good/ *maslaha* could be achieved. To establish peace, ethical jihad on all levels has to guide the path towards establishing peace, against oppression and injustice.<sup>640</sup> On the third level, it is humankind’s being and action, as individual and as groups that are targeted. The list of objectives here could read as follows: “promoting and protecting Dignity (of humankind, living species, and Nature), Welfare, Knowledge, Creativity, Autonomy, Development, Equality, Freedom, Justice, Fraternity, Love, Solidarity, and Diversity.”<sup>641</sup>

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<sup>636</sup> Ibid., 135

<sup>637</sup> Ibid., 137

<sup>638</sup> Ibid., 138

<sup>639</sup> Ibid., 138

<sup>640</sup> Ibid., 139

<sup>641</sup> Ibid., 139

For the sub-levels, the individual is centralized. The objectives Ramadan enumerates involve “promoting and protecting Physical Integrity, Health, Subsistence, Intelligence, Progeny, Work, Belongings, Contracts, and our Neighborhoods.”<sup>642</sup> With regards the group, he says that the classical scholars did not pay attention to this category, and its growing importance now needs considerations and recognition. For the group, it is essential, within the Way objectives, “to promote and protect the Rule of law, Independence (self-determination), Deliberation, Pluralism, Evolution, Cultures, Religions, and Memories (heritage).<sup>643</sup> These objectives, on all levels and axes, are fundamentally encircled by “ethics of the heart.” The Way nurtures “ethics of the heart” through “Education (of the heart and mind), Conscience (of being and responsibility), Sincerity, Contemplation, Balance (intimate and personal stability), and Humility.”<sup>644</sup> The ethical reference is, for Ramadan, a sign of being faithful not only to the written Book but also to the open Book, the universe, which requires equal care and consideration; that is why it cares more about the scientific quality before its quantity.<sup>645</sup> From the classical five to six objectives he reaches forty one in his categorization. He by no means intends the list to be limited. His idea is that with specialization and involvement of scholars of the context, minute details could lead to elaborating other objectives.

The ethical reference may seem like a limitation in Ramadan’s project, for it broadly questions modern achievements as well as classical legacy. Ramadan is aware of this challenge. He affirms that “the reform I call for is difficult.”<sup>646</sup> I refer to two notes here, among others: modernity, and shared responsibility/pluralism. For modernity, over and again, Ramadan says that the fact that the ethical is stressed upon is not a limitation to human progress and research, or an aspect of antagonism with modernity. Rather, it is a way of rendering the modern times more cognizant of humankind’s dignity, which has to be preserved. Ramadan is aware that he is read as a “threat to the West” and as a reformist who adds nothing new to the debate apart from aiming at “Islamizing

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<sup>642</sup> Ibid., 142

<sup>643</sup> Ibid.

<sup>644</sup> Ibid., 141

<sup>645</sup> Ibid., 148

<sup>646</sup> Ibid., 152

modernity” in a “reconquest agenda.” Ramadan refutes these claims as superficial, political “caricatured relationship of otherness or, most often, of confrontation, distrust, and power”<sup>647</sup>:

More ethics in science, politics, and economics at the heart of the modern era does not mean refusing “modernity” but calling for the dignity of humankind in history [...]. I am far from wishing to “Islamize modernity” [...]. It [his work] does not consist in refusing “modernity” nor in resisting the West (which is a construct that does not exist) but rather in striving to promote a global Islamic ethics aiming to regulate human action: such ethics can only be nurtured by the input of all the world’s civilizations, and it must certainly contribute to an open and pluralistic reflection.<sup>648</sup>

Ramadan disagrees with his detractors that see in any reformist effort an attempt either to Islamize modernity or to merely adopt modernity fully. For him,

Not only is this double reduction (modernity is Western and only the West produces the universal) groundless philosophically, historically, and scientifically, its binary character (the “West” versus “the others”; “modernity” versus “tradition”) is also deeply ideological, particularly arrogant, and, in the long run, dangerous.<sup>649</sup>

The Western appropriation of the modern is also a way of saying that any attempt by a non-Western religion or civilization to find its own answers to contemporary challenges means refusing universals and resisting modernity.<sup>650</sup> So, whether the project will end in traditionalism, modernity, or postmodernity, Ramadan says that it is based on “mature thought” and can take from any of these what serves its dynamic ethical reference, without being purely a closed system (traditional), an imitating one (Western modernity), or a “rootless/soulless” one (postmodernity).<sup>651</sup>

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<sup>647</sup> Ibid., 147

<sup>648</sup> Ibid., 146

<sup>649</sup> Ibid., 145

<sup>650</sup> Ibid.

<sup>651</sup> Ibid., 38. “Does this imply, however, that this reform will produce uniform interpretations and readings? That it will be blindly modern and modernist? This is far from certain, and some scholars or thinkers might indeed choose “tradition” or ‘some traditions,’ as sophisticated criticisms— and resistances stemming from mature thought—opposed to some excesses of a postmodernism perceived as rootless and soulless.” Ibid., 38

Ramadan's project, based on the ethical reference, is also rooted in dialogue among civilizations, and shared responsibility. The project requires joint, pluralist, efforts. Reform here does not wait a charismatic leader or a particular scholar; it is the responsibility of everyone, including non-Muslims.<sup>652</sup> This means that reform requires readiness of the intellect. Three Intellectual dispositions are underlined here to pave the way for an acceptable and open reform: humility, and that means that the universals are not exclusive to a particular religion or civilization, and "good modernity" cannot be monopolized; respect, and that means taking equality of and among the others as fundamental; and coherence, based on "constant critical assessment" of one's outlook of the world.<sup>653</sup> "Global Islamic ethics" is founded on "an open and pluralistic reflection" which individuals as well as groups share: "Reforming Islam" is a meaningless formula; what matters is to know what Muslims—reforming their understanding—can contribute, without dogmatism and in collaboration with other traditions, to the ethical reform of the contemporary world."<sup>654</sup> Ramadan's pluralist view becomes clearer in *The Quest for Meaning*.

*The Quest for Meaning* is pluralist in references and universalist in outlook. Broadly, it merges the religious with the philosophic and centralizes the human. No particular religious or philosophy is focalized. They are considered as one, because they all have to serve the individual in achieving an understanding of the self in the pluralist universe. It bridges gaps and seeks meaning of the self in the diverse universe. It raises existential questions in the modern area which experiences "conflicts of perceptions" and "lack of meaning and confidence." Meaning, The Universal, Toleration and Respect, Fraternity and Equality, Faith and Reason, Ethics, Tradition and Modernity, Belonging and Civilizations, Emotion and Spirituality, Female and Male, Love, Forgiveness are the themes of *The Quest's* fourteen chapters. *The Quest for Meaning* could be read as the highest stage in Ramadan's thought. More particularly, it works consequently as an explanation of his work on the Islamic tradition which he tries to bring back to the universal, by always referring to it, and world religions and philosophies. In my reading

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<sup>652</sup> Ibid., 154

<sup>653</sup> Ibid., 147

<sup>654</sup> Ibid., 148

here, I focus on his idea of “meaning” as a way of rendering “peace” back to the individual and thus to the world, “for the quest for meaning is indeed a quest for peace.”<sup>655</sup> It should be remembered that he makes “peace” stand third in the order of the objectives of Sharia, after the protection of “life” and “nature.”

Summarizingly for my purpose, I sketch the philosophy of the whole book through its opening and ending sections, where the “ocean” and “window” terms come to signify “wide” and “narrow” perceptions of the world, respectively. The idea is to journey, to go out, sail, and fail, but to discover the self, the other, and with the discovery of the other, to discover the plurality of man and the pluralism of the world, far from any religious and philosophical basis and bias: “We have to set out, ask the essential questions and look for meaning. We have to travel towards ourselves and rediscover a taste for questions, constructive criticism and complexity.”<sup>656</sup>

Ramadan claims that, because of the lack of genuine “projects” and a lack of “confidence [...] in ourselves, confidence in others, confidence in God and/or man, and/or the future [...] fear, doubt and distrust are imperceptibly colonizing our hearts and minds.”<sup>657</sup> This fear builds false perceptions of others and of the unknown world around us, and starts “projecting” itself on to, instead of having projects with, other subjects or objects. A true beginning, Ramadan claims, is that of “humbly [...] admitting that we have nothing more than points of view, in the literal sense, and that they shape our ideas, our perceptions and our imagination.”<sup>658</sup> The ways out, then, are two: to keep the window perspective on the world, by describing it from where we are, the window, or to go out into that world, that subject or object, and plunge into it, know it, and know ourselves through it, and then look back to the window to find out how ignorant we were of the world ahead of us. This second view is “oceanic,” vast, and full of humanity, while the first “window” view is individualist, reductionist, and exclusivist. The second way, which Ramadan takes, is to heal the “conflict of perceptions” that some cultures may have over others. As he writes, “This is what I call a philosophy of pluralism, which states that, by

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<sup>655</sup> *The Quest for Meaning*, 9

<sup>656</sup> *Ibid.*, x

<sup>657</sup> *Ibid.*, ix

<sup>658</sup> *Ibid.*, x

immersion in the object per se, we will be able to meet human beings, or subjects, with their traditions, their religions, their philosophies, their aesthetics and/or their psychologies.”<sup>659</sup>

For Ramadan, the need for genuine pluralism requires a journey towards meaning, meaning that also finds its significance in pluralism itself. It is a circle of thoughts where pluralism and meaning are in a process of give and take, and where the dilution of one means the shallowness of the other. To set off for meaning, and thus for pluralism, one must not carry with oneself any religious or philosophic weight, for they imprison the journeyer in an established, presupposed set of mind, while the quest is for a “new we.” In finding this “new we,” one finds “a shared universal,” “the universal can only be a universal that is shared.”<sup>660</sup> This means that exclusivism and self-standing as unique for particular human groups or civilizations does not make sense, and as individuals interact, so do civilizations, “Just as there is no such thing as an exclusive or pure identity, there is no such thing as a uniform or homogeneous civilization.”<sup>661</sup> For such a realization “We all have to learn to bring about a real Copernican revolution within ourselves,” based on “humility, coherence, the ability to listen, respect and love.”<sup>662</sup>

What I have tried to do until now is that I have followed the development of Ramadan’s thought from his earlier works until the recent ones. I consider what I take from his books to be the gist of his work. What I do not stress in a book I leave to the next one because I see it stressed there, which is how and why I have structured my reading of him accordingly, moving from the specific, the Islamic, to the universal, from the legal to the ethical and humanist. All the work done until now is theoretical. The next part of the work is practical. It concerns case studies that involve Muslims in general, and European Muslims in particular, though in many books Ramadan speaks to both as if they were one category, for they both need to participate in the “Copernican Revolution” envisaged in transformation reform. This is the case since he considers that reform needs to touch all Muslims, be they a minority in the West or a majority elsewhere. Reference

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<sup>659</sup> Ibid., xi

<sup>660</sup> Ibid., xi

<sup>661</sup> Ibid., 187

<sup>662</sup> Ibid., 25

in the practical cases is on issues that concern European Muslims, without being limited to them: secularism, citizenship, political participation, women rights, education, environment, economics, science, all stamped by the ethical reference.

## **2. European Islam within Radical Reform**

The reform Ramadan suggests touches all the “concerned Muslims,” the ones who still believe in it be they practitioners of its five pillars of Islam or just believers of its six pillars of iman (faith), wherever they are. Yet, two main geopolitical areas seem to take priority over others, i.e. the countries that are composed of majority Muslims, or the West where they make a minority that has intensified the debate for the last thirty years or so, mainly in Europe. It is to the latter that I turn the focus to in this study.

Based on the previous theoretical introduction, I argue that three main concepts in Ramadan’s project are essential in understanding his approach to the idea of Islam and Muslims in Europe. These concepts are 1) Sharia as the Way, 2) *dār ash-Shahada*, and 3) Ethics in face of formalistic jurisprudence. These concepts have been present in all his works from the early 1990s up to his recent works. The difference is in the degree of stress they receive in each book. Though there is a development in methodological considerations, the conceptualization of this development is not different throughout the texts he has written over the last twenty years or so. This means that the reader cannot feel a rupture or sudden break at a certain stage in his interpretation of practical issues in light of his theoretical framework. Yet, he underlines a note before tackling case studies: his reform agenda in its case studies is preliminary and needs expert scholars to be involved to push this work further, a note which saves his theoretical work from being a mere talk-show as case studies may be read. The three concepts influence the conceptualization of the practical issues to be referred to here: Muslim in Europe, in laïc/secular societies, citizenship, loyalty, human/woman rights, political participation, education, environment, science, arts, and ethics. Since the core of the content of Ramadan’s message is presented already in previous sections, here I will try to be brief, when I could, by making links between those general notions and the European context.

### a. Sharia as the Way: beyond Formalistic Legalism

In *To be a European Muslim*, where he goes through various scholastic interpretations of the Islamic jurisprudence on matters of Muslim minorities outside the land of Islam, Ramadan does clearly not do without the Islamic sciences. What he does is to call for reading them in the European context in light of the Islamic global vision. The passage below is long but it summarizes his vision of a possible European Islamic perspective:

*For Muslims living in Europe, it is of the greatest importance not only to know what these [Islamic] sciences actually are –and how they are interconnected- but, more deeply, to be able to re-read the Islamic message with its original life force and acquire a global vision of the fields, studies and means at their disposal so that they can face their current situation. So that they cannot confuse one moment of their history with the essence of their Religion since, by means of the latter, the means are numerous and Islam’s global rulings offer a wide field of exploration and investigation. It is necessary to master these juridical instruments and, at the same time, know and understand the European context so that it is possible to answer the question, ever the same question: How to maintain a vivid Faith and be faithful to the Quran and prophetic teachings in Europe, in our new historical, social and political situation? In other words, how to be a European Muslim?<sup>663</sup>*  
[Emphasis added]

Ramadan is interested in developing independent Islamic sciences at the heart of a “materialistic environment” and without borrowing from the lands of origin, the lands from which the new European Muslims come from. He envisions an approach that goes beyond the science of minority fiqh which looks at Muslims as a “diaspora,” minority jurisprudence (*fiqh al-aqalliyat*).<sup>664</sup>

Initially, it is the concept of Sharia that receives more focus especially in Europe. It is generally defined as Islamic law and jurisprudence, which is reductionist for Ramadan. “In the West, the idea of Sharia calls up all the darkest images of Islam: repression of women, physical punishments, stoning, and all other such things.”<sup>665</sup> In *To*

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<sup>663</sup> *European Muslim*, 42-43

<sup>664</sup> *Western Muslims*, 53

<sup>665</sup> *Ibid.*, 31

*Be a European Muslim* he presents it as “the way leading to the source,” and that includes the branch of the creed (aqida), worship (ibadat), public affairs and personal laws (mu’amalat and hudud), and mysticism (tassawuf).<sup>666</sup> In other words, if the Shahada (Testimony, first pillar in Islam) translates the idea of “being Muslim,” “the Shari’a shows us “how to be and remain Muslim.””<sup>667</sup> He clarifies this point this way:

*Being a Muslim* means testifying that one believes in God in one’s heart and mind and that one recognizes the truthfulness of the Quranic revelation and of its Messenger.<sup>668</sup>

*How to be a Muslim* covers all the dimensions of action which enable us to remain faithful to the testimony of faith, as well in the intimate sphere of spiritual and mystical approach and in that of law and jurisprudence at the individual and collective levels; it is the Shari’a, the way, the path to how to remain faithful to the source.<sup>669</sup>

By “being Muslim” one is already in the realm of Shari’a, and s/he tries to live it as far as s/he can, in daily life, and beyond the constraints of time and space. The “how to be Muslim” depends on the individual in his/her context, and that means that its implementation is “flexible,” “regresses and progresses.”<sup>670</sup>

Being based on the three main sources (Quran, Sunna, and the Universe), distinguished as two books (written and open, text and context), the Sharia is “universalist,” based on “rational investigation” and “constant dialectical movement” to match the real, the temporal, with the ideal, the divine:

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<sup>666</sup> *European Muslims*, 45

<sup>667</sup> *Western Muslims*, 31. The same idea is expressed in *European Muslim*, 47-59.

<sup>668</sup> *European Muslim*, 46

<sup>669</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>670</sup> *Ibid.*, 47. In *Western Muslims*, Ramadan says:

Wherever they find themselves, Muslim women and men try, in their practice and daily lives, to conform as much as possible to Islamic teachings. In this they follow the path of faithfulness, “the path towards the spring,” of which we have just spoken. In other words, in the West as in the East, they try to actualize the Sharia as we have defined it beyond its merely legalistic form. In Europe and in North America, as soon as one pronounces the shahada, as soon as one “is Muslim” and tries to remain so by practicing the daily prayers, giving alms, and fasting, for example, or even simply by trying to respect Muslim ethics, one is already in the process of applying the Sharia, not in any peripheral way but in its most essential aspects (33).

Sustained by faith, strong in reasoning ability, and guided by ethical injunctions, a believing consciousness must live within his own time, at the heart of his society, among other human beings, and put his energy into this *constant dialectical movement* between the essential principles determined by Revelation and actual circumstances. In practice, the “Way to faithfulness” teaches us that Islam rests on three sources: the Qur’an, the Sunna, and the state of the world, or of our society (al-waqi).<sup>671</sup> [Emphasis added]

The Sharia as a dynamic notion based on reason aims at the preservation of the human maṣlaḥa, the common good, and the fact that “it touches all the aspects of existence”<sup>672</sup> makes of it universal (shumuliyat al-islam) and doable anytime, and anywhere, “Faithfulness in time is possible only if human reason, using the instruments put at its disposal [ijtihad methods, etc.], is active and creative in putting forward original proposals in tune with the time and place.”<sup>673</sup> Sharia’s dynamic can lead to the “Copernican revolution” aspired to.<sup>674</sup> Europe, as the abode of testimony (*dār ash-Shahada*), makes no exception in this aspiration.

#### **b. The Abode of Testimony: beyond the Private Sphere**

As a second complementary book, besides the written one, the universe is a space of testimony (*dār ash-Shahada*) to the Oneness of God. Europe is part of this universe and professing Shahada is witnessing that this world makes part of the Islamic world. “The whole land is a *land of testimony*”<sup>675</sup> since the Prophet taught us in a hadith that the “the whole world is a mosque.”<sup>676</sup> The universality of Islam, through the notion of Shahada makes of Europe a world of Islam, too. The abode of testimony comes as a result of Ramadan’s re-reading of Islamic minority fiqh which is known to have distinguished between the abode of Islam (*dar al-Islam*) and the abode of infidel or war (*dar al-kufr* or *dār al ḥarb*) since its early development. The concept of war here does not necessarily mean a real state of war, but a definition to state that the land is not Islamic.

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<sup>671</sup> *Western Muslims*, 37

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid.*, 33

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid.*, 62

<sup>674</sup> *Ibid.*, 53

<sup>675</sup> *European Muslim*, 148

<sup>676</sup> *Ibid.*, 144

Classically, the four main schools (madhahib) had very divergent views on a number of legal issues in minority jurisprudence, and no unanimity could be traced. Diversity marked this discipline. However, broadly, Muslim scholars, after the death of the Prophet, defined a land, or abode, according to four conditions. These are (1) the religion or culture of the population living in the land, (2) the ownership of the land, (3) the nature of the government, (4) the laws applied in the country. Henceforth, if the majority of the population is Muslim, the land was seen as part of the Islamic abode. If the majority of the land belongs to the Muslims, it is also Islamic. If the government is Islamic, at least the head of the state, and the Islamic reference in laws is present, the abode is again Islamic. Though the head of the state or the governing elite may be corrupt or unjust, the land can still be Islamic because the religious reference is not denied, but merely not respected.<sup>677</sup> Focus on the main traits of the abode of Islam was made on the legal reference, whether it is based on the Islamic reference, and on security and peace, i.e. whether Muslims are in peace and live safely. This means that the opposing aspects of the abode of war are when the Islamic religious reference is absent and/or when security is not granted to the practicing Muslims.

Ash-shafi'i (767 – 820 CE) referred to the land of war as a land of treaty (dar al-ahd), when Muslims have a treaty of peace with the non-Islamic lands.<sup>678</sup> Faysal Mawlawi (b. 1941) preferred the concept of dar ad-da'wa, the abode of invitation to God and profession of Islam in public to remind people of God and spirituality.<sup>679</sup> For Ramadan, the world now cannot be reduced to these binaries. The global movement of people as well as changes of Muslim as well as Western people makes this binary division of the world 'simplistic' and 'reductionist.'<sup>680</sup> The current world is no longer based on relations of "abodes" but on relations of "different civilizations, religions, cultures and ethics, [...] and citizens."<sup>681</sup>

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<sup>677</sup> Ibid., 124-126; *Western Muslims*, 63-64

<sup>678</sup> *European Muslim*, 127

<sup>679</sup> Ibid., 143-145

<sup>680</sup> *Western Muslims*, 63

<sup>681</sup> *European Muslim*, 148

In the West, and particularly here in Europe, Muslims have to change their mindset and read their tradition differently. They have to live their faith in public. They can do that through shahada. That makes the European space an abode of shahada, of testimony. Shahada in Ramadan's conception stands first for the "Muslim identity," or the "Muslim personality," and for his/her responsibility before humankind as a believer:

In light of the universal message and teachings of Islam (*alamiyyat al-islam*), we might fairly, I believe, consider the notion of shahada (testimony), insofar as it takes two important forms. The first goes back to the shahada that every Muslim, in order to be recognized as such, must pronounce before God and the whole of humankind, and by which he establishes his *identity*: "there is no god but God and Muhammad is His messenger." The second is connected with the *responsibility* of Muslims, according to the Qur'anic injunction, to "bear witness [to their faith] before humankind." [Emphasis added]<sup>682</sup>

This "double function of shahada" manifests itself on the impact it is supposed to have on the individual and his/her involvement in society, the universe s/he lives in. Its features make the "Muslim personality."

### **Features of the "Muslim Personality" in the Abode of Testimony**

Ramadan develops the seven principles about "the Muslim personality" to show that the abode of Testimony/Shahada in Europe secures the Muslims the basic fundamentals to live their faith. Shahada first identifies one as a Muslim who belongs to a community of faith (*umma*). Second, it prescribes to him to practice certain basic worship rituals. These first two make what he calls *faith and spirituality* fundamental principle [his italics]. Third, *practice* principle: once Shahada is professed, one is consciously free to practice it, and if not allowed, then freedom of conscience is denied him. Fourth, *protection* principle: in society, Shahada means to act in respect of God's creation through respect of agreements and contracts with His creation; this means recognition of socio-political and economic rights of human dignity, and that makes part of the bond (*amāna*) the Muslim has towards God and His people. Fifth, *freedom* principle: to be able to speak of God is also part of the idea of sharing the idea of God through shahada; it is

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<sup>682</sup> Ibid., 175 (a similar text in *Western Muslims*, 73)

an invitation to the world to witness God and remember Him; it is a public, and not secret, da'wa based on communication and is not forceful; Islamic education is part of da'wa. Sixth, *participation* principle: as a testimony in society, one has to be engaged in all fields that need human contribution, and work ethically for the reign of justice, for "God commands justice" (Quran, 16:90).<sup>683</sup> Seventh, in *Musulmans d'occident*, he adds the principle of *justice*, i.e. participating in society, and defending justice. "If they [Muslims] are really with God, then their life must be a testimony to a permanent involvement and an infinite self-sacrifice for social justice, the welfare of mankind, the environment, and all forms of solidarity."<sup>684</sup>

The seven principles above correspond to five fundamental principles that the European context secures for the Muslims. These are: the right to practice Islam, the right to knowledge, the right to found organizations, the right to autonomous representation, and the right to appeal to law.<sup>685</sup> These make a Muslim at home in Europe, and his belonging to the Muslim umma remains intact, for belonging to the Muslim umma is spiritual, "a community of Faith"<sup>686</sup>, and not political. Spirituality answers existential questions of "why?" while political questions are based on "how?" Asking Muslim citizens whether they are Muslim first or French or British, etc. first is thus irrelevant.<sup>687</sup>

Suspecting the loyalty of some Muslims, and welcoming others whose Islam is invisible or light, is part of the colonial mindset.<sup>688</sup> Sharia in the abode of testimony makes the Muslim a responsible citizen, loyal to where he belongs geographically, thus politically:

Implementing the Shari'a, for a Muslim citizen or resident in Europe, is explicitly to respect the constitutional and legal framework in the country in which he is a citizen [...]. Loyalty to one's faith and conscience requires firm and honest

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<sup>683</sup> *European Muslim*, 146-147 (*Western Muslims*, 74-75)

<sup>684</sup> *Ibid.*, 150

<sup>685</sup> *Ibid.*, 135-137

<sup>686</sup> *Ibid.*, 156

<sup>687</sup> *Ibid.*, 136

<sup>688</sup> *Musulmans dans la laïcité*, 72, n. 13. (See also Ramadan, *Muslims in France*, 29, n. 19 and 28)

loyalty to one's country: the Shari'a requires honest citizenship within the frame of reference constituted by the positive law of the European country concerned.<sup>689</sup>

This understanding of religion makes the (especially French) allegation and suspicion of Islamic “communitarism” and “integrist” invalid, according to Ramadan. In all his texts he affirms that Muslims have nothing against the laic law of 1905; on the contrary, they ask for its just application among all religious denominations. For him, *la laïcité* is instrumentally ideologised to serve certain parties and ideologues that rekindle the “politics of fear.” He believes that such a discourse is the one that is “communitarist” and “paternalist” because it considers its Muslim citizens unequal and thus in need of improving their citizenship and learning more about it.<sup>690</sup> He warns Muslims against falling into this binary debate, and even says that *la laïcité*, if well interpreted, grants all the rights Muslims aspire to.<sup>691</sup> The case of the law of 2004 against the veil is a wrong reading of the principle of *la laïcité*.<sup>692</sup> The Muslims are not asking to change the laws; they [radical *laïcists*<sup>693</sup>] are the ones who change laws.<sup>694</sup> Ramadan calls for “a more open *laïcité*” in the interpretations of laws so that integration moves from its old debates to “post-integration” based on “equal citizenship” and a “responsible contribution” in society, and this ideal breaks away from the minority mindset, “The minority concept is inoperative: there is no such thing as “minority citizenship.”! They (Muslims) must therefore overcome this “minority” mind-set and fully participate in society on an equal footing with the “majority.””<sup>695</sup> A “French Islam,” as well as a “European Islam” are possible, are not a contradiction in terms, and are already in the making.<sup>696</sup>

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<sup>689</sup> *European Muslim*, 172.

<sup>690</sup> Zemmouri, *Faut-il faire taire Tariq Ramadan?* 189-202.

<sup>691</sup> For the French case: Muslims have to bear this point in mind: French society does not have a problem with “Islam and Muslims” *per se*; it has, rather, a historical contention with “religion” as a whole. Some reactions in the French audience cannot be understood without considering this point; this will help us to go beyond the simplistic, but widespread, idea that Muslims are the only “victims” of the “hatred” of French racism and its rejection of Islam. *Muslims in France*, 26, n.4.

<sup>692</sup> Zemmouri, *Faut-il faire taire Tariq Ramadan?* 192.

<sup>693</sup> Jean Baubérot uses the term “fundamentalists” for radical secularists. Qtd in *What I Believe*, 98.

<sup>694</sup> Ramadan says that European Muslims follow “three Ls”: language, law, loyalty; they master the first, abide by the second, and faithful to the third. *What I Believe*, 138, n. 28.

<sup>695</sup> *What I Believe*, 58

<sup>696</sup> *Musulmans dans la laïcité*, 37, 39, 44, 74, 217

### c. Between the Ethical and Jurisprudential: in the Status of Continuum?

In light of the above mentioned aspects of a “European Islam” main rights and duties, it seems that there is not much left to worry about! In Ramadan’s words, “It appears, then, that a great many of the legal conditions we have formulated are already fulfilled and that the Muslims – to a large extent – are allowed to live as Muslims in Europe.”<sup>697</sup> So where is the problem? Ramadan adds that there are still profound problems to study. For example, the confusion on the notion of neutrality of public space persists; some read neutrality as a total absence of religiosity. Moreover, the suspicious image on Islam and Muslims is over-mediatised and politicized, and this nurtures “patent discrimination.” More importantly, and this may be among the main reasons of fear and suspicion of Islam and Muslims in liberal and secular societies in Europe, some legal aspects related to social affairs in Islam (marriage, inheritance, trade interest, etc.) are not implemented and there should be a profound dialogue on how they could be read in the European context and in the modern area.<sup>698</sup> Some of the most controversial legal issues are going to be shed light on to see how Ramadan considers them in his project of radical reform, though again, he notes that these are preliminary interpretations and other scholars of the field have to be integrated in the debate over these issues.<sup>699</sup> I refer to this stage of Ramadan’s thinking as a status of “continuum” because his agenda tries to go smoothly over the jurisprudential towards the ethical, till the latter finds its clear shape upon which agreement becomes wider, particularly among Muslims conservative scholars.

Sharia and Shahada concepts are the base for the “ethical.” In totality they confirm the universality of Islam. From the basics outlined before, besides the objectives/maqāṣid referred to also earlier, case studies emerge in the debate, and Ramadan does not shy away from that. Up to now, initially, Ramadan does not reject any particular field of study nor any narrow interpretation of the religious texts. What he calls

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<sup>697</sup> *European Muslim*, 138

<sup>698</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-140. Ramadan says: “It is obvious that it is not only a matter of law. The problems Muslims are facing today have more to do with mentality, bias and sometimes racism than with legal discrimination (which of course exist). It is, thus, important to distinguish what is due to the law and what to a state of mind so as to determine and define what kind of problems need solving.” *Ibid.*, 151, n. 11; 177

<sup>699</sup> *Radical Reform*, 5

for is to listen to every religious, philosophic, and scientific discourse and analyze it according to ethics that preserve dynamic faith, human dignity and the cosmic balance. He localizes himself in the Islamic “universal universe,” as it were. In his discourse, he is critical of the seemingly reached finality of modernity, and its crises, and enjoins that criticism with a rejection of the defensive attitude of the Muslim mindset. To face the new challenges in a universally intertwined world, the ethical has to be restored. The ethical is “responsible” and “dynamic.” “Ethics of transformation” are the base for “radical internal reform.”<sup>700</sup> The ethical in Ramadan’s view is not loose, relative, and is not non-rooted; it is rooted but open to the world. It is “pluralist” and “universalist” without meaning that the individual melts in the world and becomes ‘soulless.’<sup>701</sup>

Ramadan avoids making a distinction between ethics and morality, the ethical and the moral. He prefers “ethics” and the “ethical.” He does not make any difference in his earlier books between the two terms (ethics and morality), and only in *The Quest* does a distinction appear to be soon put aside. He refers to Kant’s moral axis, “Act as though the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature,” as well as to Paul Ricoeur’s distinction of the moral as a universal binding right on the collective, and the ethical as an individual aspiration towards the good at the level of action.<sup>702</sup> Ramadan tries to “ethicize” morality to make the universal the responsibility of the individual. In a way, he is bringing responsibility very close to the individual, despite its (i.e. ethics) origin, place and time of development:

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<sup>700</sup> Ibid., 312-313

<sup>701</sup> A passage in Western Muslims expresses the point differently:

By inviting Muslims to accept pluralism by a purely rationalistic approach, to express their faithfulness in a purely private way, or to define themselves in terms of minorities, some commentators have thought to ward off the danger of Islamic universality, which they perceive as inevitably totalitarian. Is this not how the West understands the quasi summons to have to affirm one’s “faith” in the autonomy of reason in order to prove one’s open-mindedness or one’s firm support for the “universal values of the West”; or the new fashion of [being] apologetic for a Sufism so interior that it has become disincarnated, almost invisible, or a facade with only blurred links to Islam; or, again, stigmatization and the exercise of constant pressure on Muslims driven to adopt the monochrome reaction of minorities on the defensive, obsessed with their only right — to be — and with their differentness? This is all happening as if, in order to ward off the “necessarily expansionist” universality of Islam, either Islam must be refused its claim to universality or Muslims must be pressed to accept this exercise in wholesale relativization. ( 32)

<sup>702</sup> *The Quest for Meaning*, 98-99

Ethics is born in a thousand ways; it comes from different universes and finds its true independence from both the subject who elaborates it and the object to which it is applied. And yet, in the name of that very independence, its full rigour must be applied – independently – to both its subject and its object.<sup>703</sup>

Here, once the good of ethics is recognized, it becomes binding to whoever enters its realm, and “consistency” in preserving it and securing it for the individual and common good becomes the very ethical act to highly consider. “Consistency,” even in cases of going against the stream, and the common good, has to be preserved, for the ethical act demands that consistency. In simple terms, the values one defends have to become his or her real behavior and not mere ideals to speak of.<sup>704</sup> It is here that appears the reason why he does not make a big difference between ethics and morality, and opts for using them interchangeably. By this he recognizes the universal sources of ethics and thus the collective responsibility to uphold them individually as well:

The principles of ethics can be derived from what is considered to be a universal moral law (to use Kant’s terminology), but we must all be aware that there are many different philosophies and spiritual and religious traditions, and that we must therefore debate and exchange different points of view and determine the status and nature of the values we share. Those values do not belong to us alone, and nor are they the property of a religion or philosophy that can be imposed on others. They are the common property of the social or human community (depending on whether the question is discussed in national or international terms).<sup>705</sup>

Ramadan’s emphasis on the universality of ethics finds its sources in the Islamic tradition, as seen above, and since the Islamic tradition cannot be lived in isolation of the world, it has thus to find common grounds to cooperate and contribute to society. Ramadan brings the ethical up to the doors of Islamic jurisprudence and classical legalism. In his reading of the sources in light of the new universal changes, he prioritizes ethics over legal rules. This can be seen mostly in cases of individual liberties and rights.

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<sup>703</sup> Ibid., 103

<sup>704</sup> Ibid., 105-106.

<sup>705</sup> Ibid., 102

## Society, Education, and Citizenship

Based on the role of testimony, shahada, the Muslim citizen is by definition a social being. After he/she has gone through internal jihad, which serves the individual in conceptualizing life, s/he becomes necessarily aware of the social world which s/he has to contribute to along with others: “This intellectual position, beginning with oneself and one’s responsibilities, should immediately commit the Muslim citizen to promoting respect for the rights of every person in Western societies [...]. All people, as citizens, are responsible for claiming their rights and gaining respect.”<sup>706</sup> Social commitment becomes a moral responsibility:

Social commitment is a moral commandment, and reform is an obligation of conscience that, in the mind of the Muslim citizen, determines a “moral responsibility.” [...] Muslim morality is entirely based on awareness of one’s responsibility before the Creator and among humankind. To be with the One is to serve one’s fellows. In the Muslim mind, this is the root of the idea that Muslims have a mission of social reform to accomplish, wherever they are, in their society, with their fellow citizens.<sup>707</sup>

In Europe, this moral responsibility is shaped by the objectives of Sharia and solidified by the national laws in each country. This means that the Muslim community has to embrace society aspirations. His “*A Manifesto for a New We*,” written in 2006, goes in this line of thought.<sup>708</sup> For this responsibility to be profoundly established, it should stand on solid shared “ethics of citizenship.” The latter, because it is shared, adopts the main aspects of Sharia, and makes what Ramadan calls “A Theory of the Seven Cs,” grounded on confidence, consistency, contribution, creativity, communication, contest, and compassion.<sup>709</sup> This makes Muslims contributors and not “communitarists.” Ramadan opposes the idea of lobbying to defend the interests of the community in society. He rejects the idea that some propagate: to lobby as the Jews lobby in the US and Europe. He believes that the Muslims’ history is different, and the time now is not for isolationist attitudes: “The role of Muslim communities in the West is to

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<sup>706</sup> *Western Muslims*, 153-54

<sup>707</sup> *Ibid.*, 153

<sup>708</sup> *What I Believe*, 94

<sup>709</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-89

defend principles, not interests, and if it transpires that it is in their interest to have their universal principles respected, it should be clear that their fight for these principles serves society as a whole.”<sup>710</sup>

In the political and associational life, the Muslims are supposed to seek representatives that defend principles and interests of the community. Defending the minority alone is a wrong entrance into the game of politics, which some politicians use to gain more votes in election times, and which some others use to accuse the Muslim community of isolation and communitarism, “It is no good to become citizens by any means and at any price [...] To vote is not enough, how to vote is important.” “True civic ethics” speak against isolation and manipulation of citizenship ethics. “Integrity, ability, and willingness” are prime conditions that should guide the choice of a representative, and not the religion of the representative, or the concerned socio-political body.<sup>711</sup>

Education is of vital importance for “ethics of citizenship.” In this regards, Islamic schools, “after-school schools,” have become common as an alternative for many Muslims who want their children to be aware of the religious message of Islam. Yet, there are problems with these schools. First, they are expensive, since most of them up to now, do not receive State funding, and thus many Muslim families cannot afford them. Second, their faculty, generally, is not well trained and open to both Islamic tradition and the new sciences. The new context is not included as a field of study. Third, consequently, the pupils grow up torn between two realities, the ideal one learnt at school, and the lived world with its socio-political and scientific challenges. Ramadan is critical of isolationist syllabi and school environments, and suggests that it “would be better to avoid involvement in such projects” if their content as well as the manner of functioning is not revised.<sup>712</sup>

Ramadan proposes “a complementary, not parallel,” educational approach to cater for the Muslims’ need in Europe. This makes it financially accessible, and more

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<sup>710</sup> Ibid., 169

<sup>711</sup> Ibid., 168. Ramada writes “Even internationally, the Muslims should be “The voice of the voiceless” for it “is a moral imperative [...] defend forgotten people” in Africa, Palestine, Chechnya, Tibet [...] against neoliberal values, resistance, for “alternative ways,” *Western Muslims*, 172-73

<sup>712</sup> *Western Muslims*, 129-130

importantly it allows the pupils to study in public schools, live a harmonious life between what is in society and what is taught, and also harmonious life when it comes to interaction with the rest of society, which is diverse in faith and beliefs. The complementary aspect of the Islamic schools can be developed as additional courses on Islamic basics, and on partial times in weekends not only as classical courses, but that could be developed into solidarity work, like assisting the elders, the disabled, visiting prisoners, etc. Parents and association representatives should be equally involved, and follow up both the public and private schools activities, and see if they answer the ethical objectives aspired to.<sup>713</sup> Educational systems, currently, generally, opt for giving the intellectual and professional expertise needed, and the ethical aspect is not stressed; success is measured more by certain selection and examination procedures, profitability and material social success afterwards; much attention should be paid to this aspect, which needs ethical revisions.<sup>714</sup>

Since education here impacts the “integration” issue of Muslims, the content of history courses has to be scrutinized by parents and the ones concerned with true pluralism that is based on recognition and respect, which are part of the ethical:

If one looks at history (and sometimes geography) programs, one finds that they include representations of the world that are open to debate. The history of colonialism, parents’ experience of exile, the newly plural nature of Western societies, and some of the information provided about other civilizations as they are presented in most Western educational programs need some serious revision. Being interested in one’s children’s school also means being concerned about it.<sup>715</sup>

More particularly, Ramadan defends the historical negligence the Islamic heritage has received by the constructionists of European identity, which is reduced to the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian contributions:

The scientific, legal, philosophical, and religious input of Muslim scholars and intellectuals has been overlooked to such an extent – both in the collective

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<sup>713</sup> Ibid., 129-138

<sup>714</sup> *Radical Reform*, 279.

<sup>715</sup> *Western Muslims*, 135

memory and in school syllabi – that one cannot but see this as an ideological choice in the process leading to self-construction. [...] Islam is “the other,” even when present among us.<sup>716</sup>

Recognizing the historical contributors in the building of Europe, and the West, is part of recognizing the identity of the current generations of the new citizens of these societies. New historical syllabi have to be worked on:

We need an official history (national, European, and Western) that integrates the plural memories of the citizens (new or not) who are part of it: it is important to mention them, to shed light on their cultural and intellectual wealth, and to value their contribution and presence. No feeling of belonging to a social structure can develop if it does not acknowledge the value and the (historical and present) contribution of its members, of all its members.<sup>717</sup>

This social non-recognition is powered by “media politics” that “culturalize,” or “Islamize” social issues. Pluralism and ethical citizenship aims at reforming all these aspects and giving them a more open dimension founded on “common belonging.”<sup>718</sup>

### **Women rights**

Connected to the question of individual liberties in secular and liberal democracies is the issue of women in Islam. The human rights enjoyed in Western democracies are not what Islam objects to. “Islam has no problem with women, but Muslims do clearly appear to have serious problems with them.”<sup>719</sup> Discourse about women, according to the studied scholar, has been widely influenced by patriarchal cultures, so that some cultural practices that were not “Islamic” have come to be justified. Accordingly, Ramadan says,

We should indeed return to the texts and the modalities of their reading and interpretation in the light of the environments in which they were revealed. Islamic legal thinking about women is certainly the field that has suffered most

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<sup>716</sup> *What I Believe*, 81

<sup>717</sup> *Ibid.*, 69

<sup>718</sup> *Ibid.*, 74

<sup>719</sup> *Ibid.*, 62

from the two phenomena already mentioned: literalist *reduction* and cultural *projection*.<sup>720</sup>

Early interpreters could not go beyond the cultural atmosphere they lived in, though the Quranic message came first as a liberating message and addressed women and man on equal footing, equal rights and duties.<sup>721</sup> For instance, female excision, forced marriages, and honor crimes, are not Islamic even though certain scholars may have attempted to provide religious justification for them.<sup>722</sup> Imposed veil (*hijab*) and *niqab/burqa* are also cultural practices, and are not Islamic. However, for decency in attire, it is prescribed mainly for women, but is never detailed. It is up to the believer woman, according to the context, to preserve it as she sees fit. It remains not to be a forced act. For sports, athletic woman, as in swimming, Ramadan does not drop the decency aspect, but at the same time leaves it up to the Muslim practitioner to decide it over. Mixing and shaking hands are also not issues for Ramadan, and are up to the believer to decide.<sup>723</sup>

Muslims also are more familiar with Sharia through the family law, i.e. heritage law, where women portion is generally less compared to that of men. Historically, that has been justified by the fact that it is man who takes care of the household, so most of the time division of heritage, as prescribed in Quran, prioritizes man. Even against the Quranic clear cut (*qat'i*) division of heritage, Ramadan raises the possibility of re-reading the text in light of the overall objective of the message of Islam:

Such issues as the right to work, polygamy, divorce, or inheritance cannot be approached only through the study of what the texts allow or do not allow. The approach can only be holistic and elaborated in the light of higher ends; otherwise, the very essence of the ruling (*hukm*) may be betrayed.<sup>724</sup>

Against this misrepresentation of the Islamic message of social justice, Ramadan suggests some kind of institutions that defend women in cases of abused divorce and misfortunate heritage division. The aim is for more equality among the two sexes. Family law has been

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<sup>720</sup> *Radical Reform*, 213

<sup>721</sup> *Ibid.*, 210-212

<sup>722</sup> *What I Believe*, 64

<sup>723</sup> Zemmouri, *Faut-il faire Tariq Ramadan?* 205-9.

<sup>724</sup> *Radical Reform*, 214

among the most abused sections of the Islamic law, and it is time to change the way they have been considered and practiced.<sup>725</sup> Women, along with men, have to fight against patriarchal patronizing discourses that belittle womanhood, to bring back meaning to “being, dignity, development, freedom, equality, justice, balance, love, and welfare.”<sup>726</sup> At home, at work, inside or outside, equality has to be visible, and autonomy established. “Islamic feminism” has to “re-appropriate” Islamic teachings and the early example of women participation in society along man. “A discourse on womanhood” based on “feminine philosophy of being” has to be integrated into Islamic reform and dynamism, in private as in public, through education, the media and politics, in all fields that man occupies, including mosques and religious councils.<sup>727</sup> That should take place with dignity, autonomy, and responsibility, within the ethical frame that binds both man and woman:

Women should not wait passively for something to happen: they must look after themselves and develop new approaches in the light of higher objectives to protect their *being*, their *integrity*, their *femininity*, and their *rights*. They must struggle against all formalist dictatorships, both that which imposes the headscarf without belief in the practice coming from the heart and that which imagines all objectified female bodies fit into a size six dress, that which compels women to stay at home for religious reasons and that which sends them back home after the age of forty-five for aesthetic reasons.<sup>728</sup>

Ramadan is critical also of the Western representation of women issues in Islam. He reminds the West that it used to picture the female East as that of desire and sexuality in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and now it is doing the opposite. The “female liberation” he proposes finds its roots in the Islamic texts and early formative context, but he opens it up further not only towards the “modern” as mediatized in the West but more towards the ethically universal, where the future cannot be but built by both man and woman, based

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<sup>725</sup> Ibid., 207-210; 220-221

<sup>726</sup> Ibid., 216-217

<sup>727</sup> Ibid., 218-221. “Women should now be (more) present in *fatâwâ* councils throughout the world, both as text scholars and as experts specializing in social dynamics and daily realities. Their presence and the results of their reflection should be formalized, without compromise, in all constituted Councils throughout the world, East and West.” Ibid., 232.

<sup>728</sup> Ibid., 221

on intellectual maturity, contribution and not on binary differences that both religion and the market have produced:

A woman and a man are both beings who are on a quest for the same justice, the same truth and the same peace. Once they have got beyond naïve talk of equality and made a critical analysis of the logics and structures of powers, they will reach – together – the shore of philosophical, spiritual or religious questions.<sup>729</sup>

The “many illusory freedoms” the current world speaks of cannot be true freedoms unless they are based on awareness, questioning, and intelligence that universally ethical education teaches.<sup>730</sup>

Besides, Muslim women are classically not allowed to marry non-Muslim men, for fear that the latter influence the education of their children to be non-Muslim, while men are allowed to marry Jewish and Christian women (People of the Book). In the latter case, the non-Muslim woman (wife) can keep her religion, but the Muslim husband is supposed to bring up the kids as Muslims, for the household is under his responsibility. Ramadan opens the doors of personal choice and responsibility of the Muslim woman to marry who she wants.<sup>731</sup>

### **Apostates and Homosexuals**

Still in human rights context, and this time for the case of homosexuality, Islam, like the other divine religions, does not allow it, chiefly because it would be against the normal course of nature and destabilize human continuity and social stability. The Quran warns against homosexuality, but does not prescribe the stoning penalty which was developed by classical Islamic jurisprudence. However, because the law grants homosexuals their rights to parade and associate in many Western countries, this right has to be respected. More importantly, it is the human relations that should be valued most, even before the law, as argues Ramadan, and society has to develop adequate measures to integrate individuals who affiliate themselves with such a group: “Though I have reservations about homosexual couples marrying or adopting children, I do not hesitate to

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<sup>729</sup> *The Quest for Meaning*, 94-95

<sup>730</sup> *Ibid.*, 93; *Radical Reform*, 232.

<sup>731</sup> Zemmouri, *Faut-il faire taire Tariq Ramadan ?* 75.

fight against the homophobic discourse or measures of which they may be the victims and to get involved in all common causes by their side.”<sup>732</sup> Apostates or renegades (*al-murtaddun*), like homosexuals, have been also harassed and threatened sometimes by death in Europe and Islamic countries. Such acts of threat do not abide by the law nor do they respect individuals’ choices, which the Quran grants, “No compulsion in religion” (Quran).<sup>733</sup>

### **The Moratorium: Freezing the Islamic Penal Code (*Hudūd*)**

As to the debated issue of legal punishment for adultery, treason, apostasy, homosexuality, and robbery, in a seemingly unprecedented move in Muslim scholarship, Ramadan called publicly for a moratorium on the death penalty, corporal punishment, and stoning in the Muslim world in March 2005.<sup>734</sup> Though the “Call” concerns the Muslim world, yet its effects would have positive influence on some literalist imams who preach in European mosques.<sup>735</sup> Despite this daring step, Ramadan’s *France 2* TV debate with Nicolas Sarkozy on the topic of “God and the Republic”<sup>736</sup> rekindled the storms of criticism the former has been showered with, and pushed many to accuse him of doublespeak, ambiguity, and inconsistency in his reformist ideas. What his critics were expecting was a total rupture with the scriptures on those matters; freezing (*ta’liq*) the penal codes did not seem sufficient for most Westerners; banning them once for all was what some of the critics of Ramadan expected from him, which he did not do simply because his call was a *fatwa*, a mere opinion by an Islamic scholar who studies the objectives of Sharia behind prescribed punishments in context, an opinion to open a debate from within, as he says, and “improve mentalities.” In an interview with Aziz Zemmouri Ramadan says that it is not the West or Western readings that should impose the total banning of the *hudud*; this should happen gradually from within the Islamic

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<sup>732</sup> *What I Believe*, 103

<sup>733</sup> *Ibid.*, 103

<sup>734</sup> Ramadan, “An International Call for Moratorium on Corporal Punishment, Stoning and the Death Penalty in the Islamic World,” 05 April, 2005, available at: <http://www.tariqramadan.com/spip.php?article264>

<sup>735</sup> *Radical Reform*, 274-277

<sup>736</sup> Tariq Ramadan vs. Nicolas Sarkozy, *Cent minutes pour convaincre*, France 2 TV Programme, 20 November 2003, available at : [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIC\\_ehonCJY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIC_ehonCJY) ; Zemmouri, *Faut-il faire taire Tariq Ramadan?* 345-357

tradition. As for his personal opinion, he tells Zemmouri that at the end these *hudud* should be definitively banned.

Ramadan says that the *hudud* legal punishments are now practiced in some limited number of countries (Taliban Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, part of Nigeria and Soudan) to the poor, and it is only the lower classes that are victim of it, while the governors are secure from it. The aim of rendering justice here is betrayed and the contrary happens:

The proposal [of the moratorium] was not directed against Islam's teachings or against the texts—quite the contrary. In the name of the higher objectives of the message that call for respect for the *life* and *dignity* of women and men, *equality*, and *justice*, it was urgent to put an end to an instrumentalization of religion through literalist, formalist implementations that continued to affect poor people, women, and political opponents who have never had the means to defend themselves and who are punished for example's sake and without justice. It was therefore a *Call*, a stand taken from within, in the light of the texts and of social and political contexts, taking into account higher goals, determined to achieve the suspension of unfair implementation while calling upon *fuqahâ'* to debate the issue.<sup>737</sup>

Ramadan discussed the Call with a number of scholars in the Islamic countries, and they agreed to it, yet could not speak their support publicly, either because they could not dare to deny prescribed rules in the Quranic text, though they are not applied in their countries, or feared the public opinion, or because of mere antagonism with the West. The Mufti of Egypt, Ali Jum'a, for example, replied to the Call, recognizes its substance, but objected to its form.<sup>738</sup> Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the "global Mufti," endorses similar views as those expressed in the Call; his TV show on Aljazeera Channel in Qatar records this on 02 January 2011.<sup>739</sup> Internationally speaking, and more particularly for death penalty, Ramadan invokes the call of Jacques Chirac, President of France then, who called for a moratorium before heading to China in October 2004. The international community,

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<sup>737</sup> *Radical Reform*, 276

<sup>738</sup> *Ibid.*, 275-256

<sup>739</sup> Sheykh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi has the same views on the hudud issue. He expressed his views on Aljazeera TV Programme "Ash-Shari'a wa al-Hayat" (Sharia and Life), 2 January, 2011. After this broadcast, Ramadan made a link from his webpage to Aljazeera's programme of Al-Qaradawi to show that his views are also endorsed by an Islamic worldwide scholar like al-Qaradawi: <http://tariqramadan.net/Shaykh-Yusuf-al-Qaradawi-sur-le,11456.html?lang=fr>

Ramadan remarks, did not complain about the idea of “moratorium” proposal of Chirac but complained about his; the same remark goes for the Italian initiative that called for an international moratorium in December 2007 at the United Nations General Assembly. Like them, too, Ramadan says, his Call was a step to ban the penal code, but that had to go through an internal debate of all the scholars concerned.<sup>740</sup>

### **Medical Ethics**

In his reading of the historical Islamic medicinal thought, Ramadan argues that “the approach of Muslim physicians fully agrees with the substance of all the landmark oaths in the history of medicine.” Medicine ethical oath, for instance, builds on Hippocratic Oath that goes back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. During the heydays of Islam, especially since the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Muslims added the Islamic character to it. Ishaq Ibn Ali Ruhawi’s *Practical Ethics of the Physician (Adab at-Tabib)* is the earliest surviving document in the field in Arabic. In contemporary medicinal work, the First International Conference on Islamic Medicine, took place in Kuwait in January 1981 and updated the Code of Islamic Medical Ethics. Early Islamic thought, for instance, did not base treatment on the gender, race, or religion or the patient. Ibn Qudamah al-Maqdissi (d.1223) saw no problem in a male physician treating a female patient, as some salafists call for now. Saving life, and treating it, is the primary objective of Sharia. “In the course of therapy, patients have no religion, social status, or gender, and the only dimension that must motivate a physician’s commitment is the sacred character of the patient’s *life* and the protection of his or her *welfare*.”<sup>741</sup>

For abortion, Islamically, it is not allowed. Preserving life is always a prime objective of Sharia, especially if the embryo is already forty days old, the time in which the soul is blown into the body. However, pregnancy that results from rape, accidental pregnancy, risky pregnancy on health, and unwanted pregnancy that keeping it would lead to extreme family poverty are now cases that are being allowed, case by case. Contraception was permitted from the Prophetic era. Sexual pleasure was more discussed

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<sup>740</sup> *Radical Reform*, 277; Zemmouri, *Faut-il faire taire Tariq Ramadan ?* 381-382.

<sup>741</sup> *Radical Reform*, 163

in the classics than it is being done in contemporary thought. Woman sexual satisfaction was extensively discussed in al-Ghazali's works and others in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>742</sup> Regarding euthanasia, especially its direct, active form, it is also forbidden since life is given by God and only Him can end it. Yet, the use of morphine not to accelerate death but to ease suffering is now generally being accepted.<sup>743</sup> Organ transplantation is allowed as long as it is not turned into trade, and with the exception of donating genitals.<sup>744</sup> For serious illnesses like AIDS, no value judgment should be expressed to the patient; rather, treatment should be provided, with solace and humane interaction, against any discrimination and isolation. International sensibility should be raised to speak against unethical global injustice, social disparities, and push international medicine companies to lower the prices and make treatment more accessible particularly to the needy societies.<sup>745</sup>

### **Ecology**

Ramadan affirms that "reflection about respecting the environment or about how animals should be treated is virtually nonexistent in contemporary Islamic intellectual discourse."<sup>746</sup> The sources which stress the relation of humankind to the universe refer constantly to the protection of the environment, nature, and good treatment of animals. A number of Quranic and Prophetic stories are provided as examples. "A believer's relationship to nature can only be based on contemplation and respect." There is "an ecology at the source," which the London-based Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences" newsletter label as "Ecoislam."<sup>747</sup> Unlike the field of medicine which has tried to keep up with world changes and challenges, contemporary Islamic thought seems absent in envisaging solutions to global ecological problems. Certainly the majority Islamic countries are not industrial, but they are part of the world order and their consumption mode is increasing, and is also lacking ethical considerations. For instance,

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<sup>742</sup> Ibid., 167-69

<sup>743</sup> Ibid., 175

<sup>744</sup> Ibid., 173-75

<sup>745</sup> Ibid., 179-181

<sup>746</sup> Ibid., 233

<sup>747</sup> Ibid., 235, 347

for the case of animal slaughtering, mainly in Europe, Muslims are more concerned whether it is *ḥalāl* or haram (allowed or not), and not much is said about the bringing up of the animal, and its treatment all the way up to slaughtering time. Ramadan calls for a more serious understanding of the ethical, instead of stopping at the ritual that is not profound:

Proposing breeding techniques on a small, medium, or large scale; developing new types of slaughterhouses allying respect and efficiency; issuing legal rulings (*fatâwâ*) that, in some areas, more clearly encourage monetary compensation rather than ritual sacrifice (which remains a recommended act—*sunnah*) are all initiatives that may help the Muslim world to reconcile itself with the higher objectives and meaning of its ethics rather than hiding behind insistence on norms and means that guarantee only false respect of the requirements of Islam’s message.<sup>748</sup>

Considering other ways of practicing the ritual, without abolishing it, is part of the contribution the Muslim has to consider for sustainable development and charity. The month of Ramadan of fasting is another example from which spiritual and ethical dimensions should be learnt and from which other ways of facing contemporary ecological challenges can be generated.<sup>749</sup>

### **Economy**

Though “Islamic economics” seems to flourish in the face of the current world financial crisis, Ramadan is skeptic about it. Ramadan says “There is no “Islamic economy,” just as, as I said, there is no “Islamic medicine.” He adds, “What *can* be found in the Islamic Universe of reference is a series of principles outlining an ethics, a general philosophy of the economy’s goals, but there is no such thing as an economy that is “Islamic” by essence or through some specific disposition.”<sup>750</sup> The world capitalist world has permeated every part of the world, including the Islamic world, and the Muslim perception of economics. For Ramadan, the Islamic criticism of the capitalist system (high interest rates, manipulation and speculation of currency, injustices in international

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<sup>748</sup> Ibid., 238

<sup>749</sup> Ibid., 239

<sup>750</sup> Ibid., 242

trade, imposed conditions on funding, etc.) is generally imitating the very same system it criticizes: “There is today no “Islamic” alternative to the dominant neoliberal economic model.”<sup>751</sup>

Considering the status quo, Ramadan finds that the Muslim oil countries richness uses the label of “Islam” but works within the capital system, and injustice of this “Islamic model” has produced no justice or good alternative. “Islamic economics,” except for few serious attempts, is generally an “Americanized” Islam and “Islamized capitalism”:

This global “Islamized” capitalism, as it can be seen on the African continent, in Arab countries, or particularly so-called emerging Asian countries as in Malaysia, or today in Dubai, results in an Islamized Americanization under a coat of very *halâl* terminology and financial techniques [...]. Fast food is profitable, therefore Islamic, *halâl* fast-food restaurants are put into operation, from McDonald’s to other famous brands. Coke dominates the soft drink market, so a line of products labeled as “Cola” emerges (Mecca Cola, Zem Zem Cola, Medina Cola) to recall the “taste” of the parent company’s product while they are alleged to resist the actions of the foreign company or constitute an alternative! There is no resistance in this, no alternative thought, and indeed no originality.<sup>752</sup>

It is the consumption mode that Ramadan questions in Islamic practices and economic interpretations. “Whenever they can, Muslims consume with the same frenzy as others.”<sup>753</sup>

### **“Ethical Arts”**

Islam is a religion, and not a culture. Yet, no religion finds expression outside a culture in a particular society, and vice versa. “There are, therefore, no religiously neutral cultures, nor any cultural-free religions.”<sup>754</sup> It is the ethical that links the two spheres. Religious permissibility, imagination, and human creativity touch all aspects of human life: architecture, music, television, film industry, entertainment, etc. For instance, in

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<sup>751</sup> Ibid., 244

<sup>752</sup> Ibid., 249

<sup>753</sup> Ibid., 257

<sup>754</sup> Ibid., 183

Europe, films, music and songs do not have to remain oriental, nor do mosques have to be like the ones in the Islamic lands. There is remarkably a lot of uncritical and consumerist artistic industry produced worldwide, and to make it ethically artistic does not mean to include religious or Islamic verses, hadiths, or words in it to show that it is Islamic. Art in itself has ethical goals, and constant questioning and improvement should lead to that, without inferring to the religious always. Faith itself needs questioning, freedom, imagination, before it improves and elevates the human taste from degradation to dignity and responsible freedom:

The Universe of art is a Universe of questions rather than answers, and it should not be reduced to conveying only religious answers. Artistic expression precedes such answers and the accompanying norms: it seeks to reach and convey the essence of emotion and meaning, and any attempt seeking to reduce it to a strictly religious or Islamic message would naturally leave people unsatisfied. Art asks questions, faith supplies answers: it is important for faith to allow the heart a space where it can express with *freedom* and *dignity* its simple, human, painful questions, which may not always be beautiful but are never absolutely ugly. Moreover, as I said, faith needs it, for such an experience enables it to gain depth, substance, and intensity.<sup>755</sup>

“There are higher ethical goals in art” which a “critical mind and a good taste” should develop by “inviting the heart and mind to transcend the worst degradation.” “Ethical art” is part of the quest for meaning, and by thus it transcends narrow religious boundaries to the universal human being.<sup>756</sup>

### **Recapitulation**

In this part I have tried to condense the thought of Ramadan into two sections, each divided into three sub-sections. The first section has introduced the concerned scholar, his early study of the Islamic worldview, in comparison with the modern Western view. In the early texts Ramadan affiliates himself with the main sources of Islamic law, and affirms his belonging to the reformist trends of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, i.e. *nahḍa* movement. However, a development in this thought

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<sup>755</sup> Ibid., 202

<sup>756</sup> Ibid., 205-206

starts to take place with *Western Muslims* and takes its clear shape in *Radical Reform*, and *The Quest for Meaning*. In Ramadan's "transformation reform" focus is mostly given to the universal values that Islam shares with the world, mainly the Western world with which the debate seems tense. Leaving behind the classical divisions of the world into the abode of Islam and the abode of war or of the infidel, Ramadan goes back to the sources to come up with the connection the Quran and the Sunna have with the natural world as "a mosque" where Islam could be professed beyond borders, and as a 'sign' which speaks of the Oneness of God. Sharia here becomes the way, instead of being narrowly defined in its legalist prescriptions. This makes all of Earth an abode of testimony, or Shahada of the Oneness of God. With this belief goes the idea of respect of all God's creatures, despite their religious or philosophic beliefs, for they are part of the 'sign' of diversity He wills. For this belief to take place in actual life and preserve both Shahada and diversity, shared values based on "civil citizenship" and "ethical reference" are pivotal for the well-being of the individual, the group, and society at large. The ethical becomes the basis for "transformation reform" that targets not only the Muslims.

Ramadan's ethical peregrination over various issues aims at reconciling Islamic past juridical codes with societies' historical evolution and context. Starting from the Islamic universe, he moves to make it, once again, open to the world as a shared heritage, and ready to contribute, besides other world religions and philosophies, especially in the West, to overcoming the trap of modernity and the malaise it suffers from, "Muslims can show, reasonably and without polemics, that they share the essence of the values on which Europe and the West are based and that their own religious tradition has also contributed to the emergence and promotion of those values."<sup>757</sup> As vicegerents on Earth (Khulafa', or Caliphs of God on Earth), Muslims have to go beyond past normativity that is not close to reality, and turn the moral into ethical action. This brings back the note I started this sub-section with, i.e. the note on morality and ethics, and how Ramadan tries to merge both and make the ethical, which touches the individual's action, more responsible of agency in society. This comes clear in this note:

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<sup>757</sup> *What I Believe*, 84

In our present Islamic Universe of reference, which is muddled with often misleading normative formalities, *one should recall that the morality of means is never sufficient guarantee of the ethicality of ends.* That is indeed why the human conscience must never stop questioning means and ends and adding *soul* to knowledge, science, and economy. Only through this effort can we eradicate poverty and preserve the planet's future: that is what being stewards on earth (*khulafâ" fî-l ard*) requires.<sup>758</sup> [First emphasis added]

For fear that the universal moral law may be misused by elites, weakened, or not taken care of by the collectivity, as he explains in *The Quest for Meaning*, more responsibility is individual, through the ethical. That is where the spiritual, the *soul*, comes in to remind and encourage the individual actor for the good. In all, he sees Islam and Muslims contribution to the world and the societies they inhabit in the improvement they can add to the world: "If Islam can provide a meaningful contribution today, it lies in questioning the goals of life and in the requirement of improving its quality."<sup>759</sup>

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<sup>758</sup> *Radical Reform*, 258

<sup>759</sup> *Ibid.*, 257

**Part Three:**  
**Tareq Oubrou and Abdennour Bidar –**  
**Theologico-Philosophic Justifications for European Islam**

My hope is to see Muslims feeling fully European and notably French, thus contributing to this great civilization and human enterprise, and this without putting aside their spirituality, and on condition that their religiosity acculturates and Occidentalizes. Theologians, intellectuals, and other actors, coming from all Muslim communities have to take part in this. Muslims have to do their best to avoid a religious or cultural fracture. They have to be a bridge between the western world and the Muslim world. I especially remind all the Muslim responsible bodies and representative institutions to communicate to the Muslims the mission that consists in assuring the West by considering it part of them, by working for its good and prosperity, and particularly not to feel as “foreigners within.” The feel of love towards our France and our Europe has to be the engine-factor that reconciles Islam as spirituality and the West as a civilization. Intellectually and religiously, a theological secularization of Islam appears necessary to realize this marriage canonique of Islam with the West without divorce. This is what I modestly try to think for a Western Islam.

Tareq Oubrou, *Profession imam*, interview with Cedric Beylocq and Michaël Privot, 2009, 216

The question then is to know whether we can dare an existentialist reading of the Quran without this being an expression of a metaphysical revolt against the will and predestination of God. Can we give to Islam the necessary theological resources to replace submission, not by a non-submission marked by the Satanic experience, but by a human liberty that is expressed *with the consent of God?*

Abdennour Bidar, *Islam sans soumission: pour un existencialisme musulman*, 2006, 23.

To pursue my comparative interest in the emerging European Islamic thought, and after having introduced and advanced a preliminary critique of what could be called *avant-gardists* of European Islam discourse (Tibi and Ramadan), I now turn to shedding light on two other scholars and discourse. I do need to note again that the two other scholars I refer to are based in France. It is true that the debate in France over religion and secularism is very tense, but this does not mean, at least in my approach, that it is this particular country that I am interested in. My interest is more into new theoretical approaches of Islam in Europe, be they in France or other European country. Yet, one cannot deny the fact that it is the context where the debate is tense that intellectuals are “forced” to generate ideas to challenge themselves and their detractors. Muslim intellectuals in France seem to belong to this category. From within a secular context they try to re-read their Islamic sources to defend Islam, or refute it, or mostly in the cases I study to find a midway where secularism, and European values in general, are justified and endorsed by Islamic texts, past or present, with particular agendas of reform.

The other two scholars to be referred to here at this stage are defenders of Europe and Islam equally, and certainly each with a particular emphasis on certain priorities in methodology. My interest, again, is basically at that level of interpretation that attempts to fuse Islamic and European values. If Tibi has come to the debate, as seen earlier, from political science perspectives, and Ramadan from jurisprudence and broadly theological perspectives, the two scholars Tareq Oubrou and Abdennour Bidar approach the debate from theological and philosophical perspectives respectively.

## 1. Tareq Oubrou: Geotheology and the Minoritization of Islam

Tareq Oubrou was born in Agadir in 1959 in Moroccan. He came to France at the age of 19 to pursue his academic studies in medicine and biology. At that age he realized the “intensity of faith.” So, he started working as imam in Nantes, Limoges, Pau and now in Bordeaux’s al-Huda mosque. As a French citizen, Oubrou officiates as an imam. He is a religious activist and public intellectual who is present in the media, in seminars, in organizing imam-training sessions, giving religious advice, and engaging himself in debates with Muslim and non-Muslim intellectuals. He did not go through an academic religious studies curriculum as would do most public Muslim scholars; he is a self-made theologian. Oubrou is an old and active member of the Union of the Islamic Organizations of France (UOIF), first set up in 1983. The UOIF was first influenced by Muslim Brotherhood in its beginnings in the 1980s but it now claims to stand autonomous and it distances itself from it. It has cooperated with the French authorities over a number of issues and mainly for the creation of the French Council of Muslim Faith (*Conseil français du culte musulman*, CFCM), set up in May 2003. Oubrou coined the term “*chari’a de minorité*” (“Sharia of the Minority”) in a famous article published in “Islam de France” in 1998, which was expanded in 2004.<sup>760</sup> In 2006, his first volume, out of ten, was out. *L’Unicité de dieu: des noms et attributs divins* [*The Unicity of God: Names and Attributes*, vol. 1/10].<sup>761</sup> In 2002, he co-authored a lively debate with a secular French Muslim intellectual of Algerian origin, Leila Babès, on liberty, women and Islam.<sup>762</sup> Tareq Oubrou combines mastery of classical Islamic sciences with a strong grasp of European past theological debates and debaters (like Aquinas and Levinas), and contemporary hermeneutics.<sup>763</sup>

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<sup>760</sup> Tareq Oubrou, «Introduction théorique à la charia de minorité» [“Theoretical Introduction to Sharia of the Minority”] in *Islam de France*, n. 2 (1998) 27-41, made available online on 25 August 2000 at : <http://oumma.com/Introduction-theorique-a-la-chari>

<sup>761</sup> Tareq Oubrou, *L’Unicité de Dieu : des noms et attributs divins* (opuscule 1/10) (éditions Bayane, 2006);

<sup>762</sup> Leila Babès and Tariq Oubrou, *Loi d’Allah, loi des hommes: liberté, égalité et femmes en islam* [*Law of God, Law of Man : Liberty, Equality, and Women in Islam*] (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002).

<sup>763</sup> Joselyne Cesare, et al., “Islam and Fundamental Rights in Europe,” European Commission – DG-Justice and Home Affairs, Final Report October 2004, 87.

In narrating his personal as well as career developments as a man of faith, Oubrou says that he cared a lot about faith when young. With adolescence came the questions of spirituality and how to reconcile them with the mundane world:

I cared a lot about my faith, and my practice [...]. It was very difficult for me to reconcile my spirituality and the current age. Many questions went into my mind...how to integrate one's spirituality in this world, how to live the mundane, here, while being in permanent touch with the other world.<sup>764</sup>

In France, he got involved in the community affairs while in his early twenties. Choosing not to follow a promising academic career in medicine and biology, he remained close to the spiritual life he has chosen for himself. As a part time job, and sometimes as a volunteer, Oubrou would fall at times into misery life in cold winters, without money in the pocket nor heating in the room he had to rent or which was rent to him for solidarity. "This poverty I did not choose as misery, I chose it though I could have continued my academic studies and professional career [...] I was personally in a full mystic phase."<sup>765</sup> These preliminary notes aim to contextualize, though briefly, the case of Oubrou as a believer in Europe, before being a self-made and engaged theologian. His engagement into the debate of Islam in Europe then has personal aspects into it.

#### **a. Geotheology for an Islam of Context**

As to Islam and its scriptural sources, Oubrou is critical of some of their current rigid interpretations, but he is far away from denouncing the tradition. For the Quran, the main Islamic source, it remains divine as the Word of God, but its interpretation is human. Oubrou argues that the Quranic message is primarily about the meaning of life, though this has a lot to do with the ethical mannerism it advocates, "I assume that the question of meaning is much more important than the question of law, and much more important than the question of ethics itself."<sup>766</sup> This way Oubrou denies the aspects of Statehood or Caliphate from a political perspective to be the aim of Islam.<sup>767</sup> He says:

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<sup>764</sup> Tareq Oubrou, *Profession imam [Imam Profession]*, interview with Cedriq Beylocq and Michaël Privot (Paris: Albin Michele, 2009) 20.

<sup>765</sup> *Profession imam*, 32-33

<sup>766</sup> *Loi d'Allah*, 39

<sup>767</sup> *Ibid.*, 94

We [Muslims in the West] are not representatives of Muslims of the world. We think our religion in our history, and our Western societies. We are making this work. We do not have political projects; we do not have projects of domination over society, or over the State.<sup>768</sup>

For this reason, he calls for a contextual interpretation of the Scriptures and their relevancy. He emphasizes the Arabian Peninsula cultural aspects in which the divine text descended on the Prophets and the mentality of the period. In his debate with Leila Babes about revisiting the sources, he says that he is aware that any interpretation now is human, not divine, but still shows no fear of losing the divine intent, for he considers the liberty of conscience of the believer a religious value in itself and thus part of the process of faith.<sup>769</sup> This brings up Oubrou's call for a new Islamic theology, with the auspices of hermeneutics.

Oubrou believes that "We need a theological reading of God which passes by a theological reading of Man and his real condition, because we cannot know God without Man."<sup>770</sup> The theology advocated here has to take time and space into consideration. This impacts the interpretation of the divine texts on three main levels: national, transnational, and global. This new theology, which he also terms "geothology,"<sup>771</sup> is mobile, for the geographical impacts and is equally impacted by the temporal, and religion has to be well aware of these differences if it aspires to be constantly abreast of world changes and open to be revisited. Oubrou puts it this way:

A theological reading worthy of the name has to integrate space and time, society and the State...*un théologique pensé...* [In this globalized world] there is a need for an Islamic theology, for our case with ethical implications on three relative levels: national, transnational-regional, and global. This said, sharia norms have to adopt, following derivative/continuous epistemology, the physical theory of relativity, taking into account three indicators which are unstable: the national, (la France), transnational-regional (Europe), and globalization. Things cannot be conceived but in this complexity which I find intellectually passionate. A

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<sup>768</sup> *Profession imam*, 231

<sup>769</sup> *Loi d'Allah*, 62

<sup>770</sup> *Profession imam*, 147

<sup>771</sup> *Ibid.*, 157

theologico-jurisprudential mobile approach which has to be constantly revisited.<sup>772</sup>

Oubrou believes that “the world has changed.” “We are in a stage of perpetual overcoming: religion is overcome, even modernity is overcome; nation-states are overcome: we are in a phase of extraordinary turbulence.”<sup>773</sup> Modernity is overcome since it has belittled religion and overlooked spirituality, but it still can help Muslims re-read their theological, jurisprudential, ethical, as well as mystical traditions and experiences.<sup>774</sup> It is the age for “a necessary operation of deconstruction for new reconstruction.”<sup>775</sup> For a valid deconstruction, the synthesis has to be both intrinsic and historic: intrinsic with formal mechanisms of interpretation that remain valid for all epochs, and which we can also apply to our epoch, for they are part of a heritage and of this Islamic reasoning that does not change and is perpetual; historic because knowledge not only expands but also creates new disciplines, techniques, perceptions, methods, and logics in light of our age.<sup>776</sup> Hermeneutics for him can help in synthesizing the tradition and reconstructing it.

Oubrou’s advocacy of the use of hermeneutics as a device of deconstruction and reconstruction of the tradition, especially the divine texts, stems from his belief that it allows reason to expose their (i.e. divine texts) meaning and recognize their mysteries.<sup>777</sup> However, Oubrou stops here and makes this note “Hermeneutics is not a direct reading of the Texts.”<sup>778</sup> That is, Hermeneutics is an interpretation, a translation of signification related to a cultural context into another according to rules that preserve the equivalent meaning. So, hermeneutics is not a start from scratch, but a reading of the past into the present. It is a matter of continuity and not rupture. Oubrou further explains it this way:

The Islamic discourse has now to build a new discourse that is continuous to the original discourse of the Scriptures (Quranic and Prophetic) [...]. It is about reproducing, in the context of modernity, the original discourse which is,

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<sup>772</sup> Ibid., 152

<sup>773</sup> Ibid., 227

<sup>774</sup> Ibid., 228

<sup>775</sup> Ibid., 147

<sup>776</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>777</sup> Ibid., 116

<sup>778</sup> Ibid., 132

however, inseparable from the Quranic text, not dissociated from it, but also not confused with it [i.e. not replicating the exact past context in the modern context]. So, it is not the substance –the literal – of the scriptural teaching which is systematically universal, but the form –the interpretation- which it may take that is so [...] Otherwise said, interpretation re-approaches, and renders contemporary the religious discourse by renewing the Quranic and prophetic significations that appear historically and culturally distant or foreign [to us now].<sup>779</sup>

What Oubrou is saying is that hermeneutics, against the way some secular liberals want to drive it to, does not cut links with the divine, not does it make an epistemological break with the past. Most importantly, he does not imprison God in the Quranic Text, nor does he confuse God, His Word, the Quran, and does not, henceforth, consider them all as one, but both the latter (Word and Quran) as manifestations of the former, God. He does so through what he refers to as “double reflection” by which the divine Texts and socio-historical laws are capably managed to be separated in theory so that what is sacred remains sacred, and what is mundane remains so:

Double reflection (*double reflexion, nazar*): one reflection is on the Texts themselves, and the other on natural laws, and historical, social, anthropological laws...we can effectively conceive of Islam as a religion that “read” [verb read in the past] God through the Quran. At the same time, God should not be identified with Quran, nor as nature. God is not *imminent* in Quran or nature. Whatsoever can be the sacred and transcendental level of the Quran, it cannot, in its essence, be identified as God. It is an established and immanent sign of the Essence of the Divine, but it is not God. It is not God that took the shape of Verb [Word of Quran], but His Verb took the written form, which is the Book. The confusion between God, His Word, and the Quran can never happen because there has always been in Islam a distinction between the symbolic sign (aya) and the ultimate Truth [...]. The Quran in this sense is venerated, sacralized, but not – religiously- worshipped.<sup>780</sup>

Oubrou saves the sacred from being desacralized through this hermeneutical reading. What the Quran stands for then is the divine ultimate Truth, which is summarized through broad ethical dictums, historical events, and prophetic happenings of the pre-Islamic period. These details in the Quran are not God but a manifestation of Him, and it

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<sup>779</sup> Ibid., 131

<sup>780</sup> Ibid., 129-130

is up to human reason to exert itself constantly to reach it, or part of it. There is a movement in conceptualizing the divine here; the human beings have to keep the search, and thus no one interpretation is the best or the final, but each remains one way among others. For Oubrou, “the Quran exposes the universal values of justice, equality, respect and dignity of humankind;” “the Quran does not present a formalistic and predetermined normative doctrine.”<sup>781</sup> As an inclusive value system, its coherence does not stem from its formalism and stagnation but from its mobility. He calls this process “mobile coherence” (coherence mobile).<sup>782</sup>

The Sunna as well as the jurisprudential tradition are also included in this study, to be revisited, reinterpreted, but not to be dismissed altogether. Oubrou’s hermenetics travels to the present and future, but also crosses the bridge of the past as a connection. Hermeneutics then is but another name for the classical term of *ijtihad*. “*Ijtihad* as hermeneutics show that the cultural and temporal distance is a desert to be crossed, but also a bridge to go through.”<sup>783</sup>

Regarding the Sunna, it is also important in the eyes of Oubrou. It is explanatory of its realization of the divine message in what he calls the “Quranic moment.” It is relevant to show the contextual that can help the contemporary Muslims in Europe to distinguish between the cultural, which is temporary and spacial, and the divine which is universalist, atemporal, aspatial. Reviewing the hadiths, their validity, weakness, or invalidity, is also possible through a methodological reading of the Sunna, in light of the universal divine message and the current human circumstances. Like the Quran, the Sunna also goes through deconstruction and reconstruction mechanisms, processed hermeneutically according to the world changes nationally, transnationally, and globally, and as part of *ijtihad* practice.

Regarding the traditional jurisprudential/canonist schools (*madhahib*), Oubrou recognizes their authority, past contribution and the inspiration they can still contribute, “I assure you there are things said by early classical scholars in the early centuries of

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<sup>781</sup> Ibid., 46

<sup>782</sup> Ibid., 92

<sup>783</sup> Ibid., 132

Islam which could destabilize the contemporary believers.<sup>784</sup> Muslims of these times were more open than the contemporary ones.”<sup>785</sup> He believes that religious knowledge and authority is needed at a certain stage of religious intellectual development, and the believer, especially if in a position of “authority,” is supposed to be immersed in these schools, their differences, and disciplines before practicing independent *ijtihad*/intellectual exertion. Free access to the Scriptures without going through scholarly past contributions can be dangerous, and breed “Catastro-fiqh,”<sup>786</sup> “What threatens Islam is this open access to the Texts, without this culture of scholarly intelligent mediation.”<sup>787</sup> For him, he is well acquainted with them, but he exerts his intellect in light of the context he is in, mainly France. He argues that contemporary Muslims are not obliged to thoroughly follow one madhab, as is practiced in Muslim majority countries, but can use the old practice of eclecticism, or *talfiq*, according to the context, and there is no betrayal of the tradition in this, since it was used in the past and it has its basis with the tradition as a whole. Being situated in the traditional premise, Oubrou then moves to propose his “Sharia of the minority” or “minority Sharia.”

#### **b. Sharia of the Minority for the Relativization of Sharia**

Oubrou bases his approach on the philosophy of religion of “easiness” (*yusr*). For him, “Too much of religion kills religion” for “Religion should be an added value, which brings more benefits, and not a collection of chains/setbacks.”<sup>788</sup> Like classical scholars, he distinguishes between 1) the creed or *aqida*, 2) Sharia law, and 3) the mystic “*tariqa*” way. For his approach of “Sharia of the minority,” which will be clarified as I proceed, it recognizes these differences of levels in religiosity but does not stop there. It tries to overcome them to make Islam reachable and accommodative of world changes. It is good to remember what Oubrou says: “The theory on which I am currently working is a global religious theory.”<sup>789</sup> It cannot be global if it is not accommodative. Yet, he defends his

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<sup>784</sup> Ibid., 148

<sup>785</sup> Ibid., 150

<sup>786</sup> Ibid., 176. This term is Sassoubre's, one of the interviewers of Oubrou, and not Oubrou's.

<sup>787</sup> Ibid., 230

<sup>788</sup> Ibid., 102-103

<sup>789</sup> Ibid., 79

methodology by saying that his approach derives from the Islamic sources themselves: “I do not content myself with principles, I also give other possible orientations and I make the practice accessible to everyone. This method I did not invent; it is that of the Quran and the Prophet: a lenient method (*douce*), which some have not recognized.”<sup>790</sup> For instance, for the five daily prayers, Oubrou says that if someone cannot, for some reasons, pray five times a day, he or she can pray less than five times, according to his or her ability, or to what his circumstances allow. He is also lenient with the practice of Ramadan fasting: instead of stressing that one has to fast the whole day and all of the month, the Muslim believer, if he cannot but still wants to try, he or she can, as much as they can. Oubrou considers that a Muslim, practicing or not, is already in the premise of Islam as long as they profess and believe in the first pillar of Shahada/ Testimony, which is about Oneness of God and His omnipresence. Within this premise, the non-observant of the classical rituals of, say, prayers or Ramadan, is a Muslim, for religiosity here is also practiced, invisibly or visibly, through ethical behavior, solidarity, generosity, etc. So, there is no “non-practicing Muslim for Oubrou. Here, he is in the same line of thought as Tariq Ramadan about “ash-Shahada,” “living as a testimony.”<sup>791</sup> This is about the creed, but what about Sharia as law, which is more visible and “disturbing” for the liberal and secular societies of Europe?

Sharia of the minority has to be situated in the framework within which Oubrou is working: theology. It certainly can have political manifestations; for it is part of what was referred to earlier as a step towards “geothology” or “a global religious theory” which takes into account the national, transnational and global. In light of the previous highlights, and borrowing Alexando Caeiro’s reading, Sharia of minority enjoys its novelty mainly on three levels which are manifestations of what Oubrou refers to as the “ethicization of Sharia” or “relativization of Sharia.”<sup>792</sup> This relativization touches the three main levels or layers of the Islamic tradition and sources: the Quran, the hadith, and jurisprudence as developed by Muslim scholars.

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<sup>790</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>791</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>792</sup> *Loi d’Allah*, 45; 105.

First, the significance of the normative dimension of sharia law is minimized by subordinating sharia to theology. Through hermeneutical devices, the meanings of the source Texts have to be updated, according to time and space, without losing the high significance of the divine intent fused in the “Quranic moment.” Mobility in interpretation, as seen above, is emphasized. More than that, emphasis on questions of free will and destiny - [here is an invocation of the Muʿatazilite rational tradition]- are vital in the reconstruction of sharia; human freedom and rational agency would impact the legal interpretation, and pave the way for rehabilitating the distinction between the unchanging Islamic intrinsic and universal reason and the historical, expandable Islamic knowledge. This allows for moving from the Text to the Context, without losing track of the Text.

Second, sharia is ethicized. “Ethicization of sharia” denotes that Islamic legal norms are reduced to the ethical dimension, and thus able to be shared by non-Muslims as well. Here, room is given to the host country’s institutions and legal system - France in this case. Leila Babes asks Oubrou, in their book debate exchange, whether Muslims will need independent or private legal system if it is reformed, and he replies that his idea is to “incorporate French law into the metabolism and the economy of the sharia.” He also replies to her question as follows, “The issue is about elaborating a law from our own references, our culture, our intelligence, while at the same time opening up positively to contemporary human experiences without any complexity.”<sup>793</sup> He adds that any ethical system, as is the case of ethicized sharia, necessitates a legal system that protects these ethics. What Oubrou is saying is that he is against having two different laws in the same national legal boundaries. Eclectically, and hermeneutically, he aims at finding Islamic laws that correspond to the French laws, and thus legal conflicts would disappear, though the sources of the two value systems remain different. This is part of his philosophy of law within the Islamic framework and rule of moderation and ease, “Law has no sense

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<sup>793</sup> Ibid., 95

unless it leads the soul to interior happiness, and spiritual satisfactions, which the prophet calls *ḥalāwat al īmān* [The Pleasure of Belief].”<sup>794</sup>

Third, the theory of Sharia of the minority makes a substantial use of the fatwa practice. A fatwa is classically a legal opinion over a particular issue in particular time and space; it is not binding, but a mere legal opinion. Classical jurisprudential schools diverged on certain topics and their details, and each school would give its legal opinion according to its methodology of interpretation of the references, in light of time and space circumstances. The General principle about fatwas is that “most of them remain “biodegradable,” self-destructive, in the sense that their articulation is bound to a particular context, time and place and circumstances of the individual, and when these circumstances change, the fatwa expires.”<sup>795</sup> Oubrou uses this flexibility in Islamic law and makes of it a central element in his theory. Fatwa here serves well the eclectic approach, known as *talfīq* (jurisprudential eclecticism) among legalist scholars. More clearly, he elaborates his methodology as a “typology of fatwa” by means of which he distinguishes between two main types of fatwas: positive and negative. He elaborates this typology to suit the European/ French legal system(s).

Positive fatwa by pronouncement or articulation is based on articulating some old verse or hadith or fiqh classical view, as long as it does not contradict French law. It is of two types: common positive fatwa and individual or situational positive fatwa. Common positive fatwa concerns all the Muslim community, or at least those that are practicing Muslims, the French Muslims and by extension the European Muslims. It targets an average or minimal orthopraxis. It integrates the real religiosity of the Muslim community and its various possible practices (ritualist and moralist) to the Sharia premise; this way no Muslim can feel s/he is missing his spiritual and moral duty, whatsoever the level of his or her religiosity is. This norm has to be integrated in the French juridical law. Overall, “it remains theoretical.”<sup>796</sup> As to the individual or situational positive fatwa, it takes into account the majority and dominant culture. The

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<sup>794</sup> *Profession imam*, 103

<sup>795</sup> *Ibid.*, 43

<sup>796</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42

first form of fatwa aims at maintaining public order, and this one aims at avoiding social fracture in the life of the Muslim in his daily life and his social environment. It concerns individual and concrete cases. This type of fatwa necessitates from the *mufti* knowledge of society, its mentalities, its different work conditions, etc. It refines, adapts, attenuates, suspends or annuls the first fatwa, the collective one, according to the cases of individuals that raise it. “It can be valid for one Muslim person but invalid for another, valid for the same person in one circumstance and invalid in another.” This type of fatwa is “dialogic,” and “participative” (his words). It concerns the individual and involves the mufti scholar, and there is a need for the scholar to know more details about the case of the individual, and the latter has to interact with the mufti while finding out a solution that still preserves the minimum of religiosity.<sup>797</sup> Particularly for the *mufti* who is capable of giving a religious legal opinion [and not the imam], *he* should not detail the canonic/jurisprudential norms, seeing the modest spiritual and moral level of Muslims in Europe/ France.<sup>798</sup>

The second type of fatwas is the negative fatwa by voluntary omission, or principial jurisprudential silence. For Oubrou, this form of fatwa is very important in our age. It consists in abstention from confirming some laws, including the Scriptural ones, that have just one meaning, which some practicing individuals call for. “This posture allows for the contraction of Sharia, by simplifying it to its basic levels. It is an aware silence, or thought-silence, a canonical absence, doubly necessary: for an essential religiosity of society and for a *laïc* equilibrium in the French society.” It is a passive silence to counter fatwas market common amidst the community. This type of fatwa prevents the loss of religious sense of authority, either by not rushing to give a fatwa to

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<sup>797</sup> Ibid., 92. For example, a young Muslim man sells wine, came to ask Oubrou for a fatwa, a religious opinion on the matter. He does not feel at ease with the job, but it is the only thing he can live on at the moment. He was asking whether he should leave the job or keep it? Oubrou asked him to leave the job only after he finds another one, to avoid depending on social welfare, or live misery, or on robbery. Ibid., 95.

On a related matter, that of drinking wine and the reason behind its prohibition in Islam (intoxication) Oubrou says that some scholars allowed it if it is alcoholically so weak, scholars like Ibrahim al-Nakha'ī (8<sup>th</sup> century), Sufyan al-Thawry (d. 778), Abu Hanifa (d. 767). Ibid., 92.

<sup>798</sup> Ibid., 42

counter other fatwas, or by not giving in to the political demands that press for fatwas frequently.<sup>799</sup>

This said, the following question remains valid: what is Oubrou driving at behind the theory of Sharia of the minority? Three main aims are targeted in Oubrou's work: living a simple Islam with its ethics and spirituality, secularizing Islam and making it Western, and considering the West and Europe a space of testimony where Muslims feel home and contribute to the prosperity of their societies. For reclaiming the simplicity of Islam and secularization, he says the following:

It advocates a simple Islam in its visible practice via minority sharia. This simple fact will help Muslims to access this socio-economic level which will help them in turn, once settled with a comfortable intellectual stage, to seize the subtleties of the profoundness of their religion. And, instead of consuming modernity, they become contributors to it. They will contribute on the large universal level. In sum, the approach I propose is of two levels: a discourse that calls for a simple religious return, but which passes through another discourse of decomplexification which is in itself complicated in its search for the simple, because the simple in religion is never simple to find. The second level is a universal discourse which is more secular. For me, the moment to disclose this discourse has not come yet.<sup>800</sup>

Still about secularization, he also notes the following, “intellectually and religiously, a *theological secularization of Islam* appears necessary to realize this marriage canonique of Islam with the West without divorce. This is what I modestly try to think for a Western Islam.”<sup>801</sup> Otherwise said, Sharia of the minority aims at emancipating Sharia *a priori* from all political systems [Islamic State, Caliphate] as a condition for its elaboration. This gives back to Islam “its original, and essential, religious dimension, to allow it to have a laïc form as is our case in France.”<sup>802</sup> Being immersed in European sociology and theology, Oubrou believes that “Muslims can learn from the Catholic experience.”<sup>803</sup>

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<sup>799</sup> Ibid., 42

<sup>800</sup> Ibid., 206

<sup>801</sup> Ibid., 157!!!

<sup>802</sup> Ibid., 37

<sup>803</sup> Ibid., 230

With his theory, Oubrou also hopes that it can give confidence to Muslims so that they feel home in Europe and the West, and thus feel contributors to their modern societies, and be a bridge between the Western and Islamic world:

My hope is to see Muslims feeling fully European and notably French, thus contributing to this great civilization and human enterprise, and this without putting aside their spirituality, and on condition that their religiosity acculturates and Occidentalizes. Theologians, intellectuals, and other actors, coming from all Muslim communities have to take part in this. Muslims have to do their best to avoid a religious or cultural fracture. They have to be a bridge between the Western world and the Muslim world. I especially remind all the Muslim responsible bodies and representative institutions to communicate to the Muslims the mission that consists in assuring the West by considering it part of them, by working for its good and prosperity, and particularly not to feel as “foreigners within.” The feel of love towards our France and our Europe has to be the engine-factor that reconciles Islam as spirituality and the West as a civilization. Intellectually and religiously, a theological secularization of Islam appears necessary to reach a jurisprudential marriage between Islam and the West without divorce. It is this that I modestly try to think of for a Western Islam.<sup>804</sup>

Oubrou is aware that ‘This type of work aims at changing mentalities in the long term. It is not easy.’<sup>805</sup> With this theoretical preamble, I refer below to the repercussions that it brings about, moving from ‘geotheology’ and ‘Sharia of the minority’ in praxis.

### **c. Implications of Sharia of the Minority in Europe**

In the well circulated debate/ exchange between Babes and Oubrou, published as *Loi d’Allah, loi des homes: liberté, égalité et femmes en islam* (2002), the two scholars raise most of the issues that Muslim jurists are struggling with both in Islamic majority countries and Europe. Though I consider this debate very relevant and worth practicing among Muslim scholars of diverging intellectual trends, and though I also see that Oubrou not only knowledgeably defends his methodology and argumentation against a number of historical errors Babes brings up, John Bowen, in *Can Islam Be French?*

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<sup>804</sup> Ibid., 216

<sup>805</sup> Ibid., 205

(2010), thinks that the debate was engineered by the latter (Babes), and Oubrou was mainly in the justificatory and defensive position:

The mainstream setting ensured that Oubrou would lose the debate. Effectively the senior editor of this book by a mainstream publisher (Albin Michel), Babes sets the agenda and Oubrou remains on the defensive: the question is never, “Do your ideas, Mme Babes, conform to God’s words?” but rather “Do your ideas, M. Oubrou, conform to the demands of freedom and equality? Oubrou must deliver apologetics: Yes, some Muslims believe this or that, but look, the Caliph ‘Umar did not cut off hands, and many of us now think that scripture must be adapted to new times and places.”<sup>806</sup>

In the debate, Babes defends the natural rights of wo/man, clings to the universalists interpretation of human rights, and seems, as Bowen remarks, to be asking Muslim citizens to choose between the two sources of law, the Republican and the Scripturalist/Islamic, while Oubrou tries, through his approach, to ask citizens to reconcile them.<sup>807</sup> Throughout the debate, Oubrou does not relinquish from reminding his interlocutor that his approach does not start from the external projection of “modern” concepts like “equality” on the divine texts. Rather, his approach targets fathoming the intentions of these texts, in light of their “Quranic moment” (temporal and special circumstances), and only then move to the contemporary circumstances to work out a “consensus” among the various interpretations that transpire, the modern concepts and their interpretations included. He says that his approach does not aim at merely satisfying the modern and universalist concepts of natural rights, as Babes does.<sup>808</sup> This said, he still searches for theological justifications for such concepts that modern Europe is founded upon. Without much theological and scriptural details, I refer to his main views on controversial issues that concern Muslims in Europe: laïcité and/or secularization, citizenship and loyalty, liberty and equality of women, the veil, polygamy, *ḥalāl* marriage, and equality among Muslims and non-Muslims (*dhimmis*).

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<sup>806</sup> John R. Bowen, *Can Islam Be French? Pluralism and Pragmatism in a Secularist State* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2010) 190

<sup>807</sup> Ibid.

<sup>808</sup> *Loi d’Allah*, 340. Oubrou is critical of the universalist discourse of human rights which other cultures and countries were not involved in conceptualizing after WWII, and which the West dominantly prescribed in the UDHR of 1948.

*Laïcité and secularization.* As mentioned earlier, Oubrou has moved from the early ties he had with the Muslim Brothers network and its early impact on UOIF (*Union des organisations islamiques de France*). For him, “Islam should not be identified with a State.”<sup>809</sup> For the case of the French laïcité, he is for the preservation and respect of the law of 1905, though he sees that much of the current French interpretation of the law, and laïcité in general, is more of a historical residue and reaction to an established religion (Christianity). Liberty in the French context, he argues, is mostly linked to liberation from religiosity. He considers the Anglo-Saxon model of secularization more open than its French *laïcist* version. Moreover, the fact that *laïcité* is a historically constructed juridical-ideological concept, rather than “a philosophy that was created in the abstract,” makes of it philosophically contingent, ‘relative,’ and ‘revolutionary’ as he says. It remains “indefinite.”<sup>810</sup> This critical point aside, he admits that “If Muslims live in peace now in the West, it is thanks to *laïcité* and secularization.”<sup>811</sup> He also contends that modernity is a chance to rethink Islamic jurisprudence and ethics. He refers to Islamic rulers over the centuries. He does not consider their reign purely clerical or religious; he considers them politicians who use religion for political ruling as long as that serves the State. They were a political corps partly separated from the religious scholars.<sup>812</sup> “In fact, there is a possibility for secularization in Islam. Theologically, it is possible.”<sup>813</sup>

*Citizenship and loyalty.* Oubrou defends the equality in citizenship that the modern national and secular state guarantees. Thus, the notion of *dhimmitude* that concerns Jews and Christians in classical jurisprudence is no longer applicable now, though it had its advantages for these minorities. In its context, *dhimmitude* was an advanced right.<sup>814</sup> He also defends the conception of “double citizenship.” “To love one’s religion and one’s country, France, is not only possible, in this case, but totally natural, human, legitimate, and religiously justifiable. It is about having a big spirit and a big

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<sup>809</sup> *Profession imam*, 166.

<sup>810</sup> *Ibid.*, 226

<sup>811</sup> *Ibid.*, 233

<sup>812</sup> *Ibid.*, 228

<sup>813</sup> *Ibid.*, 232

<sup>814</sup> *Ibid.*, 234

heart to realize this double citizenship, celestial and terrestrial.”<sup>815</sup> He dissociates himself from preachers and imams that preach “their simplistic Arab Islam,” and by which they “spoil our work.”<sup>816</sup> For him, *imams* who are closer to the public have to be well immersed in the culture of the society they live and work in. Their preaching has to answer the needs of the believers in this particular society. For instance, he is against preachers who insult Jews and Christians in the sermons.<sup>817</sup> He demands of European Muslims not to confuse the current political realities with the textual narratives of the Quran that have their particular causes of revelation – *asbāb annuzul*. By way of illustration, he asks the Muslim youth not to be more Palestinian than the Palestinians themselves when it comes to defending their rights, “I don’t see any use for the French Muslims in tying their destiny to the Palestinian cause.”<sup>818</sup> Violence is abhorred in Islam, and jihad “is inscribed in the Quran for a just cause,” for defence.<sup>819</sup>

Hiding behind Islam, as a way of victimization or resistance to socio-political problems in society is not a sober way of approaching religion. Islam should not be used as the religion of “the wretched of the earth.”<sup>820</sup> Oubrou defends a French Islam, and a Western Islam whereby Muslims feel they belong and contribute to the countries where they belong. A previous long passage was quoted in this regard, from which I re-cite this short statement: “My hope is to see Muslims feeling fully European and notably French, thus contributing to this great civilization and human enterprise, and this without putting aside their spirituality, and on condition that their religiosity acculturates and Occidentalizes.”<sup>821</sup>

The issue of *da‘wa*, or prozelytization, is invoked in Europe as controversial. Should it be allowed as part of freedom of expression and religious belief or not? The

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<sup>815</sup> Ibid., 43

<sup>816</sup> Ibid., 151

<sup>817</sup> Ibid., 141

<sup>818</sup> Ibid., 165

<sup>819</sup> This is statement against recent violent events in France, committed by a French Muslim. See: Alexandra Schwartzbrod, interview with Oubrou, «Cette affaire va laisser des séquelles» [“This Affair Will Have Aftermaths”], 23 mars 2012, retrievable from : <http://www.liberation.fr/societe/01012397757-cette-affaire-va-laisser-des-sequelles>

<sup>820</sup> *Profession imam*, 195-196.

<sup>821</sup> Ibid., 216

controversy on da‘wa stems from the fact that it brings fear of Islamization of Europe, seeing that Islamization here is linked with what the concept of Sharia law (mainly huddud sanctions, women issues, and polygamy) brings about. For Oubrou, the idea of da‘wa is to serve society for the good. Its ideal of *al-amr bi al-ma‘ruf wa annahy ‘ani lmunkar* (promoting the good and forbidding the bad) should not be used to nurture hatred and divisions in family and society, and thus interrupt stability. Its “communicational aspect” for the transmission of the religious message of Islam bases itself on “love of the other,” without which the intention of this transmission is void. It is the realization of the good demeanour of the Muslim in his society, while living the Testimony/ Shahada, that answers the ideal of da‘wa.<sup>822</sup> “The best way to honor one’s religion is to live it fully but intelligently, in harmony with one’s self, the others, and the world.”<sup>823</sup>

*Liberty and equality. Women.* Oubrou’s book-debate with Babes is on the issue of women in Islam. To condense the detailed accounts here, Oubrou first and foremost defends the ontological equality of women and men from a Scriptural perspective. (Babes is also for the same argument). He prioritises this ontological view over the modern view that advances natural human rights. As noted earlier, he avoids a projectionist methodology in which modern concepts are forced on the tradition. “God created man and woman equal.”<sup>824</sup> “There is equality between man and woman in Islam.”<sup>825</sup> Oubrou and Babes discuss many verses and hadiths, the causes of their revelation, the way they were first interpreted and applied, and how they have been also conceived or applied historically by Islamic jurists. Oubrou seems well immersed in the history of revelation and Quranic-and-hadith hermeneutics, *tafsīrs*. Though challenged on various issues by Babes, he challenges her back on a number of historical errors that she either misinterprets or simply misses. Simultaneously, she finds him resistant to accommodating natural rights for equality without going through socio-political justifications and explanations of various verses-hadiths that speak of, or hint at, the

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<sup>822</sup> Ibid., 219-223

<sup>823</sup> Ibid., 155

<sup>824</sup> Ibid., 57

<sup>825</sup> Ibid., 62

inferiority of women as has been interpreted by the dominant orthodoxy, or as has been translated in European languages. Below I refer to his views on the points indicated earlier.

The ontological equality of woman and man justifies, for Oubrou, the expansion of equality to other aspects of male-female relations. First, for the question of the highest socio-political position that has been dominated historically in most cultures by men, Oubrou believes that woman can head the State, as a Caliph or Imam as traditionally named. Like some earlier scholars (e.g. some Hanafites, al-Tabari, Ibn Taymiyya), he sees neither a scriptural nor a historical proof that Muslim women were deprived of heading states, or being interpreters of the Quran, judges and jurisprudence scholars, or imams in leading prayers for both males and females (e.g. Um Waraqa was ordered by the Prophet to lead the prayers for both males and females). Two of his wives, Aysha, and Um Salam, were religious scholars and were consulted by male scholars. Plainly, “I am for the access of women to all leading political positions, cultural and religious responsibilities, against all jurisprudential or canonist obstacles; at the same time, I am also for thinking this access in light of the specificity of woman [nature], and for studying it from a biological, psychological, and sociological perspective.”<sup>826</sup>

Oubrou does not abrogate the seemingly masculinist verses or hadiths without trying to capture what he calls the “Quranic moment,” which may, in light of modern sciences, be examined not only from ideological-political-philosophic perspectives, but also from biological, psychological, and sociological perspectives. As an illustration of his point about the integration of biological considerations of difference and/ or parity between man and woman, he refers to some scientific findings about the brain weight of woman which is about 10 to 15 % less than man’s, and their neurological system vulnerability to oblivion is possible since they may not concentrate on two tasks at the same time as men are capable of doing – it is about memory and not intelligence, as he emphasizes. He does not say that this is why the Quranic verse decrees that two women witness equals one in the court. He (simply) says that verifying the reasons behind such a

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<sup>826</sup> *Loi d’Allah*, 308.

decree, which does not look egalitarian in modern societies, should be studied from a number of perspectives, including the exact sciences, besides the socio-political circumstances that necessitated such a decree. His sociological justification for the requirement of two women witnesses as equal to one man in administration (commerce and courts mainly) goes as follows: Arab women doing trade and accessing administrations was new with Islam; so, as a new practice, they may have needed to take time and learn the details of business, and that could lead to some mistakes in contracting for instance; as a secure way the, two women were required so that if one forgets, the other can remind her. Oubrou looks for ways to clarify controversies, though they can be easily used against him, for such arguments sound masculinist and archaic for some, like Babes, his interlocutor.<sup>827</sup>

*Inheritance.* Oubrou applies the same socio-cultural paradigm of analysis on the issue of inheritance which Quranic verses have clearly established in a mathematical way. From a modern egalitarian perspective, these verses are highly non-egalitarian. In most of the divisions the woman receives less than man. Again, Oubrou does not abrogate these verses but reads them in context, following his “double movement approach” to serve his project of “geothology.” He brings up the advantages the Arabian woman gains, compared to the man’s household responsibilities which are fully his. For instance, as a wife, woman has no obligation to take care of the household finances, even in cases she is rich and her husband is poor. He, for example, has no right to ask for her financial support, or oblige her to take care of the household financially. The *mahr*, the dowry, is also for her alone, and its sum is up to her to decide – at least legally; in a patriarchal society this can also be decided by the males of the family or the tutor. For her jewellery, for her beauty, she does not have to pay *zakat* annual tax on them. As a sister, or mother, or close relative, woman is also taken care of financially by one of her close male relatives. As an heir, in some cases, through very rare, she can receive a higher part from the inheritance. Such a socio-cultural condition was taken into account by revelation, that is why the Quranic verses advantage man on the matter of inheritance. For Oubrou, such injunctions are not constant, nor are they normative. Rather, they are

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<sup>827</sup> Ibid., 321-323. (The same point is expressed in *Profession imam*, 64-65)

applied cases of the general message of Islam which is equality and social justice. When the context changes, they can change, too. He says, commenting on inheritance discussion with Babes: That is why I have spoken about the ethicization of Sharia, which consists in modulating the application of laws on moral bases by bearing in mind the major principles of equity.”<sup>828</sup>

What I see Oubrou pushing for is not an easy admission of natural rights and passive cancellation of some divine injunctions (like women’s inheritance, witness in court, *mahr/* dowry). Though he defends equality among the sexes, he at the same time defends what he considers natural/ biological dispositions of man and woman, “*humanitude masculine,*” and “*humanitude feminine.*”<sup>829</sup> He defends women freedom to access all jobs, and at the same time he defends laws that can preserve family stability and childhood rights: for example, he backs up the once suggested European law to advantage women not to work at night, as a way of preserving the right to family, and the right of the child. Oubrou defends equality of rights, freedom, and autonomy of women as long as they do not harm her “biological, psychological, and sociological” rights, which he sees are still male influenced even in modern societies. Equality between the sexes for him does not mean uniformist parity that some *egalitariste feministe* discourse calls for:

In spite of my reservation regarding the consequences of certain egalitarian feminist discourse, no canonist [i.e. scriptural or jurisprudential] mention of gender should be made to access to any position, or to public function, or...I do not find any clear and precise text, neither in Quran nor in hadith, that reserves power uniquely to the masculine gender.<sup>830</sup>

Babes, his interlocutor, does not accept these arguments of “*humanitude feminine*” and considers them masculinist.

With regards to the case of Muslim woman marrying a non-Muslim, which is not allowed by unanimity among classical scholars, Oubrou says that the high conditions of male dominance of the household is not applicable in Europe, and the condition that

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<sup>828</sup> Ibid., 105

<sup>829</sup> Ibid., 289

<sup>830</sup> Ibid., 289

Muslims were a minority in the early formative era and thus Muslim women, who were mostly housewives, were vulnerable to non-Muslim males non-Islamic practices, which justified the prohibition of such a marriage – practices like the non-Muslim man forcing his Muslim wife to have a sexual intercourse during the day of Ramadan, or forcing their children to be reared up as non-Muslims. Now, if such a prohibition of not marrying a non-Muslim is forced on a Muslim woman, that could just lead to break ups in family ties, which is not what Islamic jurisprudence aims at. In such a situation, and also because not all Sunni jurists emphasize the presence of a *wali* (guardian of the woman or her tutor), such a condition of not marrying a non-Muslim is not an issue, as long as the freedom of the girl, as well as her rights are guaranteed. Marrying a non-Muslim does not make her an apostate.<sup>831</sup> Even in cases of apostasy (announced by male or female), freedom of religion is guaranteed. The Prophet never applied death penalty of apostates.<sup>832</sup>

The *wilayat* (guardianship) aimed at securing woman rights in a patriarchal Arabian context. For Oubrou, the *wali* was like a spokesperson for the lady that is getting married for the first time. The customs of the time required her decency (*la pudeur, al-hishmah*) in speech and appearance amidst men, so a *wali* had to facilitate the process of marriage. Now that such a condition of woman frequentation of the public administrations is not longer a space dominated by man, and where the woman does not

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<sup>831</sup> *Profession imam*, 235.

<sup>832</sup> *Loi d'Allah*, 44. Leila Babes clarifies that it was the Abbasid Caliph Almansour (reigned 754-775) who decreed the law of apostasy for political reasons among the sects and jurisprudential schools that he considered *zindiqs (zanadiqa)*, heretics (53-54). Actually, the first Caliph Abu Bakr (reigned 630-632) after the Prophet fought the tribes that left Islam after the death of the Prophet, and withdrew from the pacts they had with him, and refused to pay the *zakat*, or *jizia* in the cases of Jews and Christians. This was considered a treason by Abu Kabr, and also a weakening element for the still young Muslim community, so he spent his two years of reign forcing these tribes to go back to their pacts with Muslims and enter under their league again, as they had done before during the life of the Prophet. These are known as *hurub arridah*, or wars of renegades. Classically, they are not considered as death sentence or wars launched against anyone who leaves Islam. The application of apostasy in these wars does not concern individuals, but societies or tribes that had allegiances with Muslims, which they broke. It is considered a political decision, treason of a pact, and not a theological say on a group or individual who is no longer Muslim. So, when Babes says that the Abbasid Caliph Almansour initiated the apostasy law, she also means that it is a political decision against his own wills and interpretation of the school of jurisprudence he adopts and the way he rules. And this law was mostly against individuals who held opposing views.

have to feel obliged to be escorted, the Muslim woman can conduct a marriage without a *wali*.<sup>833</sup>

Related to the question of marriage, and while Muslims are demanding tribunal courts that take care of the registration of what is commonly known in Europe as *ḥalāl* marriages (and resolve family disputes), Oubrou takes the view that marriage in Islam is civil, and aims at securing rights of both man and woman, and their children, and if a civil (or secular) administration does this, there is no need for a religious court that simply does the same work. As to the idea that divorce is always in the hands of man, and woman is always a victim, Oubrou replies that Islamic jurisprudence has given the right to woman to list her conditions in the marriage contract. She can ask to reserve the right of marriage in her hands. She has the right of *khul'*, i.e. the right to ask for divorce. If divorce is a right for man, woman has then the right of *khul'*.<sup>834</sup>

Among the other rights of woman in marriage is *mahr*, dowry, which is also prescribed in the Quran. The latter did not bring it as a new custom, but was already practiced in Arabia, but simply made it clear as a right of woman in contracting for marriage, to be given either before or after marriage, in case of divorce. (In some Arab-Islamic countries, the *mahr* to be given as a gift to the bride can be so high, beyond the financial ability of the groom, as a way of securing some finances for the woman in case of divorce. Sometimes the *mahr* is decided by the males from the side of the woman/bride, for they consider themselves the ones responsible for her in case of divorce, and they have thus to secure that at least she gets some money in that case.) However, Oubrou states that “*mahr* is not part of the pillars of marriage in Islam. A woman may do without it if she wants.”<sup>835</sup> With this view on the *mahr*, Oubrou distinguishes between what is religious and what is cultural, facilitates marriage for man, gives freedom of choice to

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<sup>833</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

<sup>834</sup> *Ibid.*, 320-321.

<sup>835</sup> *Profession imam*, 48

woman, and paves the way to avoid, or at least reduce, Sharia courts or counselling in cases of family disputes and divorce.<sup>836</sup>

As to polygamy, Oubrou is for its abolition, as an answer to the Quranic emphasis that monogamy is the just alternative, even though it (the Quran) allows it (polygamy), and restricts it. As with previous examples, he does not condescend on the Quranic injunctions because modern concepts have to prevail. He is critical of the unrestricted extra-marital affairs more practiced in the West, while restricted and canonized polygamy is diabolized.<sup>837</sup> He goes through sociological, anthropological, and also biological justifications of polygamy. Not to go through a lengthy argumentation on the issue, as found in the book exchange with Babes, Oubrou endorses the view of some of the Hanbalite school (madhab) which does not allow polygamy once monogamy has prevailed in society, for that is the norm the Quran also prefers.<sup>838</sup> He says, “For my personal point of view, I do not admit it [i.e. polygamy] neither for me nor for my children. At the same time, I consider it a Quranic permission that cannot be abrogated irrevocably. It can be valid exceptionally, and limited in time.”<sup>839</sup> Its permissibility is applicable, for him, in cases of war or natural catastrophes in which society may lose more men, and the State should consequently intervene to adjust the sexes equilibrium for the well functioning of society. (He refers to the examples of wars in Chechnya, Bosnia, and Kosovo).<sup>840</sup>

Regarding the polemics over the veil, particularly during-and-after their ban in France in 2004, Oubrou considers this law a “moral censorship,” “an unfit demeanour

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<sup>836</sup> Oubrou was asked about the religious say on a case that happened in France and became widespread in the media: a Muslim groom discovers that his bride is not virgin; he disgraces her by conveying that to her family that same day of marriage; he asks for divorce and compensation, and sues her for ‘deceit.’ Here are excerpts from his reply: “Neither a man nor a woman have to unveil their emotional or sexual past, because it is first disapproved of morally, and second so as to preserve the unity of the couple, especially in a culture where jealousy is blind. [...] I truly consider weak a man who goes to the tribunal to say that his wife is not virgin. This is disgraceful. [...] Virginity is not a condition for the validity of marriage in Islam. [...] We should not take our personal desires and our archaic cultures for Islam.” *Profession imam*, 54-56

<sup>837</sup> *Loi d’Allah*, 102.

<sup>838</sup> *Ibid.*, 112

<sup>839</sup> *Ibid.*, 111

<sup>840</sup> *Ibid.*, 111

from a big civilization,” and “a mistake.”<sup>841</sup> He defends women’s right to belief, as long as that does not endanger public security. He is not favourable to the full veil, the *niqab*.<sup>842</sup> For the veil, the *hijab* that covers the hair, he reads the sources as decreeing it primarily for the wives of the Prophet, and not the all Muslim women. The Caliph Omar ordered it as a public practice. After the law passed in France against the veil, he asked the Muslim girls to respect it. He recognizes that more Muslim girls and women, including converts, have opted for the veil after the media and political disource assault on Islamic symbols. The practice has become “more or less now a cultural ethic.” “The veil is not part of belief. It is not even part of the *‘ibādāt*. It is part of ethics.”<sup>843</sup>

With these various views on jurisprudential issues as inscribed by the Quran, Sunna, or jurisprudence schools, Oubrou validates his statement that “law is made for man,”<sup>844</sup> and that the hermeneutical approach he follows serves man, “I advocate moderate and just hermeneutics.”<sup>845</sup> “I fight the norm that poisons the life of people.”<sup>846</sup> With the views he advances, Oubrou does not expect a total harmony on the intellectual, theological and jurisprudential level all around Europe, but at least wishes that an agreement concerns the rituals of religion, like the religious ceremonies of Ramadan start and end, and Eid days.<sup>847</sup> On the other hand, he considers that education and the school in Europe, France in his particular case, has to recognize the Islamic presence and contribution both historically and contemporarily, and avoids considering Islam a “civilization” of the Middle Ages, and not a “religion” that is now also European.<sup>848</sup>

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<sup>841</sup> *Profession imam*, 82

<sup>842</sup> *Ibid.*, 86

<sup>843</sup> *Ibid.*, 108. I understand that in this statement by ethics he means the demeanour a Muslim woman integrates in her public behaviour as part of her spirituality.

<sup>844</sup> *Ibid.*, 100

<sup>845</sup> *Ibid.*, 116

<sup>846</sup> *Ibid.*, 104

<sup>847</sup> *Ibid.*, 179

<sup>848</sup> Schwartzbrod, interview with Oubrou, available online; see above.

## 2. Abdennour Bidar: from Self Islam to Overcoming Religion

An interesting version of European Islam emerges with Abdennour Bidar. Bidar is a young French Muslim (b. 1971), philosopher by training and profession. Since 2003 he has entered the public debate on Islam, reform, and Europe, with his first long letter/article entitled “Letter of a European Muslim: Europe or the Renaissance of Islam.”<sup>849</sup> His public engagement has grown since then. Bidar’s intellectual production and interest in the debate originates from his French Islam, the way he experienced it in his childhood and adolescence, up to his mid-20s, characterized by extreme internal dilemma, before this dilemma develops into a philosophico-theological approach, which I refer to as theosophic.<sup>850</sup> In reading him, I will not bind myself to the chronology of the texts. As I have done with the previous scholars, chronology helps to trace the socio-political circumstances in which the scholar emerges, but it is the intellectual development stages and their major thematic drives that are of interest in my reading.

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<sup>849</sup> Bidar, « Lettre d'un musulman européen. L'Europe et la renaissance de l'islam » ["Letter of a European Muslim: Europe and the Renaissance of Islam"], *Esprit* magazine, July 2003, retrievable from: <http://www.esprit.presse.fr/archive/review/article.php?code=8361>

<sup>850</sup> I mean the merging of theological interpretation(s) with philosophic argumentation. I take the first to mean interpretations that are related to a religious doctrine or creed, while the second, though often assumed to be purely rationalist, can build on the creed but move to a higher level of abstraction to the extent that an ordinary observation no longer sees any reference to religion or divinity at all. In this sense, I can link the theosophic approach of Bidar to Islamic theology as known by *kalam*, literally translated as religious dispute. In clearer terms, as a new theologian-*mutakalim*, as I consider him, he both brings the old definitions of theology and philosophy to the fore and also elevates them to a merging level. I say he is a theologian, knowing the criticism I may receive for such a claim, because he attempts a new understanding of God, the Quran, prophethood, man, mortality, and so on, which traditionally is the work of theologians who presented and defended Islam when facing Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, etc. Bidar, as a modern theologian, is facing first of all Muslim scholars, and also modernity, atheism, secularism, and other religions. As to being a philosopher, that is his background and profession. It is the field that has empowered him to use analytical and rational tools for his theological purposes. So, my use of the term theosophy differs from its common meaning of mysticism. In brief terms then, by theosophy I mean ‘theological philosophy’ or ‘philosophical theology,’ and not only ‘transcendental theosophy’ of illuminist and mystic philosophers like Avicenna, Suhrawardi, Ibn ‘Arabi, or Mulla Sadra as they are studied by the contemporary renowned Iranian philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr. See, for instance, Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardi, Ibn ‘Arabi* (Delmar and New York: Caravan, 1964); and *Sadr al-Din Shirazi and his Transcendent Theosophy* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1978).

I divide the work of Bidar into three stages, which I follow in introducing him here.<sup>851</sup> The first stage refers to the experience and concept of self Islam as it develops from his personal experience as a young European Muslim. *Self islam: histoire d'un islam personnel [Self Islam: Story of a Personal Islam]* (2006) catches the early seeds of an intellectual believer who lives his faith in a liberal context. At this same stage, Bidar also shares his Sufist concerns for a version of a reformed Islam under the conditions of modernity and human rights (liberty, equality, fraternity/ dialogue). This concern is presented in his short book *Un Islam pour notre temps [An Islam for our Times]* (2004).<sup>852</sup> Bidar's second stage produces an "existentialist" reading of the Quran in which the "immortality of man" becomes its axis.<sup>853</sup> His book *L'islam sans soumission: pour un existentialisme musulman [Islam without Submission: for an Islamic Existentialism]* (2008) becomes, in my view, his most important contribution to the contemporary Islamic scholarship on reform. Self Islam approach re-appears again as an expression of rational, and not only personal, spirituality in which the individual is the "heir of God" on earth where he gains infinite presence and secures historical immortality beyond the metaphysical classical interpretations.<sup>854</sup> Bidar's third stage moves from what could be called the "classical dichotomy of thinking" (like religious versus secular, Islam versus West) to a more "expanded view of the sacred," to call it so. This current stage of thought brings Bidar's critique of Islamic thought and Western thought together, and fuses them both in his approach of "overcoming" classical views on religion, secularism, and

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<sup>851</sup> I had already read Bidar's first four books before his latest one, *Sortir de la religion*, where he also speaks of three stages of his intellectual life, which are the ones presented above. Even before his latest book came out, the reader could notice the development of his thought. His idea of «overcoming religion» is hinted at a couple of times in *Islam sans soumission*, and is made even clearer when one reads his work on Iqbal. I did not wait to read his statement about the development of his own thoughts to realize that. It was clear, and he made it clearer. *Comment sortir de la religion [How to Overcome Religion]* (Paris: La Decouverte, 2012).

<sup>852</sup> *Un Islam pour notre temps [An Islam for Our Times]* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 2004); *Self islam: histoire d'un islam personnel [Self Islam : a Story of Personal Islam]* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 2006).

<sup>853</sup> In his latest book, Bidar thinks of this stage and questions himself, "was I still a Muslim philosopher?" *Sortir de la religion*, 142.

<sup>854</sup> *L'islam sans soumission : pour un existentialisme musulman [Islam without Submission: for an Islamic Existentialism]* (Paris, Albin Michel, 2008). At this stage, Bidar also produces a book which clearly manifests my understanding of the remarkable influence Mohammed Iqbal has on him. I recognized this influence before this book came out: *L'islam face à la mort de Dieu: Actualité de Mohammed Iqbal [Islam Face to Face with the Death of God: Mohammad Iqbal Revisited]* (Paris, Editions François Bourin, 2010). I do not aim at comparing the thoughts of the two, Iqbal and Bidar, here but I refer to that *en passant* few times only.

atheism. About this stage he says, “I do not want to be enclosed in the category of “New Muslim intellectuals” just because I have initially started from studying the Quran.”<sup>855</sup>

### **a. Self Islam: Pathways for Spiritual Modernity**

#### **Personal Journey towards Self Islam**

Bidar is the son of a French convert doctor, and a Moroccan step-father. He was born Muslim from his mother side. He lived his childhood between Christianity and Islamic households. He spent a lot of time, until the age of twenty four, with his atheist grandfather, from the maternal side, in his vineyard. When in the “wine farm,” he would ask “Where is Islam?”; he answers himself as such: it is “in my heart.”<sup>856</sup> “I had the faculty to feel Muslim more or less in any context, even in the contexts, situations, and companies where Islam was totally absent.”<sup>857</sup> With his grandfather, as he retells in his biography, *Self Islam*, he learnt a great deal about man, humanism, and life without God. He was very close to his grandfather, though they never had a discussion on Islam. Bidar’s mother was his “spiritual initiator.” He speaks of after-dinner family sessions reading and discussing spirituality and world religions, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, etc. He says she taught him the greatness of man in Islam, dignity, and humanism, “The education I received seems to me priceless because it did not force me to respect man: it invoked him in me by giving me a high idea of the human kind. Respect for mankind came, henceforth, from itself [human being]; it imposed itself.”<sup>858</sup>

Bidar says that *Self Islam* aims at narrating his youth tough times between two worlds before managing to unite them in one, “this book is the story of a slow and obstinate construction of my unity.”<sup>859</sup> He does reveal the dichotomies he used to feel as a French Muslim when young boy and adolescent, Muslim at home and in the mosque, and French outside, where religion is not only not spoken of, but also suspected and considered backward. With his *djellaba* in the school bag, he would visit the mosque on

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<sup>855</sup> *Sortir de la religion*, 144

<sup>856</sup> *Self islam*, 20

<sup>857</sup> *Ibid.*, 31

<sup>858</sup> *Ibid.*, 74

<sup>859</sup> *Ibid.*, 35

Fridays, and feel security, quietude, and energy. Outside, he would see Arab youth reciprocating discriminatory language with their French peers. With these scenes and way of life, between two worlds, he would feel mature at an early age, raise questions, and decide to work out ways to demolish the wall that stood between these two worlds.<sup>860</sup>

Bidar aspired to identify himself as a French Muslim but did not have the common features of the mainstream French. His name had frequently to be explained, and with it he had to explain that his name, which in Arabic means The Son of Light, does not mean he is not French. Sometimes he had to say that his name was “Pierre” and sometime he had to eat pork at school to avoid the looks of his peers, and the justifications of not eating it if he had not.<sup>861</sup> The early internal divisions were then on identity: how to feel a French Muslim, without being considered of another foreign ethnicity. “I was a Muslim of nowhere.”<sup>862</sup>

With high school grades, Bidar managed to make it to the elitist ENS (*Ecole Normal Supérieur*) in Paris. There, with his religiosity, spirituality, as well as philosophic studies, he would realize that his peers spoke just Western philosophy, believed in reason, had little curiosity level, and did not worry much about life, the metaphysical worlds, as he did. He lived “a kind of disgraceful Islam.”<sup>863</sup> He prayed clandestinely. “My Islam became clandestine and furtive.”<sup>864</sup> “I found myself exiled in my own country.”<sup>865</sup> That was the first disillusion in Paris, in France, in the West. At this stage, wrath against the West reached its peak. Those were the years of “internal division.” He felt rejected by his own society. “I felt profoundly denied, rejected, insulted. And I found myself in a violent reaction [...] against my own Western identity.”<sup>866</sup> Bidar felt he was carrying inside him the conflict of religion and reason that the West has been in, “[T]he conflict between philosophy and religion, reason and faith, which has preoccupied all the Western

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<sup>860</sup> Ibid., 26-30

<sup>861</sup> Ibid., 48

<sup>862</sup> Ibid., 47

<sup>863</sup> Ibid., 92

<sup>864</sup> Ibid., 91

<sup>865</sup> Ibid., 93

<sup>866</sup> Ibid., 113

civilization for centuries became my own interior dilemma.”<sup>867</sup> In ENS philosophy class, he once intervened and suggested to enrich Western philosophy with Islamic spirituality. His professor received that with a kind of sarcasm. Bidar decided to leave the prestigious ENS.

With his spiritual wife, a convert to Islam and classmate in ENS, he entered a renowned Sufi path, *tariqa Boutchichiya*, in Morocco at the age of nineteen, and stayed as a disciple in the Sufi school for seven years. Those were years of enlightenment and mystic experience. However, they were in a different world. The Western world and the Oriental spiritual world were both inside, but they did not converge; they kept apart, the first for social life, in its minimum, and the latter for profound spirituality. With time, Bidar says, he realized the enclosure of the group, its sectarianism, its feeling of superiority, its genders no-mixing rules, and would experience the hierarchy some leaders of the Sufi *tariqa* wanted to build among the practitioners. It was this enclosure, lack of liberty, that would entice him, and his wife, to leave the Sufi order, in rebellion, in 1997, “The West woke up in me: my critical spirit, my desire for liberty, and also maybe the French character of independence and insubordination.”<sup>868</sup> That was the second main illusion he had to go through in his story with personal Islam: the Sufi path was not a final answer for his personal quest. He quit the ENS and the Western temple, and now the Oriental temple quit him; he felt he belonged nowhere, “I was then from neither the Orient nor the Occident. I had no place anywhere.”<sup>869</sup>

Back in France, he started to prepare for the “*agregation*” tough exams of philosophy and to study at La Sorbonne, while living with his kids in a small city in the middle of the woods. This period of silence, with his wife and kids, was happy, but also torturous. Feelings of “depression,” “absolute void” tormented him; still, he had hope and patience. His name, Abdennour, gave him “inner light,” and the divine still lived in him, through his long contemplation times.<sup>870</sup> It was “dark light” for him, “I was not spiritually dead [...]. I continued to see the universe in the Light of Allah. Outside any particular

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<sup>867</sup> Ibid., 121

<sup>868</sup> Ibid., 154

<sup>869</sup> Ibid., 161

<sup>870</sup> Ibid., 163-165

path, I remained a Sufi by heart, in the sense that I always lived my Islam as contemplation with the universal Life (*la Vie universelle*).”<sup>871</sup>

After these years of “inner division” Bidar still keeps the divine light with him, but in its new shape. He has sieved the West and Islamic tradition, and now he seems confident that he has not lost his faith, but he got rid of the dilemma it has caused him, and lost with it part of its rituals. He recounts it this way, “I no longer knew where the right and the wrong were, nor did I know if these terms still had some sense. I was henceforth in a totally flat world [...]. The principles of Islam, too, seemed relative to me.”<sup>872</sup> The consequences of the experience is that the ‘ibādāt/worship rituals are also questioned, “from then, my religious practice has nearly entirely faded [...]. I nearly left all these practices [...] now, I am no longer pious, after I have been so for long. I no longer consider the Quran as an absolute truth.”<sup>873</sup> He then wonders, “Am I still Muslim then?” He confidently answers he still is, for the Islam he has found goes beyond rituals.

Bidar’s realization is summarized in the idea of *wahdat al-wujud*, Oneness of God, which one recognizes in the first pillar of Islam, *Shahaha/* Testimony. This realization would be the pivotal axis on which Bidar builds his idea of Self Islam, Islamic reform, and the theory of immortality as will be explained afterwards. He says:

What is left to me of my Islamic tradition is the essential, which we call Testimony: there is of reality but Allah and Mohammad His Messenger. Allah as a name for the Great Life. [...] and Mohammad as the symbol of man who brings the message and responsibility of this Life, who contemplates it and works for it to make existence multiple, and to make men themselves [...].<sup>874</sup>

He adds that the Islam he has discovered, which he pictures as the Grail of the era, is more universalist, and compatible with the European/ French context he for long considered not hospitable to him:

When I realized this, I knew I have discovered the Grail of our epoch. Because in this Islam that celebrates diversity, richness, and profound signification of all

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<sup>871</sup> Ibid., 167

<sup>872</sup> Ibid., 188

<sup>873</sup> Ibid., 189

<sup>874</sup> Ibid., 194

world differences I also regained the Islam I was taught [], the values of France and modernity: liberty, equality, fraternity. Actually, it is Allah the Great Life that manifests itself in all existences [...]. Harmony between the mystic vision of Islam and the moral values of the Occident.<sup>875</sup>

What Bidar is reactivating with more emphasis here is the perception of the universe as a manifestation of God, without this being an Incarnation, but just part and parcel of Him. Bidar is sacralizing the universe, and shattering the walls that separate the sacred and the profane, and it is this that would have repercussions on his perception of the whole Islamic tradition, including its basic pillars, the pillars of Islam, as well as the pillars of faith. (I will be back to this later). The passage below illustrates his key thought:

There is no longer a separation between the sacred and the profane, neither is there any longer what is sacred and what is profane. The Great Life of Allah (*La Grande Vie d'Allah*) is at the same time all that is sacred, all that is profane, all our beliefs, and all our atheisms. For my part, I do not consider that praying is an act more sacred than speaking, nor that the mosque is a sacred place while the street is profane. I live in a world where the sacred has trespassed its old limits, like a stream that drifts everything [...]. Making love is sacred, laughing is sacred, sharing is sacred, like meditating or fasting. And I have realized in these conditions that I can lead any particular way of life without stopping a second from feeling being Muslim: whether I pray or not, whether I eat pork or not, has strictly no importance.

My Islam has nothing more of the religious. It is not an Islam of rituals, but of vision, of contemplation of Allah in the diversity of the world.<sup>876</sup>

Bidar has peeled off Islam of its layers, and argues to have found the essence of it, which is the conception of all the world as a sacred place, and this way the antagonism of sacred vs. profane vanishes. Allah as the “Great Life” (*La Grande Vie*) manifests itself in every sight, act and thought. With this realization, Bidar feels “liberated, free of my previous contradictions.”<sup>877</sup>

With such an existentialist found peace, Bidar gains back his energy, starts his engaged public and intellectual life, establishes al-Mamoun think tank to observe the evolution of Islam in Europe, and first becomes into public lights with his long article, *Lettre d'un musulman European* (“Letter from A European Muslim,” 2003). The idea in

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<sup>875</sup> Ibid., 192

<sup>876</sup> Ibid., 191

<sup>877</sup> Ibid., 210

the article would become the axis that he worked out in more details in his later books, to be referred to. In that early article he argued that “Islam as a religion, as a system of truths, is behind us.”<sup>878</sup> For him, this applies to all religions, “I wanted to say that religion as a religion is going to die, and it will not be born again.”<sup>879</sup> What Bidar sees emerging is another phase of religiosity, mostly expressed spiritually, “I do not believe in the resurgence of religion in the future centuries. The spiritual dimension of man is taking another face.”<sup>880</sup> This spiritual dimension is the crux of the matter in the concept of Self Islam.

Self Islam is founded on deep meditation and questioning of the meaning of life, and the sources of its values. It is based on liberty and responsible freedom of conscience. Bidar regrets the lack of freedom of conscience of the Muslims, even in Europe, which the community shapes and influences. Bidar challenges every Muslim to think autonomously and to listen sincerely to his “own conscience” and to put everything under the liberty of every Muslim,” for

In a “global civilization” founded on liberty, every Muslim conscience has to be left entirely free to choose its code of belonging to the Islamic culture. What the Book forbids or prescribes are but possible prohibitions and obligations. It is up to every man to decide what to do with these possibilities the Quran offers. The Text proposes, man disposes.<sup>881</sup>

Bidar calls for an Islam of conviction, adopted consciously, willingly, and not submissively. “Personal responsibility” is stressed. Every individual has the right to take of Islam according to one’s level of responsibility and spiritual need which “the interior voice” communicates, “God does not want slaves, but responsible men. Islam does not mean submission, but obedience: we are *forced* to submit, but we choose to *obey*.”<sup>882</sup> Otherwise put,

Spiritual responsibility of every Muslim is to find *his* [or her] own way, his Islam – which I call *Self Islam*, personal Islam, that means the adequate way of each to

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<sup>878</sup> Ibid., 201

<sup>879</sup> Ibid., 202

<sup>880</sup> Ibid., 203

<sup>881</sup> Ibid., 220

<sup>882</sup> Ibid., 83

attach to Islam, and to Islamic culture [...] according to a principle: “take of Islamic obligations just what you need for your spiritual path. [...] This has to correspond to an interior status.”<sup>883</sup>

“Spiritual responsibility” is the base for autonomous Self Islam. From his personal experience, Bidar now prays, reads Quran, and fasts just when his inner status requires more of spiritual exercise, but he is always in communion with Allah through the means of *munajat*, i.e. constant thinking of the divine. Whatever he does, the divine is in his mind, for there is no longer any separation between the sacred and the secular.<sup>884</sup> He experiences “lived spirituality,” where the public and the private no longer count.<sup>885</sup> It is here that the first signs of the existentialist approach develop. Self Islam is an approach to trespass Islam as submission towards *Ihsan*, “excellence,” which is like Aristotle’s *arête*, the virtue of being the best you can be, and act according to profound nature of the self.<sup>886</sup> To realize this “profound self” individual liberty is a requisite.

After four years of first writing the autobiography and introduction of the concept of Self Islam, Bidar feels that he is still misunderstood. His Self Islam and the notion of liberty he annexes to it seem to have received a lot of criticism, especially from some conservative Muslims. Here, Bidar says that liberty is still understood by Muslims as a rebellion against God, which is not what he intends. He is critical of the submissive mindset, “it is easy to obey without questions.”<sup>887</sup> So, in *Islam without Submission* (2008) he clarifies his concept. Self Islam is defined then as the adhesion of the individual to the fundamental principle of personal liberty of thought and the conscience, for the self and the others. More interestingly, it is an “Islamic existentialism” (*un “existentialisme musulman,” come foi existentialist*), and not as a mere theological servitude to God or a “social fact” based on mores and imposed laws.<sup>888</sup>

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<sup>883</sup> Ibid., 82

<sup>884</sup> Ibid., 216, 232

<sup>885</sup> Ibid., 125

<sup>886</sup> Ibid., 229-230

<sup>887</sup> Ibid., 226-227

<sup>888</sup> *Islam sans soumission*, 16. This existentialist view will be clarified as I proceed. I am giving here just the introductory lines of thought of the concept of Self Islam.

For more clarity, Bidar defends his concept of Self Islam against two misunderstandings: a “self-service-Islam,” and an “individualist Islam.” First, Self Islam does not mean “*un islam à la carte*,” a “self-service” by which the Muslim, the *self-muslim*, enters the Quran as he enters the supermarket, taking what suits him from what attracts him from the divine teachings. That would mean a tragic ignorance of the meaning of the word “liberty,” though no liberty is free from the chances of being blinded or driven from what it is supposedly about. An authentic self-Islam, well-fed by the idea of liberty and what that stands for, signifies an “Islam of autonomy”; i.e., “to give to oneself (*auto* in Greek) one’s own law (*nomos* in Greek).” Consequently, it is an Islam of personal responsibility centred on a double question. Firstly, it is centered on the question of meaning or the right form (*sense ou la forme propre*) that each wants to give to Islam to which he belongs. Secondly, it is centered on suitable means (*l’utile propre*), following the meaning the philosopher Spinoza gave to this notion in his *Ethics* (1677), by writing that “under the direction of Reason [...] we have to seek the suitable means that is adequate.”<sup>889</sup>

Second, Self Islam is not “an individualist Islam” by which the Muslim who chooses his own way of living it in isolation from the other Muslims and thus loses the meaning of belonging to the community (*umma*), for one can be one’s self without being individualist. Simply, belonging to the community changes, becomes more critical: one continues to share a common or collective identity, but it is now enriched by another identity, which is the condition of personal liberty, for one becomes here part of the community without being part of his or her own self – a key to belonging without alienation. Self Islam produces a new meaning of the community and Islamic culture. It in fact becomes more tolerant internally and externally, instead of being a monolithic block where everyone is like everyone else through the collective obedience to the religious ritual and customs. “Self Islam engenders a diversified community inside of which grows a culture of liberty, and not a culture of judgment and censorship.”<sup>890</sup>

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<sup>889</sup> Ibid., 14-15

<sup>890</sup> Ibid., 15

What Bidar is doing here is making Self Islam look both as an existentialist enterprise based on autonomy, and also as a spiritual responsibility based on profound consciousness of the nature of the self and other. It is existentialist, and historical, and not merely theological and metaphysical. Bidar is trying to bring Islam back to the world, this world, and thus challenges its metaphysical interpretations and its tradition which have subjugated the Muslim without liberating him enough to live this historical life as the beginning and end of life, and not a mere passage to the Hereafter. Bidar is threading here in muddy waters, and to come out of this quagmire he moves to propose reforming Islamic thought, in light of modernity values of Europe. At the same time, he does not give in to radical secularism or to atheism. He is critical of his European heritage, too. Next, I present the reform agenda he has for Islam. Until now, it is still his first stage of intellectual development that is being introduced.

### **Reforming Islam: Modernity as an Unprecedented Event of the Sacred**

I select points that are essential in this part of reform for a modern Islam, “an Islam of our age,” using Bidar’s phrase. The first one concerns the fertility of Europe for such a reform of Islam. The second one concerns the modern values of human rights which Bidar considers essential to live a profound Self Islam that is not only Islamic but universal. The third one considers the limitations European Enlightenment has reached, both in their secular and atheist versions, and the pathways a “new Islam” of Europe can contribute to this “European” tradition. I try to read Bidar in light of these three points for now. These three points corresponds to these three key phrases: *reforming* Islam, *embracing* modernity, *contributing* to the modern age.

First, for the first point of reforming Islam, Bidar believes that Europe is a suitable soil for that process of reform for two main reasons. One, because in the Islamic countries progress is very slow, reform can be even slower. There, political, economic, social, and cultural circumstances imprison Islam in its religious [i.e. ritualist] form. It is then here in Europe, in the vicinity of the Muslim world, that its status can evolve, because individuals live in free and secular societies where the spiritual life of man is a personal affair – not to say “private” in the sense of keeping it home. Two, because

Europe itself is an exception in the Occident, it is more accommodative to Islamic reform. Europe seems the only space in the world truly secular; that is, it has overcome religion. “It is then here, and only here, that a non-religious Islam can develop [...] this new Islam, as if this genius of non-religious Islam has waited for the genius of Europe to manifest itself!”<sup>891</sup> Reformed Islam then, in Bidar’s view, can be best expressed through Self Islam. His experience of Self Islam becomes a model of his version of European Islam. Otherwise said, as will be clearer gradually, the three terms of “new Islam,” “European Islam” or “Islam of Europe,” and “Self Islam” can be used interchangeably when speaking of Bidar’s approach. Though he hopes that the new Islam he envisages in Europe can be exported to the Islamic world, he also makes it clear that it could be quite possible that reforms of Islam in Europe and the reforms in the Islamic world take different paths, especially that Europe has for long already enjoyed the values he espouses to new Islam, i.e. modern values of human rights, “We hope that European Islam helps Islam in Islamic worlds. It is also possible that a division happens, between European Islam and other Islam.”<sup>892</sup> Now I turn to this second point of Islam and modernity.

Second, Bidar hankers for a marriage between the “lights of modernity” and the “lights of Islam.” He uses the expression of “light upon light,” which is a Quranic verse, “*nour ’ala nour*,” to speak of “confluence.”<sup>893</sup> According to him, “modernity has to be embraced, especially its humanist values (liberty, equality, and fraternity). These are the supporting elements that can give to Islam means for its renaissance. There is spiritual light in modernity which Islam has to use. For such an enterprise, two steps are necessary to undertake: 1) sacrifice all that is not compatible with human rights, 2) contribute to solving the modern problems of man, including the “disenchantment of the world.”<sup>894</sup> He argues that Muslim theologians do not want to admit that Islam and Muslims are gradually changing and secularizing, but religion in its traditional form is still “untouchable” theologically. Now that “we are all modern,” Islam and Muslims have to

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<sup>891</sup> *Self islam*, 207-209

<sup>892</sup> *Ibid.*, 208

<sup>893</sup> *Un islam pour notre temps*, 44

<sup>894</sup> *Ibid.*, 13

“contribute to global civilization or perish.”<sup>895</sup> Modernity, for Bidar, unites human diversity and has the potential for constructing an ideal world, a “super-civilization.”<sup>896</sup>

Henceforth, the task of Islamic reformists is not to limit but to affirm theologically and philosophically what Muslim believers already do. For this radical step to be taken, reform has to happen at the metaphysical level, and has to be legitimated theologically-philosophically. The task then is to “consider modernity as an unprecedented moment of spirituality,” and to “make religion and modernity cooperate, as if they were one.”<sup>897</sup> It is in this perspective that Bidar locates the reform of Islam: to “invent a spiritual attitude which reconciles tradition and modernity” to show that the latter can be a space in which emerge realities that are most sacred, and not be reduced to an absurd and empty world.<sup>898</sup> It should be remembered that already in his Self Islam experience he realized that all the world is sacred, so modernity is sacred, too. He sacralizes it. He works to smash the dichotomy of Islam vs. modernity. He puts it in plain terms:

The responsibility of reformation thought is from now on clear: to give to the changing Muslim experiences a theological legitimation, that is, to update, amidst these metamorphoses, where *God manifest Himself* – to *show God in the present*. This way, what Muslims experience in their daily life will not be seen as blindness but as a veritable spiritual revolution, i.e. the emergence of a new form for man of being in contact with the secret of his existence. We have to help believers to seize the value of the moment they live, or the value of the changes they bring to their intimacy with Islam. We are not here to tell them “this is good, this is bad,” but simply “here is the treasure in what you do.”<sup>899</sup>

Bidar is inciting Muslim reformists, as well as lay believers, to pose this rhetorical question: “when shall we understand that modernity is not a mere “environment” for Islam, but an event to be embraced wholly as a will of God himself?” More than embracing modernity, he is first of all asking reformists “*to analyse the profound*

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<sup>895</sup> Ibid., 13, 17

<sup>896</sup> Ibid., 17

<sup>897</sup> Ibid., 36-37

<sup>898</sup> Ibid., 37

<sup>899</sup> Ibid., 37

*meaning of modernity so as to reflect on the renovation of Islam.*”<sup>900</sup> That is, instead of living in a dichotomous world, Islam vs. modernity, Muslims now have to live with modernity, and see what is and where is the sacred in it, if not all of it is already sacred and has to be accepted as such. Explicitly, by studying modernity, by embracing modernity as a sacred and spiritual event, and part of the divine will, Bidar is urging for questioning every fundamental piece of Islam, without exception, “It has to be accepted now that critical questioning penetrates to the heart of Islam, and obliges it to redefines even its most essential aspects.”<sup>901</sup>

To rethink Islam in modernity is to reform it in light of its values. Three of them appear decisive for Bidar: liberty, equality, and fraternity. Sometimes he refers to fraternity as tolerance or dialogue. In light of them he proposes “new fundamentals of Islam”: the affirmation of liberty of spiritual choice among all its practices and beliefs, strict equality of all these choices, and the making of a community that embraces their difference. For Bidar, these values are not only social values, but sacred ones as well. “Beyond their moral and political application, already considerable, they also redefine totally the relationship between man and God. With them, spiritual destiny of humanity leans towards a new era.”<sup>902</sup> Because “only the sacred can change the sacred,”<sup>903</sup> modernity has to be thought of as such. The same applies to the “new” era that awaits birth. Below are the three main values of modernity in light of the sacred interpretations he gives them.

*The principle of spiritual liberty.* The place of the individual is pivotal in the approach of Bidar. Later I will speak of the individual as the heir of God, but here I will be brief, to serve the current point. The individual is central in the divine text of the Quran, but always has a subordinate position of the submissive “slave/ *‘abd*” of God. With modernity, the individual is at the center of the world, the subject, the master, and not the slave. In classical theology, the individual has to follow rules and abide by what religious authorities interpret. At present, the Quran has to be put in the hands of every

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<sup>900</sup> Ibid., 42

<sup>901</sup> Ibid., 42

<sup>902</sup> Ibid., 43

<sup>903</sup> Ibid., 12

Muslim. God is with man anywhere and everywhere. This also means that every individual's spirituality corresponds to the essence and multiple presence of God. If the world is sacred, then whatever level of spirituality one confesses is accepted as a presence of God in that level of spirituality. "The individual liberty of man is the wish of God himself."<sup>904</sup>

But liberty has to be based on reason and thinking. Before speaking of the three conditions of this liberty, it is important to understand what Bidar means by reason. Bidar is against the Ash'arite dominant tradition in Islamic theology which uses reason just to justify the divine rule and existence, without going up to the level of questioning it or challenging it, or overcoming its metaphysical heritage. He considers this the "original sin of Islamic thought." He says:

In Islamic civilization, human reason has never been defined as "critical faculty," "instrument of debate and questioning." Far from being so, it has remained in the service of Revelation, that is, in charge of only commenting it instead of contesting it [...], philosophy in the service of theology [...], human reason has remained in this frame. It is still under the tutelage of Revelation: it explains the Quran, seeks interpretations, but does not critique it. It is out of question that it approaches the revealed text on equal footing. Here lies the original sin of Islamic thought, which has condemned it to repetition and stagnation.<sup>905</sup>

Bidar also accuses the Mu'tazila, considered the most rationalist in Islamic intellectual thought, with the same way of considering reason in the service of the divine, "We find similar affirmations strictly illogic with Mu'tazila who consider that man can and has to be considered responsible for his acts and at the same time submissive to God."<sup>906</sup> He claims to go beyond this perception of reason and liberty of conscience. He traces three certain conditions for that.

Three conditions are necessary for the maturity of liberty: authenticity of choice, sense of responsibility, and dialogue. Authenticity of choice, condition one, means that revelation does not have to be left irresponsibly to unacceptable ideas that cater for the whims of some individuals. "Free usage of Quran does not mean giving permission to all

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<sup>904</sup> Ibid., 53

<sup>905</sup> Ibid., 33

<sup>906</sup> *Islam sans soumission*, 44

kinds of instincts.” There are strict limits to impose on personal choice; there is “no Islam outside the Quran.” Authenticity to revelation has to be guaranteed. For instance, one cannot recite Taoist text instead of Quran while praying.<sup>907</sup> This condition is imperative.

The sense of responsibility, condition two, means that “each individual has to determine his Islam according to his proper spiritual needs.”<sup>908</sup> Even when one opts for an “educated choice,” it still has to be constantly re-examined, according to needs. Authenticity of choice makes one responsible of what he chooses and thus in constant questioning, improvement and modification. “Behave always spiritually to the extent that your choice of practice becomes motivated exclusively by your desire for the supreme presence [of God].”<sup>909</sup> Intimacy with the Infinite, *munajat al-huwa*, is essential for spiritual energy. At this level, religious laws can be kept but their application are up to the individual. Sharia becomes “interiorized” as “*personal law*.”<sup>910</sup> Even *‘ibadat* rituals are negotiable, “hierarchy of the principles of Islam [i.e. ‘ibādāt] have to become strictly a private affair.”<sup>911</sup> This condition is imperative, too.

Dialogue, condition three, means that one can join the community of believers for spiritual comparisons and revisions. “It would be illusory to think that the believer alone can have the faculty to find his own Islam.”<sup>912</sup> Dialogue and debate with others is a kind of consultation (*shūrā*) about one’s choices. The community is an instrument of spiritual discrimination [i.e. differentiation] which helps one form his own choices. Community life is helpful to face individualism, learn pluralism, and avoid *communitarism* (in its French meaning of ghettoization and sectarianism). Difference helps to find the self, and integrate consciously in the global society.<sup>913</sup> This condition is not imperative. One is not obliged to speak about one’s spirituality to others.

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<sup>907</sup> *Un islam pour notre temps*, 56

<sup>908</sup> *Ibid.*, 57

<sup>909</sup> *Ibid.*, 58

<sup>910</sup> *Ibid.*, 62

<sup>911</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-63

<sup>912</sup> *Ibid.*, 58

<sup>913</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-71

*The principle of equality.* There is no clergy in Islam, but historically it has developed one through classical interpretations that have been elevated to the clergy status. The clergy (imams, for example) does not have to be abolished, but its place has to be redefined; its role has to be that of consultation only. Women equality with man has to be theologically admitted; the same applies for non-Muslims. Verses against non-Muslims for instance have to be abrogated. Equality has to be regained. The variety of ways people live are multiple faces of spirituality and God.<sup>914</sup>

*The principle of fraternity.* Fraternity and love grow out of this dialogue among the community of believers to measure one's spirituality and open it up to global society. Here also grows the idea of difference and pluralism, and respect for global society.<sup>915</sup> In the new conception of God and the sacred, everyone has to search "for the sacred in the variety of the world," for "God has metamorphosed in each of us."<sup>916</sup>

In sum, it remains Islamic any individual attempt that desires to remain in touch with the Absolute, and that makes liberty engulfed with spirituality. Bidar calls it the "desire principle," namely the desire to be in constant communion with Allah through spiritual behavior. It is also Islamic that path which exhausts all possible Islamic beliefs and rituals, and remains guided by the Quran; this is referred to as the "limits" principle, since it keeps the basic text of the Quran as its guide; any path taken in this direction (like choosing some rituals over others) are still equal. It is also Islamic the path that keeps in dialogue with the other believers (and global society); this is referred to as the "support" or "fraternity" principle. What this means, from Bidar's Islamic perspective, is that "modernity [...] shifts the place of the sacred," for "God has joined us [on earth], which makes of this "the major and profound event of our civilization."<sup>917</sup> Modernity is a "purifying acid" (*Acide purificateur*) of religions and obscurantisms. Even Sufism is classic and has to modernize.<sup>918</sup>

Having dealt with the point of *reforming* Islam and *embracing* modernity human rights values, the third point is about the *contributing* to the modern age that Islam can

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<sup>914</sup> Ibid., 64-67

<sup>915</sup> Ibid., 67-71

<sup>916</sup> Ibid., 79

<sup>917</sup> Ibid., 45

<sup>918</sup> *Self Islam*, 152

offer. Bidar wonders whether Islam of Enlightenment is the way out and answers his wonderment in the negative, for Enlightenment ideals have to be revisited, reinvented, too, for a new discourse on man. The lights of Enlightenment are switched off; Islam should not depend on them to reform itself.<sup>919</sup> The humanism of Enlightenment has let loose the dignity of man, and that has to be rebuilt again. It has fallen into absurdity, nihilism, and abstraction. For Bidar, the West has missed overcoming religion without sacrificing God. With such a closure of the infinite horizons of the divine, the modern man has found himself without any hope *vis-à-vis* his finitude, without a discourse on the sense of life and death. There is “a massive loss of hope in the transcendence of human life, and the overcoming of our finitude.”<sup>920</sup> Humanism has built itself on a moving and uncertain spirit, the individual; it has witnessed just depression, despair, and void in its exhaustion of human energies. The tragedy of morality is that it does no longer communicate with the heart, and does no longer explain why the human being is worthy of respect. It lacks a dimension superior to moral education.<sup>921</sup> The new man, after having inherited God’s infinity and eternity, will not fill in this void, since its energy is that of the immortal. The way out is to sacralize man:

Islam can thus lead Europe to give birth to what in my view is the key to the future: the experience of our human liberty, always more vast, the exploration of our possibilities of life, always more multiple and diverse, which link us to the Great Life [i.e. Allah] and the entire universe. Seeing this link between man and the universe, celebrating this unity of Life, giving extremely profound and enthusiastic meaning to most of our prior actual morals, preserving life, recognizing difference, protecting nature, etc., for now, we do not know sufficiently *on what basis* we cling to these principles, what makes their value, their *grandeur*. On what to found our morals? It is here that Islam can inspire us, and help us find this profundity. *Why* offering to life new spaces and new territories? *Why* working so that the world be always multiple?<sup>922</sup>

By the sacralization of man and the universe Bidar is not for the resurgence of religion in its classical way. He works out a reconciliation between man and God without the former feeling submissive, slave to the latter. Rather, it is a “new era” in which man becomes the

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<sup>919</sup> *Un islam pour notre temps*, 213

<sup>920</sup> *Islam sans soumission*, 251

<sup>921</sup> *Self islam*, 75

<sup>922</sup> *Ibid.*, 234

“heir of God,” and with that label, man gains also the divine attributes of infinity and immortality which modernity as narrowly understood has so far deprived him of. This is the contribution of Islam Bidar speaks of. It renews existentialism, and overcomes both religion and atheism – while considering radical secularism within the premises of atheism. In his reading, Islam seems a “religion for overcoming religion.”<sup>923</sup> It is on this contribution that the next stage builds to elaborate on the notion of Islamic existentialism and theory of inheritance of the divine infinity and immortality.

### **The Future Man as an Heir of God: for Quranic Ethics and Rational Spirituality**

It may still be unclear how Bidar treats the sacred Book of Islam, the Quran, and the personality of the Prophet Muhammad, after having introduced his approach of Self Islam and its espousing of modern values. Muslims may not listen to his “intellectuality” if they do not hear how he treats their most sacred text, and their most exemplary figure the Prophet, especially that he addresses them, addresses Islamic intellectual history and how Islam can be lived in modernity and the future. In light of what has been said up to now it should be clear that Bidar aims at putting most, if not all, of Islamic tradition, i.e. the various interpretations developed over the centuries, into a file of archive, which the modern Muslim can learn from but without it being central in such a decision. It was made clear enough that he challenges all jurisprudential and legalist interpretations in light of modern human rights values. It was also made clear in a passage where he attacks the “most rational” school of thought in Islamic history, i.e. the Mu‘tazila, for he considers them to have put the divine above reason, while his approach goes beyond that, as he claims and as will be clarified below. More than that, he also criticized the limitations of Sufism which privatizes Islam, does not speak of the infinity of man, does not challenge the external world nor gets involved in it, and thus remains wrapped up in its metaphysical world and avoids the historical one. So, against some reformists who see in Mu‘tazila and Sufism pathways of reforming Islam, Bidar tries to go beyond them. Besides that, he does not stop at modernity either. He criticizes its fading Enlightenment

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<sup>923</sup> *Islam sans soumission*, 249

ideals, its impoverishment of man and his dignity, and the absence of the substance on which morality stands. Atheism that limits the energy of man and leads him to depression is not the way Bidar wants to pursue either. So, what is he claiming? What is he leading to? How does he treat the Islamic basic sources (the Quran and the Prophetic tradition)?

Bidar, in brief, is looking for a theological legitimation of Self Islam. He argues for that theologically-philosophically. Bidar is looking for an existentialist reading of the Quran without a metaphysical rebellion. At the end he launches the metaphysical rebellion, but without assassinating God. The immortality theory he ultimately speaks of is a metaphysical rebellion. He creates a peaceful Islamic Prometheus who rebels against God. The “Muslim Prometheus,” to use the name, politely asks Him to allow him the torch without fighting for it, or stealing it, and thus avoids going into an eternal discord between man and God. This rebellion is also non-Satanic. The Muslim Prometheus does not defy God. He just claims that he has now realized what he missed to realize: to act as a fully free individual that recognizes the divine source of humanity but still enriches himself by the divine attributes of infinity and immortality.

### **The Quran as an “instrument of liberation”**

Bidar contends that “only the sacred can change the sacred.”<sup>924</sup> I start from a note he makes by the end of *Islam without Submission*. He states that, possibly coincidentally, after its collection as *Mushaf*/ Sacred Book during the reign of the third Caliph, the Quran starts cosmologically and ends anthropologically. The first verse of *al-Fatiha* (The Beginning) praises the Lord and His Lordship over the universe. The last verse of *An-nass* (The People) concerns the nature of human beings. He argues that even the sacred has not been understood by Muslims, and it had to wait Western modernity to rekindle it by centralizing man. Though God has been very much studied, He has remained a God, far from man, in most classical exegeses. Bidar believes that this means that the sacred has not finished with its circle of teaching man yet. Only when there is no distance between man and God could the sacred be understood. Not all the universe, including man, has been sacralized, and that is where his approach lies. Thus, for him, the Quran is

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<sup>924</sup> Ibid., 12

a modern anthropological text to study man and free him from the finitude, and fear of life and death. It is “an instrument of liberation of ultimate possibilities of human nature,” “an instrument which teaches man that it is created to be infinite, and to be gradually an exceptional being in a universe where the power of being and doing will not stop from increasing, to the point in which it cannot be threatened even by death.”<sup>925</sup> Bidar’s enterprise is ““searching for possible foundations of a new Islamic anthropology.” For him, “this is a Quranic proposition for a new meaning of man, a new meaning of human liberty, which still has to be clarified and lived, and which I would like to characterize with a formula that would come up often: man, the heir of God.”<sup>926</sup>

Bidar symbolically considers the Quran as an “umbilical matrix.” What Does that mean? He speaks of four main matrixes (plus one) in the Quran which man has to be conscious of for self-realization. The first matrix is that of God, “the Great Life.” He is the Creator and Merciful who sacrificed His infinity and attributes to man. He created man in the best shape, made him a unique creature among others, and gave him Earth to live in and rule. God has elevated man, and preferred him to angels, and that is why Satan refused to kneel to Adam, when all angels accepted to. Bidar also refers to Ibn Arabi’s image that man was created as a powerful small dot, like the letter “n” in Arabic (“*noun*” ن): God carried man in His matrix, his womb, in Heaven till He made him perfect and able to govern earth, then sent him down. God is given a female role, the Merciful (*Rahim* رحيم), as mother would be to her son. God gave birth to man only when the latter was ready, able to grow up and be independent, exactly as the mother would do with her embryo: she gives birth to it only when it is ready to come to life, to grow up gradually independently. A mother loves her baby, and so does God. For this reason of care and love, the son is not supposed to be ungrateful to the mother, and the same applies to man towards the Creator. Bidar calls this “eternal gratitude” that shapes a good relation between man and God. (I say more of this in the section when I speak of man as the heir of God.)

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<sup>925</sup> Ibid., 11

<sup>926</sup> Ibid., 25

The second matrix found in the Quran is Creation. After having been given infinite energies in the matrix of God, the Universal matrix, with all Creation in it, is another space where man is allowed to fulfill his nourishment from this Creation, which is also sacred. The previous interpretation of the universe and modernity as events of spirituality and spaces of sacredness go along this line of interpretation of Creation as another matrix for human maturity, nourishment, and action.

The third matrix is that of the Prophet Muhammad. On the personal level, as narrated in *Self Islam*, “the intuition and message of Mohammed saved me [Bidar] from falling”<sup>927</sup> when lost with conflicting worldviews in France. On the theological level, for Bidar, Mohammad is the symbol of man who brings a message and lives it responsibly; he contemplates it and works for it so that man realizes his ultimate being capacities. By extrapolation, “Whoever enters this Life and contemplates it “is a New Mohammed,” “*un mohammed*,” that is a lover of life and a creator of life, because Muhammad is in fact the name of a particular view of the world, a way of living in the universe.”<sup>928</sup> Each new form of him and his life is part of the multiplicity and diversity of the universe. Sent by the Merciful, Muhammad is a matrix of mercy for humanity. For Bidar, Muhammad’s life symbolizes “divine individuality,” and “divinity of the prophet is his humanity.” He had no other mundane perfection to envisage (power or charisma for instance), for the least of his aspirations are for God. Everything of him is permanent prayers, silent and invisible: to stand up, to sit down, to drink, to eat, to like, to greet. “In this sense, Mohammad is the first kind of men of a new era, which civilization enters into now wholly. Time has come in which Muhammad will be the name of all men.”<sup>929</sup>

The fourth matrix found in the Quran is the Quran itself. In Bidar’s perspective, the Quran is the umbilical cord of the divine matrix; it is the link between God and man. It is thanks to it that man can access the divine function of the matrix and know about his sovereignty. The function of the Quran here is to make man realize God and all that comes through Him: Creation, Messengers, and divine Books are nourishments that feed

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<sup>927</sup> *Self islam*, 187-188

<sup>928</sup> *Ibid.*, 195

<sup>929</sup> *Un islam pour notre temps*, 106-107

man in his gestation and increase gradually the infinity of his nature. “It is the mediation through which we can feed ourselves of the substance of God;” “The central call of the Quran is then to prepare us to the infinity.”<sup>930</sup>

To reach the level of God’s infinity which He has given to man through the Quranic message, the individual has to have the attributes of God’s infinity. What the Quran contains then are ethics that humans need to develop and evolve. “The Quran seems to me a Book for our time.” It is a book of reflection and meditation, a “book of the future.”<sup>931</sup> Quranic ethics affects the psychology, and impacts the ethical evolution of the believer:

The Quran is a text of spiritual pedagogy which makes of the complete realization of our nature a question of responsibility, personal and collective. Succeeding to God is not carried out automatically. The more we evolve, the more consciously we have to direct this evolution. We do not inherit unless we make of this inheritance our aim the most conscious.<sup>932</sup>

In his call for a “dynamic anthropology” of man, Bidar finds that the Quran announces the progressive substance of an “infinite human being liberated from his limitations,” and “communicates a description of the man of tomorrow,” man as an incomplete being, in the process of “evolution” and “becoming.” It is a book of direction (*houdan*), and discernment of objectives (*fourqan*).

There is another image Bidar constructs of the Quran, besides the image of ethics and guidance for humanity since it speaks constantly of the future man of high attributes. This other picture is that of chaos. Modern chaos is reflected in the illogical order of the Quran. He does not develop much this point, and he cannot, seeing that the Quran has been studied for centuries the way it has been compiled by the Caliph Othman. Yet, symbolically, he correlates modern disorder with the disorder of Quran, i.e. Quran’s lack of a logical order that may be found in a scientific text. The idea behind this symbolism is to give confidence in modernity and human civilization. It also serves the idea of

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<sup>930</sup> *Islam sans soumission*, 166

<sup>931</sup> *Ibid.*, 198

<sup>932</sup> *Ibid.*, 199-200

diversity advanced in this new perception of “new Islam,” “new man,” and “new anthropology of man,” which Bidar is advancing. “To clarify the contemporary world disorder we have to reflect on the model of disorder the Quran offers.” “Chaos principle in Quran” offers a “sacred model” that “can help us relativize the image we have of ourselves, and not fear the dispersion of lives nor their non-achievability.”<sup>933</sup> This way, absurdity, nihilism, and “derealization” of the world, as pioneered by Nietzsche, Freud, Marx, Kafka, Camus, and Heidegger, do not become worrisome. This perception of Bidar, again, falls within his sacralization of modernity and all its achievements, even the worrying achievements. It is a discourse of hope and optimism from his side to show that the infinity of man can always mend disenchantment and nihilism man encounters. “The Quran here looks more modern.”<sup>934</sup> It gives infinite energy to man through hope and the invitation to action and creativity.

The fifth, and last, matrix communicated through the Quran is that of the *oumma* (*umma*), or community of believers. Here, also, Bidar infers the feminine aspect of it, from the Arabic word “Oum,” mother, to speak of the passion, love, and mercy that should surround it. Though the *oumma* may concern just the believers, its communication with Creation and the world is part of the sacred; its difference as a community of believers should equally recognize the difference of the others. In light of the previous principles of modernity (liberty, equality, and fraternity), dialogue and tolerance are imperatives in the new world, and the community has no right of pressure over the individual or non-believers. Self Islam and modernity values of human rights are very against that – as seen earlier.

All in all, these five matrixes stem from the first one, God’s matrix. The other matrixes are nourishments of the same man that was first created in the matrix of God. As man grows up, he is supposed to show “eternal gratitude” to this matrix, simply by being consistent in realizing his infinite energies that correspond to the energies of the Father/Mother. Bidar at a certain point says that God could be both male and female. Out of these matrixes grows what Bidar calls the “heir of God,” the Caliph, the future man.

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<sup>933</sup> *Un islam pour notre temps*, 87-89

<sup>934</sup> *Islam sans soumission*, 77-79

## b. Islamic Existentialism: the Heir of God and the Immortality of Man

Bidar aims at the “sacralization of man.”<sup>935</sup> He puts man (back) to the central stage of the world as the heir/ Caliph of God. His idea of God is that of love and mercy. Such a God is not “narcissist” and does not enjoy enslaving man. He created man to be free. It is the Muslim mind that has been imprisoned in an “ethos of theological slavery.”<sup>936</sup> “The central Quranic proposition in my [Bidar] study is this one: “I will establish a Caliph on earth” (*inni ja ‘ilun fi al-ardi khalifatan*).<sup>937</sup> This will be argued for through what Bidar calls “anthropocentric humanism,” unlike theocentric humanism that individualizes God, which exalts man and his own faculties, through the philosophy of subjectivity whereby man is seen as sovereign.<sup>938</sup>

Bidar goes through classical interpretations of the term “Caliph” as appeared in the Quran. Briefly, and as a way of exemplification, in reputed interpretations (*tafsīrs*) like those of al-Tabari (d. 923 CE), al-Razi (d. 925), al-Zamakhshari (d. 1144), al-Qurtubi (d. 1273), and Ibn Khatir (d. 1373), the meaning of man as a Caliph is compared to other creatures and thus his elevation is realized. Or, the term is interpreted as succession of man, generation after generation, and thus the continuity of the human species. Ibn Taymiya (d. 1328) is reported to have argued that God cannot have a successor; man assumes the presence of God on earth, a God of earth. Ibn Arabi (d. 1240) divinizes human’s soul through the mirror metaphor: God wants to manifest His own essence to portray His mystery to Himself. Thus, the concept of the “perfect man” or “universal man” is awake and dynamic to realize this supreme spiritual destination which is the

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<sup>935</sup> Ibid., 72. I note that with his distinguished works on theosophy, Seyyed Hossein Nasr has become known in the West for the last four-five decades as a big advocate of the sacralisation of man and nature to protect humanity and modernity from the dangers of uncontrolled scientism. In passing, Bidar’s sacralization also takes a lot from theosophy as approached by Nasr, but the difference I see between them is that the former claims to go beyond mysticism that remains an individual affair in which man is always ‘submissive’ to God however higher his understanding of Him becomes. Bidar’s sacralization is linked to his idea of man as an heir who works with, and is not a slave to, God. In a poem entitled ‘Piyam i Mashriq’, Iqbal describes Adam as a ‘co-worker with God’, and I think it is the same idea that Bidar has of the heir of God: ‘God created the world, but Adam made it better / Adam, perhaps, is God’s co-worker.’ (*Iqbal, ‘Piyam i Mashriq’, retrieved on 20 January 2013 from: <http://iqbalwebcontest.com/data-themes.htm>* ) In this sense, Bidar is closer to the poet-philosopher Iqbal than to the ‘theosophist/ illuminist’ Nasr.

<sup>936</sup> Ibid., 41

<sup>937</sup> Ibid., 61. (Quran, 2:30)

<sup>938</sup> Ibid., 70

infinity of God; the ultimate thing the Caliph achieves is high divine knowledge. This has been the Sufis path, too. The Mu'tazilla, according to Bidar, also do not go beyond the interpretation of reason as a free means to reach the divine. In some modern interpretations like those of al-Mawardi (d. 1058), Abduh (d. 1905), and Qutb (d. 1965), the Caliph(-ate) is interpreted as the ability of man to domesticate civilization with reason, with the permission of God. Man has no moral power, which God has already decreed, but the authority to execute only. In all these views, Bidar argues, man remains subordinate to God; he is a Caliph only in as much as he can use reason to realize the divine and execute His divine orders.<sup>939</sup> In this sense, the Caliph is always behind God, subordinate, "inferior ontologically." Bidar moves from these lines of interpretations, which he considers to have limited ontologically the freedom and autonomy of man on earth.

Bidar, in line with the contemporary scholar Wadad al-Qadi, adopts the interpretation of *Khalafa* that means "definitive succession" of God. It also corresponds to Jean Grosjean's translation of the Quranic term "Caliph/Khaliph" as "heir," heir of God on earth. This denotes a move from spacial to temporal *khilafa*/ succession/ inheritance. This adopted view is a radical move among the contemporary interpretations of the concept of Khilafa. The spacial interpretation is static or synchronic, because it occurs at a specific point in time, and by implication freezes movement and change or independence and dynamism of the human agent. The temporal interpretation, however, is dynamic or diachronic since it denotes the status of change with time; it makes the process of "becoming," as interpreted from the Quran.<sup>940</sup> This new interpretation of inheritance and perpetual change that accompanies it stands for the fact that man's agency is active and evolutionary, and on the move. It speaks of autonomy and ability of the act of doing. In Bidar's words, the interpretation of man, the Caliph, as an heir to God is a "true theological seism."<sup>941</sup> It actually is. More precisely, what does this inheritance

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<sup>939</sup> Ibid., 93-99.

<sup>940</sup> Ibid., 102-105. As Bidar himself recognizes, this interpretation of Quran is taken from the poet-philosopher Mohamed Iqbal to whom he dedicates one of his works. I will note that in a while.

<sup>941</sup> Ibid., 112

imply? Does it mean the incarnation of God in man as is the case with Christianity? Or, does it mean the death of God? For Bidar, it means none of these.

Following this “theological seism,” man’s inheritance is God’s sacrifice. It is an act willed by God. It is ontologically present. The previous five matrixes have to be remembered here (God, Creation, Quran, Muhammad, and *Oumma*). Mostly, the dynamic nature of Creation, as narrated in the Quran justifies it: man is first created, then made perfect; the soul of God is whispered to him afterwards (“*fa lam-ma khalaqtuhu wa sawwaytuhu fa nafakhtu fihi min rūḥu* ”), and ultimately he is made respected and dignified through the prostration of angels to Adam in a historical and ontological scene whereby man is taught names (divine knowledge) and made descend to earth as an heir to rule.<sup>942</sup> Not recognizing this major event means that humans are afraid of being left alone on earth. They do not want to take benefit of God’s gifts. At some points, as was hinted at earlier, Bidar says that this interpretation needed time to mature, it needed man to reach maturity and realize his liberty. The modern age offers this, so it is now high time to welcome the interpretation of inheritance. More importantly, God did not leave man alone; He equipped him with what he would always need, and then left him to his choices: “The God that has left us is a God that has left us everything.”<sup>943</sup>

Prophecies and Books like the Quran are what He left for humanity for guidance, *al-hudda*. Like the contemporary reformist Muhamamd Khalaf Allah (d. 1988) who believes that the end of revelation gives reign to reason, and Abdelmajid Charfi (b. 1942) who believes that the end of revelation is the beginning of man’s liberation, responsibility, and solidarity, Bidar, too, believes that inheritance interpretation “is not about total divorce with the sacred.” Rather, “it is about entering a new age of reasoning, ““a new form of sacralization of the existence of the world,” and this enterprise has to be pursued with extreme prudence, *grande prudence*.<sup>944</sup> In a long passage he speaks of what God has left for humanity before sealing prophecies:

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<sup>942</sup> Ibid., 135-137

<sup>943</sup> Ibid., 255

<sup>944</sup> Ibid., 126-128

Prophecy has been sealed, but it has left behind it a new man. God has gone, but in conformity with His mercy, He communicated to humanity the attributes of sovereignty on the world. The idea of succession then allows, henceforth, to recognize that God who closes revelation does not content Himself with leaving and being silent. He does not let man to his finite condition, to his weakness and the misery of his created nature [...]. He endows us with His gift of infinity so that we can achieve in the world the same function as He would have done Himself before, and with the same power and efficiency. From this point of view, the closure of revelation corresponds in reality to the expression of God's sacrifice [...]. His withdrawal from the world is his most elevated expression of His love to us[...]. Certainly God has withdrawn, proclaimed He would not speak to us again, and left us alone in this vast universe, but before He left He had taken care to harmonize us with this world, to infinitize us in front of the indefinite grandeur of space and time.<sup>945</sup>

With such an inheritance, there should be “no fear of the cosmos now.” The classical perfect man depends on God for his qualities – because of his inferior position. His position remains theoretical, metaphysical, and not historical. Bidar is proposing the historicization of this inheritance, “the paradigm of heir of God is historical.”<sup>946</sup> This is where the shift in theology occurs: the move from metaphysics to history. Man as a Caliph, an heir is not only theoretical, abstract, by which the individual can always feel that God is far and has to work to attain Him or be close to Him, as would do the Sufis. The move now is to break away from this perception of God as residing in Heaven and man is working for Him on earth. Man is an heir, and is independent. God created Him and liberated him to live and rule earth. Earth and the universes man can reach are for man. The universe is sacred as Heaven is, so the idea of God is even closer than in used to be in classical interpretations.

The universe is a *jannat* (paradise), a garden of God, and man is its gardener. The question then is: are there limits in gardening this *jannat*? *Grande prudence*, *big responsibility*, and *eternal gratitude* are some of the terms Bidar uses to speak of the ethics that should govern man's governance and inheritance of earth. Prophecies and Books like the Quran contain what God have left us when He passed on power to us. If they are well understood, man can reign with “no fear,” as Bidar says. To master this

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<sup>945</sup> Ibid., 128-129

<sup>946</sup> Ibid., 117

inheritance in this “new state of nature” ethics are needed. “Spiritual maturity is needed.” “A new ethical responsibility awaits us [...] to construct a spiritual republic without frontiers.”<sup>947</sup> “Spiritual maturity” will open up “new spaces [...] which we don’t master yet.” Through it man will learn to share, master, and render creative the energies he has yet to discover in light of the Great Life [Allah].<sup>948</sup> Islam targets a “cosmic city,” a “spiritual republic” in this world; it is historical not metaphysical, and sovereignty implied by the notion of the Caliph will have essentially an “ethical-spiritual force.”<sup>949</sup> If Bidar says that in this interpretation of inheritance of the universe, God is not killed, what could one understand from this? What about Afterlife and the Day of Judgment which are essential parts of faith in the Islamic creed? Will man still need God for Afterlife or not at all? After having sacralized man Bidar moves to immortalize him.

Having developed the idea of inheritance, Bidar then brings about his first concept of Self Islam as its perceivable image, where the individual is centralized. This individuality is ethically and spiritually regulated, to achieve its infinite energy, through the conditions of liberty, equality and fraternity, as previously seen. This means that the inheritance of earth is not arbitrary, and not everyone can access it and enjoy its infinity. Only those who exert themselves, following the previous descriptions, can understand what inheritance and consequently immortality mean. This brief recapitulation is needed to connect the previous thoughts with the coming one: immortality.

The approach is historical, so there is no fear of metaphysics. “No worries about the interminable quest after truth, the absolute, since the absolute is in us. No fear of death.”<sup>950</sup> If one has internalized the concept of God, and has lived according to its attributes, there is then no need to fear death. Bidar does not refute his belief in the Judgement Day. Instead, he considers it a metaphor, an allegory. He does not interpret it as a physical apocalypse, but as a “spiritual metamorphosis” that is unprecedented in human history. Traditionally, there is no escape from the Day of Judgment. One encounters God. One returns to Him. But now that he proposes a historical interpretation

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<sup>947</sup> Ibid., 191

<sup>948</sup> Ibid., 184-191

<sup>949</sup> Ibid., 195

<sup>950</sup> Ibid., 100

of life and death in light of the Quranic orientation, he believes that this encounter of God happens already here, in this historical life. This encounter is not far any longer. This is the “end of time,” for time is not in space but in intimacy with God which Self Islam teaches. The Testimony (*Shahaha*) that testifies to the presence of God in the present makes the encounter already transpire here and now. “Presence entails an eternal present.” This changes the meaning of time, life, and death. “The immediate proximity with Allah transforms the present into presence. Horizons [of the physical and metaphysical] become closer. Life is no longer that interminable trajectory.”<sup>951</sup> If God is the light of heavens and earth, then existence is one; life is one.<sup>952</sup>

So, “what can immortalize man?” Bidar invokes Quranic verses that speak of individual responsibility. Two types of actions can immortalize man: piety, or *taqwa*, and good deeds. He invokes two Kantian questions: 1) “what shall I do with my life?” He provides the Quranic answer: act good, and the payoff is immortality; 2) “what am I allowed to hope for?” the hope he found described in the Quran is escaping death, for a life devoted to love develops human energy for eternity.<sup>953</sup> He also invokes Mohammed Iqbal who believes that man’s effort is the answer to immortality. Action of the ego either immortalizes it or dissolves it. By good acts one liberates himself from death, “[D]eath has nothing against anyone who has gone to the sources of life.”<sup>954</sup> For Bidar, “terrestrial immortality” is a “rational theory of immortality.”<sup>955</sup> Bidar goes so far as to say that possibly in the future there will be no death and resurrection. He gives the example of Jesus Christ. Jesus didn’t need to die to live eternally. Jesus is the symbol of future death of the future humanity. He is the first symbol of this kind of death and immortality because of his devotion to the good. Life and death become equal since piety good action make one see no difference between the physical and metaphysical. In the Quran, for Bidar, Jesus is given a better picture. He is not God. He is not crucified. He is the “perfect man” who is elevated to sit close to God as His “equal” since he lived

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<sup>951</sup> *Un islam pour notre temps*, 97-100

<sup>952</sup> *Ibid.*, 103

<sup>953</sup> *Islam sans soumission*, 203

<sup>954</sup> *Ibid.*, 203

<sup>955</sup> *Ibid.*, 204, 211

according to His attributes.<sup>956</sup> Bidar also refers to Moses as the speaker of the word of God, and God's friendship/Alliance with Moses and Aaron, and to Muhammad's Nocturnal Journey to Heaven where he sees Gabriel and the Light of God. These are examples of elevation of man that comes through piety and good act. These prophets are examples of the "perfect man" that comes with dedication and practice to express an "*ontological bond*" with the divine.<sup>957</sup>

Should man be happy with this inheritance or should he consider it as a tragedy whereby God has left man alone on earth to face despair, finitude, abstraction and nihilism? Bidar argues that Self Islam and the theory of immortality that it ends with are manifestations of a "new existentialism," "a radically new ontological situation in which man makes himself, constructs himself, without the aid or predestination of God, and with an infinite energy of action and in the horizon of immortality."<sup>958</sup> Moreover, God is neither killed nor rejected, but embraced as an evolutionary presence that man deals with in this wholly sacred universe. God is no longer far, but is present in the presence, a conception which sacralizes everything and makes man a responsible agent that has to show his eternal gratitude to the inheritance and infinity he has received from the Great Life. All in all, this theory, argues Bidar, overcomes traditional religions, spiritualities, as well as atheism. The "new Adam" (i.e. the future spiritually responsible man) is driven by "ethical-spiritual force" generated constantly from remembrance of God. I quote him in length below, as a way of reiterating these notes in his own words:

With the Islamic idea of inheritance emerges a competitive model that may initiate a movement of overcoming religion that is not tragic but euphoric, for it does not constraint us into rupture with God [...].<sup>959</sup>

The way is also opening up for the overcoming of atheism as well. A-theism, a life without God. Our life as heirs will be in a way also a life without God, but not in the sense of negating the existence of God, as atheism implies. The heir certainly does no longer return to God because he has from now understood that in him resides all the needed spiritual power. Yet, at the same time, he remembers God and does not forget what that means. Far from denying Him, he vows to Him eternal gratitude [...]; he evokes and invokes the great emotion this Being has

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<sup>956</sup> Ibid., 207, 236-241

<sup>957</sup> Ibid., 231-232

<sup>958</sup> Ibid., 255

<sup>959</sup> Ibid., 254

allowed him to acquire cosmic consciousness, his being, and all his powers, this Being from which he has received supreme adequate dignity, and which has been his old matrix. For a humanity that is grateful to Him for having passed on to it His infinity, God does not die, nor is He rejected or killed. His name has to become the object of a new cult which is that of remembrance and gratitude – God as an object of responsibility and memory.<sup>960</sup>

This means that man who has become infinite and immortal as an heir to God can be neither a believer in the old sense (hoping for something that would never come) nor an atheist in the old sense (refusing the idea that human life can trespass finitude), for all those who believe in Heaven will find it on earth, and those who do not believe in it will also find it on earth.

Bidar's quest for God ends in finding the Self, the natural or original Self that can, through its infinite energies, realize the "ultimate ego" –which is an Iqbalian term- where the physical and the metaphysical are united. Muhammad Iqbal has been behind the scenes in Bidar's books and approach. A reader of Iqbal would find him [Iqbal] in Bidar. There is no wonder about that, since he read Iqbal when young and also later as a philosopher. In his seminal work of *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1934), and in his seventh lecture entitled "Is Religion possible," Iqbal speaks of three stages of religious life: Faith, Thought, and Discovery. Faith is the first stage of religions in which they develop spiritual discipline to approach God. Thought is the stage of rationalization of religion to understand the sources of its authority; here, it also seeks its foundations via metaphysics. In the third stage of Discovery,

metaphysics is displaced by psychology, and religious life develops the ambition to come into direct contact with the ultimate Reality. It is here that religion becomes a matter of personal assimilation of life and power; and the individual achieves a free personality, not by releasing himself from the fetters of law, but by discovering the ultimate source of the law within the depths of his own consciousness.<sup>961</sup>

Discovery of the ultimate source of religious life (and law) depends on the endeavor of going into the ultimate horizons of freedom of the conscious. Bidar seems to have tried to

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<sup>960</sup> Ibid., 255-256

<sup>961</sup> Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (London: Oxford UP, 1934) 171

theorize and expand on this idea of discovery Iqbal spoke of in the 1930s. Iqbal was well immersed in both Islamic and Western philosophy. He was very critical of both traditional religiosity and modernity. He prophesied the return of religion not in its old forms but mainly in new forms, guided by spiritual ethics. Bidar has taken a lot from him and has expanded that in his own way. His *L'islam face à la mort de dieu: l'actualité de Mohammed Iqbal (Islam Facing the Death of God: Mohammed Iqbal Revisited, 2010)* illustrates my point.<sup>962</sup> His latest work, *Comment sortir de la religion (How to Overcome Religion, 2012)* develops the idea of “discovery” in his version of “overcoming religion.” I below introduce the gist of this third stage of Bidar’s intellectual development.

### c. Overcoming Religion: the Highest Stage of Self Islam

*How to Overcome Religion* can be classified as a breakthrough project that bridges the classical dichotomy between the divine and the sacred, which characterizes in particular the modern West, and which Islamic thought has not been immune from. Bidar says that his work is the outcome of his hybrid culture (Western and Islamic).<sup>963</sup> The thesis of the book is that the ultimate aim of overcoming religion is to “recreate” the world through infinite human energy (*toute-puissance humaine*) that stems from the responsibly infinite power of the model of God Who does not need to be killed to be overcome, “the aim is not the death of God but the second rebirth of man, a rebirth away from a conditioned and finite state that corresponds to his primitive status.”<sup>964</sup>

The book’s thesis is defended on the basis of two ideas which make two parts of the book. The first idea is to “disoccidentalize” the project of overcoming religion.<sup>965</sup> Bidar argues in length that the Western project of “substituting religion” with secular or atheist ideas, and of “killing God” have not been humanist enough. Rather, such attempts have brought about new profane gods, like nationalism and capitalism.<sup>966</sup> Two main reasons are behind the failure of the West in banishing the divine from sight and from the world: the first one is that the West is victim of the “Prometheus syndrome,” i.e. man has

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<sup>962</sup> I do not aim here at comparing Bidar’s developments with the pioneering thoughts of Iqbal.

<sup>963</sup> *Sortir de la religion*, 44

<sup>964</sup> *Ibid.*, 94

<sup>965</sup> *Ibid.*, 16

<sup>966</sup> *Ibid.*, 109

to kill God to enjoy His (God's) powers and freedom<sup>967</sup>; the second reason is that the West is the first to experience such an unprecedented break between historically two overlapping mindsets (divine and profane), and has thus to find ways of reconciliation between the two, or go on in its nihilist path.<sup>968</sup> Overall, the West was very erroneous, according to Bidar, in neglecting the power of religion. The West belittled the fact that most past human civilizations were based on, or at least nurtured by, the mysterious idea of God. It has missed learning from a major factor that contributed for human flourishing for centuries. It is therefore high time to overcome this weak irreligious mindset that has occasioned "an existential winter"<sup>969</sup> that cannot be surmounted unless it lives a "spiritual revolution,"<sup>970</sup> or "ontological revolution"<sup>971</sup>, that raises the fundamental questions afresh, and consequently moves away from leading a mere "horizontal life"<sup>972</sup> that does not look vertically (towards the divine) for infinite inspiration.

The second idea advanced for the thesis of overcoming religion is from religion itself, in light of modernity achievements. The critique Bidar launches on modern Western philosophies does not belittle its values of liberty and equality for instance. What Bidar mostly opposes in Western modern thought is its inability to replace the divine it pretended to be able to replace. If human history was built mostly on religious ideas and by religious societies, Bidar says that the West has failed to build a more humanist civilization, void of "profane gods" that misuse "human dignity"<sup>973</sup> even for few centuries. At the same time, religions as classically known, with their archaic "irrational" conceptions so much metaphysical in outlook are criticized, too. Religions have to become this-worldly, otherwise, they, too, remain unable to answer human existentialist and ontological questions. Is this not a paradox? How can religion be historical in its worldview, and still provide existential answers? Has modernity not tried to exactly do that? It is here that Bidar's answer can be described as "reconciliatory."

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<sup>967</sup> Ibid., 122

<sup>968</sup> Ibid., 117

<sup>969</sup> Ibid., 57

<sup>970</sup> Ibid.

<sup>971</sup> Ibid., 166

<sup>972</sup> Ibid., 62

<sup>973</sup> Ibid., 163

By now it should become clear that the second idea of Bidar in overcoming religion builds on both religion and modernity. What is kept of religion is its “transcendental” and “spiritual” aspects as long as they help man realize the “infinite” energy he is gifted with. If modernity has freed man from some archaic religious shackles, it has simultaneously limited him in this-worldly affairs that are “finite;” in trying to free him, it has imprisoned him in “finitude.” The way out of this existential impasse is for man to “re-appropriate what he thought belonged to the divine,” i.e. to re-appropriate the eternal infinite power man has been granted ontologically, and which only now is able to realize.<sup>974</sup> With such realization humanity enters its second stage of being as a “creative power” (*puissance créatrice*), after the first stage in which it believed that it could not create but only live and adapt to the world.<sup>975</sup> What is new in this “creative power” or “supernatural power” is that it does not deny the divine; rather, it takes God and His attributes as its model for infinite energy and responsibility – unlike the Western way of empowering man which is built on the idea of replacing Him, without killing Him, reaching power cannot transpire. With the “transcendental” project<sup>976</sup> proposed here overcoming religion marks a “happy end”<sup>977</sup> in which divine power is passed on (*passation de pouvoir*) to “man the creator/ *L’homme createur.*”<sup>978</sup>

To achieve the stage of “man the creator” Bidar proposes three major conditions, the third of which is the most challenging. The first condition requires access to the basics for a decent life so that the individual can have the minimum means to realize and then develop his “infinite” energies. The second condition necessitates vital socio-political rights in the lead of which is liberty of conscience and expression. The most demanding condition is the third one; it requires emulating God in His infinite power, mercy, benevolence, justice, and responsibility.<sup>979</sup> God is “the model” for any kind of use of power.<sup>980</sup> It should be remarked that the first two conditions are “modern” while the

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<sup>974</sup> Ibid., 103

<sup>975</sup> Ibid., 215

<sup>976</sup> Ibid., 184

<sup>977</sup> Ibid., 103

<sup>978</sup> Ibid., 156

<sup>979</sup> Ibid., 103-106

<sup>980</sup> Ibid., 180

last one is “traditional” - to name it so for understanding the project - which, again, testifies to Bidar’s attempt for a “reconciliatory” approach, beyond the classical dichotomies (modern vs. traditional, liberal vs. conservative, sacred vs. profane, secular vs. religious, West vs. East, etc.).

In the project of overcoming religion, gratitude and recognition of God is preserved through considering His soul to have descended in the soul of man. The “Promethean syndrome” is overcome. (This idea is more developed in his previous book *Islam without Submission*, 2008, where he outlines his theory of the immortal man.) Man becomes a new Jesus, endowed with the power of God, but still human in choices and responsibilities; Jesus had immense divine powers, and he used them responsibly; man in this “second renaissance” does the same, “we are in the position of Jesus,”<sup>981</sup> “we have to assimilate the nature of the divine, “swallow,” interiorize or integrate His science or His art. It is here that reconciliation between man and the divine is clearly inseparable; atheism and classical religions become old and useless categorizations, and reductionist in perspective. God and man are “lovers,” one cannot exist without the other.<sup>982</sup> This does not mean that man is divinized, or that the divine is humanized – though that impression can quickly be formulated by the reader. What the idea of overcoming religion all boils down to is that man realizes his full powers; he simply humanizes powers he, until now, reserves to God only, while the soul of the latter is actually already in Him and he just needed time to realize it. It is only in this sense that the future will see “many gods,” namely many human beings acting freely, responsibly, justly, and spiritually, following the model of God.

It should be clear by now that Bidar has truly moved in his intellectual journey from the ‘Islamic box’ to more global thinking necessitated by the pluralism that characterize modern societies. This allows me to note two main things. First, Bidar’s latest endeavour cannot be understood without keeping in mind his previous works. His concepts of ‘Self Islam’ and of ‘man as the eternal and immortal Caliph of God’ have influenced very much his latest attempt at ‘overcoming religion’. His ‘double culture’

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<sup>981</sup> Ibid., 154

<sup>982</sup> Ibid., 157

allows him to look at the Western and Islamic tradition with critical eyes. Though he can be studied as one of the innovative voices of the emerging European Islamic thought, that could be reductionist of his work if European Islamic thought is read as being solely Islamic. Bidar is no longer a ‘Muslim philosopher’; he is a philosopher that goes on charting territories that weaken the classical dichotomies referred to above. That is certainly not an easy job, for, sooner or later, he will be categorized. However this may be, considered from political theory perspectives, from a sociology of religion perspective or from a theological perspective, his philosophy of religion can be very useful.

By way of an illustration of this usefulness, If the current educational systems were to integrate the idea of the ‘infinite power’ of man and his ‘historical immortality’ without leaving the idea of God aside, a lot of the multicultural malaise could be solved because both the religious and the nonreligious would be satisfied. Each hears what he wants to hear, without at the same time belittling the other’s option, although ideally this dichotomy between ‘options’ itself should be overcome. Neither religion nor atheism or secularism will be needed if Bidar’s approach is understood, and further developed by various disciplines. This is a project for the future where only man creates and rules, but still respects God, and God regains His ideal place as the merciful and the just, since He no longer intervenes in human affairs directly – with, say, His divine prescribed laws, as Sharia law has been understood by some literalists. God remains a beautiful idea, and any injustice in the world is for man to be accountable for, since He abstains from direct intervention in human affairs. Bidar does not kill God, but he gives Him a respectful place which might be metaphorically described as that of a king. The latter owns a palace; the managers of the palace keep it in order, not the king himself; they decorate and improve it, always hoping that this is the ideal picture the king would like to see, while he keeps silent, never replies, and keeps them working, as if all their trials and errors were right! For Bidar, God does exactly this: He leaves man to manage the palace (the world) as he wishes, after having equipped him with His essential attributes of power, creativity, justice, mercy, and so on. This sounds extremely idealist; but it is the

job of the philosopher – meaning any thinking agent – to determine how it could resolve real, concrete problems.

Since the problems Bidar examines are facts, then his approach, however prophetic or idealist it seems, remains practical for the ongoing issue of the divine and the sacred, or the religious and the secular, that has tormented the human mind for centuries, and the modern Western mind in particular. Thus, what Bidar requires of every religion is not to leave God, but to overcome the narrow understandings that have turned Him into a sadistic God that enjoys seeing conflict among believers and non-believers. Religion in Bidar's perspective is ultimately a discipline of self-criticism and deeper self-consciousness. For him, it is only thus that it becomes truly open and spiritual in essence, and that without it life becomes meaningless.

The second point I want to make is a critique. There is no doubt that Bidar has based his approach on the two traditions with which he is most familiar, with clear openings to the Eastern or Asian religions. His criticism of modernity is also a pillar of his project, as is his criticism of religion. A liberal critique may say that there is nothing new advanced here, and that a middle way does not work. Preserving the divine while claiming human liberty and infinite creativity simply means doing without the divine. Why should one think of the divine at all, if one already considers oneself an infinite energy that has unlimited rights to realize its energies? Doesn't Bidar himself say that God is but the name of 'future humanity'? Similar questions may be raised by a religious critique which claims that 'religion is no longer religious' and 'God is no longer divine' if the metaphysical is abolished and only this-world is emphasized in the project of overcoming religion. While the project claims to be 'transcendental', 'spiritual', and not to 'kill God', in reality it is against all these. I assume that Bidar would reply to both liberal and religious critics by first reminding them of the third 'superior condition', as he calls it, of realizing the idea of 'man the creator', of taking God as a model for agency, and then by asking them to give more weight to reasoning, for the age of 'overcoming religion' requires 'rational faith' and consequently surmounts the narrow differences both liberals and religious critics are concerned with.

The two criticisms are valid and challenging, especially when the project moves to be implemented in the real world and its complexities. It is here that one should ask more from Bidar. If the anthropology of man and religions can be explained in light of his previous works so as to better comprehend the current proposal, I think that what remains to be investigated further is the idea of ‘God’ itself. If both classical religiosity and modern irreligiosity have to change because of man’s increasing rationality, which makes him assume that God is always correct and just and that it is man who has been unable to better understand Him historically, then this same God that has busied man for centuries to find the right understanding of the divine has to be re-examined. That is, the attributes of God have to be revisited. Though Bidar calls for a new kind of religiosity and being in the world from a rational perspective, this same call requires new theological re-interpretations of the attributes of this new God that is not killed, but that is also not active anymore in the age of ‘overcoming religion’. Postmodern theologies – in the sense of theologies that are pluralist, rather than relativist – from various religious traditions have to be devised. Atheism and secularism are also challenged to revise their bases, since, with the project proposed here, religion can come back in stronger, spiritual and rational forms insofar as atheism and secularism may be considered the least rational, or even irrational, options. Rationality, like spirituality, will therefore be re-examined, and a new perception of the world can develop. The future man will be very different.<sup>983</sup>

### **Recapitulation**

What I have tried to do up to now is to present my own structural reading of Bidar’s approach of an “Islam of Europe” as he calls it. I have tried to build a structure that makes sense of his works within the premise of my own approach. I have divided my reading of him into three main stages. The first stage is an intellectual biography of his mystic and philosophic experiences of Islam; it is here that the beginning of his approach of Self Islam takes its first phase. The second stage moves to his reformist agenda of Islam which he develops by embracing modernity values of human rights (liberty,

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<sup>983</sup> A shortened version of this Part on Bidar is forthcoming as an article: Mohammed Hashas, “Reading Abdennour Bidar: New Pathways for European Islamic Thought,” *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 2 (2013) 64-95.

equality, fraternity). This stage is an explication as well as solidification, theologically and philosophically, of the concept of Self Islam. The latter moves from being a mere personal experience into an intellectual product of a reformed Islam, and enters the debate of Islam in Europe, or European Islam. The final stage is where Bidar's approach reaches its maturity. His journey ends in God's withdrawal and man's inheritance of the universe. (No murder happens!). Self Islam here enters its existentialist citadel whereby the individual believer secures his immortality through his ethical-spiritual force of infinitude granted by God. Self Islam ends in being a "discovery" not only of God but of the Self, the ultimate Self of man, the infinitely energetic, which is always in the process of "becoming," outside the religious versus secular dichotomy. It is the age of "overcoming" the classical dichotomy of the divine versus the secular, or religion and atheism.

Overall, Bidar's work can be considered a breakthrough hybrid approach that aims at resolving an age old debate over the sacred and the profane. In particular, it charts new territories for those occupied with the classical dichotomies that it attempts to rethink. Bidar opens a new window from which European Islam in particular and contemporary Islamic thought in general can be looked at.

## **Part Four**

### **European Islam in Context: Renewal for Perpetual Modernity**

Religion and ethics are one; there is no religion without ethics and no ethics without religion [...].

There is no man without ethics [...]; there is no ethics without religion [...]; so, there is no man without religion [...].

Taha Abdurrahmane, *The Question of Ethics*, 2000, 52; 147-149.

### **a. European Islam and the Islamic Tradition: Revisionist-Reformist**

The previous three parts of this work have introduced the various versions of the idea of European Islam as the scholars studied conceive of it. Together they compose the first cognitive and methodological “descriptive stage.” They all aim at answering the first sub-question of this work: what is European Islam? Each part presents a version of European Islam. In this part (Part IV, Section 1) I go into the second methodological stage of my work, which is referred to as the “comparative stage.” This comparative stage aims at answering the following question: What is new in European Islam? The answer is a statement of three components: European Islam (1) “rationalizes ethics,” and in so doing it is (2-3) “revisionist-reformist,” or “traditional-modern.” Nonetheless, this is not yet the place where I provide my analytical answer to the question. This comparative stage precedes my analysis (which comes in Section 2, Part IV) because the answer I provide cannot be understood without being familiar with the classical and contemporary scholarship contributions to Islamic thought and theology in particular. “Newness” in European Islam cannot be first raised as an issue, and second cannot be detected, if revisiting the classical contributions as well as the contemporary debate are not examined even briefly. The misunderstandings and short-sighted readings of European Islam, or Islam in the West, do not go into such a historical revision to trace continuity, discontinuity, or development in Islamic thought. To avoid any short-sighted conceptualization of European Islam I revisit the early theological (kalam) debate on the place of human reason and ethics in relation to revelation and the divine in general (Section 1a).

I do reiterate the idea that a number of contemporary scholars believe that it is the revival of kalam that can lead to renewing Islamic thought. I have taken this as an assumption, or a test, that any reform project has to go through to merit the label of reform. As will be made clearer, among the prime issues debated in kalam are the interpretation of God, revelation, ethics, and the place of human reason. By implication, any contemporary reform project in Islamic thought has to meet (some of) the standards kalam already established, without obviously replicating the same thoughts and work. Otherwise said, there is a need for new kalam in Islamic thought.

The Mu‘tazila, with reference to the work of Qadi Abd Aljabar, is taken as an example of one of the most influential theological schools of kalam whose legacy – romanticizing it as is commonly done aside – can be built on in invoking the place of reason in interpreting revelation (Section 1b).<sup>984</sup> The Mu‘tazila make the first generation in Islamic scholarship that I refer to in tracing continuity in Islamic thought, for their emphasis on the ability of human reason to objectively differentiate between the right and wrong in ethical values, and revelation is but a promulgation of what reason achieves. They are known as the rationalists in Islamic history. I will explain in due space that their rationalism is not identical to rationalism as developed by Euro-modernity. Readers and critiques of contemporary Islamic thought may hope that it is the Mu‘tazila that can now solve the intellectual malaise of Islamic thought. That was also an idea I nurtured for some time before I realized that they can be a strong legacy to build on, but not the end where to stop or go back to, because Euro-modernity has added values and elevated the standards of any religious reform. European Islam has then two challenges: a challenge from within its religious/ Islamic tradition, and another one from its other tradition, which is Euro-modernity. Endorsing the Mu‘tazila heritage alone, or Euro-modernity alone, meets the expectations of reform half-way.<sup>985</sup> This being the case, I re-interpret the

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<sup>984</sup> Note that the Mu‘tazila and early Islamic theology/ kalam grew up in difficult political times the Muslim community experienced for the first time, i.e. the political first civil war in Islam over who had the right to rule, which culminated in the development of the two main religious sects, the Sunnis, and the Shi‘a, among others minor ones. The early reformists of the Arab Islamic Renaissance (*nahḍa*) also grew up in a political context: the encounter with the modern and developed West during the colonial era. The late reformists, or contemporaries, also grow up in a political special era, the postcolonial era, which requires the building of the state and the challenges it meets in constructing the identity of society, secular or religious, or in between, etc. European Islam, too, is growing up in a tense historical period of time. Immigration, security issues, and international terrorism with which Islam as a religion has been linked make the theological debate political as well. Despite the common distinction between theology and politics (mainly that one is metaphysical and the other is physical/ this-worldly), they necessarily intertwine. This work, and the argumentation it makes, has to be understood in such a politico-theological intertwining space.

<sup>985</sup> I make two notes here. One, the work of George Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (1985), is helpful in clarifying my approach on the question of ethics and reason. I just note now that I start from where he ends: he ends in calling for the revival of the Mu‘tazila heritage and in examining the option of “ethical reason,” which can be “objective” ontologically and “traditional” epistemologically in Islamic tradition. Ontologically, “right” (vs. wrong) has an objective meaning when extrinsic or intrinsic qualities or relations makes them right independently of subjective desires and wishes of the person, or the community, that judges them right or wrong, and even independently of God Who also judges them right or wrong. Epistemologically, this means that man can know “right” by natural reason, independently of scripture. For many, it would appear that the findings of Hourani are very adequate. But they are actually not innovative if they remain imprisoned by the Mu‘tazila thought, which alone cannot revive Islamic

Mu‘tazila heritage in light of the adopted framework of Taha Abdurrahmane to show that my reference to this rational heritage is for two methodological reasons. First, this reference shows that the questions of ethics and reason are old in Islamic thought, and revisiting them show that the debate in contemporary Islamic thought in general is serious and intense; it resembles in its intensity the kalam early debates. Second, this reference is a theological justification that European Islam is not uprooted from the tradition and is consequently not a simple mimicry of Euro-modernity, though the latter’s degree of influence is certainly high.

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thought. That is why I read the Mu‘tazila differently when I deal with the late reformists and European Islam, in light of Taha Abdurrahmane’s framework (humanization-historicization-rationalization) and his core idea that religion, ethics, and reason are inseparable. The Mu‘tazila have never been understood so, and that is where I contribute my interpretation of their legacy, though in a shorter form that this space allows. So, Hourani’s view could only be a start; to keep the Mu‘tazila entangled in the binary of objectivism versus subjectivism theologically is like being entangled in the binary of the State versus the Church politically. I think that European Islam is trying to move beyond these binaries. I clarify this note in Section 2b, Part IV. Two, I note here that George Hourani’s work is distinguished in the English literature on Islamic ethics, a topic that has only recently attracted more attention, though the literature on this discipline is still very low in quantity, and even lower in quality. Majid Fakhry, the scholar of Islamic intellectual history, counts few titles on the topic, written in English. He refers to Rjitse de Boer’s article “Ethics and Morality (Muslim)” (published in the early 1920s), D.M. Donaldson’s *Studies in Muslim Ethics* (1953), George Hourani’s *Islamic Rationalism* (1971), the translation into English of Mohamed Ahmed Sherif’s *Ghazali’s Theory of Virtue* (1974), and Constantine Zurayk’s translation into English of Miskawayh’s *Tadhib al-Akhlaq (The Refinement of Character)*, 1968). I add the recent work of Safet Bektovic which surveys some classic and contemporary Islamic philosophers who deal with the subject of ethics in various levels, though not substantially: Bektovic, *Islamic Philosophy: Classical Problems and Modern Trends* (Copenhagen: ANIS, 2012) see the introduction for the aims of the book. In my study here, I mainly refer to George Hourani’s *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1985), Majid Fakhry’s *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), and Mariam Al-Attar’s *Islamic Ethics: Divine Command Theory in Arabo-Islamic Thought* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2010). Fakhry’s work tries to categorize Islamic ethics into four categories: scriptural, theological, philosophic, and religious. Despite this thematic appearance of the work, he at the end studies scholars individually, each under one of the four categories/ parts. Hourani’s work is a compilation of his lectures and articles; some early articles are developed and some of his early thoughts are revised; his attempt tries a more systematic categorization of the Islamic tradition. I take his note on the Mu‘tazila and his conclusion that there is a way to be ethically rational in Islam without an epistemological break with divine abstract “all knowledge.” I have considered this point seriously. After a lot of consideration of the overall contribution of the Mu‘tazila, the early and later reformists in light of this point, I found it relevant in understanding the current stage of Islamic thought, and European Islam in particular. In this sense, Hourani’s point has been helpful, though it was more about the classical Islamic thought, and was a conclusion he reached only later in his work. Hourani’s point may not be fully understood if reformist scholarship is not considered, which he does not do. I try to do that here. I start where he ended. As to the work of Al-Attar, I mostly take her moral interpretation of the five tenets of the Mu‘tazila, and find them relevant for the framework I develop for the idea of European Islam (world-society-ethics), the skeleton of which –and not the content- I borrow from Taha Abdurrahman’s *The Spirit of Modernity: an Introduction to Founding Islamic Modernity* (Casablanca and Beirut: al-markaz at-takafi al-‘arabi, 2006). All my subsequent references to these books are to the same editions.

In this comparative stage I also refer to the second and third generation of scholarship in Islamic thought which I see European Islam building on. The second generation is that of the “modernists” of the Arab-Islamic Renaissance that I prefer to call “early reformists.”<sup>986</sup> This generation is marked by some distinguished reformists who emphasize the role of reason in reviving the tradition, but remain limited in their scope of revival by the Sharia classical prescriptions. Their call for the revival of reasoning faculty, through the practice of *ijtihad*, is made with succinct reference to Jalal Eddine al-Afghani, Mohamed Abduh, and Rachid Rida. This section is the briefest among the three generations because most of the reformists of this generation were busy in liberating their countries politically than in theorizing for substantial reform theologically; their theological contribution remains adaptive and limited within the Sharia (law) prescriptions. Human agency and the faculty of reason are allowed to interpret only the divine silence or ambiguity on matters not clearly resolved by Quranic verses or Sunna *hadiths*. The importance of these early reformists may be lying in their opening up to the Western modern ideas and sciences, and in urging the Islamic societies to realise first their political freedom and right of expression. This major achievement paves the way for the next generation, the late reformists/ contemporaries, to develop their own new interpretations that give human agency the leading role in reading the sacred texts and rationalizing its ethics.

The third generation I refer to with emphasis in Islamic scholarship is the contemporary one, which I refer to as “late reformists.”<sup>987</sup> I tentatively classify the late

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<sup>986</sup> See the following note.

<sup>987</sup> Instead of going into a long discussion about the difference between the early reformists (referred to also modernists) and late reformists (referred to interchangeably as contemporaries) I content myself with this note here: The main difference between the two will become clearer as I refer to the approach of some of these scholars, with my commentaries all along. The difference between modernists and contemporaries is not only chronological; it is also cognitive. By the modernists I mean the early *avant guardists* of Arab Renaissance who first encountered the West during the colonial era, and whose Islamic reform did not go that deep to touch upon the sharia law and the consideration of the Quran as a text, which the contemporaries, after the colonial era, since the 1950s and 1960s, have dealt with as such. By modernists is not meant total endorsement of Euro-modernity; what is meant is mainly the first opening of the Muslim mind to the modern world by the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As to the contemporaries, they are the later generation of these modern openings; unlike the *avant guardists*, they use more modern social and critical theories of approaching the sacred texts; they do not reject revelation but they are more critical and analytical of the way it has been interpreted traditionally. They may be closer to the West through the modern approaches they borrow from it, but they are also still rooted in the tradition, since they keep analyzing it, without denying it. They are also modernists in that sense, and naming them contemporaries or late reformists is

reformists I refer to into three main categories: 1) “hermeneutists,” or “ethicists-textualists” (exemplified by the work of Fazlur Rahman, Mohamed Arkoun, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and Hassan Hanafi), 2) “egalitarianists-legalists” (Fatema Mernissi and Amina Wadud, and Abdullahi Ahmed An’aim), and 3) “neo-rationalists” (Mohamed Abed Aljabri and Abdulkarim Soroush). More on this classification will be said on due time.<sup>988</sup>

The contemporary stage of Islamic thought use modern methodologies and achievements in re-approaching the sacred texts in radically various ways. Not to go into details here, they, however, all claim not to deny the divine in their reform projects. They all emphasize the place of human agency and reason. They give ethics the primal place among the classical Islamic sciences and branches of approaching and studying texts. European Islam emerges in this context, with these scholarly generations that precedes it. European Islam’s claims of defending human agency, the faculty of reason, and endorsement of modernity values in light of religious ethics, with denial of the divine, are the aspects that make it revisionist or traditional, and thus continuous of previous reforms in Islamic scholarship. What, however, makes it reformist-modern is the fact that it opens new pathways outside what could be termed “classical dichotomous mode of thought” (divine versus secular, revelation versus religion, Church versus state, etc.) that has characterized European interaction with religion for long, which Islamic thought has not avoided though it claims to be immune against it.<sup>989</sup> The new direction European Islam (along with a number of projects in contemporary Islamic thought) seems to be heading to is to restore the “original” communion between the divine and the secular, the source of ethics and the ethics of reasoning. I will revisit these scholarly generations in light of

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more of a methodological nomenclature for chronological classifications in “Islamic” thought. Charles Kurtzman, for instance, says that the modernists have mainly gained freedom of expression, and that the next steps which later Muslim reformists would take would be the modern values. I do not object so much to this view, but I do not say much more on this here either. Charles Kurtzman, ed., *Modernist Islam, 1840-1940: A Sourcebook* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), see the introduction.

<sup>988</sup> I do not aim at going into a long argumentation about why I classify these scholars the way I tend to do. I will say few words about that when I deal with them in Section 1c of this Part IV.

<sup>989</sup> An example of “classical dichotomous thought” from the issue of the source of ethics and the place of reason in interpreting revelation can be that of classifying the source(s) of ethics, whether this source is pure revelation, which largely corresponds to what Majid Fakhry refers to as “religious ethics,” or pure reason, which he refers to as “philosophic ethics,” or reason supported by revelation, which he calls “theological ethics,” or revelation supported by reason, which matches his “scriptural ethics.” Majid Fakhri, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (1991).

Taha Abdurrahmane's analytical framework (humanization-historicization-and-rationalization), in Section 2a, Part IV.

### **a. On Islamic Theology: Kalam, Reason, and Ethics**

In this first section (Part IV, S1a) I present the first generation of the three scholarship eras of Islamic thought, namely the Mu'tazila theological doctrine. Their contribution to Islamic theology is eminent in Islamic history. The current calls of renewing kalam (Islamic theology) stem from the fact that the Mu'tazila were among its leading schools. Before I refer to the Mu'tazila, I note the importance of kalam, and its potential contribution to the contemporary debate on reforming Islam. Two main reasons are behind my emphasis on the importance of this school in relation to my work on European Islam. First, though they could not live as a dominant school, compared with the Ash'aria (to be briefly reviewed), the Mu'tazila remain a distinguished contribution to the Islamic kalam. Their distinction originates from the importance they gave especially to human reason and free will in developing a rational ethical theory, which is their "most important contribution to Arabo-Islamic thought," in Mariam Al Attar's words.<sup>990</sup> European Islam, in my reading, underlines the same faculties (human reason and free will), and can thus trace (part of) its discourse to this early Islamic school. This does not mean that the Mu'tazila is the (only) solution for reforming Islam, or for European reformist Islam; the contended idea here is that there is an intellectual link with the early Islamic tradition which European Islam can also use in justifying its theological adaptations to the modern age; this intellectual link is the place of reason in understanding revelation. Second, their rationalisation of ethical values apart, I am interested in knowing whether reviving the Mu'tazila's heritage is enough at the age of modernity. I will stop at their objectivism approach of the nature of values and its traditional epistemological match which keeps the approach "friendly" with the divine. To clarify this delicate appoint about the Mu'tazila, I will use Taha Abdurrahmane's critical framework in which he equates reason with ethics and religion/ revelation. That

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<sup>990</sup> Al-Attar, *Ethical Theories*, 45

is, I will show that the classical reading of the Mu‘tazila (as George Hourani reads them for example) may not be enough in reviving Islamic thought.<sup>991</sup>

### **The Importance of Kalam in Reviving the Place of Reason in Islamic Thought**

The reformist debate for the last two centuries has centered on the applicability or not of especially Islamic laws, mistakenly commonly referred to simply as “Sharia.” “Sharia law,” “Islamic (positive) law,” or “fiqh” (and not *uṣūl al-fiqh* which is the equivalent of legal theories) are the right names for it, to be more specific.<sup>992</sup> Thus, the necessity to re-read the tradition to distinguish between, or build anew, moral theology, legal theory, and positive law in Islam becomes a requisite. Such an endeavour, however, may not succeed if reference to early kalam is not revisited as well, for it is during this formative period of Islamic theology that such distinctions flourished, before they waned away soon afterwards. Kalam legacy cannot be renewed in a mimetic format, for its first realization in the formative period of Islam had its own socio-political environment, which may not be copied or lived again unless that environment repeats itself, mostly partially, and never fully. The current context of Islam in Europe, in light of the global movement of human beings and ideas, makes such an environment partially possible, as I presented that in the detailed introduction of this work. I do not claim to conduct a thorough theological and jurisprudential research in this Section. Yet, referring to their broad guidelines for the purpose of this work is very helpful in reading the directions European Islam may take. Without these steps, understanding European Islam merely from political perspectives remains reductionist and limited.

Since the formative years of Islamic thought until now, ethics in Islam has been influenced mainly by what Majid Fakhry refers to as “scriptural ethics.” That is, it has been dominated by the “*Koranic ethos*,” and the Sunna teachings, as narrated and

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<sup>991</sup> This point (second reason) will be dealt with in Section 2a, Part OV, on “Conceptualizing the Idea of European Islam.”

<sup>992</sup> In this differentiation, I follow, among many others, Mohammad Fadel who distinguishes among scholastic theology, moral theology, and substantive law, though I do not detail these differentiations further here. My point above is enough for my purposes. Fadel, “The True, the Good and the Reasonable: The Theological and Ethical Roots of Public Reason in Islamic Law,” *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2008, 1-66, downloadable from: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1085347>

commented upon by the exegetists, *al-mufasssirun*. The Greek influence on the ethical debate was accommodated during the Islamic intellectual high days (mainly between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries), but that soon faded away. What has remained then is the “scriptural ethics,” based on religious teachings that are comprehensive in nature but are not formulated into an independent and full fledged analytical theory of ethics.<sup>993</sup> This has been the concern of some contemporary scholars who recognize this deficit in Islamic thought. The Indian pioneering reformist Sir Ahmed Seyyed Khan (d. 1898) was among the first “early reformists” to call for a “new Islamic theology of modernity” (*jadid ‘ilm al-kalam*).<sup>994</sup> Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) worked on that level, too,<sup>995</sup> and so did his compatriot Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988) who believed in the necessity of renewing kalam heritage and building an independent discipline of Islamic ethics.<sup>996</sup> A passage from Rahman corroborates my point. In his book entitled *Islam* (1966) he says, “a systematic attempt must be made to elaborate an ethics on the basis of the Quran, for without an explicitly formulated ethical system, one can never do justice to Islamic law.”<sup>997</sup> He blames Muslim scholars for that in *Islam and Modernity* (1982):

*Muslim scholars have never attempted an ethics of the Quran, systematically or otherwise. Yet, no one who has done any careful study of the Quran can fail to be impressed by its ethical fervor. Its ethics, indeed, is its essence, and it is also the necessary link between theology and law. It is true that the Quran tends to concretize the ethical, to clothe the general in a particular paradigm, and to translate the ethical into legal or quasi-legal commands. But it is precisely a sign of its moral fervor that it is not content only with generalizable ethical propositions but is keen on translating them into actual paradigms....The Quran always explicates the objectives or principles that are the essence of its laws. [...]*  
*The Muslims’ failure to make a clear distinction between Quranic ethics and law*

<sup>993</sup> Fakhry, *Ethical Theories*, 11, 31.

<sup>994</sup> Christian W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978) 307-32.

<sup>995</sup> See mainly his *Reconstruction of Islamic Thought* referred to when introducing the work of Bidar, in Part III, Section 2. Muhammad Khalid Masud, “Iqbal’s Approach to Islamic Theology of Modernity,” *Al-Hikmat*, vol. 27 (2007) 1-36; see also Iqbal’s reference to “new theology” and kalam in his letter to Sahibzada Aftab Ahmed Khan, of the Muslim University of Aligarh, on 4th June 1925, available at: <http://www.allamaiqbal.com/publications/journals/review/oct62/1.htm>

<sup>996</sup> See mainly his *Islam* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), and *Major Themes of the Quran* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980). I will refer to these works in brief when I introduce the reformist project of Rahman in the following sub-section.

<sup>997</sup> Rahman, *Islam*, 256.

has resulted in a confusion between the two. Neither ethics nor law ever became a discipline in itself.<sup>998</sup> [Emphasis added]

Mohamed Arkoun has also repeatedly brought the idea up but kept himself busy developing linguistic tools for “decoding” the orthodoxy texts, initiating two fields of study (*Applied Islamology and Critique of Islamic Reason*), and left the project of developing an independent ethical system unaccomplished. His main work on Islamic ethics was his PhD, later published as a book, on the 11<sup>th</sup> century renowned ethicist Ibn Miskawayh (d. 1030), followed in 2005 by *Humanism in Islam*.<sup>999</sup> Hassan Hanafi (b. 1936), and Abu Ya’rib al-Marzzouki (b. 1947)<sup>1000</sup> have also strongly called for the rebirth of kalam, as a way of reinvigorating Islamic thought.<sup>1001</sup> Taha Abdurrahman (b. 1944), who seems to have given the question of ethics more substantial space during the last decade, makes of ethics the basis of human existence and thought. Abdurrahma says that human existence, religion, and ethics are one; they are not separate entities.<sup>1002</sup> Without “fixing” this “intellectual deficit” no reform is possible. According to these reformists, it appears that any claim of reform based on the Islamic message of ethics (and justice according to some) without developing an independent ethical system of thought remains a mere adaptation and not a reform.

But why am I concerned with linking kalam, with ethics, and reform? As my description of the comparative stage illustrates, the three (kalam, ethics, and reform) need

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<sup>998</sup> Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 154-155

<sup>999</sup> I take it that by “Islamic ethics” he means what Majid Fakhry calls “scriptural ethics.” See: Mohamed Arkoun, *L’Humanisme arabe du IVe/Xe siècle: Miskawayh, philosophe et historien [Arab Humanism in the 4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> Century: Misikawayh, Philosopher and Historian]* (Paris: Vrin, 1984); Arkoun, *Islam to Reform or to Subvert?* (London: Saqi Books, 2007) 356-368.

<sup>1000</sup> See, for example, Hassan Hanafi: *Islam in the Modern World*, vols. 1 and 2 (Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, 1995); Ya’rib al-Marzouki, *Philosophy of Religion from an Islamic Perspective* (Beirut, Dar Al-Hadi, 2006) see Part I of the book.

<sup>1001</sup> Hanafi and Marzzouki, see above.

<sup>1002</sup> I consider Taha Abdurrahman's project of renewing Islamic philosophy, and building a new theory of ethics among the most interesting and genuine projects of the contemporary scholars in the Islamic world. However, I reserve working on him for my interest in ethical issues for future projects for the Islamic majority countries context. I see that he is not heard of here much in the West yet, though he has been developing his line of thought since the 1970s on logic and linguistic renewal first. Being less involved in issues mostly related to politics may have played a role in making him less known to the Western scholarship until now, though he is well read in Islamic philosophy departments in the Arab-Islamic world. Summarizing his logical analysis and philosophy of religion which I introduce in due time in this work, he argues for his approach as follows: “there is no man without ethics”; “there is no ethics without religion”; “there is no man without religion.” Abdurrahmane, *The Question of Ethics*, 52; 147-149.

theological justifications to be “Islamic.” Genuine reform requires an ethical theory, which the kalam, with its diversity, can encourage in reshaping, henceforth the importance of the kalam. For the latter to be even more trusted, it should show strong signs that it grew from within the Islamic creed and believer theologians. This the Mu‘tazila, among the other common kalam schools, provides.

There is a strong argument that goes that kalam grew up about a century earlier before the Greek philosophy was translated into Arabic during the Abbasid era (750-1258). In his interesting work *Reason and Revelation in Islamic Ethics* (1985), George Hourani (d. 1984) argues that kalam is genuinely Islamic, though it had some Greek influence, and this, for him, is a plus for philosophy in general, and Islamic philosophy in particular, to investigate again this heritage and realize its energies now that there is a need for that in Islamic thought. He puts it this way:

Kalam literature [...] owes little to the Greeks except in an indirect and diffuse way. It is original in Islam, and grew quite naturally out of the early theological and juristic debates among Muslims. It appears to me as chronologically the second major occurrence in history of a profound discussion on the meanings and general content of ethical concepts, the first being that of the ancient Greek sophists and Plato. *If this is a sound judgment, it gives an importance to classical Islamic ethics in the general history of philosophy that has not been realized up to now.*<sup>1003</sup> [Italics added]

Like some Islamic reformists, Hourani also believes that “what has been written has a certain relevance because they [Muslims today] face essentially the same problem about value as their classical predecessors.”<sup>1004</sup> In a passage that comes near the end of his work, he makes the earlier point even clearer with reference to the Mu‘tazila whose heritages he aspires to see rekindled in Islamic thought:

If I had a choice of what intellectual path Muslims should follow – a choice which I do not have, looking at Islam from outside – I would start over again at the points where the early jurists and the Mu‘tazilites left off, and work to develop a system of Islamic law which would openly make use of judgments of equity and public interest, and a system of ethical theology which would encourage judgments of right and wrong by the human mind, without having to look to scripture at every step. The Mu‘tazillites were correct in their doctrine that we can make objective value judgments, even if their particular theory of ethics had

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<sup>1003</sup> Hourani, *Islamic Ethics*, 21

<sup>1004</sup> *Ibid.*, 66

weaknesses, which would have to be revised by modern ethical philosophers and theologians. So I think this is the best way for Muslims to revive Islam, and I wish them success in a formidable task.<sup>1005</sup>

The relevance of kalam then lies in the fact that it raises questions that are most profound. In his attempt to construct an Islamic philosophy of religion in *The Quran and the Secular Mind: A Philosophy of Islam* (1998), Shabbir Akhtar, like Hourani in this point, demonstrates that early kalam theology was internally stimulated, as early as the mid-and-late 9<sup>th</sup> century, before and during the early beginnings of the Abbasid intellectual era, for Muslim theologians had questions which needed to be faced. The dominant part of these questions was related to fiqh (law) so this early theological phase depended heavily on the scriptures, and the use of reason for the Maliki school, for instance. Going on with Akhtar's reading of early Islamic theology and philosophy, he says that with the Abbassid's openings to the Greeks, the Muslim theologians had to defend faith using reasoning, logic and dialectics of the Greeks to encounter mainly the Muslim philosophers that were Greek-minded (especially al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Roshd later); this phase he calls "dialectical theology." For Akhtar, the Mu'tazila belong to this category.<sup>1006</sup> And seeing that Islamic philosophy did not live long to flourish, and was criticized by Hassan al-Ash'ari (father of Ash'aria dominant school), and later on crushed by, among others, al-Ghazali's critique,<sup>1007</sup> what remained of Islamic intellectual life was a "theological philosophy," for these dominant philosophers turned Greek secular reason into a means to prove and serve divine truths.<sup>1008</sup> What I mainly

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<sup>1005</sup> Hourani, *Islamic Ethics*, 276

<sup>1006</sup> Hourani, for example, categorizes them as philosophers in light of their methodology of argumentation based on dialectic as well as logic, and so does Majid Fakhry. I do not get into this debate here, for it depends on how each defines the term theology, kalam, and philosophy.

<sup>1007</sup> What is meant here is al-Ghazali's famous critique of early Islamic rationalist philosophers, which is believed by many historians to have influenced the later development of mystic and orthodox Islam, instead of going on with the early rationalist tradition of, for example, Al-Farabi. Al-Ghazali's critique is condensed in his *tahafut al-falasifa [Incoherence of Philosophers]*. The renowned Ibn Roshd (Averroes) would reply to such a critique in his famous work *tahafut al-tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence)*. Ibn Roshd softens the rationalist views of the early Islamic philosophers, and criticizes Al-Ghazali's mystic tendency, and defends what he is famous for now as the "double truth," i.e. both religion and philosophy, or revelation and reason, as two separate but complementary paths of realizing the truth. See: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, trans. Sabih Ahmad Kamali (Lahore, Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1958); Simon Van Den Bergh, trans. *Averroes' tahafut al-tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence)* vol. I & II (Cambridge: EJW Gibb Memorial, 1978).

<sup>1008</sup> Shabbir Akhtar, *The Quran and the Secular Mind: A Philosophy of Islam* (Oxon: Routledge, 1998)13-22

take from Akhtar's account is his point which is close to Hourani's; it concerns the internal aspect of the basic ontological-epistemological questions raised by early Islamic theology.<sup>1009</sup>

Hourani says that two kinds of questions busied the early Muslim minds, one is ontological, and the other is epistemological. The first was posed as follows: "What is the nature of ethical value concepts such as the good and the just?" That is, more simply put, the question tries to arrive at whether ethical values are "objective" and worth what they are intrinsically, or whether they are "subjective" and need a Lawgiver and agent to make them meaningful. The second primal question was posed as follows: "How can man know the presence and force of these concepts in particular situations?" The answer was either of the two: man can know that through reason (rationalism) or through revelation (traditionalism).<sup>1010</sup> Mariam al-Attar invokes Euthyphro's dilemma, uttered through Socrates' tongue, in summarizing the early Muslim theologians-philosophers questions: "Is the pious and holy beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved by the gods?" For al-Attar, the Muslim jurists in particular would have phrased the question as follows: is what is good commanded by God because it is good, or is it good because it is commanded by God? Her answer goes as follows: "certainly the answer would be that what is good is commanded by God because it is good, especially when we take into consideration that they considered *maslahah* and the welfare of human beings the ultimate purpose of revelation."<sup>1011</sup>

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<sup>1009</sup> There is a general agreement on the great philosophical influence of the Greeks over the Islamic philosophy; such an agreement is not always found when the question touches Islamic theology, or kalam. Some, as Hourani in this case, argue that kalam emerged before the Greek texts were translated; when they were translated, they just added intensity to the kalam which theologians solidified using Greek logic and dialectics. This historical debate of recognition and influence may have a further impact on European Islam, but I do not go further in this historical debate here. What has to be stressed in this stage of my reference is that the Muslim mind was open to various intellectual trends, be they Greek, or not. Emphasis has to be on the fact that before one mode of thinking dominated (i.e. the Ash'ari in the majority Sunni world), diversity characterized the formative period of Islamic thought. Contemporary scholars are interested in capturing this early moment of Islamic history, as will be shown through the work of hermeneutists and rationalists like Fazlur Rahman, Mohammed Akroun, and Abdulkarim Soroush (Part IV, Section 2-3).

<sup>1010</sup> Hourani, *Islamic Ethics*, 23

<sup>1011</sup> Al-Attar, *Islamic Ethics*, 138

## Kalam Formative Period amidst Political Turmoil

The development of Islamic theology originates politically from the murder of the third Caliph Uthman (reigned 644-656 AD), and the fourth one after him. The fourth Caliph was supposed to react to this murder by punishing the murderers and restoring justice. Part of Ali's partisans, known since then as the Shi'a, would secede from his Shi'a (literally meaning "group" or "partisans") and become the Seceders/ *Khawārij* as a protest against the failure to "justly" defend the murdered third Caliph. The *Khawārij* believed that God's judgment has to be pursued and not pursuing it makes one no longer a believer, mu'min; belief has to be professed and practiced, and thus God's rules have to be followed in theory and practice, otherwise the ruler/ believer can be labelled "kafir/ infidel."<sup>1012</sup> On the other side of it developed the Murji'a, or the "Postponers," who postponed giving their judgment on the murder of the Caliph, and on sinning, to the Day of Judgment; i.e. they abstained from declaring a believer an infidel, for that is up to God to decide.<sup>1013</sup>

This decisive political strife (*fitna*) in Islamic political history would fuel the theological debate among scholars later in what is commonly known as *'ilm al-kalam* (kalam, or the discipline of disputing religion, based on dialectic argumentation).<sup>1014</sup> Kalam scholars, known as *mutakallimūn*, debated matters related to the nature of God and His attributes, scripture, prophets, good and evil, human freedom and responsibility, and the religious foundations of political authority and order. A lot of this early debate developed more as a reaction to external refutations of the Islamic creed advanced by Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian theologians, who were open to Hellenistic learning, before it became a central issue among Muslim theologians themselves.<sup>1015</sup>

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<sup>1012</sup>Jamal J. Ilias, *Islam* (London: Routledge, 1999) 45- 47.

<sup>1013</sup> Malik Muhammad Tariq, "The Ideological Background of Ratioanlity in Islam," *Al-Hikmat*, Volume 28 (2008), 31-56.

<sup>1014</sup> The great late fourteenth century scholar Ibn Khaldun defines *'ilm al-kalam* as speculative theology, the "Science that involves arguing with logical proofs in defense of articles of faith and refuting innovations (non Sunnas) that deviate in their dogmas from the early Muslims and Muslim orthodox." Ibn-Khaldun, *The Muqaddima*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1958) 31.

<sup>1015</sup> Whether there is an influence of Christian theology on Islamic kalam, and how far is that influence if proof of that is established is still debated among scholars. Al-Attar, for instance, in a recent work on Islamic ethics and theology says there is no such influence, al-Attar, *Islamic Ethics*, 54; On the presence of

To focus on the issue that matters most for this study, human freedom and agency in interpreting revelation and its ethics, it is mainly the Jabriya/ Compulsionism or Determinism, and Qadariya that initiated profound theological debates in Islam. The Jabriya (from *jabr*, compulsion) argue that no act is the doing of human beings. Allah does everything. Humans do perform acts but have no actual capacity (*istita`a*) of their own to do them. Human action is predestined. All human agency is divinely initiated and rooted in God's *qadar*. Everything has been created, and nothing is created anymore. Allah punishes people for His own acts, not theirs. A human being earns neither reward nor punishment. Whoever wishes to act, let him act; the felicitous one is not harmed by his sins, and the wretched one is not helped by his piety. That denotes God's transcendence, and the symbolic action of humans in this world. Human action is figurative, metaphoric. Such is, broadly, the thought of Jabriya/ Predestination or Determinism.<sup>1016</sup> To facilitate the categorizations of these schools later, it is good to note now that this school is in modern terms referred to as "Divine Command Theory." It is "subjectivist" since the agent is the Lawgiver, though man acts on His behalf; he follows what he is destined for. It is subjectivist also because the values of good and evil, for instance, are defined by the Lawgiver, God: good is good because God Wills it; evil is evil because God also Wills it. Reason follows the dictates of revelation. The Qadariya (from *qadr* and *qudra*, i.e. power and ability), on the other hand, argue that human beings are created free and they are morally responsible for their action.

These two main trends would develop, about two centuries later, into major theological schools during the Abbassid flourishing era as Ash'aria<sup>1017</sup> and Mu'tazilla.<sup>1018</sup> The former would dominate the "conservative" Sunni Islam, and the latter, known as the "rationalist" inheritance of classical Islam, would fade away after the eleventh century,

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Christian doctrine in Islamic theology, see also the recent work of David Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), see Chapter I and VI.

<sup>1016</sup> See, for instance, Nagel's reading of Jahm ibn Safwan in Tilman Nagel, *The History of Islamic Theology* (Princeton: Markus Weiner Publishers, 2000) 109-118.

<sup>1017</sup> It is named after Abu l-Hassan al-Asha'ari (d. 935)

<sup>1018</sup> It is named after its first initiator Wasil Ibn 'Ata' (d. 748) who withdrew, *i'tazala*, from the circle of his master/ sheikh al-Hassan al-Basri (d. 728) in a theological debate about sinning and punishment.

after only about forty years of its political implementation; it survive mainly in Yemen and Iran among Twelver Shi'a and Zaydia.<sup>1019</sup>

The debate between the Ash'aria and Mu'tazila was over the perception of ethical virtues, the ontology of good and evil, and their epistemological manifestation. For the Ash'aria, revelation is the guiding force for human thought and action, though human beings enjoy a large scale of free will. Here are some of the main tenets of this school. One, reason is able to discover the existence of God but is not able to designate that an action is morally or religiously obligatory without the help of revelation. Two, human reason and the senses alone are unable to comprehend fully the unique nature of God and his attributes. Three, though human beings possess free will, they actually have no power to create anything in the material world, for that is in the premise of God alone. God has created everything in a particular time and so He has done with matters. This is the atomism tenet. Four, man acts, but God creates. Man is responsible for his acts but ontologically it is God's action. That is what the Ash'ari term "acquisition," or "*qasb*" of the will to act as a mid-stage. Five, as to moral truth, it is revelation that teaches it, and it is not known *a priori* or by deduction from *a priori* propositions or by experimenting and observation of the world. This means that human reason alone is unable to establish certainties and claims for truths, morality, the physical world, and metaphysics without the mediation of revelation. Only the sacred determines the good and evil.<sup>1020</sup>

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The Ash'aria, besides the Maturidi<sup>1021</sup> and the Hanbali<sup>1022</sup> schools, make together the major Sunni line of thought. The Quran and the Sunna are their departing references.

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<sup>1019</sup> Richard Martin, et al., eds., *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997) 25-31. The Tunisian scholar and activist Mohamed Charfi says that "the crushing of the Mu'tazilla," as he entitles a section of his book, has led to the current dilemma, and "hesitant modernity" debate: Mohamed Charfi, *Islam and Liberty: The Historical Misunderstanding*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London and New York: Zed Books, 2005) 6-9, 86.

<sup>1020</sup> See, for example, William Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology, An Extended Survey*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Edinburg: Edinburg UP, 1985) Part II and III.

<sup>1021</sup> Maturidi is a school of theology and jurisprudence that was named after Muhammad Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 944). He is a student of the Hanafi school that falls within the Ash'aria. The Maturidi, however, differ on a number of issues with the Ashari. William Montgomery Watt speaks of differences on four points: faith or iman, the doctrine of the qadar, the punishment of sins, and God's active attributes. First, while the Asharites and Hanbalites believes that iman increases and decreases, and that that iman has to be expressed in word and in act (theory and practice), the Maturidis state that *iman* does not increase nor decrease, but remains static; it is rather *taqwa* (piety) which increases and decreases. Iman for the Maturidi

Big scholars and philosophers have adopted Asharia, like al-Ghazali who would make a turn in Islamic philosophy by critiquing the influence of the metaphysics of ancient Greek and Hellenistic philosophies. His cause-and-effect philosophy (known now as occasionalism), and the development of his deductive and empirical approaches in the exact sciences (like mathematics, arithmetic's, astrology) defended the Ash'ari recourse to reasoning methodology, and hermeneutical devices in dealing with the texts in legal matters, as practiced by most of the four major legal schools, *madhabs*.

Al-Ghalazi developed (from his teacher al-Juwayni) what has become a classic in the objectives of Islamic jurisprudence. That is, the five objectives of Sharia, known as *al-kulliyat alkhamis*: the preservation of life, intellect, religion, lineage, and wealth. As was referred to earlier when dealing with Tariq Ramadan (Part II of this study), he developed categories of differentiation and preservation of the public interest (*maṣlaḥa*), but always in light of the sacred text and the Sunna. He was reserved when it comes to human reason and interpretation based on the jurist's opinion, *tafsīr bi ra'y*; he rejected the *qiyās*/ ruling by analogy. Imam Malik made use of al-Ghazali's work, and focused on

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seems immeasurable since it reflects an inner conviction. Second, the Ashaari believe that human acts are created by God and man's power to act can be measured only with action; i.e. there is no power without action. (The Mu'tazila, on the contrary, believe that power precedes action). The Maturidi here are closer to the Mu'atazilla and believe that man has the choice, *ikhtiyar*, between, for instance, believing or not, and that God does not compel him to either choice, but can just help him in the first and abandon him in the second. Third, the Asha'ari take it that the Muslim sinner will be punished in Hell, but with God's grace he can be moved to Paradise afterwards, otherwise he can remain eternally in Hell. The Maturidi seem closer to the early Murji'a who argue that even a grave sin may not remove the Muslim from the status of *iman*, and this means that since there is *iman*, the sinner cannot remain eternally in Hell, but can, by the intercession (*shafa'a*) of Muhammad be moved to Paradise. Fourth, the Maturidi agree with the Ash'arite that God has attributes, *sifat*, like knowledge, and disagree with the Mu'tazilla who believe that God knows by essence and not by attributes. Yet, the Maturidi are closer to the Mu'atazilla on the distinction between active and essential attributes, *sifat alfi*<sup>1</sup>, and *sifat adh-dhat*. They argue that the attributes are eternal. See, William Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998) 314-316.

<sup>1022</sup> Named after the imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855) is known as the "Imam of Ahl al-Sunnah." He defended the Quran and Sunna against the claims of the creation of Quran which the Mu'atazila advanced, and which the Abbasid Caliph Al-Ma'mun (reg. 813-833) adopted as the dynasty's doctrine, and initiated what is known as *Mihna*/ Inquisition against orthodox scholars like Ibn Hanbal. He defended the theological views of the early orthodox scholars, including the founders of the other schools of Sunni fiqh, Imam Abu Hanifa (d. 767), Imam Malik ibn Anas (d. 795), and his student Imam ash-Shafi'i (d. 820). See Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 98-104. See also the recent survey works of Wael Hallaq for the development of Islamic legal theories, which intertwine with theological schools, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005) Chapters 3, 6, 7, 8, and *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009) Chapters 1 to 4.

the *maṣlaḥa* as a concept for the public good. Al-Shatibi, after him, made of this a more thorough study to fathom the objectives of Sharia. For al-Shatibi, the intent of the Lawgiver is found in the Quran, and the Sunna just explicates the details, *juz' iyyāt*. Ibn Taymiya, who tried to reclaim *ijtihād* against *taqlid* during the political weakness of the Abbasids in Baghdad in the thirteenth century, opened Sharia to politics, through *mu'amalat* window, and developed his theory of *assiyyāsa ash-shar'iyya*. For Henri Laoust, Ibn Taymiya urged the use of *qiyās* (interpreting by analogy) a stage between reason and revelation.<sup>1023</sup> In general, the Ash'ari scholars are seen to have allowed a large space for reasoning in reading the revelation, which is demonstrated by the development of various schools of jurisprudence. The faculty of reason is used to prove revelation, and to explain it. They, however, did not take the step some late Mu'tazila scholars took, namely to put reason ahead of revelation, without, at the same time, condescending to the latter, nor denying it. I now move to introducing the main tenets of this school and their moral interpretations.

#### **b. On the Rationalist Mu'tazila: Qadi Abd Aljabbar's Theory of Ethics**

Known as the rationalist theologians in early Islamic thought, the Mu'tazila kalam scholars (*mutakallimūn*), first appeared as defenders of Islam against the external debaters. The *fitna* event, which Tilman Nagel calls the First Civil War in Islamic history, between Ali's partisans (Shi'a) and Mu'awiyya's partisans (mostly to be known as Sunnites later) would refuel the internal debate among theologians on judgment, determination, sinning, and God's attributes, besides the imamate and Islamic rule.<sup>1024</sup> However, three samples of work on their doctrine present, together, a picture of the thought of the Mu'tazila especially for what concerns their rational argumentation and its impact on ethics. I first give a general idea on their emphasis on the faculty of reason in reaching a reasonable conception of God, approaching revelation, and thus understanding

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<sup>1023</sup> Yet, not all scholars agree on this way of reading Ibn Taymiya. For example, Coulson recognizes that Ibn Taymiya opened the doors of *ijtihād*, as long as that does not contradict the sacred message, but Schacht is far from agreeing on such a reading of Ibn Taymiya. See, David Johnson, "A Turn in the Epistemology and Hermeneutics of Twentieth Century Uṣūl al-Fiqh," *Islamic Law and Society*, vol. 11, n. 2 (2004), 250, n.55.

<sup>1024</sup> Nagel, and he is not alone in that, argues that the Mu'tazilla were not one fraction to produce one uniform theology. Nagel, *The History of Islamic Theology*, 118.

the canons of existence and they interplay between them. Second, I present their five main tenets. Third, I end with referring to their moral interpretation. Since this is not a work on the Mu‘tazila, this account is generic, and aims at building links between part of “what went in the past of Islamic thought” and “what is going on in European Islamic thought in the present.”<sup>1025</sup>

In *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu‘tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (1997), Richard Martin (et al.) present even a more rational view of the Mu‘tazilla. They present some of its historical figures and political rise and fall. They, more importantly, introduce the first English translation of the book of Qadi Abd Aljabbar (d. 1024) who they present as the last great Mu‘tazilla scholar. (His twenty volumes work (*al-Mughni*) was discovered in Yemen in the 1950s.) The book’s title is *The Book of the Five Fundamentals (kitab al-uṣūl al-khamsa)*. It starts with a chapter on The First Principles, then is followed by five chapter titles that correspond to the five tenets of Mu‘tazilla referred to earlier, which Abd Aljabbar calls the Fundamentals of Religion. This introductory book is in the form of question-answer, a dialectic format of Plato’s, which is common among late kalam scholars.

In the “First Principles” (chapter 1) which opens the book, the idea of elevating reason above revelation is very clear. Below are quotations from the text, to illustrate without interference the priority a Mu‘tazillite like Abd Aljabbar gave to reason. I primarily cite the first question-answer that initiates the book, and it is about Knowledge of God. It prioritizes reason over revelation as a way of conceiving Him rationally:

1. If it is asked: What is the first duty that God imposes upon you? Say to him: Speculative reasoning (*al-nazar*) which leads to knowledge of God, because He is not known intuitively (*daruratan*) nor by the senses (*bi l-mushahada*). Thus, He must be known by reflection and speculation.<sup>1026</sup>

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<sup>1025</sup> At this stage, I do not give my own interpretation of their work in connection to the current developments in Islamic thought. I leave that to the stage where I introduce Taha Abdurrahmane’s framework used for conceptualizing the idea of European Islam (Part IV, Section 1a). What I am most interested in behind introducing the Mu‘tazila is their overall rational interpretation of revelation and some of its main tenets that concern the world, society, and the individual.

<sup>1026</sup> Qtd in Martin, et al., eds., *Defenders of Reason in Islam*, 90.

The third question is about why reasoning is important. The answer emphasises “rational worship” over mere “shar’/ religious worship” which may remain unsatisfactory for the rational believer:

3. Then if it is asked: Why did speculative reasoning become the first of the duties? Say to him: Because the rest of the stipulates of revelation (*shara'i*, pl. of shari'a) concerning what [we should] say and do are no good until after there is knowledge of God. Do you not see that it is no good for us to pray without knowing to whom we are to pray?<sup>1027</sup>

As to how man is able to reason and for what purpose, Abd Aljabbar recites the classical natural abilities God bestowed on man, which make him stand able to live rationally in the world. As a way of recognition, the rational believer shows gratitude and thanks through worship rituals.<sup>1028</sup> In the sixth question-answer, as another example, reason is again given the first place, and only afterwards comes the orthodox sources of the Islamic tradition as proofs of God’s existence: rational argument first, the Quran next, followed by the Prophetic tradition, and then the classical scholarly consensus (*ijmā’*).<sup>1029</sup>

These examples show that Abd Aljabbar adopts a high esteem position for reason, and considers revelation an advantage, a plus, granted by God to perfect the status of man, his autonomy, free will, and moral responsibility, which capable human beings can reach rationally. More importantly, he argues that revelation just supports what reason realizes in nature. If revelation contradicts what is reasonable and natural then that means that there is either a misinterpretation of revelation, or that God would be disrupting the

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<sup>1027</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1028</sup> To avoid long citations in the text, I refer to the passage here:

Then if it is asked: What is the first grace bestowed upon you by God? Say to him: That is something that I cannot account for. In general, however, He created me a living [being], and provided me with power (*al-qudra*) and physical means (*al-ala*). And He perfected my nature (*khulq*) and gave me passions and enabled me to enjoy a variety of pleasurable things. Then, He issued me commands and prohibitions so that I could attain the [requisite] level of reward and enter the Heavens. Therefore, it is incumbent on me to establish His existence and to know Him so that I can worship Him, give Him thanks and do what satisfies Him and avoid disobedience toward Him. (Ibid.)

<sup>1029</sup> The argumentation goes on as follows:

Then if it is asked: What are the proofs? Say to him: There are four: rational argument (*hujjat al-'aql*), scripture (*al-kitab*), the example [of the Prophet] (Sunna), and the consensus [of the community] (*ijmā’*). Knowledge of God can only be gained by speculating with rational argument, because if we do not [first] know that He is truthful we will not know the authenticity of the Book, the Sunna and the communal consensus. (Ibid., 90-91)

evidence on which human reason about this world is grounded.<sup>1030</sup> This last option is not valid, because divine justice tenet would be henceforth nullified, and the principle of Tawhid itself, which aims at liberating man, is weakened by the same omnipresent power.

For Abu L-Hudhayl al-'Allaf (752-848), an earlier Mu'tazilite well immersed in Greek philosophy, reason can be used in searching for answers to two basic types of questions which arise in every religion: those concerning God and those concerning the problem of good and evil. He affirms that human reason can: 1) discern the existence of God; 2) discern the duty for humans to give thanks to God; 3) distinguish between good and evil; 4) and discern the duty for humans to do good and avoid doing evil.<sup>1031</sup> Abd Aljabbar is not far from this frame of thought. Proving the existence of God apart, assuming that it is believed in also by the rationalists according to the Mu'tazila, it is the moral questions of good and evil, and human responsibility that take prime concern for him. He believes that humanity is obliged to three moral obligations or actions: 1) actions that are obligatory "by virtue of an intrinsic property," like being kind, protecting the self from injury, showing God's gratitude for his kindness; 2) actions for God's grace, *lutf*, which are the only non-rational-category, like *worship* rituals; and 3) the obligatory actions that performing them brings good and pushes evil.<sup>1032</sup> These three moral obligations are dispersed among the five basic tenets that he sees as components of the "fundamentals of religion." To these tenets I turn now.

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As to their doctrine, the Mu'tazila are broadly distinguished by five main tenets: 1) Tawhid or uni(-ci)ty of God, 2) *al-'adl*, i.e. divine justice, 3) *al-wa'd wa al-wa'id*, promise and threat, 4) *al-manzila bayna almanzilatayn*, the intermediate position, and 5) *al-amro bi alma'ruf wa annahyu 'ani al-munkar*, commanding the right and prohibiting the wrong. From the first two tenets, unity and justice, the Mu'tazila received their name, *ahl attawhid wa al'Adl*, People of Unity and Justice, or Defenders of Unity and Justice. William Montgomery Watt considers the last three principles as minor, compared to the first two, since they are mainly the outcome of the theological debate in a political era of

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<sup>1030</sup> *Ibid.*, 12

<sup>1031</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>1032</sup> Johnson, "A Turn in the Epistemology and Hermeneutics of Twentieth Century Uṣūl al-Fiqh," 239.

turmoil.<sup>1033</sup> In my perspective, they are not minor, since they actually help in explaining the two first prime tenets. Because of the logical order I see in them, and unlike Watt, I present them as the Mu'tazila scholars themselves do, and add to them their moral implications.

For the *Tawhid* tenet, like the majority of Muslim schools of thought, the Mu'tazila strongly believed in the oneness of God. They confirmed this tenet through denying 1) God's essential attributes such as knowledge, power and speech, 2) denying the eternity or uncreatedness of the Quran as the speech of God (i.e. they believed the Quran was created by God at a certain point of time, *khalq al-qur'an*), and 3) through denying anthropomorphism (*tashbih or tajssim*), i.e. any resemblance between God and his creation. One, for the denial of the attributes of God, the Mu'tazilla argued that speaking of knowledge, for example, as an attribute to God makes it (the attribute) ontologically equal to God, and that would lead to atheism, i.e. that there exists two gods, co-eternals, God and knowledge. For them, attributes are not distinct from the divine essence. This is very connected to their non-atomist view of God. God is the only being who does not consist of atoms and accidents; all other beings and things are composed of atoms, *jawahir*, and accidents, *a'rad*. The essence of God, henceforth, is not subject to change; change in this theological view transpires through the succession of accidents in the body, which is a human characteristic and not God's. This way God's transcendence is preserved.<sup>1034</sup> Two, for the createdness of the Quran, they argued that it was created before *laylat al-qadr*, the day of its descent, in the Divinely Preserved Tablet (*fi allawh al-mahfuz*) and that it is protected by God who says that fallacy does not come neither before it nor after it, which is for them a proof that it was created at some point of time,

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<sup>1033</sup> Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 228-231

<sup>1034</sup> For other scholars like Ibn Sinna, Avicenna, he recognizes similarities between God and the world. For him, the world in its overall system is a divine emanation; the real essence of all things emanates from God, and the difference between the two lies in the nature of their existence: God's existence is a necessary one, whereas the world receives its existence from God. For someone like Al-Ghazali, however, he finds these similarities between God and the world in the concept of the soul. The soul's nature, for him, is similar to the nature of God, and the way to have good knowledge of God begins when humans can be purified to recognize their real essence as part of God's. For some of the Mu'tazilites like Qadi Abd Al-jabbar, there is a distinction between the nature of God and man, but for philosophers-mystics like Ibn Sina and Alghazali, there are close similarities between the two. For a detailed comparison between these three schools, see: Maha Elkaisy-Friemuth, *God and Humans in Islamic Thought: 'Abd al-Jabbar, Ibn Sina and al-Ghazali* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) 152-171.

and thus it is limited and finite. More, to say that the Quran was not created would mean that it is equally eternal as God Himself, which is against the idea of Tawhid. The Mu'tazilla stood against the Ash'arite separation between the eternal speech of God and the created words of the Qur'an, which made God's will unknowable, according to the Mu'tazilla. Three, for the denial of anthropomorphism, the Mu'atazilla resorted to metaphorical interpretations of the Quranic verses or Prophetic hadiths that contain linguistic expressions of resemblances between God and man, using the Quranic logic, rational methodology and the use of pre-Islamic Arabic lexicon to defend their arguments.<sup>1035</sup> What are the moral implications of these three essential thoughts of the Mu'tazila?

The idea of the uniqueness of God and His attributes were advanced to liberate human beings from subjugation and subordination to any other being or matter which alleges power and authority over mankind. All humans are equal, and the supreme transcendental power is one. This means that political and religious authorities that claimed divine authority to rule or guide Muslims undermines the idea of Tawhid authority itself, which is unique to God. The Mu'tazila in particular opposed the Ummayyad oppressive ruling practices: some of the Ummayyads claimed to be "God's vicegerents/ Caliphs," and claimed predestination to justify their rule. The Mu'tazila also defended the tenet of Tawhid against the Shi'a who believe in the infallible imam who can rule in God's name. With such a belief, the imam claims knowledge and other attributes that are divine, and thus relegates the faculty of human reason to the margin. Against both the idea of God's Caliph and the infallible man, the Mu'tazila were defending human free will and responsibility. More than that, with the idea of the createdness of the Quran, they defended the Quranic narrated stories as historical, and thus their possible changeability. If Quran were eternal, it meant that it was equal to God in existence/ essence, and what it decreed were eternal, predestined obligations. The Mu'tazila were not for this view of an eternal Quran and predestination. If it were eternal, that would endanger God's attribute of omnipresence and ability of creation of believers

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<sup>1035</sup> Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 242-249. A lot of these arguments are present in the approaches of contemporary Muslim reformists like Abdolkatim Soroush. This will be recalled in due time, though not in details.

and non-believers, for instance. Broadly, with the tenet of Tawhid, the Mu'tazila were defending the idea of divine justice, which they considered a universal value and viable idea.<sup>1036</sup> "The Mu'tazila assumed that the welfare of human beings was the ultimate purpose of revelation."<sup>1037</sup>

It is in the tenet of *justice* of God that human action and responsibility is mostly raised and made obvious. Here, the Mu'tazilla reinterpret the predestination concepts that other schools, like the Jabria earlier, defended. The Mu'atazilla believed in total human freedom and thus responsibility. Man is given guidance signs (*idlal* through Prophets, and divine books like the Quran and the stories it contains about this world and the other world), and power (*istita'a or qudra*) to act freely. God helps man just in what is good, as to evil it is not from God but from man himself. God may have power to move or power over evil but he does not move nor does he enact evil; man moves and does evil. God's existence is necessary in itself. It transcends benefit and harm, so He cannot be moved to do good or bad. He could have created a different world, but creation arbitrarily (*'abathan*) is not His quality. Even for the case of unbelievers, God made man able to believe, and if he (man) does not, it is then his responsibility; he has the "power of faith" and "power of unbelief." For the Mu'tazila, power, or the ability to act, precedes action. Man is given this power and he either enacts it or not; he is *mukallaf*, given power, the substance to be rational, autonomous, and responsible and thus deserves merits, reward and punishment. This means that God is bound by the rule of justice and right action.<sup>1038</sup>

Henceforth, unlike the orthodox Ash'ari conception of the justice of God which is given to whatever is done or commanded by God, the Mu'tazila's conception of divine justice is limited to the right that promotes the good. Divine justice is compatible with human reason. More interestingly, and to invoke the moral aspect in this conception of justice in light of the late Mu'tazilla scholar Qadi Abd Aljabbar, an act of justice is not

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<sup>1036</sup> Al-Attar, *Islamic Ethics*, 48-57.

<sup>1037</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>1038</sup> See also Richard M. Frank, *Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism in Medieval Islam: Texts and Studies on the Development and History of Kalam*, vol.1, ed. Dimitri Gutas (Hamshire and Burlington: Ashgate, 2005) 116-121. As for children and animals, for instance, the Mu'tazilla also tried to reason about how responsible they are and how God indemnifies their non-responsibility. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 231-242.

only that which does good to the agent. Rather, a just act, if it harms someone, it should do so “in a way that is good.” He says,

The act which is distinguished by this attribute [justice] is every act which is done to benefit or harm someone in a way that is good (*'ala wajh yahsunu*), where what somebody does for himself to benefit himself or to repel harm is not described as such. For that reason it is not said that Zayd, by eating or drinking or doing what is religiously necessary (*wajib*) or recommended (*nadb*), is being just. *When he benefits or injures someone else in a way that is good, it is said that he is being just to him and that what he did was just.*<sup>1039</sup> [Emphasis added]

What I want to stress without further details is that the conception of divine justice in Mu‘tazila tenets impacted their view of social justice and human agency, and freed the divine from responsibility for social injustices, without ending in disbelieving in Him.

*The promise and threat* means that the Quranic declarations that God deliver His promise of punishing the sinner and rewarding the pious are right. The moral implications of this tenet emphasize the certainty of rational knowledge in ethics advanced by the Mu‘tazila, which will become clearer below. Because of this rationality, good actions cannot be neglected or interchanged or made equal with the wrong ones; if that is so, then reasoning is arbitrary, and God’s judgements are so, too. Wrong cannot become right; punishments cannot be annulled, and rewards are emphasized, otherwise the theory of ethics the Mu‘tazila advance remains weak.<sup>1040</sup>

For the *intermediate position*, the famous story of Wasil Ibn Atta and his abstention from declaring whether Ali, the third Caliph, or his opponents in the battle of Camel of the first civil war is considered the right position. It is a theological postponement (*irja'*) of deciding over a political issue; the believer, Ali or his opponents, here is not being judged and an event in early Islamic history is being compromised by theological silence. “It was a form of political compromise, but it was too negative to be satisfactory,” as Watt comments on this position.<sup>1041</sup> Mariam al-Attar explains this idea of

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<sup>1039</sup> Al-Attar, *Islamic Ethics*, 58. The emphasized sentence above looks close in principle to John Rawls’ first part of the second principle of justice. It could be interesting to study the ethical theory of Abd Aljabbar and its impact on social justice, in light of Rawls’ theory. See: Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (1971; Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999) 52-56

<sup>1040</sup> Al-Attar, *Islamic Ethics*, 59

<sup>1041</sup> Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 230

postponement from a moral perspective. It either means postponing judgement on humans to God who knows best, or postponing judgment in acts and considering deeds less important than belief. This implies that either human beings are not always able to make ethical judgements, but mere value judgements, or that only God is able to know the degree of one's faith in one's heart. From this perspective of postponing judgment - endorsed especially by the early Murji'a/ Postponement school - actions are not always considered the final measurement of one's faith, though they remain important for the Mu'tazila (and the *Khawārij* / Seceders before them). A wrong doer, or a sinner, from the Mu'tazilite perspective is not considered apostate (*murtad*), infidel (*kāfir*), faithful (*mu'min*), hypocrite (*munāfiq*), but is a wrongdoer (*fāsiq*), and his final punishment is for God to decide.<sup>1042</sup>

As to *commanding the right and forbidding the wrong tenet*, it is highly recommended in the Quran, whenever there is an opportunity to advocate the good by hand, tongue, or at least by heart. Moral exhortation is a duty, which explicitly means that banishing evil is also a moral duty.<sup>1043</sup> Watt's choice of the translation of the words ("right and wrong," for "*ma'ruf and munkar*") differs from the translation of al-Attar who uses "good and evil." Al-Attar's translation is more adequate to the Mu'tazila doctrine of ethics, since the "good" here refers to the rational consequences derived from an act or value, and does not limit itself to the normative judgement as established by the religious doctrine.<sup>1044</sup> This is further explained further.

The Mu'tazilite Abd Aljabbar's twenty volumes work found in the 1950s in Yemen is interestingly studied by Mariam al-Attar in *Islamic Ethics: Divine Command Theory in Arabo-Islamic Thought* (2010). This work defends the idea that the Mu'tazila, in light of Abd Aljabbar's voluminous work, believe in the objectivism of moral values, and the power of reason in reaching them. Abd Aljabbar critiques two main theories of values: the subjective theory of value and the divine command theory. First, he argues against the subjectivist theory. Concisely, the latter advances the idea that values are

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<sup>1042</sup> Al-Attar, *Islamic Ethics*, 60

<sup>1043</sup> Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 228-231

<sup>1044</sup> Al Attar, *Islamic Ethics*, 62. This is made clearer with reference to Qadi Abd Aljabbar's ethical theory as explained by Mariam Al-Attar in the following paragraph, after the last tenet is introduced.

determined by human attitudes and preferences, which make them subjective and relative. For him, good is good despite people's difference in their attitudes and opinions about it. The same applies to evil. Abd Aljabbar rejects the view that the value of an action is dependent on the state of the agent. It is harm and benefit that constitute the ultimate meaning of good and evil, and the grounds of any normative judgement.<sup>1045</sup> An act can be once good and once evil.<sup>1046</sup> It is only the circumstances and consequences of these and other actions (e.g. physical actions, pain, entering someone's house, and bowing down to someone) that can determine their moral value. In Abd Aljabbar's words, "each act that is beneficial to its agent, and is not harmful, and has no aspects of evil, should be considered good."<sup>1047</sup> "Knowing the rights of others is the base of all obligations."<sup>1048</sup> In al-Attar commentary, whatever is beneficial for oneself in the long run, and at the same time not harmful to others is obligatory. Anything that is harmful in the long run is forbidden. While benefiting others is not obligatory but recommended, observing their rights is obligatory.<sup>1049</sup>

Second, Abd Aljabbar also argues against the divine command theory advanced, among others, by the Ash'aria. In his view, revelation comes to promulgate ethical values that reason proves. He says "God is promulgator and not creator of morality."<sup>1050</sup> This shows the epistemological and not ontological aspects of the good and evil, "*al'shar*' [revelation] discloses what is already established in the intellect (*al-'aql*)," says Abd Aljabbar. That is, revelation comes after actions to command or prohibit them.<sup>1051</sup> What this denotes is that moral theory should be cognitive.<sup>1052</sup> The reasons behind divine commands and prohibitions must be intelligible and related to human morals. This makes the divine commands merely normative judgements, which are themselves grounded in

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<sup>1045</sup> Ibid., 134

<sup>1046</sup> Ibid., 129. This makes Abdeljabbar's theory teleologist, and partly consequentialist, and not fully utilitarian, because he links the good with social justice and the benefits it brings to the other, and not only to oneself.

<sup>1047</sup> Ibid., 133

<sup>1048</sup> Ibid., 134

<sup>1049</sup> Ibid., 135

<sup>1050</sup> Ibid., 111. It should be clear that the statements in inverted commas are by Abd Aljabbar, and not Al-Attar.

<sup>1051</sup> Ibid., 119-120

<sup>1052</sup> Ibid., 117

moral values. Otherwise said, ideally, there is supposed to be no contradiction between revelation and reason, according to the same scholar. In cases of obvious contradiction, which may be because of linguistic complexities, the divine text has to be interpreted according to the public interest (*maṣlaḥa*) of people.<sup>1053</sup>

More than that, the fact that divine commands are normative and cognitive makes non-believers able to perceive God's commands, and are thus worthy of reward even though they are not believers. Such moral non-believers who, for instance, refrain from injustice and return deposits are called "obedient" (*muti*) since they perform what they know by reason to be good, "a responsible human agent (al-mukallaf) might rightly obey God, even though he does not know about him. Hence the obedient (*al-muti*) is actually obedient by his conduct."<sup>1054</sup> He calls this kind of "obedience" to rational morality "rational worship," be it practiced by believers or non-believers. Believers can also call it "religious worship" (*al-'ibādāt al-shar'iya*), if it rationally embraces practices like praying and fasting that can enhance the morality of the individual.<sup>1055</sup>

The above views establish Abd Aljabbar as being very able to distinguish between what is right and what is good, a distinction of vital importance for a genuine objectivist ethical theory. For him, what is right, commanded and praised, is based on what is good. All that is right is by definition good, but not every good is right. What this means is that normative judgements are distinguished from value judgements.<sup>1056</sup> If I simplify it further, and use terms common in Islamic jurisprudence, he distinguishes between *uṣūl al fiqh* and *fiqh*, or, more simply, between moral theory and positive law. For example, believing in God and in the Day of Judgement does not necessitate rightful behaviour, nor is rightful behaviour necessary, though recommended (*mustahab*) to prove belief and behave according to presupposed good standards. That is, there is a distinction between the agent, and the action, between the normative value and the value judgement. External factors have to be considered when examining the action of an agent, instead of judging him (the agent) just based on a particular behaviour; his actions may not necessarily be an

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<sup>1053</sup> Ibid., 78

<sup>1054</sup> Ibid., 77

<sup>1055</sup> Ibid., 77

<sup>1056</sup> Ibid., 106

activation of his normative ethics, which may disapprove of what he did at a certain point of acting. Following this argumentation, moral behaviour is independent of religious sanctions.<sup>1057</sup> Such a distinction, teleological as it is, could, if followed, have been able to answer the needs of Muslim societies as they have developed historically, according to time and space requirements. Summarizing Abd Aljabbar's work, al-Attar writes the following:

Moral values are not established by what is commanded or prohibited by God. By his commands and prohibitions He merely indicates normative judgments which are themselves ultimately grounded in moral values. Divine commands are not issued to change the facts of good and evil but to guide human conduct. Law (*al-shar'*) as asserted by Abd Al-Jabbar, "does not change the facts" as "will or intention also has no effect upon the truth of things." Thus obligations (*al-takalif*) imposed by Allah presuppose moral truth and do not create morality. In other words *divine prescriptions provide the epistemological aspect of morality and do not change the ontological aspect of good and evil: "al-shar' discloses what is already established in the intellect."*<sup>1058</sup> [Emphasis added]

However, al-Attar notes that Abd Aljabbar himself did not live fully according to his rational moral theory. For example, he held that slavery is not rationally acceptable, but is allowed by *al-shar'* (religious law), and so is the case with inheritance law. Al-Attar assumes that he had to live with the norms of his days, which served the public common good (*maṣlaḥa*), conventionally established mostly by the elite of the time. She also quotes him saying that "if a rational human being errs, the reason for his error is other than his intellect (*sababu al-khata' ghayr al-'aql*),"<sup>1059</sup> meaning that there are other circumstances that intervene in applying, or not, one's rational ideas. Overall, al-Attar ends her work by stating that the Mu'tazila teleological (partly consequentialist) ethics, though it did not have long socio-political impact in Islamic history, it still influenced the late Ash'ari scholars like al-Razi and al-Ghazali who integrated some of Mu'tazila rational thought in conceptualizing the notion of public good (*maṣlaḥa*), and the objectives of Sharia (*maqāsid asharia*).<sup>1060</sup>

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<sup>1057</sup> Ibid., 78

<sup>1058</sup> Ibid., 111

<sup>1059</sup> Ibid., 78

<sup>1060</sup> Ibid., 142

In summary, ontologically, for the Mu‘tazila (like the Ash‘aria) an ethical value or act is objective in nature, which for them does not contradict natural law as established by God and realized by man, independently of their (God and man) desires. The right is right because it is right and not because God Wills it or man wishes it; a right is objective because its qualities and results are good; if revelation and man approve of a right act it is because it is beneficial, that is why the Mu‘tazila believe that though a value or an act is objective it is also divine because the divine is just and does not decree what is wrong and unjust. Epistemologically, an ethical value or act can be known by human reason, and revelation confirms what the human intellect discovers by its own through reasonable justifications (*adilla ‘aqliya*). Human beings are thus free and morally responsible for their actions.

This view appears to elevate reason above revelation. That is how the Mu‘tazila have traditionally been interpreted, a view I have reservations about, seeing that they denied the divine. The point is not about who is above or below the other; the aim is to preserve belief by always assigning just and good attributes to the divine. Human agency has to work to balance this challenge. Neither reason nor revelation denies the other; they are complementary. The Mu‘tazila adopt the views of natural law, but natural law, though reached and developed by man, is God-given, and is not an independent force; “all knowledge” is God’s, but specific knowledge is human, to put it so. Saying that natural law is man’s, and also God’s, means that man always considers another superior power which has created man himself; the origin of power is divine, but its application and development is left to man’s reason, that is why ties with the divine are not cut, and God is not “killed.” This makes the Mu‘tazila differ from the European view of natural law, which is not only ontologically objective but also epistemologically purely rationalist. In my view, then, the Mu‘tazila natural law is divine. That is why Albert Hourani calls Mu‘tazila rationalism “partial rationalism.”<sup>1061</sup> That is why also the Mu‘tazila seem close to “contemporary liberalism” of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, in Watt’s view,<sup>1062</sup> and close to

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<sup>1061</sup> Albert Hourani, in Johnson, "A Turn in the Epistemology and Hermeneutics of Twentieth Century Uṣūl al-Fiqh," 243.

<sup>1062</sup> Watt says that the 19<sup>th</sup> century occidental scholars were attracted to the Mu‘tazilla because it seemed close to “contemporary liberalism” and “seemed to place reason above revelation.” He adds, “Had

Enlightenment ideals, in Martin's view.<sup>1063</sup> That is the case at least in theory. It has to be remembered that Islamic jurisprudence and kalam theology were independent disciplines, which means that the Mu'tazila theories were generally not tested on the ground, and were hardly endorsed by the political will, except for forty years of unsuccessful period that ended with the return of the dominant Ash'ari doctrine.<sup>1064</sup>

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Although the Mu'tazila were not welcomed by most Ash'aria partisans because of their theological/ theoretical advances, it is less clear if they could have implemented their theories in practice, especially in law matters on which the Quran and Sunna were very clear. The fact that the Mu'tazilla did not live long to have political impact made their rational and theoretical advances remain out of touch with society.<sup>1065</sup> The high kalam theories and their impact on legal theory seem to have little impact on positive law (or fiqh) which was, and still is, seen as sacred, the Word of God as written in the Quran.<sup>1066</sup> This does not mean that the Mu'tazila heritage had no impact or minor presence even in the work of influential Ash'ari scholars, like al-Razi and al-Ghazali. Al-

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Mu'tazilite ideas become dominant in the Islamic world, the cleavage between Muslims and Christians might have been far less, it was felt." Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 232.

<sup>1063</sup> Martin, et al., eds., *Defenders of Reason in Islam*, 11

<sup>1064</sup> "the inquisition instituted by Caliph al-Ma'mun in 833 and lasting until 850, in which state-appointed religious authorities, such as qadis, were required to subscribe to al-Ma'mun's view that the Qur'an was created or be imprisoned." Ibid., 233.

<sup>1065</sup> Watt argues similarly, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 234. In a personal communication with Mohammed Fadel, he told me that the Mu'tazila have lived in the tenets of the living Twelver Shi'a and the Zaydis but they have failed to develop a dominant or distinguished ethical theory. This is a relevant note that needs more study on the reasons why they have failed. I cannot argue here longer on that, but there is a fundamental difference in the way Shi'a perceive, for instance, human responsibility, if the fact of the infallible imam is remembered. It should also be remembered, and that is referred in my text above, that the Mu'tazila advanced some of their ideas of Tawhid and divine justice against some of the Shi'a arguments of amorphism and infallibility of the imam. I am certainly not saying for certainty that the Shi'a Islam cannot succeed in endorsing Mu'tazila doctrine, and that the Sunni Islam is more able to do that. What I footnote here is that the historical kalam polemics have to be remembered and studied more to come up with a more valid argument. And of course, besides historical revisions, it should also be studied whether the Mu'tazila doctrines can work now, in the modern age, which is influencing Islamic thought on many levels, to the extent that living and reviving the classical dichotomies of Ash'aria vs. Mu'tazila may seem irrelevant for the future generations, because the debate has moved onwards to other levels of thought. I close this note.

<sup>1066</sup> See: Umar Abd Allah, "Theological Dimensions of Islamic Law," in Tim Winter, ed. *Classical Islamic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008) 237-257.

Attar believes that the ethical thought of the Mu‘tazila was used in formulating theories on *maqāṣid asharia* (objectives of the Sharia) developed by the Ash‘ari school.<sup>1067</sup>

With Abd Aljabbar, then, much of Mu‘atazilla would wane away after the *mihna of takfir* (Inquisition-like) era, initiated by the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma‘mun (813-833) to establish the Mu‘tazilla doctrines among all the judges and jurists of the Abbasid rule as the only voice of Islam. The Ash‘aria did not keep silent, and Imam Ibn Hanbal was their most outspoken. The Mihna was soon reversed during the reign of al-Mutawakkil (847-861). The Mu‘tazilla survived afterwards among some Shi‘a sects, like the Twelver Shi‘a and the Zaydi (Fiver) in Iran, and Yemen where the 20 volumes of Qadi Abdel Jabbar’s work was found in the 1950s. Its voice would re-appear by the nineteenth century, among both occidental scholars and reformist Muslims, sometimes referred to as modernists, not in the sense of giving in totally to Euro-modernity, but as reformists who have opened up to the West and have tried to integrate some, if not much, of its political and philosophic achievements. To this stage of the moderns (early and late reformists) I move now. I focus on their aspirations to revive the use of the faculty of reason in conceiving the objectives of the Sharia for the common good (*maṣlaḥa ‘amma*). Their efforts, as will be seen, would be more politically centered, henceforth unable to reform the Sharia law and develop an ethical theory or directly invoke the Mu‘tazila heritage.

### **c. On Early Reformists: Political Reforms within Sharia Law Prescriptions**

The colonial encounter with the West since the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt marked a new era of relations between the West and the Islamic world.<sup>1068</sup> “Christian” Europe, according to Charles Kurzman’s *Modernist Islam* (2002), threatened Islam in at least five registers: militarily, economically, cognitively, politically, and culturally.<sup>1069</sup>

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<sup>1067</sup> Al-Attar, *Islamic Ethics*, 142. Tariq Ramadan and Tariq Oubrou, for example, base their reform agendas on this aspect of reasoning as applied in seeking the objectives of Sharia in law (Revise Part II, and Part III Section 1. The critical part of this work will explain the point further, Part IV).

<sup>1068</sup> I do not need to reiterate my understanding of these general concepts the “West” and the “Islamic world.” Though I use them in their general meaning to refer to the common understanding of political relations between these two entities for a long period of time, these entities are, however, internally diverse. See the Introduction, Section Two and Three.

<sup>1069</sup> Kurzam, *Modernist Islam*, 6-7

“In sum, the challenges of modernity appeared to threaten the very existence of Islam.”<sup>1070</sup> Muslim intellectuals and scholars had to face this challenge. According to Kurzam, the modernist, or early reformist, movement among Muslims of the Arabo-Islamic Renaissance (*nahḍa*) took three forms: first, it read classics and *madhahibs* and learnt from all of them without being stuck there to seek ways out of the impasse. Second, it reached the fundamental sources directly, Quran and Sunna. Third, it tried to reconcile the sacred with human reason.<sup>1071</sup>

These three forms of understanding modernity in light of the tradition debated five general topics which were consumed and heavily dealt with: religious interpretations, cultural revival, political reform, science and education, women’s rights.<sup>1072</sup> These were the main challenges scholars like Sayyid Ahmad Khan in India (d. 1898), Rifa’a Rafi’ el-Tahtawi (d. 1873), Jamal Eddine al-Afghani (d. 1897), his student Muhamad Abduh (d. 1905), and, in turn his student Rachid Rida (d. 1935), had to grapple with in the Arab-Islamic world since the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>1073</sup> Below I refer to the last three reformists’ views especially on reason. The first section of these early reformists is the briefest among the three generations I discuss (in this part IV Section 2) because most of the reformists of this generation were more occupied politically than devoted to constructing new theological readings of the tradition. As will be noted, their calls for the revival of reason in understanding the tradition remains limited to the Sharia classical prescriptions, compared to the late reformists/ the contemporaries who go beyond that.

Jamal Eddine al-Afghani (d. 1997) is called by Muhammad Imara the “awakener of the East and the philosopher of Islam.”<sup>1074</sup> Leaving apart his highly committed

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<sup>1070</sup> Ibid., 7

<sup>1071</sup> Ibid., 9

<sup>1072</sup> Ibid., 16-25

<sup>1073</sup> It is not my intention here to go into details on the Arab Renaissance, and the influence its pioneers had in their sojourns in Europe since the first student trips sent by Muhamad Ali of Egypt in 1798. On this, see for example: Albert Hourani, *Arab Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983); Khaldun S. al-Husry, *Three Reformers: A Study in Modern Arab Political Thought* (Beirut: Khayats, 1966); 'Abd al-Aziz Duri, *The Historical Formation of the Arab Nation: A Study in Identity and Consciousness*, trans. Lawrence Conrad (Kent and New York: Croom Helm and Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1987).

<sup>1074</sup> Mohamed Imara, *Jamal Al-Din al-Afghani: mūkiz ashraq wa faylasūfu al-islam* [Jamal al-dine Al-Afghani: the Awakener of the East and the Philosopher of Islam] (Cairo: Dar al-shuruq, 1988).

political work in struggling against imperialism and working for pan-Islamism, it is his views on religion and reason that are of interest here. Afghani has a reconciliatory view of religion and reason. In his *arraḍ ‘alā aadahriyyīn* (*Refutation of the Materialists*, 1955), firstly written against the Indian reformist Ahmed Seyyed Khan who was fully for the adoption of the European version of using science and practicing reasoning, Afghani opposed the evolutionary theory of Darwin, and defends God’s creation of the universe. He also opposed the materialist legacy of atheists like Epicurus, but highly esteemed its deist and rationalist contributors (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle).

Afghani saw religion as a plus for the welfare of humanity; it should serve and equally be served by human reason and intelligence. In his historicist philosophy of religion, he contends that religious beliefs have to be grounded on sound demonstration and valid proof. He fought fatalism,<sup>1075</sup> superstition, illiteracy, especially among women, and considered religion an extra force for social development and morality. He argued that religion has taught humankind three vital teachings: spirituality, since man has a spiritual nature which encourages people to rise above egotistical and “bestial” impulses, and try to live in peace with others; competition among religious groups which pushes them to seek knowledge and further progress; and belief in afterlife which is based on reward, and motivates ethical behavior and causes people to want to live a life of love, peace and justice eternally. More precisely, he believed that religion teaches three fundamental values: modesty (*alḥayā’*), honesty (*aṣidq*), and truthfulness (*al-amāna*). Historically, for him, these values were behind the Greatness of the Greeks, the Romans, the Persians, and the Muslims, but they all declined when they left them. Religion is the source of human happiness and perfection.<sup>1076</sup>

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Afghani defended the Quranic injunctions on the use of reason, and the Prophetic teachings for knowledge and learning, which he believed other religions did not advance. He believed that Islamic renaissance is possible, as long as philosophy is revived to go in

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<sup>1075</sup> Al-Afghani, *al qadā’ wa alqadar* [*Destiny and Fate*] (Cairo: Mahmoudia Publishing House, n.d.)

<sup>1076</sup> Al-Afghani, *arraddu ‘alā addahriyyīn* [*Refutation of the Materialists*] (Cairo, 1955); Ali Shalash, ed. *The Unknown Writings of Jamal Al-Din al-Afghani* (London: Riyad al-Rayyes Books, 1987); Hani al-Mar’ashli, *Al-maadiyato wa al-libiraliyah* [*Materialism and Liberalism*] (Alexandria: almaktab al-‘ilmi, 2001) Chapter 1 and 2.

parallel with the rational spirit of Islam, and its Tawheed ethos that signifies, besides divine unity, justice and equality among people. In a lecture in Calcutta, India, in 1872, Afghani expressed his view of philosophy as “a mother science.” In his reply-letter to the French Orientalist Ernest Renan in 1883, he expresses a view which the latter also adopts: that religions generally oppresses free thought, while philosophy encourages it, since human reason requires it for demonstrative proofs. He, however, As to why then the Muslim world is in regress, his following reply/ statement has become famous:

If someone says: If the Islamic world is as you say, then why are the Muslims in such a sad condition? I will answer: When they were [truly] Muslims, they were what they were and the world bears witness to their excellence. As for the present, I will content myself with this holy text: “Verily, God does not change the state of a people until they change themselves inwardly.”<sup>1077</sup>

Overall, Afghani is mostly seen as a leading revivalist of Islamic perceptions of reasoning, and the place of philosophy for the well being of the Muslim intellect and society. For this reason, Albert Hourani considers his thought to be closer to philosophy than to theology.<sup>1078</sup> Ibrahim Kalin says that “[H]is role in the revival of the study of Islamic philosophy in the Arab and Indian worlds [...] remains unmistakable.”<sup>1079</sup>

Muhammad Abduh (d. 1906) seems to have gained a special status among the early reformists in the Arab-Islamic world. He benefited a great deal from the early study missionaries that were sent by Mohammed Ali to Paris to learn the European sciences. Rifa‘a al-Tahtawi (d. 1873) and his sojourn in Paris from 1826 to 1831 had its impact on him and the generation of intellectuals that read his translations of European modern thought and sciences. Abduh is one prominent figure among them. The latter studied in al-Azhar, but seeing that it did not teach philosophy and theology he left. He met the religious reformist and political activist al-Afghani and was influenced by his views on modern science and reason. Abduh received the instructions on rationalism of early Islamic thought from him. Later, he returned to al-Azhar as a lecturer and Mufti. He tried

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<sup>1077</sup> Keddie, Nikki, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) 173.

<sup>1078</sup> Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, 120-126.

<sup>1079</sup> Ibrahim Kalin, “Sayyid Jamal al-Din Muhammad b. Safdar al-Afghani (1838-1897),” December 21, 2007, available at: <http://www.cis-ca.org/voices/a/afghni.htm>

to introduce educational reforms to the university curriculum (sciences, philosophy, and theology). He sojourned in Beirut for some time and lectured on theology.<sup>1080</sup>

Like the Mu‘tazila, Abduh also believed that reason guides humans in following what the divine reveals. If reason contradicts revelation, then most probably it is the first that has not elevated yet to the stage of the latter. This made Harun Nasution (d. 1998), an Indonesian neo-Mu‘tazillite scholar, consider Abduh a Mu‘atazillite.<sup>1081</sup> Yet, Albert Hourani thinks that Abduh, whom he describes as “a systematic thinker,”<sup>1082</sup> avoided delicate theological debates.<sup>1083</sup> In his first version of *risālat attawhīd* (*Treatise on Oneness or Theology of Unity, 1897*) he defended the Mu‘tazilla doctrine of the createdness of the Quran, but this was withdrawn in later versions, as Albert Hourani remarks, after the controversy it may have caused him.<sup>1084</sup>

For jurisprudence and the role of reason, according to the reading of David Johnson, Abduh argued that the principles of Sharia can be summarized in the concepts of justice and equality of rights for all. Abduh assumes the independent ontological status of good and evil and the human moral ability to execute these values by means of ijihad and opinion/ *ra‘y*. He is close to adopting natural law perspective. He is close to the Mu‘tazilla on this matter. Johnson refers to Malcolm Kerr’s *Islamic Reform* (1966) in which he (Kerr) distinguishes between two models of natural law among reformists: 1) the model in which reason and revelation are seen as separate spheres of competence, and 2) the model in which they work together with no distinction. Abduh, according to Kerr, belongs to the second model, for he divides law between the individual sphere and the

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<sup>1080</sup> Martin, et al., eds., *Defenders of Reason in Islam*, 129-135.

<sup>1081</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>1082</sup> Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, 130

<sup>1083</sup> Hourani notes that a statement in the first edition of *risālat attawhīd*, supporting the theory of the createdness of the Quran, as advanced by the Mu‘tazila, was quietly removed in later editions. For Hourani “This eclecticism seems to imply a tendency to evade difficult questions: for example, he never squarely faces the problem, fundamental in Muslim theology, of whether the Quran was created or not.” [*Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>1084</sup> Hourani says the following on Abduh:

[H]is thought always bore the mark of the study of Ibn Sina in which al-Afghani had initiated him; and it is possible to see also the influence of Mu‘tazilism, that early Islamic rationalism which had been first sponsored and then supported by the ‘Abbasid caliphs, had then become a dormant element in Islam, but since ‘Abduh has been one of the elements of modern orthodoxy. (*Ibid.*, 142)

group sphere. He does so to make it clear that the ability to distinguish between good and evil is an obligation via religious reasoning. As for the group, it is reason, collective reason, alone that should govern the public affairs, and the group can be punished for that.<sup>1085</sup>

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David Johnson, following Malcolm Kerr, also refers to Abduh's disciple Rachid Rida (d. 1936). Rida lists ten objectives of Sharia (*maqāṣid*). Three of them are relevant here: religion brings happiness, Quran is the source of religion, Sunna rules are Muhamamd's *ijtihād* and the later generations of Muslims may not follow them in civil, political and military issues. Rida discusses the sources of jurisprudence and defends *qiyās*, ruling by analogy. Johnson says that Rida builds on the work of Afghani and Abduh's "eclectic theology" in which the Sharia is equivalent to natural law (with the exception of religious rites). For him, "the resulting hermeneutic of legal rulings is based not so much on specific rules spelled out by the text, as it is on the ethical principles revealed as God's purposes behind the text."<sup>1086</sup> Otherwise said, public interest (*maṣlaḥa 'amma*) can surpass ruling by analogy (*qiyās*) and consensus (*ijma*) in matters of social affairs and morality.<sup>1087</sup> Hourani says that Rida urged the *ulema* of the time to come together to produce a book of laws based on the Quran and hadith, but without being it stuck within the limits of the four main juridical schools. Like Abduh, he wanted to find answers to the new social problems using eclecticism (*talfīq*) as the way out. *Talfīq* was practiced before, but he wanted to use it more systematically and rationally to make the Muslim modern life accommodative of social changes.<sup>1088</sup>

The idea behind such sample references is to trace how the issue of reason and revelation are invoked in modern times of Islamic thought. That is, I wanted to see first

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<sup>1085</sup> Qtd in Johnson, "A Turn in the Epistemology and Hermeneutics of Twentieth Century Uṣūl al-Fiqh," 256-261. See the original in Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal theories of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Ridā* (Princeton University, 1966).

<sup>1086</sup> Johnson, "A Turn in the Epistemology and Hermeneutics of Twentieth Century Uṣūl al-Fiqh," 266

<sup>1087</sup> *Ibid.*, 256

<sup>1088</sup> Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, 234-237. For the compilation of Rida's fatwas, see Salah Eddine al-Munjid and Yussuf Khuri, eds. *fatāwā al shaykh Rachid Rida [The Fatwas of Sheikh Rachid Rida]* 6 vols. (Damascus: n.p., 1957) Read from pages 2580 to 2589 on the fatwas related to reasoning, and *ribā* for example.

whether kalam-theological issues are invoked the same way as was the case with the Mu‘tazila examples I referred to earlier, or whether it is the political and legal issues that have to do with applied social Islamic codes that are more stressed at this age of reformism. According to the scholars cited above, it seems that it is socio-political implications of Islamic law that is more stressed and being debated. Reason is being invoked as a confirmation of revelation, or that revelation is not, principally, in contradistinction with rational interpretations of matters related to socio-political life. The invocation of reason to understand revelation does not seem to revise profoundly the basic fundamentals on faith, or to interpret them through a rational, objectivist ethical theory like that of the Mu‘tazilite Abd Aljabbar. More precisely, and importantly, the human free will, or the nature of good and evil, are generally not revisited from a rational perspective. This makes the reforms called for more reforms of adaptation to socio-political pressures of the colonial era and encounter with the developed West; they are not reforms of radical transformations in the Arab-Islamic thought. The Syrian philosopher George Tarabeshi (b. 1939) says that it is too much for a mindset to fight both for independence and for renaissance:

The modern Arabic renaissance project has developed under a heavy effect of colonialism in our area [...]. Consequently, the renaissance intellectual had to build and deconstruct himself at the same time. He had to fight colonialism and build renaissance. As a result he was lost between the two issues. He couldn't overcome colonialism, nor he could build a real intellectual critical renaissance thought [...]. For me, I have discovered later on that we are in urgent need to criticism [...]. But I discovered also that a self-defense mental complex has been formed in our unconsciousness as a result of the colonial period, and that such a complex increases by time.<sup>1089</sup>

The tendency among the so-called Renaissance reformists is more adaptive, defensive, and not profoundly innovative, because “self-criticism” and “reason” are still absent from the contemporary Arab thought, “rationalism, which is the essential condition for the birth of philosophy, is still far from possessing top priority in contemporary Arabic culture [...] The authority of the Arabic culture is still crowned by the authority of

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<sup>1089</sup> Qtd in Samir Abu Zeyd, “George Tarabishi: The Future of the Arabic Renaissance,” available at: <http://www.arabphilosophers.com/English/philosophers/contemporary/contemporary-names/Tarabishi/Tarabishi.htm>

religion.”<sup>1090</sup> I do think that when the Indian early reformist Sayyed Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) called for a “modern theology” to overcome the impasse of Islamic thought and the challenges of modern sciences and their foundations,<sup>1091</sup> he did not mean adaptive theology on matters related to law only, but he meant profound rehabilitation of Islamic theology so that accommodation of modern life is founded on a new, clear and harmonious ethical theory that justifies, for example, the need to change Islamic penal code and family law, among other issues. Contemporary reformists that I turn to now still go on with evolving intellectual endeavours to develop rational bases for understanding especially the mundane socio-political matters. Rationalizing the ethics of Islam goes on among Muslim reformists in the postcolonial era, amidst the development of Salafism and even violent fundamentalism. The dilemma of reform in difficult times goes on, sometimes under a colonial situation, and at others under international pressure, postcolonial dictatorships and violent fundamentalisms.

#### **d. On Late Reformists: Theological Reforms beyond Sharia Prescribed Law**

The third generation I refer to in defending my idea of European Islam as “revisionist-reformist” in its move to the “rationalization of ethics” for a substantial reform is the contemporary one, which could also be called the generation of “late reformists.” I called the reformists of the Arabo-Islamic Renaissance “early reformists” because they paved the way for the currently profound debate on reform, re-reading the tradition and the sacred texts. If the early reformists had political priorities that preoccupied their work on envisaging radically new pathways for Islam in the modern world, the contemporaries (late reformists) are doing exactly that: deepening the debate, opening new pathways for Islamic thought. I daringly call them “late reformists” not because I think their reformist projects are perfect and thus no further projects will be needed in the future. I call them so because I see that their projects are radically new and

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<sup>1090</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1091</sup> Sayyid Ahmad Khan says: “Today we are, as before, in need of a modern theology (*‘ilm al-kalam*), whereby we should either refute the doctrines of modern sciences, or undermine their foundations, or show that they are in conformity with Islam.” Qtd in Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, 217

revolutionary in Islamic intellectual history. The Islamic world –assuming that there is such a homogeneous entity which is willing to endorse these radical projects on the ground- cannot be modern in the European classical sense, i.e. rational and “nearly irreligious” in its version of secularism. The Islamic world can be modern in a new sense of the term, which is still in progress, and which I will be referring to as “perpetual modernity” (or *ḥadatha mustamirra* or *mawsūla* in Arabic, vs. “discontinuous modernity,” *hadath munqati‘a*).<sup>1092</sup> That is, it is a version of modernity that does not de-divinize; it does not negate the divine, or kill God. It does not live with dichotomies, either the rational or the divine, the political or the religious; it lives with both. It is a midway, a peaceful transition of overcoming both classical religiosity and classical Euro-modernity. European Islam goes in the same direction of endorsing “perpetual modernity.”

The scholars I refer to here are icons of substantial reform projects in contemporary Islamic thought. Any scholarly work on contemporary Islamic thought refers to some, if not most, of them despite their background disciplines and methodological concerns from which each starts his (or her) reform project. Because they all emphasises human agency and the faculty of reason in re-reading the tradition, they can all be called “rationalists.” Because they endorse most of European modernity values, following different justifications that stem from their methodologies of argumentation, they can also be called “modernists,” “liberals,” or “secularists.” However, none of them, according to my reading and understanding, has chosen one of these “labels” and cornered himself (or herself) within that premise. It is the researchers who read them that

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<sup>1092</sup> Taha Abdurrahman uses the term “continuous innovation” (*ibda‘un mawsul*), in *The Spirit of Modernity*, to construct his critique of some modern readings of the Quran, as I have indicated in the introduction of this work, which I will explain Section 1 of Part IV in “Conceptualizing the Idea of European Islam.” Briefly here, by “continuous innovation” he means keeping ties with the tradition, *atturāth*. My concept of “perpetual modernity” is close to what he means by “continuous innovation” and is inspired by it. But I also integrate some thoughts from “late reformists” work, and from European Islam texts, which he does not deal with, especially from the reading of Abdenmour Bidar and his idea of “overcoming religion.” In passing, here, “perpetual modernity” is neither purely Islamic nor purely European in the classical meanings of the words; it is in-between, and is constantly renovating itself. I explain further this concept in Section 2c, Part IV, “Consolidating the Idea of European Islam through Perpetual Modernity.”

try to categorize them, for various reasons (chronological, thematic, methodological, etc.).

For my side, my reference to these reformists below has taken into account the chronological order since they are considered a third generation in focus in this study. It is difficult to deal with them thematically because of, again, their different backgrounds. Treating them one-by-one is the most convenient way to grasp their main reformist points, and I have followed this option, as I have done with the scholars I treat to describe the versions of European Islam, in the descriptive stage Part I, II, and III. Most importantly, my selection of these scholars has kept in mind the sub-question this “comparative stage” (Part III, Section 1) deals with: what is new in European Islam? I had to refer to some important stages in Islamic history before I answer this question. I had to refer to the first generation of scholarship, exemplified by the Mu‘tazila, then the early reformists or modernists of the Arabo-Islamic Renaissance, and now late reformists. Only when the previous contributions are brought to the fore can one then feel to have responsibly approached the question of newness, otherwise injustice is done to previous contributions. This methodological point is of high concern in understanding European Islam. Without it, the reader of only European Islam literature would say that it is “radically and totally new.”

In my search for “newness” in European Islam I have found more developed approaches that call for reforming Islam in projects of scholars based mostly in the Islamic majority countries. Immersed in these projects I had to keep in mind the triadic framework I have devised to conceptualize my understanding of European Islam, i.e. “world-society-individual,” endorsed by Abdurrahmane’s critical framework (humanization-historicization-rationalization). The projects in various ways and generally indirectly fit this framework. I explain what I mean, before I refer to each project separately, with reference to three axes, or main points, these projects share. These axes could be termed “cosmic wellbeing,” “social wellbeing,” and “individual wellbeing.” These axes match a methodologically thematic classification of the late reformists I refer to. This classification goes as follows: 1) “hermeneutists,” or “ethicists-textualists”

(exemplified by, and not limited to, the work of Fazlur Rahman, Mohamed Arkoun, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and Hassan Hanafi), 2) “egalitarianists-legalists” (like Fatema Mernissi and Amina Wadud, and Abdullahi Ahmed An’aim), and 3) “neo-rationalists” (like Mohamed Abed Aljabri and Abdulkarim Soroush). Below, I explain with brevity the three axes the late reformists seem to share, and how that matches the classification I have resorted to for methodological concerns.

The three axes I see focalized by the late reformists can be illustrated in the following manner. First, the first axis or point is measured through how these projects treat the divine text (the Quran) and the Prophetic experience (the Sunna), in light of the historical period of the 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabia. This question is vital since it is the cornerstone upon which further socio-political implications can be based. This focalized element summarizes the worldview Islam advances. Understanding the Quran and the Sunna, according to these projects, means understanding that Islam – and religion in general- is made for this world, and the “cosmic wellbeing” of man in it. There is an attempt by these reformists to understand the philosophy of religion in general, and the existentialist paradigm in Islam in particular. Not to narrow it down just to them, nor to summarize their work just in this element, the “hermeneutists,” or “ethicists-textualists,” are very concerned with reading the main sources of the tradition for the sake of getting to the heart of the matter in the religious message. Rahman and Arkoun, for instance, emphasize the ethical *élan* of Islam which has been lost through the officialization of religious teachings in “Orthodox Official Corpuses” – to use Arkoun’s term. Arguing in the same line of thought is Hannafi who sees in hermeneutics a means to social justice and understanding of the divine message for worldly well being. He argues for engaged hermeneutists and “progressive hermeneutics” that work against social oppression and injustice.

The second axis focalized in referring to these reformist projects is their reading of the accumulated scholarship from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (the time of encounter with the modern Western world). My categorization of these reformists below will clarify what kind of scholarship is meant – ethical, jurisprudential,

hermeneutical, etc. This second point, based on the first one that tries to revisit the message(s) of Islam, centralizes the implications of the religious message on society. That is, it underpins the “social wellbeing” of man as advocated by religion/ Islam itself, in light of social evolution and growing demands. By way of exemplification, the work of Mernissi, Wadud, and An’naim can be helpful in understanding this axis. Classical Sharia law aside, they either refer to the Mekkan period as a more universal and egalitarian aspect of Islam, or to more general prescriptions of equality in the texts. The focus of these scholars is the achievement of the ontological equality human beings are endowed with for social justice which women and non-Muslims, for example, have not always enjoyed equally with Muslim men for various socio-political reasons and methodological interpretations of the texts.

The third axis I see shared by the studied reformists is human agency and its pivotal role in understanding the religious message and interpreting it according to human needs in different times and places. This axis emphasizes the individual moral responsibility and rational faculty. It is about the “individual wellbeing” which it tries to realize by means of the faculty of reason, without the denial of the divine. As an agent in a cosmic order, the individual is the one mostly concerned with the comprehension of the divine, but also in communion with the social and world orders. Aljabri and Soroush are considered here as examples of reformists who insist on reviving the rationalist tradition in Islam, be it the Averroist tradition in the case of Aljabri or the Mu‘tazila in the case of Soroush.

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Overall, the three reformist groups proposed above share concern for the deduced axes – cosmic wellbeing, social wellbeing, and individual wellbeing. The three groups are all based on reading the same sacred text, and all call for a responsible and ethical use of human reasoning faculty in grasping the divine teachings that are destined for this world first. The three end in calling for the “rationalization of ethics” beyond the classically prescribed Sharia law that has been historically interpreted as the basis of Islamic ethics. The reformists’ preservation of the divine in conceptualizing approaches to ethics for human worldly good, and textualist readings of divine texts, makes them

rationalists that humanize the divine text and its intent, without humanizing the divine itself, or taking its place in a form of revolt over the master to rule in his place. No “Promethean tragedy” occurs in contemporary Islamic thought as presented by the studied projects.

Accordingly, and following my framework “world-society-individual,” the world is for man to use and contemplate. It is man’s “inheritance.” However divine it could be, it should be “humanized,” in the sense that the rules that govern it should bear in mind that they are directed to man who inhabits the world, and are not directed to God Himself. Society has to be worked for in light of the historical evolution of man, human diversity, and human growing faculties of discovery and invention. Classical fiqh is no longer the only eternal norm to follow to be Muslim or Islamic. Classical fiqh is no longer seen as the only manifestation of Islam; it is just a part of its historical manifestation. “Practical fiqh” is the way out to “historicize” divinity. Historicization requires human agency that “rationalizes” the ethical message of Islam, and makes faith a “rational” private matter.<sup>1093</sup>

### **The Hermeneutists: Rahman, Arkoun, Abu Zayd, and Hanafi**

#### **Fazlur Rahman: towards an “ethical system” through “purely cognitive effort”**

The Pakistani Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988) continues the reformism that grew early in the Indian continent with Sayyed Ahmed Khan and Muhammad Iqbal.<sup>1094</sup> Rahman

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<sup>1093</sup> All the terms between inverted commas are briefly introduced in the main introduction of this work (Introduction, Section 4). They are mine, unless otherwise indicated. They are deduced from my reading of both European Islam literature and Muslim reformists literature in the Islamic majority countries or in the broader West. Some of them are Taha Abdurrahmane’s critical concepts, also introduced in the introduction (like humanization, historicization, and rationalization). They will be examined in length in the section devoted to them “Conceptualizing the Idea of European Islam,” Part VI, Section 3. I tend to drop the inverted commas as I proceed, assuming that they are by now kept in mine by the reader. At times I use the inverted commas even at the end of this work as a way of emphasizing a term or idea.

<sup>1094</sup> Trained in traditional Islamic subjects, Rahman grew up to experience an intellectual crisis which Martin, et al. liken to that of St. Augustine and Al-Ghazali. Rahman appreciated some Western scholars’ readings of Islam – scholars like Hamilton Gibb, Wilfred C. Smith, and Kenneth Cragg. In Oxford he studied the impact of Greek philosophy on early Islamic thought. He returned as an advisor to his country’s government in the 1960s, but his reformist ideas on Islam, particularly on socio-economic matters, were not

believes that the prime message of Islam is that of “social justice.” This message lived for a very short time, during the Prophet’s life and two first caliphs, which experienced homogeneity and strength of the State. Since then, the message went unrestored. Yet, since this message was realized once, Rahman strongly believes that it can be realized again. For this to happen, “Islamic intellectualism” has to be recovered, rehabilitated, through “higher Islamic education.” In *Islam and Modernity* (1982), Rahman devotes himself to studying educational systems in the Islamic world. The results are not satisfactory. Stagnation, mimicry/ *taqlid* of the early scholars of Islam, repetition, self-centered Sufism, which he calls in *Revival and Reform in Islam* (1999) “spiritual smithery,”<sup>1095</sup> and deterministic attitudes are what these studied curricula teach. Few regions kept the philosophical and theological debates alive, and those are mainly among the Shi’a. Turkey has tried to modernize, but still “Islamic intellectualism” he hankers after was still nowhere to be seen for him. So, the reform he suggests has to be theological-philosophic, based on “intellectual jihad,” and “moral jihad.”<sup>1096</sup>

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Rahman is critical of the later Ash’aria, Mu’tazilla, Sufists, neo-revivalists, and modernists. For the “new Ash’ari,” he believes that they developed a theology of predestination and the ethics of predestinarianism, *irja’* (vs. *qadar*, and responsibility), which means that humans can only act metaphorically, and thus they are stripped of responsibility for their action. “This attitude was bound to do severe damage to the human self-image as a repository of initiatives and originality and harmed the assumptions underlying law, which considered human beings as free and responsible agents.”<sup>1097</sup> Rahman admires the Mu’tazila, though he is critical of extreme rationalists. The latter built a theory of rational ethics on the grounds that good and bad are knowable by natural reason without the aid of revelation. For “primary” or general

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welcomed by the conservative circles, which forced him to leave the country to the USA in 1969 where he worked until his death in 1988. Martin, et al., eds., *Defenders of Reason in Islam*, 200-203.

<sup>1095</sup> Ibrahim Moosa, ed. *Fazlur Rahman: Revival and Reform in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000) 113. The Tunisian scholar Abdelmadjid Charfi, for instance, who adopts a historicist study of religion and Islam, is close to this argumentation. Read a section entitled “Sufism,” in Abdelmadjid Charfi, *Islam between Message and History*, trans. David Bond, intr. Abdou Filali-Ansari and Sikeena Karmali Ahmed (Edinburgh UP and Aga Khan University, 2009) 151-155

<sup>1096</sup> Rahman, *Islam and modernity*, 1-7

<sup>1097</sup> Moosa, *Fazlur Rahman: Revival and Reform in Islam*, 68

ethical truths about right and wrong, they are rationally discovered by intuitive reason, while for “secondary ethical truths, humanity needs revelation.”<sup>1098</sup> As to Sufism, he believes that “Sufi influence brought about a vicious dualism between the “inner life of the heart” and the “actions of the limbs.”<sup>1099</sup> Sufis neglected this world and busied themselves with their inners and God. This is against the inter-human (social) morality that the Quran is about. He calls this “spiritual smithery,” yet recognizes that not all Sufists are of the same type.<sup>1100</sup> He is partially critical of al-Ghazali, too, for having read the Quran through mere Sufi perspective.<sup>1101</sup> As to the neo-revivalist and fundamentalists, he criticizes them, though they managed to protect the Muslims against the modern secularists, for not being able to build a clear reformist “method;” they suffer from “intellectual bankruptcy,” as he calls it. He adds,

The new revivalist is [...] a shallow and superficial person – really rooted neither in the Quran nor in traditional intellectual culture, of which he knows practically nothing. [...] The essence of the matter is that the neorevivalist has produced *no* Islamic educational system worthy of the name, [...] has been unable to devise any methodology, any structural strategy, for understanding Islam or for interpreting the Quran.<sup>1102</sup>

The Islamic modernists, for him, also lack a clear “enough method for reform.”<sup>1103</sup> Though he was open to Western philosophy, he took from it just what served his approach.<sup>1104</sup> He was very critical of Western scholarship on Islam in general. He was also very skeptic of secularism which “destroys the sanctity and universality (transcendence) of all moral values,” for it is “necessarily atheistic.”<sup>1105</sup> Earle Wugh says that Rahman “disagreed with both liberals and conservatives.”<sup>1106</sup>

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<sup>1098</sup> Ibid., 11

<sup>1099</sup> Ibid., 69

<sup>1100</sup> Ibid., 113

<sup>1101</sup> Ibid., 130

<sup>1102</sup> Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 137

<sup>1103</sup> Ibid., 142

<sup>1104</sup> That is the case for instance with his reading of Gadamer’s hermeneutics. See more on this in the introduction of his *Islam and Modernity*.

<sup>1105</sup> Ibid., 15

<sup>1106</sup> Waugh argues that Rahman was influenced by the Hindu rational reformist movement influenced by the West. Earle H. Waugh, “Fazlur Rahman,” in Andrew Rippin, ed. *The Islamic World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008) 409-417.

The vacuum Rahman speaks of has to do with the lack of an independent ethical approach of the Quran that distinguishes between the moral and the legal. He believes that no such approach has been developed yet. The available approaches are “atomistic” in the sense that the unity of the Quranic message is not understood; this approach resulted in interpreting Quranic verses as having a legal intent, an approach he does not agree with.<sup>1107</sup> What forced such interpretations is the lack of a Quranic approach that interprets it according to the reasons of descent of the verses, *hasaba asbāb annuzūl*. A correct interpretation that answers the social message of the Quran, and the development of “inter-human morality,” becomes his preoccupation. This becomes his aim: “a systematic attempt must be made to elaborate an ethics on the basis of the Quran, for without an explicitly formulated ethical system, one can never do justice to Islamic law.”<sup>1108</sup> To reconstruct such an ethical system requires a “purely cognitive effort.”<sup>1109</sup>

Rahman proposes a hermeneutical approach in reading the Quran for a theologico-ethical reform. This approach “is exclusively concerned with the cognitive aspect of the revelation,” and is fully concerned with values.<sup>1110</sup> “The basic *élan* of the Quran is moral.”<sup>1111</sup> The basic *élan* of the Quran – the stress on socioeconomic justice and essential human egalitarianism - is quite clear from its very early passages.<sup>1112</sup> As the essence of the Quranic message, ethics becomes, in Rahman’s reading, “the necessary link between theology and law,” between the cognitive and emotive faith that can give guidance and meaning to the individual and collective believers.<sup>1113</sup>

Rahman, like the Mu’tazilla, believes in the createdness of the Quran. He recognizes its divinity and that it is “*verbally revealed*,” but argues that this revelation took place in a particular period of time, in a particular linguistic and cultural context. For any update reading of the sacred text, so that such an innovation affects the other sectors of social and individual life, the text has to be re-interpreted. For this reason Rahman

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<sup>1107</sup> Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 2-3

<sup>1108</sup> Rahman, *Islam*, 256.

<sup>1109</sup> Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 4

<sup>1110</sup> *Ibid.*, 4

<sup>1111</sup> Rahman, *Islam*, 33.

<sup>1112</sup> *Islam and Modernity*, 19

<sup>1113</sup> *Ibid.*, 154

attempts a revolutionary reading, and among the modern reformists, he could be considered the first one to advance it.<sup>1114</sup> He argues that though revelation is divine, the wording is most likely to be that of the Prophet Mohammad, for the relation between the divine inspiration, the feeling of the Prophet, and the wording is very tight. He puts it this way,

The Quran is, therefore, purely divine. Further, even with regard to ordinary consciousness, it is a mistaken notion that ideas and feelings float about in it and can be mechanically “clothed” in words. There exists, indeed, an organic relationship between feelings, ideas and words. In inspiration, even in poetic inspiration, this relationship is so complete that feeling-idea-word is a total complex within a life of its own. When Muhammad’s moral intuitive perception rose to the highest point and became identified with the moral law itself [...], the Word was given with the inspiration itself. The Quran is thus pure Divine Word, but of course, it is equally intimately related to the inmost personality of the Prophet Muhammad whose relationship to it cannot be mechanically conceived like that of a record. The Divine Word flowed through the Prophet’s heart.

In this sense, Rahman is going beyond the Mu‘tazila idea of the createdness of the Quran. The createdness was by God, in their view, but Rahman’s view does not stop there. Though it is created and decreed by God, he is saying that the linguistic wording in the Prophet’s. That is, he is proposing a historicist view of the linguistic production of the Quranic message, taking into account the Prophet’s socio-cultural and political context. This hermeneutist, textualist, and contextualist view is very innovative for the orthodoxy. It can have immense impact on the way Islamic law has been interpreted historically for socio-political management of the Muslim community’s affairs.

In his theological advances, Rahman lists three major themes of the Quran: monotheism, socio-economic justice, and the Last Day, i.e. the final accountability of man.<sup>1115</sup> Monotheism or Tawhid aside here, socio-economic justice and free will are of particular concern for the ethical system he calls for. He proposes “double movement” as

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<sup>1114</sup> Later reformists, among them the ones I will cite in this section, will develop approaches closer to this one, and even push it further, and that is the case especially with Abdulkarim Soroush’s philosophy of religion, as I will illustrate.

<sup>1115</sup> Rahman, *Major Themes of the Quran*, 18

These three main themes are closer to the Mu‘tazilite tenets of 1) Tawhid, 2) divine justice, and 3) promise and threat or reward and punishment. Broadly, they also correspond to my three framework elements of comparison and conceptualization of the idea of European Islam: world, society, and individual.

the way to go in understanding the message of the Quran as interpreted by the Prophet in history.<sup>1116</sup> By “double movement” he aims at deducing general principles in light of the overall message of the Quran, and not by stopping at particular verses that have been interpreted legally:

*In building any genuine and viable Islamic set of laws and institutions, there has to be a twofold movement: First one must move from the concrete case treatment of the Qur'an – taking the necessary and relevant social conditions of that time into account – to the general principles upon which the entire teaching converges. Second, from this general level there must be a movement back to specific legislation, taking into account the necessary and relevant social conditions now obtaining.<sup>1117</sup> [Emphasis is original]*

This means that the Quran cannot be interpreted literally now, otherwise its ethical and social message can be thwarted. For example, the Quranic injunctions about inheritance, polygamy, penal code, and *ribā*/ usury, have to be read in light of this backward-then-forward looking “double movement.” For a better historiographic interpretation of the Prophetic Sunna, Rahman makes this distinction between the “Prophetic Sunna,” which is ideal and exemplary, and the “living Sunna,” which is historical and temporal. He argues that the *ijma'*/ consensus among the Muslim scholars about the Sunna was about the “living” one which is historic, while they should have considered the ideal one, the “Prophetic” one which interpreted the Quranic message in correspondence to that particular historical unique period.<sup>1118</sup>

Rahman elevates human intellect and responsibility to high levels to match the moral weight of the revelation. He says that revelation has to be interpreted constantly so that laws match morality, otherwise it becomes a mere emotional and abstract system, or falls into secularism; and secularism for him, though it pretends neutrality, is atheist in its aim. These views are well expressed in this clear passage where ethics are seen as the priority over law:

A God that speaks neither to the intellect of man nor to his heart, nor yet can generate a system of values for man, is considerably worse than nothing and is

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<sup>1116</sup> Rahman, *Islam*, 33

<sup>1117</sup> Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 20

<sup>1118</sup> Rahman, *Major Themes of the Quran*, 18.

better off dead. The moral values are the crucial pivot of the entire overall system, and from them flows the law. The law is therefore the last part in this chain and governs all the “religious,” social, political, and economic institutions of the society. Because law is to be formulated on the basis of the moral values, it will necessarily be organically related to the latter. But because it governs the day-to-day life of the society, with necessary social change it has to be reinterpreted. Should the process of reinterpretation stop, obviously the society must either stagnate or else rebel and take the road of secularism. In either case the whole structure of theology, morality, and law will eventually collapse.<sup>1119</sup>

This means that moral values, though intellectually perceived and morally adopted, take root in the divine. What Rahman is saying is that re-reading revelation in light of human socio-political changes does not mean laxity or loosening what seems tight in it. Rather, since it is the ethical approach that he targets in the Quran, and its impact on social justice, it is human responsibility that governs this ethical system at the end. As a philosopher, he certainly stresses the role of reason, but unlike Kant for the modern Europe, he believes that morality can be stabilized and preserved through believing in the divine.<sup>1120</sup> Morality here is not separated from reason, but they are tied together: the experience of the divine is not lived separate from the moral code that governs the individual in society. Divine morality in this system is espoused to reasoning; this way no gaps develop in society between what is divine and what is not divine, for reason thinks divinely. This is what can be inferred from this passage:

*The central concern of Quran is the conduct of man. Just as in Kantian terms no ideal knowledge is possible without the regulative ideas of reason (like first cause), so in Quranic terms no real morality is possible without the regulative ideas of God and the Last Judgment. [...] God exists in the mind of the believer to regulate his behavior if he is religiomorally experienced, but that which is to be regulated is the essence of the matter. The bane of later medieval Islam [...] was that what was regulative, namely God, was made the exclusive object of experience and thus, instead of men's seeking values from this experience, the experience became the end in itself, [...] it was mostly either neutral to social morality or even negatively related to it.<sup>1121</sup> [Emphasis added]*

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<sup>1119</sup> Rahman, *Islam and Modernity* 156.

<sup>1120</sup> Abdennour Bidar's philosophical reading of the Quranic message, as presented in Part III, Section 2, are very close to this view on morality and ethics in Islam.

<sup>1121</sup> Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 14.

Human freedom in this ethical system then takes a “middle path,” using Rahman’s word, since the moral code remains divine and not purely human based. “Values cannot be made and unmade by man at his own whim or convenience and should not be misused or abused for the sake of expediency.”<sup>1122</sup> Since the individual is the “vicegerent on earth,” it is his “*taqwa*,” piety, that makes him responsible of the ethical code that is divinely transmitted. For Rahman, “*taqwa*” is a central ethical concept.<sup>1123</sup> In sum, Rahman’s rational aspects in his interpretation aim at preserving the ethical wealth of the Quran, or the Quranic normativeness, and its social justice message.<sup>1124</sup> What I see in Rahman’s interpretation of the Quranic text, its ethical message, and socio-political implications is that ultimately he wishes to see the secular and the divine merging as if they were one. Thus, neither the divine would lose its central contribution in polishing the conduct of man, nor would the secular lose its mundane interests that serve this same ethical man.<sup>1125</sup> His three leading themes of the Quran make his approach harmonious and relevant for the divine and mundane marriage he seeks to develop. Belief in 1) Tawhid, work for 2) socio-economic justice, and remembrance of 3) the Last Day build an overlapping ground between divine ethics and secular practices.

### **Mohamed Arkoun: back to the “Quranic event” to unveil an “open Islam”**

Mohamed Arkoun (d. 2010) belongs to a different category of Islamic scholars. His background in philosophy from his early training in Algeria has influenced his approach in reading the Islamic tradition and obsession with revitalizing Islamic reason. His long sojourn in Paris where he spent the rest of his life made him a heavy reader of the French Annales historiography school, and the school of poststructuralists, deconstructionists, semiotists, psychoanalysts, and postmodernists, led by scholars like Claude Levi Strauss, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault, Algirdas Julien Greimas, and Jean-Francois Lyotard. Arkoun can be read as a

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<sup>1122</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>1123</sup> Rahman, *Major Themes of the Quran*, 120.

<sup>1124</sup> I did not want to stress here one of the other aspect that Raham works on: education. For him, “Any Islamic reform now must begin with education.” Rahman, *Islam*, 260.

<sup>1125</sup> Again, philosophically, Abdennour Bidar is very close to this view, and so is also Tareq Oubrou, and lately Tariq Ramadan from a theological-political perspective. Despite their background readings of the sources, they all aim at breaking the dichotomy between the divine and the secular.

modernist, since he belongs to the modern schools of thought from which he learnt the tools to critique the Islamic texts, but his approach is very radical to be called modernist in the sense of Euro-modernity. Arkoun's work is based on reading all the sacred texts (Quran, Bible, Torah) historically, sociologically, and anthropologically in light of what the modern social sciences have achieved. Divinity aside, the sacred text itself can be read like any other text produced in particular period of time, in a particular space and in a particular language. All these aspects influence the divine text and its interpretation. For him, every text is political, and thus an instrument of power. This makes Martin, et al. classify him as a "postmodernist."<sup>1126</sup> Arkoun is simply radical in his approach in the sense that he calls for an epistemological break with the tradition. This break is not to negate revelation *per se* but to deconstruct the way it has been hegemonically interpreted by what he calls the "official closed corpus." His *Rethinking Islam (1994)*, and the *Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought (2002)* have become iconic titles for new approaches among Islamic studies scholars.

Arkoun detects three developments of the Quran. The first is the "Quranic fact/event"; it is the moment of revelation itself, and it lasted between 610-631. It is God's appeal to human consciousness, has an existential meaning, and is linked to Arabic language. It is oral. It is also transhistorical since its appeal is atemporal and goes beyond the demise of the Prophet. Such a revelation is open to various horizons of interpretations and realizations. It is not systematized, and does not logically distinguish between the mythical and rational. Arkoun calls this stage the "Quranic discourse" or "fact/event." The Prophet, as the champion of this stage, made it a successful stage because of his ability to merge sublimation with socio-political factors, using particular heuristic devices, like metaphors, parables, symbols, and dialectic devices.<sup>1127</sup>

The second development or phase is that of collection and canonization of the Quran in a book called the *Mushaf* (between 632-936). This marks the beginning of the "Islamic fact/event," or "Islamic discourse" which establishes itself historically on the basis of the Quranic discourse. Here, the Quranic fact was used as a pretext for the socio-

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<sup>1126</sup> Martin et al., eds., *Defenders of Reason in Islam*, 204

<sup>1127</sup> Arkoun, *Islam: to Reform or to Subvert?* 239

political context that was developing as a power. Some aspects of the Quranic discourse are used, selectively, to serve power purposes that the orthodoxy provides. Here, revelation is no longer open but narrowed down to the Arabic linguistic understandings the orthodoxy constructs.

The third development is that of the “established orthodoxy” (since 936). Here a new *imaginaire* within the Islamic community emerges. This *imaginaire* shapes what is *thinkable*, what is *unthinkable*, and with it also remains hidden what is *unthought* in Islamic thought. Arkoun strives to fathom the archeology of the *imaginaire* of the tradition, to find what the orthodoxy left out in historicizing revelation. The total of the *unthought* makes the *unthinkable*.<sup>1128</sup>

The *imaginaire* that develops from orthodoxy impacts three levels: the religious, social, and individual *imaginaire*. For the religious *imaginaire*, the orthodoxy is taken for granted, without critical thinking. The social one combines the orthodox *imaginaire* and the ideological forces and discourses to maintain the idea of unity and nation. Mythologization of the Golden Age of Islam and the Medina prophetic experiences are examples of this social *imaginaire*. The individual absorbs these *imaginaires* and they all become his own, without critical thinking. For example, “the faithful still perceive religious law (shari‘a) as a Divine Law rooted in revelation. That is why people demand a political regime that protects and applies this law and rejects all legislation of human origin.”<sup>1129</sup>

The critique of Islamic reason Arkoun launches starts from the “hegemonic” and “logocentric” “official closed corpus” set up by the orthodoxy after the Mu‘tazillite rationalism and Averroes’ ordeal and death, “After the death of Ibn Roshd (d. 1198), the creative interface between theology, religious law and philosophy was disrupted.”<sup>1130</sup> Arkoun speaks of the “emerging reason” which can deconstruct the “Islamic fact” that grew up from an “official closed corpus” and “dogmatic” reading of the “Quranic fact.”

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<sup>1128</sup> Arkoun, *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (London: Saqi Books and The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2002) 9-23.

<sup>1129</sup> Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, trans., and ed. Robert D. Lee (Oxford, Westview Press, 1994) 112.

<sup>1130</sup> Arkoun, *Islam: to Reform or to Subvert?* 357

Now, an archeology of religious texts has to be developed in light of sociological, anthropological, linguistic, and semiotic studies of the texts to unearth the potential truth in the divine message. This enterprise can also be nourished by comparative studies of the three divine religions to unveil the unthought in revelations, beyond dichotomies that modernity has fallen into (secular vs. profane, state vs. Church, etc.). A more plural reasoning paradigm has to match the “emerging reason.” The “Historical epistemology” approach in Arkoun’s project aims at deciphering the structures and forces that eliminated the philosophical standpoint of reason in Islamic thought.<sup>1131</sup> A “historical discontinuity,” an epistemological break with such a tradition, on the methodological level, becomes imperative for Arkoun, by the utility of the “emerging reason.” The latter is not stable. It is analytical, deconstructionist, and constantly on the move. It is on constant analysis of any religious orthodoxy, philosophic postulate or ideological discourse. He defines it as follows:

It is concerned with the philosophical subversion of the use of reason itself and all forms of rationality produced so far and those which will be produced in the future so as not to repeat the ideological compromises and derivations of the precedent postures and performances of reason. In that sense, E.R. [Emerging Reason] will be continuously emerging to reassess its critical function.<sup>1132</sup>

The emerging reason, or “emergent reason,” is “reason in crisis.” It is so because its meaning does not seem to emerge, or it emerges to subvert a particular discourse. It is primarily against the “hegemonic reason,” like the Western logocentric reason, or the Islamic orthodox reason. The “emergent reason” helps the subaltern voices to speak up, “we have to be able to hear voices reduced to silence, heterodox voices, minority voices, the voices of the vanquished and the marginalized, if we are to develop a reason capable of encompassing the human condition.”<sup>1133</sup> This would shatter the walls of orthodox certainties and hegemonic reason. It leads to the end of certainty-based science, or *‘ilm al-yaqin*, “from *‘ilm al-yaqin* to the end of certainties.”<sup>1134</sup>

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<sup>1131</sup> Ibid., 20-21

<sup>1132</sup> Arkoun, *The Unthought*, 23-24

<sup>1133</sup> Ibid., 22

<sup>1134</sup> Ibid., 38

Because of the established orthodoxy, its official closed corpus, and the imaginaire it has hammered in the minds of its believers for centuries, political theology and political philosophy suffered immensely to the extent that they vanished from Islamic reasoning and became among the unthinkable. With the “managers of the sacred,” Islam has developed a weird combination that suffocates its reform. Arkoun puts this in a good comparative statement: “Islam is theologically Protestant and politically Catholic.”<sup>1135</sup> The first part of the statement means that “the right of examination of the Scriptures belongs to any adherent duly prepared to enter a doctrinal controversy with his peers,” while the second part means the “absolute authority and power of the caliph or the imam vertically given coverage by doctors of law (Sunni) and clerical hierarchy (Shi‘ite hierarchy).”<sup>1136</sup> In between the two much of orthodoxy and hegemony complexifications have taken place historically, through the three Ds, the trilogy of *Din, Dunya, and Dawla* (*Religion, Life, and State*), and how they have been connectedly been interpreted. This has immensely impacted the “Quranic fact.” The latter has to be regained; it resists the Islamic orthodox discourse. Arkoun believes that the Quranic fact has instinctive resistance devices, and they are the wealth that has to be explored to regain, besides its cognitive capacities, the “spiritual *ethos* of the Quran.”<sup>1137</sup>

Arkoun is for the development of “spiritual responsibility” that caters for the emancipation of the modern “human spirit.” More precisely, Arkoun is critical of the orthodox marginalization of the “person” from the focus of Islamic theology and political philosophy. He is critical of the centralization of the male and the marginalization of the female and child, from classical thought. Equal critique is launched against Judeo-Christian traditions and modern secular and material philosophy that has categorized Islam outside of the traditions that can contribute to the emancipation of the human condition.<sup>1138</sup> Western philosophy now shies away from debating the human condition. Western philosophers avoid measuring the ethical debate starting from personal

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<sup>1135</sup> Arkoun, *Islam: to Reform or to Subvert?* 258

<sup>1136</sup> Arkoun, “The Vicissitudes of Ethics in Islamic Thought,” in Stefan Reichmuth, et al., eds. *Humanism and Muslim Culture: Historical Heritage and Contemporary Challenges* (Goettingen and Taiwan: V&R unipress and National Taiwan UP, 2012) 69. (pp.61-86)

<sup>1137</sup> Arkoun, *Islam: to Reform or to Subvert?* 282

<sup>1138</sup> Arkoun, “The Vicissitudes of Ethics in Islamic Thought,” 82-83.

experiences.<sup>1139</sup> For these reasons, Arkoun recognizes the “need to rediscover what I [Arkoun] venture to call “spiritual responsibility,” as a means of resistance, on the part of the human spirit, against the operations of reason itself as the latter works with the “unthinkables” and “unthoughts” of each socio-cultural environment and each historical period.” He does not mean archaic religious self-centered spirituality, but that which revisits the debate on the “dignity of man,” “I am introducing the concept of spiritual responsibility, not to reactivate the idealistic claims for religious spiritualism, but to problematize the current reference made to the “*dignity of man*.”<sup>1140</sup> The “person” or the “human spirit” Arkoun wants to see developing is that which liberates itself from any orthodoxy whatsoever, be it religious or philosophic. Such a person is simply pluralist, epistemologically able to see what goes on in building a particular tradition, philosophy, or worldview. He provides a heuristic definition for it, which goes as follows:

For the human spirit, assuming a spiritual responsibility means providing oneself with all the means, and at all times the necessary conditions, for resisting all activities (once they have been duly identified) that aim to alienate it (the spirit), enslave it, mutilate it or mislead one or several of its faculties in an attempt to achieve an end contrary to what makes it the seat, the agent and the irreducible sign of the eminent dignity of the human person.<sup>1141</sup>

Arkoun cautions that he is not calling for a return to “mythologized values” but to “opening new spaces of intelligibility and more reliable possibilities for the emancipation of the human condition.”<sup>1142</sup> He says that religions have for centuries guarded values for societies, but with time that turned into control of these values. So, “secular religions” have started to propose themselves as the alternative. He does not blame religions *per se* but the human interpretations that imprison them. “Spiritual responsibility” is in the hands of the person, more than it is in religions’ control, “It is illusory and dangerous to ask of religions more than they can give. Only human beings, with their creativity and innovative boldness, can constantly renew and augment opportunities for their own liberation.”<sup>1143</sup> From Arkoun historiographical perspective, Islam has this potential of

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<sup>1139</sup> Arkoun, *Islam: to Reform or to Subvert?* 292; 359.

<sup>1140</sup> *Ibid.*, 284

<sup>1141</sup> *Ibid.*, 284

<sup>1142</sup> *Ibid.*, 294

<sup>1143</sup> Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 113

rehabilitating the debate on the dignity of man and human emancipation. “There exists a liberal, critical Islam open to change, an Islam still little known and rarely taken into consideration.”<sup>1144</sup>

### **Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd: “Rethinking the Quran as a discourse”**

The Egyptian Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (d. 2010), who is the student and colleague of the famous scholar Hassan Hanafi (b. 1935), adopts a literary-critical reading of the Islamic sacred text in light of modern discourse analysis tools (semiology, hermeneutics, linguistics, stylistics and science of narration).<sup>1145</sup> Initially, he reads the Quran as “text” – before he considers it later a “discourse” about the “meaning of life.” The Quran becomes like any produced text and the available devices of analysis can be projected on it. Like Arkoun, he differentiates between the divinity of the Quranic moment of revelation, and the Quran as compiled in the *Mushaf* [i.e. compiled in a book format, after it had been memorized orally and preserved in the hearts of believers].<sup>1146</sup> Because of its oral originality, the Quranic discourse is then polyphonic, and not monophonic; and this makes of it open to various interpretations. More, Abu Zayd speaks of (six) axioms that impact the production and dissemination of knowledge. The idea of the axioms is that knowledge, through the production of texts, cannot be isolated from its linguistic and socio-political contours that form them. Subsequently, he differentiates between two main texts, the Quranic text, which is “primary,” and the Sunna text, “which is secondary.” The latter explains the former. But since the latter (Sunna) is itself explained and expounded upon by scholarly jurists and commentators that came after the Prophet, then by implication this impacts the first text as well, i.e. the Quranic text.<sup>1147</sup>

Abu Zayd grounds his approach in the idea that there is no innocent text. In *Reformation of Islamic Thought* (2006), he says, “Studying the history and methodology

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<sup>1144</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>1145</sup> Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *annaṣ, aṣṣulta, al-ḥaqīqa* [Text, Authority, and Truth] 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Beirut and Casablanca, 1997) 8.

<sup>1146</sup> Abu Zayd, *Rethinking the Quran: towards a Humanistic Hermeneutics* (Utrecht: Humanistics UP, 2004) 12-14

<sup>1147</sup> Regarding the six axioms, see his *attaṣkīr fi zamāni attaṣkīr* [Thinking in the Time of Excommunication] 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Cairo: Madbouli, 1995) 133-135.

of classical exegesis, I became aware of the fact that there is neither an objective, nor an innocent interpretation.”<sup>1148</sup> This made him realize that “the Qur'an became a battlefield for the adversaries to situate their political, social and theological positions.”<sup>1149</sup> This means that the hermeneutical devices used by various early Islamic scholars move from being a mere “textual authority” that the “text” establishes epistemologically to a socio-political authority that controls and influences. It moves from being a mere process of knowledge production, an epistemic basis for thought, to a political force of power. After having considered the Quran as a text to be analyzed as a literary “text,” he, around 2002-2004, moves to considering it a “discourse” that has horizontal, and not only vertical, dimensions in society; i.e. it moves from being a text from God-individual relations (vertical relation) to involve more agents and intermediaries in society, and becomes horizontal, a relation like God-society-individual. This he explains in *Thinking in the Time of Excommunication*:

Because of this, we differentiate between “the texts” [and its epistemic authority] and authority, which is enforced by the human mind, not emanated from the text itself. And because of this, the call for “freedom for the authority of the texts” is in reality a call for freedom from absolute authority and overall reference of thought, which exerts coercion, hegemony and control when it imposes on texts meanings and connotations outside of time, space, circumstances and context.<sup>1150</sup>

Such advances on the Quran, especially when first considered as a text, forced Abu Zayd to leave his country, Egypt, to the Netherlands where he exiled himself and researched till his death. Al-Azhar scholars opposed his views, accused him of apostasy, and appealed to divorce him from his wife, for an apostate, or unbeliever, cannot be married a Muslim woman!

If textual analysis bases itself on demarcating the canonization processes of the Quranic and Sunna texts, discourse analysis of the Quran goes further than that. It has direct impacts on society, instead of remaining a more abstract/ textual analysis. Quran as discourse targets “open, democratic, humanistic hermeneutics,” says Abu Zayd, because the Quran is about the “meaning of life.” To understand this meaning, its horizontal

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<sup>1148</sup> Abu Zayd, *Reformation of Islamic Thought: A Critical Historical Analysis* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2006) 93

<sup>1149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1150</sup> Abu Zayd, *Thinking in the Time of Excommunication*, 138.

dimensions as lived and expressed in daily life have to be examined.<sup>1151</sup> It happened in its early period and it has to be revived, “remembered”; the Quran is not only a text, but a discourse that engages in debate, argues, accepts, and refuses. It can cope with modernity and face its challenges. This Muslims have to do, to “rethink the Quran,” “without relinquishing their spiritual power.”<sup>1152</sup>

Having approached the tradition from textual analysis lenses, Abu Zayd says that he does not aim at de-sacralizing the divine. Rather, since the tradition was developed by human interpretation, following rigorous hermeneutical devices that served the purpose in the past, he now calls for doing the same in light of the new socio-political changes and scientific and analytical advancements. “Such a call for freedom doesn't stand upon discarding religion or its texts, but it stands upon understanding religious texts a scientific understanding.”<sup>1153</sup>

In his approach, late Abu Zayd<sup>1154</sup>, like Arkoun, is considered to be radical in his epistemological stand towards the tradition, compared to other scholars. There is no doubt that a clear epistemological break transpires with the tradition in his humanistic and hermeneutical approach. This epistemological break does not go so far as to break ties with the divine – at least not directly. It just gives much space to human responsible *manoeuvre*. He does not believe that the Quran was created, as the Mu'tazilla, for example, do. He believes that it is the Word of God, and it was created eternally. Yet, this note of the Quran's creation apart, he agrees in his interpretation with the Mu'tazillites: “I believe that in order to make sense of the Qur'an, we need to understand the text metaphorically rather than literally. I also believe that it is essential to interpret the text by taking into account the social-cultural context in which it was received.”<sup>1155</sup> This said, Abu Zayd never doubted his belief in Islam. His criticism of the tradition is not degrading or condescending. It is for renewed confidence in this faith. In an interview he says:

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<sup>1151</sup> Abu Zayd, *Rethinking the Quran*, 9-12.

<sup>1152</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-63.

<sup>1153</sup> Abu Zayd *Thinking in the Time of Excommunication*, 146.

<sup>1154</sup> I say “late Abu Zayd” to mean especially the phase, since 2002-2004, when he moves from reading the Quran as a literary “text” to a “discourse” that has horizontal impact.

<sup>1155</sup> Abu Zayd, and Ester R. Nelson, *Voice of an Exile: Reflections on Islam* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publ., 2004) 3-4.

I am sure that I am a Muslim. My worst fear is that people in Europe may consider and treat me as a critic of Islam. I am not. I am not a new Salman Rushdie, and don't want to be welcomed and treated as such. I am a researcher, critical of old and modern Islamic thought. I treat the Qur'an as a *nass* (text) given by God to the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>1156</sup>

My reference to Abu Zayd is to show that re-reading even the fundamental divine text of the Quran through new hermeneutical devices is a stage that is reached among contemporary Islamic reformist scholars, unlike the early Arab Renaissance scholars who did not go into that level. The divinity of the message is not questioned, and its spiritual power and humanist contributions to face modernity are not denied. Yet, the status of the scholar vis-à-vis the divine message is being re-positioned, always spiritually and responsibly.

### **Hassan Hanafi: “Hermeneutics is Hermeneutics for use”**

The prolific Egyptian philosopher Hassan Hanafi (b. 1935)<sup>1157</sup> believes that Islam's core message is that of global ethics and social justice. He believes that Islam, as

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<sup>1156</sup> Fred Dallmayr, “Opening the Doors of Ijtihad,” Monday, 13 June 2011, <http://www.resetdoc.org/story/00000021629>

<sup>1157</sup> Among Hanafi's influential students was the deceased scholar Nasr Abu Zayd. In the 1980s he held a long intellectual debate with the Moroccan philosopher Mohamed Abed Aljabri, which is published as Hassan Hanafi and Mohamed Abed Aljabri, *ḥiwārūn bayna al-mashriq wa al-maghrib [Dialogue between the Mashriq and Maghrib]* (Beirut: al-mu'assasa am-arabiya li al-dirasat wa al-nashr, 1990). After his studies in La Sorbonne in Paris, Hanafi has settled in Cairo as a professor of philosophy since 1967. Hanafi translated several European works into Arabic: an *Anthology of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, *Spinoza's Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (to show the use of reason in religion and politics, to show the application of historical criticism to sacred scriptures, and to define the role of a free citizen in a free country), Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Education of the Human Race*, and Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Transcendence of the Ego*. Meanwhile, he was developing his own philosophy in a series of books. The titles of some of them (translated into English) give significant clues to their purposes: *Contemporary Issues*, Volume I on Arabic thought (1976) and Volume II on Western thought (1977); *Tradition and Modernism* (1980); *Islamic Studies* (1981); and the five-volume *From Dogma to Revolution (Min al-aqida ila al-thaura)*; 1986). In the 1960s he joined Muslim Brotherhood but he soon left them to become for some time a Muslim Marxist and Leftist, advocating an “Islamic Left.” Al-Yassar Al-Islami journal came out just once. He has written extensively on phenomenology and hermeneutics as a way of dealing with texts in the Third World, and particularly in dealing with the Islamic sources. He has also written a lot on dialogue, advocating the Islamic model of tolerance of Andalusia/al-andalus, and opposing the thesis of the “clash of civilizations” of Huntington; Massimo, Campanini, “Hanafi, Hassan (1935–),” *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2006, available at: <http://www.encyclopedia.com>. At a certain stage, Hanafi initiated a theoretical frame of Occidentalism studies to understand the West and contribute to world history. Hanafi criticizes Orientalism as a science that aimed at colonial submission. He believes that the Third World's peoples have to develop a science of Occidentalism in order to get a fresh cultural, political, and philosophical stance. In his Arabic version of *Introduction to the Science of Occidentalism (1991)*, he says, “I am just calling for the creation of a Self instead of imitating the Other, and for turning the Other into an

the third synthetical phase of revelations after Judaism and Christianity, has contributed to world history and civilization and can still play that role in the current world malaise on ethics and global injustice. Hanafi's call for the rebirth of kalam is very relevant to my work, since it ends its conceiving revelation anthropologically, historically, and thus for this world. Its ties with the divine are not cut but are condensed in the way human beings interpret it for their worldly matters.

Hanafi's philosophical method of dealing with revelation is grounded in phenomenology and hermeneutics. He applies this method to Islam and its historical development. According to him, Islam is not merely a religion, but above all a worldview that connects the temporal and the sacred. Thus the outward (social and practical) and the inner (conscience) dimensions of human reality are but two aspects of the same phenomenon. Theology must become anthropology in order to allow humanity to make faith the tool of transformation of economic and social relations. The translation of theology into anthropology needs firstly the Husserlian concept of *epoché* or *bracketing*<sup>1158</sup> on God's essence; and secondly a new orientation of the object of

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object of science [scientific study] instead of considering him the source of science." Hanafi, *muqaddima fi 'ilm al istighrāb [Introduction to the Science of Occidentalism]* (Cairo: al-dar al-fanniyah, 1991) 5, n.1. For the English abstract of his views on Occidentalism, see also: Hanafi, *Islam in the Modern World: Tradition, Revolution and Culture*, vol.2 (Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, 1995). Section "From Orientalism to Occidentalism," 353-365.) This call of Occidentalism finds its echoes in an earlier book, *On the Contemporary Western Thought* (1990), where he speaks about ideas as moments in history, which some grasp and develop, and others just project and emulate. Here, he says that historically speaking, it is the non-Western and non-European that can understand and develop Western thought, because he is an outsider who has a different "feel," *shu'ur*, about the world, and ideas, and only an external look can refresh their wealth and go beyond them. Western thought is a product of Western socio-cultural and politico-philosophic development, which cannot be replicated somewhere else. Hanafi, *fi al fikr al gharbī al mu'āṣir [On the Contemporary Western Thought]* 4th ed. (Beirut: al mu'assasa al jāmi'iya li addirāsāt, 1990) 12-13.

<sup>1158</sup> Edmund Husserl developed the method of *epoché* or "bracketing" around 1906. By *epoché* is meant dependence on the object's experience of any phenomenological subject, leaving aside intentions that may have justifications in an "extra-mental," or metaphysical world:

[...] any phenomenological description proper is to be performed from a *first person* point of view, so as to ensure that the respective item is described *exactly as is experienced, or intended*, by the subject. Now from a first-person point of view, one cannot, of course, decide whether in a case of what one takes to be, say, an act of perception one is currently performing, there actually is an object that one is perceptually confronted with. [...] in a phenomenological description proper the existence of the object(s) (if any) satisfying the content of the intentional act described must be "bracketed." That is to say, the phenomenological description of a given act and, in particular, the phenomenological specification of its intentional content, must not rely upon the correctness of any *existence assumption* concerning the object(s) (if any) the respective act is about. Thus,

theology. The center of revelation as the science of God is no longer God but humanity. Revelation is the science of humanity because humans are its objects and interlocutors.<sup>1159</sup> In this transformation of theology into anthropology, God keeps his value as *telos*, the goal of human activity in front of which all are equal. God is not logos, but praxis, not an idea, but a form of practice. Consequently, in Hanafi's view, Islam is a religion of revolution and justice, stimulating everybody to refuse any subordination to oppressive power and to claim the liberation of the world and its people in the name of God.

In his first volume of *Islam in the Modern World* (1995), Hanafi speaks of "Society and Social Justice" and the role Islam can play for both social justice and global ethics, "Islam as Universal Code of Ethics," based, among others, on the leading pillar of Islam, Tawhid:

Since God is One, submitting one's will to God's Will is submitting all human wills to one Principal. Therefore, double standard ethics: freedom, peace and justice for oneself, servitude, war and justice [sic, injustice] for the others, is completely contrary to Islam. The other has the same right as the self if not even before.<sup>1160</sup>

Hanafi defends the rights of man, for God is able to defend His. In *From Creed to Revolution: the Just Man* (1988) he lengthily, through a profound theological analysis, tries to equate Tawhid with Justice.<sup>1161</sup> In another volume entitled *Faith, Work, and the Imamate* he sees man as the historical agent that executes the divine message, whereby faith and work intertwine and make the essence of human existence, and without it,

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the *epoché* has us focus on those aspects of our intentional acts and their contents that do not depend on the existence of a represented object out there in the extra-mental world.

For brevity on the concept, see: Beyer, Christian, "Edmund Husserl," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2011), at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/husserl/>

<sup>1159</sup> As seen earlier, Bidar is very close to this anthropological interpretation of man, and "humanization" of revelation. This will be also seen below when Hanafi speaks of man as the historical agent of the divine message, and this means that a revelation that excommunicates this world is not for humankind.

<sup>1160</sup> Hanafi, *Islam in the Modern World: Religion, Ideology, and Development*, vol.1 (Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, 1995) 213; for more, read sections: "Society and Social Justice," 44-53; Section "Islam as Universal Code of Ethics," 213-216.

<sup>1161</sup> Hanafi, *mina l'aqīda ilā athawra, III: al insānu al muta'ayyal (al-'adl)* [*From Creed to Revolution vol. 3: The Just Man*] (Beirut and Casablanca: al-markaz al-thakafi al-'arabī, 1988), see the introduction: "From Tawhid to Justice," 7-12.

without the active man, this divine message, remains unhistoricized.<sup>1162</sup> Below I refer to some of his main thoughts on hermeneutics and the treatment of texts.

In his second volume of *Islam in the Modern World* (1995), Hanafi advocates hermeneutics as a means of revolution, “Hermeneutics and Revolution,” and as a form of “Liberation Theology.”<sup>1163</sup> By revolution he means social change for justice, especially in the Arab-Islamic world that has been under dictatorships and earlier under the colonial rule. For Hanafi, Hermeneutics in unjust social systems is not a theoretical exercise reserved for bourgeois intellectuals. Rather, it is a means to read justice into genuine texts that have the potential for it. Hermeneutics is used by social classes either to rule and oppress or to overthrow this rule and restore justice. He puts it as follows:

*There is no Hermeneutics per se, absolute and universal. Hermeneutics is Hermeneutics for use. It is part of the socio-political struggle. Since both Tradition and Revolution are legal, Hermeneutics becomes the legitimizing device for each one. It justifies the legality of both Tradition and Revolution. Since the upper and middle classes identify themselves with tradition while the lower class identifies itself with revolution, the interpreters of each class produce their own Hermeneutics, a passage from Revolution to Tradition by the interpreters of the upper and middle classes, and a passage from tradition to Revolution by the interpreters of the lower class. The quarrel of interpretation indeed is a social conflict between classes.*<sup>1164</sup> [Emphasis added]

Hermeneutically, then, the text moves from being a historical material, into being a meta-historical product that is able to be refilled with meaning by means of new experiences the reader and interpreter live. Experiences become its source of everlasting value and universalism: “The text is born in history but lives in meta-history. It begins in historical contingency and ends in ideational necessity. The text switches from the relative to the absolute, and from the particular to [the] universal.”<sup>1165</sup> To realize such a reading, the interpreter of the text has to manage a “double movement” between the text and reality. From the text he can use language devices to make it closer to reality. From reality he can use the worldview he perceives or believes in, *Zeitgeist* [German term for “the spirit of

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<sup>1162</sup> Hanafi, *mina l'aqīda ilā athawra, V: al-īmanu wa al'amal: al-imama [From Creed to Revolution vol. 5: Faith, Work, and the Imamate]* (Cairo: Madbouli, n.d.) 1-10.

<sup>1163</sup> Hanafi, *Islam in the Modern World: Tradition, Revolution and Culture*, vol.2 (Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, 1995). Read, for instance, sections “Hermeneutics and Revolution,” 182-188, “Islam, Religious Dialogue and Liberation Theology,” 189-197.

<sup>1164</sup> *Ibid.*, 182-188.

<sup>1165</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

the times”], and reads its feeling in the historical text he has got: “To interpret is to make this double movement from the text to reality and from reality to the text.”<sup>1166</sup> The first is realized through amphibological [i.e. ambiguous] principle of language. The second is through the feeling of the *Zeitgeist*.<sup>1167</sup> This means that reality uncovers a lot of its mysteries through language, and so does language through its reinvigoration in a particular reality and historical moment.

The double movement required to understand the text is bound by the social forces that govern a particular reality. The social structure is equally double. The governors and the governed use their source texts as each needs to either keep its governing place or change its governed position. Assuming that the interpreter is on the side of the oppressed, he then has to serve their cause:

The social structure is also double: rich and poor, oppressor and oppressed, authority and opposition, minority and majority, elite and masses, ruler and ruled, etc. The interpreter’s role is to change the status quo namely the domination of the first on the second and to generate a power-struggle between the two poles in favour of the second against the first for the sake of social change as a peaceful and gradual revolution.<sup>1168</sup>

The double structure of the text and of society engenders a double function of Hermeneutics. One function is to preserve the *status quo* of injustice for the governors, and the second is to struggle for change, for revolution, for justice. The first is “conservative,” “dogmatic,” and “theocentric,” and the latter is “progressive,” “social,” and “material”:

Conservative Hermeneutics begins by the text considered as on [sic, an] independent and literal meaning, a norm according to which reality is measured. Progressive Hermeneutics begins by reality itself and accommodates the text according to it. Conservative Hermeneutics considers the text as a value per se and an end while progressive Hermeneutics considers the text only as a tool, human life as an absolute value to be preserved. Conservative Hermeneutics is formal, void of content, mystic, dogmatic, theocentric and historical while progressive Hermeneutics is material, full, social, open, anthropocentric and

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<sup>1166</sup> “Double movement” here echoes the methodologies of interpreting Scriptures according to Rahman and Oubrou.

<sup>1167</sup> Hanafi, *Islam in the Modern World*, vol. 2, 187.

<sup>1168</sup> Ibid.

meaningful. The conflict between these types of interpretation is indeed a struggle between two social forces.<sup>1169</sup>

It should be clear by now that Hanafi's Hermeneutics as a science of interpreting texts is very close to the human needs on the ground. It is the realm of justice that preoccupies the hermeneutist. Linking this to his Islamic scholarship, Hanafi tries to update the reading of *uṣūl al-fiqh* texts by renewing the discipline of religious dispute, *ʿilm al-kalam*, theology. His many volumes speak in length of his approach. I refer below to his "method of thematic interpretation of the Quran," which links his hermeneutical approach to the Islamic main source, the Quran.<sup>1170</sup>

Hanafi's "thematic method of interpretation" is based on certain premises, which define its aim as well as limitations. Primarily, revelation is put in brackets; it is neither confirmed nor denied; it is suspended for the sake of methodological analysis. The interpreter deals with the Quran as a text, and what it contains, and does not go into its origin, its creation, and the question of how. The method asks the question of essence and that of genesis, and origin. Second, the Quran is considered to be like any other text. Though it has classically been considered unique in production and style, as a new genre never known before literally or philosophically, in this approach the Quran is considered like any text, of some kind, historical, literary, poetic, philosophic, etc. Hermeneutically, all texts are subject to the same rules of interpretation. Third, there is no true or false interpretation, right or wrong. The interpretation is an effort from a particular angle and for a particular purpose. Fourth, it follows that there is no single interpretation of a text. The interpreter fills it with content from what he experiences in time and knows in space. Fifth, various interpretations reflect socio-political conflicting interests. "The conflict over interpretation is a conflict of interest. [...] Each interpretation expresses the socio-political commitment of the interpreter."<sup>1171</sup>

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<sup>1169</sup> Ibid., 187-188.

<sup>1170</sup> Hannafi, *Islam in the Modern World*, vol.1. Section, "Method of Thematic Interpretation," 407-428. "Method of Thematic Interpretation" was originally a lecture given during an international symposium organized at the university of Bon, 17-21 November, 1993, and was published in as Hanafi, "Method of Thematic Interpretation of the Quran," in Stefan Wild, ed. *The Quran as Text* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1996) 195-211. I first read the chapter in Stefan's work, so my citations are from it.

<sup>1171</sup> Hanafi, "Method of Thematic Interpretation of the Quran," in Wild, *The Quran as Text*, 203.

The following “premises” are rules of the thematic approach. I condense them here. One, *socio-political commitment*. There is no neutral interpreter. An interpreter must be committed to a cause, a crisis, he sees in society. The interpreter is a revolutionary social actor. Two, *looking for something*. The interpreter goes into a text for a reason, *asbāb annuzūl*. “Reason is interest.” The stimulus is antecedent to the response to be offered. There is priority of reality over the text.<sup>1172</sup> Three, *synopsis of the verses concerning one theme*. This rule means that all the verses of the Quran that share a theme are collected and arranged accordingly. Four, *classification of linguistic form*. Linguistic forms that are similar have to be compiled together for content analysis. Five, *building the structure*. Here the interpreter has to find correlations between meaning and the object to the extent in which they become one, each reflecting the other. At this stage the thematic structure becomes theoretically clear, deduced by content analysis. Six, *analysing the factual situation*. Here starts the move from the ideational structure to reality on the ground. The use of social sciences, statistics, figures, etc. becomes a necessity to match theory with practice, on issues like poverty, oppression, wealth, etc. Seven, *comparison between the ideal and real*. Comparing the theoretical structure with the data from reality is focalized in this stage/ rule. What follows this comparison is point eight, which is about *description of the mode or action*. Here, the interpreter moves from text to action, to materialize the outcome of his theory and reality findings. This needs time. It is the stage of revolution, which is not violent. The text no longer stands alone, in the abstract, but responds to the needs on the ground. Reality, too, no longer stands in isolation; it has a theoretical/ textual frame that guide it. It is an organized work for social change for the better.<sup>1173</sup> These interpretative rules in the thematic approach are not totally new from the Islamic tradition, as Hanafi says. Diverse disciplines used them, but now the need for them seems higher.<sup>1174</sup>

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<sup>1172</sup> Here are echoes of, say, Rahman and Aljabri about the importance of finding out reasons, *asbāb annuzul*, behind revelation and particular laws as ordained by God in the Quran.

<sup>1173</sup> Hanafi, "Method of Thematic Interpretation of the Quran," in Wild, *The Quran as Text*, 203-205.

<sup>1174</sup> Farid Essack actually uses hermeneutics to approach the case of blacks and Muslims during the Apartheid system in South Africa. For Essack, too, hermeneutics should not be a mere intellectual or bourgeois analytical device. On the contrary, it has to be used for the reign of liberation and justice in society. He uses hermeneutics as a means of “liberation theology.” See his interesting approach in: *Qur'an*,

Overall, Hanafi sees three circles as the frame of this interpretation method. These circles are: Being, Being with others, and Being in the world.<sup>1175</sup> One, Being, *the individual consciousness is the core of the world*. Individual consciousness is related to time, and is an interior feeling of awareness, enlightenment and being. Its material manifestation is its external version in space where cognitive faculties as well as senses cooperate for the realization of this Being. Two, *Being with others* indicates the intersubjective relations with the human world through various relations of family, marriage, paternity, economic relations, social affairs, political arrangements, etc. These relations carry the various values humans know of (honesty, friendship, justice, equality, ownership, etc.) Third, *Being in the world* concerns the individual consciousness and its relation to nature and the world of things, everything there is outside. For a meaningful existence, reigned by ethics and social justice, the individual conscious has to understand the signs and significance nature offers and unfathoms gradually to man.<sup>1176</sup>

The relationship between man and land is an example referred to in the thematic approach. It centralizes both man and land, *al-ard*, meaning earth. Its message corresponds to the Islamic message behind the creation of these two components in the universe: man and land. Hanafi states that “Nature is full of signs denoting its origin and its significance. It is subjected to man.” He adds, “man is responsible: he has a vocation to fulfill on earth. [...] Man is the vicegerent of God on earth since God does not interfere directly in the world.”<sup>1177</sup> Man’s succession and inheritance, which is based on “good deeds,” on earth is fulfilled here, and not in the hereafter. Henceforth, the interpretation of the Quranic text “has the practical purpose to change society for the better. [...] The validity of a [sic, an] interpretation lies in its power. There is no theoretical validity, the proof of an interpretation is its power. [...] Thematic interpretation of the Quran begins with this reality.”<sup>1178</sup> Such a pragmatic view of the Quranic text gives to man space to

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*Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997)

<sup>1175</sup> In connection with these three circles, I recall my three framework elements that I use for the conceptualization of European Islam (world-society-individual) to be kept in mind while reading the work of these reformists.

<sup>1176</sup> Hanafi, “Method of Thematic Interpretation of the Quran,” in Wild, *The Quran as Text*, 206.

<sup>1177</sup> *Ibid.*, 206-207.

<sup>1178</sup> *Ibid.*, 211-212.

interpret the message of Islam according to socio-political necessities. It seems that with Hanafi, interpretation of the Quran is no longer a top-down approach whereby the interpreter applies the divine message literally or by applying God's words on reality. It seems now that the approach is bottom-up, i.e. the interpreter has to fundamentally raise the reality issues to the divine message and make the latter respond in a way that answers the reality needs of the heir on earth. It is not about annihilating God, but about freeing the interpreter from the theological debate, which is another level of interpretation of the divine, to focalize his concentration on the mundane issues. It is a move to smash the walls of abstraction that characterize a lot of divine jurisprudential laws that are still interpreted literally. Hanafi's approach is rooted in what he believes to be the spirit of Islam, life itself, "The spirit of Islam is life," and from it stems the priority of reality on the text, and the priority of public welfare.<sup>1179</sup> Hanafi's hermeneutics is practical, and revelation, however divine it may be, is interpreted for the good of this world.

### **The Egalitarianists-Legalists: Mernissi, Wadud, and An'naim**

Female voices among the Muslim reformist intellectuals are not absent, but are not so many yet. Still, they have managed to exert a remarkable weight as speakers of the female voice from within the Islamic tradition. They are located in the Islamic world and in the West. I briefly refer to Fatema Mernissi (b. 1940), the Moroccan sociologist, and the American hermeneuticist Amina Wadud (b. 1952), who caused a controversy among Muslim scholars when she led a Friday prayers in the USA in 2005.

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<sup>1179</sup> Whether Hanafi is liberal, secularist, and Westernized, he says in an interview that all these terms are found in the classics of Islam and need to be updated. He says he may not need to refer to Kant to speak of rationalism; the Mu'tazilla do represent the rationalism of Islam. The defence of life, reason, honour, dignity, and public wealth, common in Islamic legal theories, do defend what liberalism and secularism (which are modern terms) defend, too. Read: Hassan Hanafi, "The problem is not Islam. It's Politics," interviewer Giancarlo Bosetti, 19 September 2006, available at: <http://www.resetdoc.org/story/0000000029> .

**Fatema Mernissi: unveil patriarchy and “walk into the modern world with pride”**

Mernissi’s first monograph, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Muslim Society*, was published in 1975; many revisited revisions followed since then. It has become a classic on Arab-Muslim-and-Mediterranean socio-anthropologic work on women. Its first edition was very anti the “misogynist message of Islam.” Mernissi received tough criticism on that. Later, with more sociological and historical studies, her view of religion *per se* would change. Most of her studies are sociological-anthropological and thus aim at unveiling the patriarchal and cultural additions that have burdened the Muslim message on man and woman. She is very critical of the authority of some Prophetic narrated hadiths, and questions their validity in comparison with the Islamic message which she considers to have given full ontological equality between man and woman. She dreams of reclaiming the “second message of Islam,” which is that of equality and justice. In the preface to the book, she says, “Paradoxically, and contrary to what is commonly assumed, Islam does not advance the thesis of women’s inherent inferiority. Quite the contrary, it affirms the potential equality between the sexes.”<sup>1180</sup>

Following years of fieldwork and experience of women aspirations in the Arab world she wrote, in 1992, in *Islam and Democracy*, “The Arab world is about to take off [...] It is going to take off for the simple reason that everybody, with the fundamentalists in the lead, wants change.”<sup>1181</sup> She meant the struggle for freedom, equality, and justice. In her second book, *The Veil and male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Islam* (1987), after she has done historical readings on the tradition on the position of women in Islam, and the role of the wives of the Prophet, she writes the following:

Any man who believes that a Muslim woman who fights for her dignity and right to citizenship excludes herself necessarily from the umma and is a brainwashed victim of Western propaganda is a man who misunderstands his own religious

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<sup>1180</sup> Fatema Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society* (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1975) xv-xvi

<sup>1181</sup> Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Perseus Books Group and Basic Books, 2002) 149; see chapter 10: ‘Women’s Song: Destination Freedom’, 149-171. The second edition of the book, 2002, includes Mernissi’s introduction, while the first edition of 1992 does not.

heritage, his own cultural identity. The vast and inspiring records of Muslim history so brilliantly completed for us by scholars such as Ibn Hisham, Ibn Hajar, Ibn Sa'ad, and Tabari, speak to the contrary. We Muslim women can walk into the modern world with pride, knowing that the quest for dignity, democracy, and human rights, for full participation in the political and social affairs of our country, stems from no imported Western values, but is a true part of the Muslim tradition. Of this I am certain, after reading the works of those scholars mentioned above and many others. They give me evidence to feel proud of my Muslim past, and to feel justified in valuing the best gifts of modern civilization: human rights and the satisfaction of full citizenship.<sup>1182</sup>

After the election of Benazir Bhutto as a Prime Minister in Pakistan in 1988, some Muslim conservative scholars objected to the fact that a woman leads a country. Mernissi wanted to make sure that this was a mere patriarchal attitude and not an Islamic one. She went into history to come out with a book entitled *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (1993)<sup>1183</sup> to support her argument of Muslim women past involvement in socio-political and economic affairs of their societies. With her other sociological and theoretical works, along with her narrative-fiction contributions, Mernissi has become an icon among Muslim reformists for the last four decades. Many see her as having given confidence to the idea of an Islamic feminism in its sense of fight for social justice and equality, when Western feminism remained Eurocentrist and not Third Worldist.<sup>1184</sup>

Mernissi's links with the early Islamic intellectual heritage becomes clearer in her *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World* (2002). The book comes after the Gulf War and the rise of international focus on the debate of Islam and democracy. The writer goes here to situate the conflict in Islamic thought to the early history of Kharijites and Mu'tazilites. The former, in her reading, are labelled "rebel Islam" partisans, while the latter represent the "rationalist tradition." The Mu'tazila are described to have focalized the utility of reason on all matters that concern human affairs on earth. They raised this fundamental question: "What is the purpose of our existence on earth, and to what use

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<sup>1182</sup> Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: a Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, trans. Mary JoLakeland (Cambridge, Perseus Books Publishing, 1991) Preface to the English edition, vii-viii.

<sup>1183</sup> Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (Minnesota: Polity Press, 1993) 1-5. Some of her academic ideas are also expressed in literary works like *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

<sup>1184</sup> Anitta Kynsilehto, ed. *Islamic Feminism: Current Perspectives* (Tampere: Tampere University and Tampere Peace Research Institute, 2008) 9-14.

should we put *‘aql* (reason), that marvellous gift from heaven?”<sup>1185</sup> For Mernissi, the Mu‘tazila “forced Islam to imagine new relationships between ruler and ruled” in politics and daily life, based on dialectics, and their spirit exemplifies that of democracy and humanism.<sup>1186</sup> Yet, Mernissi does not directly state that she is a neo-Mu‘tazilite. She does not need to, since her approach in general is to reclaim the “*Rissala/* second message of Islam” and its claim for social justice, but the reader remains curious, and generally unsatisfied with her use of, actually mere reference to, the Mu‘tazila tradition, as also notes Raha Rhouni.<sup>1187</sup> The continuity link Mernissi, in general, tries to work out through her sociological-historical approach is that the Quran and Prophetic tradition responded to particular social demands, which they answered in their most adequate way; now those social challenges have changed, but the equal *Rissala/* Message of the Quran still exerts that ontological equality particularly between the males and females, which she is rooted in the creation of wo/man in Islam, “The democratic glorification of the human individual, regardless of sex, race or status, is the kernel of the Muslim message.”<sup>1188</sup>

#### **Amina Wadud: a “female jihadist” for gender equality**

Amina Wadud’s female reading of the Quran in *Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective* (1999) has become a distinguished work of gender studies in Islam. Like the rest of reformists, Wadud is also driven by the historicist approach. Three main points are her concerns: 1) to read the Islamic main sources historically, 2) to decipher meanings from them according to the linguistic utensils they used and transfer their meaning into the present, and 3) to study the Quran from a female perspective, by detecting the female voice in the Quran. The hermeneutical path she adopts convinces her that interpretation is not objective, and it allows enough room for subjectivity, which makes it fallible and changeable. This means that the earlier exegeses of the Quran are contextual and thus changeable; they are not divine. In this

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<sup>1185</sup> Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy*, 32.

<sup>1186</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33

<sup>1187</sup> Raja Rhouni contends the same in her interesting study of Mernissi’s work: Rhouni, *Secular and Islamic Feminist Critiques in the Work of Fatima Mernissi* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010). She comments as follows: “Mernissi [...] mentions the Mu‘tazila as an example of the existence of a rationalist tradition in Islam, without discussing the theological perspective that this school of theology has contributed to Islamic thought.” Rhouni, 268.

<sup>1188</sup> Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, xvi

early stage of her enterprise, she realizes that the Quran does not speak to man and woman but to the human being in general. Ontologically, man and woman are equal in creation, in duties and responsibilities; they are different only in *taqwa*, God-consciousness or piety, which is the spiritual dimension that concerns the relation of the individual to God. All other social affairs concern human beings in their tasks as social actors. Wadud, for instance, says that the biological superiority of man described in the Quran, or the higher share of inheritance given to him, concerns man as a social actor, as a husband, and this for her does not amount to any claims of superiority as old and classical exegetes claim.

From the ontological equality between man and woman described in the Quran, Wadud reads the rest of the details as “particulars.” “God created women fully human. Anything, anyone, or any system that treats them privately or in public as anything less than that is destroying the potential harmony of the entire universe.”<sup>1189</sup> Socio-historical circumstances and linguistic monopoly in reading the original text have contributed to reading it solely from the male perspectives. So, to understand the ethical and guiding principles of Islam, “appropriate historical information” has to be summed up for an up-to-date interpretation:

On the ethico-religious level, the position of men and women are on equal standing, both as to their religious obligations towards God and their peers as well as the consequent reward or punishment. The moral and religious equality of the sexes before God represents the highest expression of the value of equality. Furthermore, the ethico-religious equality of women is independent of and not subject to, change of social situation. This value, then, enjoys a higher degree of priority over any value that is dependent upon a changing social context [...]. The attitudes towards women at the time and place of the revelation helped to shape the particular expressions in the Qur'an. The concerns it addressed were particular to that circumstance. These particulars are not meant as the entire Qur'anic intent, but are the means for determining that intent provided we have appropriate historical information.<sup>1190</sup>

Wadud's hermeneutical reading opposes the classical male exegetical interpretations. Women were usually told how to be and what to do and what relation they have towards man and God. This, for Wadud, is reductionist of the Quranic message, since it is for all,

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<sup>1189</sup> Amina Wadud, *Inside Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006) 254.

<sup>1190</sup> Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1999)100-101.

males and females, and no one is the guardian of the other. The male monopoly of knowledge production monopolized the voice of the female, too.

In *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (2006), Wadud does not change her approach or attitude towards Islam. It just admits some facts her earlier hermeneutical approach obscured. In this work, she admits that there are clear emphases on the role of man and presence all over the Quranic text, while the female voice gains a lower place. The ontological equality remains, but the tone of discourse seems masculinist, and promotes man's sexual dominance. On this point she writes:

While on the one hand the Qur'an seems to operate within a structure of linguistic taboo about sexuality and matters of intercourse altogether, on the other hand, it promotes male sexuality in particular with the following three citations: (1) polygyny, housed in the language of desire, "Marry those who please you, *maa taba lakum*, of the women: two, three or four" (4:3). However polygyny is permitted in the text, it is also conditioned upon almost unachievable terms of justice. (2) Women are designated as *harth*, tilth, or something to be cultivated or tilled: "Your women are a tilth for you to cultivate . . . as you will, *nisa'ukum harthun lakum fa'tuw harthakum innaa' shi'tum*" (2:223). Whether this is a discussion of sexual position or permissible times of male sexual satisfaction, according to different jurists, it is still directed toward men and men's sexual desires, while women and women's sexuality remains passive. (3) The notorious virginal *huris* [sing. *houris*] for men—even after they are dead, men's pleasure should not be forsaken! (52:20, 55:72, 56:22).<sup>1191</sup>

From here Wadud moves closer to scholars like Rahman, Arkoun, Abu Zayd and Soroush – referred to above. From a linguistic study of the divine text as divine, Wadud now embraces the idea that a divine text that is revealed in a human language in a particular society at a particular moment cannot be a final or Ultimate revelation. She makes it clear that she is not saying that revelation is not divine; it keeps its divinity, but the way it is expressed is not so, "If revelation through text must be in human language, in order for humans to even begin to understand it, then revelation cannot be divine or Ultimate. This is distinguished from the idea that revelation is from a divine source."<sup>1192</sup>

Wadud enters to the premises of the Mu'tazilites and neo-Mu'tazilites who believe in the createdness of the Quran, and not in its eternity. Entering this premise

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<sup>1191</sup> Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 205; 192–93

<sup>1192</sup> *Ibid.*, 214

allows her to adopt confidently the historicist view she started in her earlier work, but now with a more theological argument. The createdness of the Quran then helps her question the universality of the message of Islam, its Arabity, language and socio-historical circumstances:

This has already been addressed between the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites by trying to decide definitely whether the Qur'an is *eternal* with God or *created*? There are other questions to ponder. Is Allah multilingual, so that She can reveal in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic, or is Allah meta-lingual, not restricted by any language. Every language is a constraint on complete divine Self-disclosure. Is Arabic preferable, divine, or just the most convenient tool to use with an Arab prophet? Is the divine message limited to (or by) words – of any language? Do Muslims truly recognize the presence of Allah in words, or deem themselves gods by enforcing their understandings and misunderstandings of those words? Is recognition of the presence of Allah limited to reading the words of the Qur'an? Since the majority of Muslims are non-Arabic speaking can they know the presence of Allah?<sup>1193</sup>

By so considering the divine text, Wadud is giving human reason space to reinterpret the divine message according to human conditions. "Quran's universal intent," and its humanist and just teachings are not bound to the Arabian reality of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. From her personal spiritual and social activism, summarized in her phrase of "gender jihad," she has learnt that "One must consider oneself Allah, granting rights to all others as if their status is inferior to self or deviant from the norm."<sup>1194</sup> She does not alienate the spiritual dimensions that give energy and meaning to human life from involvement in world affairs for justice and equality, "A new impetus must be generated that applies the Islamic spiritual paradigms as forces of social movements. The consequences of this are a new world order that incorporates the meaningfulness of the lives of everyday citizens, be they Muslim or not."<sup>1195</sup>

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<sup>1193</sup> Ibid., 207-208

<sup>1194</sup> Ibid., 258. (Recently, a tribute is given to her "gender jihad": Kecia Ali, et al., eds. *A Jihad for Justice: Honoring the Work and Life of Amina Wadud*, (n.p., 48HrBooks, 2012), available online at Boston University webpage: <http://www.bu.edu/religion/files/2010/03/A-Jihad-for-Justice-for-Amina-Wadud-2012-1.pdf> )

<sup>1195</sup> Ibid., 260.

### **Abdullahi Ahmed An-na'im: "Sharia is not divine"**

If the scholars referred to until now are immersed in theoretical-textual analysis of the sacred Islamic text, the Sudanese-American Abdullahi Ahmed An-na'im (b. 1946) contributes to the debate from legal studies perspective, which is a more practical field, in light of Islamic history and the application of Sharia law. In this way, referring to him can be considered as one of the practical manifestations of reform the other scholars delve into. The core idea of An'naim is that while the Quran as a realization of revelation is sacred, Sharia law is not. Sticking to the application of Sharia law, while neglecting other more fundamental and universal aims of Sharia, betrays the universality of Islam. In Part I of this work I referred to Bassam Tibi who praises An'naim's early work on Islamic reformation (1990) but rejects his later work on secularization (2008), and considers it a refutation of the earlier work. I said then that Tibi misreads An'naim. In the paragraphs below I do not go into the legal and jurisprudential details An'naim goes into about the legal controversial issues in Sharia law. I give the gist of his contribution to what he refers to as "substantial reform,"<sup>1196</sup> with reference to his ties with his "Ustadh/revered teacher" the Sudanese reformist Mahmoud Mohamed Taha (d. 1985).

With his initial work *Toward an Islamic Reformation* (1990) An'naim subscribes to the work started by Mahmoud Taha. The latter was the spiritual leader of the Republican Brothers movement which opposed the application of Sharia law in Sudan in 1983. Taha was executed in public by the Islamist government in January 1985 for apostasy. Taha's opposition of the application of Sharia law and his call for Islamic reform stems from his idea developed in *The Second Message of Islam* (1967). According to Taha, the Quran contains two messages, one of them is egalitarian, liberal, and universal, while the other is unegalitarian, coercive, and not pluralist. The first one corresponds to the Mekka period of revelation, while the second corresponds to the Medina period which saw the development of the first community of Muslims. The precepts of jihad, and the continuity with the practice of slavery, polygamy, gender inequality, gender segregation, and the veil, for example, are Medinan practices, revealed

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<sup>1196</sup> An'naim, *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Sharia* (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 2008) 2.

and practiced during the Medina period. However, for Taha, they are not original “precepts in Islam” because the 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabian society could not live up to the ideal message of Mekka period yet. Revelation had to be gradual to take the socio-cultural habits and mindset into account. The Muslim early jurists saw in such a distinction (Mekkan revelation and Medinan one) a contradiction. To solve it, they used the concept of abrogation (*naskh*). In so doing, they kept the Medina texts that are related to particular social affairs, and abrogated the Mekkan ones which are more universal. Until now, the Muslim societies live with this abrogation fact. What then Taha calls for is to go back to the original message of Islam, which he sees in the Mekkan period, and which he refers to as the Second Message.<sup>1197</sup> An’nam’s “Islamic reformation” builds on this heritage of Mohamed Taha.

An’nam’s thesis urges for reformulating *uṣūl al-fiqh* and the exercise of *ijtihad* “even in matters governed by clear and definite texts of the Quran and Sunna as long as the outcome of such *ijtihad* is consistent with the essential message of Islam.”<sup>1198</sup> Though he recognizes that Sharia law is practised in very few countries, and even so in particular areas of these countries (like Taliban Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Sudan, Nigeria), An’nam is still against the Muslim scholars silence about the Quranic verses that clearly state certain punishments for public and private affairs.<sup>1199</sup> These verses, though not implemented in most Islamic countries still do have an impact on the Muslim believer’s psychology and the policies of the State in Muslim majority countries.<sup>1200</sup> He describes

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<sup>1197</sup> The book was first translated and introduced in the English speaking world in 1987, Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, *The Second Message of Islam*, trans. Abdullahi An’nam (New York: Syracuse UP, 1987), see specially Chapter 3, 5 and 6.

<sup>1198</sup> An’nam, *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law* (New York: Syracuse UP, 1990) 28-29.

<sup>1199</sup> Clearly prescribed Quranic punishments are for *sariqa*/ theft, *haraba*/ public rebellion, *zina*/ fornication, and *qadfl*/ unproven accusation of fornication against a married individual; as to *sukr*/ intoxication, and *ridda*/ apostacy, their punishment is developed by jurists. *Ibid.*, 108-109.

<sup>1200</sup> *Ibid.*, 42. In another passage he says:

Although many contemporary Muslims would privately object to Shari’a’s suppression of freedom of belief and expression, very few are willing to express their objections publicly for fear of being branded as apostates themselves – guilt by association. Other Muslims would find it difficult to admit their objections, even to themselves, for fear of losing their faith in the process. As long as the public law of Shari’a continues to be regarded as the only valid view of the law of Islam, most Muslims would find it extremely difficult to object to any of its principles and rules or to resist their practical implementation, however repugnant and inappropriate they may find them to be. (*Ibid.*, 185)

the believer's dilemma between living the ideals of Sharia, including law prescriptions, and modernity values, which they enjoy but have reservations about, since they are not theologically endorsed and justified yet:

I am painfully aware that the vast majority of the Muslim peoples throughout the world live at a superficial level of both Islam and modern civilization. Although they claim adherence to Islam and exhibit apparent commitment to its ritualistic formalities, most contemporary Muslims fail to appreciate and live up to its moral and spiritual essence. Moreover, although they have grown accustomed to enjoying the benefits of modern technology and claim adherence to modern institutions, the majority of Muslim peoples have little appreciation of the values and ways of thinking that underlie and sustain that technology and those institutions.<sup>1201</sup>

What An'naim does at this stage of his work is that he proposes a methodological justification of modern values from within the Islamic Mekkan universal message that endorses liberty, equality, and social justice. He does so in light of the international law that guarantees these universal rights for which every human being is entitled "by virtue of being human."<sup>1202</sup> Such a basis can end with the psychological predicament in which the Muslim believer is in, according to An'naim. It is at this stage also that An'naim makes it clear that "Although derived from the fundamental divine sources of Islam, the Quran and Sunna, Sharia is not divine because it is the product of *human interpretation* of those sources."<sup>1203</sup> These methodological concerns expressed in this first work are defended further in his following work, which integrates a historical review of the religious controversial legal issues.

An'naim's *Islam and the Secular State* (2008) is a historical defense of his earlier methodological argumentation. An'naim's thesis is that to be truly a free believer the state has to be secular, without this meaning necessarily that society has to be also secular. Initially he affirms with historical evidence that the state has never been fully Islamic, "the state was never Islamic."<sup>1204</sup> That does not make it secular in the modern sense of separation between state and religion, or in these sense he himself proposes.<sup>1205</sup>

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<sup>1201</sup> Ibid., 186

<sup>1202</sup> Ibid., 164

<sup>1203</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>1204</sup> An'naim, *Islam and the Secular State*, viii.

<sup>1205</sup> In the previous work, he says that Sharia rigorous law as detailed by the early jurists "seems to be the reason" behind restricting its application (*Islamic Reformation*, 115). Even at the State level in Islamic

By the “secular state” he means a state that is neutral regarding religious doctrine, i.e. it does not adopt, endorse, or impose the Sharia religious law:

By a secular state I mean one that is neutral regarding religious doctrine, one that does not claim or pretend to enforce Shari’a—the religious law of Islam—simply because compliance with Shari’a cannot be coerced by fear of state institutions or faked to appease their officials. This is what I mean by secularism in this book, namely, a secular state that facilitates the possibility of religious piety out of honest conviction.<sup>1206</sup>

The secular state An’nam proposes is founded on 1) constitutionalism, 2) human rights, and 3) pluralist citizenship. It is a modern state that preserves the fundamentals of the Islamic faith, without making the state their guardian. It is society itself that preserves its religiosity and faith freely. That is why he makes it clear that he is not calling for banishing religion from the public sphere, “I am calling for the state to be secular, not for secularizing society.”<sup>1207</sup> He distances himself from the notion of “secularism” which for him echoes French *laïcité*, which is not the example he likes to envisage for Islamic societies, at least in the early transition towards his model of the secular state. For An’nam, French secularism is based on the separation between religion and the state, and private vs. public dichotomy. Religious doctrines are bashed from public policy and legislation for the mere reason that they are religious. He is not for this model.<sup>1208</sup> He says, “The principle of secularism, as I am defining it here, includes a public role for religion in influencing public policy and legislation, subject to the requirement of civic reason.”<sup>1209</sup> His concept of “civic reason” becomes vital in defining his model of the secular state.<sup>1210</sup>

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history its practical aspects are “extremely rudimentary and informal,” since the rulers exercised discretion in administering and executing it (*Islamic Reformation*, 105).

<sup>1206</sup> An’nam, *Islam and the Secular State*, 1

<sup>1207</sup> *Ibid.*, 8

<sup>1208</sup> In *Islamic Reformation* he says “My conviction would exclude the secularist approach in the Muslim context from the renewal-reform tradition because secularism is not an *Islamic* response to the challenges facing Muslim societies. [...] I do not believe secularism is the answer” (48). Again, by secularism here he means “radical secularism” based on the binary of private vs. public, Church vs. state, and mostly in its French version.

<sup>1209</sup> An’nam, *Islam and the Secular State*, 38

<sup>1210</sup> For many, An’nam’s concept of “civic reason” is similar if not identical to Rawls’ idea of “public reason.” An’nam insists that there is a difference. I say there is even a big difference. First, let us say how the use of the terms started. Rawls refers to An’nam’s work *Islamic Reformation* (1990) in his article “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited” (*The University of Chicago Law Review*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (Summer, 1997) 765-807). He says that An’nam’s model of reform and integration of the Islamic religious doctrine in state

An'naim's civic reason is based on the idea of pluralism and freedom of expression, as well as freedom of religious faith. He does not privatize religion just because the state is neutral, and there is a separation between the state and religion. An'naim's secular state allows religion in the public, not only to be visible but also to be active in presenting its views on policy and legislative matters, and all state matters as long as these religious views defend the constitutional state, human rights, and citizenship. This means that these views have to be acceptable, but not necessarily

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public matters through the reform methodology he suggests in the book answers the requirements of public reason. I note that An'naim's work came in 1990, and Rawls' work *Political Liberalism* which includes a lecture/ chapter on Public Reason came in 1993. But Rawls becomes acquainted with An'naim few years later in the version of *Public Reason Revisited* article of 1997. An'naim first clear use of the term "civic reason" is in his book of 2008, though its meaning is the one he has been arguing for since his early book of 1990. An'naim defines civic reason as follows:

The word "civic" here refers to the need for policy and legislation to be accepted by the public at large, as well as for the process of reasoning on the matter to remain open and accessible to all citizens. By civic reason, I mean that the rationale and the purpose of public policy or legislation must be based on the sort of reasoning that most citizens can accept or reject. Citizens must be able to make counterproposals through public debate without being open to charges about their religious piety. Civic reason and reasoning, and not personal beliefs and motivations, are necessary whether Muslims constitute the majority or the minority of the population of the state. Even if Muslims are the majority, they will not necessarily agree on what policy and legislation should follow from their Islamic beliefs. (*Islam and the Secular State*, 7-8)

In the same book, he reserves a section entitled "Civic Reason and Public Reason" to distinguish his concept from that of Rawls, "there are also significant differences between Rawls's concept and my own" (p. 97). An'naim says that Rawls' concept can work well for the consolidated democracies where constitutionalism is mature, unlike the postcolonial societies like the Islamic ones. Despite his attempt to draw such a distinction he does not make it clear enough. What I could see he most stresses is that his concept is very much accommodative of religious doctrines which have still to learn to adapt to the secular state model and the idea of constitutionalism and equal citizenship. What this means, the way I interpret it, is that public reason works to allow space for reasonable comprehensive doctrines in a liberal-secular society, while civic reason works to allow space for liberal-secular "doctrines/ philosophies" in a conservative-religious society. I can put it this way, civic reason is bottom-up in its approach of pluralism, while public reason is top-down in its approach. Western societies for which public reason is designed have been too secular, and they need to give space to reasonable doctrines, while Islamic societies have been too religious and they need now to give space to reasonable doctrines and philosophies. That is, civic reason is for societies that are still undergoing socio-political and cultural-religious changes, while public reason is for consolidated democracies. Civic reason allows religious societies to be(-come) secular or/ and liberal; public reason allows secular-liberal societies to be(-come) religious, rationally religious. This can have profound future impacts especially for societies in transition. Civic society allows them to enter modernity in harmony with religion, while the West entered modernity through strong conflict with religion, that is why when they liberalized/secularized, they hardly left any public space for religious doctrines; they allowed religious practice in the private sphere, but they did not allow it to enter the public debate on state policies and legislation. Civic reason jumps over this big conflict moment the West, Europe in particular, went through, and helps societies in transition now to enter into modernity pluralistically from the beginning. That is my perception of the difference, which An'naim himself does not make clearer, and which few pay attention to and jump to the conclusion that civic and public reason are the same. They are the same in the aim they target, but how they do that, and at what historical moment they do that make a big difference between the two.

accepted, by the public which may be different (religious, antireligious, or nonreligious). This is not an easy threshold for a rigid religious doctrine to pass. What this entails is that religious views are welcome in public but have to go through at least two major stages. First, they are allowed to the public if they are constitutional in their demands, if they respect basic human rights, and if they value shared citizenship. Only then (second) they are allowed to enter the public debate on any debated issue that concern society, and they have to abide by the democratic rules of the game, winning or losing the debate should not lead to any backlashes in these religious views. In this sense, the religious doctrines, even if they are in majority, they cannot trespass the limits established to them by the same conditions that allowed them in, as I simplified them above in stage 1 and 2.<sup>1211</sup>

This model of secularization protects religion only as long as the religious community wants it; the state does not enforce this protection if the community does not ask for that. Society itself is burdened with the task of protecting the religion it wants to preserve, and is encouraged in that through the secular state institutions the constitution provides for everybody. An'naim sees complementary roles between religion and state secularism as he defines it:

The relationship between religion and secularism can also be viewed as mutually sustaining. Secularism needs religion to provide a widely accepted source of moral guidance for the political community, as well as to help satisfy and discipline the nonpolitical needs of believers within that community. In turn, religion needs secularism to mediate relations between different communities (whether religious, antireligious, or nonreligious) that share the same political space or space of civic reason.<sup>1212</sup>

The denotation of this overall argumentation is the following. First, An'naim de-divinizes Sharia law and its classical interpretations. Second, in light of the “second message of Islam” he finds a theological justification for his methodology of integrating modern human values into the tradition, and considers “Sharia as a concept” filled with “normative content”<sup>1213</sup> that “human agency”<sup>1214</sup> provides in context. Third, he proposes

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<sup>1211</sup> See my previous note.

<sup>1212</sup> An'naim, *Islam and the Secular State*, 41

<sup>1213</sup> *Ibid.*, 2

<sup>1214</sup> *Ibid.*, 10. About human agency An'naim says “Striving to know and observe Shari’a is always the product of the “human agency” of believers—a system of meaning that is constructed out of human

the secular state as the appropriate guardian of society's free religiosity, and civic reason as the adequate concept for legitimizing the presence of the religious view in the public debate.

### **The Rationalists: Aljabri and Soroush**

#### **Mohamed Abed Aljabri: the “public good” as the “guiding principle”**

The Moroccan philosopher Mohamed Abed Aljabri (d. 2010) has occupied an important space among Arab-Islamic philosophers since the 1970s. His *Critique of Arab Reason* (*naqd al-'aql al-'arabī*), which appeared in Beirut and Casablanca between 1984 and 2001 in four volumes,<sup>1215</sup> has engaged scholars researching Arab-Islamic reason. His dissatisfaction in the 1960s of the intellectual trends mostly (liberalism and socialism) common among the Arab intellectuals led him to go back to the philosophical history of Arab-Islamic thought and seek the routes that led it astray. His project was seeking ways to modernity from within the tradition. Though most of his work focused on what went wrong with the Arab reason, and its relation with religion, an important part of his thought is relevant to my work. I especially take his defence of the objectives of the Sharia which reason can conceive, according to the historical moment in which these objectives are discussed. Aljabri's views, which reconcile reason and divine objectives,

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experience and reflection, which over time evolves into a more systematic development according to an established methodology.” (Ibid., 11)

<sup>1215</sup> Mohamed Abded Aljabri, *Critique of Arab Reason*, written in Arabic in four volumes, are: *naqd al'aql al'arabī I: takwīn al'aql al'arabī* [*Critique of Arab Reason I: Formation of Arab Reason*] (Beirut: markaz dirāsāt al-waḥda al-'arabiyya, 1982); *naqd al'aql al'arabī II: binyat al'aql al'arabī* [*Critique of Arab Reason II: The Structure of Arab Reason*] (Beirut: markaz dirāsāt al-waḥda al-'arabiyya, 1986), *naqd al'aql al'arabī III: al'aql assiyāssī al-arabī* [*Critique of Arab Reason III: The Arab Political Mind*] (Beirut: markaz dirāsāt al-waḥda al-'arabiyya, 1990), and *naqd al'aql al'arabī IV: al'aql al'akhlāqī al'arabī* [*Critique of Arab Reason IV: The Ethical Arab Mind*] (Beirut: markaz dirāsāt al-waḥda al-'arabiyya, 2001). The Syrian scholar George Tarabishi, after having acknowledged the great work of Aljabri's *Critique*, devoted about twenty years to develop *naqd naqd al-'aql al-'arabī* [*Critique of the Critique of Arab Reason*] also in four volumes. In the introduction to the first volume, *nazariyato al-'aql* [*A Theory of Reason*], Tarabishi says that Aljabri's *Critique* has missed reading correctly a number of Arab-Islamic, Greek, and European texts, and that though he conducts a great work to deconstruct and afterwards construct the idea of reason in the Arab-Islamic tradition, which is existent, he, however, fails to theorize it clearly, and ends his project before its aim is achieved. For more on this, see the first volume, George Tarabish, *naqd naqd al-'aql al-'arabī: nazariyato al-'aql* [*Critique of the Critique of Arab Reason: a Theory of Reason*] (Beirut: Dar Saqi, 1996). In the bibliography, I cite just to the volumes from which I quote in this work.

follow particularly the footsteps of his favourite medieval philosopher Ibn Roshd/Averroes.

Aljabri grounds the modern ideas of reason, human rights and the rule of law in the tradition, *atturath*, itself. He is critical of mysticism developed in the Eastern side of the Islamic world (Machreq), and embracive of the Western/ Maghreb rational tradition of mostly Ibn Rochd to the extent that he sees no future without Averroes' rationalism: "The future can only be Averroist!"<sup>1216</sup> His work introduced these approaches/ concepts, among others, on which he bases his study of Arab reason: "*burhan*" (deductive reasoning), "*al bayān*" (linguistic analysis), and "*irfan*" (mystical reading).<sup>1217</sup> He embraces the first two approaches and rejects the third, which he accuses of having "mystified" early Islamic philosophy. A passage like this one tells how critical he is of the mysticism of the classic philosophers Ibn Sina and al-Ghazali (versus the rationalists, al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Averroes, and Ibn Khaldun):

With his Eastern philosophy, Avicenna (Ibn Sina) consecrated a spiritualist and gnostic trend whose impact was instrumental in the regression of Arab thinking from an open rationalism, spearheaded by the Mu'tazilites, then by al-Kindi, and culminating with al-Farabi, to a pernicious irrationalism which inaugurated the 'gloom thinking' that scholars like al-Ghazali, Suhrawardi of Aleppo and others simply spread and popularized in various circles. Such is my judgment against Avicenna.<sup>1218</sup>

Against "Oriental philosophy" that stressed the *irfān* (mystical reading), Aljabri adopts the mid-position of Averroes of *burhān* and *al bayān*. Averroes speaks of "double truth," i.e. that religion and philosophy each seeks truth in different ways; to conflate their disciplines or paths risks that each annihilates the other; the right methodology of

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<sup>1216</sup> *That is a title of a section in his Arab-Islamic Philosophy: A Contemporary Critique*, trans., Aziz Abbassi (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).

<sup>1217</sup> These concepts are introduced in his second volume *The Structure of Arab Reason*, 1986.

<sup>1218</sup> Aljabri, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy*, 58. (George Tarabishi disagrees with Aljabri's classification of Islamic philosophy into the irrational *mashriq* and the rational *maghrib* in his third volume of *Critique of the Critique of Reason*. See, Tarabishi, *Naqd naqd al-'aql al-'arabī III: wahdat al-'aql al-'arabī al-islami* [*Critique of the Critique of Arab Reason III: Unity of the Arab Islamic Reason*] (Beirut: Saqi, 2002). On Ibn Sina, for instance, see chapter 1. He clarifies further his points on the *mashriq* vs. *maghrib* distinction in his fourth volume of *naqd naqd al-'aql al-'arabī IV: al-'aql al-mostaqiil fi al-islam?* [*Critique of the Critique of Arab Reason IV: The Resigned Reason in Islam?*] (Beirut: Saqi, 2004) 14-31.

reconciliation is that each has to be studied intrinsically and not extrinsically, for the truth they express can be understood only in this way.<sup>1219</sup>

Aljabri calls for a thorough revisit of the tradition, structurally, historically, and ideologically.<sup>1220</sup> He calls for an epistemological break at the level of concepts and not at the level of knowledge itself. By concepts he means the grammatical-juridical-theological analogies practiced irresponsibly and in a non-scientific way. He says, “the epistemological break by no means takes place at the level of knowledge itself. [...] I am by no means calling for a break from tradition – in the usual sense. Rather, we are calling for renouncing traditional understanding of tradition.”<sup>1221</sup> Following rational analysis methods, he distinguishes between the cognitive as well as ideological levels of the tradition, and underlines how they have been methodologically interwoven, which ended in incorrectly blurring the distinction between these levels.<sup>1222</sup>

Aljabri believe in the strength of the tradition, and is critical of the scholars who want to reject it once and for all. He sees that the Arab reader projects his intellectual loss on the text and tradition before reading them. He works on the level of reconciling the tradition with itself first, since a lot of its potential has not been explored, and has structurally/ cognitively, politically/ ideologically been disregarded since the levels of

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<sup>1219</sup> See Aljabri, *The Formation of Arab Reason: Text, Tradition and the Construction of Modernity in the Arab World* (London, New York and Beirut: I.B. Tauris and the Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2011) See section: "Ibn Rosch: Reconnecting Burhan and Bayan," 393-409. In original, see: *takwin al-aql al-'arabī*, 316-323. See also one of his works on Ibn Roshd, *Ibn Roshd: sīratun wa fiqr [Ibn Roshd: Biography and Intellect* (Beirut: Markaz dirasat alwahda al-arabiya, 1998) Chapter 11 on "Existence and Reason." For more on Ibn Roshd and his positions on human reason and revelation, see the English translation of one of his works by Ibrahim Najjar, trans. *Averroes, Faith and Reason in Islam: Averroes' Exposition of Religious Arguments* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001). In the last chapter of this book, Averroes presents five levels of interpreting the divine message, to whom and by whom, and the way to find the adequate one, otherwise ambiguities and fatal errors can develop. See "Conclusion: the canon of interpretation," 128-132. For his life, see Majid Fakhri, *Averroes Ibn Roshd: His Life, Works and Influence* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001).

<sup>1220</sup> Aljabri, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy*, 28

<sup>1221</sup> *Ibid.*, 23

<sup>1222</sup> *Ibid.*, 122. In his third volume, *The Arab Political Mind*, 1990, he distinguishes three main political concepts that have impacted the evolution of a reason-based political life in the Arab world: 1) Tribe/ *qabila* political mindset, 2) Bounty/ *ghanima* economic mindset, and 3) Creed/ *aqeeda* religious mindset. The three have been mythologized and ideologized historically, according to diverse dynastic political wills, and have all produced a stagnant mindset that neglects State rule of law (vs. Tribalism), socio-economic fairness and institutionalization (vs. Bountism), and freedom of conscious and expression which sectarianism and dogmatism bring about (vs. Creed). For him, the three concepts have to be rationally critiqued and revisited to rebuild democratic Arab-Islamic societies. This is the main idea of the third volume. Read, for example, pp. 7-53; 363-374.

analysis have been blurred.<sup>1223</sup> Among his interesting ideas about exploring Islamic philosophy is that its cognitive aspect has to be examined in the ideological attitudes of the philosophers themselves, for that hid the Islamic contribution and put it to oblivion. Historians of Islamic philosophy, Muslims and Westerners, focus on the cognitive level to see the Greek's influences, and forget the ideological paradigms in which the Muslim philosophers were involved, which influenced their attitudes, focalized some, and put others to oblivion. That is, the ideological function that each philosopher assigns to his knowledge has to be re-examined, besides his epistemological contribution. Aljabri contends that "Muslim philosophers occupied themselves with reconciling reason with religion, which is why it is an ideological discourse that lacks parallel cognitive evolution."<sup>1224</sup> The only way to study the cognitive is then to study the ideological with adequate analytical tools.

Aljabri's analytical tools in deconstructing the tradition to accommodate the modern challenges aim at reconciling faith and reason, following in that his "mentor" Averroes. Each of the two has its own path to the truth; each has its own methodology of apprehension, and they are complementary. This becomes clear with his views on Sharia law and the sources of jurisprudence, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, that *ijtihad* has to revisit, not because *ijtihad* doors were closed, but because the minds that practice it stagnated: "It becomes clear that calling for *ijtihad* and opening its door will remain meaningless without 'opening' the mind entrusted with the task of *ijtihad*."<sup>1225</sup> "The truth is that no one in Islam has the authority to 'close' the door of *ijtihad*."<sup>1226</sup> Hence, "What is needed is a renewal, stemming not from a mere resumption of *ijtihad* in the branches, but from a 're-rooting of the sources (*ta'sil al-uṣūl*)."<sup>1227</sup> He refers to the project of al-Shatibi on this point. Aljabri contends that the epistemological frame of the past has to be revisited in light of the new challenges of industrialized and scientific achievements of the age:

The foundations of the *uṣūl* (the jurisprudential principles) which have informed the Islamic *fiqh* up to the present time go back to the 'Age of Historical Record

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<sup>1223</sup> Aljabri, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy*, 27-28.

<sup>1224</sup> *Ibid.*, 42

<sup>1225</sup> Aljabri, *Democracy, Human Rights and Law in Islamic Thought* (Beirut: markaz dirasat al-wahda al-‘arabia, , 2009) 80

<sup>1226</sup> *Ibid.*, 78

<sup>1227</sup> *Ibid.*, 81

and Standardization’, which is at the beginning of the Abbasid Age [ca. 750CE], and some belong to a later era. Before the Age of Recording, there were no standardized principles to inform *ijtihad* thought. The *fuqaha* who laid down those principles were following the epistemological system current in their time, and the needs and interests which imposed themselves in that age. Since our age is different from the ‘Age of Historical Record’, whether in methods or [public] good, it becomes necessary to consider this difference and respond to its needs.<sup>1228</sup>

More particularly, he argues that the sources of law themselves have to be revisited in this new age, because methodologies of interpretation have to keep up with society changes.<sup>1229</sup> He elevates reason above the classical jurisprudence schools that have contend themselves with rulings and interpretations by analogy/ *qiyās*, instead of going back to the sources and the occasions of revelation, *asbāb annuzūl*– echoing, among others, Fazlur Rahman’s idea, as seen earlier. He says:

To build the rationality of a *shariah* ruling on the ‘occasions of revelation’ within the scope of considerations of [public] good would open the way for the construction of another rationality concerning other occasions of revelation, or new situations. This would renew the life of jurisprudence and *ijtihad*, and *al-shariah* would be able to cope with development and be suitable for application in every time and place.<sup>1230</sup>

Studying “occasions of revelation” over particular rulings (like the penal code and women inheritance division) should be conducted on two conditions/ bases: 1) understanding the intent of revealed law, *maqāṣid asharia*, and 2) serving the public good, *maṣlaḥa ‘āma*:

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<sup>1228</sup> Ibid., 88

<sup>1229</sup> Aljabri says:

The tremendous change brought about by the industrial civilization that persists today along with the ‘scientific revolution’ in astronautics, atomic science, biology, economics and sociology, makes opening up to these disciplines, their epistemological principles and their impact on the human race a necessary prerequisite for the qualification of the *mujtahid*. Such knowledge is no less important than being competent in language and religion. This is the only way for *ijtihad* to catch up with life and its development. The majority of Muslim ‘*ulama* today lack the ability to exercise. (Ibid., 80)

This passage echoes Tariq Ramadan’s call, in *Radical Reform*, for revisiting not only the *fiqh*/ law, but also the fundamentals of this law, the sources of jurisprudence, *uṣūl al-fiqh*. It also brings to mind the idea of Two Books (the Quran, and the Universe), as well as his distinction between Text Scholars and Context Scholars (as detailed in Part III of this work).

<sup>1230</sup> Ibid., 85. Aljabri attempts such a reading of the Quran in one of his last works, *madkhal ilā al-qur’ān I: ta’rīf al-qur’ān [An Introduction to the Quran: Defining the Quran]* (Beirut: Markaz dirāsāt al-waḥda al’arabiyya, 2006) See Part II devoted to the Quran, from Chapter 6 to 10. Chapter 10 in particular deals with the reasons of revelation (*asbāb annuzūl*) and order (*at-tartib*) in the Quran.

If we undertake a comprehensive reading of the particulars transmitted in the shariah rulings and infer general universal rules based on this survey, we shall have a foundation of comprehensive rules applicable to any particular eventuality that may emerge. Similarly, if we begin from the standpoint that the [legal] intent (maqasid) of al-shariah is ultimately, in the final analysis, in consideration of the public good (al-maslaḥa al-‘amah), and that the shariah texts themselves aim at such consideration, then the public good becomes the guiding principle, superior to any other.<sup>1231</sup>

These conditions restore rationality to Sharia. This rationality is not that of pure positive law, but that which stems from the Quran and Sunna, again following the intent and public good methodology of interpretation: “It is clear that the rationality required here is not the abstract rationality alone such as that which belongs to human positive law, but it must be the rationality behind the shariah rulings mentioned in the Quran and sunnah.”<sup>1232</sup> This makes Sharia open to any space and time conditions. It leads to “perpetual renewal and ijtihad,”<sup>1233</sup> with which the “dogma” aspect vanishes. Based on this method, jurisprudence becomes “entirely presumptive.”<sup>1234</sup> This means that the legal aspects of Sharia do not necessitate an Islamic State that guards their application, seeing that jurisprudence has to be perpetually renewed. Aljabri does not see any references in the Quran or Sunna about the formation of an Islamic State.<sup>1235</sup>

Henceforth, applying Sharia can be carried out only in a “relative manner,” since its perpetual renewal does not allow it to settle down with a particular model. Its norms change as society changes.<sup>1236</sup> Following this methodology, Aljabri expands the list of rights and objectives of Sharia, beyond the five classical ones (the protection of life, religion, mind, offspring and wealth). Contemporary human needs on all aspects of life, innumerable as they are, have to be added to Sharia objectives.<sup>1237</sup> In sum, through

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<sup>1231</sup> Aljabri, *Democracy, Human Rights and Law in Islamic Thought*, 79

<sup>1232</sup> *Ibid.*, 81

<sup>1233</sup> *Ibid.*, 81

<sup>1234</sup> *Ibid.*, 83

<sup>1235</sup> Aljabri says, “So, there is no State governing system that Islam legislates for. Rather, it grew with the Muhammadan preaching, and after his death developed the example of the “Amir” of war, which time circumstances necessitated.” *The Arab Political Mind*, 371.

<sup>1236</sup> Aljabri, *Democracy, Human Rights and Law in Islamic Thought*, 94-95. This is close to the relativization of Sharia in Tareq Oubrou’s reading, see Part III, Section I.

<sup>1237</sup> Aljabri explains the point further by stating the following:

But those interests are no longer limited to those five areas [life, religion, mind, offspring, and wealth]. We must also include the right to freedom of expression, the right to political affiliation,

restoring the place of reason to the Arab-Islamic mind, and to Sharia in particular, Aljabri claims modernity from within the tradition, and endorses change on multiple levels, a view which other scholars of his generation share in content (i.e. his emphasis on reason) but not in methodology, for they see in Euro-modernity the ultimate option.<sup>1238</sup>

### **Abdulkarim Soroush: a neo-rationalist “lighting the flame of reason”**

The Iranian philosopher Abdulkarim Soroush<sup>1239</sup> (b. 1945) receives a special place among the contemporary philosophers I refer to. His encyclopaedic *overture* to physics,

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the right to choose and change rulers, the right to employment, food, residence and clothing, the right to education and health-care, and all the other basic rights of a citizen in present day society. In addition to the needs mentioned by our ancient *fuqaha*, there are now many new needs, like the need to provide for health and the prevention of disease by establishing sufficient hospitals and other health services, and the need for taking necessary measures to encourage intellectual activities in various scientific, artistic and theoretical fields, in order to acquire sound knowledge about reality and events. As for the improvements to be decided by our age, they are simply innumerable. (Ibid., 92)

Tariq Ramadan enlarged list of Sharia objectives goes in the same line of thought, see Part II, Section 2.

<sup>1238</sup> I think here of at least two philosophers that started writing also in the late 1960s, and early 1970s as Aljabri, the Moroccan Abdellah Laroui (b. 1933), and the Syrian Sadeq Al-Azmeh (b. 1934). In *azmatu al-muthaqqafina al'arab: taqlidiyya am tarikhiyya?* [*The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism or Historicism?*], translated from French into Arabic by Zuqan Qarqut (Beirut: al-mu'assasa al-'arabiya li al-nashr, 1978), Laroui studies the Arab crisis following a historicist-Marxist perspective. His other various texts have generally classified him in the corner of Euro-modernist intellectuals. As to Al-Azmeh, his earlier controversial works *naqd al-fikr addini* [*Critique of Religious Thought*] 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Beirut: dar at-tali'a, 1970), was very critical of fundamentalism, and the involvement of religion in politics and science, thoughts which brought him a lot of criticism from some of his contemporary intellectuals but much more from the conservatives, who at some point considered him an “apostate.” Moreover, after Said's book of *Orientalism* in 1978, he wrote back his renowned booklet/essay, *al-istishraq wa al-istishraq ma'kusan* [*Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse*] (Beirut: dar al-hadatha, 1981), to depart from the critique Third World intellectuals and especially the Arab-Muslims among them, launched on the West through postcolonial studies. Al-Azmeh remains critical of any involvement of religion in politics and science. Bassam Tibi endorses the views of Aljabri, for his emphasis on reason, but still his (Tibi's) methodology is not based on the tradition in its details and is Euro-modernist, as I conclude in Part I of this study.

<sup>1239</sup> Soroush started his academic training in Tehran in Chemistry, which was followed by studies in the University of London on Analytical Chemistry. But he soon changed to study history and philosophy of science, and from it entered to the arena of Islamic philosophy. On his return to his country by the late 1970s, he worked for the Cultural Revolution Council that aimed at reforming the university curriculum after the Revolution. After three-four years, he resigned, and since then his focus has been on developing a new philosophy of religion and a new theology in Islam. Since the 1980s, he has become a leading public intellectual in Iran, replacing by his popularity Ali Shariati's (d. 1974). See chapter five: “Post-Revolutionary Religious Intellectualism and Democracy: Abdulkarim Soroush,” in Forough Jahanbakhsh, *Islam, Democracy, and Religious Modernism in Iran (1953-2000): From Bazargan to Soroush* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) 140-171. My access to Soroush's work is limited to two main texts available in English language, besides his personal website: Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdulkarim Soroush*, eds. & trans., Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000); Abdoulakrin Soroush, *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience: Essays on Historicity, Contingency*

philosophy of science, epistemology, hermeneutics, and Sufism makes him stand high among the Islamic modern and contemporary philosophers. My immense esteem of his revolutionary contribution to Islamic thought may be because of his ability to link his scientific knowledge, with philosophy and spirituality. That has undoubtedly contributed to making his philosophy of religion a real breakthrough in Islamic thought. It is because of this reason that I give him more space compared to the other philosophers. His rational philosophy of religion could embrace within its premises a lot of what the previous scholars advanced. Forough Jahanbakhsh introduces him as follows, “He is undoubtedly one of the most systematic architects of the Neo-Rationalist Islam, and one whose ideas have introduced a paradigm shift in Muslim religious thought.”<sup>1240</sup>

Soroush’s philosophy of religion is historicist. In studying religion he takes into account its internal dynamics and external influences. There is no pure religion, and no pure Islam. Between 1987 and 1989, he developed his theory *The Contraction and Expansion of Religious Knowledge*, which is an epistemological and hermeneutical theory about understanding religion as a form of human knowledge that is vulnerable to fallibility and evolution since it is based on human interaction and human learning. It is only out of this human interaction and evolution that one can understand religion. Between 1997 and 1999, he developed his theory of *The Expansion of the Prophetic Experience* in which he deals with the historicity of the Prophet’s revelatory experience, the Prophet’s impact on revelation.<sup>1241</sup> These two theories would impact the outcome of his overall project: the world is *a priori* pluralist, and he terms this “negative pluralism,” and *a posteriori* also pluralist, and he terms this “positive pluralism.” With these concepts (to be explained below), Soroush arrives to the fact that human beings or believers do not have to expect too much from religion, and he terms this “minimalist religiosity” against the “maximalist” one, for history and believers themselves add to religion “accidentals,” which cover the “essentials.” To uncover the “essentials” of religion then means uncovering the beginnings of a revelation and its later developments in light of the

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*and Plurality in Religion*, trans., Nilou Mobasser, ed., Forough Jahanbakhsh (Leiden: Brill, 2009); and his personal website: <http://www.dr.soroush.com>

<sup>1240</sup> Soroush, *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience*, xvii

<sup>1241</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii.

Prophetic experiences, historical exigencies, and human interaction. The outcome of the study of the history of religion is knowledge about this religion and not necessarily pure religion itself. Before I explain his approach and its basic concepts, I first trace his belonging to the Islamic tradition, mainly that of the rationalist Mu‘tazila. I then introduce his approach to 1) the Quran, 2) the Prophetic experience, and 3) the impact of these two approaches on religion, its essentials and accidentals.

Soroush affirms that “many of my [his] views are rooted in medieval Islamic thought.”<sup>1242</sup> Though he acknowledges the Ash‘ari main Sunni trend that has dominated Islamic thought for their revelation-empirical view of the world, he still feels closer to the Mu‘tazilla in theological matters, like the use of reason to understand revelation, the createdness of the Quran, and the objective value of values. Whether moral values can be discovered by reason alone or have to be realized by reason and through the mediation of revelation. He believes reason can discover them independently, “Like the Mu‘tazilites, I believe that human reason discovers them as evident and can, therefore, establish a revelation-independent reason.”<sup>1243</sup>

Soroush trusts reason, and speaks of levels of reasoning for the establishment of justice and freedom.<sup>1244</sup> For him, those who fear reason fear freedom. Those who fear freedom, have no other alternative to their archaic and dogmatic ideas. Consequently, they prefer enclosure to openness that reason and freedom exert. The use of reason is vital for “this-world,” because man lives here and now. There is no higher morality [super-human, or metaphysical]; morality is active morality that caters for the needs of this world; he believes the divine message adapts to human needs, “It is not the human morality but the divine morality and justice that adjusts itself to all societies. It behooves us, fallible creatures, to act as fallible creatures not as infallible gods. One should leave

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<sup>1242</sup> In “I am a Neo-Mu‘azilite” he says that even his first and main theory is rooted in both the Ash‘aria and Mu‘tazilla tradition: “Mu‘tazilites and the Ash‘arites took on added importance for me. They became illustrations of the theory of contraction and extraction, and were used to explain, defend and confirm the theory.” Soroush, “I am a Neo-Mu‘azilite,” interviewed by Matin Ghaffarian, July 2008, [http://www.dr.soroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-Neo-Mutazilite\\_July2008.html](http://www.dr.soroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-Neo-Mutazilite_July2008.html)

<sup>1243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1244</sup> He speaks of universal, particular, acquired, innate, practical, and pure reasons. See Chapter 6 “Reason and Freedom,” and chapter 7 “The Ethics of the Gods” in Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam*, 88-121.

God's work, God's morality, and God's affairs to God.”<sup>1245</sup> Still, Soroush does not claim that reason *a priori* flushes out everything right or good. He gives space to experience, which can be derived from various ways of life, to give meaning to this reasoning. He takes this esteem of experience from the Ash‘aria to measure rational advances, which the Mu‘tazilla do not esteem high. He is critical of philosophers who use reason to distance people from spiritual experiences, “by emphasizing rational analyses, philosophers distance people from and make them oblivious to spiritual experiences. They close people’s eyes to insight and open them to learning.”<sup>1246</sup> In sum, the rational heritage of the Mu‘tazila on which he builds opens, as he says, new pathways out of the limited circle and debate of tradition and modernity:

Everyone speaks about tradition and modernity as if they were closed chests, and then they try to describe their similarities and differences. I think that this is out of keeping with the analytical approach. We have to open the chests of tradition and modernity, take out their components and demonstrate the link between them. Speaking in this closed way is not going to take us anywhere. I started the Mu‘tazilite project in order to breathe new life into tradition and modernity. Rereading, reconsidering, renewing and assessing the views and ideas of the Mu‘tazilites and their school of thought, which are hefty components of tradition, can bring new gains, and truly show us the way both to using tradition and to

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<sup>1245</sup> In summing up a chapter on “The Ethics of God,” which is about the philosophical debate about morality, and its types, he says the following:

In any case, here is the synopsis of the argument. First, even if there is such a thing as an ideal morality, it is the same thing as the actual morality. Second, the actual morality is amendable but not eradicable. Third, if there is to be an invitation to morality, it will have to be toward concrete and accessible rules not toward some abstract ideas that bend to any conceivable form yet solve no specific moral dilemma. Fourth, if there is to be a struggle, it should be against the bases and antecedents that cause moral exceptions to become rules and vice versa and the ideas that promote an alien and abstract “higher” morality. Fifth, if there is to be a judgment, it should be based on moral commands that yield the most sincere, generous, and straightforward responses to the most dexterous forms of subterfuge and sophistry.

This is the essence of moral practice in society. It is, indeed, analogous to the scientific practice in nature. As such, it is a useful guide. This is a humble vision of morality apropos of fallible human beings who are far from being Gods. It is not the human morality but the divine morality and justice that adjusts itself to all societies. It behooves us, fallible creatures, to act as fallible creatures not as infallible gods. One should leave God's work, God's morality, and God's affairs to God. This is the meaning of reliance on God (*tavakkol*).

Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam*, 120-121.

<sup>1246</sup> Soroush, “I am a Neo-Mu‘azilite,” website above.

extricating ourselves from tradition. This is the kind of potential I see in the Mu'tazilite project and I'm trying to take advantage of it.<sup>1247</sup>

Following the context that brought about the rationalist heritage of the Mu'tazila and other schools, Soroush, like some other prominent reformists cited in this work, calls for the revival of "theological dialogue" which develops pluralism in thought and "reasoned religion," and leads to "epistemological pluralism." Rekindling the flames of "rational and theological religion" would shatter certitudes through skepticism and doubt. One certitude and truth bring about dogma and intolerance. Needless to say that certitude here is not compared to scientific certitude/ truth. It is of a different genre. "Reasoned religion" or "theological religion" is pluralist:

*By lighting the flame of reason, theologians rescue believers from the chilling aridity of mindless dogmas and contribute to the warmth of wisdom. Theological religion is a hundred times better and sweeter than common, emulative religiosity, and it nurtures within it a plurality of which there is neither sight nor sound in the parched desert of common religiosity. This is a plurality that is built on doubt, not certitude, and it is a pluralism that is negative, not positive.*<sup>1248</sup>  
[Emphasis added]

As will be illustrated below, Soroush builds on classical rationalist thought of the Mu'tazila, and goes further in the way he conceives the Quran and the Prophetic contribution to interpreting religion.

Soroush's philosophy of religion is composed of three main principles: 1) the Quran which includes the essentials of revelation (the core message), 2) the Prophetic experience, which expresses revelation internally through the personal life of Muhammad, and exposes some of it as the believers raise issues and the community faces socio-political circumstances, and 3) the accidentals, which are historical, evolutionary, dynamic, local, temporal, like Arabic language, Sharia law, and morality stories narrated in Quran. Thus, to go to the essentials of a religion, Islam in this case, the *mujtahid* scholar or any believer has to start from studying the third principle of accidentals, then move to the second, the Prophetic experience, before one can get a view, one among many possible others, of the essentials, or the essence of religion, and Islam. Ijtihad has

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<sup>1247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1248</sup> Soroush, *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience*, 150.

to target the essentials and their meanings, and should not stop at the jurisprudential-legal aspects. This process has to be carried out by reason, and analytical methodologies.

Soroush holds a very new view of the Quran, revelation, and the Prophet's mediation. He believes in the createdness of the Quran with Muhammad's moment. That is, the Quran is neither a text authored by Muhammad nor a word-for-word revelation. Soroush holds the opinion that revelation is not the Quran Muslims have now. Revelation is the divine message inspired to Muhammad by God through Gabriel. He uses the German term "*Blick*" to mean that revelation is an "attitude" or "outlook" that is sent/revealed to Muhammad, an exemplary and perfect man. Muhammad's prophethood is the historical exposition of this revelation. The Quranic verses then were not revealed the way they are now, but are "signs" of revelation, and are "informative" of the way Muhammad reacted to revelation, the *Blick*, within the Arabian historical context, and according to what his Companions were asking him about, and in the language they spoke and understood. This means that the Quranic laws were mere propositions of the Prophet, his transmission of the message of revelation, to his companions of the time. These laws are historical and are not final. This also means that the Quranic length could have been longer if the Prophet lived longer, and if more questions from the Companions were raised at the time. This then also means that the written Quranic injunctions as they are recorded now are not revelation itself, but one of its manifestations.<sup>1249</sup>

The Quran is seen not only as the Word of God created at a certain point of time as the early Mu'tazilla argue, but it is seen as the Word of Muhammad himself:

Let me also add here that I consider myself a "neo-Mu'tazilite." I believe that the Qur'an is God's creation. The Mu'tazilites said this. But we can take one step further and say that the fact that the Qur'an is God's creation means that the Qur'an is the Prophet's creation. The Mu'tazilites didn't explicitly take this step but I believe it is a necessary corollary of their creed and school of thought.<sup>1250</sup>

This is a radically new and unprecedented move in Islamic theology.<sup>1251</sup> In his new philosophy of religion, which bolsters the ground for new rational theology,

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<sup>1249</sup> Ibid., see Chapters 1, 2, and 3.

<sup>1250</sup> Soroush, "I am a Neo-Mu'tazilite," website.

<sup>1251</sup> Fazlur Rahman's idea of "word-feel-idea" approach should be remember here. If the Mu'tazila in the formative era advanced the view of createdness of the Quran, Rahman, among the contemporaries, has

revelation is certainly seen as divine, from God, and belief in God and His Prophet is not doubted. Yet, what is now being advanced is that revelation - revealed as Quran and compiled in book format as *Mushaf* - is not the exact words of God. God's revelation is like a muse, an "inspiration" for poets, and Muhammad transmitted this "inspiration," in the language he knows, and the style his people understand, to reveal the essentials of the new religion of Islam, without doing without the accidentals, i.e. the socio-cultural circumstances that bound both the Prophet and his community. If Muhammad lived in a different context, time and space, revelation could have been translated differently, but its core message would have been the same.<sup>1252</sup> This means that a lot of the accidentals are additions that a believer in Islam has to understand according to various circumstances. Only such a historicist view of the main source of Islam, Quran, saves the Islamic core message of guidance. Soroush smashes the classical idea of the infallibility of the Quran. Some of it, he claims, can be fallible. What remain infallible are ideas like that of God, Prophethood, Life, and the Hereafter – the pillars of *iman*/ faith in Islam – because these make part of what he calls "master values" (like Life, Humanity, God, versus "servant values" like goodness, ethics, justice, solidarity) without which life becomes meaningless.

Soroush's new interpretation of revelation and the Prophetic experience makes him believe that the believer's high expectations of religion can be dangerous. "Maximum religion" or "maximum religiosity" is not easy to achieve because there are many accidentals that stand before one reaches the essentials. To reach the "possible maximum" of religiosity, the believer has to exert himself and try to catch the *Blick* of revelation as the Prophet did, and lead a spiritual, internal experience, as the Prophet did – and as all prophets of religions do. The *ijtihad* of the believer starts from a "cultural translation"<sup>1253</sup> of the past and early experience of revelation into the present. That means

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pointed out pathways of another reading of revelation, which Soroush seems to have pushed further and developed into a theory. Because of my inability to check his books written in Farsi language, I cannot say now whether Soroush is familiar with Rahman's approach or not. But I can make an assumption: Rahman praises the work of his compatriot the great Mohamed Iqbal; Soroush is also fond of the "rational spirituality" – to use Mohamed Arkoun's term- of Iqbal.

<sup>1252</sup> Soroush, "The Word of Mohammad," interviewed by Michel Hoebink, December 2007, <http://www.dr.soroush.com/English/Interviews/E-INT-The%20Word%20of%20Mohammad.html>

<sup>1253</sup> Soroush, *The Expansion of Prophetic Experience*, 89

that linguistic, socio-political and economic circumstances have to be translated from past to present; they are accidentals, and to reach the essentials, this historical translation of the revelation and its experiences into the present has to be undertaken, following epistemological and hermeneutical modelling that serves the purpose: “The events that have taken place in the history of Islam, whether in the age of our main religious leaders or thereafter, are all accidentals and might not have occurred. This being so, they cannot be included in the articles of faith.”<sup>1254</sup> Soroush includes what is seen by the orthodoxy as the fiqh essentials and worship obligations as accidentals as well:

There can be no doubt that the underlying contention is that most of the precepts of fiqh and even its basic tenets are accidentals. Even prayers and fasting have been made proportionate to what people can endure on average. If their endurance was much greater, the obligations may well have been more severe.<sup>1255</sup>

Soroush is not worried about what kind of fiqh would emerge from his philosophy of religion. He says this should not be a detaining concern for now. Otherwise put, “historical Islam” has to be differentiated from “the spirit of Islam.” At a certain point, Soroush outlines fourteen points that can help in deconstructing historical Islam to reach its essence, goal and spirit. I quote these points in this long passage:

Religion does not have an Aristotelian essence or nature; it is the Prophet who has certain goals. These goals are religion’s essentials. In order to express and attain these intentions and to have them understood, the Prophet seeks the assistance of (1) a particular language, (2) particular concepts and (3) particular methods (fiqh and ethics). All of this occurs in a particular (4) time and (5) place (geographical and cultural) and for (6) a particular people with particular physical and mental capacities. The purveyor of religion is faced with specific (7) reactions and (8) questions and, in response to them, gives (9) specific answers. The flow of religion over the course of time in turn gives rise to events, moving some people to (10) acquiesce and others to (11) repudiate. Believers and unbelievers fall into (12) particular relationships with each other and religion; they fight battles or create civilizations, (13) engage in comprehending and expanding religious ideas and experiences or (14) wrecking and undermining them.<sup>1256</sup>

These features of accidentals in religion challenge the common view believers have of it, i.e. “the maximalist expectation of religion.” Believers generally wish to find everything in religion, as a “maximal source and reservoir;” they seek perfection in religion, and

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<sup>1254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1255</sup> Ibid., 89

<sup>1256</sup> Ibid., 90-91

forget about the accidentals that hinder the direct sight of its essentials. Again, for the case of fiqh law, and though he states repeatedly that his concern is not merely to challenge these current orthodox norms but to raise primarily theoretical concerns, Soroush believes that classical ijihad extracts maximums from minimums, and makes of legal norms a final verdict instead of considering them minimums that are able to be readjusted according to circumstances and the spirit of religion. When “normal conditions” for a normal life are not applicable, legal norms should not be applied maximally as they are now, for the maximum religiosity and its possibility is absent; the accidentals are many to make the maximum applicable.<sup>1257</sup>

More clearly, Soroush is demanding to consider fiqh and religion in general this-worldly, and not other-worldly. When considering religion this-worldly, then Sharia and ethics precepts [should and should not, dos and don'ts] are considered “*necessary and sufficient*” to run the social affairs and solve the problems that emerge from them. This means that the rationale behind law can no longer be said to be a divine secret or a hidden divine *hikmat*/ rationale. Law has to be judged according to its “immediate - and not ultimate - consequences.” Otherworldly oriented religion sees laws as duties the main aim of which is the production of felicity in the hereafter; the consequences are reaped in the hereafter, and not here. This otherworldly view lags behind society needs. It loses the spirit of religion and busies itself with the accidentals and the hereafter, without making a link with this world. In 1996 in Harvard University, Soroush titled his lecture as “Is Fiqh Possible?” - following Kant's question “Is metaphysics possible?” and Iqbal's “Is religion possible?” – and came to the conclusion that a fiqh that tries to place both this-worldly and otherworldly on a par is impossible.<sup>1258</sup> Doing so “reduce[s] the role of fiqh to zero.”<sup>1259</sup> Fiqh is incomplete; it is perfect in terms or precepts (theory), and not in planning; it is minimalist, not maximalist; it is not religion.<sup>1260</sup> For Soroush, besides fiqh, minimum religion features touch every aspect that concerns human beings. Fiqh has always followed society and asked it to follow rules, and not the opposite. Religion and

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<sup>1257</sup> Ibid., 94-97

<sup>1258</sup> He refers to Muslims jurists and philosophers, like al-Razi and al-Ghazali, for accord on this matter. Ibid., 96

<sup>1259</sup> Ibid., 101

<sup>1260</sup> Ibid., 100-101

its relations to other sciences (exact sciences or social sciences) have to be considered minimalist, too. The same can be said about governance and politics. It is society transformations and their needs that make governance and not religion's maximalist views.

Soroush's conception of religion touches immensely core theological issues of good and evil. He argues that "ethics is for life. It teaches us how to live. It serves and is subject to life."<sup>1261</sup> He distinguishes between "master values" and "servant values." The latter are "for life;" the former are what "life is for." Most values - he says, presumably, ninety-nine percent - are servant values, since they are for life. For example, we do not live to tell the truth; we tell the truth to live. Ethics have context. In war, one may lie to survive. Servant values are etiquette, and they change according to context. So, when people say modern life has changed values, they mean that servant values have changed because of life circumstances. This is not relativism, argues Soroush, for relativism touches also the master values. Master values, which life is for, are very few, and without them life is meaningless; they do not change according to context; they are not an etiquette, "In the absence of these values, life is not worth living. They are very few in number and basically consist of the things that human beings hold most dear, such as "God" or "humanity" or "life itself."<sup>1262</sup> Soroush does not see any intrinsic value in values. Their purpose says how good or bad they are, "Telling the truth is not intrinsically good and lying is not intrinsically bad. Their goodness and badness arise from their effects and consequences in life."<sup>1263</sup>

Religion is minimal on theological issues as well. Soroush asserts that religion leaves a lot unsaid about God, His attributes, the Day of Judgment, Resurrection, Paradise and Hell. Theological and philosophical debates on these issues testify that not much has been said, and still more is being explored by believers and mystical experiences as time goes by. For example, the question of free will is still being debated,

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<sup>1261</sup> Ibid., 104

<sup>1262</sup> Ibid., 106

<sup>1263</sup> Ibid., 105. Soroush's advances here are teleologist, and partly consequentialist. He cannot be said to be fully consequentialist since he still gives high value to the "master values" which give meaning to life, and thus develop internal, spiritual, and existential need for them; a full consequentialist does not do that. Soroush is a Mu'tazilite in this point. His views, in this sense, are very close to the Mu'tazilite Qadi Abd Aljabar, referred to in Part IV, Section 1.

and so is the attribute of God's speech: how does God speak? Soroush again uses his minimalist approach, as well as the prophetic experience of revelation and his mediation, besides the human interaction in history to say that much is not said yet, and more is yet to be explored by believers who take the path of prophetic experiences, as the mystics do, and as sciences also develop.

Religious leaders, including the Prophet, were/are bound by certain social and historical constraints, so their expression of religion remains minimalist; it expands and contracts, depending on circumstances. The accidentals that cover the essentials in religion are plenty. This makes the claim of the seal/ end of prophecy and the perfection of religion understood in two ways, one of them is more plausible than the other: religion is perfect in guidance, and not in details. The end of prophecy does not mean the end of religious knowledge, but simply the end of the revelation of new guidance, a new prophet. The seal of prophecy does not mean that the dictates of the prophetic experience are final, perfect, and maximalist. The spirit of guidance is so, but the details part is open to human interaction and social transformations. "A maximalist religion undermines religion itself."<sup>1264</sup>

The theories of religious knowledge, its contraction and expansion, and the expansion of the Prophetic experience lead to a pluralist view of religion. Soroush outlines two main pillars of religion: 1) "diversity of understanding religious texts," and 2) "diversity of interpretation of religious experiences." The outcome of the two, respectively, is 1) intra-religious and 2) extra-religious pluralism. For diversity of understanding religious texts, Soroush admits that historically no religious text has been interpreted without disaccord among believers. The history of theology testifies to this. Besides analytical understanding of religion, Soroush takes a lot from the Sufi tradition, especially from his mentor the famous jurist and Sufi Jalalu Addin al-Rumi (d. 896). Rumi saw all religions as truth systems within truth – "truth within truth." Each religious system of truth comes at a certain point of time, with particular Prophetic experiences; these do not catch all human experiences; they leave space for difference; believers have

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<sup>1264</sup> Ibid., 107-115. This last statement echoes a similar one expressed by Tareq Oubrou (Part III, Section I) who relativizes Sharia . This short note is to remember that Oubrou read Soroush at a certain stage of his intellectual development, as he says, and the idea of minimalist apprehension of religion which he adopts is most probably taken from him.

to live them differently. No believer can grasp the picture of truth, unless he walks in one of its paths, and its paths are many. However he tries, the believer would be bound by time and space circumstances. This is God's will, "The first sower of the seeds of pluralism in the world was God himself who sent us different Messengers."<sup>1265</sup> God intended the text to have no one meaning, "We therefore have to say that they are all the Creator's intentions."<sup>1266</sup>

As to "diversity of interpretation of religious experiences," it derives from the "diversity of understanding religious texts." Like texts, humans are pluralists, and they project their pluralism on texts and their meanings. Especially in Islam, there is no religious authority to decree one interpretation, and the individual is the one who lives the religious experiences and is solely judged by God according to that, "Everyone carries their own burden of responsibility and appears before God singly."<sup>1267</sup> Pluralism then is no longer about asking if a system of interpretation or a personal interpretation of it is true or false, but about seeking to understand meaning in it, "The point is that we should not ask these questions [of truth and falsehood] in the first place and we should look at the plurality of people's views and beliefs from a different perspective and that we should see and read a different meaning and spirit into it."<sup>1268</sup> All interpretations are fluid, open to assumptions and extra-religious influence, "the world is filled with impure identities [...] the reason for this impurity is the humanization of religion."<sup>1269</sup>

These broad lines of religious diversity in understanding and human interpretation results in two kinds of pluralisms: positive and negative. Positive pluralism is the norm in the world. The world is *a priori* pluralist, but it is positive because this realization from within religion comes later, *a posteriori*, after each religion realizes its various interpretations and also realizes the diversity of the world. It is rich, admits various interpretations, and acknowledges that none of them can be swallowed up or dissolved,

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<sup>1265</sup> Ibid., 130

<sup>1266</sup> Ibid., 178

<sup>1267</sup> Ibid., 123

<sup>1268</sup> Ibid., 122-123

<sup>1269</sup> Ibid., 143-144. Soroush says that "a human religion is gradually born which is in keeping with human beings and an answer to their real circumstances" (xxiv-xxvi). For the case of Islamic main sectarian division, he says "Neither Shiism nor Sunnism is pure Islam"; "We have no pure race in the world, no pure language and no pure religion." (143)

since each of them has “incommensurable particularities.”<sup>1270</sup> Different prophecies cannot be compared in “*kind*” but in “*degree*,” since they all preach a version of truth, from the same God. Positive pluralism is based on unity and nominalism. Religiosities based on “reason” and “experience” give rise to pluralism, while religiosity based on pragmatism and instrumentalism (“pragmatic/instrumental” religiosity) does not. Negative pluralism is “pragmatic/ instrumental.” It is inauthentic, and lacks something, like certitude or truth. Reasoned pluralism is negative pluralism. In another epistemological differentiation of pluralism, Soroush says that positive pluralism is “reason” based, while negative pluralism is “caused”: by reasons he means the interpretative rules of a phenomenon, while the causes are its changing events. Reasons identify and explain facts, and the relation between causes-and-effects, while causes only account for the proximate effects.<sup>1271</sup>

Soroush’s epistemological position rests on “reasoned pluralism,” and “hermeneutic pluralism,” for they affect religious understanding, and lead to “epistemological pluralism.”<sup>1272</sup> Reasoned pluralism (positive pluralism) embraces plurality to which everyone is invited to participate, according to their truth. This engenders “rational modesty.”<sup>1273</sup> This means that no one considers his beliefs as the chosen ones, or the only true ones any longer. Monopoly of God and truth is over; pluralism, which is the norm of the world, prevails. Politically, no society then has to be governed by one ideological/ pragmatic/ instrumental interpretation. Theologically, truth, guidance, felicity, and salvation have to be considered as shared; worship has to be sincerely to God and not to particular sects or rituals, or historical incidents or figures. Soroush is by no means implying that rituals have to be left aside for pluralism; rather, he says that they have to be perceived differently, modestly, pluralistically, and rationally. He puts it this way:

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<sup>1270</sup> Ibid., 137

<sup>1271</sup> Soroush is critical of most of Western philosophy since the 18<sup>th</sup> century as entered the phase of turning causes into reason in determining and producing knowledge. This is for him what relativism and postmodernism is about.

<sup>1272</sup> Ibid., 152;160-161. In the same line of thought, he says “We have no other option but to accept plurality” (147). He also uses the term “rational modesty” (156) and “critical rationalism,” (157) to express the same point.

<sup>1273</sup> Ibid., 156

This is not to say that the followers of all sects and religions should needlessly abandon their own practices, rituals and beliefs, and turn into a uniform mass. All that is required is for them to look at the plurality and diversity of rituals and beliefs from different perspectives; not to imagine that the essential core of rightful guidance is confined to the teachings of theology and fiqh; and not to operate on the basis of the assumption that anyone who has a few specific articles of faith engraved on their minds (Shiis, Sunnis, Protestants, Catholics, etc.) is rightly guided and saved, whereas anyone else is misguided and doomed. Let them also take into account people's deeds, longing and diligence. Let them not imagine that Satan has the upper hand over God. Let them also study the hidden ways in which God chooses to guide people. And let them, most of all, value moral virtues higher than mental habits and sharia practices.<sup>1274</sup>

For Soroush, it is easy to be an “emulative believer” who stops at his tradition of truth and negate the rest. On the other side of religiosity life are also “reasoned believers” or “reflective believers.” That latter cannot, and should not, try to turn the former into reasoned ones. The world is full of emulative believers, and they only need to enlarge the scope of their understanding of religion for more pluralism, beyond differences that historical accidentals, or causes, have brought about. The essentials are what should unite people to reclaim the pluralist world. “Rational spirituality” –to borrow Mohamed Arkoun's term- is the way here, since it can be shared, different rituals and sects apart, “What remains is the necessary minimum of spirituality and guidance granted and bequeathed to humanity.”<sup>1275</sup>

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<sup>1274</sup> Ibid., 142

<sup>1275</sup> Ibid., 145

## 2. Conceptualizing the Idea of European Islam: Overcoming Classical Dichotomous Thought

### a. Taha Abdurrahmane's Framework of Reading Reformist Projects

To put my synthesis of European Islam in its framework as outlined in the main introduction, I start with introducing Taha Abdurrahmane's critique of modern Quranic studies that he considers mimetic of the Western path towards modernity.<sup>1276</sup> Abdurrahmane's critique aims at capturing "modernity spirit" (*rūḥu al-ḥadātha*) instead of "modernity fact" (*waqi' al-ḥadātha*). The former "is the constellation of values and principles that are able to improve the civilizational being of man in any place and time," while the latter "is the realization of this spirit in a specific time and place."<sup>1277</sup> Modernity spirit is what is needed for a new reading of the Quran for intellectual revival. Modernity fact has to be studied as a mere realization of this spirit. Western modernity exemplifies modernity fact, and because it is so, it has to be rejected as a model, because spacial and temporal circumstances contributed to its realization, in light of modernity spirit. Islamic thought has to focus on modernity spirit, and thus use its own tradition to capture this spirit; it should not mimic a fact. When it works on the spirit for its intellectual innovation, it is called "continuous innovation" (*ibdā' mawṣūl*); it fuses modernity spirit with what is useful in the tradition, i.e. the link with the divine. It is a "discontinuous innovation" (*ibdā' mafṣūl*) when it cuts ties with this tradition.<sup>1278</sup> (I will

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<sup>1276</sup> I introduced Taha Abdurrahmane and why I find his critique and framewok relevant to my work in the detailed introduction of this work (Introduction, Section 4).

<sup>1277</sup> Abdurrahmane, *The Spirit of Modernity*, 175. The Arabic equivalentents that follow the English terms between parentheses are Abdurrahmane's.

<sup>1278</sup> Ibid., 175. Abdurrahmane uses the term "modernists" (*ḥadāthiyyīn*) to mean scholars whose projects are mimetic of the Western model of modernity, like Mohamed Arkoun, Nasr Abu Zayd, Hassan Hannafi, Tayeb Tizini, and Abdelmajid Charfi. As to the reformers who keep ties with the tradition and still contribute innovatively ("continuous innovation"), he calls them "contemporaries" (*mu'āṣirin*), like Abdulkarim Soroush, and Mohammed Shahrour (*The Spirit of Modernity*, 177). I do not totally agree with Abdurrahmane's categorization of these reformists here. I have referred to most of them in Part IV, Section 2 as "late reformists" or "contemporaries." Though the ones he calls "modernists" call for a break with the tradition, what I see still traditional in them is that they do not deny the divine, and this point Abdurrahmane does not consider in his categorization. In my reading, they are close to what European Islam advances: a break with the historically accumulated tradition without a clear cut with the divine. This is a side note. What I am interested in here is Abdurrahmane's framework, especially the "innovative plans," and not the critique he advances on the "modernists," though his "innovative plans" are based on the "mimetic plans."

be refer to “continuous innovation” in European Islam, and contemporary Islamic thought, as “perpetual modernity.”<sup>1279</sup>)

Abdurrahmane specifies three principles of modernity in the West (first developed in Europe), which mimetic modernists follow without “innovation” (*ibda*).<sup>1280</sup> These three principles are based on one major fact: a “conflict fact”<sup>1281</sup> that characterizes modern Western thought, conflict between man and the Church. I put these principles in a reverse order to match “world-society-individual” framework. One, Western modernity focalizes this life and world, and neglects the hereafter; this makes all modern innovation “discontinuous” (*mafṣūl*), and not “continuous” or “linked with” (*mawṣūl*) the divine.<sup>1282</sup> This principle is a reaction to encounter the political guardianship of the Church. Two, discontinuous modernity of the West depends on human reason and departs from reference to revelation, as a way of encountering the intellectual guardianship of the Church. Three, it centralizes man and neglects God, as a way of encountering the spiritual guardianship of the Church. Western modernity is reactionary, and based on conflict with the Church. This renders it incomplete.<sup>1283</sup>

The above three principles of Western modernity have been used by mimetic modernists as “plans” (*khuṭaṭ*) to read the Quran. These are the “humanization plan,” the “historicization plan,” and the “rationalization plan.”<sup>1284</sup> One, the humanization plan (*khuṭatu al-ansana* or *atta'nīs*) “aims at dropping the sacramental point (*raf' 'ā'iq alqudsiyya*) by moving the Quranic verses from the realm of the divine to the realm of the human.”<sup>1285</sup> Examples of this plan include dropping reverence phrases and terminology and replacing them with literary one, like dropping “al-Qur'an al-Qarim” (the revered Quran), “*āya qarīma*” (revered verse), “*ṣadaqa allāhu al'azīm*” (God is Right, in the end

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<sup>1279</sup>

<sup>1280</sup> I will explain these principles in “Consolidating the Idea of European Islam,” Section 2c, Part IV. In summary now, these three principles are “majority,” “criticism,” and “universality.”

<sup>1281</sup> Abdurrahmane, *The Spirit of Modernity*, 193

<sup>1282</sup> *Ibid.*, 194

<sup>1283</sup> *Ibid.*, 189

<sup>1284</sup> Abdurrahmane uses them in “humanization-rationalization-historicization” order. I swap the order of the second and third, and they become “humanization-historicization-rationalization” to match the framework I follow later, “world-society-individual.”

<sup>1285</sup> *Ibid.*, 178

of citing the Quran), “*nuzūl al-Qur’an*” (descent of the Quran). This leads to turning the Quran into a linguistic text like any other texts (*mumāthala lughawiyya*). Moreover, the cultural context of the quran is read as a move from the absolute stage of the Quranic message to the stage of a relative one open to various interpretations, which, accordingly, implies its incompleteness.<sup>1286</sup>

Two, historicization plan (*khuṭatu atta’rīkh or arkhana*) “aims at lifting the aspect of obligation (*raf’ū ‘ā’iq al-ḥukmiyya*) by arguing that the Quran has come with eternal and irrevocable obligations, and the way to lift this aspect is to read these obligations in their context and time of revelation.”<sup>1287</sup> What mostly happens with this plan is that obligation verses (*āyāt al-aḥkām*) are turned into verses of guidance, with no enforcing injunction, a plan which limits the Quran to the internal private ethics. Methods of abrogation, (*nāsikh and mansūkh*), eminent and hidden meaning (*ḥukm and mutashābah*), Mekkan and Medinan periods (*makkī and madanī*) are used to relativize clear injunctions that are considered answers to particular historical circumstances. Even worship pillars are considered a historical manifestation of religion, and are thus relativized. At the end the plan calls for renewing, i.e. modernizing (*taḥdīth*), religion.<sup>1288</sup>

Three, the rationalization plan (*khuṭatu atta’qīl or ‘aqlana*) aims at lifting the metaphysical aspect, by using the available empirical, positivist and rational methodologies of reading the sacred text. This is mostly done through the following: a critique of Quranic studies (*‘ulūm al-Qur’an*), use of methods of comparative religions, and Christian theology (*lāhūt*), use of methods of sociology, linguistics, semiotics, historiography, psychology, psychoanalysis, modern criticism, discourse analysis, hermeneutics, and opening the reign of human reason to be applied on any verse. Among the results of this plan is that there occurs a change in the meaning of revelation (*wahy*), which is given the meaning of “a talent man is endowed with,” while the metaphysical issues become to mean myths, and worship obligations become rigid rituals. The dominance of rhetoric in Quran, through metaphors and stories, is considered part of the

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<sup>1286</sup> Ibid., 180-1

<sup>1287</sup> Ibid., 186

<sup>1288</sup> Ibid., 186-188

mythical, and the verses on *djin*, superstition, and Satans are seen to target a historical mindset, and not a modern one. The distinction and supremacy of the Quran (*afdaliyya*) becomes negotiated; the changes that occurred to Torah and Bible are seen applicable to the Quran, too.<sup>1289</sup>

The three plans, for Abdurrahmane, are mimetic of the Western conflicting encounter with religion.<sup>1290</sup> Their results change facts about the Quran and generalize doubt on its entirety. Most importantly, they aim at simple critique of the religious, for the sake of weakening faith in it, and are not based on renewing faith and rational contemplation (*attadabbur*).<sup>1291</sup> In his recent work, *The Spirit of Religion* (2012), Abderrahman says that Western thought has idolized reason (*allaha al'aql*), and turned it into a tyrant of modernity (*tāghūt al-ḥadātha*),<sup>1292</sup> since it enforces oblivion of the divine (*at-tansiyah or nisyān, or al-insā*).<sup>1293</sup> It creates “a world governed by oblivion” (*ālam nāsī*), in opposition to a “contemplative world” (*ālam dhākir*). The former is inhabited by a “horizontal man” who conceives just what he sees, while the latter is inhabited by “vertical man” who conceives also what he does not see.<sup>1294</sup> Abdurrahmane’s project of “Islamic modernity” uses the same plans but innovatively, and makes the fusion of ethical reasoning and piety the axis of the project. In so doing, he claims to foster “continuous innovation” that preserves ties with the tradition (*ibdā' mawṣūl*), instead of “discontinuous innovation” (*ibdā' munfaṣil*). I now refer to his three “innovative plans.”

Abdurrahmane argues that there is “no entrance to modernity for Muslims without a new reading of the Quran.”<sup>1295</sup> For him, the “prophetic reading” inaugurated the first “modern Islamic realization” (*alfi'l al-ḥadāthī al-islāmī al-auwal*). Now, there is a need to inaugurate the “second modern Islamic realization,” and call it “continuous

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<sup>1289</sup> Ibid., 181-184

<sup>1290</sup> I recall the Prometheus predicament Tariq Ramadan and Abdennour Bidar, for example, see rooted in Western thought.

<sup>1291</sup> Ibid., 191

<sup>1292</sup> Abdurrahmane, *The Spirit of Religion*, 462, n. 21

<sup>1293</sup> Ibid., 466

<sup>1294</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>1295</sup> Abdurrahmane, *The Spirit of Modernity*, 193

innovation” (*ibda‘ mawsūl*).<sup>1296</sup> Two conditions are required for such a realization. The first condition consists in renewing the modern experience/ realization in its interaction with religion. That is, the place of religion has to be fundamentally integrated in modernity renewal; it should not be an interaction based on conflict but on continuity and harmony (*tarshīd attafa‘ul addīnī*). The second condition consists in rehabilitating the mimicked modern realization (*i‘ādat ibdā‘ al-fi‘l al-ḥadāthī al-manqūl*) so that another “fact” of modernity can be realized, in light of both the “religious spirit” and “modernity spirit.”<sup>1297</sup> Multiple modernities are possible. Arab-Islamic thought has the right to difference.<sup>1298</sup> Three “innovative plans” (*khuṭaṭ ibda‘iya*) are its basis.

One, the “*innovative humanisation plan*” denotes that man is honoured with the task of inhabiting the world (*takrīm al-insān bi al-istikhlāf*). The Caliphate principle (*al-istikhlāf*) is the highest in ranking after divinity. God has willed that man does not only care for his private matters but also carries the honorary message of inheriting the world, a deposit (*amāna*) he should ethically care about. Moreover, this humanization of the divine does not aim at effacing sacredness, but at honoring man by moving the Quranic verses from divinity to man’s access through the latter’s methods of interpretation. This does not weaken the divine; it transfers the task of religious interaction to man through language in its human interactive aspect; the divine is linguistically limitless, not bound to specific patterns of language, which humans keep deconstructing to reach what it denotes. The Quran is not only a linguistic show, but a text full of intentions and meanings that one has to find out. Each verse has some divine aspect. Linguistically, it is unrivalled, and human linguistic plurality can help in finding their various meanings.<sup>1299</sup>

Two, the “*innovative historicization plan*” aims at establishing ethics and not dismissing obligations. It links Quranic verses with their context in time and space for ethical reasons. Understanding verses in context does not weaken religion and makes of it a phenomenon of the past mythical mind. Quranic verses keep their value accordingly.

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<sup>1296</sup> Ibid., 194

<sup>1297</sup> Ibid., 195

<sup>1298</sup> See his other two books referred to earlier: *The Arabic Right to Philosophical Difference*, 2002, and *The Islamic Right to Intellectual Difference*, 2005

<sup>1299</sup> Abdurrahmane, *The Spirit of Modernity*, 197-199

The first realization of these verses-obligations during the Prophetic period is but their first exemplary realization, and not the last. They can be renewed. Prescriptive verses have two faces: legal/ jurisprudential and ethical; the former follows the latter, and not vice versa. Besides, historical events and stories are meaningful; they are cosmic signs for the mind to expand its horizons of thinking (*mabda' al-i'tibār*). Following such an understanding, the sealing of revelation then goes beyond the time of its appearance; each era becomes its possible age of realization. The historicity of revelation becomes “futuristic,” and it should be always modern through its constant newness and update to answer this futurity aspect.<sup>1300</sup>

Three, the “*innovative rationalization plan*” aims at expanding reason (*tawsī' al'aql*) and not the erasure of the divine (*maḥw al-ghaybiyya*). Abdurrahmane considers that the use of modern methodologies of understanding texts and scientific phenomena should “expand reasoning horizons” (*tawsī' ufuq attafkīr*). From here comes his use of the term “expanded reason” that goes from mere scientific analysis to existential contemplation (versus the “abstract” and “guided” reasons).<sup>1301</sup> In the innovative rationalization plan, the scientific study of Quranic verses does not weaken the religious. The divine mind and the values behind it are not like the pure mechanic and analytical mind. The expanded mind uses contemplation (*tadabbur*) principle, and links the visual phenomenon and facts with their inner and deeper values and meanings, and is attached in a particular way with

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<sup>1300</sup> Ibid., 202-204

<sup>1301</sup> Abdurrahmane clarifies further this distinction. He divides “Rational ability” into three basic levels: “Rationality of abstraction,” “Rationality of living experience,” and “Rationality of Sophist belief,” which match three terms “Abstract Reason,” “Guided Reason” and “Supported Reason.” The “Abstract Reason” is limited to description of things, the “Guided Reason” is devoted to doing things, whereas the “Supported Reason” represents the capability of knowing its internal identity. “Supported Reason” is “Expanded Reason” (Abdurrahmane, *al-'amal addīnī wa tajdīd al-'aql [Religious Practice and the Renewal of Reason]* (Casablanca and Beirut: al markaz athaqāfī al'arabī, 1989) 121). His critique of the Islamic reformist and salafi movements, besides Western rationalism, is based on this division of levels of rationality. For example, he says, “the Islamic traditional movements [Salafiyya in Arabic, which means literally to follow back the original texts] has followed two routs to refer to the original Islamic texts: the “theoretical Salafiyya,” which has been especially followed by the “Wahhabiyya Salafiyya,” and the rout of the “critical Salafiyya,” which has been followed by the national and renaissance Salafiyya. Both of them have followed the methodology of “Abstract Reason” with different applications. In the “theoretical Salafiyya” categories of abstract reason have been applied without resorting to living experience [...]. The “critical Salafiyya” has been more cautious of the importance of the experience but it is not less inclined to “Abstract Reason” [...]. Such an inclination to “Abstract Reason” is not but a trace of the influence of “Western Rationality” with its Cartesian basis” (Abdurrahmane, *Religious Practice*, 102-103).

the heart. Stories are not mythical, but are for more thinking, which the Quran clearly encourages doing. Overall, the expanded mind does not contradict modernity, but simply aims at guiding and fathoming the ethical being of humankind.<sup>1302</sup>

Despite this brief introduction to Abdurrahmane's project of another possible modernity, his thesis is that "Islamic modernity"<sup>1303</sup> is grounded on the "original unity" between the sacred and the profane, religion and politics. Synthetically, this is argued for in three points. First, he does not deny modernity core values, which he refers to as "the spirit of modernity."<sup>1304</sup> His critique is against a mimetic projection of the Western fact of modernity on Islamic thought and Muslim majority countries. Western modernity is reactionary; it is based on a conflict with religion; so, mimicking it risks projecting a history on a different one. Second, what becomes also clear in his critique that stems from his Islamic perspective is that the divine does not conflict with the "expanded reason," which is in a constant flux of thinking for both spiritual satisfaction and management of worldly affairs. In Abdurrahmane's philosophy of religion, there is an "original unity" "between religion and politics, or more clearly between worship (*ta'abbud*) and world-management (*tadbīr*)."<sup>1305</sup> He calls this "*al-i'timāniyya*" (from *amāna*), or "divine trust."<sup>1306</sup>

Third, and most importantly, Abdurrahmane affirms that he restores to Islamic philosophy its own worldview, which some early scholars of Islam lost in their interaction with Greek philosophy that first lived the dichotomy of the divine versus mundane, and which the modern West has inherited, and which, in turn, has influenced

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<sup>1302</sup> Abdurrahmane, *The Spirit of Modernity*, 200-202

<sup>1303</sup> No need to say that for him every religious, cultural, or other philosophic worldview can embrace modernity in its own way ; he defends the idea of "multiple modernities" ; he does not claim that Islamic modernity is the only modernity that can work with or replace Western modernity. It is one among other possible ones. Moreover, Abdurrahmane notes that his idea is not to further antagonism between the West and Islam; rather, he sees that "modernity spirit" can be shared by many, which makes grounds for a lot of commonalities, and thus the universality of most values it defends. Abdurrahmane, *The Spirit of Modernity*, 194, n. 38

<sup>1304</sup> He often refers to it also as the "essence of modernity."

<sup>1305</sup> Abdurrahmane, *The Spirit of Religion*, 509

<sup>1306</sup> *Ibid.*, 449

many Muslim reformists.<sup>1307</sup> Since the 1970s, Abdurrahmane has devoted himself to re-grounding Islamic philosophy on an ontological fact he sees has been lost from early Islamic times. This ontological fact is the “original unity” between religion and politics, and between this-worldly and other-worldly affairs, which makes religion vital to human life, for religion means ethics, and man without ethics is impossible. Abdurrahmane argues in length that religion equals ethics, “religion and ethics are one.”<sup>1308</sup> He does not separate the two. He sees them as one ontological unit. “The existence of man [...] does not precede the existence of ethics, but accompanies it.”<sup>1309</sup> And since religion (and consequently ethics) has existed with the existence of man,<sup>1310</sup> the following syllogism is reached: there is “no man without ethics, [...] no ethics without religion, [...] and no man without religion.”<sup>1311</sup> Linking ethics to work he says, “ethics in Islam are the origin of any work.”<sup>1312</sup> Based on this project of ethics, Abdurrahmane says a new “civilization of ethos” is needed; it is the “awaited for civilization.”<sup>1313</sup>

### **Applying Abdurrahmane’s Analytical Framework to the Studied Islamic Scholarship**

Now that Abdurrahmane’s framework of reform based on reading the Quran has been introduced, its implications for my work on European Islam have to be clarified. Three generations of scholarship in Islamic thought were presented mostly separately (in Part IV, Section 1) as predecessors of European Islamic reform. Occasionally I referred to

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<sup>1307</sup> Abderrahmane is critical of the Averroests in Islamic thought, since he sees Averroes (Ibn Roshd) as an imitator of Aristotle; Abdurrahmane sees more originality in Al-Ghazali’s work. One of his main arguments is that the early translation of Greek texts into Arabic did not match the Islamic lexicon, and thus affected the development of Islamic philosophy to great extents. To overcome this defect in Islamic intellectual history, linguistic utensils have to be re-appropriated to produce genuine philosophy. See his *hiwaratun min ajli al-mustaqbal [Dialogues for the Future]* (Casablanca and Beirut: al markaz athaqāfi al‘arabī, 2000)

<sup>1308</sup> Abdurrahmane, *su’ālu al-akhlāq: musahamatun fi annaqd al-akhlāqī li al-ḥadātha algharbiyya [The question of Ethics – a Contribution to Ethical Criticism of Western Modernity]* (Casablanca and Beirut: al markaz athaqāfi al‘arabī, 2000) 52. In *The Arab Right to Philosophical Difference*, he says “religion means ethical behaviour” (*addinu innamā huwa makārimu al-akhlāq*), 178

<sup>1309</sup> Abdurrahmane, *The Question of Ethics*, 54

<sup>1310</sup> *Ibid.*, 25

<sup>1311</sup> *Ibid.*, 147-149. Abdurrahmane also says that religious rationality is more advanced than the human one; the latter is lagging behind. *Ibid.*, 169

<sup>1312</sup> *Ibid.*, 188

<sup>1313</sup> *Ibid.*, 146

other scholars for links, and frequently I recalled the three axes framework, world-society-individual. However, I was more concerned with presenting those projects than with going at that stage into reading them in light of Abdurrahmane's analytical framework. Before I end with presenting my deductions and conceptualizations on European Islam, I still have to use Abdurrahmane's framework so as to clearly answer the question of revisionism and reformism in European Islam later on. I use his three plans of "humanization, historicization, and rationalization" in their "innovative" sense to synthesize my reading of the Mu'tazila, the early and mostly late reformists whose projects are contemporary to the scholars of European Islam. (After that I use the same plans to synthesize my reading of European Islam).

*One, on innovative humanization.* The humanization of the world is ethical. This is the case because of the ontological/ original unity man, religion and ethics enjoy, according to Abdurrahmane. This can be expressed in two points. First, it should be remembered that Abdurrahmane underlines the ontological freedom of man. Second, man has used this freedom and shouldered himself with the divine message of religion, which has become a divine trust (*amāna or i'timaniya*) for him to attend to as a caliph, an heir of God on earth. This divine message is ethical. Ethics, it has to be remembered, equals religion, for Abdurrahmane. Since man is ontologically created free, and ethics and religion are one, and also man and religion are inseparable, according to Abdurrahmane, then man's work is inseparable from the ethical paradigm inherited from the divine. Any human work is (supposed to be) religious in essence, and is thus (supposed to be) ethical; the other way around is also correct: ethics (= religion) engenders ethical (= religious) work.

Otherwise interpreted, divinity passes to man, without the latter becoming divine himself. Rather, the divinity he can reach depends on his effort to interpret the revealed message, the Quran in this case, in the most adequate manner that answers the ethical essence of the divine trust. So, reading the Quran remains a human process, as long as it does not forget the ontological trust or neglect it. The sacredness of the responsibility of man endows him with a divine aura that has to be perpetually looked for and developed

for the good of the world. While originally man cannot take the place of the divine because it is born out of His Will, what remains for man to do in his historical and physical existence is to humanize this divinity. This happens mostly through language, and interpretation of the revealed text. And since there is no other revealed text to be awaited for, from the Islamic perspective, the idea of sealing revelation gives man even further powers to humanize the divine, with permission of the divine Himself.

If man is ontologically free, established as a caliph on earth, and, further than that, expects no further guiding revelation, what remains to be understood from this is that the world is divinely willed to be human in its “management,” or *tadbīr*, using Abdurrahmane’s term. What this line of argumentation leads to is that justice or injustice in the world – assuming that ethically justice is the most important value human beings worldwide aspire to on this mundane world – is in the hands of man. Man as an heir is equipped with liberation, which implies responsibility, and a divine guiding message, which is ethical in its essence, i.e. freedom is highly tied to responsibility. Details are for man to ponder over and develop for the good management of the world.

On the face of it, Abdurrahmane’s argument, as I understand it, may appear to go against the late Mu‘tazila line of argumentation (Part IV, Section 1a-b). Abdurrahmane stresses the original unity between man and religion, religion and ethics, and ethics and man, while the Mu‘tazila, with reference to Qadi Abd Aljabar, see man and ethics as ontologically separate entities; that is why they believe in the objectivity of ethical values. Their distinction between normative ethics and value judgments explains their defense of the objectivity of ethics. This fundamental “cognitive” difference between Abdurrahmane as the modern ethicist and the Mu‘tazila as the early ethicists in Islamic thought can be explained “methodologically” with reference to the historical era of each of the two. The Mu‘tazila appeared in the formative and productive period of Islamic theology. Political and theological rivalries between religions (for example, Islam, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism), sects and schools (*Khawārij*, *Murji’a*, *Jabriya*, *Qadariya*; *Shi’a*; *Ash’aria*, etc.), besides the opening to Greek philosophy, certainly impacted the Mu‘tazila theological views and their ethical theory. Moreover, despite their

high elevation of reason in understanding revelation, the Mu‘tazila could not live an age beyond theirs; religious reasoning, to call it so, was dominant, and they hardly had any political force to help in disseminating their thought.<sup>1314</sup> Even when in power for only about forty years in Islamic “majority” history, the Mu‘tazila ethical theory did not oppose, for example, the Sharia law, because it was advanced to be considered unjust, or unegalitarian, and was seen as the guardian of social justice and minority rights, against some religious and tribal customs of the time.

As to Abdurrahmane who lives in a modern period of human history, he can see that Sharia law has not been updated to cater for the changing human need for centuries; now, its aim of social justice is not achieved when it is applied, for various internal and external reasons, theological, socio-cultural, political and economic. This being the case, he speaks out his view that ethics in Islam is not mere Sharia law applied out of text and context. For him, re-reading the Quran is a requisite, to reground Islamic thought on its main objective: the ethical being of man. For such a project to mature, he calls for the renewal of *‘ilm al-kalam* (Islamic theology), since it historically was the base of Islamic intellectual productivity in the past (see the introductory notes on kalam, Part IV, Section 1).

Abdurrahmane and the Mu‘tazila, however, meet at least on two fundamental points, which are the two prime tenets in Mu‘tazila diction: Tawhid (Oneness) and divine justice.<sup>1315</sup> It should be recalled that the Mu‘tazila advanced their defense of Islam and divine justice in difficult socio-political turmoil in Islamic history, when sectarianism and later on dynasties and rulers were fighting over who governs the Muslim community. The above two tenets aimed at defending Islam as a religion of liberation and justice. Tawhid was theologically interpreted to mean, among others, ontological liberation and equality of man, and socio-politically to mean that no ruler should step over basic rights and duties the divine prescribes for all human beings, without mediations of priests (imams) or political rulers that claim divine authority (Commanders of Faith). Thus, the divine

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<sup>1314</sup> See more on these historical facts presented in brief in Part IV, Section 1.

<sup>1315</sup> The Mu‘tazila are known by five tenets; Tawhid and divine justice are the first two important ones. For the other three, and their moral interpretations, see Part IV, Section 1.

was made innocent of the injustices ordinary human beings inflicted on others. This was further defended by the second tenet, divine justice, which meant that responsibility for socio-political injustice was man's alone, and not the divine, or the misinterpretation of its liberating and just message.

The elevation of the place of reason in Mu'tazilite thought as a precedent of revelation was meant to serve their (five) tenets, enforce human agency and responsibility, and thus free the divine from man's errors and injustices. Though they considered that human reason can objectively distinguish between the right and wrong, they simultaneously saw in revelation an endorsement of the achievements and capabilities of reason; they saw them as compatible and complementary; if contradictions appear, it is human reason that has to work more to check what went wrong during the interpretation of revelation. This is what also Abdurrahmane argues but from a different methodological background. That is for a link between Abdurrahmane's framework and the Mu'tazila referred to earlier (Section 1a-b, Part IV).

As to what kind of link can be built between Abdurrahmane's humanization plan and the reformists, my earlier distinction of "early" and "late reformists" help here.<sup>1316</sup> The early Arab-Islamic Renaissance reformists were more preoccupied to awaken the masses to their political rights of self determination and liberation. Their use of the religious incitement was mainly for that purpose. They kept the classical interpretation of man as Caliph on earth, but that Caliphate had to liberate itself first from human (European) dominance. The idea of Tawhid and social justice –to recall the Mu'tazila tenets - lacked realization on the ground, which meant that human liberation and social justice could not be realized under colonialism and European paternalism. The re-awakening the Arab Renaissance reformists initiated remained limited in scope. Their call for the revival of the place of reason and philosophy in Islam was framed within the classical sciences of interpretation that did not allow reason to directly discuss, for instance, Sharia law on equality of genders at the legislative level, equality of believers with non-believers,

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<sup>1316</sup> By "early reformists" I meant the first modernizing reformists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I briefly referred to Afghani, Abduh, and Rida. By "late reformists" I meant the 20<sup>th</sup> century reformists. I grouped them into three categories, and I referred to 1) Rahman, Arkoun, Hanafi, and Abu Zayd, 2) Mernissi, Wadud, and An'naim, 3) Aljabri and Soroush. For more, see Part IV, Section 1c-d.

equality in inheritance, the application of the penal code, and other social affairs (*al mu'āmalāt*).

In general, the early reformists lacked a clearly defined approach that takes into consideration their belief in Islam's social justice and liberation based on the Quranic ethos. To put it in words close to this section's analysis, the early reformists classically believed that man is the heir of God on earth, but they did not go so far as to read Sharia prescriptions according to the supposed human agency the heir is endowed with. Human agency, for the early reformists, works only in the spaces that the Sharia does not clearly intervene in. Reason either follows or confirms Sharia prescriptions. The humanization of the world here remains partial. The divine texts still rule, and man follows their prescriptions, not taking into account their ethical *élan* for social justice into account.

Regarding the late reformists, Abdurrahmane, as seen above, is critical of some of their advances, especially regarding their reading of the Quran.<sup>1317</sup> Still on the plan of humanization, the major critique Abdurrahmane launches on these scholars is their mimetic humanization of the divine through empowering man's interpretative methodologies, which end in lifting the sacred aspects on the Quran. That is, mimetic humanization of the revealed text ends in de-divinizing the text, and thus humanizing the source of faith in general, instead of keeping its divine aura. My reading of the reformists interpretations leads me to disagree with Abdurrahmane's critique here. I do not think that the scholars I have studied earlier do aim at de-divining the Quran. As I will make it clearer as I proceed, contemporary/ late reformists, as well as European Islam studied scholars, generally aim at humanizing the divine message through the human interpretation according to space and time. They do not cut ties with the divine; they do not "kill" the divine in their humanization of its manifestation in the world. This is my contention. I briefly recapitulate some of the views of these reformists to consolidate my point. I will show that even the "mimetic" scholars, in Abdurrahmane's view, can be classified among the "innovative" ones – following the "innovative humanization plan."

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<sup>1317</sup> Abdurrahmane is critical of Arkoun, Abu Zayd, and Hanafi while supportive of the work of Rahman, Soroush, to name these scholars I myself refer to in Section 2, Part IV.

In the previous section (Section 2, Part IV) I tentatively classified the reformists I introduced into three categories: 1) “hermeneutists,” or “ethicists-textualists” (exemplified by the work of Fazlur Rahman, Mohamed Arkoun, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and Hassan Hanafi), 2) “egalitarianists-legalists” (Fatema Mernissi and Amina Wadud, and Abdullahi Ahmed An’aim), and 3) “neo-rationalists” (Mohamed Abed Aljabri and Abdulkarim Soroush). I noted then that they could all be called “rationalists,” “secularists,” or “liberals,” because their projects have the material that could be understood as such. At the same time I also noted that such labels could be misunderstood if they are quickly linked to especially European “rationalism,” and “secularism” – though such comparisons are unavoidable. These scholars are aware of how challenging they are to the orthodoxy, and also how critical they are of Eurocentric appropriation of modern values. These late reformists, unlike the early reformists who stopped at Sharia prescriptions, go so far as to read the Quran in light of modern values and social sciences. In this aspect they are “modern,” but I emphasized that they try to preserve a special place for the divine. This makes them attached to the “traditional,” but in a modern context, and not in a traditional one. In simpler terms that echo Abdurrahmane, they are spiritually liberal but not secular in the “classical” sense of relegating the divine to the private or gradually abolishing it because it is irrelevant to modernity.

In the previous section I also inferred three “wellbeings” from the reformists’ various projects. These wellbeings are “cosmic wellbeing,” “social wellbeing,” and “individual wellbeing.” “Cosmic wellbeing” is the one that matches the innovative humanization plan discussed in this stage centered on the axes of the world (in world-society-individual). By way of an illustration, Fazlur Rahman emphasizes the ethical *élan* of Islam, and proposes to read the Quran in light of that overall *élan*, and not just in light of particular prescriptions. His “double movement” approach should be remembered here to match the text with the context, the past with present. To succeed in this approach the Quran has to be read as a “feeling-idea-word” process, whereby the Prophet Muhammad felt the divine message, got the idea behind it, and expressed it according to his time, space circumstances and subsequently people’s mindset. What this means is that the divine

message to be well understood and realized in its best forms, it has to take into account its context and people's aptitudes. That is why Rahman was critical of classical orthodoxy, mysticism, (European) rationalism, and modern attempts of reforms that are either salafist-conservative or secular *à l'Européenne*. What Rahman aspired to see was the realization of the Islamic ethical and social message on the socio-political ground. This, for him, could happen without cutting ties with the divine. The divine is the source of ethical behaviour that has positive impact on one's personal ethics and sense of being in the world. So, in Rahman's approach, humanizing the divine text does not deprive it of its divinity. Rather, it makes it just more realizable, realist, and this-worldly.

As to the other three hermeneutists and text analysts (Arkoun, Abu Zayd and Hanafi), they read the Quran as a text, but they keep insisting that considering it so does not mean its divinity is weakened or put aside once and for all. Arkoun and Abu Zayd distinction between revelation in its "orality" (*oralité*) as descended on the Prophet, and how it was kept in the heart of Quran memorizers and how it was later compiled into the Book/*Mushaf* has historically enforced the manner in which it has been interpreted by "the official orthodox corpus" (in Arkoun's terms). This distinction influenced the way Islam's humanism had been practiced before it became written. It is this humanism that they try to uncover by deconstructing Islamic accumulated thought. Hanafi works within the same hermeneutical premises, and mostly emphasizes human liberation and social justice Islam advocates through its first pillar of Tawhid. The fact that these scholars read the Quran as a text upon which they apply textual analysis methods does not steal the torch of divinity from God, but simply gives man, the agent, the freedom and faculties he is granted to activate and update human interpretation of the divine. They do not imprison human faculties of interpretation just because there is fear of misusing them. They are already misused by some violent and conservative voices, and to keep on imprisoning liberty of conscience makes more harm to the divine text itself. It is part of "spiritual responsibility" – to use Arkoun's term- to speak against global injustices; "progressive hermeneutics" sides with the weak and the oppressed, since it considers "human life as an absolute value" in Hanafi's words. Human interpretation of the divine text does not question divinity; it "brackets" this question, and considers the text a tool, and not an end

in itself. Human agency imbues the text with the content that aims at preserving social and cosmic order, and that is what a Caliph is supposed to do in the land he inherits.<sup>1318</sup>

*Two, on innovative historicization.* At this level, Abdurrahmane is critical of some reformists since their historicization and contextualization projects of revelation prescriptions leads to considering religious obligations, including worship rituals (‘ibādāt), as part of this historicist readings, and thus can be dropped in the modern age, which is a different context. Abdurrahmane seems afraid lest the ethical content of religious obligations is swept away and replaced by “modern morality” – to call it so - that alone cannot replace certain meanings religious rituals, practices, and metaphysical stories give to the believer. Sharia obligations, rituals and stories narrated in the Quran are cosmic signs for “contemplation principle” (*mabda’ al-i’tibār*), i.e. they are signs that teach moral lessons that exert the believer to think more, and deepen his piety and ethical wellbeing for the private matter (individual wellbeing). For the social wellbeing that matches most this plan of historicization, it is principally the legal and social Quran prescriptions that are controversial. From the historicization plan, it is not the very same prescriptions that have to be kept and practised to show that the divine still has a place in society. Rather, the innovative historicization plan requires that it is the spirit of the old Prophetic era that has to be kept, and now be renewed; the Quranic social prescriptions (like the penal code) served the social wellbeing of the early Islamic community, but do not now, seeing that the political and socio-cultural realities have changed. Social welfare was on offer, and the penal code, for instance, was an adequate and accepted practice at the time. Now, since the current historical moment is different from the earlier one, the historical spirit that adapts divine prescriptions requires adequate interpretations. This is what late reformists/ contemporaries do advocate - leaving aside for awhile Abdurrahmane’s fear of historicizing even the worship rituals, like the prayers and pilgrimage.

If I invoke the example of the “egalitarianists-legalists” (Mernissi, Wadud, and An’naim), their utmost interest through their historical reading of the sacred text is in the

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<sup>1318</sup> Read, for example, Hanafi’s thematic approach of the Quran, Part IV, Section 1.

prescriptions that concern the social order. Mernissi and Wadud, for instance, have re-read the Quran from feminine perspectives, and have reached the point that man and woman are ontologically equal in God's creation and judgement. There is no superiority given to one over the other in creation. Difference is spoken about in the revealed text when woman is invoked within her Arabian social context of the time, the 7<sup>th</sup> century. In light of this fundamental distinction that characterizes the Quran, they affirm that woman's inferior position in society has been based on the social mention of her position, which has ever since been turned into an established rule by the patriarchy.

An'naim's work is also more concerned with the social implication of Sharia law on matters of equality of genders, equal citizenship of believers with non-believers, and the application of the penal code, to cite but these main controversial issues. An'naim, like his tutor Mohamed Mahmoud Taha, emphasises the distinction between the Mekkan versus Medinan revelations, the abrogating and the abrogated, and demands their revival as adequate distinctions that stem from the tradition itself. The Muslim mind had to wait for modernity to realize that such early distinctions can work, after centuries of their neglect. This historicist juridical revision is solidified through An'naim's historical reading of the Islamic "states"; he realizes that an Islamic state that ruled simply on the basis of divine prescribed laws never existed. The state has always been secular; it is society that has been religious and the state integration of religious prescriptions has taken place for legitimacy. The idea is that the "second message of Islam" of universal human rights and social justice is now viable, in light of modernity values.

Rahman and Hannafi's hermeneutics, for example, also link their projects with the social benefits such interpretations bring to society. Divine prescriptions are good as long as they are good to society's public welfare (*maslaḥa 'amma*). Rahman's attempt to apply his project in Pakistan in the 1960s, under the invitation of the government, by interpreting Sharia social prescriptions according to the modern challenges goes in line with the idea of improving the public good. Rahman was called an apostate, and threatened by the orthodoxy for his interpretations. He had to leave/escape to the US. Hannafi's "Progressive hermeneutics," hermeneutics in defence of the oppressed and the

poor, is expressive of the idea of social wellbeing, too. Aljabri's expansion of the Sharia objectives to include more modern human socio-political and scientific rights also aim at making the social message of Islam a lived reality. Soroush's philosophy of religion, which he says is rooted in the Islamic tradition, in which he sees that fiqh (Sharia law) cannot pretend to be both divine and secular goes in the same direction: fiqh is for this world, and that is how divine prescriptions have to be interpreted.

Overall, for these scholars concerned with egalitarian and legal aspects of Islam, historicization plan or level of analysis targets the socio-political aspects that religious prescriptions deal with. They are not preoccupied with weakening the worship rituals that concern the individual. Their focus is on the religious prescriptions that tackle social affairs. Their aim is to activate the social message of Islam, based on the equality of citizens. Historicization plan can be further clarified with the place of reason and human agency conferred on man according to the plan of innovative rationalization.

*Three, on innovative rationalization.* Rationalism in its Euro-modern version, according to Abdurrahmane, is based on two principles: 1) it presupposes no ethics in science, and/ since it 2) acknowledges no prior knowledge to reason. That is how it denies revelation; or, when it does not deny it, it subordinates it. To project such a rationalist view on the Quran means that the metaphysical world it describes in stories is no longer valid for the modern world; these stories ethical teachings and call for contemplation over the world (*attadabbur*) are relegated to the realm of irrationalism, a process which leads to the erasure of the place of the abstract divine (*maḥw al-ghaybiyyah*). The heart, which affects a lot the human thinking and interaction with cosmic phenomenon through the intuition, is not given its place in the world of pure reason. Rationalism in this sense is limited to the positive and empirical phenomena. Reason becomes mechanical, analytical and responsive to what it sees and analyses. The world beyond it is nonexistent, until it is perceived by the mind.

For Abdurrahmane, this limits the vastness of horizons man's mind is entrusted with. As a replacement of this "abstract reason" that deals with analysing concrete phenomenon, and "the guided reason" that deals with doing things, Abdurrahmane

proposes the “supported reason,” which he also refers to as the “expanded reason” that has the capability of fathoming the internal identity of things and their significance. What Abdurrahmane means by the internal identity of phenomena or things is their ability to challenge the mind to build links between all the existing entities to make sense of them, instead of treating them as separate mechanical entities. What he drives to is a return to the “original unity” of worlds (the divine and the mundane, the religious and the political) and its implications for his ethical project. A brief reminder of his thought of humanization of the world explains his view of innovative rationalization. The original divine trust (*amāna*) man carries is ethical. On the first moment of creating man, religion was also created, as an accompanying guidance/ remembrance for him on earth. Since earth, and the world at large, is gifted to man for inheritance, it cannot be but one that is guided by *providence* (God’s blessings). Religion is this guiding and accompanying blessing. If Abdurrahmane’s logical sequences of original unities or bonds are simplified here, they could be worded to give this fundamental result: man is an ethical being.<sup>1319</sup> Man’s existence is ethical, and so is his reasoning. The ontological freedom of man makes him face the fundamental question of choice. Being created ethical, with a freedom to choose either to keep this ethical gift or not, the choice of man on earth becomes as follows: either remain ethical (=religious) and live it, or leave it.

What this means in concrete terms is that the work of man (i.e. action, or agency, or subjectivity, to use them interchangeably) is originally ethical, and thus religious, even when it comes from an actor who states he is not religious, or anti-religious. Innovative rationalization here trespasses the classical binary of religious and secular, or divine and mundane. This dichotomy is solved at the ontological level, at the source level. Bringing to discussion Abd Aljabbar Mu‘tazilite work can be interesting for a brief construction of intellectual continuity in the Islamic tradition. Abd Aljabbar’s objectivist ethical theory

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<sup>1319</sup> These unities or bonds are as follows: there is no man without religion; there is no religion without ethics; there is no man without ethics. He also says that human existence and religious existence are one, and that there is no ethics without reason. This makes human existence, religion, ethics, and reason inseparable units. This goes beyond the Platonist statement “man is a political animal.” For Abdurrahmane, the political itself is part of the ethical; so, for him, man is an ethical being, or an ethical animal. The ontological freedom of man makes him either live and keep this ethical aspect, or leave it. The question of man on earth for Abdurrahmane is to be ethical or not to be.

emphasizes that ethical values can be reached by reason; revelation does not create them but simply promulgates them. So, supposedly, there can be no contradiction between values of the good as reached by reason and as prescribed by revelation. If there is some contradiction, it is for man's reasoning to amend it. The Mu'tazila do not say that values are objectivist simply because reason defends them; they do not deny revelation; they make it stand equal to reason. Otherwise put, since reason arrives to the ethical without revelation; and since revelation comes just to promulgate this ethical, this means that reason, revelation, as well as ethics all stand equal at some point. This point cannot be historical, this worldly; it would not make any more sense to argue for rational ethics, and still believe in the divine if the meeting point of reason-revelation-and-ethics were on earth; that would be irrational. Revelation would make no sense. Rational ethics of the Mu'tazila make sense because reason-revelation-and-ethics stand equal at the ontological point, the point of creation, which happened "somewhere else" in a different world other than this human one. If the Mu'tazila kept their belief in the divine, despite their very rational advances, it is because they considered the denial of revelation as the denial of the sources of the rational ethics they argued for and defended.

The Mu'tazila have historically been linked with extreme rationalism that, for some, could end in the denial of the divine; their idea that through reason alone one can understand God and thus accept the idea of the divine and revelation was understood as a subordination of revelation to reason. My interpretation of the Mu'tazila's approach of harmonizing revelation and reason through ethics has been backed up by Abdurrahmane's innovative rationalization plan in which he conditions the existence of man with religion and ethics. The contention here is that the Mu'tazila's objectivist ethical theory presupposes that reason itself is ethical in its functioning; its creation is ethical, and so is its doing (action/ thinking). Reason is not neutral. It is either ethical (and thus religious), or it is not. It is free not to be ethical, but this freedom does not mean it is secular; in this framework of interpretation, the secular and divine dichotomy disappears; what replaces them is the nature of action, whether it is ethical or not.

In light of this meta-ethical interpretation, how can human concrete action be judged? If human reason is able to fathom the ethical, and reach the divine, does not this mean that it is this same reason that can establish value judgements? Cannot human reason then prescribe and prohibit codes of conduct, punish and reward accordingly, as does revelation in classical/ orthodox interpretations? Conservative interpretations fear giving reason supreme authority because that would impact the classical revelation prescriptions that were revealed at certain times and spaces of human history. Innovative rationalization which espouses itself to the divine, responsibly and inseparably, does not face this fear for the reason invoked in innovative humanization plan; i.e. man is the Caliph, and there is no further revelation to descend on man and guide him (seal of revelation). Thus, the “expanded reason” of Abdurrahmane, or the “ethical reason” –to call it so after having made it clear that reason and ethics are inseparable- has no other choice but to act ethically, if it aspires to keep its inheritance of its own world in good shape. To answer the action of reward and punishment, innovative rationalization invites “ethical reason” to learn from the past revealed prescriptions, fathom their morales, and envisage corresponding prescriptions and prohibitions in light of human historical evolution. Man is the one who can judge now what is good and what is bad – but always keeping in mind that reason and ethics are inseparable in this process.

The early reformists (*naḥḍa* reformists) generally remained entangled in the dichotomy of religion versus reason, though they kept calling for the revival of the place of reasoning faculty in dealing with the new socio-political challenges. Their attempts remained theoretical, and limited to the classical hermeneutical methodologies of integrating human opinion (*ra'y*) when divine texts are clear on certain matters, as is the case with Sharia law prescriptions, or when specific social matters have already been answered by classical scholars of jurisprudence. As seen earlier (Section 1c, Part IV), al-Afghani faced Ernest Renan to defend rationality in Islam. Abduh tried to reform the Azhar educational curricula in Cairo, and referred to the Mu‘tazila in the early version of his *risālat attawhīd* (*Message of Tawhid*), but had to drop that reference from the later versions, because of the possible critique he faced from the orthodox scholars of the university. His fatwa, for example, on allowing “interest benefit” (*ribā*) to face the new

economic challenges was not also welcomed. Rida, Abduh's student, was for putting the common good (*maṣlaḥa 'āmma*) above even the socio-political tradition of the Prophet. Only worship rituals remained untouchable for him. He tried to develop the idea of "eclectic theology" (*talfīq*) in a voluminous work as a reference. What is meant by this recapitulation of these early reformists attempts of reviving Islamic thought is that their approach of dealing with socio-political changes remained based on classical hermeneutics and Islamic sciences classifications, and also on the religious versus rational dichotomy that the modern context has entangled them in. It is the later generation of reformists that would try newer interpretations of how to reconcile reason with religion.

The late reformists (or the contemporaries) try to surmount the dichotomy of religion versus reason through their various interpretations of the sacred text and Prophetic experience. The reformists studied here (Section 1c, Part IV) all emphasize the pivotal role in understanding the message of religion, and in developing a more rational faith. Again, none of them denies the divine; and none of them makes reason the only ultimate source of knowledge and individual wellbeing. Reason leads human life as long as the management of the public affairs, and the world at large, are concerned. I use the previous classification of these reformists into three categories to refer to how they perceive the place of reason in "new" Islamic thought.

First, the "hermeneutists" (Rahman, Arkoun, Abu Zayd, and Hannafi) nowhere in their texts argue that human reason has to substitute the divine for cosmic, society, and individual wellbeing. Rahman, who may be considered the most ethicist of these hermeneutists, is critical of paganist use of reason<sup>1320</sup> which is purely materialist and this-worldly, and not transcendent. Though he attempted radical, seemingly secular, reforms in Pakistan with the government of his country in the 1960s through social reforms, he, however, remained cautious of making of reason the ultimate reality of human existence. In Rahman's project, reason works to activate the ethical message of Islam which is

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<sup>1320</sup> By "paganist use of reason" I echo his critique of radical secularism which he suspects of paganism; for him, it calls for separation between religion and politics, but it aims at bashing religion for life once and for all. That is why he calls it paganist (polytheist or atheist) in intent.

social justice. That is, it works on the behaviour of the person, in light of the ethics of the Quran and the Prophet, which Sharia law prescriptions alone do not summarize. Hannafi's "progressive hermeneutics" go in the very same line of Rahman, i.e. providing for the élan of social justice, and the hermeneutist has no "neutral" or "metaphysical" concerns to busy himself with other than this-worldly matters.

Arkoun and Abu Zayd, who are very close in their projects of literary-historicist deconstruction of the sacred text, also consider the role of reason in grasping the spiritual dimensions of revelation, and in interpreting the socio-political prescriptions in light of this dimension. They are very critical of the way metaphysical stories narrated in the sacred text are interpreted. That has led some to consider their reading a critique of the sacred itself, and Taha Abdurrahmane is one of them. Arkoun and Abu Zayd's work questions the sacredness of the written text (*Mushaf*); their approach tries to go to the first moments of revelation, the oral moment as descended on the Prophet, and as the latter interpreted it in the language his people understood. The desacralization of Arabic, as well as the *Mushaf*, means that the orthodoxy reasoning that has dominated Islamic thought for centuries is questioned.

Unlike the way Abdurrahmane reads them, I do not see that Arkoun and Abu Zayd target desacralizing the sacred, but they aim at rethinking Islamic reason that has been narrowed down to the limits the "Closed Official Corpus" –to use Arkoun's phrase– traced for it. It is outside this closed corpus that a new reason has to emerge (Arkoun's "emerging reason"). Arkoun, for instance, refers to the Mu'tazila who believed in the createdness of the Quran, and thus the multiplicity of readings it bears, outside its limited interpretations advocated by its non-createdness that Ash'ari and Hanbali orthodoxy advocate. Abou Zayd also believes in the createdness of the Quran, for that allows him as a hermeneutist to read it as a linguistic text, a mediation between God and man for the wellbeing of man on this world. Considering it otherwise makes of it an "imaginary" (*taṣawwūrī*) text, destined for a metaphysical world which only God Himself fathoms. So, what human reason touches in revelation is not divinity as conveyed to the Prophet in the oral version of the Quran, which is not doubted, but touches the orthodox codification

and compilation of the Quran in its written format, which has affected how Sharia laws as overall prescriptions of religion should be interpreted. While the orthodoxy depends on the classical work of early Muslims, these reformist scholars go to the original texts, and revise the place of human agency based on that first moment of revelation. The rationalization plan advocated here then does not question the divine; it questions the early interpretations that have been divinized by Muslim orthodox scholars. Based on this reading, the question of Sharia precise prescriptions on gender (in-)equality, inheritance, polygamy, and other social affairs have been revised by these scholars, as seen in the earlier section (Section 1c, Part IV)

Second, the “egalitarianists” (Mernissi, Wadud, and An’aim) also enter the debate of the place of reason in Islam by comparing the general message of Islam with its specificities that concern especially equality. The three of them mention the Mu‘tazilite idea of createdness of the Quran for its implications: possibility of human interpretation of the Quran’s non-eternal clear prescriptions. Their prime concern, however, is the current gap between the general message of Islam (social justice based on the equality of all), and its particular prescriptions (like Sharia laws on inheritance, the masculinist tone in the Quran, the penal code). Through their contextualist readings, they have realized that the classical interpretations have remained very particularist to the 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabia, and that the Islamic universalism has been narrowed down to that limited scope of interpretation. Their activation of human agency to seek justifications of equality from within the Quranic texts did not need their denial of the divine. What they consider to have done with it is that they have re-humanized a message that is destined for human beings, but which was divinized in time by the early interpreters of the tradition.

The “egalitarianists” do also assume the view of the createdness of the Quran in particular time, thus its openness to human reinterpretations and adjustments to new social conditions. Without such an assumption, human agency becomes sterile, and the universalism and equality of Islam as its general message –or the “second message” in the wording of Mahmoud Mohamed Taha - stands for becomes unrealistic and not this-worldly. Mernissi’s “pride” in the ontological equality prescribed by the Islamic

message, Wadud's "gender jihad," An'naim's non-divinity view of Sharia law and the concept of "civic reason" are some of the earlier notions used to defend reasoning in updating/ re-visiting the scriptures.

Third, the "rationalists" (Aljabri and Soroush) pursue the idea of the createdness of the Quran, and the ability of man to live the divine message rationally. Aljabri deconstructs knowledge based on the discipline of explication by analogy and rhetoric (*al bayān* epistemology), as well as the Eastern (illuminist/ mystic) system of knowledge (*al 'irfān* epistemology), and calls for the revival of demonstrative knowledge (*al burhān* epistemology) of Ibn Roshd/ Averroes, the 12<sup>th</sup> century Aristotelian philosopher. The "Averroest spirit" (*arrūḥ arrūshdiyya*) is the way to the future. (Averroes reconciled reason and revelation through coupling them as two different systems of searching for the same truth.) From this premise, Aljabri theorizes for democracy and universal human rights from within the tradition. Through the "objectives of Sharia," he revises the prescribed prohibitions, and expands the list of rights and duties of human beings as citizens in the modern world. He rationalizes the prescribed Sharia laws in their past context by especially invoking the "reasons of revelation" (*asbāb annuzūl*), since he does not consider that reason is a separate entity in man which aims at replacing God.

As to the place of reason in Soroush's project, it could be portrayed as the most neo-Mu'tazilite/ neo-rationalist among all the reformists cited here. He does not only consider the createdness of the Quran by the divine at a certain moment in history, but goes so far as to say that the written Quran as Muslims have it now is the word of the Prophet Muhammad. Revelation was the moment of descent of this now written text. This means that Muhammed intervened linguistically in the text to match his audience socio-political and intellectual capacities. Even with this very radical view of the Quran, Soroush, however, still preserves the sacred place of revelation as the oral process that the Prophet lived at a certain moment.<sup>1321</sup> That is, the written version of this revelation is translatable

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<sup>1321</sup> I actually wonder how Abdurrahmane fears that Arkoun, Abu Zayd, and Hanafi's hermeneutical readings of the sacred text could desacralize the sacredness of the Quran, and considers these scholars "mimetic modernists" while he considers scholars like Soroush as "innovative contemporaries" though Soroush's view of the Quran, in my view, is the most radical. For the latter, the Quran in its written format now is the word of Muhammad. And if one recalls the fact that the Prophet himself urged his companions

now to other languages and contexts. Human reason has not only the capacity but also the duty to translate the Prophetic exemplary era to the current and future eras as well, otherwise the idea behind revelation would remain imprisoned in that 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabian context. As detailed earlier (in Section 2d, Part IV), Soroush moves from this reading of the 1) Quran, and 2) the Prophetic experience to 3) argue that it is then human reason that should do the work after the “Seal of Revelation.” Human reason has to uncover the “essentials of religion” by peeling off the “accidentals” that cover it; among the accidentals is the Prophetic experience itself, and all the work and accumulated interpretations added by the Caliphs, and jurists after him. When the mind goes through this process of deconstruction, it realizes that religion as a social phenomenon is not “maximalist” but “minimalist” in what it provides; i.e. the believer should not expect to find all answers in the sacred texts, because these are covered by accidentals that are contextual; human reason, to reach the essentials, has to “reflect.”

“Reflective believers” (vs. “emulative believers”) can realize that religious fiqh/ law, for example, cannot be both this-worldly and other-worldly. It is just this-worldly; this implies that even religious morality does not make sense, because it cannot be metaphysical and worldly at the same time. What the “reflective believer” arrives at is that there are few “master values” (like God, Life, Humanity), which may be said to correspond to the essentials of religion, and many “servant values” (like equality, justice, solidarity, etc.), which may be said to correspond to the “servant values.”<sup>1322</sup> The idea here is that human reason lives the experience of servant values on a daily basis, and thus contributes to shaping them, constructing them, and changing them when need be. These values are servant to man in life; there is nothing intrinsic about them; their consequences and benefits to man are the measurement of their value. This makes human reason the most responsible for the choices it makes about them. Morality, accordingly, is “active morality,” lived morality, and not “higher morality” that orthodox interpretations of religion prescribe for believers.

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to differentiate between his words (Sunna) and those of God (revelation), then one would think that possibly Soroush’s view is the one that could lead to desacralizing the Quran, though he in no way intends his interpretation to be interpreted as a pejorative desacralization attempt.

<sup>1322</sup> This correspondence is my own interpretation, based on the followed framework of analysis.

Such a radical rationalization of religion and ethics could have been theorized without any link to the divine. But Soroush still believes that religion gives meaning to the values humans realize, live and construct, and mostly to the “master values.” Though human agency is very remarkable when it comes to servant values, the latter remain meaningless if the master values, few as they are, are not reflected upon. These make of many a rational man a believer. The divine, consequently, is not revolted against, even when reason controls worldly matters. There is a bond of gratitude between the two, summarized in “spirituality and guidance” bequeathed on humanity by the divine – to use Soroush’s words – and the highest manifestation of this bond is sincerity and morality in action – to echo Abdurrahmane.

### **Continuity in Islamic Thought: the Epistemological and Ontological Bond**

Having introduced Abdurrahmane’s three plans for a more innovative reform of approaching the Quran, along with the link I have built between his plans and the Islamic three generations of scholarship (1) the Mu‘tazila, 2) the early reformists, and 3) late reformists), I now stop to make a critical recapitulative note on the question of ethics, revelation and reason in light of what has been said above. I do so before I proceed to read European Islam in light of Abdurrahmane’s three plans and how I interpret them. The note I invoke here before I proceed is around this question: how can Muslim reformists call for the rationalization of ethics, and faith, without causing “some damage” to belief in the divine? Otherwise said, is “rational faith” –which I believe to be the meeting point of all these reformists - possible? In both the main introduction to this work as well as the introduction to Part IV I stated that what is new in European Islam – following the three generations of Islamic scholarship - is the move towards the rationalization of ethics. I also mentioned George Hourani’s classifications of Islamic classical scholarship and their views on reason and revelation. I do not aim at confusing, or converging, Abdurrahmane’s framework used above, with Hourani’s. That is why I stop at the latter’s classification, and use his work as a passage to the former’s. As I noted earlier when referring to his classification, it is the place of both reason and ethics in

Islamic thought that makes his classifications worth-noting here. My notes on kalam (Section 1a, Part IV) was considered and started with for this reason, too.

The fact that kalam made the relation of reason and revelation, and thus the sources of ethics, its primal focus in the early Islamic era is now being repeated at the age of Islamic search for theologico-philosophic renewal. It is for this reason that I started this work with the assumption that there could be no renewal in Islamic thought if the issue of ethics is not made at the center of the debate, which can impact other fields, socio-political, economic, etc. This assumption is endorsed by most of the reformists referred to in this study.<sup>1323</sup> Because of the diverse contributions of various Islamic schools to the debate, Hourani summarized the debate into two questions: one (1) ontological and the other (2) epistemological. Out of these two questions he deduced five tendencies or directions in classical Islamic thought. Below I refer to them in a succinct fashion, as a way of paving the way for my reading of the studied reformists, and European Islam afterwards.

The ontological question is formulated as follows: What is the nature of ethical value concepts such as the good and the just? Hourani provides two main answers or perspectives to the nature of the ethical value/ right from the Islamic tradition: A) objective (objectivism) or B) subjective (subjectivism). The nature of values, or a right, is (A) objective when “there are real qualities or relations of acts that make them right [...] independently of the opinions of the person who judges them right or wrong.”<sup>1324</sup> This means that values do not hold an intrinsic value in themselves; rather, they acquire such a value through the benefits they beget. This view was held by Muslim early philosophers (like al-Farabi and Ibn Sina) and by the Mu‘tazila (as seen in Section 1a-b, Part IV). The nature of values, or right, is (B) subjective when it has no objective meaning; i.e. “it

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<sup>1323</sup> For more on the place of kalam in Islamic thought, see Section 1a-b, Part IV.

<sup>1324</sup> Hourani, *Islamic Ethics*, 23-48; 270-276. For more, see Hourani, chapters 3 and 16. In chapter 3, he works on the ontological and epistemological classification; in chapter 16 he works on the rational classification of renowned schools and philosophers of Islam. I note here that in chapter 3, he puts the Mu‘tazila in “partial rationalism” class, while in chapter 16 he put them in the class of “independent reason supplemented by revelation.” In light of his overall work, the Mu‘tazila are rationalist, and when he put them under the “partial rationalists” label, he wants to make it clear at that stage that he distinguishes them from the Western view of rationalism, which makes no reference to the divine, whereas the Mu‘tazilaview does.

means whatever is approved or commanded by someone or other.”<sup>1325</sup> The first type of this subjectivist view is (Ba) termed “human social subjectivism”; i.e. it is the community of the believers, the *umma*, which emphasizes certain values, that may be a mixture of religious and customary laws, and elevates them to the status of authority for the community. This goes with the idea that whatever is good for the community is good for God. The second type of this subjectivism is (Bb) “theistic or divine subjectivism” by which is meant that “ethical value concepts must be understood in terms of God’s will.”<sup>1326</sup> This view has become the dominant one among Sunni jurists and theologians.

As to the epistemological question, it reads as follows: How can man know the presence and force of ethical value concepts in particular situations? According to Hourani’s synthetical classification, classical Islamic thought provides two answers: one is C) rational (rationalism) and the other is D) traditional (traditionalism). The rational tendency (C) defends the idea that “what is right can be known by independent reason.”<sup>1327</sup> This tendency is twofold: (Ca) one is “completely rational” and contends that what is right can be “always” known by independent reason, as most Islamic philosophers like Al Farabi and late Mu‘tazila argued, and the other (Cb) is “partially rational” and contends that what is right can be reached by reason alone (late Mu‘tazila are also categorized here), or by sources derived from revelation like consensus and reasoning by analogy (as defended by Hanafites and Malikites), or by both (as defended by the Malikite Averroes). This contention is reconciliatory, and sees no contradiction between reason and revelation. As to the traditional tendency (D), it contends that an ethical value, or what is right, can be known only by revelation; reason can be used only to prove this contention, through conclusions reached by consensus and analogy

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<sup>1325</sup> Hourani, *Islamic Ethics*, 23

<sup>1326</sup> *Ibid.*, 24

<sup>1327</sup> *Ibid.*, 24. By “reason,” to re-articulate it here, is meant its general sense which covers thinking that is naturalist, empiricist, or intuitive at times. Hourani says that Quran calls for the use of “reason” but does not specify which kind of reason exactly. So, he takes it to mean a judgement that is arrived at by experience or experiment, without necessary recourse to the scriptures.

methodologies; it becomes a dependent reason. Ibn Hanbal, the Zahirites, Ibn Hazm, Ibn Taymiya, and the Wahhabies belong to this (epistemologically) traditional class.<sup>1328</sup>

After this classificatory view of classical Islamic thought, Hourani ends his book with a passage in which he says that if Islamic thought seeks revival, it has to build on the rationalist heritage of the Mu‘tazila.<sup>1329</sup> (His work, it has to be remembered, makes no reference to the reformists.) His conclusion about the Mu‘tazila is based also on his own reading of the Quran, besides the intellectual tradition of early Muslim scholars. He thinks that the Mu‘tazila seem the closest to the way the Quran speaks of values and reason. Ontologically, he argues that “the Quran frequently refers to objective values, which cannot be analysed completely in terms of commands and obedience. This conclusion coincides with that of the classical Mu‘tazilites.”<sup>1330</sup> That is, values in the Quran are emphasized through the frequent invitations to contemplation, reasoning, empiricism, and experiences, historical be they, scientific, or prophetic. These values, as he reads the Quran, are not linked just with “commands and obedience” as some Quranic verses specify. The call for reasoning is more emphasised than particular prescriptions, which means that values though emphasized throughout the Quran, they are also left often unspecified for human reason to explore. This rationalist perspective on the ontological level is demurred at the epistemological level, where “all knowledge” –in its abstract and general form- is still considered divine, “Here the emphasis is on man’s need for divine guidance in ethical matters.”<sup>1331</sup> Human ability to rationally reach the value of values is espoused to divine guidance in conceiving and construing knowledge.

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<sup>1328</sup> Ibid., 24-25. In chapter 16, he labels one class as “revelation as supported by imams”; here he includes the Shi‘a who believe in the infallibility of the imam. They can be categorized in the “traditional” tendency which makes revelation (or sent imam in this case of the Shi‘a) as the source of ethical values. Chapter 16, 270-276

<sup>1329</sup> This passage was already quoted in Section 1, Part IV, when making my notes on kalam and ethics. I make this extract from it here again:

If I had a choice of what intellectual path Muslims should follow – a choice which I do not have, looking at Islam from outside – I would start over again at the points where the early jurists and the Mu‘tazilites left off, and work to develop a system of Islamic law which would openly make use of judgments of equity and public interest, and a system of ethical theology which would encourage judgments of right and wrong by the human mind, without having to look to scripture at every step (Hourani, *Islamic Ethics*, 276).

<sup>1330</sup> Ibid., 37

<sup>1331</sup> Ibid., 37

In summarizing terms based on the above abbreviated classifications, the view that Hourani hopes Islamic thought to build on is 1A2D, or simply AD: ontological objectivism, and traditional epistemology. The two levels (ontology and epistemology) are not severed, as the Mu‘tazila already tried. Human reason, however able it is to conceive and construct values, remains attached to the divine, the source of “all knowledge,” for “guidance in ethical matters” in Hourani’s words. Now, in my reading, what this further means is that knowledge as produced by man is in essence ethical, and that reason however objectivist it may be at the ontological level, it is also in essence ethical. I explained earlier, through Abdurrahmane’s project of ethical reason, how the objectivism of Mu‘tazila reason remains divine, despite the common interpretation that tries to look simply at their ontological interpretation of the nature of ethical values, without considering their epistemological view which remains traditional, i.e. linked with the divine. Otherwise, why did their rationalism not lead them to deny God once and for all? Examining just one side of their work to prove that they were “secularists” - i.e. dichotomous in their vision of the world as made of two, the divine and the sacred - fails to perceive their holistic view. That is what I have reached in my reading of the scholarly traditions dealt with until now. This is where lies, briefly now, the difference between “Islamic” and European rationalism. European rationalism is based on a separation between epistemology and ontology. The past, or the tradition in the sense of the divine or ontology, is denied. European reason expects no guidance from any other authority. That is what I reach in my study of the reformists, a conclusion which I will afterwards show to be also fostered by European Islam reformists.

The Mu‘tazila, the early and the late reformists, as seen in earlier sections and paragraphs, all emphasize the place of human reason in interacting with revelation. Still, they all keep reference to the divine. This is what I call later on the “rationalization of ethics” for “rational faith.” This is the “revisionist-reformist” argument I present for the question of this section (what is new in European Islam?). That is also the rationale behind describing the *comparative stage* as theological in its justification of reforming Islamic thought; that is, reform is envisaged within the ontological-epistemological bond,

and not without it. With these references and inferences my dealing with European Islam in the next section of this work should be clear enough.

## **b. Conceptualizing the Idea of European Islam**

### **European Islam Projects: Recapitulation**

A recapitulation of some of the main work done until this stage seems a requisite for an understanding of this *evaluative stage*, in light of John Rawls’s idea of overlapping consensus. As seen earlier, Part I, II, and III of this work are devoted to a detailed description (*descriptive stage*) of the four versions of European Islam according to my structure and aims outlined in the Introduction, i.e. following the “textual analysis method.” Each Part depicts a particular view of European Islam as developed by Bassam Tibi, Tariq Ramadan, Tareq Oubrou, and Abdennour Bidar, respectively. The *descriptive stage* provides the answer to this sub-question: what is European Islam? The version of European Islam of each scholar is studied, with reference to the socio-political context from which he emerges.<sup>1332</sup> The *comparative stage* (Part IV, Section 1) revolves around this question: what is new in European Islam? It constructs three generations of Islamic thought (the Mu‘tazila, the early, and late reformists) as predecessors of the emerging European Islamic thought. It argues that there is continuity in Islamic thought, since it theologically preserves ties with the divine though it gives human reason the authority to manage worldly affairs. This continuity traced, it is now time to see its manifestations in European Islamic texts. Below I first recapitulate the main reform agendas of the studied scholars, before I subsequently examine their implications using Abdurrahmane’s framework “humanization-historicization-and-rationalization” – a framework that tentatively matches the comprehensiveness of religion which I conceive in “world-society-individual” framework. As will be clarified, this framework results in the following argument: European Islam is “revisionist-reformist” in its overall reformist tendency.

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<sup>1332</sup> I do not aim to go into those details again in this section. Either check the part devoted to each scholar, or read the main introduction of this work for a clearer view on the spacial and temporal circumstances that are behind the development of various discourses on European Islam.

Tibi builds his version of Euro-Islam from a securitization (political) perspective. He securitizes the issue of reforming Islam. He considers most of the reformist projects as inadequate, or not reformist enough, if they do not endorse fully what could be termed Euro-modernity model, or what he refers to as “cultural modernity” – i.e. modernity à l’Européene. Tibi’s Euro-Islam could be read as based on three levels of readings. First, Islam is not Islamism. Islam is peaceful, and personal; Islamism is violent and hegemonic. The socio-political and cultural realities of the Muslim majority countries are scrutinized, based on European modern sociology and political philosophy. Despite the analytical tools he uses, he does not claim that it is the Quran/ scriptures themselves that are generally the problem behind stagnation. The predicament of Islamic majority countries stems from the inability of Arab-Islamic reason to live up to the ideals of religion itself, ideals he summarizes in peace and spiritual nourishment for the individual. He argues that so much of tribalism and patriarchy have influenced the *status quo* of Muslim majority societies.

Second, secular Islam is the key for reform. The resurgence of religion and violent fundamentalism are symptoms of the failure of political Islam, or Islamism, to re-emerge intellectually. The inability to perceive a “civil Islam” that can cope with global changes leads to a defensive reaction that takes the past Muslim political community as the model for Islamic states where religion and politics are fused. The revival of religious concepts like Sharia law, *umma*, and *jihad* manifest an inability to develop a modern political philosophy that takes current challenges into account. Islamism, for Tibi, is a threat to Muslim majority countries, to the neighbouring Europe, and to world peace. It has to be fought.

Third, “cultural modernity”<sup>1333</sup> is the way towards religious reform and cultural change. Euro-Islam is the version of this reform in Europe. Three pillars form “cultural modernity” that “Euro-Islam” has to embrace: 1) the secularization (vs. de-secularization) of politics, 2) the endorsement of individual human rights to develop pluralism (vs. supremacism claimed by the religious dogma), and 3) the revival of the classical heritage

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<sup>1333</sup> Tibi’s “cultural modernity” is what I refer to as “Euro-modernity.”

of *falsafa* (philosophy) and rationalism (vs. orthodoxy), as was exercised by the rationalist school of the Mu‘tazila, and other philosophers like Averroes. For Tibi, Islam, when it embraces these values which he considers European in origin, can be “open,” “civil,” “secular,” “liberal,” and “pluralist.” This is in brief the framework of Tibi’s reformed of Islam, and “Euro-Islam.”

Unlike some scholars who suspect Tibi of Orientalism, I do not do so.<sup>1334</sup> Tibi’s reform agenda that ends in Euro-modernity, and Euro-Islam, originates from his concern as a Muslim with the future of reform. He does not want to see any further reform failures, especially with the rise of violent religious fundamentalism in some parts of the world, which seems to have influenced his approach to the extent of not listening to recognized reformers from within the Muslim majority societies and Muslim communities in Europe. His rejection of the work of reformists like Arkoun, Abu Zayd, Hannafī, the early work of An’naim, as well as the work of Ramadan on European Islam, makes him rejectionist of interesting projects that revisit the main Islamic sources (Quran, Sunna, and classical scholarship) from within the tradition. His praise of Aljabri’s work, on the other hand, does not find theoretical echoes in his own approach, knowing that Aljabri’s project is fundamentally an examination of the classical Islamic thought within the Arabian mindset and culture. Such a critique makes the reader of Tibi welcoming of his ideas, but not so of his methodology and references that are Euro-centered – not to say Euro-centrist. More particularly, Tibi remains entrenched in the private vs. public European, especially French, dichotomous relation between the state and the Church/ religion. He does not try some other pathway that overcomes this classical dichotomy. What he brings to Islamic thought is more politically oriented, and leaves the theological unfathomed. Henceforth, he does not solve the real predicament of Islamic thought in the modern age, and as lived (i.e. as manifested in Euro-Islam) in liberal societies. His idea of secularizing Islam through private vs. public classical solution faces a major problem when the idea of rationalism, as he advocates, is thought of more deeply. The Muslim European citizen, for instance, has to live the private vs.

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<sup>1334</sup> See, for instance, As‘ad Abu Khalil, “Review of Tibi’s *The Challenge of Fundamentalism* (1998),” *The International History Review*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Sept. 1999), 841-843.

public dichotomous way of life; that is, the secular remains superior, since it dominates all public life, while the private remains personal, and has to be kept as invisible as possible. If Tibi's "secular Islam" adapts to secular Europe, it does so from an adaptive, defensive, and classical perspective: faith is not part of the plural life he advocates, since it has to be kept private.

Tibi's "liberal Islam" is also "classical," or Euro-modernist, because it presupposes that modern values are European, and what religion (Islam) has to do is to abide by these values which are taken to be superior. Tibi's project replaces religious dogma and superiority with Euro-modernity superiority complex. It is again the same Eurocentrist view of the modern and the traditional that remains behind the scene of such a reform. It is not grounded on theological re-reading of the sources. It is adaptive, to differentiate it from the reformists. This gap in Tibi's approach is more delved into by the other scholars (Ramadan and Oubrou), and especially Bidar who re-reads modernity as a sacred moment. As I will state in due time, Bidar's project could be read as a philosophical-theological continuity of the political adjustments of Tibi's work.<sup>1335</sup> According to the various projects referred to, with reference to the evaluative methodology introduced in this work, Tibi's project appears to be the least reformist.

Ramadan's reform agenda and version of European Islam could be read as an attempt that covers the theological missing part in the work of Tibi.<sup>1336</sup> I distinguish two stages in Ramadan's work, which can be termed "early Ramadan" and "late Ramadan." Three levels of work characterize "early Ramadan." First, he integrates the beautiful in the tradition. He re-reads, for example, the Prophetic experience from an ethical perspective, and situates his views on the controversial issues that Islam in Europe especially raises (issues of loyalty, jihad, polygamy, and gender equality for instance). Second, he situates himself in the line of the early reformists like al-Afghani, Abduh,

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<sup>1335</sup> Maybe, if Tibi's Euro-Islam were profoundly reformist, Bidar, would not have needed to conceive a more reformist approach that goes beyond the secular versus religious, private versus public, or what I refer to as "classical dichotomous mode of thinking."

<sup>1336</sup> The chronological appearance of their discourses has to be born in mind. Tibi coined the term Euro-Islam in 1992, and Ramadan's work that uses the term of European Islam came out in 1999, though he already entered the debate and wrote on Islam and *laïcité* in 1994. Tibi suspects the project of Ramadan which he considers "fundamentalist" in tendency. Such details can be found in Part I and II.

Rida, and his grandfather al-Banna. His call for renewal in juridical theories remains advocated from within the classical hermeneutical sciences, though he tries to be eclectic in his approach and takes from various juridical schools. Third, at this level, Ramadan is very much entrenched in the classical dichotomy of Islam vs. the West, and his early books testify to that. For example, in his earlier texts he speaks of “Islamic modernity” as a replacement of the irreligious and unethical Western modernity; his critique of some aspects of Western modernity (like unlimited liberty, materialism and consumerism) earns him many non-sympathizers and contributes to constructing the image of “double speak”<sup>1337</sup> around him. It is mainly from his *Radical Reform* that another Ramadan, or “late Ramadan,” develops. As he notes in the same book, and earlier in introducing *Western Muslims*, Ramadan moves from calling for a “small intellectual revolution” into calling for a “true intellectual revolution,” à la Kant’s “Copernican Revolution.” Ramadan moves from “adaptation reform” to “radical reform,” or “transformation reform,” to use his terms.

Ramadan’s radical reform is based on three main concepts the scope of which intertwines. One, “Sharia” is redefined as “the way.”<sup>1338</sup> Far away from the conservatives and radical secularists’ reduction of Sharia to legal matters, and the penal code, as the media also does, Ramadan makes of Sharia a philosophical concept that means a way of life, or a worldview, irreducible to particular law prescriptions or isolated norms. Sharia becomes the way of a universal Islam that protects three major rights in Ramadan’s classification: Life, Nature, and Peace. They make the first three guiding objectives of Sharia for Ramadan.

Two, the abode of Testimony (*dar ash-Shahada*) becomes the living experience of Sharia in the sense that it knows no private versus public distinction, nor does it know the geographical classifications of the Abode of War (*dār al ḥarb*) and Abode of Peace (*dar al-islam/ assilm*). Neither time nor space can interrupt the validity of this concept

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<sup>1337</sup> The term is the title of a book on Ramadan, written by the French journalist Caroline Fourest. See more on Ramadan’s controversy in Part II.

<sup>1338</sup> This definition is classic, known more among the Sufists. What renders it new is the context, and the other concepts that go with it. See Section 2a, Part III.

because it becomes the living proof of belief, the basis of which is the first pillar of Islam, Tawhid (Oneness). Shahada/ Testimony concept empties some other concepts like that of the *umma*, *jihad*, and *da'wa* (proselitization) from their interpretations that are invoked by some fundamentalists, especially in Europe. The Umma is not a geographic entity, but a spiritual community; the jihad is spiritual, and against oppression of the oppressed and injustice done to the world and nature; and proselitization is not in inviting people to what one believes in, but in simply living truly what one preaches.

Three, I condense the other various views of Ramadan on reason, environment, economics, etc., in the concept of “ethics,” or the “ethical.” At the heart of this concept is his consideration of the Universe as a Second Book of Revelation, besides the First Book which is the Revealed Quran. Such a consideration could be read as the most radical in Ramadan’s view – his “Copernican Revolution” - because of the following main reason: reading the universe as a Second Book of revelation means that the universe is sacralised and human agency is not given a second place, after revelation prescriptions like those of the Sharia law, but is made equal to the First Book, which he considers a book of guidance.<sup>1339</sup> The management of the Universe is in man’s hands, and the only “thing” that links it with the First Book is guidance, spirituality, summarized in ethical responsibility. Human reason that governs the Book of the Universe keeps its ethical guidance provided in the Word of God (Second Book).<sup>1340</sup> This is the major sign of “continuity” and “attachment” to the metaphysical in Ramadan’s reform project. The ethical here is lived as a “testimony” (Shahada) that follows “the way” (Sharia). The laws that govern man in the universe are no longer made ready somewhere else, but are

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<sup>1339</sup> Despite such a move in Ramadan’s thought, his view that the Quran should not be read as a human text because it is the eternal Word of God may contradict his consideration of the Universe as a Second Book of Revelation. How can Ramadan explain his view of a God who reveals an eternal Word/ Book that is complementary of a changing Universe ruled by human beings “equally,” since the prescribed laws in the First Book may no longer be valid in front of the changing laws of man in the Second Book? Ramadan could find it difficult if he thinks of going into theological debates about the attributes of God. That is one of the challenges he should consider if he aims at developing his project further; otherwise, his readers will have to take charge of that in light of his various notes here and there, which are generally not deep enough on that level. I bracket this note for now, and consider that such a point is not raised in my main text above.

<sup>1340</sup> As I will clarify later, Ramadan is close to Abdurrahmane’s view of making ethics and reason inseparable; the only difference is that he still considers them in Two Books, while Abdurrahmane considers them in one.

developed in this same universe. That is, knowledge, however produced by man, remains spotted with divinity through the concept of Shahada that follows the Sharia. Since the Two Books are complementary, and considered on an equal status, that means that their laws that govern human societies should not be contradictory; rather, they should be complementary, if not the same. Tareq Oubrou moves to this direction of fusing laws, and thus erasing the idea of “secular” versus “divine” laws.

Oubrou aims at secularizing Islam through theological foundations (“theological secularization”), an approach Tibi calls for but does not theorize from within the tradition. Oubrou considers three Books: Revelation, the Universe, and Man. This denotes that God, the omnipresent Creator, is disconnected from one single reading of the Quran. If revelation is the mediation between God and man, man is also a mediation between God and revelation itself. So, there is a world of mediation that has to be taken into account when interpreting God and revelation. Such mediation happens in the universe, in context, in which the leading agent is man. Based on this division, Oubrou’s argumentation could be condensed into three levels.

One, Oubrou believes that the diversity of the world necessitates the development of “geothology,” a theology that takes its spacial (geographical) and temporal conditions into account. The national, regional, and global levels are what he considers for a successful development of the concept of geothology. In the case of Islam, the notion of the political umma is accordingly invalidated. Each national political entity can develop its version of living and practicing Islam (French Islam for example); the same applies regionally (European Islam), for the proximity between these geographies that share particular history and cultural habits. This way, what remains of Islam at the global level is its broad lines of ethics and spirituality. Oubrou is aware of the fact that geothology ends in minoritizing Islam, for it is only in this way that Islam can be universal. A “double reflection” between the guiding text and the lived context becomes a constant necessity, to keep the approach of geothology perpetually updated.

Two, the minoritization of Islam is developed through his concept of “Sharia of the minority.” The latter relativizes Sharia to cater for the needs of its believers. He develops levels of readings of fatwa classical juridical tool (positive and negative fatwa) so as to make religion merciful and beautiful (*douce*) to its adherents, and an added value to their life, and not a burden, a practice he says the Prophet teaches (the joy of faith, *ḥalāwat al īmān*). Such an approach “contracts” the Sharia, and “relativizes” it, unlike the classical view that makes of Sharia jurisprudence maximalist in its catering for the expectations of believers.<sup>1341</sup> The relativization of Sharia goes then through the three levels of geotheology, and ends in “ethicizing” it. The improvement of one’s behaviour as well as one’s sense of being is the essence of Sharia, and its legal aspect is but a means to that good.

Three, because he aims at relativizing Sharia through ethicizing it, Oubrou does not want to see that in the modern liberal societies of Europe –France in his case- the believer is divided between two laws, one secular and one religious. Such a situation is burdensome for the believer. The way out is to fuse the two laws, by incorporating French law –for example- into the “metabolism and the economy of the Sharia” (his terms). This is what he aspires to see in the future, a “theological secularization of Islam” that allows Muslims to feel both religious and still contributors to the secular and modern European world they reside in.

Until now, Tibi is found to be an advocate of direct secularization by the adoption of laïcist dichotomy (private vs. public). Ramadan softens this classical dichotomy by presenting the universe as a Second Revealed Book in which man’s vicegerency and rational advancement is complementary to the guiding ethical principles generally conveyed in the Revealed Book, the Quran. This paves the way to considering human (secular) laws part of the divine will. Oubrou works at this level of convergence and aims at fusing the two laws in an attempt to go beyond approaches that still divide the world

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<sup>1341</sup> Oubrou says that he developed in his approach from the 1980s, by reading, among others, the work of Soroush. That is why I could see that his view of “contraction” and “relativization of Sharia” is close to that of Soroush. See Section 1, Part III, on Oubrou, and Section 1d, Part IV, on Soroush.

into two, like Ramadan's. Abdennour Bidar tries another more innovative path in European Islamic thought.

Bidar, the youngest of the three previous scholars, comes to break away from what I referred to earlier as the "classical dichotomy of thinking" by sacralizing modernity, beyond the consideration of Two or Three Books (as Ramadan and Oubrou attempt). This view is the most innovative of the three previous ones. Bidar does not only challenge Islamic thought to go beyond the "box of thinking" it has been entangled in at least for the last two centuries when it first came in contact with the modern Europe, and the West in general, but also challenges European secular and atheist thought to go beyond living a constant binary opposition in faith and politics. Bidar sees modernity as the age of maturity of man: modernity values have sensitized man to his capabilities, and religious values are the guardian of these values, guardian (not in the sense of being paternalist) since modernity in its Western version has failed to capture the infinite energy man is endowed with. Considering modernity values sacred values dismisses the "classical dichotomy of thinking" for being minor and finite: being either religious or secular, divine or mundane, Eastern or Western, does not give a complete version of the capabilities of man. The convergence of the divine and the secular give birth to "rational spirituality" and "ethical responsibility" harmoniously. This makes his "theosophic approach," or "rational theology" approach. Bidar reaches this argument through three stages of intellectual development.

First, the concept of Self Islam is formulated, following a personal experience of faith in a secular context. Having grown up in a secular context with a "traditional" understanding and practice of Islam common among practicing believers, Bidar realizes that a believer living in a modern society lives internally a difficult life that sees the world as replete with dichotomies and binary oppositions. Henceforth, the concept of Self Islam comes to converge these dichotomies by sacralising modernity, i.e. by seeing it as an "unprecedented event of the sacred" willed by God Himself. He fuses the Islamic pillar of Tawhid (Tawhid) and Testimony (Shahada), the mystic tradition of the Sufies, and modernity three values (liberty, equality, and fraternity).

Second, at this stage, Bidar is still preoccupied with the Islamic issue of how to read the sacred text in light of modernity values. Here, he speaks of five matrixes: God, Creation, Prophethood, Quran, and the *umma* (*umma* in the sense of “all nations”). The link between these matrixes is eternal, and that is how Bidar preserves the ontological ties between the first matrix and the fifth one. To summarize them here, the creation of man from the soul of God and his stay in Heaven till his creation is perfected, and then descended on earth after having been taught “all names/ knowledge,” makes man the chosen caliph of God, His heir. The “all names” taught to him in Heaven followed him as a reminder on earth through Prophethood and guiding books like the Quran. Creation, the universe, is created to facilitate this descent and reign of man. Peoples are created equal, with the same divine spirit and same trust of inhabiting the world, and managing it in light of the “eternal gratitude” taught through “spiritual pedagogy” of revealed books. What this denotes is that the distinction between the metaphysical and physical/ historical world disappears. Man does not need to live two worlds as if they were discontinuous. The physical life of man does not differ from its metaphysical one; whatever one does in this world will be continued in the other world. If one wants to do justice to the divine which is part of him, it should be done here. There is infinity imbued in the soul of man, received from the divine on its creation, and this infinity has to be lived, with no breaks and separation between this world and other world. The divine attributes are man’s too. That is the ground for “Islamic existentialism” that does not limit itself to the physical world, but lives it as if it continued later on in a different stage. Accordingly, the “inheritance of the world” presupposes the “immortality of man.”

Third, this stage of Bidar’s work tries to open new paths of thinking not only for Islamic thought but for Western thought as well. Without the first two stages, Bidar would not have come to argue about the need for “overcoming religion and atheism” altogether. He recognizes the pivotal role religion has played in human history and building of past civilizations, despite the dark side of this link. By overcoming religion he does not deny it. Rather, he means “modernizing it,” without remaining also trapped in the limitations of radically secular, or/and atheist, modernity. This stage of “overcoming”

attempts not only a reconciliatory worldview where tolerant religion and soft secularism cohabit but aspires to merge them into one worldview.

According to Bidar, the idea is to merge together the religious and the secular, the divine and the mundane, since they are both parts of the whole.<sup>1342</sup> Neither classical Islamic thought that negates modernity nor modernity which negates the divine is the way for the future civilization of man. The “new Adam” has to live again the bond between the divine which is a “spiritual pedagogy” that teaches “rational spirituality,” and the secular world which is the “inherited” space that is mercifully and gracefully given to man for his wellbeing and self realization. Such a view would have immense socio-political implications on the modern pluralist world: only the ethical that preserves the good deserves human moral attention; the classical distinction between the secular and the divine becomes redundant, and so become their respective laws. The divine does not need to be protected as a separate world; rather, it is the world as inhabited by man that deserves this protection. Only highly committed agency, like that of the divine that acts only mercifully and justly, becomes the basis of measurement of human action.

### **Conceptualizing the Idea of European Islam Using Abdurrahmane’s Framework**

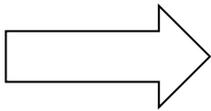
As a reminder, the concern at this stage of my work is theoretical-theological, that is why reference to case studies or particular issues is considered secondary for now. It is renewing the conception of religion as a comprehensive doctrine that is in focus. These theoretical advances could be confidently considered new directions and manifestations of kalam (Islamic theology) because the place and intentions of God, Prophethood, revealed Book, the metaphysical world, and the place of reason are all reconsidered in the studied contemporary Islamic thought and European Islam in particular.

I use Taha Abdurrahmane’s three innovative plans (humanization, historicization, and rationalization) because I see them analytically inclusive of various reform projects

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<sup>1342</sup> As I have noted in the section devoted to presenting Bidar (Part II, Section 2), there are strong echoes of Mohammed Iqbal in his work. The idea of one indivisible world is Iqbal’s, too, but the latter did not present an approach of reading the divine and modernity as does Bidar; he simply presented a critique and proposed pathways.

of Islamic thought. It is not directed for or against just one or some of them, but is generic in the sense that it considers the comprehensiveness of religion and thus can grasp the potential or weakness of any reform project. I make clearer my use of these “three plans” by matching them with the triadic framework that depicts the comprehensiveness of religion: world-society-individual. Abdurrahmane’s framework then helps a lot in detecting the aspects of theological reform in European Islamic thought. Having made this note, I now read European Islam projects accordingly. I end my analysis of each “plan” with broad ethical implications that lead to the conceptualization of the idea of European Islam.<sup>1343</sup> I use a table to illustrate the framework I follow, the major concepts used by the studied scholars, and the main concepts I generate following the established framework.

<b>Framework Concepts for a Comprehensive Religion</b> <b>Analytical Framework</b>	<b>Mimetic Plans for Renewing Islamic Thought</b>	<b>Innovative Plans for Renewing Islamic Thought</b>	<b>Consequences of the Innovative Plans for European Islam</b>	<b>Consequences through The Following Principles (Values)</b>	<b>For the Following Aims:</b>
<b>World</b>	Humanization	Innovative Humanization	Inheritance of the Universe	Principle of Fraternity	Cosmic wellbeing
<b>Society</b>	Historicization	Innovative Historicization	Practical Fiqh/ Fiqhology	Principle of Equality	Social wellbeing
<b>Individual</b>	Rationalization	Innovative Rationalization	Ethical Reason/ Rational Faith	Principle of Liberty	Individual wellbeing
	Discontinuous Modernity - Severing Ties with the Divine	Perpetual Modernity - Preserving Ties with the Divine	Ontological- Epistemological Bond	Values in the Service of Public Good First	Overcoming Dichotomous Thought

**Table 1: European Islam: Analytical Framework and Main Developed Concepts**

<sup>1343</sup> I use these implications in consolidating my concept of “perpetual modernity” that I see European Islam to be contributing to, along with other contemporary Islamic reformist projects outside Europe. This will be done in the following section, “Consolidating the Idea of European Islam through Perpetual Modernity,” (Part IV, Section 2c).

## World Axis

*One, on the humanization of the world through divinely willed inheritance for cosmic wellbeing, based on the principle of fraternity.* My argument here is that European Islam defends man's "inheritance of the world"<sup>1344</sup> as a divine will and consequently reclaims the ontological bond between the two spheres, the metaphysical and the physical, for "cosmic wellbeing," based on the "principle of (universal) fraternity" (*mabda' al-ikhā'*).<sup>1345</sup> I explain this view as follows. Abdurrahmane's view of man's reading of the sacred text should not aim at desacralizing and de-divinizing it, nor should it aim at divinizing man as a replacement of God. Rather, it is the idea of the Caliph that is echoed here: man as a Caliph is endowed with infinite capabilities that allow him to preserve the trust (*amāna*) that he was entrusted with in descending on earth, after his creation had been perfected. This means that the sacred text is not put aside as a text that can be dealt with just in the private sphere. Carrying out the trust of working good for the world (*islāhū al 'ardi wa i'māruhā*) is strongly emphasized. This does not make it a mere private matter, though it starts private, as will be understood from the rationalization innovative plan.

In European Islam studied texts, Tibi's project of reform and Euro-Islam relegates the understanding of the Quran to the private sphere. The public sphere is secular and it is for the political to find answers for it. This view reduces the holistic approach of religion to an unacceptable extent for the believers who want to feel and live religion also in public. Even though he calls for re-reading the Quran in light of German legal theory hermeneutics, and even if such a reading works to update Islamic law to face the modern way of life, his view of separating religion from politics, and the private from the public is strongly emphasized. This taints his project of reform with continuity in perceiving a conflict between the divine and the secular. According to Abdurrahmane's framework of

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<sup>1344</sup> In this section, the concepts or phrases in inverted commas are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>1345</sup> The principle of fraternity here is not limited to the religious, or the Muslims alone, because at this level of innovative humanization of the world, it is understood as inconceivable that Islam or Muslims in religious terms are the only ones shouldered with the responsibility of taking care of the universe as their inheritance. It is a responsibility of all men. This is how the new interpretations of Creation, Revelation, and the Universe see the place of Man and his ethical role in contributing to the wellbeing of the world.

innovative plans for religious renewal, and compared with the other studied projects, Tibi's view does not "qualify" as innovative since it still works within the religious and secular classical dichotomous thought.

In comparison, Ramadan and Oubrou have an innovative view of the sacred text and its place in the physical world. I allow myself to put them in one category, despite some methodological dissimilarities between them, the main of which I point out as follows. "Late Ramadan" considers the sacred text a First Book of revelation while the universe is a Second Book: to understand one necessitates the understanding of the other; they are put on equal footing. In my view, this is challenging to conservative Islamic thought which claims that such a view is not new. Ramadan does not introduce a new hermeneutical reading of the sacred texts; he is even critical of considering the Word of God (Quran) a text like any human text. Instead, he, for example, uses his jurisprudential studies background to arrive to the fact that the physical world, the universe, is another revelation that has to be taken into account in understanding the Word of God. Ramadan preserves the sacredness of the Quran, as Abdurrahmane also calls for, and does not consider it created at a certain time as the Mu'tazila and some reformists like Arkoun and Soroush do. For him, it is the eternal Word of God. The sacredness of the text preserved, he, however, elevates the status of the Book of the Universe to its status, and makes them equal. How can the Word of God be eternal, and at the same time equal to the Book of the Universe? Ramadan does not provide an answer that is clear and deep enough about this question which can lead to deep theological debates (like the question of time, space, divine being and existence).

In my understanding of his project, I can say that Ramadan brackets the question of the createdness of the Quran and tries to resolve it through his immersion in jurisprudential classical theories from which he develops updated Sharia objectives to face the new challenges of modern life. That is why he elevates the Book of the Universe to sacredness. This way he not only preserves the divinity of the Quranic texts, but preserves the sacredness of Creation (the Universe) as a whole, as if this sacredness were lost at a certain point of time in history and needed modern time to be recalled again.

Since the Word of God is eternal, thus divine, and since the Universe is equalled in divinity with the Word of God, this means that the Universe is also a Word of God willed at the same time when the World was willed/ created, otherwise how could they be made equal in divinity if they were not created at the same time and for the same purpose, even in the case of assuming that the Word was not created? To say that the Universe is equal to the Word in purpose but not in time of creation would lead into a theological debate about the intentions of God, or His arbitrariness in Creation. I do bracket this hypothesis in this work (Ramadan still has to face this challenge, if he wants to clarify his project further). The idea I drive to, which was expressed earlier in reading especially contemporary reformists, is that Ramadan restores to the universe its ontological sacredness at the age of modernity, and simultaneously restores to man his central place in interpreting the divine so as to manage the inheritance humanly-divinely, as it were. Further implications of this move will be noted when dealing with “historicization-and-rationalization” plans.

Oubrou is close to Ramadan’s perspective, though differently in methodology. He speaks of Three Books: Revelation, Creation, and (the inner self of) Man. He does not fear the fact that reading the Quran as a text could lead to its desacralization because it is for human beings and they are the ones to read it according to their context. That is what his geotheology approach is about. So, unlike Ramadan who tries to preserve the divine aspect through sacralising the Universe and thus indirectly read Sharia law, for example, in context, Oubrou seems closer to the views of the Mu‘tazila and he prefers to centralize man himself as a Book that keeps revealing itself in context, in light of Creation (Universe) and Revelation Books. For Oubrou, the way to inherit the world passes by the notions of time and space (geotheology) which, gradually, reveal not only the diverse manifestations of the divine, but mostly reveal the diverse stages man goes through in understanding its capacities of management of the world it inhabits. What I see geotheology to be pointing at theologically is that the (Quran) cannot be eternal but temporal: it requires time and space to be highly taken into account to envisage an appropriate manifestation of the divine in them. This goes in line with Oubrou’s idea that there is a need for a new theology of God that passes by understanding the conditions of

man. Since the latter depend on context, they have to be constantly revisited, otherwise formalizing man's conditions would lead to formalizing the understanding of God, which goes against the idea of the required rational belief, based on contemplation of the inner and outer sides of Creation and Man. All in all, Oubrou does not seem to fear the desacralization of the revealed text if it is interpreted by man because it is destined to be for his good and contentment. The inheritance of the world through the interpretation of revelation does not annihilate the divine which has to be constantly interpreted geothologically. Ties with the divine are preserved.

I consider Bidar to have managed to put the major views of the other three scholars under his concept of man's inheritance of the world as a divinely willed fact that is not disconnected from the metaphysical world. Bidar's five matrixes (God, Creation, Prophethood, Quran, and umma) harmoniously defend the idea of the sacredness of the universe and the man that inhabits it. Bidar innovatively re-interprets the place of God, the Universe, and Man from an Islamic perspective, and in light of the Quranic verses on creation of both man and the universe. Unlike the three previous scholars, he theosophically engages in a theological attempt of re-understanding God and His intentions behind Creation by going through explaining some of His attributes which He has generously put in the soul of man on his creation. It is these attributes that make man divine in his dimensions and actions as long as they try to reproduce aspects that match His attributes of especially mercy and generosity. Man's inheritance of the world cannot flourish until such attributes are vividly endorsed by the heir. In light of this view, the sacred text has nothing to lose, since the actor is man, and the text is but a spiritual guide for remembrance of the divine attributes man seeks to humanize in this physical world.

Overall, what I see emphasized on the "innovative humanization plan" from European Islam perspective is that the physical world is recovering its primal place compared with the metaphysical one. The original moments of creation as narrated in the Quran are revisited. The idea European Islam seems to reach is that there is an ontological bond between the Creator and the created, and it is this bond that can preserve the wellbeing of the world (cosmic wellbeing) which is now in man's charge, the heir

(Caliph). This is not the concern of the religionists alone, or Muslims alone. Cosmic wellbeing is a global concern. It expands the meaning of the principle of fraternity (not only normatively but also legally. The principle of equality explains fraternity further; the example of re-interpreting Sharia law prescriptions on non-Muslims and women will clarify the point).

The divine is not denied or killed so that man inherits the universe. On the contrary, this inheritance is seen as a will of God Himself. For the good management of this universe, this ontological trust between God and man is enriched by the infinite energy divine attributes represent. It is for the sake of the good of this physical world that God and His attributes are considered symbols of beauty, mercy and generosity - attributes the preservation of which leads to no abuse of man's infinite energies. Having experienced some tragic developments in human history at the age of "irreligious" modernity, European Islam claims to be targeting the recovery of, and contribution to, human responsibility by elevating the standards of morality to the attributes of the divine. This puts no limits to human energies to be innovative since the divine is limitless at that level. The challenge for the new man, in light of this reclaim of the divine in European Islam, is to be divine in action for the preservation of the good of the world. Tibi's privatization of the issue aside, this is the view the other three scholars emphasize. Putting Tibi aside here does not mean that he negates the divine; he just keeps it alive in a classical dichotomous style of thought, which is not what the other three scholars do. Despite Tibi's difference here, I overall consider the above view the one European Islam is directing itself to, namely inheriting the world with God's consent. God is not killed; man takes his place in the physical world, and also takes his attributes as the way to go to build a new human civilization that reconciles the divine with the humane. The inheritance of the world necessitates a high level of responsibility and generosity that echoes divinity aspects in man.

The inheritance of the world in European Islam entails "cosmic wellbeing," which is a shared responsibility, a global one. Fraternity principle, as a universal value that trespasses Euro-modernity and classical limits of fraternity among co-religionists, is a

requirement towards the enhancement of cosmic wellbeing. Bidar, for example, uses this “modern value” as one of the values needed to renew the Islamic view of fraternity. Abdurrahmane does the same in re-visiting the universality of Islam. What this implies from the doctrinal perspective is that European Islam, so understood, not only minoritizes the place of Islam in the world (to remember Oubrou here), after centuries of dominant supremacist view as the last revealed religion (which is Tibi’s view), but also divides the task of the good management of the world among all its inhabitants where Muslims are but partakers in this ethical work (which is Ramadan’s view, to cite him as an example). More precisely put, the Islamic perspective of ontological equality of all human beings makes them also equal in sharing responsibility of managing the Universe, despite the fact that other religions and cultures may have developed a totally different view of this same ontological perspective, and translated this development in different epistemological productions, some of which may have clearly cut ties with the divine, as Euro-modernity has done. This means that European Islam acknowledges modesty at the epistemological level, so as to answer the requirements of fraternity principle that aim at overcoming difference at the metaphysical level and facilitating human cooperation at the worldly level.

### **Society Axis**

*Two, on the historicization of revelation through fiqhology (practical fiqh) for social wellbeing, based on the principle of equality.* My argument here is that European Islam historicizes the revealed text, and consequently shoulders man with the responsibility of interpreting the prescribed laws in the sacred texts according to human society’s needs. That is, fiqh law is for this world, and not for the divine satisfaction at the metaphysical world. Practical fiqh, or fiqhology, needs to be constantly revised to match the divine universal message for perpetual peace and social justice, based on the “principle of equality” (*mabda’ al-musāwāt*). I argue for this as follows. Abdurrahmane’s innovative historicization, to be recalled, aims at preserving the divinity of the revealed text even in the case of reading its prescriptions historically. In my study, I have found that European Islam also reads the revealed prescriptions (Sharia law) historically, without this being an

aim to de-divinize it. For example, narrated stories in the Quran about the past miracles, prophethoods, and the otherworld are not belittled or considered mere mythical stories by European Islam studied texts. Rather, they are generally considered part of faith for contemplation and morality lessons. This corresponds to what Abdurrahmane calls “cosmic signs” for reflection and meaning (*mabda’ al-i’tibār*). This point is mostly invoked by the three scholars, Tibi aside again.

As to the revealed prescriptions on socio-political and economic matters, they are interpreted according to the socio-political and economic life of the 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabian society. Society most important matters here concern the state of the community of believers, or their belonging to it from a minority position, equality of genders, equality among believers and non-believers, social justice, and the public welfare. (Individual matters are mostly deduced from the innovative rationalization plan which comes afterwards). In this point, all the four scholars historicize the 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabian context, and bracket it as one realization of the Quranic message among other possible ones. However, historicizing the formative period of Islam does not bracket the Prophetic experience which is considered exemplary in living revelation ideals on the ground. On the contrary, the Prophetic example makes renewing the ideas of religion possible on this world if the way he lived revelation in its context is relived again. That is, the Prophet understood revelation in light of the socio-political and cultural circumstances of his society, and that is why his period remains exemplary. If revelation could be understood in the same fashion, another exemplary moment is possible. That is the aim behind Ramadan’s study of the biography of the Prophet, Oubrou’s decomplexification of religion through ethicizing it to answer its ideal the Prophet spoke of (namely the beauty of faith, *ḥalāwat al īmān*), and Bidar’s conception of the future man as a “new Mohammed.” The idea of the Seal of Prophecy is taken to mean that the model is given, and on it should be based future interpretations.

When it comes to more specific views on the state, equal citizenship, and social justice, Tibi’s view can be put in a different side though his view is secularist and strongly defends state neutrality, equal citizenship, and public welfare. He does so from

his angle of private versus public dichotomous worldview, while the three other scholars endorse the same socio-political rights but without relegating the religious to the private. While he remains concerned with the political/ public sphere, the three other scholars engage religion in the public sphere through theological justifications for most modernity values. Ramadan's Second Book (the Universe) implies that socio-political matters can no longer be in the hands of texts scholars (*'ulamā' annuṣūṣ*) alone; the task is shared with context scholars (*'ulamā' al-wāqi'*). Though he is more concerned with calling for a radical reform at the theoretical level first, he gives examples on how Sharia law can be revisited to be compatible with secular laws in liberal societies, based on Sharia expanded objectives. Oubrou invokes the "Quranic moment" to historicize its socio-political prescriptions which he revisits by means of "double reflection" of present-past-present movement in reading the texts. He ends in calling for converging the divine and secular laws for "secular theology." Revealed prescriptions are for this world; they are not supposed to contradict man-made laws as long as they improve the social public good. In the same line of argumentation goes the view of Bidar on the prescribed revealed texts. In his first stage of intellectual development, he centralizes three modernity values (liberty, equality, and fraternity), and defends their theological validity. The value that matches most this historicization plan is that of equality – equality of genders, equality among believers and non-believers before the law, which means equality of citizenship for social justice. In a second stage, he historicizes the five matrixes he develops to fit his theory of immortality of man and Islamic existentialism.

I see that European Islam, as reflected in the studied texts/ scholars, answers the requirements of Abdurrahmane's innovative historicization plan in three ways. One, the Prophetic experience is interpreted as exemplary in time for its ability to have matched the ideals of revelation with society's way of life. That is for instance Ramadan's view, though it is also shared by the others. Two, revelation prescriptions or fiqh law is not made the core of Islam, but just part of its outer manifestations. Modernity values that do not cut ties with the divine and serve the public good are embraced as part of faith. This renders fiqh law more practical (practical fiqh) and constantly open to change according to context. Oubrou's geotheology and secular theology, and Bidar's consideration of

modernity as an unprecedented event of the sacred are examples in defence of this view. Three, and most importantly, this lived physical world is considered a context where revelation makes sense; revelation is for this world and has to be interpreted for that purpose. Social justice and the public good are its concerns at this level – remembering that it targets three levels “world-society-and individual.” The metaphysical world is not denied, but is considered a continuity of this one.

The general inference one ends up with at this level is that European Islam considers revelation secular in intentions, though metaphysical in essence. That is why the bond between the two constructs the idea of continuity (*ittiṣāl*) between two worlds, henceforth their equality (Ramadan’s view) or their convergence (Oubrou’s aim, and Bidar’s view), as illustrated in the innovative humanization plan. What this denotes at the societal level is that the human faculty is shown capable of being in charge of the world, and capable of remembering the divine even when revelation prescriptions are historicized and relegated only to the sphere of reference and guidance (Ramadan and Oubrou’s “testimony concepts,” and Bidar’s “eternal gratitude”). More clearly, the divine’s creation of diversity among human beings is now emphasized as a willed act, and the way to go with it is not to try to homogenise it (diversity), but to realize through it the most important rationale behind it, i.e. equality and social justice, or what I termed earlier “social wellbeing.” Social wellbeing becomes tied to fostering the principle of equality, first among co-religionists themselves, and next among non-religionists as well, following the principle of fraternity.

### **Individual Axis**

*Three, on the rationalization of individual faith through the principle of ethical liberty for individual wellbeing, based on the principle of liberty.* My argument here is that European Islam substantially elevates the place of human agency and reason in dealing with faith at the personal level, making of the “principle of liberty” (*mabda’ al-ḥurriyya*) the basis of this elevation. Two vital deductions could be made here, which distinguish liberty in Islamic thought from Euro-modernity. First, without the feel of liberty, European Islam (and contemporary Islamic thought in general) would not have

gone so far as to humanize revelation and historicize its juridical prescriptions. The principle of liberty could be described as already rooted in contemporary Islamic thought since it has produced various discourses on how to reform. European Islam various versions is an example. Second, even though the principle of liberty has gone so far as to immortalizing man, reading the Quran as a text, and interpreting revelation and the Prophetic example historically, such a liberal feel in interpretation has freely not opted for denying the divine once and for all. Liberty in Islamic thought seems so free, to put it so, to the extent that it does not want to free itself from the divine.

The explanation I have for this choice of liberty, in light of European Islam texts and Abderrahman's framework, is that it is the divine that makes liberty meaningful and makes of human existentialism free from meaningless freedom. That is, the divine expands the horizons of liberty with its (divine) infinite attributes. Human reason, from European Islam perspectives, had to wait for modernity to realize such a link, and find out that liberty does not necessarily require the denial of the *metaphysical referent*. The latter does not block liberty, but nurtures it with attributes that make its realization more demanding. Otherwise said, the divine liberates freedom from subjective whims that could appear meaningful to the individual but not so for society and the world. The ontological union between the various matrixes (God, creation, revelation, prophethood, umma/humankind) conditions liberty to what could be termed "*divine standards of action*." These standards are, among others, liberty to do and liberty from doing, justice, mercy, generosity, and creativity (remember the tenets of the Mu'tazila, Ramadan's ethics of justice and mercy, Oubrou's praise of beauty of faith and cosmic order, and Bidar's invocation of mercy and generosity). The ideal practice of liberty has to take these attributes as its models; since the latter are infinite and on constant manifestation, according to man's ability to realize them, so is liberty as could be practiced by man: it should be constantly improved for the betterment of the wellbeing, social wellbeing, and cosmic wellbeing. When such a view of liberty is understood, the innovative plan of rationalizing ethics and faith could be understood, too.

This said, the rationalization of ethics in European Islam does not develop into a replication of the Mu‘tazila rational ethical theory, as that of Qadi Abd Aljabar (presented in Part IV, Section 1b, and also interpreted in light of Abdurrahmane’s framework in a subsection above when referring to George Hourani’s classification of the place of reason in classical Islamic thought, Part IV, Section 2a). It, however, develops into making equations. Religion is summarized in its ethical power; ethics is not considered merely objective, as the Mu‘tazila did, but as equivalent to the divine, which nurtures it with its attributes. Reason is not considered a separate entity, but part of a whole. It is ontologically born/ created ethical, and what it does on the epistemological physical world is that it works out details for a good materialization of its ethical basis. Religion, ethics, and reason become equal. Henceforth, man as an ethical being, as I concluded earlier in introducing Abderahmane’s project, is endowed with the liberty to be either ethical or not to be (so). This is the question that faces the modern man, according to this Islamic perspective. Another look at European Islam projects helps in explaining the point further.

Tibi, to be recalled, is a strong defender of individual human rights for the success of Islamic reform and Euro-Islam in particular. He is also a defender of the early Islamic rationalists, like al-Farabi, Ibn Roshd and the Mu‘tazila. He, nevertheless, says that faith is a private matter, and its place is the private sphere. At this level of analysis, a challenging question could be posed on Tibi: if he calls for rationalizing faith, why should it remain private? In my perception, a rational faith should be trusted and allowed visibility in the public sphere. This right can sometimes be allowed even to dogmatic religious practices as long as they are not a threat to the public security and order and do not go against the law of the state, so why should Tibi’s call for the rationalization of faith still stick to the idea of relegating it to the private sphere? Tibi’s view is not elaborate enough to face such a challenging question; it is blinded by the private vs. public classical view of approaching religion in Europe. That is also why Abdurrahman’s framework does not read it as innovative.

The other three scholars hardly speak of religion from the private versus public perspective because their reform projects aim at overcoming it. To start with Ramadan, he elevates the Universe to the stage of divinity (First Book = Second Book). This implies that Sharia prescriptions for socio-political as well as individual matters (like the questions of equality, inheritance, and penal code) which are divinely prescribed can be re-arranged according to this world's needs. Ramadan does not say revelation prescriptions are "wrong"; he says human reason "is capable of" understanding its intent, and thus able to reform the way it has been interpreted for mundane matters. In giving human reason this capability, he shoulders it with a responsibility that makes its capability "equal" to the divine's reactions to the Prophetic moment and Muhammad's society needs. Ramadan's elevation of the Universe to the stage of divinity means that the caliph in charge of this universe is supposed to match (or at least try to match) the divine in its ability to prescribe laws and provide answers that do bring benefit to society. This is the responsibility human reason in Islam is supposed to do: to constantly look for replicating the Quranic moment and Prophetic experience according to diverse human needs as they transpire in light of the ethics of the divine and "capabilities" of man.

Ramadan's idea of Two Books means that he merges human rational capabilities with the ethics as generally outlined by the revealed text. The fact that he embraces European modernity values as long as they give dignity to man and preserve equilibrium in the natural universe (and rejects that part of modernity that denies the divine and leads to abusing human dignity and meaning in life) means that what he retains from the divine are its ethical guidelines for the wellbeing of the world, society, and man, as broad as may this seem. His "Copernican revolution" does not give reason alone full reign; it binds it to the ethics of the divine, though the latter no longer intervenes in worldly matters directly. The classical (conservative) signs that the divine still plays a direct role in human societies through Sharia law are now being gradually changed by reading these laws in their historical context. This reading of Ramadan's project at this level makes him close to Abdurrahmane's idea of innovative rationalization where the divine and revealed prescriptions and narrated stories are "signs" for contemplation from which could be

developed other forms of management of the world, as long as their ethical spirit or essence is kept.

Since the essence of the divine (First Book) is ontologically ethical, and since it is made equal to the Second Book, this means that the latter's spirit is also ethical. Ramadan does not say clearly that human reason is created ethical (at the ontological level), but his idea of the Second Book says that it is supposed to find this out by itself through remembering the divine trust (*amāna*) (and also) through experience and produced knowledge. So, at least at the epistemological level reason is supposed to be ethical. This view is indirectly proposed –and deduced– at the ontological level through the equation he builds (First Book = Second Book). If the Second Book that is epistemologically ethical equals the First book that is ontologically ethical, it also goes right to assume that this equality binds reason which comes later to the divine (which comes first). Consequently, even if the second assumption is the one that is most close to Ramadan's view, it does not change the conclusion that ethics at the epistemological level is bound to (or equal to) ethics at the ontological level. More precisely, religion for Ramadan becomes equal to ethics, and reason becomes equal to ethics; subsequently, religion and reason are equal. That is what I mean by the “rationalization of ethics,” or the “rationalization of faith.” This fits very well Abdurrahmane's innovative rationalization plan.

The same process of linking the divine, ethics and reason applies to Oubrou who speaks of Three Books and equally emphasises the question of ethics and spirituality in Islam. Since Oubrou is close to Ramadan on this matter, I do not need to say the same thing about him. Bidar's example, however, deserves a pause because he goes beyond Ramadan (and Oubrou) in speaking of Books, and makes the bond between the physical and metaphysical even stronger.

Bidar's last intellectual stage (stage 3) of overcoming religion and atheism explains well the previous stages of Islamic existentialism (stage 2) and Self Islam (stage 1) which all together underpin the place of reason in faith. Bidar does not reproduce a scheme of two harmonious worlds as Ramadan and Oubrou do. Rather, he speaks of one world, the

historical (physical) world, in which the divine and the secular are inseparable. Modernity is considered a will of God, so the divine versus secular dichotomy on which Euro-modernity and most classical thought is based is overcome. Self Islam is based on Euro-modernity three basic values (liberty, equality, and fraternity); Bidar provides theological justifications for them, both from the Quran, the Sunna, and from the Sufi tradition of Islam. Belief that is inherited culturally, without personal engagement in deconstructing it and subsequently endorsing it (or leaving it) with conviction, remains a classical dogma that soon falls into supremacist views that deny the other his being and difference, which is willed/ created by the same divine power.

Bidar's Islamic existentialism aims at converging the physical and metaphysical worlds into one that the believer experiences physically. So as not to sever the physical world from the metaphysical one, Bidar formulates a link between five matrixes (God, Creation, Prophethood, Quran, and the umma), the mother/ father of which is the matrix of God, the divine. The other matrixes develop from the soul and will of God. The universe of the divine (in the metaphysical world) manifests itself in the physical universe in which Islam claims the sealing part (Seal of Prophecy). In light of this chain of matrixes, the individual's capacity of reasoning is ontologically bound by the divine spirit. This makes human's capacity to act and reason infinite, like the infinity attribute of the divine. It also makes human reason the divine's heir. This inheritance is generously given to man on his creation. The divine cannot put or create in man something that harms him, because the divine attributes of justice, beauty, and mercy, for example, make such an option impossible.

Ontologically, then, human reason is imbued with (good) divine intents and capabilities. It is these attributes of the divine that Bidar passes on to the heir of God on earth. He conditions his freedom of thought and reasoning to the ethics of the divine. Bidar seems to echo one of the ideas of his theological-philosophical mentors, Mohamed Iqbal. The latter considers man a "co-worker" with God in the universe: if God created

the world, man has made it more beautiful.<sup>1346</sup> Human pure reason could have been taken as the ultimate source of ethical action and morality, but Bidar prefers a higher source for reference, and in so doing he elevates the standards of ethics to those of the divine. Such a deduction corresponds to the argument of Abdurrahmane: faith, ethics, and reason are inseparable at the ontological level. By implication, they are also inseparable at the epistemological level, particularly that he speaks of one world where the heir of God does not need to wait the metaphysical world to feel, perceive and activate such a unity. Though ethical values have their origin in the metaphysical world, it is in the physical one that they are practiced and measured.

In my reading, the rationalization of ethics and individual faith in European Islam takes the following format: religion = ethics = reason. This deduction has been inspired by the use I have made of Abdurrahmane's "innovative rationalization plan." The deduction confirms the preservation of the divine by rationally integrating it in the individual's modern way of life. Neither "pure reason" nor "pure religion" answers alone, or separately, the individual's needs.

### **Recapitulation: towards a Conceivable European Islam**

This most important section of my work has tried to conceptualize the idea of European Islam. This conceptualization attempt has been preceded by describing four projects on the topic, revisiting some important phases in Islamic scholarship (the Mu'tazila, early reformists, and late reformists), and introducing Abdurrahmane's framework to analyse the innovative aspects in contemporary Islamic thought, and European Islam in particular. Abdurrahmane's framework has been substantially used, first, because it matches the comprehensiveness of religion in trinity framework I summarize in "world-society-individual," and, second, because it guides in tracing innovative readings in Islamic thought. What I do below is that I condense my conclusions on European Islam in light of the intellectual excavations I have tried in this work.

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<sup>1346</sup> I refer to Iqlal's poem where he mentions man as a "co-worker" when dealing with Bidar's works, in Section 2, Part III.

Following Abdurrahmane's framework, I have shown that among the four projects studied here Tibi's is not innovative since he is still occupied with the classical idea of the divine vs. the secular, private vs. public, etc. Ramadan and Oubrou try gradually to move away from this classical dichotomy; they are innovative. Bidar stands as the most innovative. His theological readings illustrate a daring move from classical religiosity as well as classical atheism and secularism. European Islam as a concept, succinctly, is more innovatively expressed by the last three projects. More precisely, my use of the concept of European Islam is the culmination of my reading of especially the last three projects (Ramadan, Oubrou, and Bidar) in light of Abdurrahmane's critical framework. I summarize it here.

European Islam has been captured by Abdurrahmane's analytical three plans of "humanization-historicization-and-rationalization," which intertwine. Each of the three plans is shown to match my tentative triadic framework that captures religion's comprehensiveness "world-society-and-individual." In the first plan, the place of the world in the reformist European Islam, it has been illustrated how it is considered an inheritance willingly granted by God for management to the Caliph. This means that the way revelation has to be interpreted should be physical, this-worldly, and not disconnected from the realities of this world. It has to be "humanized" without being de-divinized. In the second plan, society is seen as the fieldwork where the first plan of humanization of the world takes place, based on the historicization of revelation. Historicization aims at contextualizing revelation prescriptions so as to differentiate between the "essentials" and "accidentals" –to borrow Soroush's terms – and thus reach revelation intent by rendering fiqh (law) practical and pragmatic.

At this level, European Islam theologically justifies modernity values of liberty, equality, and fraternity since they correspond to social justice and public good Islam advocates. In the third plan, the individual is centralized as the principal interlocutor with revelation. Humanization and historicization of revelation leads to its rationalization. The fear here is that such a rationalization revolts against the divine (and kills God!). This does not happen in European Islam – nor so in the reformist projects mostly developed in

Islamic majority countries as seen in Section 1c-d, Part IV. Henceforth, the rationalization of interacting with revelation at this level could be considered the most innovative plan among the three. At this level, religion is made the source of ethics which reason has to invoke in managing the inherited world. European Islam, accordingly, follows this format: religion = ethics = reason, which is inferred from Abdurrahmane's work. As explained earlier, the three become ontologically and epistemologically inseparable. That is the main characteristic of and theological justification for a conceivable European Islam.

As to answering the guiding sub-question of this part of work (what is new in European Islam?), a threefold response is provided: European Islam rationalizes ethics, and in so doing it is "revisionist-reformist," or "traditional-modern." First, it rationalizes ethics in the sense that it promotes both the place of human reason in interpreting revelation, and also raises the place of ethics as the most important rationale behind revelation. Formalist legalism becomes secondary, and inspiring for understanding divine intents and ethics. Second, European Islam is revisionist/ traditional in the sense that it is not the first to call for renewing Islamic thought based on human rational faculty. The Mu'tazila, early reformists and late reformists have been shown as calling for rationalizing religion and ethics, though following different approaches. Debating the place of reason is not new in Islamic thought. Thus, there is continuity and contact (*ittiṣāl*) with the tradition. The current debate on reason echoes the kalam productive period on the same theological issue, among others. Most of this debate has, however, been entrapped in the classical dichotomous mode of thinking (two worlds, two spheres, private vs. public, etc.).

Third, European Islam is reformist/ modern in the sense that it tries to converge the two spheres, the metaphysical and physical into one. The consequence of this convergence is that religion, ethics, and reason are made equal and inseparable. The fundamental questions of being and freedom (how to be? How to act?) become ethical: be either ethical or not. This convergence of spheres and universes could not have been achieved if the example and achievements of Euro-modernity have not been used and

built on. European Islam integrates modernity values and enriches them by re-linking them with the divine (fraternity, equality, and liberty, which match in my reading “world-society-individual” order). It preserves the divine in its modernity. It is because of this difficult enterprise of modernizing without cutting ties with the divine that I see in European Islam a fertile material for a new version of modernity which can be called “perpetual modernity,” or “continuous modernity” versus “discontinuous modernity” that does without the authority of the divine, (*ḥadatha mawṣūla or muttaṣila*, vs. *ḥadatha munqati‘a*). The divine here, again, means ethics, universal as broadly as they have been deduced above. The next section on Abdurrahmane’s principles and pillars of the essence of modernity will illustrate my concept of “perpetual modernity” that I see European Islam to be developing. It builds on his concept of “second modernity,” or “spiritual modernity” and on the conceptualized idea of European Islam.

### **c. Consolidating the Idea of European Islam through Perpetual Modernity**

This section goes on with the conceptualization of European Islam and its opening towards revisiting modernity in its own fashion. The second guiding sub-question of this work (“what is new in European Islam?”) is still the center of this part of the *evaluative stage*, especially the second part of its answer, which is “European Islam is revisionist-reformist.” The conceptualization does so far need profundity and, most importantly, measuring by means of invoking basic modern principles and values. For this purpose I keep referring to Taha Abdurrahmane’s project of re-grounding Islamic thought. I used him before to form the framework of European Islam mostly with reference to how to approach the sacred text. Now I use his project of “second modernity” as a fitting scheme for European Islam’s reformism. I do so through two stages. I first present the three principles and their pillars (two pillars for each principle) of Abdurrahmane’s approach to modernity, his critique of Euro-modernity, and his concepts of “second modernity.” Then, second, I re-visit European Islam in light of these principles and pillars. My major aim behind examining the aspect of “reform in European Islam” using Abdurrahmane’s framework of “innovative modernity” is to corroborate my previous conceptualization of European Islam, and to ultimately pave the ground for John Rawls’ requirements of

reasonableness of doctrines for the flourishing and stability of a just political liberal society (which the closing section of this work deals with).

In this evaluative stage (third stage) of my work I have started with introducing Taha Abdurrahmane's critical framework for "continuous innovation" in Islamic thought. The framework is composed of three plans (humanization, historicization, and rationalization). To understand the utility of these plans for my argument of continuity as well as reform in European Islam (revisionist-reformism) I have first used them on Islamic thought projects referred to in the comparative stage (stage 2), i.e. on the Mu'tazila, the early and late reformists (Part IV, Section 2a). I have then moved to putting the broad lines of conceptualizing European Islam in light of this framework (Part IV, Section 2b).

In conceptualizing the idea of European Islam I have built a network of concepts based on the studied texts and the analytical framework used to approach them. Henceforth, I have arrived to the following deductions, which I reiterate to link them with the subject of the present section on "perpetual modernity." This conceptualization breaks away from Euro-modernity style of dealing with religion, and opens new pathways for what I refer to as "perpetual modernity," or which Abdurrahmane labels "continuous innovation" that breeds "second modernity." The conclusions that have conceptualized the idea of European Islam go through Abdurrahmane's "spirit of modernity" for consolidation, before they are finally consolidated through Rawls' "political Liberalism."

### **Taha Abdurrahmane's Essence of Modernity: Principles and Pillars**

Abdurrahmane's project of renewing Islamic thought is based on his idea of the "right to difference" in culture and religion as in philosophy analytical thinking, because there is "no creativity without particularism."<sup>1347</sup> The "right to difference" overcomes two major obstacles that have weakened Islamic thought and imprisoned it in its mode of mimicry: one is the "concept of unitary thought" (*mafhum al-fikr al-wahid*) which standardizes and imposes one style of thinking over all cultures and their philosophies despite their difference, and the other obstacle is the "concept of the *status quo*" (*mafhum*

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<sup>1347</sup> Abdurrahmane, *The Arabic Right to Philosophical Difference*, 17; (see also *The Islamic Right to Intellectual Difference*, Chapter 4 on the types of intellectual difference and the principles of preserving it).

*al-'amr al-wāqi'*) which gives in to especially the political hegemony that is backed up by its previous “concept of unitary thought.”<sup>1348</sup> The right of difference is but a reclamation of a natural right that characterizes the universe. “This right cannot stand without liberty as a natural right.”<sup>1349</sup>

From this premise Abdurrahmane moves to distinguish between two kinds of modernity as a way of finding space for the right of difference to be exercised by Islamic thought. One is the “essence of modernity,” or the “spirit of modernity” (*rūḥu al-ḥadātha*), and the other is the “fact of modernity” (*waqi'u al-ḥadātha*). The latter manifests itself in the way it is realized by the West, or what I have been referring to in this work as Euro-modernity. This kind of modernity practices three “absolute sovereignties” of costly results on the modern world: sovereignty on nature, on society, and on the individual.<sup>1350</sup> Mostly, the fact of modernity has sometimes been summarized in rationalism, and at others in secularism; sometimes it has been condensed in the ideals of humanism, individualism, and at others in liberty. Seeing its repercussions that have been exported sometimes by force to the rest of the world, it has to be rejected, not in its entirety, but in the way its principles have been interpreted and practiced. Modernity has to grow from within. Any other option is mimetic. Multiple modernities are possible through understanding the “spirit of modernity” or the “essence of modernity.”<sup>1351</sup>

As to the “essence of modernity,”<sup>1352</sup> it is “innovative” because it recovers to man his ethical essence. “The essence of man is ethical.”<sup>1353</sup> In this “second modernity” man’s wholeness is recovered, and is not divided: his material outer being is considered an indivisible part of his spiritual inner being.<sup>1354</sup> In the “second modernity” which gives man his role of the prime free agent who can revise and devise concepts, modernity becomes minor, and not the opposite as the “first modernity” (“the fact of modernity” of

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<sup>1348</sup> Ibid., 17

<sup>1349</sup> Ibid., 21

<sup>1350</sup> Abdurrahmane, *The Spirit of Modernity*, 19-23. Note that these three sovereignties partly correspond to the three mimetic plans of “humanization-historicization-and-rationalization” that Abdurrahmane critiques from which he develops three “innovative plans” of the same name. See Section 2a, Part IV.

<sup>1351</sup> Ibid., 24-32.

<sup>1352</sup> The term “essence of modernity” is used interchangeably with other terms like the “spirit of modernity,” “second modernity” (Ibid., 56, 67), and “spiritual modernity” (Ibid., 48). It is also very close to “continuous innovation” and “innovative creativity” (Ibid., 193-196).

<sup>1353</sup> Ibid., 59

<sup>1354</sup> Ibid., 58

the West) has dominantly exercised it. Man recovers his majority (i.e. maturity) place, which means that this same man can revisit modernity and its practices. This is what the “second modernity” aims at, “man is more powerful than modernity.”<sup>1355</sup> Such a role is given back to him because his ethical essence urges him not to accept mimicry and subjugation position. Since the essence of the actor is ethical, so becomes of what he innovates: the essence of modernity is equally ethical.<sup>1356</sup> What Abdurrahmane does through his ethical reading of modernity is that he expands the premises of the “first modernity,” and allows other cultures, religions, and philosophies to contribute to it, instead of making it the one and only correct version. As will be further explained below, the horizontal values (i.e. physical/ material) of the first modernity are backed up by vertical ones (metaphysical/ spiritual) to overcome the limitations of the “fact of modernity.”<sup>1357</sup> The “second modernity” is more open to accommodating the diversity that characterizes the modern world.

The “essence of modernity” is based on three principles, and each of them is built on two pillars: 1) the principle of majority (*mabda’ arrushd*), and its two pillars of autonomy (*rukn al-istiqlāl*) and creativity (*rukn al-ibdā’*), 2) the principle of criticism (*mabda’ annaqd*) and its pillars of rationalization (*rukn atta’qīl*) and differentiation (*rukn attafṣīl*, or *attafrīq*), and 3) the principle of universality (*mabda’ ashshumūl*) and its pillars of extensibility (*rukn attawasu’*) and generality (*rukn atta’mīm*). It is clear from the start that Abdurrahmane refuses to base his reading of modernity on classical concepts (like liberty, rationalism, and secularism) either because his basic principles – as will be illustrated below- cover them or because they have been separately abused and their interpretations exaggerated.<sup>1358</sup> This will be made clearer as these concepts are explained, along with a critique of the way they have partly been interpreted by the first

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<sup>1355</sup> Ibid., 53

<sup>1356</sup> I reiterate the conclusion I reached in Section 2a-b, Part IV: religion, ethics and reason are made equal in their moment of creation, inseparable ontologically-epistemologically, and are thus the essence of man. This means that religion and reason are not supposed to antagonize, and the same applies to religion and modernity, and obviously to reason and modernity.

<sup>1357</sup> Abdurrahmane, *The Spirit of Modernity*, 59

<sup>1358</sup> Ibid., 24, n.3. Abdurrahmane also notes that the principles and pillars of the essence of modernity as he classifies them does not mean that clear cut lines can be drawn among them; he says they intertwine; for example, creativity is impossible without rationalization and differentiation; and differentiation is impossible without rationalization (Ibid., 29, n. 17).

modernity.<sup>1359</sup> In my reading, it is this kind of modernity that is the center of this part of work to understand the reformist direction European Islam is taking. Explicating these terms follows first, before I integrate my earlier conceptualization of European Islam in this frame of the essence of modernity. My concept of “perpetual modernity” is the result of fusing Abdurrahmane’s principles of modernity with my earlier conceptualization.<sup>1360</sup> I visualize these principles and pillars in a table, before explaining them.

<b>Principles</b> <b>Pillars</b>	<b>Principle of Majority (1)</b>	<b>Principle of Criticism (2)</b>	<b>Principle of Universality (3)</b>
<b>1a</b>	Autonomy		
<b>1b</b>	Creativity		
<b>2a</b>		Rationalization	
<b>2b</b>		Differentiation	
<b>3a</b>			Extensibility
<b>3b</b>			Generality

**Table 1: Taha Abdurrahmane’s Principles of Modernity and Its Pillars**

<sup>1359</sup> Abdurrahmane derives and coins many new terms in Arabic, in a genuine manner, which other contemporary philosophers and reformists do not generally do because they depend on translating foreign terms and adapting them into Arabic, instead of generating new ones from the language itself. He does so because he aims at regrounding Islamic thought on its own linguistic utensils and lexicon. He believes that translation of Western terminology has also impacted Islamic thought and made it unable to renew itself authentically. Among the contemporary Arab-Islamic philosophers, his innovative use of the Arabic language seems unrivalled. Translating his concepts from Arabic into English would not have been easy if he himself had not provided their equivalents in his footnotes. Besides the original books in Arabic, this section has made use of a conceptual introductory chapter on modernity from his book *The Spirit of Modernity*, from which I also borrowed the framework of innovative “humanization-historicization-rationalization,” 11-69. This introductory chapter is luckily fully available in English, at *Islam Today Journal*, N° 21 1425H/2004, and from which I have used most quotes instead of translating them myself. So, the quotes in this section are not my translations; they are the direct words of Abdurrahmane. However, I give the pagination according to the Arabic text so as to keep harmony with the previous section that built its framework based on a chapter from the same book.

For Abdurrahmane’s argumentation on the relation between linguistic and philosophic renewal, and the place of translation, see, for example, his fiqh *al-falsafa I: al-falsafa wa attarjama [Praxeology of philosophy I: Philosophy and Translation]* (Casablanca and Beirut: al markaz athaqāfi al‘arabi, 1994) See specially Part I and III of the book.

<sup>1360</sup> Once the reader appears to have familiarized himself with Abdurrahmane’s concepts and appears able to differentiate between my concepts and his, I drop the inverted commas, and use them again later as a way of stressing them.

## 1) The Principle of Majority (*mabda' arrushd*)

By the principle of majority in modernity is meant the maturity of man and the realization of his majority (i.e. maturity) capacities. Two pillars uphold this principle. First, autonomy: the major human being enjoys his inalienable rights and pursues his goals without deterrence from any other human authority. Second, creativity: the major man quests for being creative in his way of thoughts, sayings and actions based either on newly devised values or ones developed from old ones in a more updated and creative manner.<sup>1361</sup>

This principle and its pillars, as briefly presented above, have been practiced by the West in a form of “intellectual tutelage” on Islamic thought. At the autonomy level, this has been done based on three hypotheses which particularly colonial and hegemonic West advances: a) “the tutelage of the strong outsider equates care for the weak”; b) “the internal tutelage is that of religious entities”; c) “modernity is autonomy from internal tutelage.”<sup>1362</sup> Abdurrahmane considers these hypotheses erroneous, in three corresponding ways: a) paternalism goes against the spirit of majority and autonomy; b) Islamic history did not experience a religious authority like that of the Church and the clergy; c) because Islamic history did not experience a similar religious tutelage as that of the Church, so its adoption of modernity cannot be the way Europe adopted it; religious authority cannot be annihilated in the modern age simply because Europe did so to break away from the tutelage of the Church. Abdurrahmane says, “the tutelage prevalent in our environment is not that of religious scholars but of the coloniser and foreign hegemony that take myriad shapes, going even so far as to use us as its spokespersons;” thus “all that we need to do is strive to liberate ourselves from this tutelage by embarking on the process of thinking for ourselves.”<sup>1363</sup> Autonomy in thinking is then of two kinds: one is “responsible autonomy” (*istiqlāl mas'ūl*), which cuts ties with the Western tutelage and renders its autonomy creative (“creative autonomy,” *istiqlāl mubdi'*), and the other is “minor

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<sup>1361</sup> Abdurrahmane, *The Spirit of Modernity*, 25-26

<sup>1362</sup> *Ibid.*, 36

<sup>1363</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-38

autonomy” (*istiqlāl qāšir*), which seems free but its practice of this freedom takes place within a traced premise created by someone else; that is, free as it may seem, it is not reach the level of autonomy; this autonomy is mimetic (*istiqlāl muqallid*).<sup>1364</sup>

As to the creativity level, Abdurrahmane considers that Western modernity has adopted it in its own way, based on three hypotheses. These are as follows: a) “the highest form of creativity is what constitutes an absolute rift”; b) “creativity creates need in the same way that it satisfies it”; c) “the most authentic creativity is one where the self reaches ultimate fulfilment.”<sup>1365</sup> Abdurrahmane refutes these hypotheses as follows: a) no absolute rift with the past is possible; most human values are ahistorical since they are tied to the essence of humanity, and the essence does not change; creative modernity is not that which cut ties with the past, but that which builds on it; it is a “modernity of values” and not a “temporal modernity;”<sup>1366</sup> b) high increase in economic and technological progress has also increased the level of consumption and material self-fulfilment to uncontrollable levels; to make of modernity a process of equilibrium for human development, spiritual nourishment has to increase, too, so that the modern man avoids loss of meaning of liberty and being; for this purpose, inventing aesthetics and morals that take the modern conditions into account is of tantamount importance; c) self-fulfilment turns into selfishness and indulgence if the wellbeing of the other is not considered as part of self-fulfilment; the individualism of first modernity can be faced by the solidarity values of second modernity, for the “good is a transcending rather than a limitative value,” and “charity to the other is a charity to the self.”<sup>1367</sup>

## 2) Principle of Criticism (*mabda’ annaqd*)

The principle of criticism means a shift from a state of belief to one of questioning and criticism. It is backed up by two pillars: rationalization, i.e. the sovereignty of reason, and differentiation, i.e. the action of drawing distinctions among

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<sup>1364</sup> Ibid., 36-38

<sup>1365</sup> Ibid., 39

<sup>1366</sup> Ibid., 40

<sup>1367</sup> Ibid., 41

coherent elements to facilitate the comprehension of the mechanisms of a concerned element or component. Rationalization is best represented through the achievements of natural sciences, bureaucracy, technocracy, capitalism, and techno-science. Differentiation has touched all the institutions and forms of social and individual life. This includes differentiation in the field of knowledge (differentiation between science, law, morals, arts), in the field of culture (between the spheres of theoretical, practical and symbolic values), in the social arena (between the tasks and roles delegated to the diverse social actors), in the field of economy through work division, and in politics through the principle of secularity (that differentiates between religion and the state).<sup>1368</sup>

However, despite its importance, Abdurrahmane says that the methods of this principle have in most part been blindly borrowed from the West without taking into account the difference of the material on which it has been applied in the Islamic environment and its tradition. This has opened an era of mimicry and distortion of facts as accumulated in the tradition over the centuries. Applying this principle and its pillars endangers the spirit of modernity, so unveiling their erroneous premises is what Abdurrahmane does.

Abdurrahmane argues that the premises upon which the pitfalls of rationalism are first exercised by Western modernity are threefold. These premises are: a) “the mind grasps everything”; b) “man is the master of nature”; c) “everything is open to criticism.”<sup>1369</sup> He refutes these premises, and expands their interpretation. Against the first (a) premises, he brings up his logical utensils to argue that, firstly, the mind cannot bring itself to reason, though it does fall within the ‘all’ that the mind is said to be able to comprehend, the rule being that the means should be stronger than the object it seeks to rationalise. Henceforth, to rationalise the mind, a mind that is stronger than it is needed, and to rationalise this second mind, another one that is stronger is needed, thus falling in a vicious circle. Secondly, the mind cannot rationalise the whole as it is part of this whole; the part cannot encompass the whole. There are then things or phenomena to which reason in its abstract version cannot be

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<sup>1368</sup> Ibid., 26-28

<sup>1369</sup> Ibid., 43

applied. It needs expansion to engender “supported reason” or “expanded reason” as will be noted below in introducing “differentiation pillar.” For Abdurrahmane, man carries within himself a spiritual world where values and ideals mingle with knowledge and machines. Contrary to what is widely believed, the realm of passion and emotions is no less rationalistic than the world of knowledge though its form of rationalisation is lighter. The “desired mind” – or “expanded mind”- should accommodate this emotional world in the same way that it accommodates sciences and values. The rationalisation engaged in by the reasonable man is therefore one that seeks knowledge and manufactures machines in light of the noble imports profoundly ingrained in man’s soul.<sup>1370</sup>

As to the second (b) Cartesian premise of “man is the master of nature,” Abdurrahmane considers it a kind of fiction, “this premise is no more than a metaphor that falls within the realm of beautiful fiction.”<sup>1371</sup> Man did not create nature; he does not own it, so he cannot master it. Its mysteries do not stop from enthralling the modern man at times, and at revolting against him at others owing to human waste, contamination and over-technologization. The perception he holds on this is that of an ethical being with nature that requires a treatment of gratitude, “Nature is the mother to man, not his slave [...] and the mother can never be a slave to her infant.”<sup>1372</sup> The alliance between man and nature should expand to include also the intangible world, which is part of the whole.

The third (c) premise - “everything is open to criticism” – is narrow in scope, too. There are matters that have no tangible sings such as spiritual values and ideals. The most convenient way to understand them is to live them, and experience them. Criticism here would require another or other reasoning levels and analytical criticisms to reach some of the realized aspects of these values and ideals. This is referred to as “varied criticism,” as

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<sup>1370</sup> Ibid., 43-44. (For further details on the types of reason in Abdurrahmane’s project, see, for example, his *Religious Practice*.)

<sup>1371</sup> Ibid., 44

<sup>1372</sup> Ibid., 45

opposed to “uniform criticism.”<sup>1373</sup> Abdurrahmane recognizes a strong connection between three premises (a, b, c), that is why he calls for a constant communication (dialogue) between the three in light of the interpretation he has given to each. He puts it this way:

Once we acknowledge that man, nature and life are different but interrelated, we will realise that proof can differ in three ways. First, each of the three fields has its own critical logic if tackled on its own; second, the logic of each field should be adjusted in accordance with its degree of interrelation with that of the other fields; and third, that the logic reached, when consideration is taken of this interrelation, may help guide the specific logic of each sphere, this guidance being of course different from one sphere to another.<sup>1374</sup>

As to the pillar of differentiation, Abdurrahmane alleges that it has focalized the issue of distinction in at least two premises: the premise of a) “dissociating modernity from tradition” and that of b) “separating politics from religion.” For mimetic modernists, or Euro-centrists, this means that the Islamic heritage is cut off from modernity; so, it has to build these ties following modernity values. However, for Abdurrahmane, projecting these differentiations on the Islamic tradition can be rejected for a number of reasons. First (a), modernity spirit is not purely Western-European. Previous influential civilizations also experienced it, though according to the human achievements of the time; otherwise, how could the fact of civilizations, their fall and rise, be explained? They were modern in the fashions of their own times. Second (b), the Islamic civilization has contributed to planting the seeds of modernity in Europe. Third (c), even in case the Islamic heritage may not clearly show that the spirit of modernity is part of its tradition, and the current realities illustrate the absence of any signs that defend this argument, the principles of modernity still make part of this tradition; the tangible aspects of this spirit are not necessary conditions to say that they are absent when they are not visible.<sup>1375</sup>

Regarding the second (b) premise of “the separation of politics from religion,” a very important premise that characterizes especially Western modernity, it is given particular attention in the various works of Abdurrahmane, which certainly cannot be

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<sup>1373</sup> Ibid., 45-46

<sup>1374</sup> Ibid., 46

<sup>1375</sup> Ibid., 47

presented in this limited space. Overall, his argumentation targets redefining the concepts of religion and politics according to the principle of criticism and the pillar of differentiation. The argument starts as follows. The above premise, in Western modernity, is based on three assumptions: a) “the dissociation of modernity and tradition is an absolute separation”; b) “the dissociation of reason and religion is an absolute separation”; c) “differentiation is conditional upon the demise of sacredness.”<sup>1376</sup>

Abdurrahmane refutes these assumptions, one by one. For the initial assumption above (a), he first considers that a big confusion took place in using interchangeably the concepts of Church and religion in European modern history. The politicized clergy that was tyrannical in its practice of authority does not represent the religion of Christianity. Supposing that the political clergy represents this faith, this does not necessarily mean that when this clergy is no longer in power this religion will consequently disappear. Second, he asserts that modernity did not grow in one surge, but had been a process that infused a lot of the past achievements before it came up with its worldview. Its origins could be found in the Greek, Judaic, and Islamic traditions, too. Seeing that it emerged out of these dominant religious traditions, its spirit cannot deny religiosity as its component. In this sense, it does not totally cut ties with the past, including religion. Third, humanist modernity concepts have built on the classically religious ones: “perfection,” “brotherhood” and “time,” for example, have turned into modern concepts equivalent to “progress,” “solidarity,” and “linearity in history,” respectively. Fourth, religious leaders, and scholars of religious background or interest, were also among the pioneers of the European Renaissance and later Enlightenment, like Erasmus, Descartes, Newton, Kant and Hegel.<sup>1377</sup>

The second (b) assumption – “the dissociation of reason and religion is an absolute separation” – is also refuted because it is based on understanding religion as mythical, transcendental and irrational. The relegation of religion to invisibility in

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<sup>1376</sup> Ibid., 48

<sup>1377</sup> Ibid., 48-49

Western modernity is based on linking religion with irrationality. This assumption can be contested if at least three possible significances of the irrational surface in the discussion. The first (1) is that the irrational stands for the impossible, such as bringing together two extreme opposites; the second (2) stands for what cannot be grasped by the mind, either because it goes beyond its premises or falls in a different category; the third (3) stands for that which cannot be judged by reason, either for confirmation or refutation. So, what then is referred to as transcendental may be irrational in one of the above three senses. Yet, the point is that irrationality here is measured or judged through ordinary reason that is critical of tangible components only. Religion requires a “higher mind” to understand it, or part of it. This higher mind is called the “soul” or “spirit.” What follows from this is that the “impossible” – as in one above (1) -, “what cannot be grasped by the mind” (2), or “that which cannot be judged by reason” (3), may be contrasted only with “ordinary reason” whose mechanisms are unable to go to the level of the three assumptions. Other possible mechanisms of a “higher reason” may be able to approach these levels and assumptions, and thus make the contrast between religion and reason weak or even absent. That is, if what is called religious is transcendental, then there is no logical need to subject it to an ordinary reason that does not match its requirements, mechanisms, and levels.<sup>1378</sup>

The third assumption of differentiation – “differentiation is conditional upon the demise of the sacred” – is equally refused by Abdurrahmane because it has wrongly considered sacredness and magic equal. Since magic is found irrational, through the differentiation methods applied to it in both the social and exact sciences, so is said of the sacred. In his differentiation, sacredness is the attribute of worshipping something that transcends this world and rises high above, while magic is used to describe something that comes into contact with this world and interacts with it, even merging totally with it. Sacredness is connected to cosmic signs (*āyat*) that are of high significance in human life, and their significance remains a human quest, part of their rational classification/differentiation, while magic soon falls under this classification, and proves to be limited in its significance. It is this deep significance contemplated in the universe that can turn

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<sup>1378</sup> Ibid., 49-52

one into a spiritually rational being, and thus a “connected” part with the intangible part of the universe. Abdurrahmane words it this way:

Man is inherently not a discontinuous whole [...]. Our relationship with the world is no longer one where we seek to take away all the secrets of the world in order to exploit it, but to discover them in order to people and develop the earth; nor is this relationship one of detachment from the universe’s phenomena but of harmony with them because they are the only key to its innermost secrets.<sup>1379</sup>

Communion with the world, as described above, opens the principle of creativity in modernity to new horizons of exploring nature and dealing with the sacred. The exploration of the hidden mysteries of the world unveil creativity energies in man, endorses his trust of nature and hope in life, and turns fear of the sacred a means of inspiration. To use terms from his recent work *The Spirit of Religion* (2012), “the expanded reason” develops the idea of the “expanded man” who leads a “vertical life” (transcendental) besides the “horizontal” (physical) one. He becomes a “connected man” (*insan muttaşil*) with the transcendental and intangible in the universe.<sup>1380</sup>

Creativity in the pillar of differentiation, henceforth, is based on two principles, according to Abdurrahmane: the “rationalization of religion,” and the “distension [expansion] of politics.”<sup>1381</sup> He affirms that most of religious Sharia-based rules are rational but “should be placed within their contexts in each of modern life’s fields.”<sup>1382</sup> As to the rules that seem irrational, “we need to endeavour to rationalise them in accordance with new circumstances, or to re-conceptualise rationalisation in such a way as to encompass these rules.”<sup>1383</sup> Religion and reasoning faculty are bound together to find justifications that either rationalize religion or religionize reason by expanding its horizons in dealing with the transcendental.<sup>1384</sup> From his Islamic perspective, religion and

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<sup>1379</sup> Ibid., 53-54

<sup>1380</sup> Ibid., 53

<sup>1381</sup> Ibid., 50-52

<sup>1382</sup> Ibid., 52

<sup>1383</sup> Ibid., 52

<sup>1384</sup> It was seen earlier that Abdurrahmane uses terms like “higher mind” or “expanded reason” as a higher stage compared to “ordinary mind” or “mechanical mind.” I note here these types as he explains them further in one of his recent works. In *Religious Practice*, Abdurrahmane divides “Rational ability” into three basic levels: “Rationality of abstraction,” “Rationality of living experience,” and “Rationality of Sophist belief,” which match three terms “Abstract Reason,” “Guided Reason” and “Supported Reason.” “Abstract Reason” is limited to description of things, the “Guided Reason” is devoted to doing things,

reason are not supposed to be opposing entities but parts of one whole. Abdurrahmane tries the same with the second principle of differentiation pillar: politics. He distances his definition from its Western counterpart.

“The right to difference” as a natural right based on human liberty to choose, started with earlier has to be born in mind here. While in the West politics is conceived as “running the public affairs through rules and regulations *laid down* by the *Western* people themselves,”<sup>1385</sup> in the Islamic context Abdurrahmane conceives of it as “running public affairs through rules and regulations *selected* by the *people*,”<sup>1386</sup> thus drawing a lucid distinction between choosing and drawing up. What he reaches with this distinction is the right to decide how public affairs should be run: either through pure human creativity, or through human creativity as inspired by the divine, a choice Western modernity cut off in devising its modern politics, “I may choose what I have not devised. The rules in our [Islamic] context may be of our own devising or of divine inspiration, but they are all of our own choice.”<sup>1387</sup> Accordingly, politics in its new definition is based on the right to choose first, and on the right to devise next. What this implies is of high importance. The rationalization criteria used to evaluate the political act would follow the same definition of politics above: rationalization criteria have to be based not on examining the rationality of rules as “laid down” by people but as “chosen” by them first. Henceforth, “the “rationalisation” of the political act becomes conditional upon the degree of “choice” available within it.”<sup>1388</sup>

### 3) The Principle of Universality (*mabda' ash-shumūl*)

According to this third and last principle, modernity is intrinsically based on a move from particularity, or individuality, to universality. Universality denotes “the process of surpassing the particularity of modernity in its two senses, the contextual (*al-*

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whereas the “Supported Reason” represents the capability of knowing its internal identity. In my understanding, “Supported Reason” is the same as “Expanded Reason.” Abdurrahmane, *Religious Practice*, 121.

<sup>1385</sup> Abdurrahmane, *The Spirit of Modernity*, 50

<sup>1386</sup> *Ibid.*, 50

<sup>1387</sup> *Ibid.*, 50

<sup>1388</sup> *Ibid.*, 51

*majāl*) and the social (*al-mujtama'*).<sup>1389</sup> These two senses are what Abdurrahmane terms “extensibility” and “generality” (or “generalizability”), two pillars that back up the principle of universality. Extensibility means that “the process of modernity is not restricted to one or more specific fields. It permeates all the spheres of life and levels of behaviour, influencing thought, science, religion and morals, as well as law, politics and economy.”<sup>1390</sup> Its action within a given field impacts other fields and triggers transformations that transcend the limits of this field. Generality means that “modernity does not confine itself to the society where it emerges. Its highly sophisticated products and values which call for the liberation of man are applicable to other societies, heedless of the historical and cultural differences existing between them.”<sup>1391</sup> Generality paves the way for “a new phase of modernity called globalisation.”<sup>1392</sup> The two pillars are further explained below, first as the West has interpreted them, and next as Abdurrahmane re-interprets them.

Abdurrahmane analyses the pillar of extensibility first by unveiling the way it has been conceived by Western modernity. Following this pillar, (Western) modernity has been interpreted based on three premises, or assumptions: a) “modernity is inevitable”; b) “modernity engenders absolute power”; c) “the essence of modernity is an economic one.”<sup>1393</sup> The first assumption asserts that modernity is unavoidable, in all its aspects because they are comprehensive and the most developed. The second premise gave reasons for exporting modernity principles by force or by will, and turned it into a hegemonic discourse. The third premise makes of economy and consumerism the main manifestations of modernity, and turning its other values (liberty, equality, justice, etc.) into means for the economic end. Economy in Western modernity is not part of the social fabric; rather, it has become an independent field that influences all the other fields, which gradually turn into its servant-fields. They consequently lose their independence, their creativity, and their ability to contribute to human flourishing. Socio-cultural norms

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<sup>1389</sup> Ibid., 28

<sup>1390</sup> Ibid., 28

<sup>1391</sup> Ibid., 29

<sup>1392</sup> Ibid., 29

<sup>1393</sup> Ibid., 55

become useless, and a mere means to the consumerist mindset. This threefold extensibility of modernity cannot be universalist in Abdurrahmane's view.

Abdurrahmane presents “three truths”<sup>1394</sup> to counter the three premises of extensibility as interpreted by Western modernity. These three truths give extensibility its authentic universality. One, the “defeatist logic”<sup>1395</sup> of the first premise – “modernity is inevitable” – that accepts Western modernity as the only way for human development falls in the same logic that created it: Western modernity was not inherently imposed on man from outside by some other human faculty, nor was it divinely imposed; rather, it was man himself who devised it and chose it. This primal value of liberty is denied to the other non-Western. Western modernity is a “historical phenomenon,”<sup>1396</sup> in Abdurrahmane's view, and it should not be considered an insurmountable model; otherwise, creativity becomes repetitive and uncreative. The first “truth” that counters this first defeatist premise is that “man is more powerful than modernity”<sup>1397</sup>: while the Western version can become obsolete with age, man cannot, because it is he who influences human history and the world of ideas in light of the historical circumstances of his time. Extensibility has to take this “truth” into consideration for continuous renewal. This consideration allows the Islamic perspective to be creative, and so it does for other perspectives. Modernity frees itself from Eurocentrism based on such new premise/ truth, and allows new contributions from other cultures, civilizations, religions, and philosophies to create “a new global project of development” that may shape a better “second modernity” or even take a “different name.”<sup>1398</sup>

Two, against the second premise of extensibility as conceived of by Western modernity – “modernity engenders absolute power” – Abdurrahmane proposes a “second truth.” That is, egotism, materialism and self-indulgence are challenged to be wholly extensive by equally increasing interest in the inner self and psychology of man. The

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<sup>1394</sup> “Truths” here do not mean absolute epistemological facts; they mean “facts” or “assumptions” – to follow the argumentation in this context.

<sup>1395</sup> Abdurrahmane, *The Spirit of Modernity*, 56

<sup>1396</sup> *Ibid.*, 57

<sup>1397</sup> *Ibid.*, 56

<sup>1398</sup> *Ibid.*, 56

second truth works following this principle: “man’s corporeality is part of his spirituality.”<sup>1399</sup> Recalling Abdurrahmane’s view of complementariness between the physical and transcendental/ metaphysical, it becomes evident now that gratifying just one side at the expense of the other does not grasp the wholeness of man. The inner side has to be developed as is the material side. In his words:

If the application of one of the principles of modernity involves the permeation of all the aspects of human life, this premise entails that modernity incorporates man’s soul in the same way that it does as regards his body, catering to his spiritual needs in the same manner as to his material needs. It even makes the fulfillment of material needs conditional upon that of the spiritual ones.<sup>1400</sup>

The point here is that “material modernity” has to match “spiritual modernity,” and vice versa.<sup>1401</sup> If material modernity has to revisit its values so that they accommodate human diversity and inner demands, so is required of spiritual modernity that has to radically renew faith to encompass material needs. In other terms, the “horizontal values” (material values) of man have to open up to the “vertical dimension” (transcendental dimension) of his life.<sup>1402</sup>

Three, against the third premise of Western extensibility – “the essence of modernity is an economic one” – Abdurrahmane proposes the “third truth” which works on the basis that “the essence of Man is a moral and ethical one.”<sup>1403</sup> Accordingly, the self-gratification that economy allows to satisfy hides behind it the quest for human perfection that starts in the present and lives the idea of the future, or what Abdurrahmane calls “continuous perfectibility” (*al-istikmāl al-mutawāṣṣil*) and “futura” (*al-istiqbāl al-ājil, or al-mustaqbaliyya*).<sup>1404</sup> Due to the fact that material gratification alone cannot grasp the inner side of man, spiritual gratification, with its possibly various worlds, has to accompany it (material gratification). So the practice of perfecting one’s material aspirations become bound by morals derived from divine inspiration and divine spirituality. The future then is not a purely modern concept, but it is deeply rooted in

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<sup>1399</sup> Ibid., 58

<sup>1400</sup> Ibid., 58

<sup>1401</sup> Ibid., 58

<sup>1402</sup> Ibid., 59

<sup>1403</sup> Ibid., 59

<sup>1404</sup> Ibid., 59-60

religious vocabulary, “religious morals and ethics are truly the morals that confer perfection on man because they carry within themselves the awareness of the future.”<sup>1405</sup>

Now I turn to explaining the second pillar of universality principle: generality.

The pillar of generality, to be recalled, means that “modernity does not confine itself to the society where it emerges.”<sup>1406</sup> Its values which call for the liberation of man are applicable to other societies, regardless of the historical and cultural differences that may characterize them. However, Western modernity has misinterpreted this pillar in practice mostly because it has always presented the abolishment of religion as a condition for the realization of this practice. Western modernity has conditioned the generality of modern values by preventing religion from contributing to this generality. This malpractice has been based on three premises, according to Abdurrahmane: a) “modernity sustains individual thinking”; b) “secularity preserves the sanctity of all religions”; c) “the values of modernity are universal.”<sup>1407</sup> The three premises share the principle of viewing religion as irrational, so individual thinking and the preservation of religion are this worldly based, which does not make them universal, since other societies do not hold the same Western negative view of religion; the fact that Western secularism preserves religion does not mean that it welcomes it as a contributor to its values, a fact that affects both individual thinking and its universality. As he does with the previous principles and pillars, Abdurrahmane re-interprets these premises of generality from his Islamic perspective to make them more accommodative of religion.

One, against the individualist thinking that the first premise of generality – “modernity sustains individual thinking”- engenders, Abdurrahmane proposes reviving the meaning of “human being” as a universal being. The view of society as composed of “a gathering of individuals that we take as a whole entity but whose hearts are divided, each preoccupied by furthering his own interests” does not make of

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<sup>1405</sup> Ibid., 60

<sup>1406</sup> Ibid., 29

<sup>1407</sup> Ibid., 62

modernity a universal enterprise.<sup>1408</sup> It is the “human being” who can make a value, or values, universal, and can thus contribute to the making of a “universal society” (*al-mujtama‘ al-‘ālamī*) because it thinks beyond society, a limitation the individual falls in. As a practitioner of what Abdurrahmane calls “extensive thinking” (*attaḥkīr al-muta‘addī*) versus the “restrictive thinking” (*attaḥkīr al-qāṣir*) of the individualist individual), the human being engages in thinking “with the assumption that our [Muslim] thinking is about the other as much as it is about ourselves.”<sup>1409</sup> “Extensive thinking” implies that “intellectual parity” (*al-ma‘iyya fikriyya*) is a practice exerted by all “human beings” for the sake of the “universal society.” The necessity for this parity is justified by at least three facts. First, extensive thinking takes into account the fact that a problem that touches one society can travel to other parts of the world; so, solving such a problem would require solving it at the global level. Second, the cultural disintegration of communities in the globalized current world has amplified the need for their interaction; the problems they face are similar, and solving them individually is not easy. Third, non-governmental associations, like independent persons, are crossing borders all over the world, making involvement in society not the sole duty of that particular society in a particular geography. Extensive thinking has allowed for extensive action on the ground, weakening by thus the restrictive action of the individual who cares only for self-gratification.<sup>1410</sup>

Two, against taking for granted the premise that “secularity preserves the sanctity of all religions,” Abdurrahmane demands of modernity to exert its criticism principle on all religions to differentiate between them, and see which of them is more rational or not, and which of them can be learnt from in devising public affairs. He says, “To say that all religions are equal would be as much of a fallacy as to say that policies, philosophies and thoughts are equal. There are differences between religions as there are differences between these.”<sup>1411</sup> Applying differentiation for clarity among religions can solve the major issues of differentiations in Western modernity - religion

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<sup>1408</sup> Ibid., 62

<sup>1409</sup> Ibid., 63

<sup>1410</sup> Ibid., 63

<sup>1411</sup> Ibid., 64

versus politics, revelation versus reason, private versus public. Some religions are more rational than others, the way some philosophies and policies are more rational, and thus beneficent, than others. For Abdurrahmane, Islam is more rational, at least among the three monolithic religions, and if the West has put all religions in one basket, Muslims have to rethink this Western differentiation, by overcoming them in light of considering the essence of modernity and not the fact of modernity. Nonetheless, modernity hides either its inability to go into such a level of criticism and differentiation of religion or its contempt for them as equally irrational and thus its superficial discourse of protecting them and treating them as equals. Both options (either/or) show that religion is not of importance to Western modernity. To surmount this “restrictive thinking,” rationalizing religion and expanding the meaning of politics –as explained when dealing with the previous pillars and principles- is the way out to regain trust in religion as a contributor in the management of world affairs. Besides, “extensibility in thinking” contributes to comparative studies of religions and to dialogue.<sup>1412</sup>

Three, against the misapplication of the third premise of generality pillar – that “values of modernity are universal” – Abdurrahmane recalls that human values have always been universal, but their contextual interpretation have made the difference and created diversity in the world. Western modernity is itself a historical variety of universal values; the difference they have made is that they have their particular circumstances, and exporting these values with these particular circumstances which other societies may not have gone through goes against the spirit of modernity itself, “the Western application of modernity as we witness and experience it is far from being universal.”<sup>1413</sup> It follows from this line of argumentation that Abdurrahmane distinguishes between (1) “contextual universality” (*kawniyya siyyāqiyya*), where an idea or an object, though created in a given society, may be re-invented in another one, going beyond its primary innovative aspect to be added on and enriched by another or other societies, and (2) “non-contextual universality,” or “absolute universality” (*kawniyya ittlāqiyya*), where an innovation first

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<sup>1412</sup> Ibid., 64

<sup>1413</sup> Ibid., 65

emerged in a particular society is fostered as such by others that adopt it, mimic it, or even consider it immutable. It is “contextual universality” that caters for the spirit of modernity, and allows diversity in creativity, a fact that endorses its universality, “values cannot be disconnected from their context, either the context in which they are created or the context in which they are re-created.”<sup>1414</sup> Contextual universality allows for the multiplicity of applications of the universal values, and feeds cultural exchange and hybridization.<sup>1415</sup>

In sum, Abdurrahmane’s three principles of modernity (majority, rationality, and universality) have first been presented as they have been narrowly interpreted by the first modernity, or quasi-modernity, of the West, and have subsequently been re-interpreted from the Islamic perspective, in light of the achievements of Western modernity, and world continuous changes. Six pillars, or concepts, have been developed, each for every principle above: creativity and autonomy for the first principle of majority, rationalization and differentiation for the second principle of criticism, extensibility and generality for the third principle of generality.

Succinctly put, and corresponding to each of the six pillars of the essence of modernity that are required to initiate a second modernity, the following conclusions are deduced. One, autonomy does not mean freedom from the religious tutelage that the West suffered from, but means autonomy from the Western monopoly of modernity which has turned it into a colonial tutelage. Two, creativity does not require total break from the tradition and revelation because modernity means renewal of values; these values, to be recreated, need inner energy which spirituality substantially contributes. Three, rationalization of religion is required, but this does not mean that the mind can grasp everything, because its consciousness cannot encompass itself, nor can it criticize everything because not all that is around it is tangible; the mind cannot prevail over nature; it lives with it as a mother to man. Four, differentiation cannot be total, because man is part of the whole, part of the world that he lives in; levels of reason are required to capture the cosmic signs; expanded minds are needed for that practice. Five, extensibility

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<sup>1414</sup> Ibid., 67

<sup>1415</sup> Ibid., 66

does not mean that the first modernity is the only and final version of its essence; man is more powerful than modernity. As a moral entity, man can always reshape the first dominantly material manifestations of modernity and colour it with values that give him meaning. That is genuine extensibility, and not the economic alone. Six, generality means that extensive thinking of the human being considers the universal society in whatever it thinks about, and thus shows that solidarity with the other is a requisite in generality. This means that the universality of values renders them contextual, able to be reshaped by different cultures and philosophies, and cannot be replicated on one absolute universality model.<sup>1416</sup>

In renewing the principles of modernity, Abdurrahmane has been driving to the following conclusions. One, the spirit of modernity differs from its reality. Two, Western modernity is but one realization of the spirit of modernity. It is quasi-modernity, or first modernity. Three, all nations are equal in appropriating the spirit of modernity. Four, Islamic thought and the reality in the Islamic majority societies has been closer to quasi-modernity than to the essence of modernity. Five, modernity is internal and creative; it should be home-made. Six, creating “our internal modernity” requires rejecting the first modernity that is pregnant with many pitfalls.<sup>1417</sup>

Until now, in the evaluative stage in this work, I have introduced two aspects of the work of Abdurrahmane. First, I have presented his “three innovative plans” (humanization-historicization-rationalization) in reading the revealed text (Part IV, Section 2a). Second, I have used this framework to conceptualize the idea of European Islam, in light of the four studied scholars (Tibi, Ramadan, Oubrou, and Bidar), taking into account three axes that correspond to the comprehensiveness of religion (world-society-individual) - (Part IV, Section 2b). Now, third, in this section (Part IV, Section 2c) I have until now introduced Abdurrahmane’s framework for innovative modernity where principles and pillars of the essence of modernity are developed and explained. The remaining part of this section fuses the work done in this evaluative stage by building links between the innovative plans in reading revelation and the pillars of the

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<sup>1416</sup> Ibid., 68-69

<sup>1417</sup> Ibid., 67-68

spirit of modernity. That is, I revisit my conceptualization of European Islam as I have firstly formed it using Abdurrahmane's three innovative plans by, secondly, using his three principles of modernity. Overall, my primal aim here is to study aspects of modernity and reasonableness in European Islam, using Abdurrahmane's framework of "innovative modernity." It is a way of solidifying my previous conceptualization of European Islam, and also paving the ground for John Rawls' requirements of reasonableness of doctrines for the flourishing and stability of a just political liberal society.

The theoretical links I build here aim at enforcing my idea of European Islam as being revisionist-reformist, and more particularly aim at clarifying my concept of "perpetual modernity" that I believe it is opening to. "Perpetual modernity" (*ḥadatha da'ima* or *mawṣula*) is close to Abdurrahmane's concept of the "second modernity" that is nurtured by "continuous innovation" as opposed to "discontinuous innovation" that is mimetic of "first modernity" of the West (*ibdā' muttaṣil* or *mawsul* versus *ibdā' munqati*). It also renders modernity clearly an "unfinished project," to use Jorgen Habermas' phrase.<sup>1418</sup> Abdurrahmane uses "continuous innovation," as seen previously, to speak of another possible "Islamic modernity" because his project aims at reviving Islamic thought based both on its ethos and modern achievements. He, however, remains generally entangled in this binary of Western and Islamic thought, though he tries to critique them both. My use of "perpetual modernity" takes into account Abdurrahmane's view, but also considers other Islamic reformist projects, and those of European Islamic scholars in focus, which he does not refer to in his work. "Perpetual modernity," as I see European Islam is contributing to shaping, tries to overcome what I refer to as "classical dichotomous thought" in three major ways, which I outline below (in the paragraph after the next).

My conceptualization of European Islam, as I argue in this section, perpetuates modernity. It builds on Euro-modernity as well as the version of Islamic modernity as

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<sup>1418</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity: an Unfinished Project," in Maurizio P. D'Entrèves and Sheila Benhabib, eds. *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on the Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997) 38-55.

Abdurrahmane theorizes it (i.e. the essence of modernity). European Islam's modernity is neither Euro-centrist nor Islamo-centrist. It stands in a third space between the two. It tries to break the strong "classical dichotomous thought" of secular versus religious, revelation versus reason, private versus public, etc. It is revisionist, or traditional, in the sense that it preserves the divine as the core of its ethos. It is reformist, or modern, in the sense that it embraces modernity values, but re-interprets them according to the divine ethos. Perpetuity in modernity stems, henceforth, from the fact that neither revelation *per se*, nor modernity *per se*, claims stability in interpretation. Rather, since its ideal is social stability and social welfare, perpetual modernity requires that revelation remains modern, constantly revisited to answer human needs, so it remains appealingly "new" in the eye of its beholders. Such reciprocity in rejuvenation perpetuates revelation through a modernity that accommodates it and revisits it continuously. Perpetual modernity is religious-friendly. Religion is equally perpetually modern. I have three reasons that support this argument. Each reason corresponds to a level of conceptualization that assembles a number of concepts devised and developed all the way through until this stage of my work. I first summarize my three reasons, or three levels, in the following paragraphs, before I explain them subsequently (in "Perpetual Modernity Framework Explained: Three Level" sub-section).

According to my reading, European Islam's modernity is perpetual for three reasons, which I subsequently present in terms of levels of concepts. It is (1) perpetual in the sense that the inheritance of the world, through innovative humanization plan of reading revelation, matches the principle of majority as enshrined by the essence of modernity. It is (2) perpetual in the sense that practical fiqh (Sharia law), through innovative historicization plan, matches the principle of universality as enshrined by the essence of modernity. It is (3) perpetual in the sense that the rationalization of ethics and faith, through innovative rationalization plan, matches the principle of criticism as enshrined by the essence of modernity. Table three (3) below summarizes this understanding of European Islam and innovative/ perpetual modernity, and the major concepts henceforth devised.

	(1) Axes	(2) Plans	(3) Deductions	(4) Principles of Perpetuity		Aims
	<b>Framework Concepts for a Comprehensive Religion</b>	<b>Innovative Plans for Renewing Islamic Thought</b>	<b>Deductions from European Islam</b>	<b>Essence of Modernity</b>		
				<b>Principles</b>	<b>Pillars</b>	
<b>a</b>	<b>World</b>	Innovative Humanization	Inheritance of the Universe	Principle of Majority	Autonomy Creativity	Cosmic wellbeing
<b>b</b>	<b>Society</b>	Innovative Historicization	Practical Fiqh/ Fiqhology	Principle of Universality	Extensibility Generality	Social wellbeing
<b>c</b>	<b>Individual</b>	Innovative Rationalization	Ethical Reason/ Rational Faith	Principle of Criticism	Rationalization Differentiation	Individual Wellbeing

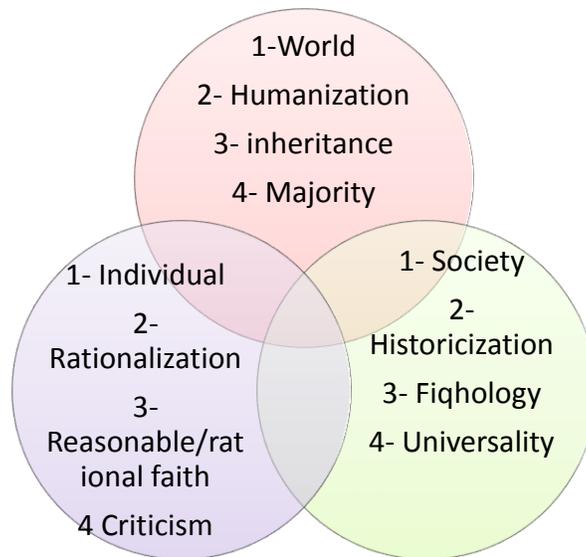
**Table 2: Basic Concepts of European Islam and Perpetual Modernity**

At this stage I emphasize that this classification cannot deny the heavy intertwining between (1) the three axes I have envisaged to encompass the comprehensiveness of religion: (1a) world- 1b) society- 1c) individual), (2) European Islam’s three main deductions: ( 2a) inheritance of the world- 2b) practical fiqh - 2c) rationalization of faith), that match (3) the three innovative plans of Abdurrahmane: (3a) humanization- 3b) historicization- and 3c) rationalization), and (4) his three principles of modernity (4a) majority- 4b) universality- 4c) criticism) which I take to endorse the idea of perpetuity. The fact that each principle of modernity is backed up by two pillars allows it (the principle) to be mobile among the other levels of comprehensiveness, European Islam’s deduced concepts, and innovation plans.

For example, at the (1a) “world/cosmic” level, it is not only the (2a) inheritance of the world, through (3a) the innovative humanization plan, that correspond to (4a) the principle of majority as required by the essence of modernity. The two pillars of the principle of majority (autonomy and creativity) are also required by other levels (society and individuals) for the success of the innovative interpretation of other plans (historicization and rationalization). The same applies to other axes, plans and principles. The principle of criticism (4c) cannot be limited only to rationalization plan (3c), rationalization of faith (2c) and the individual axis (1c). The principle of criticism’s two

pillars (rationalization and differentiation) are also required by society (1b), practical fiqh deduction (2b) and historicization plan (3b).

The overlapping between these *axes, plans, principles* and *deductions* illustrates that the success of renewing religious thought and modernity cannot be at the expense of bargaining their principles; that is, one principle alone, or one level of interpretation alone cannot secure the success of this harmonious outlook. The pitfalls of dogmatic religions and irreligious modernity have shown that spirituality alone, law alone, or rationality alone cannot work well and for a long time. Perpetual modernity, as I conceive of it, requires good balancing between these principles, though it is conceivable that considering all these principles always equally for all situations is also impossible. Perpetuity requires constant revisiting of these principles for a “modern modernity,” i.e. self-rejuvenating modernity. Figure three (3) shows how intertwining these levels of analysis could be. I close this note. Having summarized my view at this stage, I now turn into making these links clearer.



**Figure 1: Intertwining Territories between the Concepts of European Islam and Perpetual Modernity**

### **Perpetual Modernity Framework Explained: Three Levels**

*One, innovative humanization of the inherited world through the principle of majority for cosmic wellbeing.* Three major aspects govern the first axis of perpetual modernity as developed by my reading of European Islam: revelation in the physical world (1a) is innovatively humanized (2), responsibly inherited (3), autonomously ruled and creatively re-created by man (4) (See Figure 1 above). The inheritance of the world gives the Caliph (heir) infinite liberties in managing the world, without sacrificing/killing the divine, because this inheritance is willingly given to him, and also without an intermediary human agency that proclaims the position of guarding the rights of God and the duties of man. Man does not need to go into a fight with God to “have” the world. Rather, man is empowered by divine attributes to “be” in the world. Man is major (mature or *rāshid*), but his majority here is not static. It is a process that requires perpetual autonomous realization and creativity. (Abdurrahmane’s majority principle, and its pillars of autonomy and creativity are relevant in this point.)

Divine attributes of infinite energy, creativity, mercy, justice, and beauty, for example, are sources of constant inspiration for the human being whose soul remains part of the Great Life/ Creator. There is no other revelation expected, and it is now up to man, the Caliph, to care for the world because it is his. As long as man emulates the Creator in His attributes of creation, justice, and mercy, there is no fear of the freedoms of man, for the divine attributes guide him: God cannot act foolishly, arbitrarily, and so should man. Divine attributes are a high threshold for man to reach. Man’s perpetual work on that level makes his autonomy responsible and creativity mature. The divine is a reference by which ethical action – i.e. ethical here in the broad sense of being good, and God always Wills the good for people - is measured. By the divine as a reference I mean that there is a constant act of remembrance (or *i’tibār*) through the religious pillar of Testimony (Shahaha) the broad significance of which is not only to believe in Unity but also, and most importantly, to believe that belief is comprehensive, atemporal, aspatial. Testimony bears the idea of trust (*amāna*) that bonds the human and the divine. Even in the case of any morality code that humans develop rationally (as will be referred to below), this trust

or Testimony, remains the utmost manifestation of belief in and communion with the divine.

The fact that the world is humanized does not belittle the role of the divine, for the Caliph carries the divine within himself through the bond(s) of trust and Testimony. The major/ mature agency of man does not, and cannot, liberate itself from the divine simply because whatever the Caliph thinks is autonomous or creative and thus human is essentially divine in nature as well. If the Euro-modern man liberates himself from the divine to be free, the (Islamic) new modern man, or what I have referred to earlier as the Muslim Prometheus,<sup>1419</sup> can be free without such a liberation (from the divine). On the contrary, liberty of man to rule the world cannot be mature unless it wears the attributes of the divine, which are the values Euro-modernity itself advocates (attributes, or values, like liberty, equality, fraternity, solidarity, etc.). The difference at this level between mastering the world in Euro-modernity and inheriting/ managing it in perpetual modernity is that the latter summons the energy of man to live not only a horizontal life, but also a vertical one that leaves space of creativity infinitely open. Vertical thinking, or perpetual thinking, to call it so, does not aim at conquering the world, but at exploring the unknown, which ends in expanding both the horizons of human energy and divine infinite powers. The universe becomes a laboratory to be creatively explored, without a constant psychological fight over what is secular and what is divine. Vertical thinking tries to make sense of human existence beyond its material, concrete and immediate benefits. Maturity of man grows as such thinking expands. Perpetual thinking inspired and empowered by divine attributes makes the understanding of both religion and modernity able to go beyond formalisms of classical religiosity, classical atheism and secularism. Neither classical religion nor classical modernity alone is the way to live the future civilization.<sup>1420</sup>

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<sup>1419</sup> I first used the label “Muslim Prometheus” when reading Bidar’s project of man’s inheritance of the world through Islamic existentialism approach. The Muslim Prometheus is very close to what Iqbal refers to as co-working with God, or man as a “co-worker” with God, and not His rival. See, Section 2, Part IV.

<sup>1420</sup> By the “future civilization” I mean the new stage Islam and Europe enter into together, which a number of the studied scholars in this work also underline in their prospection of future developments of spirituality in the modern age. In the main introduction of this work I said that Europe-post-1945 is a different Europe, a Europe that is entering a new phase in its intellectual history with the pluralism that characterizes its

Henceforth, the humanization of the inherited world, through the principle of majority, engages into vertical thinking for cosmic wellbeing.<sup>1421</sup> Cosmic wellbeing here simply means the harmonious outlook the individual develops in rationalizing religion and the understanding of the canons of the universe. It is especially based on the idea of merging the physical and the metaphysical as if they were part of a whole. The physical world is sacralised, and modernity, henceforth, is seen as part of the sacred. The diversity that characterizes the world becomes part of the divine will. The primal impact of such a perspective is that the majority (i.e. maturity) of man fraternizes nations, religions, and philosophies – based on the principle of fraternity.<sup>1422</sup> This could be read as a clear sign of epistemological modesty from the part of contemporary reformist Islamic thought and European Islam in particular. Epistemological move may be interpreted as a sign of defeatism, weakness, inability to overcome the “Islamic predicament” or “crisis.” That could be just one valid interpretation of such a move. A more articulate interpretation of the move, in my perspective, is as simple as this: modesty in understanding the divine message is the most challenging step a comprehensive religion could take. In light of the argument developed throughout this work, the concepts of inheritance, innovative humanization, and majority principle that I have knitted in this first level/axes of analysis (world), I could say the move is more of an epistemological reformation, fuelled with scholarly courage. It could be read as a sign of an expanded intellectual revisionism of some of the most established religious dogmas and interpretations. Overcoming the immutability of interpreting prescribed Sharia laws is a reformist move, compared to the existant various conservative trends in contemporary Islamic thought.

The point I want to make here is that cosmic wellbeing as a consequence of the interpretation I have given to the principle of majority is very much linked to the interpretation I have earlier given to the principle of fraternity in humanizing the

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societies. The same thing applies to Islamic thought which has been trying to renew itself for the last two centuries or so. The future civilization is the one in which the two historically antagonizing entities, “Islam and Europe,” come to acknowledge each other and give birth to a hybridized worldview where modernity and religiosity converge to face the various challenges that face each of them, and which can be a threat to the world at large, be they political, economic, environmental, etc.

<sup>1421</sup> I used the term cosmic wellbeing in Section 2b, Part IV, when conceptualizing the idea of European Islam.

<sup>1422</sup> The principle of fraternity was also deduced from reading European Islam texts in Section 2b, Part IV.

understanding of revelation, following the established methodological framework. If human beings are now in charge of interpreting revelation and humanizing its message, do not they then consider that the same God that speaks to them does also speak equally to “others,” whatsoever is their religion or philosophy of life? The moment revelation is handed down to man to interpret, the idea of supremacy - like saying “my religion is the best or most true, or most intact” – gains modesty and the idea of God becomes more inclusive of the other, thus the validity of the principle of fraternity.

Two, *innovative historicization of revelation prescriptions through the principle of universality for social wellbeing*. Three major aspects govern the second axis of perpetual modernity as understood in my reading of European Islam: revelation as it finds space in society (1b) is innovatively historicized (2b), fiqh law is pragmatically re-interpreted (3b), and universality principle is embraced for social wellbeing (4b). The historicization of the denotations of revelation perpetuates in time and space the broad ethical lines of revelation without freezing them in a particular historical period of time as that of the 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabia. Though revelation is sacred, its prescriptions for social affairs are bracketed as historical. This allows for perpetual modernization of these prescriptions – in the sense of updating them according to societal needs and changes. Revelation prescriptions are not belittled as backward, but as relevant for a particular context in particular times. Having passed their times, these prescriptions are now interpreted in light of the general message of revelation, which is social justice and social wellbeing.

The revealed prescriptions (like the penal code and inheritance division) are studied as sources of ethical reasoning in re-reading revelation and its relevance for social affairs. Law as prescribed by revelation is no longer considered the ultimate version of the translation of revelation into positive law. Rather, it is the intent of revelation that is mostly searched for as the rationale behind these prescriptions, and based on this intent, new, more adequate laws can be envisaged. Laws as prescribed by modernity are thus not rejected just because they are purely man-made. Revelation is man-interpreted (historicized) in light of modernity challenges; the same is done with Euro-modernity

(historicized). The principle of universality as re-interpreted by Abdurrahmane weakens the Euro-centrist interpretation. If man is major (mature) to reinterpret revelation, so can he do with modernity. The fact that modernity can be expanded and generalized to cover other contexts and societies is not negated. Instead, it is further expanded in the sense that if the European man could work out his own version of modernity, a non-European could do the same. The value of liberty, and the concept of human being cannot apply to some (Europeans) and not be so to others (non-Europeans). The principle of universality appropriates Euro-modernity values and impregnates them with divine spirituality so as to overcome the extravagant materialism of the first modernity.

What appears to be the value of perpetual modernity in securing social wellbeing is that it covers, or at least tries to cover, the non-concrete, the non-material psychological aspirations human beings nurture within their apparently material bodies. Perpetual modernity recognizes that the historicization of revelation is part of the humanization process of the religion in focus – humanization as innovatively interpreted above. Thus, keeping the manifestation of the divine also in social affairs is not problematic to this process. Humanization and historicization here do not aim at enforcing further the private versus public debate of religion. Rather, they try to overcome it. The way to do that is to consider man in his entirety, and not only in his material, visible aspects which material and economic modernity can answer. Perpetual modernity is at this level spiritual – “spiritual modernity” of Abdurrahmane is to be recalled here. Laws that serve the material common good render at the same time spiritual satisfaction to the consumer whose inner side is not in conflict with its outside, seeing that the common good that modern laws secure do elevate the threshold of needs of man from a stage of an individual in society to a human being in the global society where the other is not forgotten while working out ways of preserving the common good. The principle of universality in this level does not only capture the un-material needs of the human being, but also captures the material and un-material needs of the other as well. What this means is that the principle of equality becomes vital in reading revelation for social wellbeing and for the “universal society” – to use Abdurrahmane’s term.

*Three, innovative rationalization of faith through the principle of criticism for individual wellbeing.* Three major aspects govern the third axis of perpetual modernity as understood in my reading of European Islam: the interaction of the individual with revelation (1c) is innovatively rationalized (2c), reasonably ethicized (3c), and critically embraced (4c). The rationalization of faith becomes the ultimate conclusion after the humanization and historicization innovative plans. Instead of banning the divine from man's modern thinking, perpetual modernity proposes a more advanced understanding of religion and faith whereby reason is either expanded – or at least invited to expand its horizons of analysis to the intangible components of the universe and religion – or made equivalent to the essence of man, religion, and ethics.<sup>1423</sup> The Euro-modern man claims to “grasp everything,” but “everything” is only tangible; it ignores the intangible, and still claims to be comprehensive of “everything;” it fails to either modestly claim its limitations or its inability to develop more sophisticated analytical tools that approach the intangible.

Perpetual modernity builds on the above limitations and expands the scope of reasoning by at least two means, henceforth applying the principle of criticism to itself for innovative perpetuity. First, rationalization encompasses the intangible not because it is irrational but because it carries the potential for new manifestations of rationality. Perpetual modernity, at this level, does not disregard the intangible. Considering it part of the whole of man and the universe, it keeps reason in the process of rationalizing the cosmic signs that have been for long considered mythical and irrational. It keeps space open for possible findings that can enlarge the capacities of reason. While this process of deciphering cosmic signs and seemingly irrational aspects contained in religious practices and faith keeps going, all these signs and rituals altogether are taken positively, as an exercise for both rational faculties and spiritual feelings, which makes the boundaries of both reason and faith in constant mutability, and permanent vertical thinking about horizontal life.

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<sup>1423</sup> I recall my formation of this interpretation in the following: religion = ethics = reason, Section 2b, Part IV.

Second, I go back to my earlier format of “religion = ethics = reason” to comment on the pillar of differentiation in Abdurrahmane’s principle of criticism. The point here is that reason is not only an isolated part of the whole/ entity of man. Reason is not only that mechanical part that is invoked to categorize and differentiate items or components that man needs to analyse. “Ordinary reason” stops at this level of mechanical analysis. Reason in perpetual modernity especially stands for the kind of reason Abdurrahmane calls “expanded reason,” which is the essence of every human action. If Euro-modernity has rationally pigeonholed human action in categories, and has thus led to differentiating morality from actual action, ethics from business, religion from politics, management of the world from contemplation of the world, etc., perpetual modernity espouses reason to ethics, and the latter to religion – “religion = ethics = reason.” The essence of human reasoning becomes religiously ethical. This link between the three is connected to the earlier interpretation that the majority of man (according to the majority principle) cannot be universally beneficial to him (cosmic wellbeing) unless it is tied to the divine attributes of the good (mercy, justice, etc.). Otherwise put, the ontological bond between the Creator and Creation, between the divine and the physical world through revelation, finds its utmost resonance in man’s Testimony to live the trust (*amāna*) that is fused in his capabilities to act in the world. That is, the natural, or original, trait of the spirit of man is good; reason, religion, or ethics are but means to activate this good and channel it through for concretization.

What this interpretation of perpetual modernity boils down to is that knowledge production through the apparatus of criticism of “everything” is based on the principle of liberty. Man is free to act as he wishes at all levels, except from “one thing.” Man cannot root out divine attributes of the good (as the aim of ethics) from his soul, however he tries to avoid that in actual action his body carries out. That is why I earlier read Abdurrahmane as saying that the fundamental question that actually faces the modern man is to be either ethical or not to be.<sup>1424</sup> The implication of this reasoning is that the ontological and the epistemological are united. Arguably, knowledge production should not be produced “neutrality” and afterwards classified as “ethical,” or “religious,” or

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<sup>1424</sup> See Section 2b, Part IV, on “Conceptualizing the Idea of European Islam.”

secular.” The ideal of this reasoning is to initially produce knowledge that is all of these: secular, religious, and ethical. For the individual, then, to think and act ethically, he does not need to think of two worlds, one religious and one secular, or two spheres, one private and one public. They all intertwine, and to imprison religious thought in the private sphere – according to this interpretation - is like imprisoning ethics at home. There is no liberty in imprisoning part of man anywhere, especially if this part of man is the most essential for his wellbeing, and his wellbeing affects social wellbeing, and cosmic wellbeing.

Overall, such a high level of relations between various concepts that are replete with meaning, modernity and religion become intertwined to inseparable levels to the extent that the renewal of one of them denotes the renewal of the other, and the failure of one of them to renew itself means the failure of the other. To avoid the “classical dichotomous thought” and its mode of analysis, perpetual modernity as manifested in European Islam aims at burying this distinction and reciprocal blame. A religious conservative commentator would say that the world is religious by default, and modernity values are the means that allow it to rejuvenate itself. A secularist commentator would take the opposite attitude and say that it is just because secularism is tolerant, that modernity values are married to religion; and since religion is tamed by modern values, it is fine to allow the religious to interpret it the way they like, though the world is secular by default. An atheist, whose attitude is closer to the secularist, would say that since religion has accepted (most) modernity values, lives this world and shares the rules of the polity as agreed upon by the majority, though they still think of a metaphysical world, then there is no doubt that the world as lived politically at least is by default Godless, i.e. God is not visible in the political rules devised for citizens. Perpetual modernity gives space to the three main worldviews. Unlike Euro-modernity that mostly satisfies just the secularist and atheist, perpetual modernity gives a large space of confidence to the religious. Such a comprehensive attempt aims at shattering dichotomies. The point I want to make is that perpetual modernity is truthful to various doctrines, and does not “lie” to various views. It does not tell the secularist that the world is secularist by default just to win his heart. It does not do the same for the atheist and religious either. With this

interpretation I enter the realm of “overlapping consensus” as devised by Rawls’ political liberalism where the religious, philosophic or moral doctrinal differences are all put aside –as if they were equal- for the consolidation of the “political.” Conceiving European Islam for “perpetual modernity,” with the links of terms as done before, aimed at paving the ground for evaluating the possibilities of conceiving European Islam as a “reasonable comprehensive doctrine,” which the ultimate section of this work advances.

#### **d. European Islam as a “Reasonable Comprehensive Doctrine”**

This section ends the primal circle of conceptualization endeavour that has been taken in this work. It is an attempt to bring together two theoretical projects, one theological and one political, despite the strong intertwining territories between them (i.e. theology and politics). It may be risky to attempt a demanding endeavour in a closing section in a work of theory and conceptualization. However, as an addition to this enterprise of thinking through bridges, and bringing my interdisciplinary background into facing its diverse components, I have preferred to close this work with this level of abstraction, instead of avoiding it because it could be “dangerous” or “damaging” to the harmony constructed in the previous parts, or because it could be “methodologically untenable.”

The rationale behind this endeavour is to examine how it is possible that the idea that European Islam, through overlapping consensus framework, offers an internally pluralist theological doctrine of the “good” out of which a reasonable European Muslim believer may effectively mediate his normative commitments to European Islam as a comprehensive theory of the “right” with his political commitments to the liberal constitutional society in which he lives. For this purpose, I first introduce John Rawls’ main traits of his idea of “overlapping consensus,” and the “political” in “political liberalism.” I introduce the general terms that serve my purpose, without going into a critique of Rawls’ work. It is not my aim here. Subsequently, I try a political conceptualization of European Islam in light of my earlier generated concepts and the Rawlsian overlapping consensus framework added in this section.

## John Rawls: Political Liberalism and the Idea of Overlapping Consensus<sup>1425</sup>

### The Conception of the Political

John Rawls' work in contemporary (Western) political philosophy has established itself among the classics in the field. Robert Nozick says that contemporary political philosophers "must either work within Rawls's theory or explain why not."<sup>1426</sup> Brian Barry describes the current historical period a "post-Rawlsian world."<sup>1427</sup> In this part of my work that does not aim at analysing Rawls but at understanding European Islam using one of his major ideas for stability in a just society ruled by a constitutional democracy, I introduce two aspects of his work, one theoretical and one practical, i.e. his "theory of justice," and "political liberalism," respectively. I mostly refer to some of the basic terms these two phases of his work have contributed to contemporary political theory.<sup>1428</sup> It is this move from a highly theoretical project to a more practical one that stands behind the adoption of Rawls' framework here.<sup>1429</sup> Though my focus is on his idea of "overlapping consensus," I cannot jump into it without going generally through the framework and concepts that it is based on. For that reason, I do the following. I bridge his theory with its more realistic framework of political liberalism where a "political conception of justice"<sup>1430</sup> is constructed. From the latter I take the idea of overlapping consensus as the most suitable to my work on European Islam.

Rawls' *magnum opus* *A Theory of Justice* (*Theory* in short, 1971) theorizes for a just society, based on a shared conception of the political, where justice, stability, and moral differences are all respected equally. The two main principles of justice, the

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<sup>1425</sup> I am assuming that a section entitled "Why Using Rawls' Political Liberalism in Understanding European Islam?" is read. Methodologically, it is a very relevant "Section" in my whole work. See: Introduction, Section 4.

<sup>1426</sup> Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974) 183

<sup>1427</sup> Qtd in Hadji Haidar, *Liberalism and Islam*, 2

<sup>1428</sup> The assumption here, to voice it as simple as this, is that Rawls' work is taken to be the most convenient for use in a growingly pluralist world in Western contemporary political theory. I use some of the ideas of Rawls because of their high level of abstraction, their higher chances of viability, and even higher level of being endorsed by many people and citizens of various religious, philosophic, and moral doctrines.

<sup>1429</sup> As Rawls says, "we turn to political philosophy when we face deep political conflicts, and when our shared understandings of politics breaks down or is about to fall apart." *Political Liberalism*, 44.

<sup>1430</sup> *Ibid.*, xlv

principle of equality and difference principle,<sup>1431</sup> are achieved by the “free and rational persons” behind “a veil of ignorance.” It is at this level called “the original position” that the principles of justice are agreed upon fairly, where no one is advantaged or disadvantaged by natural chance or social circumstances, hence the name “justice as fairness.”<sup>1432</sup> The main critique *Theory* faces is that it is in itself a comprehensive philosophical doctrine that should not be (indirectly) imposed on other religious or moral doctrines for the sake of the just society. That is, it simply lacks diversity, which renders its stability unsecure. In Rawls’ own terms, *Theory* does not recognize the political diversity in the constitutionally democratic and liberal societies, “*Theory* does not distinguish between comprehensive doctrines and political conceptions.”<sup>1433</sup> It is this fact that leads him to develop the project of “political liberalism.”

In *Theory* Rawls theorizes the way for a just society, and in *Political Liberalism* he defends it further for the sake of its stability in a world characterized by pluralism and different theories of the good, or “reasonable comprehensive doctrines” to use Rawls terms, be they religious, philosophical, or moral. In introducing *Political Liberalism*, he says that his second work has been driven by the following question, which, I believe, every ordinary human society grapples with:

How is it possible that there may exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable though incompatible religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines? Put another way: How is it possible that deeply opposed though reasonable comprehensive doctrines may live together and all affirm the political conception of a constitutional regime? What is the structure and content of a political conception that can gain the support of such an overlapping consensus?<sup>1434</sup>

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<sup>1431</sup> *Theory*, Chapter 2. The theory’s two basic principles of justice are as follows:

First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others. Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all” (*Theory*, 53).

<sup>1432</sup> *Theory*, 3

<sup>1433</sup> *Political Liberalism*, xli

<sup>1434</sup> *Ibid.*, xx

Not having abandoned the basic principles of *Theory*, as he admits,<sup>1435</sup> Rawls opens up more to the realities of especially Western liberal democracies characterized now by the presence of various religious, philosophical, and moral “comprehensive doctrines.” To safeguard the liberal principles of a “well-ordered society” in a constitutional democracy, he devises the idea of “political liberalism” where it is the “political” that brings about together the various doctrines found in the current plural society. The comprehensiveness of liberalism, as that of E. Kant, and J.S. Mill, is put aside as hegemonic and moral in essence and more attention is paid to the preservation of the “political” *per se* – though its principles remain liberal, thus the name “political liberalism.”<sup>1436</sup> Rawls puts it as follows:

Thus, a main aim of PL [*Political Liberalism*] is to show that the idea of the well-ordered society in *Theory* may be reformulated so as to take account of the fact of reasonable pluralism. To do this it transforms the doctrine of justice as fairness as presented in *Theory* into a political conception of justice that applies to the basic structure of society. *Transforming* justice as fairness into a *political conception* of justice requires *reformulating* as political conceptions the component ideas that make up the comprehensive doctrine of justice as fairness.<sup>1437</sup> [Emphasis added]

What should be underpinned from the passage above is that the theory of justice is described as a “comprehensive doctrine,” and because of this comprehensiveness it cannot answer the practical needs of pluralism as a fact which characterizes current liberal societies. To solve the good idea of justice as fairness, Rawls proposes

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<sup>1435</sup> Rawls argues that “[N]ot very much of the content of the doctrine of justice as fairness needs to be changed” in the political society being envisaged in *Political Liberalism*. For instance, he asserts that the significance and content of the two principles of justice and of the basic structure are the same and only need to be understood now within the “political” framework of *Political Liberalism*. On the other hand, he notes that the meaning of autonomy has substantially moved from being moral autonomy in the Millian sense of individuality and Kantian sense of liberal comprehensive doctrine to being political autonomy (*Political Liberalism*, xli-xlii, n. 8). Through political autonomy, the citizen moves from rejecting the idea of moral autonomy as a believer in a particular comprehensive doctrine into endorsing the ideas of freedom and equality as a citizen, a political person. *Political Liberalism*, xliii.

<sup>1436</sup> Rawls makes it clear that the move from *Theory* to *Political Liberalism* is basically a move from moral to political philosophy:

In *Theory* a moral doctrine of justice general in scope is not distinguished from a strictly political conception of justice. Nothing is made of the contrast between comprehensive philosophical and moral doctrines and conceptions limited to the domain of the political. In the lectures in this volume, however, these distinctions and related ideas are fundamental (*Political Liberalism*, xv).

<sup>1437</sup> *Ibid.*, xli. Rawls explains the “basic structure of society” as the “main society’s political, constitutional, social, and economic institutions and how they fit together to form a unified scheme of social cooperation over time [...]. This structure lies entirely within the domain of the political.” *Political Liberalism*, xli, n. 7.

“transforming” it into a “political conception of justice.” How does Rawls argue for that? In his words quoted above, “How is it possible that there may exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable though incompatible religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?” Rawls relativizes the comprehensiveness of any existing doctrine by “politicizing” it – to put it this way – because he sees that no political system can be plural and at the same time based on just one comprehensive doctrine.<sup>1438</sup> I sketch out three main features of the conception of the political.

First, the “political,” besides being a moral conception whose content is shaped by certain ideals and norms, is especially oriented towards the “political, social, and economic institutions” as its main subject or content. These institutions fit together in “one system of social cooperation” over the generations. This focus is what Rawls calls the “basic structure” of the “modern constitutional democracy.”<sup>1439</sup> Second, the political tends to be inclusive –on the condition of being “reasonable” which will be explained later- without being comprehensive. It is “freestanding.” The political conception of justice is freestanding “when it is not presented as derived from, or as part of, any comprehensive doctrine.”<sup>1440</sup> The political is or can be supported by various comprehensive doctrines in society without it being summarized in the doctrine of just

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<sup>1438</sup> I can say that Rawls also “liberalizes” all doctrines, but I bracket this view here. That is why some scholars, like Bhikhu Parekh suspects *Political Liberalism* of being a philosophical comprehensive doctrine; if not already now, then it could turn into one in the future, as it secures the stability of overlapping consensus. However, not to say much here, the idea of overlapping consensus aims at stability, but the political society it works on has to keep permanently the debate of who fits in, and how far, etc. That is, securing stability, though an end in itself, is, most importantly, a process, a project always in the making, that is why comprehensive doctrines should not fear “fully converting to liberalism” because in that case, overlapping consensus and the idea of political justice may make no sense at all! Moreover, Rawls makes it clear that political justice cannot cover all virtues; it cannot be a doctrine, or a full doctrine; it needs other virtues, which it gets from other doctrines: “we should not expect justice as fairness, or any account of justice, to cover all cases of right and wrong. Political justice needs always to be complemented by other virtues” (*Political Liberalism*, 21). That is another work to be thought of by the future generations when *Political Liberalism* has taken some good space in plural societies. I have anticipated and summarized a number of issues in this note.

<sup>1439</sup> *Political Liberalism*, 11. This basic structure is assumed to be that of a “closed-society” that has no relations with other societies, and the citizen enters it by birth and leaves it only with death (*Political Liberalism*, 12). I interpret this to mean that the “political” secures stability and justice by clinging so much to its basic structure, which other societies may not share, and may even try to weaken. Seeing the general idea I want to withdraw from *Political Liberalism*, I do not stop at other minor details of each concept, otherwise this section would turn into a work on Rawls, which is not my intention.

<sup>1440</sup> *Ibid.*, xliii.

one or some of them. “It offers no specific metaphysical or epistemological doctrine.”<sup>1441</sup> Third, the political can be nurtured by the “implicit public political culture of a democratic society.” “Public culture” includes the constitutional institutions and public traditions, the way they are composed and interpreted, and the way they are perceived in society as part of “common knowledge.”<sup>1442</sup> The success of the “political” then requires all citizens in the closed society to contribute to it, despite the diversity and difference of their doctrines. How is it possible to bring different people to agree on one content of a concept – the political? Three more fundamental ideas solidify the project: “the idea of society as a fair system of cooperation,” “the idea of the original position,” and “the political conception of the person.” These three fundamental ideas give shape to the political, to the “idea of a well-ordered society.” I say more on each below.

The political requires that citizens consider their society “as a fair system of cooperation.” Rawls lists three main aspects of cooperation. One, cooperation does not mean “merely socially coordinated activity” that is decreed and controlled by a central authority. Rather, it means recognizing public rules as fundamental to the citizen/person’s conduct. The person endorses these rules, and makes them part of his daily comportment. Two, for the person to adopt such rules, the others in society should adopt them too, otherwise it would be unjust, and disadvantageous to him (or/and her). Shared adoption of these rules are called “fair terms of cooperation.” “Reciprocity” is crucial in this aspect; it does not mean the simple share of advantage, but means taking into account the two principles of justice into account; mutual advantage could be disadvantageous to one part than to the other. Three, and interestingly, “[T]he idea of social cooperation requires an idea of each participant’s rational advantage, or good.” That is, each participant has to think rationally of the good he receives from the cooperation he is involved in “when the scheme is viewed from their [the person’s] own standpoint.”<sup>1443</sup>

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<sup>1441</sup> Ibid., 10

<sup>1442</sup> Ibid., 12-14. Note that “public culture” here serves the “political,” while “background culture” in Rawls’ differentiation is “comprehensive” since it is disseminated not in public, but in particular institutions, like churches, associations, universities, clubs, teams, etc. which are part of daily life and “culture of the social.” (*Political Liberalism*, 14)

<sup>1443</sup> Ibid., 16. Such cooperation seems very rewarding; however liberal it looks, it still keeps part of the doctrine of the engaged person to himself; it does not efface, it appears, the existential questions that may have indirectly pushed him to cooperate. On the other hand, this may even lead him to renew his perception

No need to say again that the person as a normative concept, as used by Rawls here, is considered free, equal to other persons, and endowed with moral powers that can conceive the good, and rational powers that can form judgments and inferences.<sup>1444</sup> However, this can also mean that when cooperating, there is a space to think of why one is working/cooperating, and for what reason; so, the political aside, the doctrine one belongs to is given space to live, and to be thought of rationally when cooperating with others, even when the thing cooperated on does not think initially of the doctrine of the person and its place; as a fair pay off, the person who cooperates fairly, gets his doctrinal idea preserved somehow, if not materially then at least psychologically, which he thinks of preserving, possibly as a fundamental part of his identity or aim in life: “persons also have at any given time a determinate conception of the good that they try to achieve. Such a conception must not be understood narrowly but rather as including a conception of what is valuable in human life.”<sup>1445</sup> Now that the main features of society as a fair system of cooperation are outlined, the question that is faced is the following: “How are the fair terms of cooperation to be determined?” Are they divine, laid down by God? Or are they laid down by some supreme authority, or by some moral order that tries to be inclusive of various doctrines available in society?<sup>1446</sup> These are delicate questions.

Rawls proposes “the idea of the original position” as “a device of representation [...] of public reflection and self-clarification” for the attainment of wider agreement possible.<sup>1447</sup> The original position, mostly its prominent device called the “veil of ignorance,” seeks a point of view that is empty of any particular doctrinal, historical, social, political, or economic features that may have been accumulated over time by the persons seeking agreement. In the original position, persons speak metaphorically from “behind the veil of ignorance” where they all stand free and equal, empty of any considerations that may advantage one or some over others.<sup>1448</sup> This device demands that

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of both his doctrine and the political perception he is engaged in, actively and fairly; he may realize that there is no conflict between his doctrine and the political. I will come back to this point later when I invoke European Islam.

<sup>1444</sup> Ibid., 19

<sup>1445</sup> Ibid., 19

<sup>1446</sup> Ibid., 22

<sup>1447</sup> Ibid., 26

<sup>1448</sup> Ibid., 23

“the parties [cooperating] are not allowed to know the social position of those they represent, or the particular comprehensive doctrine of the person each represents.”<sup>1449</sup>

The original position here veils the comprehensive doctrines from directly appropriating the principles that govern the political conception of justice, and thus prevents them from dominating it. Highly theoretical as it is, how does the political conception place the person in light of the idea of the original position?

The “political conception of the person” has three main features in Rawls’ work. One, as free citizens, persons are featured as having the moral power to have their own conception of the good. They are able to revise their perceptions of the good based on their reasonable and rational faculties. Their status as free citizens does not change even when their views of the good change over time. Citizens usually do not lead a life solely political. They pursue other non-political ways of life, shaped by other doctrines. However, their political citizenship gives shape to their way of life and shows them what they want, though that can keep changing. It is this moral capacity of free citizens that the political person enjoys and preserves, which remains crucial to his political and social cooperation with other citizens, however different or not it may be with other doctrines simultaneously followed by other citizens.<sup>1450</sup> Two, free, citizens are featured as having the capacity to self-authenticate their claims. This capacity allows them to demand that institutions cater for their claims as they stem from their conception of the good, which in turn could be implicitly nurtured by their doctrines, as long as these claims are allowed by the public conception of justice. Three, free, citizens are considered capable of taking responsibilities of their ends, which impacts how their claims in general are evaluated. This also renders them responsible of matching their claims with the principles of justice as endorsed by everyone, cooperatively, in society: “[T]hat is, they can adjust their ends so that those ends can be pursued by the means they can reasonably expect to acquire in return for what they can reasonably expect to contribute.”<sup>1451</sup>

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<sup>1449</sup> Ibid., 24

<sup>1450</sup> Ibid., 30-31

<sup>1451</sup> Ibid., 34

The three ideas above are essential features of the political in *Political Liberalism*. They construct what Rawls calls “the idea of a well-ordered society.” Broadly, and in light of what has been said, such a society is characterized by three aspects:

First [...], it is a society in which everyone accepts, and knows that everyone else accepts, the very same principles of justice; and second [...] its basic structure—that is, its main political and social institutions and how they fit together as one system of cooperation—is publicly known, or with good reason believed, to satisfy these principles [...]. And third, its citizens have a normally effective sense of justice and so they generally comply with society's basic institutions, which they regard as just.<sup>1452</sup>

This “well-ordered society” has until now been broadly described, based on ideas of the political conception of justice, the person, and society itself. Doctrines have been mentioned as unavoidable and inerasable from society, however just it [society] may be, and however reasonable they [doctrines] could be. They are strong components of society, but what is their place in Rawls’ political society? And what is the condition –or conditions- that they should meet to enter the political and secure its justice and stability? It is here that the requirements of “reasonableness” are introduced for the various doctrines –religious, philosophic, or moral- that compose society. It is only reasonableness that promotes pluralism from a mere fact into “reasonable pluralism” that is able to sustain the political through the idea of overlapping consensus –which the coming paragraphs explain gradually.

As a definition, a “doctrine” – which can be religious, philosophic, or moral - is a “conception” (not only a “concept”<sup>1453</sup>) that can be “fully comprehensive if it covers all recognized values and virtues within one rather precisely articulated system.”<sup>1454</sup> That is, it is a system that includes conceptions about what is life, what is of value in life, and how social, economic, political, etc., relations should be considered to lead such a good

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<sup>1452</sup> Ibid., 35; 201-202

<sup>1453</sup> Rawls defines them as follows: “[...] the concept is the meaning of a term while a particular conception includes as well the principle required to apply it. [...] To develop a concept of justice into a conception of it is to elaborate these requisite principles and standards.” That is, when a term is filled with meaning it becomes a concept; when a concept is further detailed with principles and standards in a more argumentative manner, it becomes a conception. Rawls uses the “idea” to mean the two together, which means that it is even more inclusive in scope than they are. Ibid., 14, n15.

<sup>1454</sup> Ibid., 13

life. A doctrine is only “partially comprehensive when it comprises a number of but by no means all, nonpolitical values and virtues and is rather loosely articulated.”<sup>1455</sup> For example, a partial doctrine may not include a code of conduct in the field of politics, or economics, or some other particular field of human relations. This fact of pluralism of doctrines as well as their levels of comprehensiveness, means that the polity cannot accommodate them all unless there is a framework that allows each to be “in” without being domineering. This same framework curtails the fully comprehensive doctrines so that they do not become coercive; at the same time, the partially comprehensive ones would be covered in the areas where their doctrine does not provide clearer conceptions for conduct. Such a framework serves no doctrine in particular but serves all together. This is the aim of the “political conception of justice” in Rawls’ work. There are, however, conditions to tailor such a serviceable and just framework. Remaining with the question of doctrines and pluralism, Rawls requires reasonableness so that they contribute to building “reasonable pluralism.”

Rawls applies the distinction between “reasonable” and “rational” on persons before he uses them for doctrines. On defining the first he invokes the principle of “reciprocity”:

Persons are reasonable in one basic aspect when, among equals say, they are ready to propose principles and standards as fair terms of cooperation and to abide by them willingly, given the assurance that others will likewise do so. Those norms they view as reasonable for everyone to accept and therefore as justifiable to them; and they are ready to discuss the fair terms that others propose.<sup>1456</sup>

In clearer terms, persons are reasonable when they are ready to enter into a debate to build agreement, leaving aside their own personal interests that may be purely egoist or doctrinal, “Reasonable persons, we say, are not moved by the general good as such but desire for its own sake a social world in which they, as free and equal, can cooperate with others on terms all can accept.”<sup>1457</sup> Reciprocity is essential for the reasonable because it advantages everyone not equally, but justly. “The overall criterion of the reasonable is

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<sup>1455</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>1456</sup> Ibid., 49

<sup>1457</sup> Ibid., 50

general and wide reflective equilibrium.”<sup>1458</sup> In simple terms, “reflective equilibrium” is the process of deliberations and adjustments or reciprocity that the citizen enters till “reasonable agreement” on the content of the political is reached. The “unreasonable” do the opposite; they enter agreements but “[T]hey are ready to violate such terms as suits their interests when circumstances allow.”<sup>1459</sup> As to the “rational,” it is an individual that seeks “ends and interests peculiarly its own,” though Rawls warns that such an individual can have strong love for his society, and nature, for instance. The difference is in the level of moral stimulus behind a choice that serves society, “[W]hat rational agents lack is the particular form of moral sensibility that underlies the desire to engage in fair cooperation as such, and to do so on terms that others as equals might reasonably be expected to endorse.”<sup>1460</sup> That is, the rational can endorse cooperative agreements for the wellbeing of society of individuals, but he remains morally untouched by such behaviour. I may put it this way: the rational can be convinced by the idea of the political, but not persuaded by it, while the reasonable is both convinced and persuaded.

What the distinction between the reasonable and the rational leads to is the concept of “reasonable comprehensive doctrine.” The latter becomes a conception, or a system, that holds a particular view about human life, and the virtues and behaviours that support such a worldview. Rawls gives it three main features. First, “a reasonable doctrine is an exercise of theoretical reason” in the sense that “it covers the major religious, philosophical, and moral aspects of human life in a more or less consistent and coherent manner.”<sup>1461</sup> It does so by organizing values in a system that renders them compatible with one another to picture the core worldview the doctrine targets. Each doctrine has its own system of categorization, which allows persons to distinguish one from the other. Second, “a reasonable comprehensive doctrine is also an exercise of practical reason”<sup>1462</sup> when it allows persons in general and its adherents in particular to

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<sup>1458</sup> Ibid., 384. See n. 16, for the difference between wide and general reflective equilibrium: “The reflective equilibrium is wide, given the wide-ranging reflection and possibly many changes of view that have preceded it. [...] Since citizens recognize that they affirm the same public conception of political justice, reflective equilibrium is also general: the same conception is affirmed in everyone’s considered judgments.”

<sup>1459</sup> Ibid., 50

<sup>1460</sup> Ibid., 51

<sup>1461</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>1462</sup> Ibid., 59

prioritizes some values over others when a situation brings them together. Third, “a reasonable comprehensive view is not necessarily fixed and unchanging,” which means that “it normally belongs to, or draws upon, a tradition of thought and doctrine.”<sup>1463</sup> The fact that it links itself to some past but still uses theoretical and practical reason to update its value system means that however it tries to seem stable over time “it tends to evolve slowly in the light of what, from its point of view, it sees as good and sufficient reasons.”<sup>1464</sup> What these features imply is that reasonable people cannot reasonably reason the same way because of the various reasonable reasons or causes that lead them to adopt a particular type of reasonableness. These causes behind “reasonable disagreement” are termed “the burdens of judgement.”<sup>1465</sup> Reasonableness, in other words, requires “reasonable disagreement” that is founded on reasonable burdens of judgement.

The three features of reasonable comprehensive doctrines have three implications that end up in forming “reasonable pluralism.” These implications are as follows: 1) reasonable persons have to accept the consequences of the burdens of judgement; i.e. they have to accept “reasonable disagreement;” 2) “reasonable persons do not all affirm the same comprehensive doctrine;” 3) “reasonable persons will think it unreasonable to use political power, should they possess it, to repress comprehensive views that are not unreasonable, though different from their own.”<sup>1466</sup> In a note, Rawls gives an example to differentiate between the reasoning of the person and the reasonableness of his doctrine: he says that a subjective view of some person may be unreasonable, possibly because of blindness or capriciousness; “this does not make the doctrine as such unreasonable.”<sup>1467</sup> With this level of reasoning, difference is not seen always as a result of ignorance or hatred or search for power and dominance; difference could simply be the result of different ways of reasoning.<sup>1468</sup> It is this mode of thinking that makes “reasonable

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<sup>1463</sup> Ibid., 59

<sup>1464</sup> Ibid., 59

<sup>1465</sup> Ibid., 55

<sup>1466</sup> Ibid., 60

<sup>1467</sup> Ibid., 60

<sup>1468</sup> Rawls write: “It is unrealistic—or worse, it arouses mutual suspicion and hostility—to suppose that all our differences are rooted solely in ignorance and perversity, or else in the rivalries for power, status, or economic gain.” Ibid., 58

pluralism,” which is different from “pluralism as such,”<sup>1469</sup> or “simple pluralism.”<sup>1470</sup> Reasonable pluralism, henceforth, is “the natural outcome of the activities of human reason under enduring free institutions.”<sup>1471</sup> Having argued further that society is deeply divided by diverse reasonable comprehensive doctrines, besides others that may be unreasonable, the question comes back: how is it possible to conceive of a stable and just society where free and equal citizens are deeply doctrinally divided? With some essential terms introduced above, it is now the “idea of overlapping consensus” that has to be brought out as one of the ideas of *Political Liberalism* that aims at sustaining and stabilizing the sought for “well-ordered society.” Starting with its features it becomes gradually clearer.

### **The Idea of Overlapping Consensus**

Rawls outlines three major features of overlapping consensus. It is political, moral (not general and comprehensive), and stable. First, overlapping consensus as a fundamental idea for a public conception of justice, is political. It targets the basic structure of society – the political, social and economic institutions. If it does not work for the basic structure, it cannot be political. It is political because it is independent, or freestanding; it is not dependent on any specific religious, moral, or philosophical doctrine.<sup>1472</sup> This empowers it with what Rawls calls “liberal legitimacy,” i.e. a constitutional liberal democracy, as envisioned in the well-ordered society, cannot be based on one comprehensive doctrine. Pluralism is taken to be an enduring fact, and not a temporary one.

Second, overlapping consensus is moral but not in the sense of being another comprehensive doctrine that can be added to the already existing doctrines. It is a device that brings together all the reasonable existing doctrines without itself being one or turning into one, for “no general and comprehensive view can provide a publicly

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<sup>1469</sup> Ibid., 63

<sup>1470</sup> Ibid., xxx

<sup>1471</sup> Ibid., xxiv

<sup>1472</sup> Ibid., 144

acceptable basis for a political conception of justice.”<sup>1473</sup> Through reasonable pluralism, it does not aim at establishing a community that adopts one comprehensive doctrine either. The fact of reasonable pluralism makes it very difficult for overlapping consensus to become a comprehensive doctrine. Rawls does not deny the fact that “firmly held beliefs” are expected to “change in fundamental ways” with time so that the idea of the political works – always based on the principles of justice as fairness.<sup>1474</sup> Ideally, overlapping consensus would like to see a citizens’ comprehensive doctrine merging with the concept of the political, so that stability –as will be referred to below- is granted. So, the object of overlapping consensus is moral: the realization of the political conception of justice through stability. The conception of justice in society, justice principles, the conception of citizens as free and equal persons are requisites that make it a moral consensus, though not a comprehensive doctrine as any other doctrine (the liberalism of Mill and Kant, Marxism and Utilitarianism, for example).<sup>1475</sup> The fact that overlapping consensus does not base its moral standing on any existing doctrine does not make it “skeptical” or “indifferent.” The idea is to satisfy as many existing doctrines as possible

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<sup>1473</sup> Rawls, “The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus,” 4.

<sup>1474</sup> Ibid., 5. I think that he especially means that this change touches mostly the unreasonable comprehensive doctrines, and also the reasonable comprehensive doctrines that might have had some suspicion over the idea of the political. In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls seems to be saying something different, when discussing the idea of overlapping consensus and its moral basis:

All those who affirm the political conception start from within their own comprehensive view and draw on the religious, philosophical, and moral grounds it provides. The fact that people affirm the same political conception on those grounds does not make their affirming it any less religious, philosophical, or moral, as the case may be, since the grounds sincerely held determine the nature of their affirmation. (*Political Liberalism*, 146-147)

I do not consider this a contradiction. While the assumption, first voiced in his article on 1987, shows that firmly held doctrines are expected to change in fundamental ways, his revision of the article to be part of *Political Liberalism* in 1993 puts the feature of the morality of overlapping consensus within the broader structure of the work. I understand that it is only after the original position device is gone through that the political conception of justice allows that persons of different doctrines can resume to link the moral freestanding of the political with their reasonable comprehensive doctrine. It should be remembered that levels of reasonableness are different, and the levels of justification are also different, and so is the way towards overlapping consensus. When these stages and concepts are taken into account, they make the seeming contradiction in terms another way of expressing a complicated process of reasoning for the idea of overlapping consensus. Later when Rawls speaks of “constitutional consensus” he acknowledges that Samuel Scheffler has directed him to illustrate this point. A note in *Political Liberalism* explains it plainly; he says: “Note that here we distinguish between the initial allegiance to, or appreciation of, the political conception and the later adjustment or revision of comprehensive doctrines to which that allegiance or appreciation leads when inconsistencies arise. These adjustments or revisions we may assume to take place slowly over time as the political conception shapes comprehensive views to cohere with it” (*Political Liberalism* 165, n 25).

<sup>1475</sup> “Overlapping Consensus,” 4-6 ; *Political Liberalism*, 147

without at the same time declaring itself tied to just one of them; every moral doctrine has to find its space in the political,<sup>1476</sup> without this meaning that questions about “truth” are solved, let alone some political questions that remain open to discussion. Overlapping consensus neither rejects questions of truth as irrelevant nor does it solve them; it allows discussing them reasonably within the framework of the political.<sup>1477</sup>

Third, overlapping consensus is stable. It secures stability for the political conception of justice. In Rawls words, “[T]his means that those who affirm the various views supporting the political conception will not withdraw their support of it should the relative strength of their view in society increase and eventually become dominant.”<sup>1478</sup> Even in the case of shifts in power – for example, if a minority becomes a majority – the political conception of justice does not change; the same basic principles that govern the political remain stable. Stability, along with the other two features of the political and moral, renders overlapping consensus different from the status of *modus vivendi* in which stability is not secure. In *modus vivendi*, as long as the gain of each community or doctrine is secured, stability could be formed and preserved; if such a community or doctrine’s power increases, its ambitions to overrule the agreements and

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<sup>1476</sup> *Political Liberalism*, 150

<sup>1477</sup> *Political Liberalism*, 151. Rawls further says in a note:

When certain matters are taken off the political agenda they are no longer regarded as appropriate subjects for political decision by majority or other plurality voting.” He gives the example of abolishing slavery, serfdom, and the protection of freedom of conscience as “correctly settled once and for all. (Ibid., 151, n. 16)

Other doctrinal truths that are part of the core beliefs of some doctrines have to be discussed internally, among the members of these doctrines, and if they come to the public, they should do so following the many principles introduced until now, and also the principles of the “idea of public reason” which I do not introduce here. For more on that, see *Political Liberalism*, Lecture VI: “The Idea of Public Reason,” 212-254. From overlapping consensus, some interesting statements can clarify this here. For instance, Rawls says, “by avoiding comprehensive doctrines we try to bypass religion and philosophy’s profoundest controversies so as to have some hope of uncovering a basis of a stable overlapping consensus” (Ibid., 152). Few paragraphs later, he goes so far as to say that if a comprehensive doctrine is true, and yet endorses the conception of the political, then the other doctrines, even though they may be different from this one assumed true doctrine, can also be true, since they contribute to the political too. A long passage explains it:

If any of the reasonable comprehensive doctrines in the existing overlapping consensus is true, then the political conception itself is true, or close thereto in the sense of being endorsed by a true doctrine. The truth of any one doctrine guarantees that all doctrines yield the right conception of political justice, even though all are not right for the right reasons as given by the one true doctrine. So, as we have said, when citizens differ, not all can be fully correct; yet if one of their doctrines should be true, all citizens are correct, politically speaking. (Ibid., 153-54, n. 19).

<sup>1478</sup> Ibid., 148

cooperation with the other partners become very possible, thus endanger any previous consolidations of the political conception of justice. Overlapping consensus makes the principles of justice inherent in the political conception of every contributing doctrine, hence renders it hardly feasible that these contributing doctrines change justice with injustice. This implies that the principles of justice as fairness go deep into citizens comprehensive doctrines to the extent that they no longer wish to withdraw from them; they become part of their comprehensive doctrine which may have initially had reservations over such a conception of justice or may have fully refused it in the first place. To erase such a possible tension between the citizen as a political agent as well as a believer in his doctrine, Rawls pictures a merger between the two as the ideal version of overlapping consensus:

[I]n an ideal overlapping consensus, each citizen affirms both a comprehensive doctrine and the focal political conception, somehow related. In some cases the political conception is simply the consequence of or continuous with, a citizen's comprehensive doctrine; in others it may be related as an acceptable approximation given the circumstances of the social world.<sup>1479</sup>

The point here is that benefits of justice to the self and other become immeasurable that no reasonable person or reasonable doctrine would wish to change them or rebel against them.<sup>1480</sup> Stability of overlapping consensus, in brief terms, stems from the fact that “values of the political are very great values and hence not easily overridden;” they “govern the basic framework of social life—the very groundwork of our existence—and specify the fundamental terms of political and social cooperation.”<sup>1481</sup> The constitutional regime secures diversity; no comprehensive doctrine feels that its existence is at risk, for “no conflict of values is likely to arise.”<sup>1482</sup> In case they do, the “very great values of the political” of tolerance, reasonableness, and fairness can outweigh them. The freedom and equality enjoyed by persons of various doctrines make the political conception a defensible project. It is defensible because, among the other previous reasons, the values

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<sup>1479</sup> Ibid., xix

<sup>1480</sup> Ibid., 149

<sup>1481</sup> Ibid., 139

<sup>1482</sup> Ibid., 155

it defends for the public good –like tolerance, reasonableness and fairness - are “liberal.” These values flourish in a constitutionally liberal, democratic regime.<sup>1483</sup>

The three features of overlapping consensus – being political, moral, and stable – described above do not transpire over a night and thus create a well-ordered society. They take shape over two stages, which Rawls calls “constitutional consensus” and “overlapping consensus.” It should be remembered that Rawls builds his project of political liberalism on the European heritage of the Reformation, and the development of toleration as a way to avoid further religious conflicts. It is from this historical basis that the stage of constitutional consensus is developed. This first stage of building a constitutionally democratic regime requires that the conflicting views - that may have had to go into war before sitting for negotiations and agreement – subscribe to some basic principles that secure a minimum of stability and constitutional liberal democracy. Constitutional consensus then is an initiation to a new conception of society and the political where various doctrines tolerate each other, and all work together for the welfare of society – social justice. It is at this stage a form of *modus vivendi*. It initiates the citizens to the political procedures, principles and rights of a democratic government – like the legislative and electoral procedures, freedom of political speech and freedom of association. These principles and rights are reached through deliberations by means of “public reason,” the “allegiance to institutions,” the fact of “reasonable pluralism” and the effects of “moral psychology.”<sup>1484</sup> These principles push the citizens to revise or shift their comprehensive doctrines to serve the conception of justice in this framework.<sup>1485</sup> Yet, “these principles are accepted simply as principles and not as grounded in certain ideas of society and person of a political conception, much less in a shared public

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<sup>1483</sup> Ibid., 156

<sup>1484</sup> Ibid., 161-163. By moral psychology is meant the reciprocity citizens find in the institutions they have started to trust, a trust which turns in time into a defense of these institutions, seeing that other citizens also abide by them (for more on its features, see *Political Liberalism*, 163).

<sup>1485</sup> But not all doctrines make or need such a shift; some need just time to realize that their doctrine or truth is compatible with the political, thus they join its claims and claim it as theirs. It depends on the reasonableness and levels of comprehensiveness of doctrines, as referred to in various occasions earlier. What this means, in my view, is that each doctrine, especially fully comprehensive doctrines, have a minimum of liberal ideas which just need historical circumstances to make them visible. After introducing these basic Rawlsian concepts, I will consider European Islam one of such doctrines.

conception. And so the consensus is not deep.”<sup>1486</sup> What especially remains unsettled at this stage are “the more exact content and boundaries of these rights and liberties, as well as what further rights and liberties are to be counted as basic and so merit legal if not constitutional protection.”<sup>1487</sup> This means that the various doctrines have not consolidated their views as very compatible or supportive of the conception of political justice. They still consider a gap between their doctrine and the political. Pluralism here is still “simple” and not “reasonable.” The second stage – which is overlapping consensus - is where a substantial move towards the endorsement of the political conception of justice takes its ideal form.

Unlike constitutional consensus, which is close to being a prolonged *modus vivendi*, overlapping consensus is an independent political, moral and stable conception of the political. In overlapping consensus, the various doctrines that cooperate for the realization of society as a fair system of cooperation do not support such an ideal from their own reasons alone, nor do they support them as a “political compromise.”<sup>1488</sup> Though they have different conceptions of the good which each doctrine derives from its conception of truth, in the society they envisage, they have to share the conception of the right for the sake of stability. They go beyond that. They integrate the political conception of justice as part of their doctrine. That is how stability is secured. All the concepts introduced until now are devices that contribute to the political society envisaged by overlapping consensus. In brief terms, Rawls states two conditions for the functioning of overlapping consensus: a) it must be correctly based on the concepts and principles described until now (i.e. constitutional liberal democracy basics), and b) it must be stable thanks to the principles that support it and which it simultaneously encourages.<sup>1489</sup> What should be retained until now is that overlapping consensus is a leading idea in political liberalism that aims at solving the fundamental question of how it is possible to have a stable and just society profoundly divided by various doctrines:

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<sup>1486</sup> *Political Liberalism*, 158

<sup>1487</sup> *Ibid.*, 159

<sup>1488</sup> What is meant is *modus vivendi*. *Ibid.*, 171

<sup>1489</sup> *Ibid.*, 168

The problem of political liberalism is to work out a political conception of political justice for a constitutional democratic regime that a plurality of reasonable doctrines, both religious and nonreligious, liberal and nonliberal, may freely endorse, and so freely live by and come to understand its virtues. Emphatically it does not aim to replace comprehensive doctrines, religious or nonreligious, but intends to be equally distinct from both and, it hopes, acceptable to both.<sup>1490</sup>

Having said so, I ultimately point to Jorgen Habermans' question to Rawls. The question is whether overlapping consensus adds a justification to the conception of the political or whether it adds a condition to social stability.<sup>1491</sup> Overlapping consensus seems to do both. This is further illustrated by Rawls in his "Reply to Habermas" article.

Overlapping consensus carries the political conception of justice within it and tries to protect it through the stability it seeks. It is a core idea to the realization of the aim of *Political Liberalism* – along with other ideas: "public justification," "stability for the right reasons," and the liberal principle of "legitimacy," as Rawls explains in his "Reply."<sup>1492</sup> The four terms intertwine. Public justification which is a requisite for legitimacy is impossible without overlapping consensus (and its stability).

Thus, in *Political Liberalism*, overlapping consensus has a vital place. Owing to the fact that legitimacy for the constitutional liberal democracy cannot be gained without public justification, I note here that Rawls outlines three stages of justification, and they take a lot from, or intertwine with, overlapping consensus. First, "*pro tanto* justification" of the political conception considers only "political values." The original position and

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<sup>1490</sup> Ibid., xxxviii

<sup>1491</sup> Ibid., 394. (See, "Reply to Habermas")

<sup>1492</sup> Ibid., 388, n. 21; 394. I am more concerned with public justification here, on which I say few words in the main text. In this note I succinctly say few words about the idea two ideas: "stability for the right reasons" as a term is used by Rawls in reply to Habermas, but he does not use the same term in the first edition of PL. He notes that it should be understood as meaning the same thing as "stability" (Ibid., xxxvii). Stability for the right reasons simply means that each citizen endorses the political conception of justice willingly for internal reasons – which could be part of his comprehensive doctrine. If this endorsement of justice coincides, and it should later be so in the sense of being compatible, with the citizen's comprehensive doctrine and its conception of the good that leads to stability, which is a vital aim of reasonable comprehensive doctrine. As to the liberal principle of legitimacy, it means that a constitutional democracy is not fully legitimate unless it has secured public justification, or full reflexive equilibrium. This entails that all the reasonable citizens in a political society have to endorse the political conception as if it were part and parcel of their comprehensive doctrine. If this condition is not secured, the political society is not fully liberal.

deliberating in public from behind the veil of ignorance –as public reason requires- give ample answers about the basics of a just and constitutional society.

Second, “full justification” is expressed by a citizen as a member of civil society. At this second, he somehow adds the political conception to his comprehensive doctrine either as true or reasonable, depending on the type of the doctrine. However freestanding the political conception is, this does not mean that it cannot be integrated into some doctrines as a “module,” as part of the doctrine in some of its political aspects. Accordingly, the citizen, and his association or doctrine, do find within their doctrine what answers the requirements of the political, and keep apart the non-political aspects of their doctrine.

Third, “public justification” - which is a basic idea of political liberalism along with the three other ideas of overlapping consensus, stability, and legitimacy – “happens when all the reasonable members of political society carry out a justification of the shared political conception by embedding it in their several reasonable comprehensive views.”<sup>1493</sup> What this implies is that citizens look at each other as reasonable and coming from reasonable comprehensive doctrines that all support the political; such an attitude makes them all equal defenders of the political, each claiming it as his while at the same time knowing that the other does the same; “this mutual accounting shapes the moral quality of the public culture of political society.”<sup>1494</sup> They all become reasonable and political. Despite their original differences of the conception of the “good,” now it is the “right” that unites their attitude. Each of them becomes confident that he and his doctrine contribute to the political, and are themselves political. For these doctrines to reach such an agreement, they have go through conditions and aspects of reasonable overlapping consensus, as seen earlier, “Only when there is a reasonable overlapping consensus can political society's political conception of justice be publicly—though never finally—justified.”<sup>1495</sup>

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<sup>1493</sup> *Political Liberalism*, 387

<sup>1494</sup> *Ibid.*, 387

<sup>1495</sup> *Ibid.*, 388. Justification is never full because deliberations on the political and the political conception of justice never end in a plural society. This implies that the conception of the political cannot become a

## Features of European Islam as a “Reasonable Comprehensive Doctrine”

Seeing the shift from studying texts to understand how they mostly revisit religion theologically to how this understanding could be interpreted politically,<sup>1496</sup> I will have to proceed following a “founded assumption.”<sup>1497</sup> This assumption is twofold: 1) it considers European Islam as a “theory of the good,” or a “reasonable comprehensive doctrine,” and 2) it considers that European Islam seeks the “permanence of social justice.” First, European Islam is a theory of the good, or what I take Rawls to mean by a “reasonable comprehensive doctrine.” I opt for this assumption of “a theory of the good” based on the theological justifications the Islamic tradition advances, which is also

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rigid comprehensive doctrine. it is constantly being deliberated, without this endangering the stability and justice it brings about. For justifications of my use of Rawls in evaluating European Islam, revisit the main introduction, and my notes on “Methodological Concerns,” and more specifically a sub-section entitled “Why Using Rawls’ Political Liberalism in Understanding European Islam?” There, I provide three main reasons behind my choice, and refer to the few but interesting available works that also use Rawls in reading especially Islamic classical jurisprudence and contemporary conservatives.

<sup>1496</sup> As a reminder, by the “theological” I broadly mean the study of religion in its physical and metaphysical dimensions, or the meaning of religion in its secular and divine dimensions. By the “political” I mean the “management of social affairs,” taking into account the “world-and-individual” dimensions into account, in light of the religious theological dimensions, without this being reserved only to the religious. The “management of social affairs” becomes “the management of world affairs,” and thus inclusive of the three axes (world-society-individual), as well as other axes besides religion, like man-made religions, philosophy, morality, etc., or what Rawls calls “doctrines.” Overall, theology means the contemplation (*tadabur*) of religion, and politics means the management (*tadbīr*) of world affairs. I have borrowed the terms “contemplation” and “management” (*tadbīr* and *tadabur* in Arabic) from Taha Abderrahman who uses them to define religion and politics, respectively. Note that I have given his definition of religion to theology. That is, while he says that religion means the contemplation of the world, I say that theology is the contemplation of religion, which in turn is a contemplation of religion. Abdurrahmane, *The Spirit of Modernity*, 64; *The Spirit of Religion*, 509.

<sup>1497</sup> I say it is a “founded assumption” because my work until now has been based on two arguments that support it: political challenge(s) and theological interpretation(s). These two challenges intertwine, and they are the driving force behind the way the whole argument of this study is structured. One, the political challenge: it is quite obvious that the reform searched for by contemporary Islamic thought in general and European Islam in particular is not taken as a leisure activity. There is a challenge to face, and this challenge has manifested itself politically. It is European modern polity that has shown that Muslim communities within Europe, and also Muslims in Muslim majority countries, face various problems within the polity they reside in. European Islam is, then, part of the “revision” going on in the so-called Muslim world. Two, the theological challenge: this “revision” is not only political but is most importantly theological. The policies that show the Muslims in the defensive, unable to, or unwilling to, adjust to the constitutionally liberal societies they reside in, have pushed for more thorough revisiting of their religious basic texts to read them anew in light of human modern changes and challenges. Without justifications from within the tradition itself, ordinary Muslims would often suspect modernity and what modern societies ask them to abide by and endorse. To overcome a psychological dilemma the believer faces in living modernity without endorsing it, theological management – i.e. re-visiting- of religious texts is evidently taking its course. European Islam tries to answer this need. Generally, the two arguments are founded on historical records, political decisions, sociological realities, and theological texts and interpretations. See the main introduction of this work, and Section 1a-b, Part IV, for more on what I mean.

emphasized by European Islam as I showed in earlier sections; it aims at establishing cosmic wellbeing, social wellbeing, and individual wellbeing. In theory, what else is needed to show that a theory/ a doctrine is good, apart from these three major axes (world, society, individual)? As it seeks the good, it obviously keeps its right to be also a theory of the right (i.e. Islam as a religion of right, or a right divine religion that claims to be the seal of divine prophecies). European Islam here is introducing itself as both a religion and a political theory for modern Muslim citizens – thus both “right” and “good,” to echo terms that are also used in Rawls’ project. The management of religion (*attadabur*) and the management of world affairs (*attadbīr*, in Abderahmane’s terms) are not separated; they are merged. As seen earlier (Section 2b-and-c), it tries to overcome “classical dichotomous thought” that divides the world into binaries of religious versus secular, divine versus mundane, etc.<sup>1498</sup>

In simple terms, European Islam just does not cut ties with the divine. It considers the secular world part of the divine. In clearer terms, and using “common terms,” the theory of the good European Islam proposes is the political version of Islam, not the way political Islam has been claimed by non-reformist movements or violent movements (like the Taliban-al-Qaeda or even the Iranian Islamic Revolution and the Sudanese Islamic Movement) as synonymous of a global *umma* or a restored Caliphate. That is, European Islam as a theory of the good tries to manifest its aspects of the good in the physical/

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<sup>1498</sup> This does not necessarily mean that the emerging European Islamic thought will develop into a very copy of Western liberal thought the way it is perceived now. It is the perception of the world and modernity in this case that have changed; it does not necessarily mean that Euro-modernity becomes the future of Islamic thought; it could, but it is not a necessary conclusion. (Revise the levels of rationality as I explained them in Taha Abderahmane’s project (Section 2c, Part IV). Rawls also makes it clear that there are levels of rationality, and reasonable pluralism illustrates that different doctrines could be rational but not the same.) To draw a comparison that some may have strong reservations about, I can say that while Reformation in Europe ended up with liberalism taking over the place of the Church (as a religious unified authority), European Islam as a version of reformist Islam does not take over the place of the Islamic unified authority –which does not exist officially in theory - but simply recognizes that it has for long opted for a division between politics and religion which it now renounces by re-uniting them. Certainly this has not been an easy realization, nor an easy step to theorize. In this sense there is reformation here, but it is not the same as that of European Reformation. The point here is that Islamic reform seems to have achieved what Reformation has achieved. However, the theological differences in this reform seem to me substantially different. I do not say more here. My point should be clearer by reading Sections 2a-b-c, Part IV.

secular world. These manifestations are what I try to explain in light of the work done until now, by bringing up some of the basic terms generated so far.

Second, continuing with the assumption followed here, I say that European Islam seeks the “permanence of social justice” as its main good.<sup>1499</sup> This part of the assumption is also a “founded assumption.” It is so because, as has been illustrated through the previous parts of this work on various historical periods of Islamic thought, past and present, the idea of securing social justice comes often as a vital value to defend. For example, the idea of Tawhid has been interpreted to mean man’s liberty from being enslaved by any other human or market or ideological force. The divine attribute of “justice” has also been taken as a leading one from which humans should learn in living the divine message. The work of the Mu’tazilite Qadi Abd Aljabar and his explanation of the tenet of Tawhid and Justice is one example (Section 1b, Part IV). With the early and later reformists, Mohamed Abduh, Fazlur Rahman, Hassan Hanafi, and Tariq Ramadan, to name but these, social justice is vital in their interpretation of the message of Islam, too. No one has developed a whole theory about justice alone; they have, nevertheless, integrated it in their various projects, and have referred to Quranic verses and hadiths as further arguments for their views.

As to the term “permanence” in “social justice,” it is also another deduction I take from my previous various scholarly projects I have studied in this work. The meaning of “permanence” echoes the idea of “peace” that Islam calls for. Peace here is not only political but also “cosmic,” “social,” and “individual,” as I have understood it while conceptualizing the idea of European Islam (Section 2b, Part IV). Moreover, the section devoted to the concept of “perpetual modernity” tries to work on these levels of peace through “perpetual” revision of the message of Islam, and this way it keeps itself modernizing, according to external changes and challenges (Section 2c, Part IV). However, since it is the political concern that matters here when dealing with the idea of

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<sup>1499</sup> Rawls quotes Kant as saying: “If justice perishes, then it is no longer worthwhile for men to live upon the Earth,” *Political Liberalism*, lx, n. 40.

overlapping consensus, I now say that “permanence” serves the idea of “stability” which Rawls stresses.<sup>1500</sup>

In brief terms, the theory of the good European Islam especially advocates politically is the “permanence of social justice.” To proceed to the last section of building links between the conceptualized European Islam and overlapping consensus requires that all the previous various used as well as generated terms are kept in mind.<sup>1501</sup> My argumentation follows my previously used three axes (world-society-individual). I note that I make a small re-order in these axes: I refer to the individual axis at the second level instead of the third for the reason I will explain in due time. This shift is methodological, and does not change the substance of the argument. Each of these axes uses the generated concepts of European Islam and presents them in three points as I explain in the following.

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<sup>1500</sup> I cannot explain all the concepts all at once; I try that, but I also try to avoid being repetitive. So, methodological reasons require that there are elements that should be understood even superficially at first when first mentioned till the place of their explanation is rightly reached. I often remind myself of the great J.J. Rousseau who would warn his readers in his political writings that they should wait and read through till the concepts he uses become clearer in due space.

<sup>1501</sup> As another reminder, in my analytical reading of European Islam selected texts, I use the triadic axes of “world-society-individual” as a comprehensive framework to understand what the various interpretations of the studied scholars aim at in their reformist attempts. With this axis in mind, I apply the framework of Taha Abdurrahmane to the study of texts, to find out that my triadic axes match to a large extent his three innovative plans of “humanization-historicization-rationalization” (Section 2a, Part IV). Based on these, I devise three main concepts for my own version of European Islam: “inheritance of the world-practical fiqh-rationalization of ethics” (Section 2b, Part IV). I subsequently evaluate these concepts in light of modernity values, using Abdurrahmane’s three principles of the essence of modernity for my purpose “majority-universality-criticism.” I end up interpreting Abdurrahmane’s “second modernity” as “perpetual modernity” in light of my earlier concepts for European Islam. I end up saying that European Islam’s modernity is perpetual for three reasons, which I subsequently present in terms of levels of concepts - these levels and concepts have been generated as evaluation and conceptualization went on gradually. It is (1) perpetual in the sense that the inheritance of the world, through innovative humanization plan of reading revelation, matches the principle of majority as enshrined by the essence of modernity. It is (2) perpetual in the sense that practical fiqh (Sharia law), through innovative historicization plan, matches the principle of universality as enshrined by the essence of modernity. It is (3) perpetual in the sense that the rationalization of ethics and faith, through innovative rationalization plan, matches the principle of criticism as enshrined by the essence of modernity. Below I try to revisit these concepts with overlapping consensus framework in mind.

## **World Axis – Humanization of Revelation**

I have earlier argued that European Islam innovatively humanizes the inherited world through the principle of majority for cosmic wellbeing. This inheritance is considered a divine will. European Islam defends man's inheritance of the world as a divine will and consequently reclaims the ontological bond between the two spheres, the metaphysical and the physical, for cosmic wellbeing, based on the principle of (universal) fraternity. Man as a Caliph is endowed with infinite capabilities that allow him to preserve the trust (*amāna*) that he was entrusted with in descending on earth, after his creation had been perfected. This means that the sacred text is not put aside to be dealt with just in the private sphere. Carrying out the trust of working good for the world is strongly emphasized. I briefly synthesise thoughts on this axis below in three points, as have further been conceptualized in Section 1b, Part IV.

One, revelation in the physical world is innovatively humanized, responsibly inherited, autonomously ruled and creatively re-created by man. The inheritance of the world gives the Caliph (man) infinite liberties in managing the world, without sacrificing/killing the divine, because this inheritance is willingly given to him, and also without an intermediary human agency that proclaims the position of guarding the rights of God and the duties of man. There is no other revelation expected, and it is now up to man, the Caliph, to care for the world because it is his. As long as man emulates the Creator in His attributes of creation, justice, and mercy, there is no fear of the freedoms of man, for the divine attributes guide him: God cannot act foolishly, arbitrarily, and so should man. Divine attributes are a reference, a high threshold for man to reach. By the divine as a reference is meant the constant act of remembrance through the religious pillar of Testimony (*Shahada*) the broad significance of which is not only to believe in Unity but also, and most importantly, to believe that belief is comprehensive, atemporal, aspatial. Testimony bears the idea of trust (*amāna*) that bonds the human and the divine. Even in the case of any morality code that humans develop rationally, this trust or Testimony, remains the utmost manifestation of belief in and communion with the divine.

Two, the fact that the world is humanized does not belittle the role of the divine, for the Caliph carries the divine within himself through the bond(s) of trust and Testimony. The major/ mature agency of man does not, and cannot, liberate itself from the divine simply because whatever the Caliph thinks is autonomous or creative is essentially divine in nature as well. The divine is not against human agency, its maturity and creativity.

Three, the universe becomes a laboratory to be creatively explored, without a constant psychological fight over what is secular and what is divine. Vertical thinking tries to make sense of human existence beyond its material, concrete and immediate benefits. Maturity of man grows as such thinking expands. Perpetual thinking inspired and empowered by divine attributes makes the understanding of both religion and modernity able to go beyond formalisms of classical religiosity, classical atheism and secularism. Neither classical religion nor classical modernity alone is the way to live the future civilization.

Henceforth, the humanization of the inherited world, through the principle of majority, engages vertical thinking for cosmic wellbeing. Cosmic wellbeing here simply means the harmonious outlook the individual develops in rationalizing religion and the understanding of the canons of the universe. It is especially based on the idea of merging the physical and the metaphysical. The physical world is sacralised, and modernity, henceforth, is seen as part of the sacred. The diversity that characterizes the world becomes part of the divine will. The primal impact of such a perspective is that the majority (i.e. maturity) of man fraternizes nations, religions, and philosophies – based on the principle of fraternity.<sup>1502</sup> This could be read as a clear sign of epistemological modesty from the part of contemporary reformist Islamic thought and European Islam in particular.

The epistemological move may be interpreted as a sign of defeatism, weakness, inability to overcome the “Islamic predicament” or “crisis.” That could be just one valid interpretation of such a move. A more articulate interpretation of the move, in my

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<sup>1502</sup> The principle of fraternity was also deduced from reading European Islam texts in Section 2b, Part IV.

perspective, is as simple as this: modesty in understanding the divine message is the most challenging step a comprehensive religion could take. In light of the argument developed throughout this work, the concepts of inheritance, innovative humanization, and majority principle that I have knitted in this first level/axis of analysis (world axis), I could say that the move is more of an epistemological courage than of modesty, if modesty is understood pejoratively by some. Overcoming the immutability of interpreting prescribed Sharia laws is a courageous move. For example, the “late reformists,” or contemporaries, have moved beyond the reform limitations started by the “early reformists” of the Arab Renaissance (See Section 1c-d, Part IV). The point I want to make here is that cosmic wellbeing as a consequence of the interpretation given to the principle of majority is very much linked to the interpretation given to the principle of fraternity in humanizing the understanding of revelation.

However innovative may seem the perception of the world in European Islam, this level of theological revision and interpretation has to be bracketed in Rawls’ overall project of *Political Liberalism*. Overlapping consensus requires that the deeply controversial issues of a cooperative doctrine have to be left to be discussed by the believers of this same doctrine. I consider this issue of interpreting the world from a religious perspective as deeply controversial because each doctrine – be it religious, philosophic, or moral – has a different perception of nature, creation, death, and life, etc. It is this deeply controversial issue that creates the worldview of each doctrine, and results in difference. A political society as envisioned by Rawls does not concern itself with this issue that seems to have no solution, nor does it need one in the first place, for each doctrine has the right to believe in its own way of pursuing the good, which becomes its version of the right for reasonable pluralism. However, I believe that though I do agree with this way of studying doctrines for political reasons, I still see that the innovative perception of the world which European Islam has developed impacts the other two axes (society and the individual) which are more political, and thus of more interest in the Rawlsian framework. I elaborate this, based on three points.

One, *the physical and the metaphysical are one*. Not all versions of Islam do agree with the reformist European Islam, and not all reformists go in the same line of thought. The examples of the Universe as a Resealed Book (in Ramadan's project), the secularization of Islamic theology (in Oubrou's project), and existential Islam (in Bidar's project) make the doctrinal perception of the world as wholly a sacred space allows for the interpretation that European Islam in this sense could be even more accommodative of the political as Rawls advocates it. One of the possible repercussions of these projects, as illustrated in earlier parts of this work, aims at finding ways of considering modern-secular law as Islamic, as long as it achieves the same ideals of Islam. This doctrinal perception, though it has to be bracketed in the thinking "behind the veil of ignorance" at the original position stage, it cannot be denied at later stages of the political life. I explain this further with my next point.

Two, *stability of the political well-ordered society is required by the divine*. It was also noted earlier that Rawls expects strongly affirmed beliefs to change substantially with time to endorse from their own beliefs the requirements of the political. I think that European Islam moves into that direction, based on the tradition as well as the modern re-interpretation of the same tradition. I consider this example. If the citizen has to endorse political values of the constitutional liberal society from behind the veil of ignorance in the *pro tanto* justification stage, he has to go further and integrate these values in the doctrine he believes in for the sake of stability of overlapping consensus, otherwise the consensus remains constitutional. The point I stress here is that theological reformation as proposed by European Islam, whether bracketed at a certain stage of overlapping consensus if this framework is used, or left to be claimed in public without a particular framework, can substantially contribute to the stability envisaged by this political framework. That is why I do not see the reason why reformist voices should not be considered in studies that use Rawls framework, and only the pre-19<sup>th</sup> century scholarship is studied (I referred earlier to the studies of March and Fadel, for example).

Three, *every human system of social justice is substantially divine*. If I go so far as to say how European Islam theological/ doctrinal revisions further help in endorsing

justice as fairness as an ideal for the political society, I can say that the fact of humanizing revelation –as explained in Section 1, Part IV for world axis- and inheriting the world so that man uses divine attributes to support, here, social justice makes the (Muslim) citizen equal to the (secular or atheist) citizen who does not use a revealed Book to support a constitutional liberal democracy. The humanization of revelation, through the principle of majority and its pillars of autonomy and creativity, make the heir/ Caliph a citizen who has to work with others –religionist or not- to endorse a just social system – always assuming that Rawls’ is the best available framework for social justice. Universal fraternity as a cosmic feature moves from being doctrinal/ Islamic into being shared, for justice as fairness equally aims at that in its world of a closed-system that one leaves only by death. The idea behind making these conceptual links between Rawls’ and mine as developed earlier (Section 1, Part IV) is mostly to stress how they can be useful in supporting from a theological perspective the political aims discussed here, though, again, theological/doctrinal matters are bracketed in Rawls’ political in most, but not all, stages of his argumentation for overlapping consensus. These fundamental points noted, I move to discuss the other more political axes – society and the individual – where such links and comparison of terminology becomes clearer.<sup>1503</sup> I start with the individual axis, so that my attempt of matching the three axes with the three stages of justification in Rawls’ overlapping consensus become evident.

### **Individual Axis - Rationalization of Revelation**

European Islam substantially elevates the place of human agency and reason in dealing with faith at the personal level, making the principle of liberty the basis of this elevation. The whole process is part of the principle of criticism European Islam has adopted to revisit its interpretation of the interaction between faith and man in the modern age. Otherwise put, rationalization, ethics, and liberty become vital in understanding European Islam. The concepts of the heir of God (Caliph), immortality of man, and

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<sup>1503</sup> I am not aiming at matching by force the generated terms seen in earlier sections on European Islam with Rawls’ framework. I am simply trying to find shared grounds. There is a lot of condensation of terms here because I have explained them in length all throughout Part IV of this work. To be understood, going through the previous sections is a requisite. I cannot re-explain each term each time I move to another level of abstraction and argumentation.

development of practical fiqh do not make sense at the world and social axes if they do not have further implications on the individual axis. Also at this level, I outline three major points.

One, *there is no faith without reason*. The rationalization of faith becomes the ultimate conclusion after the humanization and historicization innovative plans. Instead of banning the divine from man's modern thinking, European Islam proposes another understanding of religion and faith whereby reason is either expanded – or at least invited to expand its horizons of analysis to the intangible components of the universe and religion – or made equivalent to the essence of man, religion, and ethics.<sup>1504</sup> Bidar's concept of Self Islam clearly endorses this view of faith in both ways: the expansion of the role of reasoning in belief, and the ethicization of the role of religion. Rituals apart, their meanings are more emphasized, despite the diverse significances they could hold. The individual is considered a modern believer if he reflects on the implications of the ritual. This reflective process engenders more understanding of the self, faith, and diversity in the world, and engenders modesty in belief (versus the supremacist view orthodox believers hold); the reflective believer – to borrow Soroush's term – reaches the fact that truth cannot be one, and that the divine has to be understood in that sense, otherwise its divine attributes of majesty and greatness are belittled by the same believer who believes that God is great. To use the Rawlsian terms of the rational and reasonable, the individual is invited first to be rational in his beliefs, and second to be reasonable so as to accommodate the others' differences and what the latter imply: cooperation to reach agreement on political matters. In other words, reflective equilibrium as a mechanism of reaching cooperation cannot succeed if the believer-citizen does not expand his horizons of reasoning and consideration of his beliefs to allocate space for the others.

Two, *there is no faith without ethics*. Religion is summarized in ethics. The latter is considered equivalent to the divine. Reason is not considered a separate entity, but part of a whole. It is ontologically born/ created ethical, and what it does on the epistemological level is that it works out details for a good materialization of its ethical origin. Religion,

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<sup>1504</sup> I recall my formation of this interpretation in the following: religion = ethics = reason, Section 2b, Part IV.

ethics, and reason become equal. Henceforth, man as an ethical being is endowed with the liberty to be either ethical or not to be (so). This is the question that faces the modern man, according to this perspective, and he is free to choose to be ethical/ religious/ rational or not to be. The implication of this ethical aspect is that whatever rational choice an individual makes is part of the religious as long as it serves certain major aims: individual wellbeing, besides social and cosmic wellbeing. Divine attributes and prophetic behaviour are models to learn from; they set a high standard for moral comportment of the individual. The emphasis on Islamic ethics, especially through divine attributes and prophetic teachings, makes reformist Islamic thought attached to its prime source, which is revelation, but shoulders the individual with carrying this attachment in his behaviour first, more than through community rights that could be unreflective. I reinvoke some examples on the matter.

Bidar raises the Kantian two questions: “what shall I do with my life?” and “what I am allowed to hope for?” He answers these questions as follows, respectively: act good for immortality, and escape death by love which grows with piety. The ethical dimension emphasized by European Islam does not aim at remaining tied solely to the Islamic framework; rather, it aims at considering ethics universal. As Ramadan puts it, it is not enough to call for “Islamic ethics,” or “Islamic art,” or “Islamic economy,” while inequality, for instance, rampages this same label. It is going out of narrow considerations of ethics that led Bidar, in his third stage of intellectual development, to call for overcoming religion and atheism alike in an attempt to construct one world where the religious and nonreligious dichotomy disappears; ethics, as supported from various doctrines, breaks the dichotomy, and following Rawls, only a political framework unites them. Liberty in faith allows the nourishment of Self Islam that is modern, rational, and ethical beyond the jurisprudential labels of the “permitted” and the “forbidden” (*al ḥalāl wa al ḥarām*) that belong to the classical binary perspective that divides the world into Islamic and un-Islamic. This does not mean that such terms are considered irrelevant and will be forced to disappear; they are needed for ethical reasoning; what is required is to impregnate them with new meanings, as have been attempted in the three axes, world-society-individual.

Three, *there is no faith without liberty*. Without the feel of liberty, European Islam would not have gone so far as to humanize revelation and historicize its juridical prescriptions. The fact that it voices its reformist projects shows that it has internalized the principle of liberty in its mode of thought. More importantly, even though the principle of liberty has gone so far as to immortalizing man, reading the Quran as a text, and interpreting revelation and the Prophetic examples historically, such a liberal feel in interpretation has not opted for denying the divine once and for all. Liberty in Islamic thought seems so free, to put it so, to the extent that it does not want to free itself from the divine. European Islam does not kill God to celebrate liberty; it considers the latter an original endowment that has to be explored to understand the divine. The Muslim Prometheus, as I have called him in reading Bidar's project of the immortality of man, works with God. He becomes a "co-worker" with God, to echo Iqbal's image.

The explanation I have given earlier for this choice of liberty by European Islam is that it is the divine that makes liberty meaningful and renders human existentialism free from meaningless freedom. That is, the divine expands the horizons of liberty with its (divine) infinite attributes. Human reason had to wait for modernity to realize such a link, and find out that liberty does not necessarily require the denial of the metaphysical. The latter does not block liberty, but nurtures it with attributes that make its realization more demanding. Otherwise said, the divine liberates freedom from subjective whims and meaningless atheism. The ontological union among various matrixes (God, creation, revelation, prophethood, humankind) conditions liberty to what could be termed "divine standards of action" – attributes like justice, mercy, generosity, and creativity. The ideal practice of liberty has to take these attributes as its models; since the latter are infinite and on constant manifestation, according to man's ability to realize them, and so is liberty as could be practiced by man: it should be constantly revisited for the betterment of individual wellbeing.

Henceforth, what happens at this level/ axis, is that the individual Muslim citizen finds that European Islam empowers him from within his two traditions (the Islamic faith and European socio-political culture) to faithfully and confidently engage in the political,

not “as if” it were part of his religious doctrine but because it “truly” is so. Following European Islam, the Muslim citizen finds out that what he might have always considered just a possible space of his involvement from, say, a minority position, is no longer so. The freedom and equality he might have seen as part of Europe, and not Islam, before are now legitimized as his, too. On the other hand, the Europe he might have considered before as “godless,” or “nihilist,” or “fully atheist” is no longer so, and one major proof of that is his presence, his Testimony/ Shahada, on the soil of Europe. Moreover, the same Europe he might have belittled as “godless” is the same that has contributed to his modern understanding of his own faith, and has updated his ethical value-system through the values of equality among genders and citizens, despite their religions. The pluralist Europe becomes a historical opportunity for the Muslim citizen to reflect on his beliefs and understandings of God, and his learning from the prophetic model of behaviour.

The point here is that the Muslim citizen of Europe revises some of his doctrinal perceptions of the good, espouses them with other perceptions the pluralist Europe provides, and enters a shared space of the right, i.e. the space of the political. Using Rawls terms for correlations, he realizes that his comprehensive doctrine is reasonable, pluralist, and contributes substantially to the ideals of the political. This brings us close to the full justification stage required in building (stable) overlapping consensus. The citizen here sees that his comprehensive doctrine –European Islam- supports the basic structure of society. There is no necessity to point to the fact that differences remain, both on minor issues regarding rituals for example, and also regarding the claim to truth. Those are left for internal discussion among believers. Still, whatever difference there may remain, the core of the political seems to be agreed upon from the perspective of the religious doctrine. Three examples illustrate the point further.

### **Example One: Sexual Liberty**

I strongly note that European Islam is aware of the fact that its rationalization praxis does not touch every aspect of faith; if it does, then there is no need for faith in the first place, if it can be replaced by pure human reasoning. Moreover, this level of rationalization is not required by the political as well. Political liberalism acknowledges

that there are aspects of doctrines that can remain unexplainable, seemingly irrational, and those remain non-public, but not necessarily private. They remain part of what the believer clings to as part of the path of truth the doctrine teaches. This does not need to be changed for political reasons; it can be so only for 1) personal or 2) doctrinal reasons' sake. I try to explain this through the example of sexual liberty, starting from "doctrinal" reasons first then "personal" ones some believers may advance.

By doctrinal reasons' sake I mean possible reforms that the doctrine goes through. But in Islam, officially, there is no central authority to change some of its beliefs. I give an example that may be controversial to many believers and attract the curiosity of many non-believers. I on purpose refer to this example, which I assume many shy away from giving, because I am aware of the sensitivity that arises out of discussing freedom, equality and sexuality in contemporary Islam, especially in Europe. A number of readers, Muslim or not, may quickly jump to conclusions in reading reformist European Islam. One of the main critique from the conservatives would be that European Islam clearly allows the most ominous *ḥarām*/ forbidden acts in Islam, adultery in the case of individual liberties, simply because it strongly defends liberty and equality. Extreme secularists that like to hear clear cut answers about the compatibility of Islam with liberal Europe would act similarly and say that European Islam still does not specify it clearly that such freedoms are guaranteed and Muslims are sexually free. Both sides tend to forget that ethical requirements bind all values in different ways, and one answer cannot be sufficient. It is unreasonableness to expect one answer to such issues. This said, I then make two inferences regarding this issue from European Islam perspectives as I have studied it in this work.

One, European Islam has no central authority to tell Muslims that adultery, before or after marriage, is "*ḥalāl*/ permitted" simply because liberal laws do not generally criminalize it (while Muslim majority countries do, except Turkey that has repelled the law a few years ago to comply with EU standards).<sup>1505</sup> Even if it had that central

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<sup>1505</sup> With the Arab Spring, the same issue is raised by some voices, as is the case with Morocco, to give one example. Some human rights activists demand the annulment of the law that criminalizes adultery as

authority, it might not allow it first because it stresses the aspect of personal responsibility and liberty without central tutelage, and second because the essence European Islam wants to keep is ethical (however broad and unclear the definition of ethics may be), and it considers the issue of sexual freedom a space for individual exertion and discipline, seeing that it always refers to divine attributes and prophetic teachings as models for self liberation, piety, and the preservation of family institution, among other virtues. Consequently, ethics require a high standard of commitment from the citizen, be him a believer or not, and when he enjoys freedom and quality such a commitment is tested. Accordingly, if a Muslim in Europe commits such an act, and he is still not criminalized by law, because liberty grants him such a right as long as it is practiced with the consent of the partner, it remains the role of his religious association/ community to punish him somehow to learn “a lesson,” but still without this causing the intervention of the state; i.e. such a punishment can be psychological, but not corporal or violent; it is only the state that has the right to legislate laws. European Islam does not want to be ghettoised nor does it want to be isolated from the wider secular society in terms of law. It refuses minority rights status. It seeks secularizing its laws, but in this case secular law does not provide any prohibition to the adulterers. Apart from the mild psychological punishment the community can show, it does not seem there are ample alternatives that address the issue apart from accepting it as a personal responsibility with the consequences that it may bring about (maybe losing the trust of the whole family forever, or living a psychological lifelong internal discomfort and feel of guilt, etc.).

One might think of this first scenario/ inference: maybe the European Muslim believers, not necessarily from a ghetto perspective, can ask for the adoption of a mild law at the state level, and lobby for it to be accepted by Muslims and non-Muslims alike because it aims at preserving family ties especially for the adultery of married adults. If that is the case, it may no longer be seen a “pure Muslim issue.” It becomes the issue of a majority or all of society; if they support Muslims to lobby for it, then it is a public issue that enters the sphere of the Rawlsian concept of the political. If a doctrinal issue of

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practiced with consent among adults. See my “Morocco’s New Constitution and Individual Freedoms: What Future Scenarios?” 26 April 2012, available at <http://www.resetdoc.org/story/00000022044> .

Muslims becomes so important to be addressed at the state level, then it means that others also share the concern. At that level, it is no longer an issue of a particular minority. However it may be solved, the way of raising the issue seems democratic. But since this scenario is far from being possible in the current socio-political context, the second major inference may provide further insights into the issue.

Two, the second inference I make on the issue of sexual liberty is based on the principles of freedom and equality. It has been argued repeatedly that European Islam defends equality of genders and their liberty. It criticises, for instance, any patriarchal and sexist consideration of the body of women. It is against formalizing a decent attire of modesty; it allows each to dress the way he wishes. It invites man to overcome the image of looking at women only as a body but as a human being that is equal to man in rights and duties. The requirement is to elevate the understanding of human nature by elevating the old look at the roles of man and women (man works outside, woman works at home). Gradually, the argumentation can be pushed further by some and say that freedom and liberty allow one to explore the body as he wishes, especially that there is no legal prohibition at the state level that can prevent such a wish, as explained in the previous paragraphs. I have jumped over other details and possible scenarios to touch one major issue that has caused violence and even killings among some Muslim families in Europe.

To link the issue to the scholars studied here, I refer to a story that Oubrou refers to in *Profession imam*. It is a real story of a young Muslim woman who is accused of having had a sexual affair outside marriage (before marriage). I develop details through assumptions that Oubrou and the lady do not make, to further explain the point. On her official marriage with a practicing Muslim young man, not the one she had slept with, the bridegroom discovers that his bride is not virgin. This same partner is Muslim and he loves her. The assumption is that she loves him too and there was no forced marriage; the assumption is also that he is either conservative or open but blinded by jealousy. Discovering she is not virgin in the wedding night, he makes a scandal, shames her in front of the guests and asks for divorce and the pay back of the wedding expenses. How would European Islam as I understand it consider such a case? Various answers can be

given: the young man is conservative, illiberal, blindly jealous, possessive, very rude to dishonour his wife in public; he is masculinist-sexist; he can never believe in freedom and equality, etc. As to the young woman, she may be described as follows. She is naïve: having had an affair before marriage, why should she think that everyone else has an affair before marriage, too? She is honest: she could have restored her virginity, but she did not want to fool her husband; she is liberal; she is a light believer; liberal as she is, this does not mean she does not believe, or that she will be unfaithful to her husband after marriage, etc.<sup>1506</sup> All these answers may turn into strong arguments for some believing citizens.

For the case above, Oubrou says that if there is love and trust, the case could not have gone into that direction of public embarrassment of the lady and divorce. First, he says that virginity is not a condition in marriage in Islam. Very intimate matters are for the couple to discuss in private. Reciprocal agreement on marriage, free from family or community pressure, is the prime condition. Love, respect, trust, ethics, piety, to name but these, are emphasized values for the success of marriage. He condemns the behaviour of the bridegroom, and refuses judging the bride for what she might have committed before marriage, knowing in this case that the bride defended herself by saying that she lost her virginity when she was practicing some kind of sport that required a lot of movement. Whatever may be her explanation in this particular case, other cases are not always caused by sports incidents. Few young Muslim ladies were killed in Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy because their parents or brothers found out they had affairs before marriage; more so, they found out they had affairs with non-Muslim men, which adds to the problem – bearing in mind that most classical jurisprudential opinions forbid a Muslim woman from marrying a non-Muslim man, let alone having a sexual affair with him outside marriage. The point here is that European Islam is against any violent intervention against the choices Muslims make, whatsoever these choices may be.<sup>1507</sup> It

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<sup>1506</sup> I have avoided detailing a scenario of each of these possible answers. They can all make interesting cases to study more closely; yet, I narrow the scope to the point I select.

<sup>1507</sup> Like adultery, this also applies to homosexuality, and apostasy for example. While apostasy is accepted as an expression of freedom of conscience, homosexuality is accepted as sometimes a natural inclination that the doctrine cannot accept but tolerate and help in finding solutions to, though “the idea of finding solutions to” can be refused by Muslim, and non-Muslim, homosexuals because they generally say they are

has both reclaimed the religious dictum that religion cannot be exercised by force (*lā ikrāha fī addīn*), and has also internalized the values of the basic structure of a liberal constitutional democracy, and cannot deride from them. What it does is that it gives its own solutions, basically ethical, to the problems that it cannot face or change from a legal perspective. It leaves to society and the individual a large space of manoeuvre, based on liberty, equality and piety.

### **Example Two: Daily Prayers**

Traditionally, a Muslim is not expected to rationalize the daily duty of the five prayers, the second pillar of Islam after the profession of Shahada/ Testimony. It is a daily duty that is expected to be carried out with utmost devotion and spirituality. Spiritual discipline and humility teachings that it is replete with aside, there is no classical agreement on the meanings of its ritualist gestures and timings. As a discipline, some say, there is no need to seek meanings in the gestures as such. They are not the end, but the means to an end, being closer to God, spiritually faithful, and what all that requires. Many reformists as well as conservative scholars have always been critical of unreflective rituals. This does not mean they asked for freezing it or cancelling it. They just ask the individual believer to accompany his ritual duties with internal spiritual elevation that and good action. So, European Islam may actually be seen as bringing nothing exceptionally new on the matter. It is just stressing something that is already existent in the tradition. Still, what is new is the context in which such a call for individual involvement is underlined. While a believer in a Muslim majority country may not have the chance to reflect upon rituals because he is born in a Muslim family and surrounded by a practicing community, with the pressure it may have on him to practice too, a European Muslim – the European Muslim seems free from the community and state pressure to practice a pillar-ritual without free will and reflection. This may not

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fine they way they are; it is not an illness, but a natural inclination; it is divinely chosen; they believe; they are not abnormal in that sense.

seem something special, but the European Muslim feels its exceptionalism, because the context both invites him and pushes him to reflect on what he does.<sup>1508</sup>

What I want to reach here is first the contextualization of the issue of prayers from the political practice which has also contributed to discussing the place of this ritual in the modern times and societies. It should be remembered that Bidar found it very difficult to pray while a student of philosophy in ENS of Paris, because the context made it hard for him. This has contributed to reflecting fundamentally on the place of rituals in general. Other ordinary Muslims ask the imam-theologian Oubrou for issues about the prayer, too. The same applies to Ramadan to a large extent. It is then a ritual worth referring to.

The conceptualized European Islam seems resistant to giving in to the political dictates of a society, dictates that may be unfair to a religious minority. I see two major issues with the example of prayers, issues represented by two major types of Muslim believes: 1) a practicing Muslim who wants to observe the exact timings of the prayer, 2) and a Muslim believer who wants to practice this ritual but on his own way; he may call himself liberal, or secular, or open; he does not deny the place of the prayer in religion, but deals with it in his own fashion. The first case may be more complicated politically, and the second one theologically, to use the terms in their commonly understood way in this clarification. They certainly intertwine. I say few words on the political complication, because I deal with both cases more theoretically-theologically afterwards, following European Islam framework as conceptualized here.

The current liberal societies of Europe allow Muslims their right of prayer and in most cases allow them to have their worship rituals in worship places – though sometimes these worship rituals are considered associations and not clearly defined as mosques, besides some mosques that are designed as official and have relations with the state to facilitate understanding between the religious community needs and the state. Some public and private administrations even allocate some space of rituals for religious

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<sup>1508</sup> The principles of rationalization and majority of the essence of modernity in Abdurrahman's framework should be remembered here, Section 2c, Part IV.

people, which is mostly attended by Muslims. Sometimes such ritual places are called spiritual space or contemplation space, and are for all religions; but since some Muslims tend to be more practicing, they are the ones who frequent them most. Availability of worship space aside, there is the other side of the story. Sometimes, Muslims are not allowed to pray at work because that would disrupt the chained work, say, of the company that manufactures cars. Still, a devout practicing Muslim who cares about the exact timing of prayers would try to use the lunch break for example to pray in his office, or in some corner in the company where he finds some privacy for few minutes. In worst cases, the manager would say any visibility of difference and religiosity is not allowed in the company because it is a secular space even when the worker uses his own lunch time to pray, instead of asking for few minutes more or replacement of those prayers times with extra-work. Such a ban does not appear democratic to the Muslim citizen. A secular worker can smoke in his break time or lunch time, and even may have beer or wine during his lunch break. Beer or wine, the manager or this worker may argue, are not religious signs, so they are allowed. The Muslim worker would still defend his case and say that even if it may be a non-religious sign (though the Catholic Christians, for instance, do consider wine as blood of Jesus Christ, thus a religious sign), it still advantages a worker over another; it advantages a moral-philosophic doctrine, secularism or atheism in the case of the worker who drinks, over a religious doctrine, Islam in the case of the worker who prays.

This noted, I return to infer how the political and theological, in Rawlsian-European Islam, intertwine and respond to the role and place of this ritual in liberal context. First, from the Rawlsian political perspective, the Muslim should be allowed to pray at work, preferably in a space devoted for that. At the same time, the political has no right to intervene and force a particular interpretation on such a vital ritual for the believer. He cannot be asked by the state to reduce his prayers time, shorten their frequency, or annul them as irrelevant or irrational. At the same time, reasonableness expects that citizens-believers have partial, in case of not full, rational justifications for the attachment to a particular doctrinal ritual like prayers. That is, besides the purely doctrinal justification, there should be another level of justification that makes this

practice reasonably acceptable in the public domain which is shared by other citizens of different faiths and moral doctrines. A full comprehensive doctrine is expected to have various justifications of its belief system, and Islam, in my study, provides such justifications. European Islam is aware of this, and it faces it. It is only the internal debate within the doctrine that can enter into justifications of this type. So, the external factors directly or indirectly intervene in re-visiting the role and place of the ritual that is supposed to be most private in relation with the public domain. Again, a doctrine like Islam claims comprehensiveness, thus able to face these challenges. European Islam brings to the surface some of these arguments, because the context prioritizes them.

The pillar of prayers retains its fundamental space in the versions of European Islam studied here despite the nuances that characterizes each approach. What they share is the disciplinary role it has on the conduct of the behaviour and how it answers the daily existential needs of the believer. I make inferences of how it is conceived based on my framework of the rationalization of revelation as it corresponds to the individual axis, and also based on the previous three notes I made above on this axis (reason, ethics, and liberty).

One, it should be clear by now that the rationalization of religion does not mean the full annulment of the rituals that on the surface seem irrational. It is a point similar to the idea of man as an heir of God, but the heir does not need to kill God to place himself at an influential agent in the universe. By rationalization is meant reclaiming emphasis on the reflective aspect that is required to understand the divine and one's place in the world. By reflection and reading the message of religion in its entirety, one can reach rational significances of rituals that may look irrational. The basis of this rationalization makes the other point: ethics.

Two, reason is understood as ethical in its essence, for whatever God offers man is ethical and sacred in essence; reason is sacred, too. As to what it leads or brings about, that is left to the other point man is endowed with, liberty. I say first more on the ethical with reference to the concept of Testimony/ Shahada, as emphasized by all the studied scholars. The concept of Shahada is the basic thought they see vital in any ritual. The aim

is to testify to one's witness to the divine as it is present in the human, and how the human presents the divine in his thoughts and in his deeds. Shahada testifies to the sacredness of man, and to the humanization of the divine message; they are for each other, and the source of this intertwinement is the reading of the physical and metaphysical as both sacred and complementary to each other – as is advanced on the world axis. So, however rational the advancement is made here, remembering the divine remains vital, as a way of controlling reasoning consequences. Remembrance (or *zikr*), as Bidar considers it, is an act of gratitude to the infinite creativity taught to man through the attributes of the divine. Nevertheless, reasoning and ethicizing rituals cannot achieve its ends if the concerned individual is not free.

Three, liberty is essential in understanding the religious message. The ritual, when practiced free from the community pressure seems more meaningful, since it reflects the individual's rationalization process that might have allowed him to endorse certain doctrinal practices as he wishes them, thus the development of Self Islam, to use Bidar's term. When such a reflective process is gone through some rituals risk losing their traditional place among believers, and the call to reforming them becomes controversial. That is the reason why scholars from within speak of intention and remembrance as fundamental, otherwise the reform called for is not sincere but a mere political-ideological invitation. To cite examples, Ramadan does not go so far as to say that even the rituals are negotiable; even in his *Radical Reform* that is innovative on the jurisprudential level, it does not seem so on the worship level. Ramadan retains the role of remembrance through the ritual as fundamental for ethical behavior. Oubrou, as an imam, is asked whether it is acceptable to pray just as much as one could, and not necessarily following the exact number and timings of the ritual. He shows more flexibility on the matter, believing that to pray less or not on due time is better than not to pray at all. As to Bidar, he goes further and revises even the worship rituals, and says they are negotiable, the way religious law is. Because he spiritualizes everything (space, time, action, speech, food, etc.), he sees no difference between the prayer and good speech, good behaviour, and so on. He mostly takes the individuality of the act of prayer beyond the gesture itself, and centralizes its meaning. The way a believer kneels (*sujūd*),

for example, is considered the most intimate moment of communication with the divine; symbolically, it reminds man of his embryonic stage, of the moment when he was in the matrix (*rahim*, womb) of the divine (*arraḥmān*, the Merciful). Prayers are strong moments of renewing this tie with the divine.

Henceforth, since the human act is invited to be divine through sincere intent, then any act is a prayer, be it ritualized or not. However centered it may seem on the individual, it actually reaches out to include its impact on one's behaviour with the others, all others, and not only the co-religionists. The ritual then moves from being individualist to being an individual act destined to the flourishing of the public, too. That is why European Islam mostly emphasizes its ethical dimensions that are reached by high reflection, more than on mere rituals, though the frequentation of the ritual, however unreflective it may be in the beginning, aims at reaching that elevated reflection level. It aims at making the divine present in human presence and existence, hence the meaning of Testimony. In its overall perception, European Islam allows the believer space of considerations of rituals according to one's spirituality level and capacities. Rationalization ethicizes rituals, and rituals in turn ethicize rationalization. In this circle, rationalization cannot be but ethical.<sup>1509</sup>

### **Example Three: *Eid al-Aḏḥā* Sacrifice (Bairam)**

However, if another example is taken, the political intervenes. The Muslim observer offers a yearly sacrifice of Bairam (*Eid al-Aḏḥā*): he slaughters a ram for instance. It is not an obligation, but a confirmed sunna of the Prophet; if one does not do it, it is not *ḥarām* to miss, though it has historically become part of the rituals. In Europe,

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<sup>1509</sup> There is another point one can infer from European Islam. It concerns the ablution (*al wudū'*), i.e. cleaning one's body parts (the facial and intimate parts) before prayers. I can say that especially in Bidar's case, it could be enough that the believer is clean to pray, as to going through the exact washing rituals is not necessary. The idea is to be clean. To return to Oubrou who aims at facilitating religious practice, it could be easier for believers at work to pray without going through the exact washing rituals. Still, not all European public bathrooms offer the facility of access to water in the bathroom to wash one's sensitive parts, instead of just cleaning with hygienic paper. For a number of Muslims "squat toilets" are more comfortable. That encouraged some Muslims in the UK, for instance, to demand adequate architectural facilities that accommodate also Muslims. See, Iqbal Akm, dir., "Muslims in the Work Place: A Good Practice Guide for Employers and Employees," Stradford: The Muslim Council of Britian, 2005, 16, 23. <http://www.mcb.org.uk/faith/approved.pdf>

and a number of Islamic majority countries' big cities, the believer is not allowed to slaughter the ram at home, or in the garden that is inside the city, visible to the public, for instance, for 1) ethical reasons (animal rights against torture in slaughtering; preference is to electronic shock first), 2) timing reasons (Muslim's cannot all be given holidays on this day, or make it a national holiday for all), 3) hygienic reasons (blood in the public sphere), to name these three main reasons. European Islam takes these law requirements into account: the believer is not asked to stop practicing the ritual once and for all in its common old form.

European Islam can advance three views to answer the three challenges above. First, the Eid, besides the sacrifice, is also composed of communal prayers observed before midday, and only afterwards the sacrifice can be slaughtered and considered religiously acceptable. That is, the believer has a part of the ritual already observed by observing the collective prayer of the Eid, and thus his intention of remembering Abraham and Muhammad's rituals cannot be denied. Second, the sacrifice timing, if space and hygiene conditions are secured, goes up to the third day of the celebration, which allows the believer enough time to arrange his work schedule and holidays accordingly, if he is so meticulous about the sacrifice ritual. Thus, the Eid day is not limited to the first day only; the sacrifice is considered sacred even if it is slaughtered on the second or third day after its official start. Third, the believer can buy the sacrifice and leave it in the slaughterhouse, which does the rest of the job for both ethical and hygienic reasons. This is different from doing it at home, which is psychologically more religious for the believer. However, amidst these choices and prescriptions, the believer may even take another direction of thinking, which European Islam encourages: the believer can give that sacrifice as a financial support to the needy; as a replacement of slaughtering, the believer still shows his ritualistic discipline and attachment to God but in a different way that could be more helpful to others, from social justice point of view. Such a believer would from within his own interaction with his doctrine think that God does not need man's sacrifice to show belief; rather, He may be more pleased to see people helping each other. This reasoning is done by the believer and his community, and not by the political system which should not intervene directly in forcing such a re-

interpretation, though, as Rawls notes, doctrines are sometimes required to change fundamentally with time to be political in the way he envisages it.

### **Society Axis – Historicization of Revelation**

I have argued that European Islam historicizes revelation through pragmatically interpreting the sources of jurisprudence (fiqhology), and the adoption of the universality principle for social wellbeing, and its pillars of extensibility and generality. European Islam consequently shoulders man with the responsibility of interpreting the prescribed laws in the sacred texts according to human society's needs. That is, fiqh law is for this world, and not for the divine satisfaction at the metaphysical world. Practical fiqh, or fiqhology, needs to be constantly revised to match the divine universal message for perpetual peace and social justice, based on the principle of equality.

The historicization of revelation perpetuates in time and space the broad ethical lines of revelation without freezing them in a particular historical period of time as that of the 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabia. Though revelation is sacred, its prescriptions for social affairs are bracketed as historical. This allows for perpetual modernization of these prescriptions – in the sense of updating them according to societal needs and changes. Revelation prescriptions, referred to as Sharia Law, are not belittled as backward, but as relevant for a particular context in particular times. Having passed their times, these prescriptions are now interpreted in light of the general message of revelation, which is social justice and social wellbeing. The clear revealed prescriptions (like the penal code and inheritance division) are studied as sources of ethical reasoning in re-reading revelation and its relevance for social affairs. Law as prescribed by revelation is no longer considered the ultimate version of the translation of revelation into positive law. Rather, it is the intent of revelation that is mostly searched for as the rationale behind these prescriptions, and based on this intent, new, more adequate, laws can be envisaged. Laws as prescribed by modern needs are thus not rejected just because they are man-made.

Laws that serve the material common good renders spiritual satisfaction to the consumer whose inner side is not in conflict with its outside, seeing that the common

good that modern laws secure do elevate the threshold of needs of man from a stage of an “individual in society” to a “human being in the global society” where the other is not forgotten while working out ways of preserving the common good. The principle of universality in this level does not only capture the un-material needs of the human being, but also captures the material and un-material needs of the other as well. What this means is that the principle of equality becomes vital in reading revelation for social wellbeing and for the universal society. Having re-outlined these theological interpretations of European Islam, what are then their clear political implications in the Rawlsian framework? On society axis I also underline three major points that I see European Islam has developed for political stability, in light of Rawls’ framework.

One, *the universality and eternity of the divine message cannot be a fixed constitution for changing societies*. The historicization of revelation makes the realization of the Islamic ideal of social justice applicable under any framework that supports it. The idea of the Islamic state is taken to mean the ideals of Islam and how they find their way institutionally to realization. The Islamic message is rooted out of its classical spacial and temporal circumstances and implanted in the context of modernity. What this means for European Islam is that the constitutional state as developed in modern liberal societies does not conflict with the general ideals of Islam. On the contrary, the constitutional state prescribes duties and rights for all, which is a preliminary requisite for the flourishing of the idea of social justice. The Quran is not the equivalent of the Constitution in the modern sense of the term. If it is taken to be so, then it is no longer valid for this age. But it is still considered valid for the core moral ideals it calls for, and social justice is considered its core message when a community of peoples is involved. To refer again to the studied scholars, Ramadan, for instance, speaks of five core rights which the liberal constitutional state guarantees for Muslims, which makes it [the state] part of their belief as he does later in *Radical Reform* idea of Two Books.<sup>1510</sup> As to Oubrou, he speaks of geothology approach (a theology bound to the specificities of a particular political

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<sup>1510</sup> These five rights are: the right to practice Islam, the right to knowledge, the right to found organizations, the right to autonomous representation, and the right to appeal to law. Ramadan also expands the classical five universal principles (*maṣāliḥ* or *kulliyāt*: the preservation of life, religion, mind, honour, and wealth) to include all the major rights defended by human rights international conventions. From these five he sketches a list of forty-one right or public good. See Section 2b, Part II.

geography) in which he considers the context a way of fathoming pluralism within Islam. A European Islam, or a French Islam, is the result of his approach.

Two, *the best system of social justice is the most adequate for the divine social message*. The historicist approach to revelation requires that the best achieved human system is the one that should replace the historically unfit prescriptions of revelation. The classic “public good” and “objectives of the Sharia” as insisted on by Islamic jurisprudence throughout the centuries is read accordingly. Fiqh law is read as contextual, positive, an answer to the ideals of religion at a certain point of time. Now that the modern man has realized the value of equality of all, despite religion, colour, race, or gender difference, and that this gives more dignity to the individual, then that is considered more able now to give credit to the idea of justice than any earlier interpretation. Social justice cannot be materialized if inequality among human beings is not first established. The principle of equality, then, becomes central in practical fiqh. Recalling some views of the studied scholars is helpful here.

Ramadan’s endorsement of equality principle is repeatedly emphasized. For example, while he considers all citizens equal before the law, for the case of inheritance law which is clearly divided in the revealed text and in most cases favours man to woman, he suggests preliminary to use state institutions to balance the difference in portion, taking into account the financial situation of both sides, for the sake of arriving at a more just division. He also calls for the moratorium/ freezing of the Islamic penal code till a more updated revisit and re-interpretation of these laws is carried out. He refers to these as proposals from his own readings, and calls for more discussions on his project to reach more updated interpretations that could be agreed upon by more scholars working in the field (“scholars of text” and “scholars of context,” as he calls them).<sup>1511</sup>

As to Oubrou, he aims at fusing religious and secular law into one through secular theology. His views on marriage as a civil act, and not religious in the narrow sense of the term, is one example. He makes registration of marriage obligatory first in the civil

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<sup>1511</sup> I do not need to note again that this brought his immense criticism especially among the French secularists and media predators. See Part II devoted to his work.

secular marriages office to secure that especially women are not mistreated and are financially not the losers in cases of divorce, for instance, if marriage is registered only in religious offices/ courts where law is still conservative and lags behind the equality principle. Moreover, his considerations of *halāl* food for ethical and hygienic reasons, instead of being limited to being simply religious or Islamic, are also examples, among others, that endorse his project of secularizing theology, through fusing laws, always bearing in mind the ethical-spiritual dimensions in his approach. His approach of Sharia of the minority and relativization of Sharia by means of various types of fatwas explain the point further. That is, he treats religious cases on individual bases, and issues fatwas to the believer who consults him in a way that is very close or compatible with the French/ European laws. The case of the hijab law is one example: he asks Muslim veiled women to uncover themselves in public institutions as law requires in France for instance. Believers, who have problems with prayers time at work, if there is no way to carry out this religious duty, can be postponed till one is at home. Similar facilitation of religious practice is left to the individual and his discipline and spirituality levels, not forcing them on him nor asking him to cancel them all if part of them is not properly observed for some reasons. This is more of an issue at the individual axis but it still has impacts of the social axis examined here. The idea is to allow the individual space for agency even with the worship rituals which have classically been considered unchangeable. The community is not allowed to pressure the individual in his profession of faith.

Regarding Bidar, he defends the idea that modernity three major values (liberty, equality and fraternity) are part of the sacred, and are part of the modern rational faith he envisages more able to render justice to the Islamic message. What religion adds to these values is more fidelity to them, without thought of the material gain behind them. Attachment to these values, according to Bidar, has to stem from a deep love of the divine, a love that has to be seen in one's behaviour with the other in society. Compared to social injustice lived in most Islamic majority countries, these scholars see in the constitutional liberal democracies more adequate political systems that cater most for human dignity and equality among citizens, despite their religious, moral and philosophic

differences. They go so far as to say that European Islam can be an example for reform in the Islamic majority countries.

Three, *beliefs require adaptation to the historicization of social values*. European Islam recognizes the universality of modern values and how they permeate all political - and non-political - sectors of life. It also recognizes that these values, however great they are, do not need to be de-divinized to be political. The horizons of reasoning are expanded so as to give space to as many religious perspectives as possible, as long as they do not threaten peace and justice. Spiritual modernity or second modernity – to use Abdurrahmane’s terms – impact the individual’s psychology and morality and can sharpen his senses of moral obligations that further his citizenship responsibilities and loyalty to the social contract enshrined in the democratic constitution of the modern liberal state. That is, the values of modernity are considered a sacred will and part of the religious sector. The mundane-secular world is emphasized as the true space where the divine should be lived, with full engagement from the believing citizen. Other religions and varieties of moral and philosophical worldviews are treated equally politically (legally), though, like any other doctrine, European Islam generally still keeps the idea of considering itself the seal of the chain of revelations, though in a more demure and modest way.

Plainly put, the shared space where modernity values permeate are not a land of war or *haram*, as are considered by some conservatives, but are a potential space for ethical agency and spirituality that are not defined simply by the outer rituals. The liberal Western Europe is not an isolated geography that is “godless” – as Ramadan looked at it in his earlier writings, an attitude he changed later with *Radical Reform*. The same applies to Oubrou who belonged to the conservative Muslim Brothers in the 1980s, and Bidar who had to go through immense internal dilemmas and intellectual endeavours before finding God also in Europe. Such a consideration of Europe as a spiritual space allows the Muslim citizen to overcome the binary division of Europe versus Islam that various factors have contributed to. The affirmation of the idea that Islam is at home (or inlandish) impacts the believer-citizen’s psychology and makes him embrace the political

system as part of his duty and space of agency. This can impact fundamentally the political participation and the feel of belonging that the early generation of immigrants lacked because they mostly considered themselves guests and Islam “an alien” to this land (or outlandish).

### **Example One: Jihad**

Jihad may be a suitable example for the historicization of revelation prescriptions as society axis demands. European Islam historicizes the concept of jihad which affects fundamentally the classical/ medievalist geographical divisions as well as the idea of da‘wa or proselitization. It is by now evident enough that one of the main definitions given to it is “self-ijtihad,” “self-exertion,” to do good and be pious; so the struggle is internal to cultivate goodness. There seems no problem with this in a constitutionally liberal society. The problem remains to be examined when the term denotes “war against the infidels.” I focus on this controversial issue. European Islam does not consider Europe a land of infidels, which means that the concept of jihad takes other meanings. Accordingly, and deductively, I condense the way it is considered in four major options.

One, jihad was divinely allowed, and is still so, only in the case of defence, never for justifying a war without being first assaulted against. It is only in such a case that a modern democratic state is allowed to defend itself. Still, this does not happen at random. It is not the concern of any one religious minority; religious leaders are not allowed to issue a fatwa to declare jihad in a constitutional democratic state. There are standards to meet. The issue has to go through a national debate in the House of Representatives, for example, and the international community has to show democratic support of it as a legitimate reply of self-defence. When this is done, then the defensive war can still be called jihad among Muslims –if they want to- but speaking state-wide, it is a war of defense of the whole pluralist society that has taken the decision (through the Parliament) to defend itself. Each doctrine can contribute to the debate in Parliament and through civil society from its own doctrinal perspective, but the framework of this debate is the political framework as has been described in Rawls work. Such a defence war then,

whatever justification it may internally have, is political, and the Muslims have no right to call it jihad when it represents diverse reasonable comprehensive doctrines.

Two, traditionally, a Muslim citizen should not go into a war in which the adversary is Muslim or is composed of Muslim troops, for a Muslim should not fight a Muslim. This traditional view is problematic from European Islam perspectives, in the Rawlsian framework. It is problematic for many reasons. I cite some prominent ones. First, following the previous point, the war is gone into only in the case of defense. This means that the other side is “wrong” anyway in their attack. So, fighting them back is legitimate, whatever their religion or moral doctrine may be. Injustice has to be fought. Second, when the collective decision is taken in Parliament to defend the country (where social justice reigns), such a decision is not based on religious reasoning alone nor does it concern only the sensitivities of particular minorities and doctrines that contribute to the debate and the decision. It is a decision taken by all, and has to be assumed by all – or at least the majority, which is assumed to be a just majority. It is a political decision, not doctrinal. So, when invited to go to war to defend the country, the Muslim citizen cannot withdraw from his task, otherwise the social justice that both his religious doctrine and the political system he belongs to fall down and give rise to injustice, which is contrary to the sources of his ideals, political and doctrinal. Even abstaining from war in this case, and using “conscientious objection” is unjustified. Third, in the battlefield, there are rules of good behaviour towards the enemy, be him Muslim or not. Fundamentally, the Muslim soldier has to remember that European Islam teaches him to consider everyone free and equal, and he should not be biased in showing morality and care for the enemy just because he is Muslim. Before facing him in the battlefield, there preceded negotiations and calls for peace, and war is the last option.

Three, one of the classical and conservative ideas on jihad is that it is to expand religion and the land of Islam; if the new lands do not accept to convert, then they pay taxes (known as *jizya*) for protection by the Muslim army, not to mention other details. European Islam replies to this perspective as follows. First, Europe is already a land of Islam. Muslims have fundamental rights to exercise their religion freely. Even the

Muslim majority countries cannot be called Islamic lands in the classical sense of the term, because religious law is not fully practiced there for political reasons and socio-cultural transformations in these societies. Moreover, religion is not about land but about the person, and in Europe citizens as persons have the right to be Muslim if they want to. Islam is everywhere and no longer needs jihad to make people hear about it. Second, a liberal constitutional democracy does not go into war to force people to convert to a religion or its doctrine of the good. Freedom and equality are essential values that do not allow such a perception of religion or communication with others who do not share the same doctrine. Toleration of difference is fundamental in a liberal society.

Four, and more importantly, the state is secular in the sense that it believes in no one perfect religion that protects all reasonable comprehensive doctrines of the plural society.<sup>1512</sup> So, it can never choose to defend and expand one religion (Islam in this case) and opt for waging wars to expand it. Other reasonable comprehensive doctrines cannot accept this; otherwise they withdraw from the social contract of the political to which they contribute equally. The secular state allows religions to flourish: to have their associations, worship space, and to discuss in public issues related to their internal doctrines and those related to the shared political. They can even practice proselitization as long as there is no discriminatory note in it, or call for violence, or hatred for the other citizens that hold different views of the same religion or of another religion. Proselitization here is canonized; believers can speak of their religion, as do political practices speak of their agendas for example. There should be no hidden agenda to overthrow the social contract, i.e. the basic structure of the well ordered society. Overall, a society with these beliefs and practices cannot aspire to endorse a jihadist perspective that contradicts all these values. Loyalty is to the political as a fair system of cooperation based on justice as fairness.

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<sup>1512</sup> I am bracketing the critique that the fact that the state is secular means that the secular moral doctrine is preferred and has advantage over any religious doctrine. That is a reasonable critique and has to be taken into account for stability reasons. That is why overlapping consensus should be taken seriously by religious, moral and philosophical doctrines. Only when it is considered seriously could citizens of different doctrines find that the state is secular in a really neutral sense, and not secular in a biased sense. By bias is meant the version of extreme or radical secularism that considers the world secular by default, an attitude that is (nearly) atheist. It wishes that religion disappears in time as it keeps modernizing and liberalizing.

## Example Two: Gender Equality

A number of other examples can be examined on the social axis. For brevity, I put some of them in one example under the label of “gender equality.” The controversial legal issues that can go under the label are as follows: polygamy, inheritance law, testimony of women, and the place of non-Muslims. Homosexuality and apostasy can partially be considered within the scope of “gender equality” though they are certainly examples of liberty of conscience that adequately fit in the individual axis premise. Each case can be examined differently, but the general argumentation falls within the same general framework as conceptualized by European Islam. So, I focus on the example of polygamy, and from it inferences could be made to match the argumentation that could be developed for the other examples. Besides, in earlier sections I already referred to some of these examples. The structure as envisioned by society axis in light of European Islam and Rawls’ concept of the political and overlapping consensus was broadly summarized above as follows: 1) the universality and eternity of the divine message cannot be a fixed constitution; 2) the best system of social justice is the most adequate for the divine message; 3) the ahistoricization of belief requires adaptation to the historicization of values. This structure is rooted in the idea of historicization of revelation. To clarify further my point, I re-read the above example issues with reference to three principles: liberty, equality, and fraternity. These three liberties are universal, but they had been appropriated by Euro-modernity to the extent that non-European traditions have had issues using them again, for fear of misunderstandings. Still, as was seen in earlier parts of this work, Europe Islam uses these values and fills them in with Islamic-spiritual values that the religious general message embraces. This to say that I use these three values as I have re-read them in conceptualizing European Islam (for more revise, Section 1b-c, Part IV).

One, *liberty of the individual is theologically granted, according to European Islam*. God does not want slaves. He created free heirs, imbued their souls with his attributes, referred to in summary as “divine ethics” or “divine standards of action,” and allowed them responsible use of reasoning capacity. This theological understanding

entails that revealed prescriptions, if they are truly ahistorical, cannot be a fixed constitution for believers. Modern constitutions then, though human-made, allow ample space to consider the presence of the divine. Further than that, modernity itself is considered a sacred event that religions needed to elevate their understanding of man and the place of the divine. Added to this that Self Islam centralizes the revealed verse of no compulsion in religion; there is no faith without liberty. (I referred earlier to two examples on practicing religion on individual axes: sexual liberty, and the daily prayers; they give a clearer idea, I think, of the way this value is considered in European Islam. It is a liberty that does not deny the divine, but seeks it.)

Henceforth, from European Islam perspectives a believer may advance the right of polygamy on the European soil. (I bracket for a while equality principle to answer such a proposal.) A believer can say that since liberty is so sacred in liberal constitutions, to the extent that adultery and sexual liberty are not punishable, so what does prevent polygamy from being allowed legally, too? The believer can advance enough arguments to defend his case. For example, 1) he may say that polygamy is based on the liberal idea of personal choice and maturity; 2) the first, second, or even third wife gives her consent to her husband to marry another wife; 3) the first wife makes an educated choice: as a citizen of Europe, she has a minimum educational level until the age of 15 or 16 as law requires, so she is aware of a minimum list of rights and duties to make a judgement; 4) his financial situation is good, and so is the situation his first and other potential wives, which means that they will not suffer with him financially, and cannot be a burden on the welfare state; 5) because he is a pious Muslim, he prefers to have legal wives than to have mistresses who may live with him for years and at the end he leaves them without having a stable life, possibly burdened with kids without financial support; the wife that agrees and the potential second or third wife may also be pious and prefers a man who marries on her legally than someone who cheats on her.

Such arguments are sometimes heard of among conservative believers as well as some young Muslims born in Europe. Such arguments are not based on the historical argument that the prophet allowed controlled polygamy (maximum four, with conditions

of consent, financial ability, and in cases of war in which more men die and more women are left widows without a breadwinner, and so on). These arguments above use the concept of liberty to argue for the permission of polygamy so that it is both legal and spiritually acceptable. The secular and atheist argument may seem weak if the value of equality is bracketed. Considering the bracketed value of equality, their simple refusal of polygamy, while they allow sexual liberty and adultery at least from a legal perspective and not the moralist one, could be seen by the believer as unfair; the state secularism on the whole could be considered biased to the side of the secularist. So, to push the argument further, the conservative believers would like to change the law once they become an electoral majority. That is what scares the secularists-liberals on the ground. It is here that I see European Islam able to address the issue differently, thus avoiding being on the conservative believer's side or the secularist's side. This leads to the second value of equality.

Two, *European Islam takes the liberal constitution as part of its doctrine, despite some of the laws that are not substantially compatible with the religious doctrine, even in its utmost reformist forms.* Three main reasons can be considered, among others, in defending the equality value from European Islam perspectives. First, there is no difference between man and woman at the ontological level, at the creation period. There is no Quranic verse that elevates man over woman in terms of humanity or creation. The difference is on piety, which a woman can nourish more than a man, and vice versa. The inequality clearly stated in the Quran concerns, on all cases, the social affairs only: inheritance, family responsibilities, giving testimony in the court, and polygamy. European Islam is of the opinion that the mistake Muslim legalists have made is that they based their judgements on the revealed prescriptions on the social affairs, which are historically unequal, instead of centralizing the equality status found in the Quran at the level and moment of creation. European Islam historicizes the Quranic prescriptions on social affairs, which are considered to answer the 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabian society, and are thus adjustable, in light of the ontological equality the Quran reveals. Second, European Islam defends the ideal marriage as the source of a stable and natural family life, composed of a wife and a husband. For instance, Ramadan quotes the revelation verse

where it is stated that a husband can never be just among his wives even if he wishes to, and the best for him is to have just one wife. Third, as a loyal citizen to the liberal constitutional state, a Muslim man has to abide by the dictates of law, which decree that polygamy is illegal. The law is no longer considered un-Islamic (since revelation is historicized and any law is now reasoned about), thus possible to manoeuvre or refute once the power weight is on the side of the Muslims. Equality is a fundamental value in the political well-ordered society, and without it justice as fairness, which assumably Islam also defends, is impossible.

As to the evident conflict of the value of liberty in the liberal constitution (which allows sexual liberty)<sup>1513</sup> with the value of equality (which disadvantages the polygamous over the, say, atheist and secularist equality advocates) in this issue, European Islam, in light of Rawls' overlapping consensus framework, advocates first and foremost an internal debate over this possible contradiction, taking into account theological and political circumstances. European Islam assumes that a believer who internalizes the idea of liberty as well as equality as the divine calls for them cannot bring about contradictions of values that are unsolvable. I explained this above. The additional point I want to make is related to the state intervention in the cases of conflicting values. I gave a similar argumentation when discussing sexual liberty on the individual axis. The point can be explained as below.

The assumption is that a good number of Muslim practicing believers internalize the value of liberty and equality to a large extent, and still stick to the right of polygamy as long as there is the right to sexual liberty even among adults who are married in an extra-marital affair. These believers want to exercise the right of sexual joy but legally and piously. Suppose also that there is no war in which more men are lost, and they can

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<sup>1513</sup> Following the assumptions and scenarios formed here, there is no need to say that not every liberal is necessarily open to sexual liberty, be him an atheist liberal or a liberal who believes in some religion, be it divine or not. The fact that liberal societies allow sexual liberty legally does not necessarily mean that every liberal is open to it; he may either abstain from enjoying this unpunishable "liberal right" outside marriage or refrain from condemning his society that practices it; he may be indifferent to it; his concerns with liberty may go beyond the various discourses on the body. This is to say that liberty does not necessarily bind itself to sexual liberty by default. I have opted for centralizing the controversial issue of sexual liberty in this regard because it is related to polygamy as a possible expression of sexual freedom within legal boundaries of the liberal political society.

thus have an extra excuse. Psychological analysis can still illustrate that wives married to one man do not feel happy, and that he can never be just with them, even when he is a good and rich person. The polygamous citizen would use the same arguments about the allowed sexual liberty as a right: he would say, for example, that adultery is a treason, immoral, damages family values, increases divorce rate, impacts children life, and affects the way human beings speak of justice, fidelity, love, and sincerity. These are very strong arguments from the polygamous side. Even saying polygamy is against the great value of equality may not be enough at all. The assumption can further be that these are already known by all the people involved and society at large, yet the call to allow polygamy persists from some believers.

European Islam reacts to this in defense of the liberal law that bans polygamy, but, like the liberal state, allows the freedom of expressing this doctrinal thought. Polygamy can pass into public debate and become a reasonable issue of discussion in a pluralist society only if it manages it go through the three stages of justification (*pro tanto*, full, and then public justification), or from constitutional to overlapping consensus stage, to bring to the table part of the idea of political liberalism that tries to be accommodative to various doctrines. The requirements of overlapping consensus are not easy to cater for, but at the same time not impossible, especially when a doctrine like is fully comprehensive and has developed complicated levels of argumentation over the centuries. I do not want to go into step by step details comparing polygamous analysis and overlapping different stages and requirements. I have tried that above differently.

The idea I think European Islam defends is that the issue of polygamy can become a public issue in the envisaged society of *Political Liberalism* when other religious, moral and philosophic doctrines, not the Islamic one alone, endorse the same claim for some natural, social-economic, political, or any other, reasons. When such a situation transpires, then polygamy moves from being Islamic to being political, i.e. to being the affair of the state, maybe to balance gender birth rate after a war, an epidemic, or a natural/ cosmic event that may fundamentally affect the well functioning of the well ordered society. In such a situation, it is not only the Muslims who are concerned, but the

whole society. So, if the idea of polygamy is borrowed to restore population balance and birth rate, the Muslim citizens can no longer claim that the idea is purely theirs, and thus they can lead the majority to influence the law of the state. The mechanisms of overlapping consensus and the requirements of political liberalism remain the same. Polygamy becomes a state matter, a political matter for all; the Islamic doctrine becomes one of the contributing doctrines for social flourishing, even if it claims polygamy to be “originaly” its own proposal or idea to solve the social problem faced (i.e. the lack of males for some reasons).

Three, *the value I briefly refer to here in relation to gender equality issue is the value of fraternity, or tolerance* as Bidar also refers to it. Fraternity value is considered central not only for social wellbeing but especially for the global society. According to the new theological interpretations of the Quran and the Universe as equal sacred Books (Ramadan and Oubrou) or as one (Bidar), the consideration of gender equality and most importantly equality among Muslims and non-Muslims is pertinent. The three innovative readings of revelation (humanization, historicization and rationalization) render to the value of universal fraternity the result of internalizing the values of liberty and equality, though it could also be read as the value that causes them. Fraternity as tolerance is taken from the doctrine’s major source, the Quran, but it is updated in light of modernity achievements of liberty and equality. For the studied scholars, normative Quranic fraternity or tolerance did not always match the political history of Muslim majority countries; Islamic law, when applied, followed the revealed prescriptions and thus advantaged Muslims over non-Muslims, and men over women.

The modern interpretations of the values of liberty and equality, according to European Islam, render justice to the Islamic normative messages (of liberty and equality) as seen above, and in earlier sections (revise Section 1a-b-c, Part IV). Henceforth, what was said above on these two values gives both theological and political justifications of the endorsement of fraternity principle, or tolerance. This fraternity/tolerance can be described as twofold: external and internal. External tolerance includes the believers of other doctrines as equal before the law and part of the divine will of

difference. Such an acceptance of diversity becomes a sacred act, an act of worship. As to internal fraternity/ tolerance, it means the reconciliation of the doctrine with its own ideals of justice, equality, and liberty of believers. Both types of toleration have impacts on laws, which can no longer be unequal and discriminatory.

In my earlier analysis of these developments of European Islamic thought I said that what it fundamentally realizes with modernity values is that Truth is Supreme, Absolute, and cannot be summarized in the claim of one doctrine. European Islam, in plain terms, modestly bows down to epistemological difference and speaks out its epistemological modesty, claiming that such a realization is itself part of the divine and thus a new form of spirituality. This big shift affects the mindscape of the believers' and allows, consequently, the adoption of modern values – spiritually. This seems highly compatible with the Rawlsian political framework and the fair terms of cooperation between various doctrines, which at the end corroborate the liberal framework of the basic structure of society.

What I am driving at behind my broad deductions on fraternity is that the gender equality example taken above for examination, with a focus on polygamy, can be expanded to touch on examples of the manifest discriminatory law of inheritance, and woman's unequal weight of testimony compared to man's (in Islamic law, man's testimony, in a court for example, equals two women's). It can also include the legal prescription that a Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim man. The same line of reasoning followed with the previous examples could be applied to these examples because they all revolve around the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Even the issue of homosexuality can be confidently defended from European Islam argumentative apparatus, though it still does not recognize it as a “natural and acceptable practice,” and one should not expect it to accept it as part of the doctrine to say that it is truly reformist.

What makes European Islam able to include these controversial issues within its scope and argumentation is that it does not criminalize them, or even show abhorrence to them, and invites respecting them as social facts and examining their future repercussions as could be examined any newly developing phenomenon in society and science. The

previous examples set a pattern of argumentation, which I hope is clear by now. Theoretical argumentation aside, sociological-anthropological works may be a further consolidation of these various examples of the studied voices of European Islam.<sup>1514</sup>

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<sup>1514</sup> I propose a fieldwork example to foster my point that European Islam's project seems possible on the ground, and some of its visible aspects are already lived: "Young Muslims in the Netherlands: Understanding Tariq Ramadan." I refer to part of the results relevant to the theoretical work developed above. The fieldwork was conducted in a period of about three months during the summer of 2010. It focuses on young Muslims living in the Netherlands. It was considered important that they were born in the country or migrated to it while very young so as to make sure that they had passed most of their life in a European environment. Sixty persons participated in the study, 41 (68.3%) of them males and 19 (31.7%) females. Their mean age was 31 years and 10 months. The group of respondents disposes of a relatively high level of education. Nearly 80% has a higher educational grade. All questionnaires were processed in an SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software statistical system.

The fieldwork asks basic questions that correspond to some religious visible practices, rituals, and other issues that are a matter of controversy in European liberal societies. These issues are clearly responded to in Ramadan's various works, which is why they are used for this study. This list of questions and selected views of this scholar do not exhaust his other theological and political views (For more on this, see Part II of this work). Time, space, and the limited aims of this fieldwork did not allow making comparisons among various versions of European Islam. Moreover, Ramadan's engagement with European Muslim Networks, and Rotterdam municipality in the Netherlands for a period of time before being fired made the focus on some of his ideas more relevant at the time.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections, totalling in sixty four (64) questions: 1) "Islam and Dutch values," 2) "Tariq Ramadan's Project for European Muslims," 3) "The Netherlands in Focus." Section Two is most relevant here because it tries to measure how some proposals of Ramadan's European Islam match the thinking of young Muslims in a liberal society like the Netherlands. In this Section, fourteen (14) views of Ramadan were presented to the respondents and they were asked to react to them through a simple scale consisting of three options: (1) agree; (2) neutral; (3) disagree. Below I cite the statements summarizing the scholar's project, followed by a short commentary about the relevance of the study.

Tariq Ramadan's selected views go as follows: 1) Loyalty is for the country where one belongs, not where one comes from, 2) Gay marriage should be respected as a choice in Europe, though it is not allowed by Islam, 3) Freedom of religion is granted, 4) Wearing the headscarf/hijab should not be obligatory, but a matter of choice, 5) Burqa is cultural, not Islamic, 6) Polygamy should not be allowed in Europe, 7) Besides Islamic inheritance code, women should be given equal rights through state institutions, 8) Arranged marriages is a cultural practice, not Islamic, 9) Hudūd sanctions like stoning should be temporarily frozen, 10) Islamic banking should be respected as a choice, 11) Islamic sciences do not contradict the general frames of science and reason, 12) Abortion is possible in particular cases, 13) Euthanasia is generally forbidden, 14) Literature works and arts that do not follow Islamic ethics should be respected. I do not want to discuss these statements and argue for them from European Islam perspectives as I did with the previous examples. That would require more space and invocation of the other parts of the fieldwork which I do not cite here. My aim behind referring to this fieldwork is primarily to show that a number of the issues that some consider an unsolvable problem, and thus make Islam incompatible with European liberal values, are not considered so by young Muslims who are born or have grown up in a European context. These young Muslims, as mentioned above, are not all of them aware of Ramadan's project, yet they endorse his views. They neither deny their Islamic faith, nor do they endorse some controversial views that are against the laws of their country. Here, it does not matter whether they have a theological training, religious education, or whether they have studied only in European schools and their religious views are thus in favour of European values. The sociological fieldwork does not ask the informants what is their source of inspiration for the views they hold. Rather, it seeks to know how Islam is lived in a liberal context. That is the aim behind giving it as an example. While I do the theoretical

## Recapitulation

As a reminder, the attempt of reading European Islam as a reasonable comprehensive doctrine has aimed at contributing to answering the leading question of this work: is European Islam possible? In the main introduction, I stated that it is possible theologically and politically. I have tried to defend this thesis throughout this work. The previous parts and sections approached the question from theological arguments. This final section integrates Rawls' overlapping consensus of political liberalism as an evaluation of the theological advancements of European Islam. What I have reached in my understanding and argumentation is that European Islam is also possible politically – taking Rawls' conception of the political as the framework of study.

This endeavour has been carried out based on a fundamental assumption that considers European Islam a doctrine of the good that seeks the establishment of perpetual justice the way the Rawlsian project of political liberalism envisages it. Both in terms of theory and practice, I have advanced parallel arguments on controversial doctrinal issues that seem incompatible with the liberal Rawlsian framework. Based on the three axes device I have used throughout this study (world-society-individual), I brought to the political realm the reformist considerations of European Islam in light of the other triadic analytical device of Abdurrahmane (innovative humanization-historicization-and-rationalization of revelation). I have tried to juxtapose these three levels of analysis with Rawls' overlapping consensus stages (constitutional consensus and overlapping

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argumentation in this work, believer citizens on the ground provide a concrete example of the European Islam perspectives raised in this study.

The idea reached in this fieldwork is that Ramadan's project of European Islam has high agreement levels and seems already a lived idea among the young educated Dutch Muslims of Moroccan origin. There is no disagreement ratio with Ramadan which goes beyond the ratio of agreement; even in the cases of neutrality high percentage cases, agreement ratio still exceeds both neutrality and disagreement ratios in all the cases surveyed. That is, the responses to the fourteen statements that correspond to Ramadan's reformist project are all agreed upon: the minimum agreement ratio marked is 40%, while neutrality highest ratio is 34% and disagreement is 32%, making by thus the agreement zone the most dominant. The fourteen statements are agreed upon with a percentage higher than 50%, except in two cases where it is agreed on with a percentage of 40% (for loyalty to the country of residence) and 42 % (polygamy to be banned).

For the whole article, see Mohammed Hashas and Jan Jaap de Ruiter, 'Young Muslims in the Netherlands: Understanding Tariq Ramadan,' in Martina Topic and Srdjan Sremac, eds. *Europe as a Multiple Modernity: Multiplicity of Religious Identities and Belongings* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, (forthcoming), 2013) 1-51. The pagination will appear differently in the final published manuscript.

consensus) and the three levels of justification (*pro tanto*, full, and public justification). Accordingly, this section has illustrated how the theological readings European Islam presents at the metaphysical/physical levels (world axis) affect the relational aspects at the mundane levels (individual and social axes). Despite the importance of the three axes of considering the theological politically, it is mainly the social axis that concerns overlapping consensus most. Here, European Islam's historicization of revelation becomes pivotal. Not to be long here, I end with emphasizing this aspect.

The quest for stability of the conception of the political, which is the embodiment of the idea of social justice, requires that religious laws that are discriminatory can no longer be applied in “a fair system of cooperation” where everyone is free and equal to everyone else. While the political system does not allow the unreasonableness of some doctrinal prescriptions, the believer and his association have to find ways to legitimize their endorsement of the system in light of their own sources. Such is the endeavour of the reformists of European Islam. Instead of reading their sources literally and ahistorically, they use various methodologies, either from their own tradition or borrowed from modern societies, to revisit their doctrinal texts and read them anew, with contemporary eyes, not aiming at deceiving their believers through their interpretations but aiming at solving problems and controversies they might have themselves felt as believers of this same doctrine. Their positions are “declaratory.”

Issues related to the historicization of the divine message for social changes are fundamental in the project of European Islam and its adaptation to the requirements of the political conception of Rawls. Historicization of especially the social affairs prescriptions as specified in the sacred text, besides the ones added by the early Muslim Caliphs and scholars, renders the task of embracing the political of *Political Liberalism* feasible. What historicization seeks is chiefly the rationalization of laws related to social affairs as well as individuals. Because there are layers of rationalizations, which differ for various reasons, internal and external to religion and its believers, it is not possible to ask someone to be as rational as someone else. So, what becomes required for the well-functioning of the political is that reasonableness is emphasized – i.e. the rationalization

that seeks midways for the right of all, and not only for the majority or the good of a particular doctrine. Rationalization of faith does not mean irresponsible individualization of faith. I have given some examples also in the individual axis about how a believer may rationalize his faith without leaving it altogether if he is so careful about preserving it.

The point I would like to reiterate in recapitulating this section is that European Islam at the social axis internalizes the basic requirements of the political, and more precisely answers the demands of overlapping consensus and enters the third and most important stage of political justification, the public justification. After the individual internalizes the basic structure of the political just society and finds justifications for that from his doctrine (full justification), he moves further and considers that other citizens belonging to other reasonable comprehensive doctrines have done the same thing and internalized the political as part of their own doctrine though they still look at the political as freestanding. That is, citizens of various doctrines reach the idea that the political is for all but still does not stand on the side of any, despite the fact that each doctrine always considers that it has contributed to that same political. Such a psychological feeling is allowed and is required. Without it, stability of overlapping consensus cannot transpire. The political as a freestanding framework aims at imbuing every citizen with the fact that the other contributing reasonable comprehensive doctrines do equally endorse the political values that he (the citizen) also endorses. Whatever disagreement happens between citizens, associations, parties, and any actors inside society, the general framework of the political cannot be at risk, for it is the social construct that binds everyone and to which everyone has contributed. Differences in suggesting particular policies for whatever issue, for example, ideally cannot trespass the boundaries where a particular doctrine can feel discriminated against. Such cases of difference certainly happen, but the mechanisms Rawls suggests for the well-functioning of political liberalism in general and the idea of overlapping consensus in particular prevent falling into serious decisions that can weaken the legitimacy of the political.

## Conclusion

This work has dealt with the following main question: is European Islam possible? I have argued that European Islam is possible, following my conclusions from the studied texts. For further clarifications, I have tried to show that it is possible both theologically and politically, first by following the common distinction often referred to between religion and politics, and second by trying to go beyond it as European Islam calls for. I have provided various historical as well as methodological justifications for the thesis I advance throughout this work.

The main aim behind raising the research question above has been to examine the aspects of newness as well as revisionism (traditionalism) in the studied texts and scholars that raise the banner of reform in Islamic thought. That is, I have tried to see what European Islam is really about, and what is its theological-political contribution to the debate on Islam in Europe. I have examined varied texts for theoretical justifications and comparisons of the ideas that come out of this particular idea of European Islam. As I have referred to in the main introduction, scholarship has been driven by political, sociological, and anthropological approaches, a number of which builds on a classical essentialist and Orientalist approach. Unlike these approaches, I have directly treated texts of scholars who speak of both Europe and Islam from within. That is one aspect of the originality of this work. It is comparatively content-based. The other aspect, as will be re-iterated, is methodologically-based.

In defending this thesis, I have divided my argumentation into three cognitive stages that are methodological in aim. Each of these stages corresponds to a sub-question. I have called the first stage *descriptive* since it corresponds to the question that portrays the version of European Islam I work on: what is European Islam? I have studied four scholars as voices that call for “this” European Islam and try to theorize for it: Bassam Tibi, Tariq Ramadan, Tareq Oubrou, and Abdennour Bidar. I use content analysis approach in reading their texts, focalizing their major ideas. While driven by political external pressure they consider historical, the four scholars raise theological matters and revisit their meanings as well.

Their scholarly efforts aside, I have considered Tibi the least innovative since his approach is mostly a securitization of the issue of Islam in Europe, and there is hardly a theological elaboration of his version of Euro-Islam. His version requires a total division between religion and politics in the sense of private versus public, following the French *laïcité* model, which makes some read him as an Orientalist, which I do not do. Though his ideas are shared by the rest of the scholars, the way he defends them does not render his voice innovative. This view is corroborated by the evaluative framework followed in this study. Ramadan and Oubrou, who have moved on with their projects from their early conservative approaches, try a reconciliatory approach that is more innovative. Each uses his own devices for it. For instance, I have condensed the concepts of Ramadan in three (Sharia, Shahada, and ethics) and tried to read them in light of his approach of considering The Book of Revelation and the Book of the Universe as equal Books, an approach that can have immense impacts on the practical dimensions of religion. Oubrou, through the device of Sharia of the minority and geotheology, for example, tries to secularize Islamic theology and fuse the religious and the political laws into one.

Bidar, the fourth figure studied here, takes these approaches further and proposes concepts that leave little space of arguments to both conservatives and extreme secularists since he aims at overcoming the ongoing interpretations of the physical and metaphysical altogether. His concepts of Self Islam, Islamic Existentialism, and his consideration of modernity as an unprecedented event of the sacred all work towards weakening what I have referred to as “classical dichotomous thought” that thinks through oppositions and binaries (religion vs. politics, divine vs. rational, private vs. public, Islam vs. Europe, etc.)

Overall, in the descriptive stage, I have tried to show that these various projects of approaching the Islamic tradition and European modern values all aim at preserving the place of the divine for ethical inspiration to the individual and social norms. I have portrayed this conclusion in the image of a God who leaves the world, His propriety, to man. The latter keeps working on it as if He were not there. Neither man denies the existence of the divine, nor does the divine intervene in the world affairs of man any more to say that man’s work is good or bad, right or wrong. It is all to man to decide

now, with reference to the “divine attributes” of doing. Simply put, I have deduced that the “Muslim Prometheus” does not kill God to inherit the world.

The second methodological stage of my work, referred to as the *comparative* stage, has dealt with the following sub-question: what is new in European Islam? The answer I have reached is that European Islam (1) “rationalizes ethics,” and in so doing it becomes (2-3) “revisionist-and-reformist,” or “traditional-modern.” In corroborating my conclusion, I refer to three scholarly generations from Islamic intellectual history: the early Mu‘tazila as eminent rationalist theologians, the “early reformists” of the Arab-Islamic Renaissance (*nahḍa*), and the “late reformists,” or the contemporaries. My reference to these three scholarly tendencies in the history of Islamic thought aims at situating the aspects of newness and reform in European Islam. That is, a line of continuity or discontinuity has to be examined, so that the approach to European Islam is not done merely from current political perspectives, or from European modernity angles. I refer to past and present Islamic scholarships so as to situate better my understanding of European Islam. That is the aim of the comparative stage. I mention especially some basic ideas of Qadi Abd Aljabbar and the moral interpretations of his ethical theory. I also refer to the early and late reformists and realize that they all stress the issue of ethics and reasoning, which European Islam also does. Following these results based on comparisons, I move to the critical and synthetical third step, referred to as the *evaluative* stage.

I have devised a comprehensive framework of three axes in evaluating European Islam: “*world-society-individual*.” I have first used this triadic framework to examine some of the theological advancements of the studied texts and scholars. I have matched it with Taha Abdurrahmane’s triadic framework he uses in critiquing some contemporary reformist projects in the Islamic world and in proposing three innovative plans for genuine renewal and development of a more “universal modernity” (that is not Eurocentrist), or what he also calls “second modernity.” I ultimately refer to this envisaged modernity as “perpetual modernity,” in light of my reading of European Islam.

Abdurrahmane’s triadic framework is innovative “*humanization-historicization-and-rationalization*” of revelation. Briefly, first, the “innovative humanisation plan”

denotes that man is honoured with the task of inhabiting the world (*takrīm al-insan bi al-istikhlāf*). God has willed that man does not only care for his private matters but also carries the honorary message of inheriting the world - a deposit (*amāna*) he should ethically care about as his. Moreover, this humanization of the divine does not aim at effacing sacredness, but at honoring man by moving the Quranic verses from divinity to man's access through the latter's methods of interpretation. Second, the "innovative historicization plan" aims at establishing ethics and not dismissing obligations. It links Quranic verses with their context in time and space for ethical reasons. Prescriptive verses have two faces: legal/ jurisprudential and ethical; the former follows the latter, and not vice versa. Third, the "innovative rationalization plan" aims at expanding reason (*tawsī' al'aql*) and not the erasure of the divine and the desacralization of its rituals and meanings (*maḥw al-ghaybiyya*).

In my analytical reading of European Islam selected texts, I find out that my triadic axes match to a large extent Abdurrahmane's three innovative plans. Based on these, I devise three main concepts following my deductive reading of European Islam: "*inheritance of the world-practical fiqh (or fiqhology)-rationalization of ethics*." I build links among these concepts (Abdurrahmane's and mine), and infer conclusions, which I word as follows: 1) *the humanization of the world through divinely willed inheritance for cosmic wellbeing*, 2) *the historicization of revelation through fiqhology (practical fiqh), for social wellbeing*, 3) *the rationalization of revelation through reasonable faith for individual wellbeing*.

Following Abdurrahmane's framework, I have shown that among the four projects studied Tibi's is not innovative since he is still preoccupied with the classical idea of the divine vs. the secular, private vs. public, etc. Ramadan and Oubrou try gradually to move away from this classical dichotomy; they are more innovative. Bidar is the most innovative. His theological readings demonstrate a remarkable move from classical religiosity as well as classical atheism and secularism. European Islam as a concept, succinctly, is more innovatively expressed by the last three projects. More precisely, my use of "the idea of European Islam" is the culmination of my critical reading of especially the last three projects (Ramadan, Oubrou, and Bidar) in light of

Abdurrahmane's critical framework. Otherwise put, when I speak of European Islam as I understand it and present it as an idea, I have the work of the three scholars above as my main reference. Tibi's contribution cannot be neglected, but it does not have the same place in my idea as the others' for the reasons I have especially developed in length in Part IV, Section 2, of this work.

To consolidate my conceptualization of the idea of European Islam, and as a way of preparing the ground of reading this idea as a "reasonable comprehensive doctrine," I subsequently evaluate its concepts in light of modernity values, using Abdurrahmane's three principles of the "essence of modernity." These principles are "*majority-universality-criticism*" principles, backed up by their six pillars: "*autonomy and creativity, extensibility and generality, rationalization and differentiation,*" two pillars for each principle, respectively. I build links of varied used concepts and reach the following conclusions that European Islam and the essence of modernity principles share in their treatment of revelation and human agency. Together they underline the (1) *innovative humanization of the inherited world through the principle of majority for cosmic wellbeing*, the (2) *innovative historicization of revelation prescriptions through the principle of universality for social wellbeing*, and the (3) *innovative rationalization of faith through the principle of criticism for individual wellbeing*.

I close this section by interpreting Abdurrahmane's "second modernity" as "perpetual modernity" in light of my earlier concepts for European Islam. I argue that European Islam's modernity is perpetual for three reasons, which I subsequently present in terms of levels of concepts. It is (1) perpetual in the sense that the inheritance of the world, through innovative humanization plan of reading revelation, matches the principle of majority as enshrined by the essence of modernity. It is (2) perpetual in the sense that practical fiqh (Sharia law), through innovative historicization plan, matches the principle of universality as enshrined by the essence of modernity. It is (3) perpetual in the sense that the rationalization of ethics and faith, through innovative rationalization plan, matches the principle of criticism as enshrined by the essence of modernity.

I end up my evaluative stage, and my work as a whole, by opening up my previous theological comparisons and argumentations to the political framework of John

Rawls. From the previous stages, I proceeded based on two major assumptions. I have first assumed that social justice is the main target of the conceptualized European Islam. I have also assumed that Rawls' framework of "political liberalism," with a focus on "overlapping consensus," is the most adequate framework that can preserve the great values of both a liberal society of justice as fairness, and the great values of the doctrine under examination (European Islam) in the age of pluralism that characterizes the current modern liberal societies. I have used my comprehensive triadic axes also here (world-individual-society), along with the triadic framework of Abdurrahmane (humanization-rationalization-historicization), and tried to match them with the three levels of Rawlsian legitimacy for the constitutional liberal democracy (*pro-tanto*, full, and public justification). The reason behind this attempt is to find out how European Islam offers an internally pluralist theological doctrine out of which a reasonable European Muslim believer may successfully mediate his normative commitments to European Islam as a comprehensive theory of the good and his political commitments to the liberal constitutional society in which he lives.

Accordingly, I have come up with the following intertwined conclusions, replete with concepts reached in previous stages of this work.

First, world axis humanizes revelation. It henceforth leads to the following:

*One, the physical and the metaphysical are one;*

*Two, stability of the political well-ordered society is required by the divine;*

*Three, every human system of social justice is substantially divine;*

Second, individual axis rationalizes revelation. It henceforth defends the following:

*One, there is no faith without reason;*

*Two, there is no faith without ethics;*

*Three, there is no faith without liberty.*

Third, society axis historicizes revelation. It henceforth brings about the following:

*One, the universality and eternity of the divine message cannot be a fixed constitution;*

*Two, the best system of social justice is the most adequate for the divine message;*

Three, *the ahistoricization of belief requires adaptation to the historicization of values.*

Based on examples, I have illustrated the above fundamental arguments European Islam presents theologically to defend its political affiliation to the liberal constitutional ideals as enshrined in the Rawlsian framework. These examples revolve around sexual liberty, worship rituals, jihad, and gender equality.

Having summarized it so, without having re-iterated all methodological justifications and reservations, I close this work by underlying three major points that may open this project to further comparisons, developments and challenges. One, I think that “the” European Islam conceptualized here, however “intellectual” it may seem, is “a lived Islam” of many believer-citizens who are born and educated in Europe. It has the characteristics to be the future of Islam in Western Europe. At the same time, besides the extreme secularism external pressure, it also has to face the internal pressure of extreme conservatives who see reformists as “light Muslims,” or sometimes as “not Muslims” at all. “This” European Islam can be described as the product of both pluralist Europe and pluralist Islam. So, it adopts both traditions (commonly considered incompatible), and challenges their centrism and essentialisms. In this sense, European Islam is open, secular, and liberal. At the same time, it is also conservative in the sense that it does not deny religion its place in the public sphere. It also centralizes the “beautiful” side of religion – its ethical and spiritual dimensions. European Islam tries to merge two worlds, and overcome what I have referred to as “classical dichotomous thought.”

Two, I think that European Islam is a continuity of the projects of reform that have been initiated in the Arab-Islamic world since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. As I have also argued in the comparative part of this work, there are strong echoes of the early pluralist period of Islamic scholarship. The Mu‘tazila were given as an example of rationalization of ethics and theological profound discussions. I do not believe that European Islam will stop at their legacy. On the contrary, they could be just an example for legitimating further developments/ reforms. From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, prominent projects of reform have been developed, especially by the contemporaries. So, while European Islam seems to have built on that tradition of reform, it has found a different socio-political and

economic climate where its chances of growth and legitimacy are more available than they are for projects in the Arab-Islamic majority countries where various factors deprive reform projects from development. The point here is that European Islam, as a project of Islamic Renaissance, may not, and should not, be considered the ultimate, or best, form of reform for the Islamic majority societies, for various socio-political, economic, and historical reasons, particularly if one underlines the fact that reform projects in the Islamic world are actually “more” solid theoretically-theologically, and they could be a real theological challenger to, or supporter of, “this” European Islam. The space of comparisons among Islamic theologies as they mature in various contexts is then immense for scholarship.

Three, how can individual liberty survive when its meanings differ from a doctrine to another? In an ideal liberal society, conflict of values cannot be denied. The way to secure both liberty and diversity is to outline a social justice project, as Rawls has tried. Its individual aspect aside for a while, European Islam assumes a vital role to play for social wellbeing, which I have interpreted as its political version for the defence of the “permanence of social justice” – a classic argument in Islamic scholarship. I have also assumed that Rawls’ overlapping consensus secures the stability of justice as fairness in a society characterized by (reasonable) pluralism. One of the challenges to this assumption could be whether social justice can flourish only if the framework is liberal, founded on the freedom and equality of individuals. The challenge is whether the individual can develop a sense of social justice as a moral value in the first place, before he works on it within the political liberal framework of a constitutional democracy. The idea could be an easy “yes” but the presence of various doctrines in a pluralist society can create conflict of values, even when they all agree on the same values. Prioritizing them can become a real problem that threatens stability. That is why some doctrines may opt for calling for more minority rights to prioritize teaching some values over others. A doctrine may prioritize a value like justice because it is more socially-oriented, while another may prioritize individual autonomy because it considers it most important for self realization.

The idea is that education in the family or community level becomes vital and possibly problematic if the framework of the political that binds every citizen does not

develop an adequate educational curriculum whereby each doctrine, be it religious, moral, or philosophical, finds echoes of its teachings and values. What this implies is that not all doctrines have the means to internalize (part of) the political as if it were (part of) their own doctrine. I have shown that European Islam, as a fully comprehensive doctrine, has that flexibility. But I do not think that all versions of Islam, and all other religions and philosophies, enjoy the same flexibility. So, comparisons between these various doctrines – religious, moral, and philosophic- can be another interesting enterprise that enriches the formation of pathways for the “permanence of social justice.”

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