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Chapter II
Heritage, Historicism, and Hermeneutics: Pathways in Contemporary Islamic Thought

Introduction

This chapter on the mapping of pathways for critical thinking about religion by present-day Muslim intellectuals is a condensation of fifteen years of research into the history of ideas of the contemporary Islamic world. In the course of this period, I have moved from investigating the contributions of so-called heritage thinkers to the study of Islam as a field of scholarly inquiry, to an examination of the discursive formations shaping the intellectual debates on Islam and the place of religion in modern-day Indonesia, and then to the development of antifoundational philosophies of difference by expatriate Muslim intellectuals.[1] This chapter briefly replicates that trajectory.

In terms of approach and methodology, as is the case with these projects on a larger scale, the present chapter engages with text and context, through close readings and detailed analyses of both primary sources (the works of the intellectuals in question) and secondary sources, consisting of the scholarly literature from fields as diverse as academic philosophy, cultural studies, (intellectual) histories of the Muslim world, religious studies, and the social sciences. The theoretical framing of this research has expanded from post-phenomenological hermeneutics and postcolonial theories of cultural hybridity and endogenous intellectual creativity to absorb Edward Said's idea of traveling theory, and the reflections of Zygmunt Bauman and Bruce Robbins, in which they characterize intellectuals as gardeners

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1 Carool Kersten, *Cosmopolitans and Heretics: New Muslim Intellectuals and the Study of Islam* (London and New York: Hurst & Company and Columbia University Press, 2011); Carool Kersten, *Islam in Indonesia: The Contest for Society, Ideas and Values* (London and New York: Hurst & Company and Oxford University Press, 2015); Carool Kersten, "Islam *vs* the West? Muslim Challenges of a False Binary," in *Poesis of Peace: Narratives, Cultures, and Philosophies*, ed. Klaus-Gerd Giesen, Carool Kersten and Lenart Škof (London and New York: Routledge, 2017): 81–96; Carool Kersten, "Anti-Foundationalism in Contemporary Muslim Thought" (keynote lecture presented at the Reformulating Islamic Thought in the West Workshop, University of Exeter, 17 June 2015); Carool Kersten, "Alternative Regimes of Knowledge for a Post-Islamist World: Pragmatism, Anti-Foundationalism & Hermeneutics of Alterity" (paper presented at the XXI IAHR World Congress, Erfurt, 24 August 2015).

and gamekeepers, and signal the fragmentation of academic disciplines and the bureaucratization of the university.[2] A regard for the interstitiality of contemporary Muslim intellectuals and a concomitant cosmopolitan disposition have remained constant concerns in the various projects that I have pursued over the years, or to which I was invited to contribute.

Heritage and Historicism

The term heritage thinkers was coined to refer to exponents of a counter current to what scholars of Islam from different academic disciplines refer to as the "Islamic Resurgence", which began in the 1970s.[3] Its Arabic equivalent, *turāthiyyūn*, is derived from the cognate *turāth*, or heritage. In this case, the term is employed to take Islam beyond its conventional understanding as a religion, narrowed down to a fixed set of doctrines and tenets. Instead, these thinkers regard Islam as a civilizational concept with a rich legacy of not only religious and philosophical expressions, but also wider cultural ones, extending beyond the purely spiritual and intellectual to include also the artistic domain.

The emergence of heritage thinking can be marked by three important meetings held in Arab countries, in the course of the same time frame during which the reactive —and often reactionary— forms of political Islam became increasingly noticeable: The 1971 Cairo Conference on Authenticity and Renewal in Contemporary Arab Culture; the forum that took place three years later in Kuwait on the Crisis of Civilizational Development in the Arab Homeland; and another conference held in Cairo in 1984, convened under the title "Heritage and the Challenges of the Modern Age in the Arab Nation: Authenticity and Modernity".[4]

Represented at these meetings were three main trends in Arab thinking about what Issa Boullata called a "painful introspection" into the state of affairs of Muslim thinking about the role of their religion and their wider intellectual legacy.[5] On

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2 Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (London: Faber & Faber, 1984); Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-Modernity and Intellectuals* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1987); Bruce Robbins, *Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

3 For example, Ibrahim Abu-Rabi', *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

4 Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 116–172.

5 Issa Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 3.

opposite ends of the spectrum are the proponents of a radical cultural revolution in which the religious outlook is jettisoned in favor of a secular one inspired by Western modern thought, and a very vocal Islamist cabal wishing to eliminate all intellectual and cultural influences originating outside Arab societies. The group in between these two outliers advocates an intellectual-cultural adaptation of the Islamic heritage to the demands and challenges of the present rather than a radical transformation, because they believe that contemporary Arab-Islamic civilization is flexible enough to absorb the features of modernity. From the early 1980s, this group has produced what Leonard Binder, another veteran observer of the modern Muslim world, has called a rich, varied, and growing *"turāth* literature".[6]

The last of these conferences, held in 1984, heralded a changing of the guard. Whereas the first meeting in Cairo and the conference in Kuwait were still dominated by thinkers such as Zaki Naguib Mahmud (1905–1993), Mahmud Amin al-ʿAlim (1922–2009), and Anouar Abdel Malek (1924–2012), by the 1980s they were being replaced by a new generation of intellectuals, less timid in terms of pushing renewal in the direction of a critical engagement with existing Islamic *epistèmes* or regimes of knowledge. These include what I have called elsewhere the "Arab quartet" of heritage thinkers: The French-Algerian historian of Islam Mohammed Arkoun (1928–2010), the Egyptian philosopher Hassan Hanafi (1935–2011); his Moroccan counterpart, Mohammed Abed al-Jabri[7] (1935–2010), and the Egyptian literary scholar Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (1943–2010).[8]

Even though the three meetings were confined to the Arabic-speaking part of the Muslim world, it is important to stress that the interest in heritage thinking is not limited to the Middle East and North Africa. For example, in Indonesia —located on the south-eastern periphery of the historical *Dār al-Islām*, but also the most populous Muslim nation state in the world— there is not only a voracious appetite for the writings of the heritage thinkers but also a thriving local discourse of Islamic renewal thinking involving Indonesians themselves. The beginnings of this strand of critical engagement with the Islamic heritage can be traced to the 1960s and 1970s, when Muslim students under the direction of one of their

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6 Leonard Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 298.

7 One finds al-Jabri also spelled as Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī, but the former version had the bearer's own preference.

8 Carool Kersten, "Al-Jabri in Indonesia: The *Critique of Arab Reason* Travels to the *Lands below the Winds*," in *Islam, State, and Modernity: Mohammed Abed al-Jabri and the Future of the Arab World*, ed. Zaid Eyadat, Francesca M. Corrao and Mohammed Hashas, foreword by Abdou Filali-Ansari (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018): 150.

union leaders, Nurcholish Madjid (1939–2005), started the so-called "Movement for the Renewal of Islamic Thinking" (*Gerakan Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam* in Indonesian). With this particular initiative and their own growing appreciation for the "intellectual treasures of Islam", this first fully postcolonial generation of Muslim intellectuals prepared the ground for the reception of the ideas expounded by heritage thinkers from Middle Eastern and North-African origins.[9]

Despite different academic specializations and varying approaches to the Islamic heritage, these critical Muslim thinkers share an intellectual profile characterized by an intimate familiarity with the Islamic tradition and a solid acquaintance with the achievements of Western academe in the human sciences. Where Egyptians lean toward a conceptual focus, scholars from the Maghreb are more inclined towards historical approaches. Both Binder and Boullata regard *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism and Historicism* (1974) of Abdallah Laroui (b. 1933) as a key text in the body of *turāth* literature.[10] According to Laroui, the prevailing tendency of eclecticism among Arab intellectuals needs to be replaced by a more disciplined and historically aware way of thinking. However, Binder has charged Laroui with being eclectic himself; calling him a "superb dialectician, whose rhetoric includes both phenomenal and pragmatic tropes", which have turned him into a "cultural and philosophical hybrid, capable of interpreting Europe to the Muslim world and the Muslim world to Europe".[11] Thus Laroui was able to engage critically with unsympathetic historiographies, such as those written by the Austrian-American Islamicist G.E. von Grunebaum.[12] At the same time, he was doubtful of the chances for a meaningful dialogue with heritage thinkers, because of the disjunction between existing Arab-Islamic historiography and contemporary Muslim worldviews. Frustration over the fact that Arab intellectuals fell short in their appreciation of historicism remains detectable in Laroui's later work, including *The Concept of Reason* (1997) and *Sunna and Reform* (2008).[13] However, notwithstanding Laroui's disappointment about the lack of progress in

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9 Cf. Nurcholish Madjid, *Khazanah Intelektual Islam* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1984).

10 Abdallah Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual: Traditionalism and Historicism*, trans. Diarmid Cammell (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1976).

11 Binder, *Islamic Liberalism*, 317.

12 Originally, Gustav Edmund Ritter von Grünebaum (1909–1972). Abdallah Laroui, "Les Arabes et l'anthropologie culturelle: Remarques sur la méthode de Gustave von Grunebaum," in *La Crise des intellectuels arabes: Traditionalisme ou historicisme?* (Paris: François Maspero, 1974): 59–102.

13 Abdallah Laroui, *Mafhūm al-ʿAql*, 2nd ed. (Casablanca: Al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-Arabi, 1997); Abdallah Laroui, *Al-Sunna waʾl-Islāḥ* (Casablanca: Al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-Arabi, 2008).

Arab critical-historical thinking, Boullata considers that his propositions have helped shape a more comprehensive view of the Arab-Islamic past.[14]

Maghrebi Critiques of Reason

Fellow-historian Mohammed Arkoun has also engaged with von Grunebaum.[15] In his case this has formed part of a wider research program on Islamic thought, which —over time— Arkoun has developed and presented under various headings or titles: "Applied Islamology" (1973); "Critique of Islamic Reason" (1984); and "The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought" (2002).

A Berber from Kabylia in what was then French Algeria, and educated at French and Arabic institutions in Oran and Algiers, in the mid-1950s Mohammed Arkoun moved to France for postgraduate studies at the University of Strasbourg and later in Paris. He arrived during a time of political and intellectual turbulence: this was the era of his home country's fight for independence; the age of thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus; the student revolts of 1968, which heralded another intellectual changing of the guard; and the subsequent rise of discourse analysis, deconstructive text analysis, poststructuralism, and semiotics, promoted by figures such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, and Louis Althusser. Even though Arkoun would take many of these new strands of thinking on board, he initially fell under the spell of the medievalist Claude Cahen. Based in Strasbourg, Cahen was an exponent of a trend in French historiography as the *Annales* School. It emerged in the 1930s under the direction of Marc Bloch (1886–1944) and Lucian Febvre (1878–1956), who introduced new ideas such as "histories of mentalities" and "unthinkability," and focused on economic and social history.[16] Arkoun's own doctoral research was dedicated to the court culture of the tenth-century Buyids —a Shi'i dynasty of viziers, but serving the Sunni Abbasid Caliphate— in which he applied the distinctions made by Fernand Braudel (1902–1985), leader of the second *Annales* generation, between his-

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14 Boullata, *Trends and Issues*, 26–27.

15 Mohammed Arkoun, "L'Islam moderne vu par le professeur G.E. von Grunebaum," in *Essais sur la pensée islamique*, 1st ed. (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 1973): 283–296.

16 Cf. Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 9–30; Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam with an introduction by Peter Burke (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 24; Stuart Clark, "The *Annales* Historians", in *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences*, ed. Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985): 191.

torical events, mid-term conjunctures, and the *longue durée* of civilizational and environmental influences.[17]

Despite a disappointing lack of response to the *Annales* School approach on the part of other historians of Islam, Arkoun insisted that the methodological innovations he favored advocated an even more explicit articulation. He came up with an alternative way for studying Islam, Muslims, and their history, which he called "Applied Islamology".[18] He used the term for the first time in 1973, but compiling the new research agenda would take another decade, until it was finally presented in 1984 as "Critique of Islamic Reason".[19] In what was to become his most influential collection of essays, Arkoun proposed a survey of the Islamic heritage as an "exhaustive tradition," quarrying the Muslim world's intellectual past for what had been ignored, rejected or not critically interrogated.[20] His fourteen-point agenda for an "Applied Islamology" included examinations of the inception of the Qur'an; the embryonic Muslim community in Medina; the Sunni Caliphate and the Shi'i Imamate; the emergence of the various disciplines of traditional Islamic learning and its transformation into the positivist rationalism that dominated during the early Muslim confrontation with modernity; all the way to the new social imaginaries of the postcolonial Islamic world. Critical of the obsession of contemporary Middle East watchers with short-term events, Arkoun contrasts their "pragmatic Islamology" with the much more demanding accommodation of a plurality of meanings opened up by his own alternative approach, which pushed epistemological questioning to its limits.[21]

The term "Applied Islamology" is an adaptation of the *Applied Anthropology* of Roger Bastide (1898–1974).[22] Based on field work conducted in Brazil, the book was conceived as a social theory for dealing with the phenomenon of acculturation. Aside from Emile Durkheim's view of religion as being embedded in social structure, Bastide also leaned heavily on the ideas of the Brazilian social scientist Gilberto de Mello Freyre (1900–1987), which favored the kind of experiential knowledge promoted by the American pragmatist John Dewey and which was also

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17 Mohammed Arkoun, *L'Humanisme arabe au IVᵉ/Xᵉ siècle: Miskawayh, philosophe et historien*, 2ⁿᵈ edition, (Paris: Vrin, 1982).

18 Mohammed Arkoun, *L'Humanisme arabe*, 13.

19 Mohammed Arkoun, *Pour une critique de la raison islamique* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1984), 43–64.

20 Mohammed Arkoun, *Essais sur la pensée islamique*, 10.

21 Mohammed Arkoun, "The Study of Islam in French Scholarship," in *Mapping Islamic Studies: Genealogy, Continuity and Change*, ed. Azim Nanji (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1997): 240.

22 Roger Bastide, *Applied Anthropology*, trans. by Alice L. Morton (London: Croom Helm, 1973).

regarded as the indirect outcome of the interactions between Muslims, Christians, and Jews of the Iberian Peninsula before the Age of Discovery. For this, Freyre had coined the term "Lusotropicology."[23]

Arkoun's research agenda for the critical study of Islam also continued to be informed by the *ethnohistoire*, or historical anthropology, of third-generation *Annales* historians Georges Duby (1919–1996) and Jacques Le Goff (1924–2014), as well as their successors Pierre Nora (b. 1931), Jacques Revel (b. 1942), and Roger Chartier (b. 1945). These younger *Annales* historians assert that cultural relations are not simply determined by economic and social factors, but that they are "fields of cultural practice and cultural production themselves".[24]

Aside from professional historians, since his postgraduate days, Arkoun was also inspired by the hermeneutics of the philosopher Paul Ricœur. Arkoun's observation that "accurate description must precede interpretation, but interpretation cannot be attempted today without a rigorous analysis using linguistics, semiotic, historical, and anthropological tools", is not just echoing Ricœur's slogan that "to explain more is to understand better," but a serious attempt to emulate the latter's generous or charitable interpretations by which he sought to reconcile conflicting philosophical positions on knowledge and understanding.[25] Toward the end of his career, Arkoun expanded his "Critique of Islamic Reason" into what he called the "Critique of Emerging Reason," meaning an all-encompassing critical examination of any conceivable line of thought or regime of knowledge, regardless of its initial cultural provenance.[26] Although he wrote detailed case studies on medieval Islamic humanism, Arkoun's contribution to critical thinking about Islam's civilizational heritage was primarily agenda-setting, outlining wide-ranging research projects, which he envisaged involving international teams of academics (*chercheur-penseurs*) from different disciplines and fields in the human sciences, including scholars from Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds.[27]

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23 Gilberto Freyre, *Portuguese Integration in the Tropics: Notes Concerning a Possible Lusotropicology which would Specialize in the Systematic Study of the Ecological-social Process of the Integration in Tropical Environments of Portuguese, Descendants of Portuguese and Continuators of Portuguese* (Lisbon: Realização Grafica da Tipografia Silvas, 1961).
24 Lynn Hunt, *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1989), 7.
25 Mohammed Arkoun, "The Study of Islam in French Scholarship:" 43; Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative.* Volume 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), x.
26 Carool Kersten, *Cosmopolitans and Heretics*, 214 ff.
27 Carool Kersten, *Cosmopolitans and Heretics*, 202, 222.

Toward the end of the 1990s, the Moroccan philosopher Mohammed Abed al-Jabri became increasingly noticeable as a "person of interest" in critical Muslim thinking: in both a positive and negative sense. Very critical assessments of his work were written by fellow Moroccan Abdurrahman Taha (b. 1944) and the Syrian writer and translator Georges Tarabishi (Jūrj Ṭarābīshī [1939–2016]).[28] More positive responses to al-Jabri's ideas issued from Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia. Instrumental for introducing al-Jabri to Indonesian audiences were prominent scholars and religious leaders, such as Said Aqil Siradj (b. 1953), executive chairman of the largest mass organization of traditional Muslims, the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), and the philosopher and former rector of the State Islamic University of Yogyakarta, M. Amin Abdullah (b. 1953), who also served on the central board of the modernist-Islamic Muhammadiyah organization.[29] At the turn of the century, al-Jabri's ideas began to gain wider circulation when a selection of his essays was translated and published for the first time in Indonesian under the title *Islamic Post-Traditionalism*.[30] A year later, in 2001, this name was also used to designate an alternative Indonesian Islamic discourse formulated and introduced by a number of young NU cadres in a special issue of what would become their flagship periodical: *Tashwirul Afkar*.[31]

Trained at universities in his native Morocco and in Syria, but lacking any exposure to postgraduate or postdoctoral experiences outside the Arab world, the intellectual trajectory of Mohammed Abed al-Jabri's thought seems to betray the eclecticism that his fellow Moroccan Abdallah Laroui had identified as a hallmark of contemporary Arab intellectualism. His early interest in Marxism and Ibn Khaldūn's sociological approach to world history colored al-Jabri's elaborations of *turāth:* his Indonesian translator and editor Ahmad Baso relates how al-Jabri's discovery of Yves Lacoste's comparative study of Ibn Khaldūn and Marx made him

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28 ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ṭaha, *Tajdīd al-Manhaj fī Taqwīm al-Turāth* (Casablanca: Al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī, 2007); Georges Tarabishi (Jūrj Ṭarābīshī), *Naqd Naqd al-ʿAql al-ʿArabī* (Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 2002).

29 Carool Kersten, "Al-Jabri in Indonesia:" 151–152, 159–164.

30 Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, *Post Tradisionalisme Islam*, trans. & ed. Ahmad Baso (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2000).

31 *Post Tradisionalisme Islam: Ideologi & Metodologi. Tashwirul Afkar: Jurnal Refleksi Pemikiran Keagamaan & Kebudayaan* (Jakarta: Lakpesdam NU, 2001). For more extensive discussions of this relatively new strand of Muslim thinking in Indonesia cf. Carool Kersten, "Islamic Post-Traditionalism in Indonesia: Revisiting Tradition and the Future of Islam," in *Alternative Islamic Discourses and Religious Authority*, ed. Carool Kersten and Susanne Olsson (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2013): 137–158; Carool Kersten, "Islamic Post-Traditionalism: Postcolonial and Postmodern Religious Discourse in Indonesia," *Sophia: International Journal of Philosophy and Traditions* 54, no 4 (2015): 473–489, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-014-0434-0.

realize that the Muslim world has its own version of a socially determinist and historical-materialist analysis predating the work of Marx by several centuries.[32] Al-Jabri also used his newly developed awareness of the Muslim world's former intellectual prowess to challenge the Orientalist tradition in the study of Islam, even criticizing sympathetic scholars such as Louis Massignon and Henry Corbin for their "egocentric" interests in controversial Sufis such as al-Hallaj and Suhrawardi. This foreshadowed a realization that al-Jabri shared with Arkoun that many classical Orientalists accepted and adopted the same uncritical glorification of the Islamic past propagated by Muslim writers of the classical era, while others fell into the same reductionist trap as nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Muslim reformists and revivalists by dismissing the classical Islamic tradition as stultified or decadent. Baso goes on to explain how al-Jabri insisted that the Islamic heritage must be understood as a broad concept, in which religion is seen "not just as truth, facts, words, concepts, language and thought, but also myth, legends, ways of behavior, and methods of thinking" —words reminiscent of Arkoun's critique of Islamic reason.[33] Al-Jabri found the methodological cues for this alternative reading of *turāth* also in the work of linguists, anthropologists, psychologists, and philosophers such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Jean Piaget, as well as their poststructuralist successors Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault. From them he learned that reason can no longer be conceived in Cartesian terms as a coherent, conscious and transcendent process. Instead, the achievements of structural linguistics and psychoanalysis teach that reason is more accurately described as a collective understanding shaped by culture and by what Piaget called the cognitive unconscious.

Al-Jabri applied this heuristic apparatus in his *magnum opus*, which he began publishing in the mid-1980s, and introduced under the umbrella title *Naqd al-ʿAql al-ʿArabī*, or "The Critique of Arab Reason". Dissecting the intellectual history of the Arab world through critical-historical and structural analyses combined with an ideological critique of its dominant political discourse, it was initially presented in three volumes.[34] A fourth volume on ethics was added many years later.[35] As an

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32 Ahmad Baso, "Posmodernisme sebagai Kritik Islam: Kontribusi Metodologis 'Kritik Nalar' Muhammad Abed al-Jabiri," in *Post Tradisionalisme Islam*, Mohammed Abed al-Jabri: xix–xx. This is elaborated in al-Jabri's own study of Ibn Khaldūn: Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, *Fikr Ibn Khaldūn: Al-ʾAṣabiyya waʾl-Dawla. Maʿālim Naẓariyya Khaldūniyya fīʾl-Taʾrīkh al-Islāmī* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Wahda al-ʿArabiyya, 1992).

33 Ahmad Baso, "Posmodernisme sebagai Kritik Islam:" xxiii.

34 Consisting of *Takwīn al-ʿAql al-ʿArabī* (Beirut: Dar al-Taliʾa, 1984); *Bunya al-ʿAql al-ʿArabī* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Wahda al-ʿArabiyya, 1986); *Al-ʿAql al-Siyāsi al-ʿArabī* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Wahda al-ʿArabiyya, 1990).

overarching critical reading of the Arab-Islamic intellectual heritage, "The Critique of Arab Reason" aims to present a comprehensive deconstruction of Islamic thinking as the product of a historicized civilization that needs to be set free from *a priori* assumptions and the authoritative dominance of a supposedly fixed tradition, which shackles the autonomy of Muslims as freethinking human beings.

The first volume, *The Formation of Arab Reason*, offers a historical analysis of the start of the "era of recording" ('*asr tadwīn*) in the eighth century, during which the data for constructing both pre-Islamic and early Islamic history were collected. This rich storehouse of orally transmitted knowledge was put into writing and then gradually structured into the discrete disciplines of Islamic learning such as *tafsīr* (Qur'an exegesis), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), and *kalām* (discursive theology). When analyzing this period of data collection and codification, al-Jabri stresses that it is as important to pay attention to what is not said as to what is said if one wants to understand how knowledge receives its epistemological and ideological validity and authority. In the second volume, entitled *The Structure of Arab Reason*, al-Jabri distinguishes three epistèmes, or regimes of knowledge: *bayānī* (discursive); *'irfānī* (intuitive or illuminationist), and *burhānī* (demonstrative) reason. He argues that from the *tadwīn* period onwards, discursive reason has held center stage in Arab-Islamic thinking. Texts become authoritative through epistemological protocols and practices that rely predominantly on emulation and reasoning by analogy (*qiyāṣ*) —an epistemological method developed to its greatest level of sophistication in the field of legal studies. Almost a decade after the release of his initial "Critique of Arab Reason" trilogy, al-Jabri published a summary in French, which was later translated into English.[36]

In contrast to Mohammed Arkoun's "Critique of Islamic Reason," al-Jabri confined his project to the Arabic-speaking part of the Muslim world, showing himself —as will be seen below— to be very dismissive of the contributions of the "Muslim East" (*Mashriq*). Aside from these geographical limitations and epistemological exclusions, another contrast with the text-critical approach that dominates in Arkoun's work, al-Jabri's project can be characterized as a historical-philosophical approach of the academic philosopher, focused on quarrying the Islamic past for regimes of knowledge so as expose the power relations that govern the production of knowledge. If one wants to make a comparison with contemporary postmodern Western thinkers, then Arkoun's interest in the archive of the "Unthought" of the

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35 Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, *Al-'Aql al-Akhlāqī al-'Arabī* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Wahda al-'Arabiyya, 2001).

36 Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy: A Contemporary Critique.* Translated from the French by Aziz Abbassi (Austin: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, The University of Texas at Austin, 1999).

Islamic heritage has an affinity with Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of texts, whereas al-Jabri is an archaeologist of the Foucauldian mode, excavating layers of discursive formations.

When articulating the relation between the Islamic tradition and modernity, al-Jabri rejects the view that this implies a break with the past. Indicative of al-Jabri's awareness of the relativity and historicity of each and every tradition is his insistence that modernity must be developed organically from within Arab-Muslim culture instead of just being copied from European modernist methods. In this respect, al-Jabri's Indonesian translator appears to disagree with Laroui's characterization of heritage thinkers as eclectic thinkers, because he described al-Jabri's return to the tradition as not a matter of picking and choosing, but a holistic appropriation for the purpose of analyzing Arab-Islamic thought in its theological, linguistic, juridical, as well as philosophical and mystical aspects.[37]

Analyzing defects in the ways in which Muslims have studied their history, al-Jabri distinguished three different readings of tradition: The fundamentalist reading employed by Islamists presents the past as a means of reconstituting an imaginary that confirms a supposedly pure Islamic identity and projects "a 'radiant' future fabricated by ideology-upon the past".[38] Then there is a liberal reading of the tradition. This interpretation is clearly derived from European thinking and endeavors to read one tradition through the lens of another. However, with a nod to Pierre Bourdieu, al-Jabri cautions that adopting such an "orientalist *habitus*" harbors the risk of a "dangerous identity alienation".[39] The third -Marxist- reading is qualified as a ready-made dialectical method that must be considered scientifically unsound because it posits a foregone conclusion before even engaging in analysis. Al-Jabri points out that all three readings suffer from two major weaknesses. The first one is methodological, namely the lack of objectivity and analytical rigor resulting from a flawed epistemology. The other is visionary, evincing a lack of historical awareness and a skewed perspective in which the past is projected as transcendental and sacral, thus rendering it a-historical.

The only escape from this cul-de-sac is what al-Jabri —with a nod to Gaston Bachelard and Louis Althusser— calls an epistemological break; emphasizing that this does not constitute a break from tradition itself at the level of knowledge, but is better understood as a mental act. The systematics of al-Jabri's philosophy continues to draw on post-structuralist thinking, suggesting a disjunctive-rejunctive reading. By this he means the disruption of the subject-object relation in order to

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37 Ahmad Baso, "Posmodernisme sebagai Kritik Islam:" xx.
38 Mohammed Abed Al-Jabri, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy*, 9.
39 Mohammed Abed Al-Jabri, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy*, 12–13.

get rid of a biased understanding of tradition based on that tradition itself. So far modern students of Islamic philosophy have failed to make such a distinction between the cognitive and ideological perspectives of this reading, rendering Islamic thinking an "immobile void of progress and of dynamics".[40] In order to liberate Arab-Islamic thinking from its atrophied stasis and restore its dynamism, al-Jabri pins his hopes on demonstrative reason. In effect this means a rejection of much of the intellectual legacy of the eastern parts of the Muslim world: dismissing figures such as al-Farabi and Ibn Sina on account of *'irfān* amounting to nothing more than obscurantism. The discursive theology of al-Ghazali is also condemned on the grounds of the latter's instrumentalization of Aristotelian logic. Instead, al-Jabri proposes a reintegrated epistemology resting on a systemic understanding of the Hellenic heritage.

In an essay entitled "The Andalusian Resurgence," al-Jabri lays out his revisionist view of Islamic philosophy as an intellectually militant discourse.[41] Against the background of the cultural, intellectual, and religious plurality of medieval Iberia, he argues that the thinkers of the Muslim West were uniquely positioned and well-equipped to tackle complicated philosophical questions. Far removed from the ideological and political controversies raging in the central and eastern parts of the Islamic world, the philosophers of Al-Andalus and the Maghreb were in a much more comfortable position to internalize foundational scientific disciplines, such as mathematics, physics, and logic, before engaging with metaphysics.

The critiques of Ibn Hazm and al-Shāṭibī, but especially the rationalism developed by Ibn Rushd (Averroes), form the key ingredients for al-Jabri's panacea against the *bayānī* obsession with textual authority and the speculative irrationalism of the *'irfānī* tradition. Al-Jabri claims that Arab-Islamic philosophy reaches the height of its sophistication when it is suffused with the *rūḥ rushdiyya*, or "spirit of Averroism" (his paraphrase for Ibn Rushd's use of Aristotelianism) —embracing the methods of both inductive and deductive reasoning, and the way in which he interpreted the concepts of universal validity and historicity. This leads al-Jabri to the provocative conclusion that in order to revive Arab-Islamic reason, "the future can only be Averroist".[42]

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40 Mohammed Abed Al-Jabri, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy*, 42.
41 Mohammed Abed Al-Jabri, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy*, 63–119.
42 Mohammed Abed Al-Jabri, *Arab-Islamic Philosophy*, 120.

A Hermeneutical Reconstruction of Islamic Thought

Whereas al-Jabri received his entire academic training in the Arab world, like Mohammed Arkoun, Hassan Hanafi pursued his postgraduate studies in Paris. In fact, Hanafi was one of the last Egyptian students to leave Egypt for France, just before the outbreak of the Suez Crisis in 1956. After a flirt with the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan Hanafi's initial enthusiasm for thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb was tempered by the trauma caused by the Brotherhood's persecution under Nasser. While retaining the Qutbian perspective of seeing Islam as a comprehensive method or *minhaj*, the impact of events in the 1950s and 1960s cured Hanafi from following the trajectory of radical Islamism. Instead he abandoned Qutb's Islamist ideology for the ideas of Muhammad Iqbal, the spiritual father of Pakistan. Hassan Hanafi considered Iqbal's writings as the third phase of Islamic reformism after the awakening of the Muslim spirit by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh's institutional reforms. Rather than drawing on *Milestones*, he turned to Iqbal's *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* with its focus on subjectivity and creativity, using this as the template for an anthropocentric reconstruction or liberation of man as "the central proposition which regulates the structure of Islam".[43]

Enrolling at the Sorbonne for doctoral studies in philosophy, it was his ambition to develop an "Islamic method of philosophical investigation".[44] For this he turned to the traditional field of Islamic learning that dealt with jurisprudence or *fiqh.* The reason for this choice was that, for an orthopraxy like Islam, rules and regulations of are key importance, so that, traditionally, the study of law has held center stage in Muslim intellectual activity. The particular domain with the most sophisticated methodological apparatus and greatest potential for providing the necessary academic rigor was a subfield of the Islamic legal studies known as *uṣūl al-fiqh* or the "foundations of Islamic jurisprudence". For the first volume of the three dissertations required for a French *doctorat d'État*, Hanafi developed what he called a *minhāj fiqhī* or "juristic method" for transforming a jargon into a general philosophical idiom. This was later published under the title *The Methods of Exegesis.*[45] Under the direction of his doctoral advisers Robert Brunschvig and Paul Ricœur, Hanafi subjected this particular scholarly specialism, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, to

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43 Carool Kersten, *Cosmopolitans and Heretics*, 127.
44 Carool Kersten, *Cosmopolitans and Heretics*, 111.
45 Hassan Hanafi, *Les Méthodes d'exégèse: Essai sur la science des fondements de la compréhension "'Ilm Usul al-Fiqh"* (Cairo: Conseil supérieur des Arts, des Lettres et des Sciences sociales, 1965).

a critical examination along the lines of Husserl's philosophical phenomenology in order to transform a specialist field within legal studies into a philosophical method that could be universally applied to any domain of Islamic thinking by transposing or transmuting its juridical jargon into a generic philosophical idiom.[46]

Aside from being introduced to phenomenology and existentialism by Paul Ricœur, Hanafi also studied Christian theology with the Catholic modernist Jean Guitton, who introduced him to the writings of Ludwig Feuerbach, among others. Both *The Essence of Christianity* and Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* inspired Hanafi to make his own "anthropological turn".[47] During his Parisian years, Hanafi also explored the newly emerging field of Liberation Theology, developing a particular interest in the work of the Colombian priest-activist Camillo Torres.[48]

Together with the traumatic effects of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the exposure to this type of religious thought turned Hanafi increasingly political, including a brief infatuation with the transformative potential of the Iranian revolution of 1979. Translating some of the writings of Torres and Ayatollah Khomeini into Arabic, in 1981 he also launched a manifesto for an 'Islamic Left' (*al-Yasār al-Islamī*).[49] Although this initiative did not really take off, the ideas behind it drew the attention of the Indonesian Muslim leader (and future president) Abdurrahman Wahid (1940–2009), who introduced Hassan Hanafi's thought to his followers among the country's young Muslim intelligentsia after he became the head of the largest traditionalist Islamic mass organization *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU).[50] By then, Hanafi had returned to his philosophical studies, embarking on a very ambitious undertaking that would occupy him for the remainder of his scholarly life. Expanding the scope of his research to other fields of Islamic learning, he named this comprehensive

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46 Carool Kersten, "Bold Transmutations: Rereading Hassan Hanafi's Early Writings on *Fiqh*," *Journal of Comparative Islamic Studies* 3:1 (2007): 22–38. Http://doi: 10.1558/cis.v3i1.22.

47 Carool Kersten, *Cosmopolitans and Heretics*, 115, 145, 165–166; Hassan Hanafi, "Théologie ou anthropologie?" in *Renaissance du monde arabe*, ed. A. Abdel-Malek, A.A. Belal, and H. Hanafi (Algiers: J. Duculot, 1972) : 233–264 ; Hassan Hanafi, "Al-Ightirāb al-Dīnī 'inda Feuerbach," *'Alam al-Fikr* 1 (1979): 41–68.

48 Carool Kersten, *Cosmopolitans and Heretics*, 114–115, 162.

49 Hassan Hanafi, *Al-Yasār al-Islāmī: Kitābāt fi'l-Nahda al-Islamīyya* (Cairo: Self-published, 1981). For an assessment in English, cf. Kazuo Shimogaki, *Between Modernity and Post-Modernity: The Islamic Left and Dr. Hassan Hanafi's Thought: A Critical Reading* (Tokyo: The Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, International University of Japan, 1988).

50 Cf. the foreword to an Indonesian translation of Shimogaki's book: Abdurrahman Wahid, "Hassan Hanafi dan Expermentasinya," in *Kiri Islam AntaraModernisme Posmodernisme*, ed. Kazuo Shimogaki (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1993): ix–xi.

project after the programmatic blueprint introduced in 1980 under the title *al-Turāth wa'l-Tajdīd* – "Heritage and Renewal".[51]

The project's first volume, subtitled *Our Attitude towards the Old Heritage*, lays out the master plan for applying Husserl's phenomenology to the examination of the historical, eidetic, and active levels of Muslim consciousness, with which Hanafi had first experimented in *The Methods of Exegesis*.[52] However, the definitive scope of the project was not published until 1991, with the release of *An Introduction to the Discipline of Occidentalism: Our Attitude toward the Western Heritage*.[53] Motivated by a dissatisfaction with a tendency among modern Muslims to blindly imitate the West in the same manner as they used to adhere to their own heritage, Hanafi argued for an alternative attitude of critical distance and defiance similar to that of critics operating from within the Western civilization, such as Spinoza, Voltaire, or Feuerbach. Hanafi also pointed to the challenges of rationalist analyses that lose sight of the human dimension by Maurice Blondel, Henri Bergson, and Gabriel Marcel's attack on positivism and empiricism in the name of self. At the same time, he upheld the reservations against certain specific features of Western thought, such as the dualism between spirit and matter or "schools of personalism" represented by thinkers as different as Kierkegaard, Bergson, Unamuno, Marcel, Jaspers, and Sartre, with which he had already engaged during his studies at the Sorbonne.[54]

An Introduction to the Discipline of Occidentalism also contains the fullest presentation of the project's three-front campaign: widening the investigations of Muslim attitudes towards (1) the Islamic and (2) Western heritages with (3) an examination of the current situation in the Muslim world in which Hanafi envisioned synthesizing the antitheses of the other two critiques into an emancipatory theory of interpretation.[55]

The trajectory of Hassan Hanafi's intellectual journey illustrates that Islamism and Post-Islamism need not be thought of as necessarily sequential. Even though he eventually traded Sayyid Qutb's writings for the philosophical ideas of Muhammad Iqbal, Hanafi retained part of the vocabulary of the Muslim Brotherhood ideologue. The search for a method of Islamic thinking with general applicability and validity still carries echoes of Sayyid Qutb's view of Islam as a *minhāj*; an all-en-

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51 Hassan Hanafi, *Al-Turāth wa'l-Tajdīd: Mawqifunā min al-Turāth al-Qadīm* (Cairo: Al-Markaz al-Arabi li'l-Bahth wa'l-Nashr, 1980).
52 Hassan Hanafi, *Al-Turāth wa'l-Tajdīd*, 203 ff.
53 Hassan Hanafi, *Muqaddima fī 'Ilm al-Istighrāb* (Cairo: Al-Dar al-Fanniyya li'l-Nashr wa'l-Tawzi', 1991).
54 Hassan Hanafi *Qaḍāyā Mu'āsira 1: Fī Fikrinā al-Mu'āsir* (Beirut: Dar al-Tanwir, 1981), 64–75.
55 Hassan Hanafi, *Muqaddima fī 'Ilm al-Istighrāb*, 9–15.

compassing universal concept, method, and system.[56] Although Hanafi interprets religious traditions from an anthropocentric perspective instead of Sayyid Qutb's theocentric orientation grounded in the notion of divine sovereignty (*ḥākimiyya*), the latter's *fiqh al-wāqiʿī* or "new realist science" continues to resonate in Hanafi's "*fiqhī* method" as the best way of analyzing Muslim attitudes towards their present-day reality.[57] Hanafi's example shows the porosity of discursive formations: theories travel and ideas circulate not just among like-minded individuals, or from one part of the Muslim world to another, but also between Islamist thinking and its counter-currents, which give rise to alternative discourses attaching greater weight to a critical reflection on Islam's heritage.

Toward a Hermeneutics of Alterity

Hassan Hanafi's interest in combining philosophical hermeneutics and liberation theology is sustained in the writings of Hamid Dabashi, an Iranian academic and cultural critic based at Columbia University where he is Hagop *Kervorkian* Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature. Moreover, Dabashi's advocacy of a disposition of worldly cosmopolitanism (or cosmopolitan worldliness) also echoes the anthropological turn made by Hassan Hanafi. However, trained as a sociologist of knowledge and historian of Islam under Philip Rieff and George Makdisi respectively, in terms of scholarly background Hamid Dabashi is closer to Mohammed Arkoun than to academic philosophers such as Hassan Hanafi, or even Mohammed Abed al-Jabri. In addition, in his hermeneutical pursuits, the way Dabashi pushes boundaries bears more affinity with Arkoun's "Emergent Reason" than Hanafi's "Occidentalism", although he resembles the latter again in his political engagement. As Dabashi's thought has received —so far— relatively little attention in the literature of contemporary Muslim thought (at least in comparison to the heritage thinkers), the remainder of this chapter will map the relevant parts of Dabashi's steadily growing œuvre and offer a *précis* of some selected illustrative texts.[58]

Via detours and excursions through film studies and increasingly critical engagements with Shi'a thinking and Islamist ideology, Dabashi has eventually

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56 Cf. Ahmad S. Mousalli, *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Ideological and Political Discourse of Sayyid Qutb* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1992), 69–70.

57 Ronald A.T. Judy, "Sayyid Qutb's *Fiqh al-Wāqiʿī*, or New Realist Science", *Boundary* 3:2 (2004): 113–148.

58 Cf. Andrew Davidson, *The World is my Home: A Hamid Dabashi Reader* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2010); Carool Kersten, "Islam *vs* the West?:" 82–88.

ended up formulating an open-ended hermeneutics, informed by students of Heidegger such as Hannah Arendt and Hans-Georg Gadamer, and French and Italian post-structuralists such as Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Gianni Vattimo. Instead of the "metaphysics of identity" that informed the Islamist agendas of figures such as Sayyid Qutb and Ali Shariati, and that continue to plague the thinking of Hassan Hanafi, Dabashi wants to move away from the Islam versus the West dichotomies that characterize their binary ways of thinking. He ends up developing what he calls a "Hermeneutics of Alterity", which recognizes and acknowledges the radical difference of the other, but with the purpose of breaking down false binaries, such as the one opposing Islam to the West.[59] To that end, he borrows Gianni Vattimo's notion of *penseiro debole* or "weak thought" to devise his own "weakening strategy" for subverting dichotomous ways of thinking that inhibit productive dialogical exchanges.

The theoretical framing of Dabashi's hermeneutics is laid out in three books: *Islamic Liberation Theology* (2008); *Post-Orientalism* (2009); and *Being a Muslim in the World* (2012).[60] The first one provides the central blueprint for what is both a critique and an emancipatory mission, but it interlocks with the "liberation geography" laid out in *Post-Orientalism.* "Islam vs the West" is not the only binary that disappears in the decentered world of the present-day, which is not only postmodern and postcolonial, but also post-Islamist, post-Orientalist, and post-Western.[61] Hamid Dabashi advocates a disposition that he alternately calls "worldly cosmopolitanism" or "cosmopolitan worldliness", and which underpins a new Islamic ethos he outlines in *Being a Muslim in the World.*

Orbiting these theory-laden and agenda-setting books are more politically engaged publications, including *Iran: A People Interrupted* (2007); *Iran, the Green Movement and the USA* (2010); *Brown Skin White Masks* (2011); *The Arab Spring* (2012), and *Can Non-Europeans Think?* (2015).[62] These consist in more topical analyses of developments in the twentieth-century Middle East and polemical critiques

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59 Carool Kersten, "Islam *vs* the West?:" 86.

60 Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology: Resisting the Empire* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008); Hamid Dabashi, *Post-Orientalism: Knowledge and Power in a Time of Terror* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009); Hamid Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World: Rethinking Islam for a Post-Western History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

61 Carool Kersten, "Post-Everything" *Critical Muslim 2*0 (2016): 122–131.

62 Hamid Dabashi, *Iran: A People Interrupted* (London and New York: The New Press, 2007); Hamid Dabashi, *Iran, the Green Movement and the USA: The Fox and the Paradox* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2010); Hamid Dabashi, *Brown Skin, White Masks (The Islamic Mediterranean)* (London: Pluto Press, 2011); Hamid Dabashi, *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2012); Hamid Dabashi, *Can Non-Europeans Think?* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2015).

of those whom Dabashi regards as compromised intellectuals from the Muslim world, who —instead of speaking truth to power— have turned native informers (not informants!) of Western neo-imperialism and its proxies in the Muslim world. In his latest two books, he goes back to the past, to the classical Persian poets; showcasing their writings as a form of literary humanism exhibiting the "worldly cosmopolitanism", which Dabashi advocates as the disposition for a Muslim ethos of the future.

In *Islamic Liberation Theology*, the belligerent tone of liberation theologies inspired by the likes of Sayyid Qutb and Ali Shariati is traded for what Dabashi now suggests calling an "Islamic theodicy".[63] He does not use the term theodicy in the conventional sense of the word, to explain the presence of evil in the world. Instead, Dabashi recoins it as radical difference, or alterity; allowing for shades and shadows of truths, rather than the certainties associated with absolute truth claims. These claims are grounded in a metaphysics of identity that can only be thought of in terms of binary oppositions, leading to the kind of othering that underlies the dichotomous worldviews that he envisages dispelling with his project. This critical dismissal of all binary thinking extends to the nomo-centrism of both classical Islamic *fiqh* and contemporary Islamist ideologies and the logo-centrism of Western thought and the hubris of its metaphysical philosophies, but also to the isolationist anthropocentrism characterizing the inward retreats of some forms of Sufism.

For now, *Being a Muslim in the World* forms the terminus of an intellectual journey that began with a study of the totalizing Islamic worldviews in opposition to the West, as propounded by Jalal Al-e Ahmad, Ali Shariati, and ideologues of the Islamic revolution in Iran (as the Shi'a counterparts of Sunni Islamist ideologue Sayyid Qutb, who had stimulated Hanafi's earlier thought).[64] In *Being a Muslim in the World*, Dabashi conceives a new ethos, informed by a disposition he calls alternately worldly cosmopolitanism or cosmopolitan worldliness.

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63 Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 196.
64 Hamid Dabashi, *Shi'ism: Doctrines, Thought, and Spirituality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers 2006); Hamid Dabashi, *Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest* (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap, 2011).

"Weak Strategies" against Binary Thinking

Being a Muslim in the World also contains a chapter with the telling title "Breaking the Binary".[65] Here Dabashi presents a Hermeneutics of Alterity as his version selected from a "number of weak strategies," for subverting an ontological remnant of the modern colonial world:[66] the metaphysics of identity. The latter still features prominently in (Western) sociological literature, characterized by essentializing categories but also shaping the Islamist ideologies, which Dabashi had already dissected in his studies of Shi'i political Islam. The term "weak strategies" is evidently a nod to the notion of "weak thought" used by the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo.[67] Although this is Dabashi's only direct and explicit reference to Vattimo, I argue that there are resemblances between their respective ways of engaging with religion.

Both a poststructuralist philosopher and practicing Catholic, Vattimo is very interested in religion. This is also reflected in the titles of some of his more recent publications, which include brief monographs entitled *Belief* and *After Christianity*, and essay collections on religion co-edited with John Caputo, Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty, and René Girard.[68]

Vattimo's own direct engagement with religion is confined to Christianity and seems very Euro-centric; on occasion even echoing fellow Italian Benedetto Croce's observation as to why, as Europeans, "we are unable not to call ourselves Christians".[69] At face value, this may make him a very unlikely interlocutor for someone like Hamid Dabashi. However, what helps here is Vattimo's interpretation of a concept that goes back to St Paul: *kenosis:* the emptying —the weakening— of God into the world. To Vattimo it refers not just to the incarnation of God in Christ: the revelations of scriptures are also instances of *kenosis*, and they have not ended. According to Vattimo: "revelation continues [...] by way of an increasingly 'truer' in-

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65 Hamid Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 19–41.

66 Hamid Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 25.

67 Gianni Vattimo and Pier Aldo Rovatti, *Weak Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012).

68 Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*, trans. Luca D'Isanto and David Webb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); John D. Caputo and Gianni Vattimo, *After the Death of God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo, *Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Gianni Vattimo and René Girard, *Christianity, Truth, and Weakening Faith: A Dialogue*, ed. Pierpaolo Antonello (New York: Columbia University Pres, 2010); Gianni Vattimo and Richard Rorty, *The Future of Religion*, ed. Santiago Zabala (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

69 Thomas G. Guarino, *Vattimo and Theology* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 102.

terpretation of Scripture".[70] To come to terms with all these philosophical quandaries, Vattimo resorts to the term *penseiro debole* or "weak thought". It is an instance of intellectual modesty that parallels the epistemological humility of antifoundational philosophical thinking in general. But "weak thought" not only deals with epistemological concerns; it also has ethical and ontological pretensions. I suggest that Vattimo's rereading of *kenosis* has a parallel in Dabashi's aforementioned equally idiosyncratic interpretation of theodicy in *Islamic Liberation Theology*.

Setting aside his often polemical tone, an attentive reading of Dabashi's work evinces a consistent agenda for critiquing philosophical archaisms and promoting rationality tempered into reasonableness that is not so dissimilar from Vattimo's philosophical concerns.

For example, take Vattimo's declaration of the "end of modernity" in the book bearing the same name.[71] In spite of a lack of explicit acknowledgement, the vocabulary employed by Dabashi in analyzing the obsolete Islam-West dichotomy resonates strongly with the Nietzschean-Heideggerian idiom of Vattimo.[72] Like Vattimo, Dabashi too is very critical of what he refers to as the "autonormativity" of modern Western thinking —proclaiming itself as the benchmark of intellectual rigor.[73] Both Vattimo and Dabashi criticize Jürgen Habermas for this. While Vattimo agrees with Richard Rorty's challenge of Habermas's misplaced confidence in Kantian and neo-Kantian metaphysics as the foundation for his insistence that modernity remains an unfinished project, Dabashi thrashes the Frankfurt School philosopher for ignoring Kant's blatant racism that lies at the root of Habermas's own favoring of European Enlightenment modernity.[74]

Dabashi's critique not only targets Western modernity, it is also directed at Islamic theology and philosophy. His earlier examination of Shi'i Islamism had already led Dabashi to an interesting conclusion. The success of the Iranian revolution also heralded the failure of political Islam; the tragic consequence of what he calls the paradox of Shi'ism as a "Religion of Protest": morally strong when politically weak, and the other way around.[75] During the two centuries of resisting European colonization and the concomitant spread of Enlightenment modernity, mu-

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70 Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*, 48–49.

71 Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*, trans. with an introduction by Jon R. Snyder (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988).

72 Hamid Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 33.

73 The term "autonormativity" occurs repeatedly in Dabashi's writings, including *Brown Skins, White Masks* and *The Arab Spring*.

74 Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 145–146, 147; Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 101–108.

75 Carool Kersten, "Islam *vs* the West?:" 83.

tating Islam into a counter ideology made sense, but it collapsed under its own success after the Iranian revolution. Just as he continues to engage with European thinkers in *Islamic Liberation Theology* and *Being a Muslim in the World*, his historical work on Shi'ism shows he does not disavow Islam. On the contrary; it is time to reconstitute the worldly cosmopolitanism of the various Muslim cultures as the underpinning of a new revolutionary ideology. Dabashi rejects the kind of civilizational thinking that underlies the Fukuyama-Huntington "end of history" and "clash of civilizations" paradigms, but also Islamic ideologies formulated in response, because they are nothing but a mirror image of the same binary thinking.

This latter criticism is not just directed at the violent extremism and repression in the name of Islam crafted out of the ideas of Sayyid Qutb or Ali Shariati, it also extends to Iranian religious intellectuals, such as Abdolkarim Soroush, as well as heritage thinkers such as Hassan Hanafi, and others, including Tariq Ramadan, who are involved in what Dabashi considers a futile pursuit of authenticity. Already in a chapter of *Islamic Liberation Theology*, aptly entitled "Blindness and Insight," he considers this a rear guard battle similar to Habermas's dogged pursuit of his unfinished modernity project.[76] In order to oppose the metanarratives of both Enlightenment modernity and Islamism, "Muslims will have to learn the logic of their own inauthenticity, syncretism, pluralisms and alterities".[77] He takes the same lesson from Gadamer as Vattimo: conceptually and terminologically, humans are imprisoned in the *koinè* —and vernaculars— of their respective cultures and they must mine its legacy for the intellectual deposits needed to forge this counter discourse. In "Breaking the Binary," Dabashi explains that the dichotomy between the West and Islam is the result of an erroneous metaphysics of identity in which both elements are understood as essentialized and incommensurable opposites. Dabashi's contrasting alternative, a hermeneutics of alterity, is characterized as not oppositional (there is no East and West) but appositional; being both contrapuntal and exercising a centrifugal pull; being anthropocentric in focus and exhibiting cultural heteroglossia (*pace* Foucault); drawing on scattered memories.[78]

A further parallel between Vattimo's philosophy of difference and Dabashi's understanding of alterity can be found in their shared criticism of Richard Rorty. As mentioned above, they sided with Rorty in challenging Habermas's unfinished modernity project, but both Vattimo and Dabashi also think that Rorty's own thinking is still very Euro-centric.[79]

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76 Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 100.
77 Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 16
78 Hamid Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 34–39.
79 Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 106; Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 151–158.

Vattimo's criticism of Rorty in this regard points out two parallels with Dabashi's hermeneutics of alterity and his liberation geography for a decentered world. It revolves around Rorty's provocative conclusion that instead of philosophy all we need is cultural anthropology, in order to deal with the radical alterity of this new world that consists of nothing but differences.[80] Very perceptively, Vattimo counters that Rorty's proposition is based on an understanding of cultural anthropology that is completely Euro-centric, because it assumes "the other" as being elsewhere. However, as a result of the relentless Europeanization and Westernization of the world, which also continues in our postcolonial times, non-Western cultures have been turned into construction sites of "hybrid traces and residues contaminated by modernity". Vattimo's construction sites of "third world societies and the ghettos of industrial societies" are none other than Dabashi's postcolonial, post-Orientalist and post-Western world where metropole and colony, center and periphery intermingle.[81] The ways in which philosophical hermeneutics and cultural anthropology as technical disciplines are wont to deal with this kind of otherness no longer work. And it is here that Vattimo's "weak thought" becomes useful for transforming Islamic liberation theology into a liberation theodicy, which Dabashi seeks to articulate with his hermeneutics of alterity.

To my mind, this also points out the delicacy of alterity and its vulnerability to violence. Dabashi makes that connection too, relating it to the "state of exception", about which Walter Benjamin, Karl Schmitt, and —more recently— Giorgio Agamben have written.[82] Dabashi contrasts Schmitt's appropriation and misinterpretation of Walter Benjamin's notion of "pure violence" with Agamben's cautioning against giving this "state of exception" a status of normalcy, because it reduces human life to the level of *zoë*, the bare life of *homo sacer*, elaborated in Agamben's eponymous books.[83] Dabashi also signals a breakdown in communications between Foucault's idea of biopolitics and Hannah Arendt's *Human Condition*, brought about by the latter's failure to see the relation between what Dabashi calls Arendt's own version of biopolitics and her writings on totalitarianism and revolution.[84]

Dabashi proposes overcoming these pathological mutations of violence with a new consciousness growing out of a parallel transformation of the liberation the-

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80 Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 381; Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 145–163.
81 Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, 158.
82 Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 258–262.
83 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998); Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
84 Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 258–259.

ologies from the colonial and postcolonial age into a liberation theodicy and a hermeneutics of alterity.[85] Paralleling the diametrically opposed ways in which Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt understood the notion of "pure violence," Dabashi's interpretation of the theodicy does not, just to reiterate it once more, account for evil in the world, but for diversity and alterity.[86] It is therefore "other-based, not self-based" —taking its hermeneutical cues from Emmanuel Levinas rather than the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl.[87] As an alternative to the inherent violence of the totalitarian ideologies undergirding the French Revolution, Bolshevism and Islamism, Hamid Dabashi proposes a decentered, post-colonial, post-Orientalist and post-Western world, with Arendt and Gadamer, as well as Agamben, Deleuze and Vattimo, looming over this new geography of liberation that will restore a worldly cosmopolitanism in which Muslims will also partake.[88]

Dabashi, who shares Gadamer and Vattimo's interest in aesthetics, sees these worldly dispositions and imaginations exhibited in the literary humanism articulated by the great Persian poets of the classical era, and —as the inveterate cinephile— also in present-day Iranian cinema.[89] Dabashi considers them as oppositional discourses that are imaginatively attuned to the new geography of a decentered world facing a truly global form of "Empire." Although adopting the term, Dabashi criticizes Negri and Hardt's account for being "pathologically Eurocentric".[90] This echoes the similar reservations that Gianni Vattimo expressed toward Negri and Hardt. Rejecting their self-proclaimed spokesmanship for people without a voice, Vattimo added the even stronger charge that, actually, they do not wish to be understood by these very people: if Negri and Hardt want the so-called "multitude" to experience the increased mobility, indeterminacy and hybridity characterizing the global spread of the postmodern condition as a liberation rather than a form of suffering, "why did they need to say in a complicated way what you can say in an easier way?"[91]

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85 Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 214; Hamid Dabashi *Being a Muslim in the World*, 158–159.

86 Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 22.

87 Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 14.

88 Hamid Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 117.

89 Hamid Dabashi, *Being a Muslim in the World*, 42–82; Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 218; Hamid Dabashi, *Post-Orientalism*, 155–184. Cf. also Hamid Dabashi, *Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema* (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2007); Hamid Dabashi, *The World of Persian Literary Humanism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

90 Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 153.

91 Gianni Vattimo, "A Prayer for Silence," in *After the Death of God*, 108.

The same is true for what Dabashi refers to as the "phenomenon code-named globalization," which he reads primarily through women authors.[92] Dismissing Julia Kristeva and Susan Sontag as European provincials, Dabashi sides with Arundhati Roy and Judith Butler, but especially Zillah Eisenstein and Amy Kaplan's reliance on the African-American intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963).[93] Their writings open up the prospect of an "emancipatory remapping" of the world in which the binaries of center-periphery and colonizer-colonized collapse along with the "meta-narratives of [...] Islamism, nationalism, [and] liberalism."[94] Dabashi saw the new solidarities they propose already prefigured by Malcolm X. He too launched forward from early discourses of emancipation, including Islamic ideologies, Gustavo Guttierez's Catholic Liberation Theology, and Frantz Fanon's *Tiers-Mondisme.* In contrast to the kind of new transnational politics envisaged by Saskia Sassen, Dabashi foresees more localized instances of "insurrectionary resistance".[95] Dabashi's presentation of this new global confrontation also echoes with the Marxist undertones of such poststructuralists as Louis Althusser and Michel Pêcheux, as he pitches the disenfranchised masses in both the global south and the former metropolises against predatory capitalism. This capitalism is benefiting an aggregate of interests represented by corporate multinationals and their political allies in the US, Europe, and select regimes in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

In contrast to the transformation of liberation theology into a liberation theodicy, and the even more conciliatory tone of *Being a Muslim in the World* or his publications about classical Persian poetry, in his most recent book, Hamid Dabashi returns to the polemical tone that informs his politically engaged writings. As he notes himself, *Can Non-Europeans Think?* forms part of what Dabashi calls his "Intifada Trilogy", which also includes *Iran, the Green Movement and the USA*, and *The Arab Spring.* In this book, Dabashi returns to the implicit violence of Euro-centric ways of thinking, which dismiss or simply ignore contributions by philosophers or religious traditions of other provenances.

Can Non-Europeans Think? finds its origins in a polemic involving not only Hamid Dabashi and Slavoj Žižek, but also the leading theorist of postcoloniality, Walter Mignolo —who also signed on to write the book's foreword. It began with heated exchanges on the Al-Jazeera website in 2011, which lasted until 2016, and which provoked Dabashi to challenge once again the worldviews that

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92 Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 35, 157.

93 Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 150.

94 Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 168.

95 Hamid Dabashi, *Islamic Liberation Theology*, 158. Cf. Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and its Discontent: Essays on the New Mobility of People and Money* (New York: The New Press, 1998).

many European philosophers, including Žižek, continue to hold. They evince a blindness to what Dabashi calls other "imaginative geographies".[96] He uses these to illustrate not only the alternatives he envisages, but also to highlight how obsolete Euro-centrism has become in the twenty-first century: "We should no longer address a dead interlocutor. Europe is dead. Long live Europeans. The Islam they invented in their Orientalism is dead. Long live Muslims. The Orient they had created, the Third World they had crafted to rule and denigrate have disappeared".[97] It is not only a matter of recognizing and acknowledging the dignity of the other, it is also in the interest of retaining the relevance of contemporary Europe: "Europeans as Europeans [...] will be unable to read unless and until they join the rest of humanity in their common quest for a level remapping of the world. The relations of knowledge and power are multiple and varied".[98]

Blindness on the part of Europeans towards other ways of knowing, towards epistemologies other than those that have come about on the back of the Enlightenment, has also resulted in a form of tunnel-vision as to what constitutes philosophy, which by and large dismisses the contributions of non-Europeans —who, ironically, actually only exist by virtue of "the European".[99] Here not only the *provocateur* Slavoj Žižek stands accused, Dabashi also targets Emmanuel Levinas. Even though the French-Lithuanian's "thought and manner lack all theatricality" that are so typical of the Slovene pop philosopher, nevertheless Levinas has made observations such as:

> When I speak of Europe," he wrote, "I think about the gathering of humanity. Only in the European sense can the world be gathered together... in this sense Buddhism can be said just as well in Greek. [...] "I often say [...] that humanity consists of the Bible and the Greeks: All the rest can be translated: all the rest —all the exotic— is dance.[100]

Dabashi's robust riposte in *Can Non-Europeans Think?* is a double pushback, not just asserting the ability of non-Europeans to think, but also intended to move European intellectuals to reflect on their own shortcomings and become more acutely aware of how much Western thought dances to its own tune: a composite of Hellenic philosophy & Judeo-Christian Scripturalism. This argument makes claims not just to intellectual superiority, but also to universal validity, sound rather vacuous. Hamid Dabashi is not anti-European in the sense of being against using ideas of

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96 Hamid Dabashi, *Can Non-Europeans Think?*, 9.
97 Hamid Dabashi, *Can Non-Europeans Think?*, 1011
98 Hamid Dabashi, *Can Non-Europeans Think?*, 28–29.
99 Hamid Dabashi, *Can Non-Europeans Think?*, 9.
100 Hamid Dabashi, *Can Non-Europeans Think?*, 256.

Western provenance, because that would be in contradiction with his opposition to binary or dichotomous thinking.

Concluding Remarks

On the back of three emblematic gatherings of Arab intellectuals in the early 1970s, a new strand of critical engagement with the Muslim intellectual legacy began taking shape in the Arab world. Its exponents were referred to as *turāthiyyūn* or "heritage thinkers". Pairing an intimate familiarity with the Islamic tradition with an equally solid knowledge of Western scholarly advances in the humanities and social sciences, 'heritage thinkers' can be considered a product of cultural hybridization. Situated in the interstices of civilizational legacies, they are apt to navigate between two opposing strands in contemporary Muslim thought: the wholesale adoption of secularized Western-inspired modes of thinking and their uncompromising rejection. From this position of liminality, "heritage thinkers" negotiate their own course, elaborating a variety of responses to the encounters with post-modernity and postcoloniality. Whether formulating post-structuralist critiques, phenomenological hermeneutics, or Islamized adaptations of liberation theology, this type of intellectual identifies the achievements *and* shortcomings of both Muslim and non-Muslim thinking.

Aside from a contrast between the catholicity of Mohammed Arkoun's Critique of Islamic Reason project and the Maghrebi chauvinism of Mohammed al-Jabri's Critique of Arab Reason, comparing the former's text-critical investigations to the historicized philosophical approach of the latter, Arkoun's interest in the archive of the "Unthought" in the Islamic heritage bears a resemblance to the deconstruction of Jacques Derrida, while al-Jabri shares the concern for the knowledge-power nexus of Foucault's archaeology of discursive formations.

Both Dabashi's and Hanafi's engagements with religious and philosophical hermeneutics have an anthropocentric focus. Hanafi's shift from Sayyid Qutb to Muhammad Iqbal already reflects in itself an anthropological turn, given Iqbal's preoccupation with the Ego or the Self. Hanafi's anthropocentrism is further confirmed by articles such as '*Théologie ou Anthropologie?*' and his commentary on Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, leading Hanafi to concluded that modern European philosophy is "nothing but an attempt to approach the humanism of Islam."[101] Dabashi's anthropology in his Hermeneutics of Alterity culminates in a cosmopolitan disposition of worldly imaginations epitomized in the literary hu-

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101 Hassan Hanafi. "Al-Ightirāb al-Dīnī ʿinda Feuerbach:" 53.

manism of the classical Persian poets. This interest in humanist tendencies in Islamic thought also points to a family resemblance with Mohammed Arkoun.

Hanafi and Dabashi's agreement with Heidegger and Gadamer's notion that the human condition can be characterized as one of living in language, is highlighted by how they deal with language and phenomenological hermeneutics in Islamicate contexts. In the case of Hanafi it led him to the transposition or transmutation of the juridical vocabulary of *fiqh* into a general philosophical idiom. Whereas Hanafi's interest in language is one of application, Dabashi's engagement is more analytical, examining its rhetorical employment of metaphorical and symbolic tools, but also with the purpose of ascribing new meaning to existing terms to suit the new objectives. This difference is also due to Hanafi's propensity to abstraction and concern for the collective as opposed to the more concrete disposition of Dabashi's worldly cosmopolitanism and the sublimations found in literary writings, which leaves more room for the individual.

In all instances, the biographies of the Muslim intellectuals discussed in this chapter and the negotiations in their works between endogenous and exogenous sources, methodologies, and rhetorical devices illustrate an intertwining and interpenetration of the Western and Islamicate contexts. Such hybridizations are difficult to disentangle. However, if we recall Ricœur's observation that to explain more means that we can understand better, there is perhaps no need for such disentanglement anyway, because it highlights the complexity, multi-layered nature, and inherent ambiguities of critical thinking about religion in the contemporary Muslim world as products of the circulation of ideas and travelling of theories across cultural divides.

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