REVIEW OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

Special Issue 2

Beyond the Divide: Discussing Secularism and Religion

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Editor

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Between Secularism and Islamism
Islah Jad

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Rediscovering Religion and Secularism:
A Critique of a Critique
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Institute of Women's Studies

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BIRZEIT UNIVERSITY

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Beyond the Divide: Discussing Secularism and Religion

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Introduction: Beyond the Divide

In 2011, the Institute of Women's Studies (IWS) at Birzeit University launched a teaching, research and discussion initiative on "Dialoging Across the Religious/Secular Divide," which aimed to address the political and cultural polarization between religious and secular proponents occurring globally, regionally and in Palestine through scholarly scrutiny, relevant curriculum development and democratic dialogue. The four scholars published in this special issue of the Review of Women's Studies initially gave their presentations during the Institute's 2011-2012 seminar series. Both the quality and range of their interventions and the lively discussion and debate that ensued with Birzeit faculty and students attest to the importance of this project in contemporary Palestine and the region. We hope the reader of this special issue of the Review of Women's Studies will find the analyses and observations herein stimulating to new thinking that goes "beyond the divide" to discover both commonalities and productive contradictions that can, in turn, engender further exploration of these issues. These four thoughtful (sometimes provocative and always stimulating) contributions do not contain any packaged or ready-made solutions but rather invite a conversation that the Institute of Women's Studies hopes to continue.

In her contribution, Islah Jad finds that the sharp divide conventionally made between secular nationalists and Islamists blurs when she examines how both nationalists and Islamists in Palestine and elsewhere deploy the notion of an 'ideal woman.' Jad also problematises the exclusionary dichotomy between Islamists and nationalist secularists in Palestine through probing the positions of the mainstream nationalist Fateh movement and the Islamist Hamas movement. In particular, she argues "the formal ideology of Palestinian Islamists largely stems not from religious texts, but from accommodations to contending positions." She goes on to examine the complex relation historically and in the present between Arab nationalism and Islam and compares the contrasint points of view of two Palestinian scholars, Musa Budeiri and Jamil Hilal, who have debated "the linkages between religion and secularism in the construction of Palestinian nationalism."

On 29 October 2011, the Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University welcomed Professor Wael Hallaq, the Avalon Foundation Professor of Humanities at Columbia University, for a keynote lecture, entitled "The

Delusions of Modernity and the Religion of Secularism." Professor Hallaq's talk was a signal event in the lively series of talks and discussions sponsored by the Institute to explore (and indeed interrogate) the religious-secular divide. In her introduction to the lecture, Islah Jad, Director of IWS, noted that Wael Hallaq was "one of the most prominent scholars of Islamic law and philosophy of law. His primary focus is the epistemological and legal fragmentation commencing with the onset of modernity." She also noted Professor Hallaq's crucial and extensive scholarship on "the evolution of Islamic traditions from the theoretical and legal perspectives and the independent systems at the heart of these traditions." Hallaq's lecture, held in Ramallah offered a powerful critique of the modern state and the "moral, environmental, social and political crises of modernity that we all suffer from." He also urged an "epistemological retrieval of our civilization and cultural identity," and a "critical dialogue" with the West. Hallaq explained the modern state as a European project with inherent contradictions and traced the "rise of the political" (in the sense used by Carl Schmitt) and the "rise of the legal," to the exclusion of the moral, leading to a division between "Is and Ought," or between facts and values. Hallaq suggests that an Islamic state is a contradiction in terms, but that "Islamic governance" has must to offer to "modernity's moral predicament."

The transcript of Professor Hallaq's lecture in Arabic, along with his discussion with Birzeit students and faculty, is available on the IWS website. In English, we publish here the concluding chapter of Professor Hallaq's new book, The Impossible State: Islam, Politics and Modernity's Moral Predicament (Columbia University Press 2013), which addresses the main themes of his lecture and also elaborates the signal importance, as the title suggests, of the "central domain of the moral." We thank both Professor Hallaq and Columbia University Press for permission to publish this chapter for academic purposes.

Magid Shihade, a faculty member at Birzeit's Ibrahim Abu Lughod Institute of International Studies, agrees with Hallaq on the irreducible contradiction between the modern nation-state and a putative Islamic state. However, his probing and strongly-argued "critique of a critique" also questions the academic critics of secularism and discusses their limitations. Shihade proposes a political approach that does not see binaries among secularism and religion, even from within Islamic history. He thus challenges assumptions in the academic scholarship that criticize secularism as a purely western discourse, and, drawing on the work of Ibn Khaldoun, points to a long tradition from within Islam that he argues contains a secular approach to society and politics.

Jamal Daher's contribution also challenges long-standing assumptions, but on an earlier era in the history of the region. Daher, a faculty member in Birzeit's

Department of Philosophy and Cultural Studies, examines the dominant trend of past and contemporary Arab research on Arabs before Islam in order to show the impact of scholars' preconceptions on their research. He argues that the underlying assumption was that Arabs before Islam were capable neither of producing thought nor of engaging in any philosophical abstraction. His study shows the opposite through demonstrating not only the richness of the Arabic language and its subsequent capacity to serve as an epistemological tool capable of describing the early Arabs' understanding of nature and of the necessary survival skills for life in the desert, but also their ability to accurately interpret their social and cultural life. His translators, editors and colleagues Nadim Mseis and Abdul Karim Barghouti deserve special thanks for their scrupulous attention to producing a readable and accurate English version of a complicated text.

The Institute has previously published on-line four student papers that emerged from a spring 2011 course (GAD 638) on secularism and religion, designed and taught by Dr. Ahmed Abu Awwad. Students then presented their arguments and findings for discussion in the 2011- 2012 seminar series in which the scholars published herein gave their presentations.

The 'Ideal Woman': Between Secularism and Islamism

Islah Jad

Conflict over the construction of gender, and in particular of the 'ideal woman,' is not a neutral or a primarily religious concern. Islamists, just like nationalists, seek to establish an ideal society which depends on a particular conception of the ideal woman (Papanek 1994; Kanidyoti 1991, 1998; Moghadam 1994). The difference between the two - and the problem this poses for women - is the dedication of religious or fundamentalist groups to the restoration of an ideal past or a mythical age which allocates women to the guardianship of traditions (Roy 1999; Zubaida 1997, 2000, 2003).

Visions of such a past typically place strong emphasis on the role women are imagined to have played in infusing life with perfection. In this sense, the ideal woman might embody a past time in which the evocation of the "traditional family and moral values on which 'our nation' (Hawley 1994: 32) was built would be essential. Such a vision makes 'traditional' gender roles second nature in fundamentalist religion (ibid: 34). Thus, the 'traditional' Islamist ideal woman is opposed to the 'modern' ideal woman constructed by nationalist secularist discourse (ibid: 30; White 2002). The ideal society the Islamists strive to build is also seen as reactionary and anti-modern (Roy 1999; Al-Azmeh 1996; Zubaida 1997).

The ongoing debate between secularists and Islamists in the Middle East reinforces this dichotomy. Secularism, for the Islamists, is seen as a colonial imposition, an entire worldview that gives precedence to the material over the spiritual, and promotes a modern culture of alienation and unrestrained hedonism. Secularism, for the secularists, is central to universal humanism, a rational principle that calls for the suppression, or at any rate, the restraint of religious passion so that a dangerous source of intolerance and delusion can be controlled, and political unity, peace and progress secured (ElMessiri and Al-Azmeh 2000, cited in Asad 2003:21).

I aim to problematise this exclusionary dichotomy between Islamists and nationalist secularists. In my previous work (Jad 2011), I did so by focusing

on the Women's Action Department in the Salvation Party founded by Hamas in Palestine, I examined the formal gender ideology of the Islamic movement Hamas and how this formal ideology is reconstructed, re-narrated and practiced by Islamist women. My argument, developed here, is that the formal ideology of Palestinian Islamists largely stems not from religious texts, but from accommodations to contending positions. The 'traditions' that the Islamist, like the modernist nationalist, seeks to revive are 'invented' and are modern constructs (Hobsbawm 1983: 2-3).

In the Palestinian context, the debate between secularists and Islamists over the reform of the *shari'a* law may thus be cast as a contest between tradition and modernity. Given the complexities, contradictions, and ambiguities of modernity and nationalism (Kandiyoti 1998: 283), I question whether the boundaries separating the two movements - the nationalist and Islamist - are as clear-cut as one might imagine. Through an analysis of how nationalists and Islamists perceive and construct gender roles and relations, I argue that there may be more continuities than differences between the two.

The Shifting Nature of Palestinian Secularism

Arab nationalism has from its origins invoked Islam as a basis for legitimacy. Neither Islam nor nationalism is a fixed idiom and here I argue that the brand of Islamic movement contesting the power of the Palestinian national movement is, to a great extent, a product of the failure of the secular national movement to deliver on its promises for national independence or state building. I argue that one of the elements that eased the shift to a 'fusion' between Islam and Palestinian nationalism was the defeat of the Palestinian national movement and the ability of the Islamic movement (Hamas) to identify itself with the struggle to gain Palestinian national rights.

Arab nationalism, whether in its Baathist, Nasserist or other forms, incorporated Islam as part and parcel of its claims of difference and was a unifying ideology in the quest for building what Salame calls a 'state of legitimation' - a move that derives fortification from enduring social elements, rather than insisting more fundamentally upon a vision for change and innovation (Salame 2001:20);. Al-Azem goes further to accuse the 'secular' nationalist elites of obstructing a rational understanding for the Islamic cultural heritage to become the subject of independent scientific methodologies and inquiries pertaining to social sciences. They rather used the Islamic cultural heritage as an ideological tool in the service of their regional, national or party politics. Thus, when the nationalist waves faded away, the uncritical approach to Islam and Islamic

heritage remained and was easily presented as untouchable core of Arab and Muslim identity (Al-Azem 2004).

In some of the above views the assertion that Islam was fused with Arab nationalism was seen as a hindrance to true secularism and true modernity. Many scholars referred to the fusion between religion and nationalisms in the modern construction of the latter. Hayes, for example remarked that "nationalism has a large number of particularly quarrelsome sects, but as a whole it is the latest and nearest approach to a world-religion" (Hayes cited in Asad 2003:187)). Geertz had identified the centrality of sacred symbols springing from religious impulses to all forms of political life, nationalist as well as pre-nationalist, in societies both modern and pre-modern. The symbolic activities that take place in the centre, Greetz suggests, give it "its aura of being not merely important but in some odd fashion connected with the way the world is built". This is why "the gravity of high politics and the solemnity of high worship" are akin (Greetz 1983: 124 cited in Asad 2003: 188).

In analysing the fluctuating relationship between Islam as a religion and nationalism as a secular notion, Lawrence explains that Islamism or 'fundamentalism' as he calls it (the controversy over the use of the terms Islamism or fundamentalism will be discussed below) was shaped by the overwhelming and new character of secularisation, much of which permeated not only the elite classes of Muslim countries but permanently affected all residents of the Muslim/Arab world through the emergence of such new institutions as communications, health care, education, and, above all, nationalism. He propounds the idea that, while nationalism was not a Muslim institution in origin, it was adopted by many Muslim elites as a strategy for coping with the otherwise intractable authority of colonial governments, economies, and armies (Lawrence 1987: 29). In this context, what emerged within nationalism in nearly every country was an enforced obedience to the state, with the kind of Islam advocated by the government made compulsory as a symbol of political loyalty as well as religious orthodoxy (ibid: 29). Thus, Islam was amalgamated with Arab secularism[1].

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1 Efforts to apply the concept of the nation-state to Islam and to the Islamic *umma* (community of believers) are a salient feature of the historically recent Muslim exploration of political issues. Some authors have tried to combine Islam with nationalism by treating Islam and Arabism (*uruba*) as an inseparable unity. Al-Bazzaz (a young Iraqi teacher), for example, denied that there was a contradiction between Islam and Arab Nationalism. For him, Islam is a national religion, the real Islam was Arab Islam and the Arabic language is the "soul of the Arab Nation" (Hourani 1983: 308-9).

In the Arab world, the fusion of religion and nationalism as a brand of 'secularism' wielded amongst the post-colonial national elites was a clear marker of identity for these post-colonial nation-states in the Arab World. 'Abd El-Baki Hermassi, for example, writing on Islamism and secularism, summarizes the differences in the important distinction between *de facto* and *de jure* secularism. Whereas in the West *de jure* secularism called for the formal separation of church and state, the Arab state recognized Islam as the religion of society and, in this way, demobilized its political use. Although formally the state was not secular, in practice, these states marginalized the role of the mosque in politics and practised *de facto* secularism (Hermassi 1993 cited in Hatem 1994: 664-5).

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Middle East has been confronted by different forms of nationalisms: religious nationalism, territorial nationalism and ethnic or linguistic nationalism (Hourani 1983: 341-2). It is believed by many commentators that the nation as linguistic community has become dominant and superseded or absorbed other formations (Hourani 1983; Al-Azmeh 1993; Salame 2001). However, religious nationalism continued to exist as an element in territorial and linguistic nationalism in the Middle East. Yet the linkage between religion and nationalism is not unique to Muslim societies. Munson sees that religious and national identity tend to be fused in many parts of the world. Just as Hourani thinks, for example, that being a Turk involved being a Sunni Muslim, a Persian a Shi'i and Arab consciousness is inextricably connected with Muslim consciousness (Hourani 1983: 342), Munson states "to be really Irish is to be Catholic, to be an Arab, in the popular perception, is to be a Muslim (a Sunni Muslim), similarly to be a 'real' Iranian is to be a Shiite" (Munson 2003: 41). He believes that Islamists generally condemn nationalism, but compares the situation to Marxism's denunciation of nationalism, which nonetheless used nationalistic resentment of foreign domination to fuel its revolutions. Juergensmeyer characterises religious political movements as religious nationalism. He suggests that there are "individuals with both religious and political interests, they respond in a religious way to a political situation" (Juergensmeyer 1993: 87).

Part of the confusion between the use of Islam and of Arab nationalism stems from the shared use of the notion of *umma* (community of believers and the Arabic translation of the word 'nation'). Here it is important to note the differences. Its use by the Arab nationalists evolved as a result of European influence which emphasises the importance of unifying cultural markers (such as language, history or religion) or territorial groupings to include all adherents to such markers irrespective of religious identity

(Hourani 1983). It was argued that the basic thrust of Arab nationalist ideology is supra-denominational (despite its invocations of Islamic history and its concessions to Islamic popular sentiment), and that it is committed to the doctrine of separating law and citizenship from religious affiliation and of confining the latter to the private domain. In brief, religion is what secular Arabism specifies and tries to set in its proper social place (Asad 2003: 196). However, the history of Islam is important because it reflects the early unification and triumph of the Arab nation in which the 'Arabian Prophet' is regarded as its spiritual hero[2].

The classical theological view of the Islamic notion of *umma* has a completely different meaning (Donohue and Esposito 1982; Tibi 1987; Asad 2003). Here the Prophet is not the object of national inspiration but the subject of divine inspiration, a messenger of God to mankind and a model for *sunna* (virtuous conduct) that, together with the Quran, each Muslim must seek to embody in his or her life. In this theological view, classical chronicles are not 'history' but grow out of *hadith* (records of the sayings and doings of the Prophet) on which the *sunna* is based, and they articulate a Quranic world view. According to this view, while the 'Arab nation' is inconceivable without its history, the Islamic *umma* presupposes only the Quran and *sunna* (Watt 1977 in Tibi 1987: 64; Asad 2003: 196-7). The Islamic *umma* is thus not an imagined community waiting to be politically unified, but a theologically defined space enabling Muslims to practise the disciplines of *din* (religion) in the world. In this regard, the Islamic *umma* presupposes individuals who are self-governing in a distinctly Islamic way but not autonomous (Asad 2003: 197).

The expression *umma 'arabiyya*, used today to denote the 'Arab nation', represents a major conceptual transformation by which *umma* is cut off from the theological predicates that gave it its universalising power, and is made to stand for an imagined total society, limited and sovereign like any other (Anderson 1983: 15). In contrast, the *ummatu-l-muslimin* (the Islamic *umma*) is ideologically not a society onto which state or economy can be mapped. It is neither limited nor sovereign, for it can and eventually should embrace all of

2 A Christian Arab nationalist writes with admiration of the personality of the Prophet Mohammed, of his strength of conviction and firmness of belief, and concludes: "this is the spiritual message contained in the anniversary of the Arabian Prophet's birth which is addressed to our present national life. It is for this, in spite of their different tendencies and their diverse religions and sects, that the Arab nationalists must honor the memory of Mohammed, the Prophet of Islam, the unifier of the Arabs, the man of principle and conviction" (Zuraiq cited in Haim 1962: 171)

humanity. Thus, according to Asad, the two are grammatically quite different (Asad 2003: 198).

Further conflicts may be noted between Islam as a religion and nationalism. In the contemporary political Islamic movements and contrary to the meaning of Islam at its inception, the 'new' meaning of Islam is inclusive of Muslims and exclusive of all non-Muslims, unlike nationalism. But like nationalism, Islam is interpreted as a political system and used for political ends which is a threat to secularism (Al-Azmeh 1996; Roy 1999; Tibi 1987). However, according to Asad, both Arab nationalism and Islamism share a concern with the modernising state because Islamism takes for granted and seeks to work through the nation-state, which is so central to the predicament of all Muslims. It is this statist project, he argues, and not the fusion of religious and political ideas that gives Islamism a 'nationalist' cast (Asad 2003: 199). Asad urges us not to focus on the 'real motives' of Islamists, but rather to look for what circumstances oblige 'Islamism' to emerge publicly as a political discourse, and how it challenges the deep structures of secularism (ibid: 199). Asad stresses interconnections between religion and secularism by stating that "although religion is regarded as alien to the secular, the latter is also seen to have generated religion, that in the pre-modern past secular life created superstitious and oppressive religion, and in the modern present secularism has produced enlightened and tolerant religion. Thus, the insistence on a sharp separation between the religious and the secular goes with the paradoxical claim that the latter continually produces the former" (ibid: 193).

In the Palestinian context, two scholars with contrasting points of views have debated the linkages between religion and secularism in the construction of Palestinian nationalism. Budeiri, on the one hand, argues that the fact that Fateh "resort to religious symbols and ideology to mobilise and enlist support, casts doubt on the often repeated assertion that Fateh, and by implication the Palestinian national movement, is a secular force" (Budeiri 1994:12). Islam, Budeiri assures us, was and continues to be one of the paramount elements of Palestinian national identity, especially inside the Occupied Territories. He states that "the Islamic movement in Palestine was instrumental from the very beginning of the British Mandate in assimilating a nationalist discourse. It is indeed difficult, [according to him] to establish a demarcation line separating Islamists from their 'nationalist enemies" (ibid: 7).

With this view, Budeiri sees that the 'fusion' between Islam and nationalism is demeaning for the 'real' meaning of secularism which should be separate from religion. He also perceives Islam and politics in terms of continuity rather than discontinuity. Islam, as a symbolic reference point, functions as a cultural

reservoir drawn upon in the national call for resistance. The configuration of Islam as a political movement, depicted as cyclical or more or less unchanging, could be understood as a type of 'resurgence' of Islam (Stowasser 1987, Davis 1987) battling on with its continuous ideological rivalry with nationalism. In such a view, no wonder the leader of the national movement during the British Mandate, Haj Amin, was put in the same basket with Ezzel-Din el-Kassam seen both as 'religious' and 'Islamic' However, socially, the *Palestininan* nationalist elite came from the upper notable families in Palestine, including Haj Amin, the Grand Mufti and the head of the Arab Higher Committee, which constituted the leading structure for the national struggle from 1936 to 1948.

The Arab Higher Committee's ideology was nationalist as well as secularist in the sense that they aimed to establish an independent Palestinian state that would include Arabs and Jews. They were driven by a strong desire to modernise their state and society and spread education and science, following the model of British public schools in their curricula, with one exception - that in their private schools they added religion as a requirement, which was not taught in the public schools (Al-Tibawi 1956). They were not hostile to the West *per se*, their animosity was reserved mainly for its dominance and Occupation and they pursued a path of negotiation and diplomacy to seek independence, and, when this strategy did not work, they were pushed by the destitute peasants to use violence. Ezzel-Din el-Kassam, a déclassé, and a minor religious clerk and political exile from Syria, attained a short-lived leadership amongst the urban poor and the uprooted peasants. The importance of Kassam, as a national religious leader, is that he was the first who called for the resistance of the British by force against the will of Haj Amin. Neither Kassam nor Haj Amin formed their Islamic organisations or movements to fight the British and the Zionist movements. In Zu'aytir's diary on the 36-39 revolt it was mentioned clearly that "the rebellion, leaded by the nationalists, mobilised religious clergy" and not vice versa (Zu'aytir 1980: 411). The first attempt to establish such a movement occurred when the Muslim Brothers in Egypt sent some delegates to connect their movement to similar groups in Palestine in 1935. According to Abul-Omrein, this move did not result in extending the Egyptian movement to Palestine (Abul-Omrein 2000: 56), it was in 1946 that the first group for the Muslim Brothers as an Islamic movement was established in Jerusalem by Jamal al-Husseini one of the nationalist leading figures and the aid of Haj-Amin (Cohen 1982: 144).

In contrast to Budeiri, Hilal does not recognise Islam as a central factor in the construction of Palestinian national identity, whether under the Mandate or in its modern formation in the sixties. He defines secularism as a clear separation

of political institutions from religious ones saying that "in a national political field it implies that organizations, identities and ideologies have distinct paradigms, dynamics, and determinants that differ from those pertaining to the religious field" (Hilal 2002: 1). He believes that the confrontation with Zionist and British rule generated a secular, or nationalist, dimension to Palestinian identity in the form of a *national* individuality transcending that of religion, sect and locality (ibid: 1). According to him, at no stage did Palestinian nationalism resort to religious discourse or mythology to maintain its hegemony and the PLO had leading Christian figures such as George Habash, head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Nayef Hawatmeh head of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. "This does not contradict", he says "the fact that most Palestinians have been and are still religious in the popular meaning of religiosity" (ibid: 1). However, once Hamas established a 'sort of cultural hegemony', the dominance of Islam was reflected in the common mode of dress, in proposed curricula for government schools, in the increasing use of Quranic verses in official statements and speeches by the PA, in the self-censorship of newspaper articles relating to issues that touch on religion and in the Palestinian official media[3].

While I agree with Hilal that the PLO did not return to Islam as a meta-political point of reference (Salame 2001: 8), it accepted that marriage, divorce and inheritance should be based on the popular understanding of Islam. Gender relations within the Palestinian community under the political control of the PLO were governed by *shari'a* and not secular law. Gender relations were the 'blind spot' of commentators on Islam and secularism who failed to see that in matters of gender and the family, there was more continuity than discontinuity between the two ideologies. This confirms Kanidyoti's opinion that the ambiguities of modernity are most apparent when it comes to the issue of the role of women in the body politic (Kandiyoti 1998: 283). In the meantime, Hilal, who drastically distinguishes religion and nationalism, did not provide an answer as to why a 'mainly' secular movement was in need of religious idioms to legitimise itself.

Analysing the ideology of Fateh as the backbone of the PLO and the contemporary nationalist movement, Abdel-Jawad states that Islam as a religion was never put aside by Fateh leadership. In his study of the subject, he reveals that the majority (13 out of 21) of the founding leaders of Fateh in the early fifties were either members of the Muslim Brothers, Islamic Liberation party

3 Palestinian newspaper columnists have complained of frequent censorship by editors of articles that touch on religion, for fear of provoking Islamists.

or sympathisers (Abdel-Jawad 2003; El-Hamad and Al-Bargothi 1997). Their first magazine *Falastinuna* (*Our Palestine*) reflected the religious language and orientation of the nascent movement which, according to Abdel-Jawad, helped to spread the movement's agenda amongst refugees in Gaza who came from a rural, conservative background. Among the old elite, Christians represented 20%, (whereas their presence did not exceed 11%) in Fateh, all the founding leaders were Muslims. Such an historical background, although denied by Hilal, does not go against the brand of secularism of Fateh he presents.

Secular nationalism did of course play an important role in the Middle East in the mid-twentieth century. One thinks, for example, of Muhammad Mossadegh and the National Front in Iran, Nasser and Nasserism in Egypt, and the PLO among the Palestinians. But all these forms of nationalism eventually failed to produce liberation from foreign domination, not to mention their failure to resolve the various other social and economic problems found in most of the third world. Moreover, at grass-roots level, Islam suffused all these forms of 'secular' nationalism. As for the secular PLO, Fateh always made extensive use of common Islamic concepts such as *jihad* (holy war) and *shahid* (martyr). The Marxist Palestinian movements never had anything like the popular appeal of Fateh. It is legitimate to point out here that the PLO's discourses on modernity were conditioned not only by the encounter with Zionism, as Hilal claims, but also by the its troubled relations with different Arab regimes, using a more conservative and religious approach with the Saudis for example, more liberal and 'modern' with the Tunisians, and 'progressive' and 'modern' with the then Soviet Union.

One of the diagnostic criteria for unmasking the nature of a national project is to examine its construction of gender and gender relations, yet many writers and scholars who have written on Hamas and Palestinian nationalism (Hroub 1996, 2000; El-Hamad and Al-Bargothi 1997; Abul-Omrein 2000; Al-Taheri 1995; Abu 'Amr 1994; Litvak 1996; Schiff and Ya'ari 1989; Hilal 1998; Munson 2003), are silent on this question.

Those authors who insist Palestinian national identity was mainly based on secular idioms have to homogenise this identity; they do not want to see how nationalism and its multiple identities are permeated by class, gender, and religion (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989; Kandiyoti 1991). Kandiyoti, for example, demonstrates that "although many (nationalisms) were influenced by the ideas of the enlightenment and were of secular persuasion, they unwittingly endorsed the notion that any changes in the position of women could only be condoned in the national interest" (Kandiyoti 1991a 410). Nationalist ideologies need an 'ideal woman' but she is ambiguous. Fateh perceived

gender relations and the 'ideal woman' as carrying, as Kandiyoti puts it, "their own ambiguities and tensions" (Kandiyoti 1998: 282). The 'ideal woman' was portrayed as the peasant, who is fertile, modest and 'authentic'. However, at the same time 'the modern woman' was portrayed as the disciplined, de-eroticised body, the 'sister of men'. In other words, the Palestinian national movements portrayed women as the "privileged repository of uncontaminated national values" (Kandiyoti 1991a: 410). The parallel models of woman have persisted through Fateh, the PLO and the PA.

Fateh always resisted challenging the patriarchal control of women within the PLO. The many attempts by activists in the General Union of Palestinian Women to promote and protect women's rights in divorce, marriage and inheritance failed. They attributed this failure to the refusal of the head of the PLO to endorse any such move or, according to Khaled and Salah, "to question the flagrant abuse and exploitation of some of the Fateh fighters whether in the uncontrolled practices of polygamy, the failure to recognise their children from undeclared marriages or the many cases of domestic violence" (Laila Khaled and Samira Salah, Interviews).

This might serve to explain the ease with which support for a secular PLO comprised of men and women, was transformed into sympathy, and, in many cases, even allegiance, to the Islamic movement. The increasing politicisation of gender and religious identities might call into question the 'progressiveness' of the secular Palestinian national unity and the unity of the Palestinian national identity. The increasing popularity of Islamists has its roots not only in cultural or ideological premises but it is also related to some important changes that occurred in the West Bank and Gaza after the Israeli Occupation in 1967.

Islah Jad is the Director of the Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University

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The Central Domain of the Moral

Wael Hallaq

An excerpt from Chapter 7 of Professor Wael Hallaq's 2013 book, The Impossible State: Islam, Politics and Modernity's Moral Predicament (Columbia University Press) is published here by the kind permission of Professor Wael Hallaq and Columbia University Press. The editor's introduction to this special issue of the Review of Women's Studies has a brief summary of Professor Hallaq's lecture at Birzeit University that may be helpful in providing context for this chapter.

Editor

"Love thy neighbor as thyself" is the very soul of the moral point of view, which demands that we regard another's good as having the same direct claim on our attention as our own good expectably does. And those wedded to an instrumentalist approach will naturally refuse to attach any rational sense to the idea, holding that our allegiance to morality has to be grounded in the pursuit of our own interests, and finding themselves therefore unable to explain why our moral attention should extend to strangers and to the weak, as it obviously must if another's good weighs with us independently of our own. Yet though I have quoted Scripture to bring home the import of a non-instrumentalist conception of morality, can one really maintain that it makes sense only within a religious world-view? Do we not judge the worth of a religion by moral principles we know in our heart of hearts to be right, including the very one in question?

Larmore, The Autonomy of Morality

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Modern Islamist discourses assume the modern state to be a neutral tool of governance, one that can be harnessed to perform certain functions according to the choices and dictates of its leaders.[1] When not used for oppression, the machinery of state governance can be turned by leaders into a representative of the people's will, determining thereby what the state will become: a liberal democracy, a socialist regime, or an Islamic state implementing the values and ideals enshrined in the Qurān and those that the Prophet had once realized in his "mini-state" of Medina. The modern state is then seen by them just as logic was seen by Aristotle and the Aristotelians, namely, as a neutral technique or instrument guiding correct thinking about any issue or problem in the world-until, that is, it was shown centuries after Aristotle, by Muslim intellectuals themselves, that Aristotelian formal logic and the theory of universals on which it rests was *inherently* saturated with particular metaphysical assumptions that predetermined the nature of its premises and therefore its conclusions. The very use of this logic meant an a priori acceptance of a certain brand of metaphysics, one that most Muslim intellectual's rejected.[2]

The modern state is no different, for it comes with its own arsenal of metaphysics and much else. It *inherently* produces certain distinctive effects that are political, social, economic, cultural, epistemic, and, no less, psychological, which is to say that the state fashions particular knowledge systems that in turn determine and shape the landscape of individual and collective subjectivity and thus much of the meaning of its subjects' lives.

As no idea or thought can come into existence outside of a human context, and as no event or act can be conceivable outside time or space, the state-as both abstract thought and concrete practice is product of a unique historical experience. As a paradigm of governance, it evolved in Europe and was later nurtured by Euro-America, and it subsequently was exported to the colonies and the rest of the world. As we have seen, the modern state is uncomfortably seated in many parts of the world, suffering from lack of legitimacy and unable to rule hitherto unhomogenized subject populations. We often characterize these as "weak" or "rogue" states, euphemisms for the fact that a nonindigenous form of political control has, relatively recently and without "preparation," been violently imposed on colonized societies that never knew or had never on their own or willingly adopted such a form. This perhaps is the most evincive evidence of the foreignness of the modern state, an entity that is-historically, substantively, and conceptually-thoroughly Euro-American.

However, none of this should mean that the modern state is an immutable phenomenon, that it does not and cannot change, that it has not adapted or could not adjust to an ever-changing world. For it is hardly deniable that the

state of the nineteenth century had noticeably evolved by the middle of the twentieth, and today's state, as we saw in the preceding chapter, continues to undergo certain changes in response to, inter alia, the emerging challenges of globalization. Yet none of these changes and none of the otherwise persistent structures of the modern state have ever proven themselves compatible with even the basic requirements of Islamic governance. In fact, instead of rendering the modern state less objectionable, the mutations of the last three decades, especially in the direction of so-called globalization, have increased their incompatibility progressively. It should not by now come as a surprise that this incompatibility is ultimately a moral one.

1. The Major Incompatibilities

Let us, by way of summary, count some of the important ways in which this incompatibility manifests itself, while realizing that no single one is mutually exclusive of the others. First, as an anthropocentric entity, the state possesses a metaphysic that resides within its own boundaries as sovereign will. The metaphysic generates its own meanings, which is to say that its particular views of the world are of its own creation and bound by its own standards, however changeable these standards may be. As the highest manifestation of positivism, the state possesses and displays a metaphysic of the here and now, reflecting its own concepts, structures, and practices. What Is for the state is its truth of will, its will to power, all other truths being marginal and subordinate. By stark contrast, no form of Islamic governance can permit positivism, nor is there a place for a metaphysic that issues therefrom. If the autonomy of the moral is the highest of all desiderata, then metaphysics, which foregrounds moral autonomy, cannot descend to positivism. If moral autonomy must lead, if it must be the determinant of all determinants, then metaphysics must necessarily transcend the narrow domain of positivist anthropocentricism. The two metaphysics, therefore, stand in an irreconcilable deadlock.

Second, and flowing from the former consideration, Islamic governance cannot permit any sovereignty or sovereign will other than that of God. If morality is to guide human actions, if it be autonomous, then it must rest on universal and eternal principles of truth and justice, principles that transcend the manipulation and whims of a positivist entity. It must determine the limits of human actions, drawing a line of separation between what can and cannot be done and curbing the domain of the rational when this leads to the violation of its own domain. In Islamic governance, where-as we have seen-the rule of law takes on one of its most supreme expressions, no earthly sovereignty is allowed to compromise the dictates of moral autonomy. If transcendent morality

imposes on us the protection of the poor and the weak, if it creates for them an inherently natural right against the wealth of the rich, then no economic development or capitalist principle can be allowed to override this will. If this morality dictates a humane treatment of others, then no political or scientific calculation whatsoever can be permitted to reduce another's humanity by any measure, to let her starve or send him to the gas chambers, simply in the name of science and rationality. As Paul Kahn aptly observed, there are no principles of restraint on the use of force in a polity that "understands itself as the expression of popular sovereignty under the rule of law." On the other hand, a "state that understands itself as an expression of a divine or a natural order can look to meanings outside of itself to limit its actions."[3]

Islamic governance is thus bound by a sovereign will outside of and higher than itself, whereas the modern state's sovereignty represents an inner dialectic of self-constitution: sovereignty constitutes the state and is constituted by it. These two opposed conceptions of sovereignty will inevitably stand in a deadlock.[4]

Third, and flowing from the former two considerations, if God is the only sovereign-which is to say, if God is the ultimate source of moral authority-then any system that regulates human behavior must heed the general norms and technical rules and regulations derived from and dictated by the higher moral principles. This, for Muslims past and present, is the true and ultimate meaning of the rule of law. As we saw in chapter 3, the best form of separation of powers in the paradigmatic modern state suffers from defects that render the system, even as an elaborate theory, inconsistent, confused, and even a "failure."[5] If the modern state as a sovereign will inherently bestows on the executive branch powers formidable enough to chip away at the legislative, then the rule of law would have to be defined in terms of executive will as much as of that of legislative will. At the same time, judicial review chips away at the latter will still further, reducing its purview and narrowing its competence. Such a constitutional arrangement, integral to the structures of the modern state, would be unthinkable in any form of Islamic governance, making the two arrangements, both in theory and in practice, largely incompatible.

Fourth, and reflecting the aggregate effects of the former three considerations, the modern state produces subjects that differ from those produced by any form of Islamic governance in profoundly political, social, moral, epistemic, and psychological ways. The microcosmic insistence of the Muslim subject on the unity of the Is and Ought is a faithful representation of the macrocosmic Sharī (and Sufist) insistence that fact and value are one and the same, *that all existence is a unity*, and that the term "poor" in Qurānic discourse and in Muslim social and economic life is not a statistic or a scientific datum.

In the very terms "poor" and "poverty," *the value of an inherent right to aid, assistance, and compassion* is intertwined with and indistinguishably meshed into the fact of descending into poverty. There is no "poor" in the vocabulary and conceptual categories of Islamic governance that can be distinguished in any way from the deontological moral value not only of the poor's right to aid but also of a commensurate duty incumbent upon those who can provide it. This type of nondistinction is pervasive, extending to nature and the nature of things. Everything in the world is the work of One Agent who created one and all for a reason. No "atom of a good or bad deed" can be separated from any atom of sand or seed. Everything is interconnected, and all things are but One. Living in the world is living in the Kingdom of God, with all of its fortunes and misfortunes, its good- and evildoers, its trees and rivers, its poor and rich. To live in this world is to accept the majestic wisdom of its Creator, as manifested in His creation. It is to accept humanity with its honorable strengths and dishonorable weaknesses. But it is also to accept the necessity and the paradigmatic desideratum of striving to be good and of being thankful for being alive and for the bounties bestowed upon humankind, however small or large they may be. It is to surrender to the majesty of this creation, our transient abode and our test of goodness. There is no reason for humankind to exist other than to prove, in heart and deed, the extent to which they can do good. Doing good is the heart and soul, the core and kernel, and the most pronounced message of the Qurān and therefore of Islam and Islamic governance. If there is Hell and Heaven, punishment and reward, and if God is the One, the Punisher, the Compassionate, and the Merciful, it is all deployed for one purpose and one purpose only: To create the good-doer and hence the good community, for there would be no meaning for his Oneness, Mercy, and Wrath without this concept of good.

But the call to goodness is not an ambiguous invocation, a moral injunction devoid of content. To be good is both a defined and defining concept that can be located within the five pillars of religion, pillars that Islam-from the beginning until this very present-never questioned and, more importantly, never abandoned. If the pillars are by definition exclusivist-and they are-it is because everything other than them is subsidiary and subordinate. If these are the pillars, then everything else is not. But since the Sharīa and Islamic governance must, by necessity, regulate all human behavior,[6] then that which is not a pillar must conform to the pillars' dictates and aggregate will. Which is to say that the structure and operation of the pillared system predetermines both the subject and subjectivity, preparing them to embark upon that which lies in the nonpillared world And the pillars, accurately reflecting the tenor of the Qurānic philosophy, are anchored in a simple message: understand your

place in the world; understand your own transience; understand that you are created as part of a community and of a family that together feed your soul, just as plants and grains feed your body; understand that all this is a gift that comes with a responsibility toward everything around you; understand that you really own nothing, that you will inevitably face your end and that you will take nothing with you to the grave except your good deeds, your good name; understand that you have duties toward the world in which you have been created, toward the community that was created for you and that is your anchor. Take nothing for granted.

It is this foundational understanding that underlies a set of performative acts and utterances which have a cumulative shaping effect on the body, soul, and mind. In their entirety, these acts are private, internal, and thus affective. From prayer and fasting-which both locate themselves in that foundational understanding-to pilgrimage and almsgiving, the total effect of these acts tends to shape the Muslim subject, fulfilling the desideratum of the Sharīa, of Islamic governance, and therefore of the art of living itself. The remaining Sharī laws and rules presuppose such a subject and operate-in one strong sense-as the addendum and annotation of this morally formed subject.

By stark contrast, the subject of the modern state is not wholly formed by the moral imperative. The conventional morality of tradition is constantly contested by a state-oriented technology of the self that systemically and systematically operates to create the national citizen. The contest is summed up with pinpoint precision in the statement that "it is not the duty of the state to make us good. That is our business."[7]

The duty of the state, fulfilled maximally and most faithfully through education and nationalistic discourse-among much else-is to create the efficient and productive citizen, the subject of "law and order" who is willing to die for his country and nation. Whereas Islam-as we have seen-does not command sacrifice of life, even for the sake of God, the modern nation-state is inconceivable without this requirement. But there is another difference still. Whereas the aggregate effects of Islamic governance are intended to fashion the moral subject who inter-acts responsibly with an anima mundi and with community and family, the subject of the modern state is an exteriorized personality whose soul and spirit are of no concern but whose value resides in a political, materialistic, and efficiency-based conception of life. Put differently, whereas the Muslim subject strives for moral improvement, the state's subject strives to fulfill sovereign will, fictitiously a representation of the subject's own will but realistically the will of a commanding sovereign. The difference is a paradigmatic one between a continuous and unending moral struggle for the

Ought and a continuous and unending worldly struggle for the Is, which aims to maintain a hold over the material bounties of an otherwise brute world of fact. The subject of Is and the subject of Ought are two drastically different human subjects. They stand not only in diametrical opposition but in irreconcilable contradiction.

Fifth and finally, the modern state, in its collaboration and contestation with the globalization project, remains engaged in a preeminently material world of Fact. It depends on and promotes a homo economicus whose exclusive and ultimate desideratum is material profit and little else. This stands in sharp contrast with the morally constructed homo economicus of Islam and its governance, a species that is subordinated to a higher moral imperative. This latter subject is neither contingent nor a mere accident in the structure and makeup of Islam and Islamic governance: it is of its essence. Without this moral homo economicus there could hardly be an Islam, Muslims, or a Muslim civilization, at least in the way we have come to know them. It is precisely this homo economicus that created, over the course of an entire millennium, a civil society that kept politics and executive power at bay and that defined what Islam was. The paradigmatic Muslim homo economicus seeks wealth and profit but remains materially and psychologically committed to social responsibility, as is abundantly evidenced in twelve centuries of Islamic socioeconomic history. Honor, prestige, nearness to God, and the love and respect of family and neighbor all paradigmatically intersect with this ethic of indebtedness to one's own community. As everything is owned by the Ultimate Sovereign, wealth and profit are not possessed by or destined for only the rich. They are made "from" and "for the sake of the Ultimate Sovereign," whose Rights are identical with those of the rights of the poor and unprivileged. In this equation, the poor are integral to God, and He is integral to them. Serve them, and you serve God; serve God, and you serve them. Produced by the state and pushed, though willingly, into a brute world of economic competition and profit, the modern subject is one who will find the true Muslim homo economicus a curiosity and an aberration, something belonging to the museum of extinct species. Raised on the moral technologies of the self and imbued with a mild form of asceticism, the Muslim homo economicus would similarly regard his modernist counterpart as irrational, greedy, shortsighted, and selfish-in short, a brute. The oppositions between the two and their utter incompatibility are nothing short of staggering.

The totality of these inherent and fundamental oppositions poses a significant problem. If Muslims are to organize their lives in social, economic, and political terms, then they face a crucial choice. Either they must succumb to the modern state and the world that produced it, or the modern state and the

world that produced it must recognize the legitimacy of Islamic governance, that is, the Muslim conception of polity, law, and, most importantly, morality and its subordinated political and economic demands. The first option would at first glance seem more realistic, given that at present it is largely accepted by Muslims and even their intellectuals, though often on the erroneous assumption that the system of the modern state can in good time be converted to an Islamic state. As I have argued in the previous chapters, this assumption forgoes a proper understanding of the nature of the modern state, its form-properties, and its inherent moral incompatibility with any form of Islamic governance. The second option seems, to all indications, far less likely, since any form of Islamic governance will have to live within a system of states that itself is under pressure from the imperatives of a globalized world. If the modern state, as so many analysts tell us, must itself compete with and readjust under the pressure of globalization, an Islamic governance would suffer multiple and incremental challenges that will quite likely cause its decline and, as likely, total collapse.

2. A Way Out?

Yet there is something worthy of investigation beyond this realpolitik, which by definition rests on a skewed vision of morality. Just as the modern state sits uncomfortably in the Muslim (and much of the Afro- Asian) world, modernity as a whole sits rather problematically in the entirety of this world of ours, including the very Euro-America that originally produced it. Throughout this book, we have alluded to some of these problems, which range from the spiritual vacuousness of the fragmented, hedonistic, and narcissistic self to the destruction of the organic community, family, and natural environment-none of which can be dissociated from the overarching project of the modern state. Thus the interrogations of the modern project cannot do without placing the state at the forefront of critique. Nor can they do without at the same time placing the destruction of the environment and the natural world at the center of our gaze, because, as I have already argued, our attitude to and dealings with this natural world is the measure of our existence, of our estimation of what it means for us to be human beings. The consequence of these attitudes is not, as many think, just a fact of life, a merely unfortunate byproduct of our otherwise good intentions. *Humanity and morality are concomitant*; divine omnipotence, however eternal and abstract, is functionally and sociologically laid in the service of these grand moral imperatives. There is no meaning for this omnipotence without the moral imperative, for the very raison d'être of this omnipotence hinges on the demand for, and insistence upon, the moral domain. Should the moral domain one day disappear from this cosmic order,

then omnipotence would have no reason to continue to exist. The world was already created by this omnipotence, a faculty that can now be withdrawn or set aside, since the task has been accomplished. But if omnipotence remains, it is by virtue of its twin, omnipresence, this latter guaranteeing the continuity of the former as keeper of the moral domain.

The Qurān, the Sharīa, and the jurists who represented it for centuries all recognized the permanency of this moral domain. Yet all of them also recognized, and with equal force, the fact that the particular legal norms to be derived from this moral domain are situational, subject to the never-ending ijtihād. This latter captures the soul and body of the coextensiveness of reason and reasons, of the constant dialectic between them that allows for the eternal moral domain to manifest itself variably according to time, need, and circumstance. If the Qurān was revealed in the idiom of the Arabs, it was, as it repeatedly states, for the purpose of making the moral domain comprehensible to them through their language and customs. The Sharīa followed this logic most faithfully, adopting the telling maxim-which it consistently and persistently practiced throughout the centuries-that "the Sharīa is good for all times and places."[8] And what made this possible was the concept and institution of ijtihād, the constantly renewed effort to reason the moral law, to examine at every turn and in every instance the dialectic between reason and reasons. In this tradition, reason was through and through unfailingly receptive to reasons.

3. Courses of Action

As we saw, Sharīa's moral bent was like a thorn in the side of colonialism in the Muslim world, a thorn that had to be extracted. Sharīa's decimation in the nineteenth century thus sums it all up: modernity and its state could not and cannot accept the Sharīa on its own terms because these terms are profoundly moral and egalitarian, whereas the state and the world that produced it relegated the moral to a subsidiary domain. To state the case minimally, colonialism's central domain was the economic and the political, not the moral. And so the economiccum-political remains as the central domain of modernity and its increasing globalization.

Yet despite the destructive effects of colonialism, historical Sharīa today remains, ever more forcefully, the locus of the central domain of the moral. While its institutions, hermeneutics, and personnel have all vanished without hope of return,[9] its moral effects persist with unwavering stubbornness. This moral system, a capital of immeasurable value, can sustain at least two courses

of action, one internal, the other external.[10]

First, in line with the central domain of the moral and its imperatives, Muslims can now begin-especially in light of the "Arab Spring"- to articulate and construct nascent forms of governance that would be in due course amenable to further and more robust development along the same lines. This would require nonconformist thinking and native imagination, because the social units that would make up the larger sociopolitical order must be rethought in terms of moral communities that need, among other things, to be reenchanted. Historical moral resources would provide a blueprint for a definition of what it means to engage with economics, education, private and public spheres and, most of all, the environment and the natural order. It would also provide for a concept of communal and individual rights, which would require a clear understanding of the shortcomings and strengths of the liberal order's concept of rights. An articulate position on rights is of the essence, as we will see momentarily. But internal, indigenous considerations of the community as the central domain of the moral would be the ultimate basis on which an evincive theory of antiuniversalism might be constructed, a theory that advocates the uniqueness of world societies but that also must summon up the intellectual stamina needed to provide a persuasive antidote to the dominating liberal concept of universalism. This initial but sustained process is therefore dialectical, moving back and forth between the constructive efforts of community building and a discursive negotiation with- and of-the modern state and its liberal values, *in both East and West*. As we will see, insisting on the second component of this dialectic is as essential as the steadfastness with which the first component-the raison d'être of the entire project-is pursued.[11] Such a steady and slowly evolving approach has the promise, if not the assurance, of initial success, avoiding (if not evading, thanks to its low-key programmatic) the forces we have identified in this book as antagonistic to and destructive of full-scale Islamic governance.

Second, during the long process of building nascent institutions- which would require a restatement of Sharīa rules and a reconceptualization of political community-Muslims and their intellectual and political elites can and must engage their Western counterparts with respect to the necessity of positioning the moral as the central domain, which would in turn require Muslims to develop a vocabulary that these interlocutors can understand, a vocabulary that, among other things, attends to the concept of rights within the context of the necessity to construct variants of the moral order befitting each society. Here, Muslims engaged in this process would be convinced and would expend the utmost intellectual energy in persuading others-including

Muslim liberals[12]-that universalism and a universalist theory of rights can have no fate but ultimate failure.

In other words, even during this initial process of building morally based communities, there is much that Muslims can do[13] to contribute to the reformation of modern moralities. Such a proposition may at first glance seem bold and far-fetched, but it is not, for there is at least one important moral strand of Western philosophical and political thought that exhibits a near identity with the current Islamic quest, providing intellectual energy to the postmodern critique, however problematically modern this critique remains. As we have seen, the moral quest of modern Islam, which reflects the continuing commitment of today's Muslims to the central domain of the moral, finds its equivalent in the slim yet resounding voices of the MacIntyres, Taylors, and (even liberal) Larmores of the Western world. But this resemblance, nay commonality, is neither coincidental nor fortuitous, because all these voices-Muslim and Christian, Eastern and Western-are responding to the same moral condition,[14] however much their respective vocabularies and idioms may differ from each other. The paramount questions therefore remain: Can these forces, on all sides, transcend their ethnocentricity and join ranks in the interrogation of the modern project and its state? Can the Taylors summon enough intellectual courage to become MacIntyres? Can they all, Western and non-Western, dismantle the pernicious myth of a clash of civilizations? Can they augment their moral power so as to bring about a victory that installs the moral as the central domain of world cultures, irrespective of "civilizational" variants? For, just as there can be no Islamic governance without such a victory, there will be no victory in the first place without modernity experiencing a moral awakening. This has yet to happen.

> *The political forms which may arise in truly post-Enlightenment cultures will be those that shelter and express diversity-that enable different cultures, some but by no means all or even most of which are dominated by liberal forms of life, different world-views and ways of life, to coexist in peace and harmony. For this to be a real historical possibility, however, certain conceptions and commitments that have been constitutive, not merely of the Enlightenment and so of modernity, but also, and more fundamentally, of the central traditions of Western civilization, must be amended, or abandoned. Certain conceptions, not only of morality but also of science, that are central elements in Enlightenment cultures must be given up. Certain understandings of religion, long-established in Western traditions, not as a vessel for a particular way of life but rather as the bearer*

> *of truths possessing universal authority, must be relinquished. The most fundamental Western commitment, the humanist conception of humankind as a privileged site of truth, which is expressed in Socratic inquiry and in Christian revelation, and which re-emerges in secular and naturalistic form in the Enlightenment project of human self-emancipation through the growth of knowledge, must be given up....*
>
> *It is in reaching a new relationship with our natural environment, with the earth and the other living things with which we share the earth, in which human subjectivity is not taken to be the measure of all things, that a turn in our inherited traditions of thought can be accomplished, which opens up the possibility of profoundly different forms of human community dwelling together on earth in peace.*[15]

Dwelling together on earth in peace is certainly a tall order, perhaps another modern Utopia, but subjecting modernity to a restructuring moral critique is the most essential requirement not only for the rise of Islamic governance but also for our material and spiritual survival. Islamic governance and Muslims have no monopoly over crisis.

Endnotes

1. A strong claim for state neutrality is made in An-Na'im, Islam and the Secular State, 1 and passim. If this claim-central and essential to An-Na'im's overall thesis-cannot be sustained, then that thesis must be reconsidered. Similarly, see Turabi's views (remaining no more than bare outlines) of an "Islamic state" that must not be wholly sovereign or even nationalistic. Euben and Zaman, Princeton Readings, 213-215.

2. For the metaphysical implications of syllogism and the theory of universals on which it rests, see Hallaq, Ibn Taymiyya Against the Greek Logicians. For a classic critique of Aristotelian metaphysics, see Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-Falāsifa.

3. Kahn, Putting Liberalism, 277 (obviously by now, Kahn's use of the term "state"-in a context in which the "state" is subordinated to a higher will- must be taken in a metaphorical sense). See also Scanlon, "Rights, Goals, and Fairness," 93.

4. Abou El Fadl, "Islam and the Challenge of Democratic Commitment," 69: "Effectively, a religious State law is a contradiction in terms. Either the law belongs to the State or it belongs to God, and as long as the law relies on the subjective agency of the State for its articulation and enforcement, any law enforced by the State is necessarily not God's law. Otherwise, we must be willing to admit that the failure of the law of the State is, in fact, the failure of God's law and, ultimately, God Himself. In Islamic theology, this possibility cannot be entertained." However, Abou El Fadl does not tease out the full implications of this penetrating insight, largely taking the modern state for granted.

5. Magill, "Beyond Powers and Branches," 605. See also Marshall, Consti- tutional Theory, 97, 124; Hansen, "Mixed Constitution," 509, and our discussion in chapter 2, section 1.

6. For the norms that must apply to any act, including one that is "neutral" (i.e., allowing for what we nowadays call personal/private choice), see Hallaq, History of Islamic Legal Theories, 40-42. It should be noted here that the private sphere in the modern state is left "unregulated" by a deliberate choice (or decision) of the state and not by virtue of the inherent autonomy of that sphere, for when the state decides that a matter in this domain must henceforth belong to the public sphere, there can be no criteria by which this decision is

judged other than that by the state's will, which, after all, is said to express popular sovereignty. Further on this latter point, see Asad, Genealogies of Religion, 200-208.

7. Murdoch, Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals, 350 (her emphasis); see also Strauss, "On the Spirit," 13.

8. The juristic manifestations of this maxim are explored in detail in Hallaq, Authority, Continuity, and Change.

9. 33. See Hallaq, "Can the Sharia Be Restored?"

10. Of course, much can be said in the way of proposing solutions to the challenges and problems this book raises, but an elaborate outline of such solutions would require writing another and much longer book.

11. A similar call, in a different contest, was issued in Massad's important work Desiring Arabs.

12. Although it is very likely that a paradigmatic shift in the Western liberal order will, almost automatically, weaken the Muslim and Arab liberal movement, perhaps to the point of collapse, for Islamic and Arab liberalism is a current that suffers from more profound contradictions and incoherence than even the Euro-American liberal order. For a general critique of the liberal order, see Nicolacopoulos, Radical Critique of Liberalism; Schmitt, Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy; MacIntyre, After Virtue; MacIntyre, Whose Justice?; Sandel, Liberalism and Its Critics; Gray, Enlightenment's Wake; Gray, Straw Dogs; Gray, Liberalism; Amin, Liberal Virus; Bell, "Communitarian Critique"; MacLean and Mills, Liberalism Reconsidered; Kahn, Putting Liberalism; Sprangens, Irony of Liberal Reason; and (from the Islamic reformist perspective) Haj, Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition, among countless others.

13. As already evident in the remarkable work of Ṭāha Abd al-Raḥmān, for instance. See the list of his works in the bibliography.

14. See chap. 4, n. 99.

15. Gray, Enlightenment's Wake, 153-155 (emphasis mine).

Rediscovering Religion and Secularism: A Critique of a Critique

Magid Shihade

In this paper, I will discuss some aspects of the academic critique of secularism, and some of its limitations. I will also discuss how this scholarly critique of secularism has frequently been used to defend symbolic and sometimes real repressive social norms within Muslim societies. This discussion is in the context of recent developments in the Arab world, where political Islamic movements whose interpretations of the past have the stamp of fantasy, call for a return to a "real," "non-secular," Islamic state. Both academic and Islamic political arguments base their analyses on false assumptions and evasions, historical and otherwise, I will also propose a possible political approach that does not see binaries among secularism and religion and both of these and politics, even from within Islamic history, and which will challenge certain assumptions in the academic scholarship that criticize secularism as a purely western discourse, and will also challenge political Islamic arguments for their refusal of secularism as a western imposition, thus denying a long tradition from within Islam that I term a secular approach to society and politics.

The critique of secularism is not a totally new phenomenon, as I will show in the following discussion, but has been taking place in the academy for years in the United States as well as elsewhere (Asad 2003, 2009, Connolly 1999, Mahmood 2005, 2006, 2012, Taylor 2007). The resulting demand is presented as a call for "openness," and also of "making space for those supposedly marginalized in the academy." Of course, this ignores the power of these religious groups in making their voice heard though television and radio stations, internet sites, newspapers and magazines and political representation, let alone in the academy itself. This call for "inclusion" and "openness" also ignores the fact that many institutions of higher education were specifically religious when founded and may continue to be so in their mission and practices. Hence, the call for opening space for religion and religious views comes only to enforce existing hegemonic forces; fundamentalist Christian

Zionists in the United States, and fundamentalist Islamists in the Arab world.[1] This call for "openness, tolerance, and dialogue," can also be part of what is called the "interfaith industry:" Rather than being about equality, this industry is about keeping hegemonic forces intact, while the inclusion of so called minorities are only an act of tokenism that keeps the real minority groups on the margin. Further silencing them by such an apparent inclusion does not transform the reality on the ground, where members of such a group remain under repression and surveillance at home and abroad.[2]

In the Palestinian context, in a series of talks around the question of secularism and religion (a binary itself) organized by the Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University, the call is to interrogate the apparent dichotomy between the official narrative of "liberal secular Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, and a religious authority in Gaza." Such a framing that represents the Palestinian Authority as representative of secularism and Hamas in Gaza as representative of religion is misleading. Rather than seeing them as the opposite of one another, one should see them as a continuum. Hamas uses religion primarily to gain public support, but also to control public space and vice-versa, and the PA, dominated by Fatah, uses religion as well to challenge Hamas hegemony over this issue (religion), competing on who is good/better Muslim, and thus reinforcing the dominant religion in the Palestinian society, rather than proposing an alternative. The public space in the West Bank (under PA rule) is largely conservative in most towns, cities, and villages, and only in a few places, like Ramallah, are there enclaves of liberal spaces. Birzeit University, for example, that was once the site and representative of what one might call secular nationalism is no longer as such. Last year, a prominent faculty member, Dr. Musa Budeiri, was under attack by student partisans of a relatively minor revanchist Islamist political party for posting on his door cartoons that are critical of social practices in Islamic society. Their protest was accompanied by anonymous physical threats posted on social media. Rather than being wholeheartedly supported by the academic community, he was criticized also by faculty members, although others offered support. Regrettably, his is not a singular case of challenge to academic freedom and freedom of expression: on occasion, university employees have not only opposed the invitation by faculty

1 I use the concept of the call for openness that enforces hegemonic forces from the discussion by Aditya Nigam in the Indian case, where the call for more space for Hinduism is explained as a call for more room for the already dominant identity in India (Nigam 2006).

2 Shihade, Magid. 2011. "Interfaith Industry." *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 40, 3, pp.123-125.

members of speakers that challenge social and religious taboos, but sabotaged these talks. Rather than taking a stand against this interference in academic freedom, some faculty members and officials provided further excuses for these employees. The effect is chilling: some departments continue to avoid discussing or bringing speakers to discuss issues that are considered taboo according to the conservative section of the society.

With the rise of political Islam to power in the region in the last several years, calls for the implementation of Shari' a came to the fore in many countries including in the Palestinian territories. The arguments to support such calls are many, including that "a real Islamic society must be run according to the Shar'ia and its interpretation," as well as the argument that secularism has had its time in the Arab world and failed to bring solutions to the political, social, and economic problems in the region so why not to let political Islam have its own course and find solutions for these problems. Of course these calls ignore the fact that many Arab countries already claim Islamic governance (such as Saudi Arabia, and others), and even those who were not considered Islamic (such as Egypt, Syria or Iraq)deployed Islamic rhetoric and practices,, and in some cases even encouraged political Islamic parties at the cost of liberal and left parties.

Such political use of religion sometimes draws on academic discourse that is critical of secularism, and thus, it is worth to reflect on some of the arguments made in these academic discourses before going further in discussing their limitations.

The Critique of Secularism

Among other aspects of his critique of the discourse of secularism, Talal Asad correctly pointed out the misuse and abuse of the term secularism itself, often politically motivated in the West, and how a discourse supporting secularism and its values has been often used to justify western intervention in the Muslim world. Nonetheless, many scholarly critiques of this secular discourse have frequently been used to defend symbolic and sometimes real repressive social norms within Muslim societies. Such defensive arguments against western interference in social norms have relied also on scholarly work that calls for "cultural sensitivity," rejection of "universalism," and similar arguments that often play into the Orientalist discourse about the Arab and Muslim world, and allow local functionaries more space to defend repressive measures that are imposed on the public, using excuses under the rhetoric of "Islamic or Arab authenticity." In the context of recent developments in the Arab world, this is also the line often used by political Islamic movements, who embody fantasies about a certain past calling for a return to a "real," "non-secular," Islamic state.

I argue that these academics and proponents of political movements base their analyses on false assumptions, and evasions, historical and otherwise. In the following sections, I shall discuss some of these assumptions and arguments with the aim of clarifying some of their limitations, false assumptions, and their evasions of concrete conditions on the ground, and ignorance of a long history in the Arab and Muslim world that challenges the arguments about the origins of secular approaches to social, economic, political, and other aspects of our lives.

The Critique of Secularism: Blind Spots

Among the arguments made by scholars critical of secularism is that the academy in the United States has been hostile to religion, and has been ignorant of the force of religious attachment in the lives of many members in the society (See, for example, Connolly 1999). Such arguments, as stated in the introduction, neglect several facts. One, to claim that the academy has been "secular" is to ignore the number of private institutions of higher education which are religious by their own definition. Even public universities are full of various religious groups and centers that serve the different religious communities. And there are also many academics that are religious and open to religion in their programs. Indeed, there are academics that are hostile to others who are not religious. In some academic settings, to be not religious impacts one's prospects for academic jobs. So, in short, to paint a picture of a "secular, anti-religious campuses" is misleading and not accurate.

Furthermore, as stated in the introduction, to argue for tolerance of religious diversity can also lead to making the dominant religion more hegemonic rather than allowing for equal standing of all beliefs (religious and otherwise). To be "open and tolerant" to religion in the U.S. can only lead to making the dominant and active Zionist Christians or born-again Christians have a more leading presence on campuses. To be "open and tolerant" to religion in a dominantly Islamic society such as in Palestine, can only lead to further making the Islamic religious groups more dominant on our campuses. In a sense, tolerance in such contexts can mean exclusion of minorities and dominance of the majorities.

It is thus important to differentiate between minority critiques of discrimination and intolerance, which Edward Said (1997, 2004) and Amir Mufti (1998, 2004), among others, undertook, and between a majority's perception of discrimination as claimed by Christian Zionists in the US, Hindu right wing groups in India, and Islamic political groups in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

Furthermore, we must not conflate between fighting against discrimination and racism in the West against Muslims, who have no political ambitions of taking over governments there, and Islamist groups in the Arab and Muslim world, who already are part of the dominant culture: clearly, what they are fighting for is different from Muslims' concerns in the West. In the context of the Arab and Muslim world, Islamist groups who already function within a Muslim hegemonic structure (which includes for example a requirement that a head of state ought to be Muslim) aim at using religion to compete with existing elites deploying the language of "true Islam" to take over power/governments, and in the process dominate the public space further. While in the West the issue is of tolerance and non-exclusion, in the Arab and Muslim worlds it is an issue of imposition and further hegemony of the public space and the political system.

Another important aspect of the critique of secularism is that it takes too lightly the analysis that secularism aimed in Europe/West at the separation of state and the church in order to make the church less powerful in leading or controlling the society and the state. The limitation of such an analysis lies in neglecting the historical context within Europe/West, in which secularism as a concept emerged in a continent that was plagued by religious wars and by the dominance of the church and religion The power of the church in politics had huge implications on individuals' rights (including property rights, and rights of death and life), controlling states and societies based on religious texts and revelations, and religious wars that left so much deaths and damage to these societies.

It is true that many of these western states are still truly not completely secular. But, there is a qualitative difference between the past where such states were subject to powerful dominance of the church, and between the present, where the church plays a less powerful role, Generally, about issues of war and peace, property rights, and peoples' life and death is not decided by a cleric, but by laws and regulations that are more or less transparent. Of course the democratic shifts in these societies can be critiqued for their limitations, imperfections, problems, hypocrisy, and racism against immigrants and marginalized groups, among other issues. But to target secularism as the main problem in these societies is to neglect larger questions of economic, social, and political implications.

In his critique of the discourse of secularism, Talal Asad, and rightly so, points to the misuse and abuse of the discourse of secularism in the West that has been often politically motivated and used as a tool for intervention in the Arab and

Islamic world.[3] Asad's critique is very important for it argues against the rhetoric of European modern secularism, where this discourse is used to show superiority vis-à-vis the Muslim world, and provides a justification for intervention/ interference in the Arab/Muslim world. This applies also to other discourses in the West such as the discourse on democracy or women's rights where such discourse have been exploited to wage wars against states and societies in the Arab and Muslim worlds (e.g. Afghanistan in 2001, and Iraq in 2003).

But, to limit the critique of the role of such discourse to external interventions is insufficient. A more astute insight, put forward by Laura Nader, can be more helpful. According to Nader, a discourse of women's rights in the Third World, deployed in the West from the position of superiority, has two effects; one external, that is intervention, and one internal, that such adiscourse suppresses the unequal reality of women in western societies, and limits the possibilities for more advances of women's rights within the West itself.[4]

Another important and missing issue in the secularism debate is around the issue of similarity-dissimilarity. As I suggested earlier in the paper, there is a difference between defending minorities in the West against anti-Muslim racism, racism that is directed against a minority that makes no political claims in that context, and between the context of such debate in the Arab and Muslims worlds. In the latter context, the issue is about a majority in an already largely hegemonic Islamic context to varying degrees in different states, and about a phenomenon of Islamic movements making political claims, and their attempts at more social control.

Thus, the critique of secularism by Asad and others should not be used to defend repressive symbolic as well as real reactionary and dictatorial practices in the Arab and Muslim world, whether by states or movements. Indeed, some of these movements were either the creation of colonial policies or were adopted by Muslims as a copycat of western religious movements and practices, none of which is really organic, pure or authentically Islamic in

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3 *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford University Press 2003.

4 Nader, Laura. (1989). "Orientalism, Occidentalism and the Control of Women". *Cultural Dynamics*, Issue 2; 323.

essence.[5] To defend wearing the hijab as exhibiting women's agency, neglects the religious and social pressures on many Muslim women, who continue to be held as a symbol of the purity of the society, and as a symbol of evil for patriarchal misogynist societies. And if there was a failure of secularism (of course ignoring the lack of secularism as such in the Arab world and the West alike) the answer must not be more "piety," or religiosity.[6]

Furthermore, in these studies, it is often neglected how many of these movements not only have been shaped by western modernity, but are a product of it, and often come to embody and repeat Orientalist representations of Arabs and Muslims as essentialized categories, frozen in time and space. It is in this context, that one may understand the reactionary attacks by crowds in Arab and Muslims countries whenever there is a cartoon, a book, or a film negatively depicting Islam. Such reactions and practices ought not be defended or justified. For those who participate in and or defend such reactions, the question is why there are no such reactions when Muslims' lives are slaughtered in the Arab and Muslim worlds? Why is it that a text or an image is more important than human lives?

Rather than accusing those who are critical of both western colonialism and Islamic fundamentalism or even presenting them as stooges of US imperialism,[7] one is better reminded of the role that the West played in propping up Islamic movements in Egypt, Pakistan, Syria, and Palestine in order to suppress nationalist and leftist currents in the region, as well as influencing Islamists'

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5 For example see Saba Mahmood, "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation." *Public Culture* 18:2, 2006, pp.323-342. Also, Talal Asad. "Free Speech, Blasphemy, and Secular Criticism", pp.20-63 in *Is Critique Secular*?, published by the Townsend Center for Humanities, Berkeley, CA, 2009.

6 For such views see; Sadaf Ahmad, *Transforming Faith: The Story of Al-Huda and Islamic Revivalism among Pakistani Women*, Syracuse University Press, 2009. Also, Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Princeton University Press, 2005.

7 In addition to the other sources I refer to in this paper, see the different posts by Mahmood at http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/author/smahmood/

ideology and practices.[8] Today, while many Western leaders and "experts" participate in dehumanizing Islam, thus justifying intervention, they are also contributing to supporting certain ideologies and practices of Islam, as they did with the Islamic movements they helped empower during the Cold War to undermine Arab and Third World nationalism. In Egypt, for example, the main focus of western powers is to keep Egypt loyal to the "peace" treaty with Israel, and not allow "extremists" to threaten the "security" of the Israeli colonial state. Such is also the case with western concerns and interventions in the rest of the region that mainly focused on maintaing the dependency of the region, and the hegemony and superiority of Israel, which fits well with supporting political Islam, as Samir Amin (2012) argues.[9]

And, it is worth reminding ourselves and others that Third World nationalism was never secular (in the French sense of being hostile to the church or to religion); not in Syria, in Iraq, or in Egypt. Rather, it respected religion, yet it also was not ready to be run over by imperialist accomplices who wanted to use Islam to takeover governments, while recreating a fantasy of and about the past of an "authentic Islamic state" that never existed. These forces thus never challenge the core capitalist and neoliberal economic principles of the West. These movements, using Samir Amin's term (cited earlier), are *islamgiyya* not Muslims, because they are using Islam as a tool for hegemony and control of our societies, not as a tool for economic, political, military, and epistemic liberation.

Bringing Back Edward Said and Secular Humanism

Furthermore, rather than critiquing Edward Said's advocacy of secular critique and secular humanism as elitist, one should not forget that these critics of Said are part of the elite that both enjoys privileges in the West and are also sheltered, by their elite position, from the repressive practices of different Islamic movements in the Arab and Muslim worlds whose immediate victims are the lower/poorer classes that cannot escape the public space that is dominated by these conservative forces. Rather than attacking Edward Said's secular humanism, it is rather important to give credit to Edward Said's contribution

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8 Richard Dreyfuss, *Devil's Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005. Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, "Terror: A Speech after 9/11." boundary 2, 31:2, 2004, pp.81-111.Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. Doubleday, 2004.

9 Amin, Samir (2012). "The Arab revolutions: a year after." *Interface: a journal for and about social movements*. Vol. 4, No1, May, pp. 33 – 42.

to the study of Islam, and his critique of Western representations of Islam, especially in *Orientalism and Covering Islam*, pioneering works that need to be acknowledged over and over again, as a reminder for those who think that their discourse is new in its defense against Islamophobia in the West.

It also important to stress that critics of western secularism and anti-Muslim discourse in the west seem to forget the *Question of Palestine* that was central to Said's work, and which is also central in understanding the agitations against Muslims in the West and elsewhere.[10] None of these critics, when critiquing Western discourse and practices about Islam, engage in the question of Palestine, which is central in analyzing the issue. A campaign of fear against Arabs and Muslims in Europe and the West is promoted by Zionist intellectuals and organizations.[11] One example is the linkage between the Danish cartoonist and Daniel Pipes and other pro-Israeli Zionists, who aim to frame the Palestine issue as that of Islam versus the rest or more specifically a religious issue,[12] rather than an issue of colonialism and racism. Thus, serious political issues are evaded by the critics of secularism.

Thus, Said's contribution, as well as others who are taking Said's work seriously and who aim at reviving Said's critical secularism, should not be maligned as promoting US imperialism, or designated as elitist,[13] for their work on humanist criticism, is not against religion but against repression, silencing, and exclusion of all people regardless of their location, ethnicity, religion or gender.[14]Works such as that of Amir Mufti (1998, 2004) who advance Said's concept of secular criticism as belonging to minority criticism that aims at challenging any form

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10 Matt Carr, "You are Entering Eurabia." *Race and Class*, 2006, Vol. 48. N. 1.

11 *Ibid*

12 http://www.aljazeera.net/news/pages/53ceec19-7976-493a-9b0d-922f8b3675eb?GoogleStatID=1 (Accessed on September 12, 2012. Also http://www.aljazeera.net/news/pages/4e700a0e-39b1-41be-b5d4-de41aadc2222 (Accessed on September 12, 2012).

13 Mahmood, and Asad, cited earlier. Said's central texts that seem to be neglected by these scholarly debates are: *Orientalism*. Vintage Books, 1979. Also, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. Vintage Books, 1997.

14 Edward Said, Secular Criticism: The World, the Text, and the Critic, Harvard University Press, 1983. Also, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. Columbia University Press, 2004.

of hegemony, exclusion, and repression,[15] is anti-colonial at its core, for it is not only challenges the Euro-centric approach to the concept and practices of secularism, but also aims at creating a new framework for societies to live/co-exist without any form of repression and exclusion.

Those who feel attacked by Western discourse and intervention in the region are justified to fight back, as many of us do, but not in a defensive way that blinds one to reality. This defensive approach, Ronald Judy argues, can contribute to collapsing Islam from a diverse faith, both in theory and in practice historically, to a set of rules and regulations that aim at making Islam singular in theory and practice,,[16]which fits well in the Western Orientalist discourse, including the Zionist discourse, about Islam and Muslims.

Such religious-political discourse in the name of Islam or in the defense of Islam is a colonial discourse, and the talk of establishing an Islamic state in Palestine, as elsewhere in the region, is a copycat of the Israeli Jewish colonial racist state, rather than a challenge to the Jewish colonial state in Palestine that was the creation of western imperialist power and continue to enjoy their support. Furthermore, while Wael Hallaq's (2013) argument about the incompatibility of Islam with the state, as the state is a modern western structure that has its own historical development, is convincing,[17] it is also true that this is the case with any religious state. It is not only impossible to combine Islam as a religion with the modern state structure, but it is also so for any religious state, because religion automatically excludes those who do not belong to the specific religion adopted by the dominant group in such a state.

Finally, in this regard, the critique of the state's tyranny is useful and needed. Yet, it doesn't mean that we end up with both-top-down state political and economic tyranny, and bottom-up religious and social tyranny. Following such a route, we will end up being squeezed between the tyrannies of both. This is not the solution, but it will make the situation much worse, and

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15 Amir Mufti, "Critical Secularism: A Reintroduction for Perilous Times." boundary 2, 31:2, 2004, pp. 1-9, or his "Auerbach in Istanbul: Edward Said, Secular Criticism and the Question of Minority Culture," *Critical Inquiry* 25:1, 1998, pp.95-125.

16 Ronald Judy, "The threat to Islamic humanity after 11 September, 2011." *Critical Inquiry* 45: 1-2, 2003, pp. 101-112.

17 Wael Hallaq. *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament*. Columbia University Press, 2013.

especially much worse for those who are less likely to have the means to create their own space, or to be mobile enough to escape the tyranny of the state, as elites do through their own elite local enclaves or their global mobility.

Debating Secularism: The Contribution of Ibn Khaldoun

There is a history of denial in the West of the contribution of Arab and Muslim thought, which was central to the making of the West and Europe.[18] While this denial is central to the making of western colonial racist hegemonic modernity,[19] it is important for those who are critical of this western racist modernity not to fall into its traps and binaries, or to evade taking seriously Arab and Islamic scholarship. The arguments critical of secularism, such as those noted earlier in this paper which present secularism as a modern western discourse, fall into the western denial of the contribution of other cultures to global knowledge. They thus buy into the dichotomy of European/western discourse on religion and secularism, as if such debates were purely the invention of the West, rather than being part of global development of thought and critique. In the Arab/Muslim world we have many examples of centuries of such debates; here I will limit myself to a brief examination of the work of Ibn Khaldoun on the subject, as a reminder of the history of such debates in the Arab and Muslim worlds that challenge these denials, binaries, and evasions.

In his discussion of the conditions for any community to survive and prosper, Ibn Khaldoun argues that religious texts and religious experts are not the source for the study of human history and its development, nor a source for decision making on social, economic, or political questions. These issues are of any society's concern, and rather must be tackled by rational thought . While allowing room for faith, scholars, according to Ibn Khaldoun must use their critical faculties to rationally tackle social, economic and political questions regarding humans' needs and conditions for survival and prosperity.

While a believer in Islam, Ibn Khaldoun based his argument on religious, historical, and material facts and argued that religion/faith is not the central issue for community's survival and prosperity, due to at least two important points. One reason is that since other cultures in the region before the coming

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18 Jonathan Lyons, *The House of Wisdom: How the Arabs Transformed Western Civilization*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009, and Gerard Delanty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, and Reality*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1995.

19 As argued in the different works of Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo, among others such as Jonathan Lyon, cited earlier.

of Islam managed to develop sophisticated social organizations (Egyptians, Mesopotamian, and other cultures), and since other groups in Ibn Khaldoun's time, belonging to other religions, including those who are in what we call today Asia, and whose numbers are much larger than Muslim, have managed to sustain continuous existence, survive, prosper, and develop sophisticated cultures, and since these societies do not belong to the so called monolithic religions nor specifically to Islam, than, his argument follows, religion and faith, in this case Islam, is not the primary condition for groups' survival and prosperity.

Ibn Khaldoun further argues, that even if one wishes to claim that religion/faith/Islam is the defining principle of how we ought to run the affairs of our societies, humans, including scholars, cannot do that because all believers admit that only God is all knowing, and his words revealed to the prophets cannot be understood by common human faculties. If there are some who have special abilities to communicate with God directly and know the meaning of his words, these are only the prophets, and there are not any longer prophets to know/interpret the Qur'an and directives from God on how to run the state. In his view, prophets are rare t, and since we are not prophets, we must look for our own rational human faculties to find solutions for our daily affairs, questions, and or problems.

Ibn Khaldoun argues further, that even those who assume they know what the Qur'an exactly says might be wrong, because there is a difference between a thought, and expressing that thought in speech or in writing, and the difficulty of how a listener or a reader might perceive the real meaning of that thought/idea expressed in speech or in a text. In other words, texts, the Qur'an included, cannot be understood by reading them in the same way they were intended or expressed by God and delivered to the community by the prophet, and each person/believer will have a difficulty in making his/her understanding a uniform one for others to follow. This is why, in addition to other reasons, there are many schools in each religion believing in the same text/God.

As a result of both arguments presented above, Ibn Khaldoun argues, rather than religious texts and religious experts, rational critical human mental faculties are needed to dealing with social, economic, and political conditions that are central to the survival and prosperity of the community, any community.

Rather than piety, or faith, according to Ibn Khaldoun, there are several conditions that are necessary for human societies to exist, survive and prosper. First, and here is the starting point, humans by nature are political. To survive and prosper, individuals need to exist in a community/collective for self-

protection and food. For that community to survive and prosper, there are several conditions but religion is not a necessary condition, although religion/faith/spirituality must not be excluded.

These conditions are many; including a reasonable governing system that treats the subjects of its rule with dignity and equality. Unjust and harsh governance leads to the alienation of the members of that society, resentments, and finally the system's downfall. Just societies must also treat the labor (mental and physical) of each individual justly, for if one's labor is abused, it leads to the laborer being discouraged and the collective would be under threat without the input of each individual member in it. To achieve and maintain a stable society that can survive and develop, attention must also be paid to education, for education is crucial to the development of mental and physical skills of individual members in the society. Also important is to guarantee personal and public health, as well as city planning that makes living possible and sustainable, for all these issues affect the ability of each individual to survive, develop, and contribute to the collective's survival and development. As the group/collective is best understood as a circle, once a link in it is broken, the circle ceases to exist. The political, social, economic, and philosophical analyses offered by Ibn Khaldoun point to the need for justice, equality, and solidarity, so that any human can live in dignity, without which one cannot be human, and without which not only the individual collapses, but the group/collective (the sum of individuals) collapses as well.

A consideration of Ibn Khaldoun's work, as well as other thinkers in Arab,Islamic and global history, exposes the fallacies of western modernity about the origin of rationality and secularism, and can also help us broaden these concepts in order not to fall into the trap of binaries of rational versus-non-rational, or secular-non-secular, or even the myth of origins. What if the critics of secularism discussed in this paper take into account the argument presented by Ibn Khaldoun here? What if political Islamic groups in the region take into account the knowledge and heritage of thought that Islamic societies produced such as that of Ibn Khaldoun? How much sense would the argument of both (scholars critical of secularism and Islamic political activists on the ground) make after taking into consideration Ibn Khaldoun's ideas? Would they still be relevant?

Conclusion

I have tried to discuss the arguments made by critics of secularism and show their limitations. The arguments by these critics, as I have demonstrated, are based on false assumptions, evasions, and binaries that obscure historical

realities of societies in the West ,as well as those in the Arab and Muslim world. Their critiques of secularism are also used to defend reactionary practices and groups in the Arab and Muslim worlds, and finally as a tool to in the arsenal of those who call for Islamic states in the region.

Regardless of the issue of whether there was ever an Islamic state, or whether Islam or any other religion can fit with the structure/concept of the state, the issue today is whether religious doctrine should be imposed on any state foundation or structure,, In our region the issue is about Islam, and whether Palestinians, should support such an approach.

While in the past if a person or a group of people were not happy with a certain theological doctrine imposed by a ruler, the person or group was often able to change their place of residence with much more ease than today, and live somewhere else where they are more dignified, content or happy. Today, within the framework of the nation state that dominates the world system, and the only possible/available one to us at the moment, one cannot easily cross borders and change residence, and Palestinians must be more attuned to this issue than anyone else, sincee Israeli settler colonial rule since 1948 has made most refugees, and the rest under a system of repression, and restriction. This Palestinian experience should an important factor in the way Palestinians envision a possible future state that does not duplicate the racist Jewish state's ideology and or practices.

Again, one should emphasize here that much of the discourse about Islam in the West obscures the issue of Palestine, including that of critics of the discourse of secularism. This is because the Palestine question is not a religious question, but a question of dignity, equality, and justice.

Furthermore, regarding the question of Palestine and western discourse of secularism, we also need to keep in mind how the West continues to support Israel despite Israel's religious nature as a state and society, built on a supremacist Jewish world-view, and supremacist racist practices against Christian and Muslim Palestinians since before its inception in 1948, continuing this day. Here again, Palestine can be a test for the rhetoric of justice, human rights, dignity, and secularism and tolerance. But the opposition to Jewish racist supremacy in Palestine must also include an opposition to any other supremacy. One should not mirror and replicate western rigidity and intolerance, especially that Arabs and Muslims pride themselves ona civilization/culture with a long history of tolerance. But that the past might have been tolerant compared to the other histories of other monolithic religions where difference was not accepted, one cannot

ignore the historical developments of human societies. What was accepted in the past, and even favored as relatively tolerant governance, cannot be duplicated today, where the equality of all groups and individuals must be the norm and the goal, and no hierarchy of existence can be tolerat.d as was the case in the past.

Another important issue in my "critique of the critique" of secularism is that these critics of secularism have assumed that this discussion was purely an European/Western invention, ignoring the history of the discussions of such issues in the Arab/Islamic history. As Enrique Dussel, among others, argues .much of western modernity's claims of new knowledge are in fact not new but emerge from, or can also be found in, Arab and Islamic sources, as well as in the contributions of many other cultures. We thus need to re-conceptualize knowledge to include non-Western philosophy and thought in order to reshape knowledge about ourselves, for us, and for others, and where knowledge must aim at liberation, dignity, equality, and the well-being of all members of our societies, not the few.[20]

The aim of the paper is also, in part, to critique what has become known as political Islam in our region, that aims at organizing our societies socially and politically according to an interpretive fantasy about an Islamic state in the past, to which we must return in order to 'develop,' and even become a global dominant force, and requiring that we return to some original text or religion in its pure form.

In the current context, we are speaking in light of developing events in the region, and the growing and dominant discourse of religion, especially the argument about the lack of contradiction between religion/Islam and the state at this time of human history, and in light of the revolutions and changes in the region, Here we see that what is called political Islam has managed to partly coopt these revolutions/changes after it collaborated and lived with colonization and dictatorships.

In such arguments, both the past and the present is misrepresented, and hence a better future is not possible, for only if we study the past without silencing many aspects of it, and if we study the causes of current problems, can we learn where to look for a better future. As for the imagined past, it is correct to argue that there was never an Islamic state in the modern

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20 Enrique Dussel. *Philosophy of Liberation*. New York: Wiqf & Stick Publisher, 2003. Also, T*he Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "the Other" and the Myth of Modernity*. Continuum International Publishing Group, 1995.

sense of the state. In these arguments in the present, the reasons for the current situation in the Arab world, which are political, economic, social, and epistemological/intellectual are absent. Also unacknowledged is the divisiveness in each society in the region, societies that are also plagued by racism and exclusion.

As for the future, is it something that will never be if we continue to be trapped by these binaries, illusions, and evasions; because the reasons for our current miserable situation is not found in religion or religious texts but rather, as Ibn Khaldoun argued, in social, economic, and political conditions, and this future cannot be realized by coercion, exclusion or repression, whether exercised by colonial and neocolonial structures, authoritarian rule or represented in fundamentalist reactionary Islamic discourse.

It is also important to stress that there is a binary in western modernist thought that leaves no room for the non-material world. Thinking through Ibn Khaldoun, among many other Arab and Islamic thinkers as well as among many contemporary thinkers worldwide who are critical of western modernity, we find that they did not fall into the trap of the binary between the material and non-material, and thus offer a way out of the materialist repressive western capitalist structure. In Ibn Khaldoun's view, humans are concerned with both their material and spiritual needs, and desires. These cannot be satisfied only through mechanical formulas for "progress," which is a term he does not specifically use, but by necessary material things to live on and to enjoy, as well as meeting needs in spirituality or the non-material sphere (psychological). But in the long run, in order to maintain and develop any society, political, social, economic, and environmental issues must be the core of our analysis, as explained earlier. Ibn Khaldoun is anything but a naïve humanist thinker; he, like many others, stresses moderation, and warns against extremes that will bring the dialectic of forces, the negations, to the point of collapse. Justice for him is not necessarily an absolute category, but some measure of justice is needed for any human to survive and produce.

By drawing on Ibn Khaldoun I attempt here to show that we had many pasts from which we can draw inspirations and ideas, that we can and need to develop further to fit our historical time. History is not static, and must always develop in a way that makes more room for people, and in which we work to making our lives more just for everyone. Finally, one is not against religion as such, but against the use of religion in the modern political context of states and societies in a way that cannot but exclude,

and produce inequality not only between one religion and another, but also between good Muslims and bad Muslims, This can only lead to the exclusion of the self in the end, and the destruction of the collective. Islam, and other religions, could serve us in ideas and concepts about justice, equality, and freedom, along with other humanistic perspectives.

As Palestinians, we must, while opposing Jewish supremacy in Palestine, also oppose any supremacy and exclusionary systems anywhere, and not replace it here in Palestine with Islamic or any other supremacy. Such a system, no matter who is in power cannot be defended ethically or religiously. It is a system that is built on oppression and injustice, and cannot be sustained in the long run.

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The Arabs before Islam: A Refutation of a Prevailing Perception

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This study critically examines the dominant trend of past and contemporary Arab research on Arabs before Islam. The aim is to show the impact of scholars' preconceptions on their research and on consolidating a prevalent conception of Arabs. This conception is based on the assumption that Arabs were capable neither of producing thought nor of engaging in any philosophical abstraction. Our study, therefore, aims, to show the contradictions between the theoretical frameworks utilized by these researchers, and their explanations for what they discover and find about Arabs. Moreover our study endeavors to demonstrate not only the richness of the Arabic language and its subsequent capacity to serve as an epistemological tool capable of describing the early Arabs' understanding of nature and of the necessary survival skills for life in the desert, but also their ability to accurately interpret their social and cultural life.

Introduction

In this paper Arabs are defined as those who lived in Arabia before the rise of Islam although we intend to examine opinions that addressed Arabs in general, both before and after the rise of Islam. This broad view will shed light on how even the most thoughtful of researchers dealt with historical data on Arabs that proved to be incompatible with their thoughts and beliefs. Our intention is to show how historical data, regardless of its nature and degree, failed to alter these researchers' presumptions about Arabs in the pre-Islamic 'Jahiliyya' period who, they insist, had nothing of any scientific nature to be proud of except

their "linguistics, their language provisions and the writing of speeches"[1] Such presumptions were supported by the most thorough of researchers such as Tarabishi who asserted that "despite some information about books that were in circulation amongst pre-Islamic Arabs, we must state that the only prose that was known amongst the Arabs of the 'Jahiliyya' period was the writing of aphorisms and maxims, and the rhymed prose of Kahan which is close in its structure to poetry"[2]. The results of studies on Arabs were therefore in harmony with these ideas, and to be precise these a *priori* judgments constitute one of the main factors determining researchers' understanding, analysis, and interpretation of available historical evidence on Arabs. This subsequently deepened the researchers' a *priori* judgments on Arabs and in turn confirmed the assumption that the intellectual sources of Arab-Islamic philosophy had nothing to do with Arabs but were Greek in origin and root.

Such an approach to study Arabs is not an exception[3]. But what is striking here is the exceptionalism of such an approach, whichexcludes Arabs from any theoretical explanations deployed in studying other peoples. Even worse, some scholars and researchers went so far as to suggest that Arabs do not constitute a people. **Al-Shahrastani**, for instance, who lived in the fifth century AH, insisted that God has not granted Arabs anything from the scienceof philosophy, "nor has He prepared them to take care of philosophy or think philosophically"[4]. It is important to note here that if it were not for the prevalence of such a *priori* ideas on Arabs, their characteristics and ways of thinking would have become known a long time ago. We mean to say that these a *priori* judgments,

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1 Al-Jabiri, Momammad 'Abed, The Formation of Arab Reason (in Arabic), Beirut, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies and the Group for Arab Studies, and History and Society, 1991, p. 88.

2 Tarabishi, George, The Critique of the Critique of Arab Reason, the Problematic of Arab Reason (in Arabic), Beirut, Al-Saqi Books, 1998, p. 180.

3 This is an issue that Thomas Kuhn discusses in his book The Structure of Scientific Revolution, 1962 where he makes reference to the impact of the size of the belief of scientists of a specific scientific theory, not only on their understanding of the results of their researches, but on the scientific experiment in its entirety. Look also at Thomus Kuhn, "Logic of Discovery or Psychology of Research" in Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge, Edited by Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp.1-23.

4 Al-Shahrastani, Abe al-Fath 'Abd -Alkarim Ibn Abe Bakr. al-Milal wal Nihal, edited by Mohammad al-Wakeel, Cairo, al-Halabi Institute, 1968, p.1 and p. 10

constituted, and still continue to constitute one of the more important reasons behind the continued ignorance of what Arabs were capable of scientifically and intellectually and the spread of knowledge among Arabs before the rise of Islam.

Hence, the main theoretical assumption of our research is that Arabs are like other peoples and what can be applied to the study of others can be applied to them. We do not however mean by this that either Arabs or other peoples do not have their own particular idiosyncrasies. What we mean is that theories, in the various ways they have applied to other peoples, are also applicable to Arabs. So if it is possible to adopt theories that connect living conditions and human activity to explain the behavior and knowledge of other peoples, then it should be possible to use the same theories to explain the behavior and knowledge of Arabs. And if the maturity of thought and the breadth of knowledge among peoples are associated with the maturity of their language, then that should also be true with regards to Arabs.

The Boundaries of the Position

The belief in the ignorance of Arabs, especially the naivety of the Bedouin, constitutes the starting point of a deep-rooted certainty for most researchers, including Arab researchers, especially when it comes to studying Arabs before the rise of Islam. Ignorance and naivety are considered to be the attributes of Bedouin Arabs, or the ignorance and naivety of Arabs is attributed to Bedouin ignorance and naivety. So while, on one hand, ignorance and naivety were attributed to Arab nomadism (*al-Badawa al-'Arabiyya*), on the other hand, the ignorance and naivety of Arabs were used as a basis for judging Arabs. Some researchers went so far to pass the judgment that "the main general cultural features characteristic of what can be named or called (Arab mentality) are features, no matter how different the judgments and opinions on these features are, that can be characterized in the last analysis as: a pragmatic culture void of any deep theoretical and philosophical tendency and does not in consequence accept the idea of overlapping and intermingling between the Gods and humans"[5]. **Zeidan** makes such a statement without giving an explanation that is consistent with the size and seriousness of such a judgment, as if the indication of pragmatic thinking among Arabs is enough to deny their ability to be creative and innovative and to be able to engage deeply in philosophical theorization. In contrast, **Israel Wolfson** states, for instance, that the Canaanites, because of their material mentality and earthly focus, invented what they invented and

5 Zeidan, Yusef, Arab Theology and the Origins of Religious Violence (in Arabic), Cairo, al-Shurouq Publishing House, 2010, p. 87.

created what they created. They were the ones who "invented the ship and found ways to make glass and set-up the system of arithmetic. They were the ones who invented the reduced alphabet of writing that was made up of cuneiform and hieroglyph symbols. So no wonder that the Canaanite inscription or writing has become the basis for the development of all inscriptions in the civilized world in the East and West"[6]. In fact the Canaanites and Phonecians, with their material mentality, are attributed with the invention of "purple as a color as well as atomic theories"[7]. Even more than that if we accept the opinion of Glazer, as cited by Wolfson, that the term "Ma'in Misran", which was mentioned in "Egyptian writings, refers to Ma'inite Butoun (sections of a tribe) that were found in Egypt and were expelled out of it…and that these Ma'in tribes were themselves the Semitic tribes which conquered Egypt and ruled it for centuries and were known thereafter as the Chaso or the Hyksos"[8], these tribes, which were one of the greatest Arab tribes "that ruled some of the countries located in the Northern part of the Arabian peninsula for a long period of time"[9], would then be the ones which introduced the chariot and the sword to Egypt and also introduced the alphabet to the Greeks, something which **Bernal** believes must have taken place prior to 1400 BC[10].

As for the claim of their refusal to accept the idea of overlapping and intermingling between the gods and the humans, **al-Ma'rri** states in his letter that the Arabs did not "during the Jahiliyya period venture into these great mistakes and those issues that were erroneous, but their minds tended to follow or adopt the opinions of the wise and those books written by their predecessors, especially given that most philosophers did not believe in any prophet and they thus used to consider those who believed in any one to be an idiot"[11]. That is, the lack of belief of Arabs in the idea of prophecy or the idea of intermingling

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6 Wolfson, Israel, The History of Semitic Languages (in Arabic), Beirut, al-Qalam Publishing House, 1980, p. 52.

7 Maisel, John, The History of Phoenician and Canaanite Civilization (translated to Arabic by Ruba al-Khash, al-Ladhiqiyya, al-Hiwar Publishing House, p. 17.

8 Wolfson, Israel, p. 176.

9 Ibid. p.177.

10 Bernal, Martin, Black Athena (in Arabic), Edited by Ahmad Othman, Cairo, The Higher Council for Culture, 2002, p. 190.

11 Al-Ma'rri, Abi al-'Ala', Letter of Forgiveness (Risalat-al-Ghoufran), edited by 'Aisha 'Abd al-Rahman (Bint al-Shate'), Cairo, Dar al-Ma'aref, Taa 9, 440.

and overlapping between the gods and humans stems, in their opinion, from the fact that the idea in itself is ridiculous. With such an opinion, they were similar to many pagans to whom Christianity seemed as "a barbaric ideology and the Christian God to be harmful or primitive who intervenes in an irrational way in human affairs, and that there is nothing in the Christian God which is common to the God of philosophers who is not subject to change and who is distant as the God of Aristotle"[12].

Yousef Zeidan's assumption of the ignorance and naivety of Arabs is not an exception, nor is his willingness to judge them without backing up such judgment with evidence, despite the fact that there are enough sources that show that his judgment is unsound and thus incorrect. Furthermore, even if many sources used in his field seem to suggest conclusions different from his position and opinions, for him all such sources are without any value and thus there is no need to agree with them or even to assume that they really exist. Another example of such an approach is that of **'Azzeh Hassan**, who states, in his introduction to **Ibn al-Ajdabi's** book, without any attempt on his part to back up his argument, that "the knowledge of Arabs during the Jahiliyya period about the subject of al-Azmina wal-Anwaa (the stars, when they are in a state of gradual disappearance) was a pragmatic knowledge, and was based on continuous experimentation and observation throughout the years and was not a result of any rational induction or scientific research because they were ignorant of mathematics and geometry"[13].

Al-Jahiz mentions a story narrated by **al-Yaqtari**, about an Arab Bedouin who was describing "to a group of inhabitants in the city, a*l-Anwaa and al-Ihtida*' stars and the stars of the hours of the night and **al-Su'oud** (stars that bring happiness) *wal-Nuhous* (and stars that bring bad luck). A man said to an '**Abadi Sheikh** (an 'Abadi inhabitant) who was present : "don't you see how knowledgeable this nomadic Arab is of the stars which we really don't know enough about! He answered: Woe unto your mother, who wouldn't know the branches of his house?"[14]

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12 Armstrong, Karen, God and the Human Being over 4000 years from Ibrahim al-Khalil until the Current Age, translated by Muhammad al-Jiwara, Damascus, Dar al-Hasad, 1996, 104.

13 In: '"Azzeh, Hassan, Ibn al-Ajjdabi, Abi Ishaq Ibrahim Ibn Ismail, al-Azmina and al-Anwaa, edited by 'Azzeh, Hassan, Dar Abi Raqraq, 2006, p.11.

14 Al-Jahiz, Abi Othman 'Amro Bin Bahr, Al-Haywan (the Animal), edited by "Abd al-Salam Haron, 2nd Edition, vol.6, Cairo, Mustafa al-Babi Al-Halabi Publishing House, p. 31.

In order to be able to examine the extent to which the description given by al-Sheikh al-'Abadi of the Arab Bedouin's relationship to and knowledge of the stars was accurate, it is necessary to look at the other areas of knowledge of Arab Bedouins, especially those that have to do with the natural world, including the stars.

Arabs not only distinguished between the four seasons, as four conditions that nature passes through during its cycle, but also divided every one of the four seasons into periods in accordance with various conditions. "Each time-period was named by the name of the type of rain that fell during that time. So that the first three time-periods of winter is named *al-Wasmi*, then the winter, then the spring and all are winter. And the first time-periods of the summer were named *al-Sayf* (with shad-da on the yaa), then *al-hamim*, then the fall and all are *Sayf* (summer)"[15]. They even made a distinction between the conditions of rain and their characteristics, starting systematically with weak rain and then going through all other types of rain[16]. The months of the year came to refer to what characterizes nature in each period of that season, and they then distinguished between ten weather conditions within the month, which means that the fractionalization of the year into its various components matched the natural conditions at different times.

Accordingly, and in the context of the linguistic activity of the Arabs, we need to understand the immobility or stability of the months in the year before the rise of Islam, where the *Nasee'* (the act of delaying the start of the year) was implemented to maintain their stability and seasonal times in relation to the conditions of nature. Thus, the names of the months were connected to the natural conditions in every month of the year. Accordingly, "their winter would begin in Jamadi the first and Jamadi the last. Water would freeze during these two months and that was the reason why they gave them these names"[17]. Their summer would start during Ramadan, due to extreme heat during this period of the year. Arabs not only set forth in detail the weather conditions

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15 Ibn al-Ajdabi, Al-Azmina wal-Anwaa, p.95.

16 There is no need here to list the names of rain, and they are 29, in addition to the weak types of rain (look at al-Tha'labi, Abi Mansour 'Abd al-Malik Bin Mohammad, Fiqh al-Lugha wa Asrar al-'Arabiya (The Jurisprudence of Law and the Secrets of Arabic), edited by Yaseen al-Ayyoubi, Beirut, al-Maktaba al-'Asriyya, 2000, p. 303). It's enough to indicate here to the Arabs knowledge activity in everything that had to do with al-Anwaa and Al-Azmina.

17 Al-Asfahani, Abi al-Qasem al-Hasan Bin Mohammad, Al-Azmina wal-Amkina, Haidar Abad, Dar al-Ma'aref, 1332, AH, vol.1, p. 86.

of each month, but, in addition to these names, there were other names for Arab months, like for instance *al-Mu'tamir* (meaning ordering), *wal-Najer wa-Khawwan* and they all refer to either the weather conditions or to the activities to be carried in every month. So *al-Mu'tamir* "means to order everything which the year brings and needs to be accomplished"[18]. And they would name "the two months of winter the months of *Qammah* … because the camels would raise their heads when they were close to the water due to the severity of its coldness and so *al-Ibl al Qimah* (the camels raising their heads)… and they would give the name for the months of *Qaith*, due to the severity of heat, the months of *Najer*. And this is due to the fact that the camels would drink, and they could hardly quench their thirst. So *al-Najr* and *al-Baghr* are converging, and this means to drink but without quenching one's thirst"[19].

Additionally, every three nights had a special name. "So the first three were given the name: *Gharar*, and the second three: *Nafal*, for the *Gharar* is the origin and *Nafal* was just an addition. The third three: *Bouhron*, where the moon light is predominant in comparison to that of the stars, and the fourth were *Zouhron* due to their whiteness, and the fifth *Beedon* (white) due to the fact that the moon appears from the beginning till the end of the night. The sixth set of three was called *Dura'on* due to the predominance of blackness in the beginning of the night and to its whiteness thereafter, the seventh was called *Thulmun* due to the prevalence of complete darkness, the eighth *Hanadisu* due to the intensity of their blackness, the ninth *Mihaqun* due to brightness of the crescent, and the tenth *al-Da'da*', meaning the intensity of darkness, where the moon would be completely hidden for a night or two so it couldn't be seen in the early morning or in the evening. Finally, the twenty eighth night is named *al-Da'jaa*, and the twenty ninth *al-Dahma*' and the thirtieth *al-Laylaa*. Together this final set of three was called *al-Da'da*"[20].

The fractionalization of the year to its components, the categorization of natural changes and the distinction between the natural cycles, were some of the methods Arabs used to relate to the desert so as to be in control of their lives. The Arab's seasons, for instance, "such as the pilgrimage season and that of the big markets were facets of civilization in the age of Jahiliyya. It was not enough for the time periods of seasons to be known, including

18 Al-Bayrouni, Abi al-Rihan Mohammad Bin Ahmad, Al-Athar al-Baqiyya Min al-Quroun al-Khaliya, Cairo, Maktabat al-Thaqafa al-Diniyya, 2008, p. 60.

19 Ibn Qutaiba, Abi Mohammad Abdullah Bin Muslim, 276, AH, al-Anwaa fi Mawasem al-Arab, Baghdad, al-Shuun al-Thaqafiyya Al-'Amat, 1998, pp.109-110.

20 Ibn al-Ajdabi, Azmina wal Anwaa, p.85 and p. 87.

the days when they began and ended, but it was also necessary to set steady units of measurement that did not rotate in time like the rotation of the months of the lunar year, which sometimes occurred in the winter, at times in the summer, sometimes in the spring, and at other times in the fall… The Arabs during the Jahiliyya used to have more days inserted 'intercalary', so as to set fixed times for their seasons. They called these days '*al-Nasee*', meaning delaying"[21]

The categorization and distinction of the conditions of life in accordance to the conditions of nature and the act of giving these categories names was a way of linking nature with social behavior. It was, in fact, an act of taking nature into the social-spatial space in order to ensure the Arabs' ability to be in control of their lives. They used language to do all of this, a process that wouldn't have been possible if language hadn't reached the proper stage of maturity.

If language, as Jerar Jihami says, is: "an active principle that imposes on thought a number of various distinctions and subjective values, and this what converts the system of each language to a diverse repository of inherited experiences of successive generations"[22], then the act of naming, being part of the activity of language, should thus be part of such repository. Describing naming this way reveals its connection to the inherited experiences of successive generations and to the nature of the relationship between the producers of language and their environment. But naming is also an activity which is indicative of the limits and nature of the Arabs' knowledge of their environment. The act of naming, as an act of abstraction, is an act of distinction which makes something what it is and separates it from the other. Namely it is an act of categorization of beings and phenomena and a way to distinguish between them and thus the act is indicative of the nature of cognition and the type of knowledge. By this we can say that as the abstractions of language multiply and are able to categorize and account for a larger and larger number of beings and phenomena, then the knowledge of nature also reaches a mature state of development. Also, as names multiply, like for instance the multiple names Arabs have for rain, knowledge becomes deeper and clearer. When naming multiplies and increases, the transmission of information, becomes easier and faster. The descriptive transmission of information technically needs a larger

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21 Hamour, Urfan Mohammad, Seasons and the Calculation of Time amongst the Arabs before Islam (in Arabic), Beirut, Muassat al-Rihab al-Haditha, 2000, pp. 9-10.

22 Jihami, Jerar, The Linguistic Problematic in Arab Philosophy, Beirut, al-Maktabeh al-Phalsaphia, 1986, p. 1.

number of words and more descriptive expressions. And as the transmission of information becomes easier, the possibility of its dissemination and accumulation becomes greater.

So, looking at the periods before and after the rise of Islam, as far as language is concerned, we can say that the roots of this naming activity can be attributed to the pre-Islamic Arabs. What is implied here is not what al-Farabi meant in his statement that "the populace and the masses preceded those who had specific specializations, and the common knowledge which was representative of the opinions of all preceded in time the practical industry and the knowledge which has a specific relationship with these industries, and all of these are public knowledge."[23] Instead, language itself was the project of the Arabs and one of their overriding obsessions before the arrival of Islam. The same was with their pursuit of knowledge.

The Elusiveness of Language

"Every meaning for al-'Ajam (the foreign), is a result of deep thought and diligent opinion and extended seclusion and consultation and cooperation, and also the result of prolonged thinking and the study of books, and the story of the second is the knowledge of the first, and the addition of the third is the knowledge of the second, until the fruits of that thought culminated with the last. While everything for Arabs is but the result of intuition and improvisation, as if it is an inspiration, and as such they have no difficulty or endurance in producing thought nor do they need to think long or beg for help for their thoughts… for they are able and capable of being eloquent and of occupying a lofty position in rhetoric, and their orators can deliver wonderful speeches for their words come easy and in convenience… " [24]

Al-Jabiri interprets this quote by stating that **al-Jahiz**, though not being careful, takes away from Arabs "the ability to be rational" meaning the ability to infer and to use reason in making judgments. According to **al-Jahiz**, the principal constituent of "the Arab mind" is intuition and improvisation, and by this he means that the Arab is quick in "understanding" things and not hesitant in making judgments. It follows that the normative view sees Arabs

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23 Al-Farabi, Abu Nasr, Al-Hurouf (Characters), edited by Muhsin Mahdi, Beirut, Dar-Al-Shourok, 1986, p. 134.

24 Al-Jahiz, Abu Uthman Amr ibn Bahr al-Kinani al-Basri, Al-Bayan wal-Tabyeen (Eloquence and Demonstration), corroborated by 'Abd Al-Salam Haron, Cairo, Al-Khaniji Bookstore, 1998, vol. 3, p. 28.

as having instantaneous reactions to their surroundings, in contrast to the objective view which is based on "suffering, endurance and contemplation". In other words, it is the suffering, endurance and contemplation of reason in its pursuit of knowledge. According to **al-Jahiz**, these tenets of "reason" are found only amongst *al-'Ajam* (non-Arabs or foreigners) such as the Persians and the Greeks"][25]

Before we examine **Al-Jabiri's** interpretation of **Al-Jahiz'** position, we need to clarify the meaning of "*Fitra*" (innate) and "*Badaha*"(intuition) in the Arabic language so as to make clear whether **Al-Jahiz** really belittles or takes away from Arabs their ability to rationalize, though without intending to do so.

Fitra bil-kasra (the vowel kasr below the letter fa), is what God has given to his creatures from His knowledge and it means initiation and invention. And *fatara bil-fatha* (the vowel fatha on the top of the letter fa) means to crack a thing and *tafatara* means cracking or breaking something. (*Lisan al-'Arab, "Fa, Tah, Ra*a). Each of the two above meanings reinforces the other. Cracking means the cracking of something in itself into two parts, and if language for the Arabs comes by *fitra* (i.e. it is innate), then language is its other part (the other part of innate, or fitra). But what fitra *bil-kasra* means is that language for Arabs, is succinct in expression and eloquent, and it begins with the Arab and it is his own invention. If we look at the meaning of *badaha* (intuition), we will find that its meaning is not that different from the second meaning of fitra (innate) which is the first of everything and it is what emanates from it (Lisan al-'Arab, Ba, Dal, Ha). Based on this understanding, **Al-Jahiz** expressed his position towards the relationship of Arabs with language, which in turn means that **Al-Jabiri's** interpretation of **Al-Jahiz'** opinion of Arabs and their utilization of their language to be a negation of their ability to rationalize, entails projecting and imposing on **Al-Jahiz'** text that which cannot possibly be a part of it. This means that it is an interpretation that relies on **al-Jabiri's** preference for reason over *al-badaha wal-fitra* (intuition and innate).

When **Al-Jahiz** compares between the relationship of the Arab and *Al-'Ajami* (the Persian and the Greek) to language, he does not favor or prefer reason over *al-Badaha*, even though we may feel the existence of admiration and appreciation on his part of the relationship of the Arab with his linguistic activity, but he talks about two different paths, and in fact about two different faculties used for this same activity; **the Arabs use fitra and badaha** while **Al-'Ajami (the Persian and the Greek) use hard work and endurance**. This

25 Al-Jabiri, Muhammad 'Abed, The Formation of Arab Reason (in Arabic), p.32

subsequently means that **Al-Jahiz** did not negate, and it is not possible for us to conclude from his words that Arabs did not or could not use their reason (mind) in the production of language. Instead he argues that they were not in need of much effort, endurance and hard work to conduct this type of activity.

So if Arabs were already successfully developing a rich language, why should they then relate to it in a different way, in a way where they should exert more much effort and engage in hard work? Or should the Arabs have taken the paths of the Greeks, regardless of their success, in order to have the recognition and appreciation they deserved for their intellectual activity and language production?

We need here to make reference to the fact that al-Jabiri's association of subjectivity with *al-Badaha* and *Fitra*, and his association of objectivity with reason, which he argues comes from hard work, real effort, and endurance, lacks distinction, comparison, and scientific caution. Thus, not every activity of reason can be described as objective, even though it involves a lot of effort, hard work, and endurance. And when we talk about the production of language by itself, there is no place to discuss the objectivity of reason, due to the fact that objectivity is associated with the discussion of truth. Thus **Al-Kindi**, following Aristotle[26], defines truthfulness as "the positive statement of what is and the negative statement of what is not; and it is also either to prove what a thing is not or to negate a thing of a thing that is for it"[27]

That is to say that objectivity as a concept has to do with the relationship of language with reality, after its production and formulation, and does not come as a result of the process of production and formulation. And if the discussion is about the production of literature, regardless of its nature, then objectivity has no relationship with language even after its production and formulation for the mere fact that a definitive statement, as **Al-Farabi** states, is "when a judgment is passed or made on a statement, it will be truthful or untruthful in its structure and in in itself and not by mere accident."[28] As such the production of literature cannot be considered to fall within the realm of

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26 Aristotle, The Complete Work of Aristotle, De (26), Interpretation, Ed., Jonathan Barnes, Vol. 1 Princeton New Jersey, 1984, 18b1.

27 Al-Kindi, Abu Yusuf Ya'qub ibn 'Ishaq as-Sabbah, Rasail Al-Kindi al-Phalsaphia (The Philosophical Treatises of Al-Kindi, edited by Muhammad Abu Zayda, Cairo, Hassan Press, 2nd Edition, p. 117.

28 Al-Farabi, Abu Nasr, Al"Ibara, corroborated by Muhammad Salim, Dar al-Kutayeb, 1976, p.19.

definitive statements, and what does not fall within the realm of definitive statements cannot be considered to have any relationship with objectivity.

The interpretation by **Al-Jabiri** of **Al-Jahiz**' text, which states that the linguistic activity of Arabs was an appropriation of rational activity, is compatible with his judgment that the world from which the Arabic language was collected, during the Era of Codification, was an **ahistorical sensual world**. Codification according to Al-Jabiri "is the first indication of the manifestations of creativity and innovation by this reason. It is the constituent reason in Islamic culture, reason in its foremost manifestations and strongest formations."[29] According to **Al-Thahabi**, the Era of Codification began in the year 14 AH"[30] and "it continued between the mid-second and mid-third century AH"[31]. That is, Arab reason, before the middle of the second century AH, was neither creative nor innovative.

Not only does **Al-Jabiri** make the judgment that Arabs were neither creative nor innovative before the Era of Codification, but he goes on to include in such judgment Arab reason and Islamic civilization in their entirety. He states: "the reason that has compiled or collected the language from Bedouin Arabs, and only from them, has subsequently kept in the language the impact of their lives that is, some of the characteristics that stem from their living conditions especially the sensual nature of their thinking and perception. The collection of language from Arab Bedouins and not from others means that this language is confined by the limitations of the world of those Arabs."[32] And, the world "from which the Arabic language emerged," or at least was collected from, is, according to al-Jabiri, "an ahistorical sensual world."[33] So, if we may name the Islamic civilization by one of its products, then we need to say that it is "a civilization of *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence)." Thus, Greek civilization is "a civilization of philosophy", and contemporary European civilization is "a civilization of science and technology"[34]. With regards to Islamic civilization, it should be noted here that jurisprudent reason is "one whose ingenuity is almost restricted to

29 Al-Jabiri, Muhammad 'Abed, The Formation of Arab Reason (in Arabic), p.65.

30 Al-Suyuti, Jalaluddin 'Abd Al-Rahman Bin Abi Bakr, Tarikh Al-Khulafa' (The History of the Caliphates), Dar Ibin Hazm, 2003, p.208.

31 Al-Jabiri, Muhammad 'Abed, The Formation of Arab Reason (in Arabic), p.67.

32 Ibid, p. 86.

33 Ibid, p. 87.

34 Ibid, p. 96.

researching the origin of each branch, and thus everything new that can be measured according to something old"[35].

To assert his judgment of the world where the Arabic language was collected as being "an ahistorical, sensual world", **al-Jabiri** states that the meaning of reason in the Arabic language, and subsequently in Arab thought, is associated with behavior and morals. This can be clearly seen in the various definitions that the Arabic dictionary gives to article "*ayn, qaf, lam*", where there is a necessary inherent association between the definition and moral behavior."[36]

If we take article "*ayn, qaf, lam*" in the Arab tongue we find that it means the reason the heart, and the heart the reason. Reason was named so, because it helps man avoid being in danger, that is, it imprisons man (it prevents him from any hazardous involvements). To explain further, reason is what distinguishes mankind from other animals, and that a reasoning heart and a questioning tongue is what creates understanding. I understood a thing means I reasoned it, I knew it. And to know a thing is to have knowledge of it, *al-'Irfan* (knowledge) or *al-'Areef* and *al-'Aref* meaning to know and to be knowledgeable. The name "*'Aql*" (reason) came to mean "to enable the person using his reason to avoid engaging in hazardous behavior, **to imprison him/her.**" So, the association of the verb to reason with dangerous activities does not necessarily make it a sensual verb. Thus to say: to a person a reasoning heart, is to refer to the desire for knowledge. So "when **Mu'awiya** summoned **Daghfal**, he asked him "about the ancestors of Arabs, and about the stars, and about the Arabic language and the ancestors of Quraysh. **Daghfal** reacted by telling him everything. A man of knowledge, who witnessed this exchange, said, how did you memorize all of this? Daghfal answered, with **a questioning tongue and a reasoning heart"**[37], "**and the tragedy of knowledge is forgetting**. Then **Mu'awiya** told **Daghfal**, go to **Yazid** and teach him about the ancestors of Arabs, and about the stars, and

35 Ibid, p. 105.

36 Ibid, p. 30.

37 Al-Baihaqi, Al-Hafez, Al-Madkhal Ila Al-Sunun Al-Kubra (commonly known as Sunan al-Bayhaqi), edited by Muhammad Al-A'thami, Riyad, Dar Adwa' al-Salaf, vol.2 1420, p. 10.

teach him also the Arabic language."[38] This thus means that the statement "a reasoning heart" contradicts what al-Jabiri says. Secondly, even if we go along with **al-Jabiri** and accept that the association of the verb, to reason, with dangerous activities makes it a sensual verb, the meaning of the verb "ayn. qaf. lam", or aqala, to reason, as mentioned in Arabic sources, also has to do with understanding[39]; to know a thing is to understand it. This was demonstrated in a rather profound way in the linguistic activity of the pre-Islamic Arabs which was an expression of the nature of their existence and a reflection of the maturity of their comprehension and cognition. So the Arabs, "even though they concerned themselves with expressions which they rectified and refined, the meanings of these expressions were, however, much more important, and more respected and honored by them. And since expressions conveyed meanings and the purposes behind such meanings, they endeavored to improve them, enrich them and in fact they went out of their way to enhance them: so as to ensure that that would have the right expressional impact upon them and would as well be more representative of what they exactly meant or wanted to say"[40]. To further support this point, it would be helpful to cite two examples which have to do with how Arabs used language to account for their understanding of water. The first concerns the names to categorize the various sources of water, and the second concerns how they categorized the quantities and qualities of water in nature.

The names used to account for different water sources were, from *al-sahab* (the cloud) saha, from *al-yanbou'* (the fountain), *naba'a*, from *al-hajar* (the stone), *inbaja*, from *al-nahr* (the river), *faada*, from *al-saqf* (the ceiling), *wakafa*, from *al-qirbah* (the water bottle), *saraba*, from *al-Ina'*, (the container), *rashaha*, from *al'ayn* (the eye), *inskaba*, from *al-mazakeer*, *natafa*, and from *al-jurh* (the wound), *thagha*."[41]

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38 Ibn Abd al-Barr, Abu Umar Yousef Ibn Abdallah, Al-Isti'ab Fi Ma'rifat Al-Ashab (The Comprehensive Compilation of the Names of the Prophet's Companions), edited by 'Ali al-Bajawi, Beirut, Dar al-Halabi, 1412 AH, vol. 2, p. 462.

39 Look at Al-Tahawuni, Muhammad Bin 'Ali, Mau'sou'at Kishaf Istilahaat al-Founoun wal 'Uloum, corroborated by 'Ali Dahrouj, Beirut, Maktabat Lubnan, vol. 1, Al-Aql.

40 Al-Qalqashandi, Abu Al-Abbas Ahmad ben Ali, Subh al 'Ashah, Cairo, Dar al-Koutub al-Khidiwiyya, 1913, pp.183-184.

41 Al-Tha'alibi, Abu Manşūr 'Abd ul-Malik Bin Muhammad, *Fiqh al-Lugha Waasrar al-'Arabiyya*, p. 305.

As for the categorization of the quantities and qualities of water in nature: "if water was continuously flowing and did not split into a fountain or a well, it is *'ad*, and if one of its banks was moved and its other side was not affected, it was *karr*. If it was overflowing (abundant) and fresh, it was *ghadq*. If it was flooding (drowning), it was *ghamr*. If it was underground, it was *ghawr*. If it was running, it was *ghayl*. If it was surface water unaffected by a machine like a waterwheel or *noria*, it was *saih*. If it was running on surface it was *ma'in* and *sanam*. And if it was flowing between the trees, it was *ghalal*. If it was a swamp in a hole or a hollow, it was *thaghab*. If it was ditched from the bottom of the well, it was *nabt*. If a bit of it diverted from its main flow, it was *ghadir*. If it reached the ankles, it was *dahdah*. If it was close from the bottom of the well, it was *dahl*. If it was very little, it was *dahl*. If it was even a little less, then it was washal and *thamad*. If it was pure and not mixed with anything, it was *qarah*. If cloth fell in it to the point of being soaked, it was *sadam*. If animals walked in it and muddied it, it was *tarq*. If it was changing, it was *sajas*…"[42] In addition to this, there are thirty one other names to categorize the quantity and quality of natural water sources. **Al-Tha'labi** lists these in (*fiqh al-Lugha*, the jurisprudence of language,). And about this, **al-'Askari** says: that Quraysh was named, during al-Jahilliyah, *al-'Alamiyyah* (universality), for the virtues and knowledge (science) of its people."[43] Thus, in this context comes **Abi 'Amro Bin al-'Ala's** saying: What has come from the Arabs is but the very little. And if it came in abundance, you would have received a lot of knowledge and poetry.[44]

Categorizing the quantities and qualities of water in nature, and the flow of water from its sources, are just two examples of their cognition of their environment. That is, the issue for Arabs is neither about the discussion regarding the one hundred names that are given for the snow amongst the Eskimos nor is the case that their linguistic activity was confined to the multiplicity of the names given to the sword and the characteristics of the camel. Instead it involves a comprehensive activity that accounts for all the phenomena that exist in life and also the conditions of life.

Based on this, in our attempt to attend to the question regarding the relationship between the sensed and the abstract, we can establish that the

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42 Ibid.

43 Al-'Askari, Abi Hilal al-Hasan Bin 'Abd Allah, Alawael, edited by Muhammad al-Wakeel, Dar Al-Basheer Lilthaqafa al-'Arabiyya, 1987, p. 65.

44 Al-Jamhi, Muhammad Bin Salam, *Tabaqat Fuhoul al-Shu'araa*, explained by Mahmoud Muhammad Shaker, Cairo, Dar al-Ma'aref liltiba'a Walnashr, (no date of publication provided), p 10.

accuracy in describing what is sensed using names is what distinguishes language, and it is therefore the basis for moving from the sensory to the abstract, in terms of segmenting what can be seen - the experience. For example, Arabs used numbers (one, two, etc.) to describe the transformations of *al-Anwa'* (the stars), and time (i.e. to numerically set the tone for nature). They also attached numbers to letters in order to create a law of motion and rhythm that undoubtedly mirrored the movement of nature in an abstraction that corresponded to the transformations of the balanced rhythm of numbers. Similar to the names of water, there is, for example, a text, which is cited by the researcher **Farid al-Zahi**[45] and attributed to the grandfather of **Imru' al-Qais**, which lists the precise names of the parts s of the body. These words describe integral aesthetic forms that suggest clear images describing the beauty of the body. Similarly, what corresponds to the description of the body is the description of poetry of what exists, such as the existence of the house, that is abstraction starts conforming to the image or form in the line of poetry or in the concept of the house in itself. Then the line of poetry is composed in a balanced numerical rhythm, where the movement of language becomes a reflection of things themselves and what regulates it are rules that are themselves one and that are applied both in the universe and in poetry and the knowledge of one generates the knowledge of the second.[46]

The abstraction established by the Arabs, takes us from the process of portraying nature to that of the abstract meaning, going through the medium of language-words, number and numbers. This was, later on, symbolized through the endeavor that aimed at abstracting the abstract (God). What this means was that the collection of language by Arabs was built upon the abstraction of the abstract, even though it was accompanied by a necessary adverse tendency to absolute abstraction, the tendency to embody the abstract, up and down, standing and sitting as in the motion of praying.

The nature and meaning of the position

Although researchers looking into Arabs before Islam were using sound scientific theory, it did not provide them with the rationale to reconsider their a *priori* ideas. In other words, when these researchers found enough evidence that contradicted their ideas about the customs and traditions of Arabs and

45 Al-Zahi, Farid, *Al-Jasad Wal-Istratijiyya al-Mazhariyya Fi al-Thaqafeh al-Arabiyya al-Islamiyya*, al-Carmel, Ramallah, 1998, No. 54, p. 105.

46 Look at: Al-Barghouti, Hussein, "*Qisas 'An Zaman Wathani*", al-Carmel, Ramallah, 2002, No. 72-73, pp. 297-336.

/or their living activity, they still found themselves carried along by their previously formed conclusions rather than reconsidering or deconstructing them, as is usually done by most scientists. They thus abandoned their scientific reference and took Arabs out of the framework or realm of scientific explanation. **Mohammad Tawfic Abu 'Ali**, for instance, was ready to exclude Arabs from any theoretical explanation or even scientific theoretical explanation that he endorsed in his studies. He even expressed his inability to understand the incompatibility between the Arabs' linguistic activity and their living conditions, traditions and customs, or rather, what he believed them to be as was evident in his statement that : "It is excessively strange for this refined system to be a result of spontaneity and intuition, especially given that it was shaped and dictated by the conditions of nomadic life and the then prevailing mode of relationships, and was based in its entirety on instability. It is a strange coincidence that the emergence of this system of terminology was not consistent with the broad spread of knowledge, as expected by the law of scientific development of any society, especially considering the significant decline in writing and reading, and the preponderant semi- to complete illiteracy that dominated the vast majority of people. However what is surprising is the accurate terminology that was commonly used amongst the people, and which was more like a public heritage or an endowment that is common to all, in which everybody participated without exception."[47]

If it is extremely surprising for such a refined system to be dictated and shaped by the conditions of nomadic life, so perhaps the situation was not a result of spontaneity, and was not, in fact, dictated by nomadic life. And, in any case, Arabs before Islam "were not one society but were different inharmonious social classes, representing the human societies that humankind has passed through in its long history"[48], especially that the discussion here is not, as Abu Ali states, about the articulation of idiomatic expressions that was restricted to one tribe or to a small group of people while others were excluded. It is bout the fact that these idiomatic expressions were, without exception, common amongst pre-Islamic society as a whole.

What is even more peculiar is the distinction that **Abu 'Ali** makes between idiomatic expressions and knowledge. Idiomatic expressions are not just knowledge of the existence of a certain thing; they signify knowledge of a thing

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47 Abu 'Ali, Muhammad Tawfic, *Al-Amthal al-'Arabiyya wal 'Asr al-Jahili*, Beirut, Dar al-Niqash, 1988, p. 127.

48 Al-Assad, Naser Aldeen, *Masader al-Shi'r al-'Arabi*, Cairo, Dar al-Ma'aref, 1978, p. 9.

that comes as a result of making a distinction. These expressions therefore represented knowledge and understanding of things. And this means that these commonly used idiomatic expressions represented a common knowledge and understanding in Arab society. This is not only true of idiomatic expressions, but also of linguistic representation, which we can judge to show maturity of thought. This is so because "thought and language are in a continuous state of innovative interaction with one another and each of the two derives its common nourishment and creative dynamism from daily existential (life) practices, i.e. from both the individual and collective history"[49].

Despite the fact that **Abu 'Ali** was aware of how common these idiomatic expressions among the Arabs were and the reasons for their existence and diffusion, and despite his understanding that terms or expressions are some of the most important pillars of "cultural technology", and "that when terms in a language become clear for a certain people, this indicates o the clarity of their vision and the maturity of their language to the level where it was able to achieve real cognitive awareness"[50], all of this, nevertheless, did not induce him to reconsider his belief of the ignorance of the Arabs or to relook at and reconsider his research findings and their subsequent assumptions. Instead of doing that, he insisted on excluding Arabs from any theoretical explanation., combining as a result two opposites: the lack of knowledge and the spread of idiomatic expressions..

Excluding Arabs from typical theoretical interpretations and combining contradictory ideas are features of most research studies that have to do with pre-Islamic Arabs. There is an embedded assumption here that there is neither a problem in the inconsistencies ies nor with the contradictions. So if it is, according to the established scientific method, acceptable to to remedy these inconsistencies by modifying or replacing the theoretical framework, then refusing to do so and excluding only Arabs from any theoretical interpretation is a point at issue. The question in this case is not about the correctness of the theory, or about its ability to interpret, but about the credibility of researchers themselves, and about the degree of their adherence to the requirements of the theoretical framework they choose to adopt or follow.

There is more than one example of such an approach in studying pre-Islamic Arabs. There are so many in fact that it has become possible to say

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49 Arkoun, Muhammad, *Tarikhiyet al-Fikr al-'Arabi al-Islami*, Translated by Hashem Saleh, al-Dar al-Baida', Al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, Beirut, Markaz al-Inma' al-Qawmi, 1998, p.8

50 Abu 'Ali, Muhammad Tawfic, *Al-Amtha*, p. 127

that we are dealing with a phenomenon, the symptoms of a syndrome in the research conducted on pre-Islamic Arabs. So we find somebody like **Tarabishi** contrasting the development of Arabic with the usual development of language. He claims that "despite the fact that the development of language is usually very slow… the development of the Arabic language over a period of fourteen centuries has, on the contrary, taken the form of mutations"[51]. Others like **'Isam Qasabji** insists on categorizing the 'expression', in accordance with general rules and criteria, as a self-expression, denying, in consequence, the intellectual activity among the Arabs. He writes,"poetry is strong among the Bedouins while weak among those who live in the city, while literary criticism is weak among the Bedouins and strong in the city. So it might be said here that cultural intellect spoils poetic intuition, for it provides the mind with more than one path, and sets before it more than one possibility, making it difficult for the poet to choose between thinking and expression while intuition features what is agitating in the character or nature of man before affecting the sharpness of reason and thus we feel, in intuitive poetry the pulse of life more than can we feel in the logic of reason"[52]. In this, he contrasts reason and intuition and separates the urban situation from the Bedouin situation and the cultural intellect of urban life from the intuitive poetry of Bedouin life. He considers the activity of reason as a more developed stage than sensation and intuition[53]. He however is not content with just separating the two situations, nor is he satisfied with denying the existence of any activity of reason among the Bedouins, such as literary criticism, for instance, but he even goes further to rectify the properties in Arab Bedouin life, claiming that "the problem during the Jahiliyya period was that sensation was partly hidden so it couldn't transform into a principle of reason; because as a stage it precedes reasoning."[54]

Apart from the problems associated with **Qasabji's** claim of the existence of a relationship between the strength or soundness of poetry and the Bedouin situation, which **Ahamd Amin** demonstrates the weakness of in his book (*Sadr al-Islam*, Early Islam)[55], his assertion that: "the problem during the Jahiliyya period was that sensation was partly hidden and could not transform

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51 Tarabishi, George, *The Critique of the Critique of Arab Reason*, p 208

52 Qasabji, 'Isam, *Usoul al-Naqd al-'Arabi al-Qadeem*, Halab, Manshourat Jame'at Halab, 1991, pp.5-6.

53 Ibid, p. 6.

54 Ibid.

55 Amin, Ahmad, *Fajr al-Islam*, Mawsu'at Ahmad Amin al-Islamiyya, Beirut, Dar al-Kuttab al-'Arab, 1969, p.22.

into a principle of reason, because as a phase it precedes reasoning" and his argument in the same book that "what perhaps most prominently clarifies the features of Jahiliyya criticism is what was narrated about **Qubat** (the dome of) **al-Nābia al-Dubyānī**, widely known in **Souk 'Uqaz** (the Market of 'Uqaz), where he identified the features of aesthetic criticism which deny the poet the freedom to express as he wishes or as he feels, and require him to express in accordance with tradition and ideals"[56], all beg the question how he did he manage to combine these contradictions.

So al-Nābiga's criticism and his desire to have poets express themselves in accordance with traditions and ideals, means that these rules and criteria are defined, known and agreed upon. That is, a criterion can be used generally by a large group only if its features become clear. So, in this context, poor artisanship among Arabs was defined as that "inconsistent behavior and performance: for instance, when one is unable to divide the lines (of a poem), explain correctly, quote and apply properly, and weave and cast rightly"[57]. So without this definition and its commonality, it would not be possible to understand the mere possibility of the criticism that **Tarafa Ibn al-'Abd** made, when he was still very young, towards **Al-Mutalammes** for using descriptions inappropriately[58], nor to explain people's approval of Tarafa's criticism but even the acceptance of **Al-Mutalammes/** or **Al-Musayyib Bin 'Alas** himself of **Tarafa's** criticism. It is also not possible to understand without this definition, **Qubat al-Nābiga**, for which he was famous in **Souk 'Uqaz**, or his recognition or awareness of the deficiency in his own reciting while entering Yathreb, saying while leaving it: I entered Yathreb and found in my poetry an artisan, and so when I left it, I felt of the Arabs.[59]

It is true that Tarafa Ibn al-'Abd could have criticized al-Mutalammes and that people could have accepted his criticism without having to use a criterion that was accepted by both sides. It is also possible to explain the criticism that the people of Yathreb made against al-Nābiga and his acceptance of such criticism without having to revert to criteria for reciting accepted to both sides. Al of this does not however solve the problem, especially knowing that the difficulty

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56 Qasabji, 'Isam, *Usoul al-Naqd*, p. 6.

57 Al-'Askari, Abi Hilal al-Hasan Bin 'Abd Allah, *Al-Sina'atayn*, *Al-Kitabat wal-Shi'r*, corroborated by 'Ali al-Bijawi wa Akharoun, Dar Ihya' al-Koutub al-'Arabiyya, 1952, p.44.

58 What is meant here is Qisat of Al-Mutalammes wa Istinwaqihi Lil-Jamal, according to Taraf Bin al-'Abd said.

59 Al-'Askari, Abi Hilal al-Hasan Bin 'Abd Allah, *Al-Sina'atayn*, p. 45.

in **Qasabji's** position does not end here, but includes his combination of n two contradictory meanings in the term itself as **Abu 'Ali's** combines the lack of knowledge and the spread of idiomatic expressions to describe the situation itself. Qasabji combines an expression in accordance to mood and desires, and an expression in accordance to norms and ideals. The expression in accordance to norms or ideals is an expression that is formulated in conformity to rules and criteria that are neither subjective nor are they arbitrary in nature. This means that what is required here is for one to distance oneself from subjectivity and personal desires for it is not possible for the critique, and this is Qasabji's request, to be in accordance to Bedouin's intuition that is based on the fluctuation of mood and desires. Because how would it be possible for an expression in accordance to mood, to be at the same time an expression in accordance to sensible criteria? Thus the request for an expression can either be moody in nature and in accordance to the desires of **al-Nābiga** at the moment of his critique, or it can be in accordance to what is customary and known amongst them.

The contradistinction of the evidence that the researcher possesses together with his position towards the Arabs, make him like a person who is sitting on a swing not knowing where to stop it. So we realize that after the researcher makes a list of the evidence, he diverts to a different position passing judgments that contradict the his evidence, attempting at the same time to fill the gap resulting from such contradiction with various ways, making other methodological mistakes. And the price he has to pay as a researcher will be nothing less than abandoning his understanding of the nature of things and of all the classifications and definitions of each theoretical framework he armed himself with. However, the issue still did not end here as some Arab researchers went further in their attack to include Arab accomplishments in linguistics. They emptied these accomplishments from their meanings and employed them against the Arabs themselves exactly as **Yusef Zeidan** considered the refusal of Arabs to accept the idea of the intermingling or interaction of the Gods with the humans to be a deficiency. That was what **Mustafa 'Abd al-Rahman Ibrahim** also did with the accomplishments of Arabs in linguistics, which was basically another attempt to fill the gap between the evidence about the reality of Arab life, as it became apparent to them in their research results, and their a *priori* beliefs about them.

Ibrahim states, in a rather detailed and extended manner, his understanding that Arab poetry could not have emerged in conformity with this impeccable system in which we found it flourishing. And the reason for that is that nature rejects mutations in such a matter, and subsequently must accept the principle of development and progress. Subsequently, it is only natural for poetry among

the Arabs, as was known about it, to have gone through long historical periods to reach the level of maturity and aligned order it has eventually attained. Then he concludes from this that the poet must "have, in every step of his development on the ladder of life, stopped to turn back his face to what has preceded him, so as to prepare himself for the second step. Then he would have new insights with which to further develop his poetry or correct or fix any thoughtlessness. He could then revise the poems based on what he had learned from his previous mistakes and the experiences of other poets. And in each of the steps he takes, he disproves or denies what have other people found in his work as deficient, while he adds what will positively contribute to the structure of the poem he has constructed"[60]. But, after **Ibrahim** talks about maturity and aligned order, and the preparedness for the future steps and the new leaps, and the renewal in the construction of the poem, and the benefits one acquires from previous mistakes, he adds, in the same page of the same book, as if he is retracting so that nobody will criticize him, "when this poetry reached the level of maturity and its artistic image was completed, Arabs were fascinated by it and they thus praised it, relished it and viewed it in a way that corresponds to their life and nature and their non-urban lifestyles. Accordingly", he adds, "they declared their appreciation of what they considered to be good and their disapproval of what they considered to be repulsive in brief terms and abrupt judgments, which although correct and just, were dictated by common sense or intuition, and not by the deep research, examination and logic that emanate from analysis and reasoning"[61].

Ibrahim's judgment that linguistic activity does not accept mutation corresponds with his description of the behavior of poets in the pre-Islamic period. **Zuheir Bin Salma** is, for instance, the best example of a poet who criticized his own poems. He named his long poems *al-Hawliyyat* "because they were not composed all at once, and were not announced at the moment of their completion…and of those poets from the Jahiliyya period who were famous for criticizing their poetry were **Aws Bin Hajar**, and **Zuheir Bin Abi Salma**, and **Ka'b Bin Zuheir**, and **al-Hutaya**, and **Tufail al-Ghanawi**, and **Nimr Bin Tawlab** and others"[62]. So what we can deduce from the above is that these poets did not just compose their poems without any kind of critical and deep thinking. On the contrary, in the process of composing they

60 Ibrahim, Mustafa 'Abd al-Rahaman, *Fi al-Naqd al-Adabi al-Qadeem 'Ind al-'Arab*, Cairo, Makka Lil- Tiba'at, 1998, p.28.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid, p. 63

subjected their poems to critical thinking, experimentation and examination and they in fact went through them line-by-line and verse-by-verse, carefully choosing their words and meanings. They would then keep their poems for a period of time reconsidering and reexamining various parts before presenting them to the public. Hence, **Shawqi Dayf** concludes that such an approach, which was prevalent amongst the poets in the Jahiliyya period, was "but a clear development of a common critical spirit"[63], which emerged after their language reached the level of perfection and was articulated in "a highly developed form of maturity as far as the syntax, conjugation and etymology are concerned, or as far as the broad diversification in the composition, the sources, the conjunctions, the tools of exclusion, negation, definition and travesty are concerned and up to the indeclinable words and to the point of the culmination of an internally disciplined and complete system. This is in addition to its ability (the Arabic language's ability) to retain letters and loopholes that were not fully retained by other Semitic languages such as al-thaa, al-khaa, al-thaal, al-thaa, al-daad, and al-ghayn"[64].

If that was the case, and if **Ibrahim's** theoretical understanding correctly corresponds with Arab literary activity, how would looking back to the past in order to prepare one's self to the step that follow lead to maturity and aligned order, and even, according to what he says, to the construction of a complete poetic system, if their account of what they considered to be good or to be repulsive were but quick judgments on their part? Further, is it possible for such judgment to extend over a long year and be quick at the same time?

However the problems with Ibrahim's argument and discussion do not end here for when he connects between "brief expressions" and "quick judgments," he imbues the word "brief" with negative characteristics, despite the fact that it is one of the most important features of the Al-Jahiliyya period. It was in fact defined by **'Arafa Abdallah Bin Sinan al-Khafaji** "as that which gives the meaning of a comprehensive matter in a clear and comprehensive manner, and does not, due to being over-succinct, disguise and conceal the true meaning of a thing to the point where there would be a need for deep reflection and accurate thinking, for it is but improper and imperfect to say anything of this sort"[65]. For Ibn **al-Roumi** eloquence is that "which can be excellently succinct when it comes to intuition or spontaneity, and abundant when it comes to

63 Dayf, Shawqi, *al-Naqd*, Cairo, Dar al-Ma'aref, 5th Edition, p. 23.

64 Dayf, Shawqi, Al-'Asr al-Jahili, Cairo, Dar al-Ma'aref, 22nd Edition, p. 117.

65 Al-Khafaji, Abdallah Bin Sinan, *Sirr al-Balagha*, pp. 243-244, HYPERLINK:-http://www.kotobarabia.com, retrieved on 27/02/2011.

elaborateness"[66]. Succinct means "to take the few from the many, and the root of this lies in the saying: to shorten the branch, i.e., to cut it from its tree"[67]. In fact "Arabs in the Jahiliyya period sought to be succinct and concise in their poetry… to the extent that conciseness or briefness became for them a virtue that they would request and be proud of"[68].

We are not trying here to have an extensive discussion about a brief or concise expression, or about its relationship with Arab eloquence (rhetoric) in the Jahiliyya period but we simply want to make the important point that: to associate one of the most important features of the pre-Islamic Arab Jahiliyya with quick judgments would practically transform such an expression into a composite negative and would thus render it as an indicator for an imperfect rather than a value added product.

In addition, associating instinct and intuition with Bedouin naivety, as both **Qasabji** and **Ibrahim** have done, is on par with associating a brief or concise expression with quick judgments. As in the cases presented earlier this association was another attempt to fill the gap between the researchers' judgments and their evidence in order to back up their a *priori* ideas.

The Sources and Historicity of the Position

According to **al-Thahabi**, following **al-Sayouti**, "In the year forty three, Islamic scientists began to codify *al-Hadith* (the Prophet's Sayings), *al-Fiqh* (law) and *Tafsir* (interpretation). **Ibn Jarih** began his classification ing in Mecca, **Malik al-Mawta'** was working in Medina and al-Awza'i was working in Damascus, and I**bn Abi 'Aruba and Hammad Bin Salma** and **others** were working in Basra, and **Mu'ammar** was working in Yemen, and **Sufyan al-Thawri** was working in Kufa. Meanwhile **Ibn Ishaaq** was writing about Islamic conquests while **Abu Hanifa** classified *al-Fiqh* and *opinion* (the opinions of Islamic *fuqaha'*, jurisprudents). Shortly after, **Hashim** and **al-Laith** and **Ibn Lami'a, Ibn al-Mubarak, Abu Yusef** and **Ibn Wahb** all madetheir classifications. During this era the codification and tabulation of science multiplied and Arabic books, language, history and the daily stories of people were codified. Before this era (the era of codification and classification), all the *imams* (Islamic religious leaders) were memorizing the

66 Al-'Askari, Abi Hilal al-Hasan Bin 'Abd Allah, *Al-Sina'atayn*, p. 27.

67 Ibid.

68 Atiyyah, Mukhtar, *Al-Ijaz Fi Kalam al-'Arab wa Nass al-I'jaz*, Cairo, Dar al-Ma'aref al-Jami'iyya, no date, p. 53.

Qur'an or they were narrating science from documented but disorganized papers."[69] Such classification induced **Al-Jabiri** to look at this era, which started in 143 AH, as one in which "the image of the Jahiliyya era and the first Islamic era was identified"[70]. **Tarabishi**, however, made a distinction between codification and tabulation.[71] Relying on **al-Thahabi's** position "that before this era (the era of codification and classification), all the *imams* (Islamic religious leaders) were talking about their memorization of the Qur'an or about narrating science from documented but disorganized papers" and also on his identification of those who were late amongst the followers (*al-Sahaba*) of the third class and the greatest of memorizers and those who died in the era of the fourth class, **Al-Jabiri** postulates that "we can ascertain that the historiography for the beginning of "codification"- continually in accordance to **al-Thahabi** - starts with the period between 100 to 120 AH"[72]. Subsequently, and in accordance to **Tarabishi**, the drawing or the characterization of the image of the pre-Islamic period should have started before the era of Mansour and before 143 AH.

History books show that there isn't one identified date that we can make reference to as a starting point for codification. There isn't even agreement on when codification started in each field. So **Fuad Sizkeen** marks the beginning of the history of the codification of *al-Hadith* in "the last quarter of the first century and the first quarter of the second century AH,"[73]. while **Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani** goes back to an earlier period stating that the codification of *al-Hadith* began in the third quarter of the first century AH, and asserting that "upon the order of **Omar Bin 'Abd al-'Aziz**, **Ibn Shihab al-Zuhari** was the first historian who codified *al-Hadith* at the beginning of the second century AH, and after that period codification and classification proliferated and that brought great goodness, thanks to God"[74]. **Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani** also

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69 Al-Suyuti, Jalaluddin 'Abd al-Rahman Bin Abi Bakr, *Tarikh al-Khulafa'*, p. 208.

70 Al-Jabiri, Muhammad 'Abed, *The Formation of Arab Reason* (in Arabic), p.70.

71 Tarabishi, George, *The Critique of the Critique of Arab Reason*, p.50.

72 Ibid, p. 22.

73 Sizkeen, Fuad, *Tarikh al-Turath al-'Arabi*, translated by Mahmoud Hijazi, reviewed by 'Arafeh Mustafa and others, al-Riyad, Jami'at al-Imam Muhammad Bin Saud al-Islamiyyah, 1991, vol. 1, p. 119

74 Al-Asqalani, Ibn Hajar Ahmad Bin Ali, *Huda al-Sari li-Fath al-Bukhari Muqaddamat Sharh Sahih al-Imam Abi Abdallah Muhammad Bin Isma'il al-Bulhari*, Cairo, al-Matba'at al-Kubra al-Miriyya, 1301 AH, vol. 1, p. 208.

takes back the codification of antiquity and the tabulation of news, to the late period of the era of followers, stating that the first historians who made a collection of these were **al-Rabee' Bin Sabih**, **Said Bin Abi 'Aruba** and **others**, and that they classified each section separately."[75] He is talking here about the third quarter of the second century AH. So it is important here to indicate that this is not incompatible with the claim of the existence of an era for the spread of codification and proliferation of classification, but with the claim that codification and classification began in a given period. This subsequently means that if there was a relationship between codification and the pre-Islamic period, the beginning of such identification would be before the era of Mansour and the era which extends between 100 and 120 AH.

So treating the beginning of the era of codification as an era "of an imposed interfusion from the post to the pre"[76], that is as an era when the character of the pre-Islamic era was determined, and thus to investigate its beginning as an attempt to determine the beginnings when the image of the pre-Islamic period was drawn, is in our belief erroneous. This is due to the fact that even if the diffusion of codification occurred in a given period this neither means that the pre-Islamic era began with the beginning of the diffusion and spread of codification, nor does it mean that it ended when the diffusion period was completed. Instead the pre-Islamic period is not attached to and did not start with the beginning of codification in any field whatsoever. This is due to the fact that the act of imposition that **Tarabishi** talks about is an act which is concurrent with every attempt to characterize a previous era even if it was not an intended or a conscious one. This is so because any representation of the past or ideas from the past is done from our present perspective and orientations including our a *priori* ideas.[77] Hence, regardless of the period of codification and regardless of whether it has one specific beginning or not, it is not possible for the pre-Islamic era to have begun with it. If codification means the collection of all sporadic writings, in other words what has been copied down, and classification is the tabulation of what have been collected, then the roots of classification will be deeper than those of codification and of copying. That is, as **Tarabishi** states, "those who classified first are not those who codified and tabulated first, and those who codified first are not those who wrote down and read first, for classifications were preceded by

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75 Al-Asqalani, Ibn Hajar Ahmad Bin Ali, Huda, p. 4.

76 Tarabishi, George, *The Critique of the Critique of Arab Reason*, p.10.

77 Coleman, Janet, A History of Political Thought: From Ancient Greece to Early Christianity (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell; 1 edition, June 30, 2000), p.17.

books and books were preceded by newspapers. In the text that is ascribed to him **al-Thahabi** talks about those who classified first and not those who codified and tabulated first."[78] It is important here to state that an era cannot be characterized in only one way and can neither be associated with writing nor can it be conditioned by it. If it had to do with writing we would then say that the pre-Islamic era is also tied up with or connected to the copying of the Qur'an, especially that it contains a number of verses which were relied on, after they were interpreted, in creating our current image of the pre-Islamic Arabs, such as the verse from Surat al-Jumu'ah[79], - in God's saying: "He it is Who sent among the unlettered ones a Messenger from among themselves", and which as a verse was interpreted by al-Tabari[80], and al-Baghawi[81], and al-Qurtubi[82], to mean Arabs are a nation ignorant of both writing and reading.

If we, however, take into consideration the possibility that the specific understanding of the interpreter was imposed on the interpreted verse that and the possibility that the verses were interpreted in accordance to the interpreter's view and opinion of the pre-Islamic period, we have then to exclude the Qur'an from the factors that helped characterize the Arabs of the Pre-Islamic period as being ignorant of any knowledge of reading and writing.

Interpreting *ummiyya* (illiteracy) as meaning ignorance of writing and reading has influenced the interpretation of a number of researchers, such as **al-Tabari**, **al-Qurtubi** and **Ibn Kathi**r, and consequently created a specific image of pre-Islamic Arabs. Verse two of Surat al-Jumu'ah, for instance, despite the fact that it clearly refers to the ignorance of *al-Kitaab* (the book of God), and its implicit wisdom, was interpreted to mean the ignorance of writing. The continuation of this verse "reciting to them His verses and

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78 Tarabishi, George, *The Critique of the Critique of Arab Reason*, p. 50.

79 The Holy Qur'an, Surat al-Jumu'ah, verse (2).

80 Al-Tabari, Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir, *Tafsir al-Tabari Jami' al-bayan fi ta'wil al-Qur'an*, edited by Abdallah al-Turaki and others, al-Jizah, Dar al-Hijra, 2001, vol. 2, pp. 153-154, vol. 28, p. 625.

81 Al-Baghawi, Abu Muhammad al-Husayn ibn Mas'ud, *Tafsir al-Baghawi Ma'alim at-Tanzeel*, edited by Abdallah Nimer and others, Al-Riyad, Dar al-Taybeh, vol. 8, p. 113.

82 Al-Qurtubi, Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad, *Al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an wal Mubayen lima Tadamanahou min al-Sunna wa ay al-Furqan*, edited by Abdallah al-Turaki and others, Beirut, Mussasat al-Risalat, 2006, vol. 20, p. 452.

purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom-although they were before in clear error," refers to the fact that ummiyya (illiteracy) here is the illiteracy of the Prophet or being ignorant of al-Kitaab the Qur'an, like others to whom God has delivered His book. So God delivered His book to the Prophet through revelations to teach them the Qur'an and to deliver them from their delusions or aberrations. Deliverance from their delusion means here deliverance from their polytheism and from worshiping gods other than God. This was how **al-Qanouji**[83], interpreted this verse, and a number of other verses. To further illustrate, "the unlettered people," or *ummiyyun* [84] are referred to in another verse this way, "And there are among them (Jews) unlettered people, who know not the Book, but they put trust upon false desires and they merely guess." This was interpreted by **al-Baghawi**[85], and **al-Tabari**[86] to mean those who are not good in reading or writing. **Al-Farra'** however, as an indication of the lack of agreement on the meaning of *ummiyya* in the Qur'an, says what is meant by the word *ummiyyun* in this verse is the Arabs who didn't have a book .[87] **Al-Asfahani**, following **Qutrub**, indicates, in the same place, that "*al-ummiyya* is inattentiveness and ignorance, and so *al-ummiy* (the illiterate) is who is inattentive and ignorant and lacks knowledge." In this context, **Al-Sharastani** says, "the people of the book used to champion the religion of Al-Asbat [the offspring of the twelve sons of Ya'qub (Jacob)] and follow the doctrine of the sons of Israel, while *al- ummiyyun* used to champion the religion of the tribes and follow the doctrine of the sons of Ishmael."[88]. And those who champion the religion of the tribes are those who do not have a book.

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83 Al-Qanouji, Abi al-Tayeb Sadeeq Bin Hassan, *Fath al-Bayan Fi Maqased al-Qur'an*, introduced by Abdallah Bin Ibrahim al-Ansari, Beirut, al-Maktabeh al-'Asriyyah, 1992, vol. 14, p. 129.

84 The Holy Book, Surat al-Baqara, verse (78).

85 Al-Baghawi, Abu Muhammad al-Husayn ibn Mas'ud, *Tafsir al-Baghawi Ma'alim at-Tanzeel*, vol. 1, p. 114.

86 Al-Tabari, Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir, *Tafsir al-Tabari*, vol. 2, pp. 153-154.

87 Al-Isfahani, Abi al-Qasem al-Hassan Bin Muhammad, *Al-Mufradat Fi Ghareeb al-Qur'an*, edited by the Center of Studies and Research, Cairo, Maktabet Mustafa al-Baaz, vol. 1, p. 29.

88 Al-Shahrastani, Abi al-Fath 'Abd al-Karim Ibn Abi Bakr, *Al-Millal awa Nihal*,, vol. 1, p. 207.

There are two additional meanings for *ummiyya*. So, as was shown, the verses in themselves do not imply that the meaning of *ummiyya* is ignorance of writing and reading but, on the contrary, they contradict such an interpretation. *Ummiyya* in the verses refers to ignorance of the Qur'an or failure to follow *al-Kitaab* and this corresponds with the essence of God's message, which is the deliverance from aberration or delusion through knowing and following God's book. In addition, the interpretation of *ummiyya* as meaning ignorance of *al-Kitaab* corresponds with the reasons behind God's revealing His book to them and with God's mentioning them in His Holy book. Despite that, ignorance of writing and reading was still chosen to be one of the meanings when interpreting verses from the holy Qur'an.

So apart from the reasons behind choosing ignorance of writing as one meaning for *ummiyya* to interpret verses from the Qur'an, was the purpose of such interpretation, to show the miracle of the prophet who could not read or write[89]?, as **Ibn Ashur** explains in his interpretation of verse two from Surat al-Jumu'ah[90], or was it a way to distinguish between the pre and the post Islamic period as was the position of the Muslims from the very beginning of the Islamic *da'wa* (call)[91]? Perhaps more than any other reason, this definition was one of the factors that contributed to the prevalent understanding of the pre-Islamic period which, in terms of being an option, it could possibly not have been chosen to be one. Certainly, considering ignorance as a meaning for the word

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89 There are signs that indicate that the Prophet Muhammad knew reading and writing, such as what Qutaiba has mentioned following Sufyan "following 'Amro bin Dinar following 'Ata' following Safwan bin Ya'li bin following Umya following his father saying I heard the Prophet "Peace be Upon Him reading at the tribune". (Al-Hafez Ibn Arabi Al-Maliki, 'Aridat al-Ahwazi bi-Sharh Sahih al-Tarmazi, Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, vol. 2, p. 295), and about the truth behind umiyyat (the illiteracy) al-Rasul (the Prophet) and about the debate regarding this look at: al-"Asqalani, Al-Hafiz Bin Hajar, the answers of al-Hafiz bin Haha al-Asqalani, edited and studied by Abd al-Rahmanbin Muhammad Ahmad al-Qalqashri, al-Riyad, Adwa' al-Salaf, 2003, p.48.

90 Al-Tahrir wal-Tanwir, vol. 28, p.208.

91 This is shown clearly in Huzaifa bin al-Yaman's discussion with the Prophet of God: " Huzaifa bin al-Yaman - may God bless him- said: people used to ask the Prophet of God about goodness and I used to ask him about evil fearing that it will befall upon me, so I said: Prophet of God! We were, during al-Jahiliyya, immersed in evil and God has brought such goodness (and we are in it), (for God has brought you to us), so will we after this goodness experience evil (as was the case before?)" (Al-Albani, Naser Addin, Silsilat al-Ahadith al-Sahiha, al-Riyad, Dar al-Ma'aref, vol.6, the first section, 2505).

ummiyya, even if ignorance of writing and reading prevailed amongst the pre-Islamic Arabs, would not change the fact that it was a choice, and it contributed to characterizing the per-Islamic period as one whose people were ignorant of writing and reading. Such an option corresponds to, or to be precise, does not go beyond the boundaries of the obsession of the Islamic *da'wa* (in other words the preoccupation of Muslims to spread the new religion or the message of God).

The obsession, in the first years of the emergence of Islam and in the years that followed, was to establish and consolidate the new religion and to confirm the holiness of what was revealed as being the prime and only source of knowledge and science. Consequently, this led the prophet to prevent anything to be written down from his sayings other than that which was revealed to him (the Qur'an). So he said, "Don't write anything of my sayings other than the Qur'an, (and if someone) wrote anything other than the Qur'an let it be erased"[92], fearing that his sayings would be intermingled with what was revealed to him from God. People followed this order to a point, and this can be clearly seen in what "**Abu Hilal bin Ja'far** talked about when he said: we were informed by **Abu Ismail bin Mohammad Al-Saffar**: '**Ali Bin Sahl, Rawh Bin** 'Ubadah and **Kahmas** talked about **Abi Nadra** saying: I said to **Abi Said**, shall we write? He said, "I shall not let you write; but take from us as we have taken from the Prophet of God."[93]

Controversy has arisen over whether the Prophet gave approval and permission for his sayings to be written down even though it has been proven that "the prevention was during the period of revelation due to fear of confusion with his own sayings, and later the permission to do so was given in a different period of the prophet's life," as **Ibn 'Abd al-Bir** mentions, quoting **al-Hafez** in "al-Fath."[94] Or was the prevention general and absolute? The position of the Prophet, however, indicates, in the two cases, to his attempt to keep what was revealed to him pure even from his own sayings, so as to preserve the purity of the divine knowledge and science contained in the revelation. The Qur'an in fact constituted for the Prophet the prime and only source of knowledge and it was due to that that the Prophet of God said: "Tie science to the holy book"[95].

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92 Ibn 'abd al-Bir, Abu 'Umar Yusef Ibn Abdallah, *Jame' Bayan al-'Ilm wa Fadleh*, corroborated by Abi al-Ashbal al-Zuhayr, al-Riyad, Dar Ibn al-Jouzi, 1999, vol. 1, p. 268.

93 Al-Baghdadi, *Taqyeed al-'Ilm*, p. 28.

94 Ibn 'abd al-Bir, Abu 'Umar Yusef Ibn Abdallah, *Jame' Bayan al-'Ilm wa Fadleh*, vol. 1, p. 269.

95 Al-Albani, Mohammad Naser aldin, *Silsilat al-Ahadith al-Sahiha*, p. 2475.

The Prophet's companions followed his in his footsteps and it is in this context that we can read in **Ali's** speech when he said: "Those who claim that we have something we can read that is not there in God's book as evident from this section of the Qur'an, are lying"[96]. And like **Ali**, the rest of the believers followed the Prophet Muhammad: "our grandfather told us, **Yazid Ibn Haron** informed us, **Al 'Awam Bin Hawshab** informed us quoting **Ibrahim al-Taymi** saying: Someone informed **Ibn Masu'ud** that some have a book, so he was restless until they brought him the book, and when they brought him the book he erased it (soaking it in water). He then added, "the people of the book were destined to hell before you since they accepted the books of their scientists and bishops leaving in consequence the book of God, or the Old Testament and the Bible, and thus disregarding their divine precepts and provisions."[97]. Things in fact went so far with them that they uttered "the words: we do not write science nor do we make others write it"[98]. Thus, the animosity of those who hated the books (of science) from the early Muslims, was because they didn't want these books to be compared with the book of God the Almighty, nor did they want people to be occupied with a book other than the Qur'an. People were forbidden to even consider old books, because the good from the bad from these books was not known, and the Qur'an was superior to them and thus became dominant."[99]

This obsession with the Qur'an and the Muslims' subsequent refusal to accept or even admit the existence of any knowledge or science other than that of *al-Kitaab*, and their refusal as well to write down that science, reached the stage where the phenomenon of erasing these books, became widespread.[100] This in itself indicates the level of knowledge pre-Islamic Arabs had reached and partly explains why there was not enough evidence of the existence of such knowledge except for some sporadic reports about how they used to deal with these books in the early years of the emergence of Islam, such as, for instance, what has already been discussed regarding their rejection to write or even consider the

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96 Al-Baghdadi, *Taqyeed al-'Ilm*, p.110.

97 Ibid, p. 59

98 Ibn 'abd al-Bir, Abu 'Umar Yusef Ibn Abdallah, *Jame' Bayan al-'Ilm wa Fadleh*, vol. 1, p. 275.

99 Al-Baghdadi, *Taqyeed al-'Ilm*, p.61

100 There is no need here to mention here other events of the erasing of books to demonstrate the extent of the diffusion of this type of occurrences, for Arabic resources, Al-Baghdadi, in *Taqyeed al-'Ilm*, for instance are full of examples about such news.

non-Qura'nic science as well as their decision to erase books written by pre-Islamic Arabs. This is in addition to the widespread existence and abundance of books that are known to have existed in the early years of the emergence of Islam. All of what was mentioned above constitutes in itself an indication of how knowledgeable pre-Islamic Arabs were. This was clearly vouched for in what **Abu al-Hussein** informed us about the camel load of books of **Abu al-'Abbas** which **Kareeb** kept in his house, and about "**Ali Bin 'Abd Allah Bin 'Abbas**, who, if he needed a book, would send him a message asking him to send him few sections of this and that book, and so he would copy his requests from the books and would send them to him."[101] This clearly indicates to the size of the book exchange between Muslims during that period, which could not have been created overnight. That is, the abundance of books and the spread of knowledge amongst the Arabs explain the Prophet's obsession with preserving the purity of the revelation that was sent to him and its classification as the only and prime reference for knowledge. It is also the only factor that can explain the widespread phenomenon of the Muslims' decision to erase books and to evade writing down scientific ideas. This in fact contradicts the interpretation of *ummiyya* in the Qur'an as meaning ignorance of writing and reading, and supports the interpretation that it means failure to follow the book and/or to be ignorant of it. If ignorance was what prevailed amongst pre-Islamic Arabs, Muslims would have definitely found nothing to reject and refrain from writing, and there would have been no need for the Prophet of God to say, "he who learned a science other than that of God or sought it from a source other than God, let him assume (or expect) his place in Hell."[102]. And if ignorance of writing and reading were what characterized the pre-Islamic Arabs, there would have been no need for the elimination of books.

The attempt to preserve the revelation sent to the Prophet and to regard it as the only source of reference, and what followed in consequence, indicates, though partially, to the reasons behind the lack of evidence that Arabs were a people of knowledge and science, which, in its turn, helped formulate the basis behind the development of the false opinion that pre-Islamic Arabs were ignorant of writing and reading.

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101 *Al-Bayhaqi, Al-Madkhal Ila al-Sunan al-Kubra*, vol. 2, p. 244.

102 Al-Maliki, al-Hafez Ibn Arabi, '*Aredat al-Ahwazi Bisharh Sahih al-Tarmazi, Beirut, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya*, no date, vol. 10, p. 123.