ISLAMIC POLITICAL THEOLOGY

EDITED BY

MASSIMO CAMPANINI
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Islamic Political Theology

Faith and Politics: Political Theology in a New Key

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"Political Theology" is a theme which straddles two major areas of inquiry: political philosophy and theology, or differently phrased: the realms of secular politics and the sacred. The relation is marked by difference, sometimes by tension or conflict. During the past century, such conflict reached a boiling point when the Nazi regime sought to co-opt or integrate the Christian population. In opposition to this attempt, a "Confessing Church" was formed which, under the leadership of Karl Barth, issued the Barmen Declaration (May 31, 1934) which insisted on the independence of faith from political power structures while, at the same time, guarding against the pure "privatization" of faith. In our time, it is important to remember this precedent because there are strong tendencies to push religion into similar dilemmas. This series will launch new investigations into the relations between faith and politics on a broad ecumenical and global level. Its guiding question will be, "to what extent do different theologians or different political theologies make possible the prospect of a divinely sanctioned 'kingdom' of peace and justice?"

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Islamic Political Theology

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In memory of professor Massimo Campanini

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Introduction

What Is Islamic Political Theology?

Massimo Campanini and Marco Di Donato

Editing a book on political theology in Islam is a challenge. First of all because the expression "political theology" is ambiguous and open to diverse interpretations. Secondly, because we must oppose the widely shared—even in the academy—view that Islam is *naturally* theological-political since it is "theocratic." The question in itself is simple: how can a religion like Islam, connecting heaven and earth, faith and society, worship and mundane action, not be political? Rather, the answer is difficult.

The concept unifying these elements is that of a religious community (*Umma*) which could be, at one and the same time, the privileged subject and the object of political theology. The idea of a religious community or *Umma* is pivotal in Islam, being charismatic (Watt 1980); therefore, Islam seems particularly fitted for political theology. Moreover, connecting politics and religion does mean in Islam connecting politics with jurisprudence, insofar as Islam is a normative religion (like Judaism) and, as is well known, the law (*shari'a*) is of divine origin. Through the revealed basis of the law (the *shari'a*) and the consequent human elaboration of positive jurisprudence (*fiqh*), God made manifest His will both in social life and in politics: the law became the basis of Islamic political theology. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (ca. 1056–1111), for instance, who was a celebrated jurist and professor of law, grasped the possible foundation of Islamic political theology linking together the dimension of religious science with the dimension of legal acts (al-Ghazali 2010).

Our subject is not so obvious, though. The texture of religion and state (*din wa dawla*) is not so automatic in Islam, if Patricia Crone, among others (and we are in the number too [see Campanini 2019]), was right in writing that "most polities in [Islamic] history have been characterized by the distinction between the political and the religious spheres" (Crone 2004, p.

14). Moreover, to stress only another point, a great number of contemporary hyper-conservative Muslims are apolitical, as most of the Salafis are very traditional in ethics and behavior but not necessarily engaged in politics (Di Donato 2018). Therefore, the problem of whether a political theology exists in Islam is open. This book will try to give a provisional but critical answer exploring a wide range of issues.

We would like to suggest a number of initial considerations, beginning with a definition. Political theology is a field of study revived in contemporary times, the 1920s of the past century, by the German jurist and philosopher of politics Carl Schmitt. Political theology affirms that political concepts and theological concepts are strictly linked and, in Schmitt's opinion, that the concepts of politics are derived from theology (Schmitt 1922). Giovanni Filoramo put the question as follows:

> [Political theology] is the historical and political study of the way theological concepts and representations of the divine in a particular religious tradition correspond with the forms and the dynamics of a particular structure of power and political authority. All this has two basic meanings: 1) the way political structures are mirrored in the theological conceptions; 2) and *vice versa* the way theological conceptions must be shaped in order to provide proper representations of divinity and sovereignty. The element that mediates between these trends is the religious community which is, at one time, the privileged subject and object of political theology. (Filoramo 2004, p. 347)

Another possible definition is the following: "two aspects of political theology may be distinguished . . . one examines the theological implications of politics . . .; the other the political implications of theology" (Assmann 2000).[1] An even more detailed definition could include further dimensions of political theology: first of all, that political theology is the theological legitimization of a political order. If political theology is a kind of politics going back to God in order to realize its objectives and if the concept of God as the supreme legislator is a form of political theology, surely Islam had its own political theology in that, on the one hand, (almost) all its rulers sought the legitimization of their power in religion; and that, on the other hand, God is the main source of legislation and power.

Jan Assmann, however, turned Schmitt's paradigm upside down (Assmann 2000): in Assmann's opinion, theological concepts are derived from politics. Ancient Egypt and Judaism are the litmus paper of this *bouléversement*. If Schmitt supported the idea that God rules the state, Assmann supported the idea that the state is representative of God and then legitimized by religion. According to him, in ancient Egypt the pharaoh reigned as gods' deputy: because gods are remote from earth and humans, so an institution was needed

in order to keep alive contact with them. This institution was the pharaoh's kingship. In Judaism, the pharaoh's position was replaced by the Jewish people which was "elected" by YHWH as His exclusive favorite people. The Jewish people acted exactly as the Egyptian gods: they chose their kings in harmony with an indication received from YHWH. In a very curious expression, Michael Brett argued that Judaism works with a "Melchizedek paradigm": the identity of priesthood and kingship (Brett 2019). On the whole, Assmann argued (and although we don't share all his approach, we agree with this) that God is never apolitical, at least in the monotheistic Semitic heritage (involving obviously also Christianity). The difference between ancient Egypt and Israel lies in that Egyptian god(s) bequeathed their power to pharaohs, while in Israel YHWH took on Himself, directly and personally, the political function on behalf of the Jews. The false myth of being God's elect people is rooted here.

On the other hand, Christianity seems theological-political in nature. It is perhaps enough to remember a famous passage of Paul of Tarsus's letter to the Romans: "Everybody must submit to constituted authorities. For authority comes only from God, and existing human authorities are established by God. Therefore, who opposes authority, opposes the order established by God" (Rm. 13, 1–2). The concept that the civil, public power must be subject to divine sanction—and therefore to the institution which performs this sanction, that is the Church—sounds inherent in the very foundation of Christianity. It is interesting to point out (and all readers are able to draw their own conclusion) that Paul's statement is tantamount to the Qur'anic assumption Q. 4:59: "O believers! Obey God, His Messenger and those among you who get authority (*ulu'l-amr*). If you are disputing, report the controversy to God and His Messenger."

Considering the evolution of the Papacy-Empire struggle in the Western so-called Middle Ages, it is true that Pope Gelasius (492–496) neatly distinguished between priesthood and kingdom (remember the "Melchizedek paradigm"), each of them occupying a clearly defined sphere, but it is also true that the "political Augustinism" neatly submitted the emperor to the pope: the emperor must bow to the pope, who has the duty to counsel him, lead him, and has even the authority to depose him. Perhaps it is only with Dante's *Monarchia* (probably written in 1313) that an explicit parallelism between the two *potestates* was vindicated. And it is only with Marsilius of Padua's *Defensor pacis* (written in 1324) that the two orders were neatly divided.

Therefore, we don't share Marta Sordi's contention:

Christianity [at its origin] never opposed the constituted power . . ., rather it opposed the political power usurping the rights of God. [. . .] it has been correctly written that separating the kingdom of God from the kingdom of David

["Give Caesar what it is his own and give God what it is His own"], Jesus de-politicized, spiritualized the very idea of God's sovereignty, and then broke up with the Jewish idea of Israel's freedom, refusing Jewish theocratic Messianism. (Sordi 2004, pp. 11–12)

Giovanni Filoramo's opinion is completely different—and we share it:

The Christian faith in the resurrected Christ is a political faith. At odds with the "dualistic" interpretation of Mt. 22,21 ("Give Caesar what is his own and give God what is His own"), that allegedly represents the root of Western separation between spiritual and temporal powers, Christian faith is intrinsically political, tantamount to Islamic faith, although pursuing different paths. (Filoramo 2009, pp. 18–19)

Actually, Christianity is not less theological-political and/or "theocratic" than Judaism or Islam, although it can seem otherwise. Christianity—at least Roman Catholicism and Greek Orthodoxy—are structured in strictly hierarchic form, while, as it is well known, Judaism and Islam (at least majority Sunni Islam) don't know a clerical hierarchy. Therefore, Christianity is clearly in possession of a theological-political dimension.

Merio Scattola (2007) keenly argued that Paul's theology, upon which all Christian theology is grounded, envisages a triangle whose vertexes are God, the Church, and the world. According to Scattola, there are three possible political theologies: one when transcendence manifests itself as eternal Logos (*verbum*) in a secular kingdom; one when transcendence, through the incarnated Logos, manifests itself exclusively in the Church; one when transcendence, manifesting itself both as eternal and incarnated Logos, acts upon both the kingdom and the Church. The first is the political theology of the Byzantine Roman Oriental empire and means, in the end, caesaro-papism. The second is the political theology of the Western Roman Empire in the first four centuries after Christ's death. The third is the political theology of the Medieval German Holy Roman Empire. Perhaps Scattola's analysis is questionable. However, it shows that Christianity was theological-political right from the beginning, both in the so-called Late Antiquity with the Emperors Constantine and Theodosius, who linked the empire's destiny to the triumph of a religion, Christianity (the "pagan" Roman empire was very tolerant and pluralistic in regard to religions), and in the Middle Ages with the struggle between the empire and the Church for supremacy—and the formulation of theocracy by popes like Innocent III, Gregory VII, and Boniface VIII. The Eastern Byzantine Empire with its open caesaro-papism was theological-political at the same level, or even more.

The complicated interreligious dialectics we have only briefly sketched raises two basic questions about (1) the way political structures are mirrored in theological conceptions; 2) and *vice versa*, the way theological conceptions must be shaped in order to provide proper representations of divinity and sovereignty. As far as we are concerned here, the concept of Islamic state and the concept of sacred space(s) are worth considering.

The concept of state is one of the most controversial in Islamic political thought and has been widely debated. But *what is the Islamic state*? The most obvious answer, to use again an expression of Patricia Crone, is that the Islamic state is the state wherein religion regulates temporal affairs. In more precise and refined terms, it is the state wherein God's sovereignty (*hakimiyya*) is in force through the revealed law (*shari'a*). Scholarly research has questioned when and how the Qur'an and the *sunna*, the elements making up the *shari'a*, were established. Naturally, opinions differ and some orientalists have maintained that the Qur'an and the *sunna* were not formed at the time of the Prophet Muhammad, but later in different, varying long periods. If this is true, it is clear that an Islamic state wherein the *shari'a* ruled in full has never existed. For *shari'a*, even though revealed, is a historical fact. Consequently, the very concept of an Islamic state must be projected into an evolutionary, historical dimension. Beyond their historical importance, what is really significant and decisive is that, from the Muslims' point of view, the Qur'an and the *sunna* are the direct constituents of the prophetic and human experience of Muhammad, so that, from the very beginning, they formed the basis of the imagined Islamic state.

A new question then arises: *when did the exceptional circumstance of the implementation of the* shari'a *occur and therefore the sovereignty of God was implemented*? The most obvious—and objective—answer is: at the time of the Prophet, when he was a statesman and the conveyor of revelation in Medina (622–632). But did this exceptional condition survive him? Sunni Muslims will answer yes, as they consider the time of the four "Rightly Guided" (*rashidun*) caliphs—Abu Bakr (632–634), 'Umar (634–644), 'Uthman (644–656), and 'Ali (656–661)—blessed by God. The first four caliphs are believed to have followed the example of the Prophet and applied the *shari'a*. (Some doubts could arise in the light of the fact that three out of four caliphs, all of them except Abu Bakr, were murdered: the situation was therefore far from being idyllic.) Obviously, Shiite Muslims have a different opinion and they will answer no to the previous question: the first three caliphs were not "Rightly Guided," but usurpers of 'Ali's rights.

Actually, *al-fitna al-kubra*, the civil war between the caliph 'Ali and his opponent Mu'awiya, a relative of 'Uthman, after the latter's assassination, has been the watershed of political theology's birth in Islam. For the *fitna*

marked the "falsification of Muslim consciousness." As Nasr Abu Zayd put it:

> It was the Ummayads and not the Khawarij . . . who first put forward the idea of divine sovereignty; with all that implies in the way of claiming that texts are operative in the domain of political rivalry and clashes of interest. That was when Muʿawiya took the advice of ʿAmr Ibn al-ʿAs and ordered his men to put the pages of the Qurʾan on the tips of their swords and appeal to the Qurʾan as arbiter in their dispute with their rivals. [. . .] It marks the start of the process of creating false consciousness, a process that the Umayyad regime practiced because it had lost the legitimacy on which any political system must be based. (Abu Zayd 2018, p. 60)

In order to understand the huge implications of this perspective, it is necessary to remember that, at the time of the Prophet, Muslim Community (the *Umma*) was grounded upon a political covenant (the Chart or *sahifa* of Medina) and upon a wholly secular system of tribal alliances. The Chart of Medina is by no means conditioned by *religious* worries. It is with *al-fitna al-kubra* and the falsification of Muslim consciousness that political theology began (Campanini 2020). Therefore, Islamic political theology did not operate at Muhammad's time—when Muhammad was still alive: the Prophet neither built up a state in the common sense of the term, with its complex apparatus of administration and legislation, nor granted to this alleged state principles derived from revelation and religion, nor implemented a succession based on dynastic rules as was the case with the Umayyads (the dynasty of caliphs founded by Muʿawiya). Muhammad's Medina was an ideal *polis* wherein he performed the function of *hakam* (arbiter) and *shaykh* (old man, chief), tantamount to any other Bedouin chief in pre-Islamic times. A clear demonstration of all this lies in the assiduity with which he consulted (*shura*) the Companions in the crucial moments of political or military choices. Again, no religious worry was overwhelming, but there were instead concrete, technical, and practical concerns.

The Tunisian historian Hichem Djaït wondered whether the civil wars were religious or political struggles and responded that "actually the religious and the political were intertwined. The murderers of the caliph ʿUthman claimed to comply with the literality and a-temporality of the Qurʾan. [. . .] They represented a new force, strongly ideologized and imbued of 'Koranism,' both the revolutionary and the terrorism face of the *fitna*" (Djaït 1989, p. 11). In the following centuries, the political character of religion and the religious character of government were emphasized and become paramount, but this evolution was not by nature carved in Islamic ideology in itself. After all, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali argued for a *parallelism*

between religion and politics, not for a subordination of the former to the latter or *vice versa*:

> It has been said that religion and sultan are twins, and also that religion is the foundation and the sultan is a guard: that which has no foundation collapses and that which has no guard is lost. No rational person doubts that, if mankind, given their different classes, diverse desires and disparate opinions, are left to their own devices without decrees that they obey and that unify their factions, they would all end in ruin. (al-Ghazali 2013, p. 238)

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali never said that politics must be submitted to religion or absorbed by religion; nor the contrary. The caliphs and the sultans are (theoretically) independent from *'ulama'*, the religious scholars; and *'ulama'* are (theoretically) independent from caliphs and sultans. The Hanbali theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) himself theorized a *siyasa shar'iyya* (politics in harmony with religious law), not a *dawla islamiyya* (Islamic state).

An interesting interpretative key consists in solving political theology into the polarity between Mecca and Medina (Salzani 2006). The former is a symbol, a dream after the Hegira, a *mundus imaginatus*, a place of desire to come back to. The latter is prosaically real. After the Hegira (and it is important to stress that the Prophet Muhammad never returned to live in Mecca, he remained in Medina in order to build up the Islamic *Umma* [*not* the Islamic state!]), Mecca became the utopian realm perhaps impossible to attain. On the contrary, Medina, the seat of the *Umma*, and after Muhammad's death, the capital of the Islamic empire, is simply a worldly, mundane place wherein government and power are managed, and so possibly a corrupted and corrupting place. Indeed, in Islamic and especially in contemporary Islamist thought, Medina has also become part of the utopia. In Medina, the Prophet achieved his mission, while it is with the *fitna*, the civil war between 'Ali and Mu'awiya, that the incantation of the pristine *Umma*'s perfection was definitely broken. The community survived by now as an institution remote from the original, perfect and purely religious incarnation of God's will and of the monotheistic idea: it has been corrupted by political theology.

It will be of no surprise then that the "Islamic state" (*dawla islamiyya*) is a concept of modernity (Campanini 2019; Hallaq 2013). It did not exist in classical Islam (the formula *dawla islamiyya*, we repeat, is unknown in classical political works like al-Mawardi's *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya* [The institutions of power, al-Mawardi 1996] or Ibn Taymiyya's *al-Siyasa al-Shar'iyya* [Politics in harmony with religious law, Ibn Taymiyya 1996], let alone in Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddima* [Introduction to his universal history, Ibn Khaldun 1978]) and was formulated in the twentieth century in reaction against Western imperialism and in order to recover the pristine glory of Islam. The

idea of the Islamic state is asymptotical; not something actually existing or implementable, but something toward which it is necessary to move and to point. Unfortunately, a retrospective utopia stopped the forward development of Sunni political thought which was unable to formulate a theology of history (Campanini 2018). The idea of a retrospective utopia means that, in order to build up the future, we must look to the past: a commonly shared view in contemporary Islamist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood and many others indeed, but clearly involving a distortion of historical time. It was rather the Shiites, elaborating the concept of the Imamate (the hidden Imam expected to return at the end of times), who suggested that history has a teleological meaning.

Briefly, the issue of the Islamic state is theological-political insofar as politics seeks a religious ground (Belkeziz 2009), while in contemporary (radical) Islamism religion is plainly used as a political tool and instrumental to wholly mundane goals. In any case, in the Western Christian outlook, political theology sounds negative, while in Islam it sounds positive insofar as power is a benefit bestowed on men by God Itself.[2] As Patricia Crone correctly put it: "[Muslim thinkers] did not share the medieval Western view of government as a secondary development of human history rooted in the Fall. They tacitly assumed government had existed even before the creation of mankind. [. . .] Government was an inescapable feature of universe. [. . .] God rules in the most literal sense of the word. [. . .] Contrary to what medieval Christians said, coercive government did not develop among humans as a result of the Fall. All God's created being[s] were subject to His government, directly or through intermediaries, whether they sinned or not" (Crone 2004, pp. 4 and 6).

We stress again that, in order to understand the problem of political theology in Islam is fundamental to refer to the Prophet Muhammad's experience: *min al-daʿwa ila al-dawla*, that is "from revelation to the (Medinan) state." Hasan Hanafi would have said: *min al-wahy ila al-waqiʿ*, that is "from revelation to factual reality" (Hanafi 2012). For Muhammad's biography witnesses the translation from prophecy to government (Watt 1961), from the ideal to the factual, from theory to praxis. In this translation, theology mixed with politics, became political. It was not in itself a drama treading the same path as Judaism and Christianity. However, it paved the way to the successive theological-political developments we have described, the dramatic disruption of the *Umma* through the *fitna*. Islamic political thought kept alive the distinction between secular rule and religious authority (Islam is by no means "theocratic"), but the two dimensions transformed themselves in an irretrievable mixture.

Considering the wide range of meanings of political theology, it goes without saying that the articles collected in this volume cover a wide range

of topics. What seems to emerge is, on the one hand, the complexity of approaches Muslim thinkers developed throughout the centuries; and, on the other hand, the substantial character of a praxis-oriented thought in Muslim/Islamic tradition. Political theology is not simply a matter of theory but a prism through which to observe Muslim/Islamic society and history. It is unavoidable that ideal contradictions reflect historical conflicts.

NOTES

1. My English translation is from S. Mimouni in G. Filoramo (ed.), *Teologie politiche, modelli a confronto* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005), p. 19.

2. See the still intriguing book al-Tabari (d. 923) devoted in his monumental history of the world to the birth of humanity and its pristine organization (Tabari 1987; and see also al-Tabari 1957–1960).

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Chapter 1

Alfarabi's Political Theology in *The Virtuous City*

Catarina Belo

INTRODUCTION

Alfarabi (d. 950) was a prominent medieval Islamic philosopher. His primary significance arguably lies in the fact that he was the first to present a complete philosophical system in the Islamic tradition. He benefited from the many translations that had been made from Greek into Arabic of the most significant Greek and Hellenistic philosophers and scientists, and particularly of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic works. His philosophy, consisting of a voluminous corpus, of which many works have been lost, shows a combination of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic elements. However, the Islamic elements in his philosophy are not far to seek, in his choice of themes and in the way he handles them.

Within a Neoplatonic and Aristotelian framework, Alfarabi was keen to discuss politics. He was also a prominent metaphysician. He certainly had read an Arabic version of Plato's (d. 347 b. C.) *Republic* and Plato's *Laws*, or summaries of those works (Alfarabi 2015). He follows in the tradition of Porphyry (d. 305) in combining the thought of Plato and of Aristotle (d. 322 b. C.), which is particularly patent in a work devoted to the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle which summarizes some of Plato's dialogues (Alfarabi 2001).

ALFARABI ON POLITICAL SCIENCE

In his political philosophy, the greatest influence appears to be that of Plato, noticeably in his views on the perfect state which is headed by a philosopher-king in the Platonic tradition, and who for Alfarabi is also a prophet. The

preponderance of Plato's influence may have to do with the fact that he had access to some form of Plato's political works, such as the *Republic* and the *Laws*. It is not thought that he had access to Aristotle's *Politics*. However, he considers human beings as social and political animals, echoing Aristotle's position. Living in society is required in order to achieve human perfection. Political science is part of ethics (Alfarabi 2001, 23).

In Alfarabi's view, political science is also part of the science pertaining to human beings. He defines political science as consisting of "knowing the things by which the citizens of cities attain happiness through political association in the measure that innate disposition equips each of them for it" (Alfarabi 2001, 24). This is part of the science of man. Alfarabi further distinguishes voluntary intelligibles from theoretical intelligibles, the former dealing with events that are changeable, and assigns the deliberative faculty to voluntary intelligibles, in the sense that these are the object of the deliberative faculty. The latter consists in

the skill and the faculty by which one discovers and discerns the variable accidents of the intelligibles whose particular instances are made to exist by the will, when one attempts to bring them into actual existence by the will at a determined time, in a determined place, and when a determined event takes place, whether the time is long or short, whether the locality is large or small. (Alfarabi 2001, 27–28)

In discussing political theology, we must bear in mind three interrelated disciplines, namely philosophy, politics, and theology or religion. In Alfarabi, as we shall see, the link between philosophy and religion is mediated by and particularly evident in his politics, since politics is inseparable from religion and also from philosophy. Moreover, politics has a firm grounding in philosophy, as practical philosophy, while theology is considered as a part of philosophy, specifically as part of first philosophy or metaphysics. Therefore, there is a link between philosophy and religion which is articulated in different ways and at different levels, theoretical and practical. In one part of philosophy, politics, that connection is particularly apparent, as will become clearer later.

It is important to bear in mind that politics, according to Aristotle, is one of two parts of practical philosophy, the other part being ethics. Politics is an important element in Alfarabi's philosophy, but as part of practical philosophy it must refer to theoretical philosophy. The preeminence of the theoretical over the practical can be seen in the way Alfarabi argues that moral virtue is dependent on theoretical virtue (Alfarabi 2001, 32). He states that "it is evident that the deliberative virtue with the highest authority can only be subordinate to the theoretical virtue" (Alfarabi 2001, 32), and the former

cannot be detached from the latter. And politics is clearly based on the more general knowledge of human virtue (Alfarabi 2001, 24).

Before treating the connection between these different disciplines in Alfarabi, it is important to think of the political aspect within classical Islam.

The connection between theology or religion and politics in Islam is a central element studied by scholars of Islam and goes back to the very beginning of Islam, which is a religion and a civilization as well as a way of life, pervading all aspects of social and political life. This is apparent in the way the early Islamic community was a political entity starting from the time of the emigration (*hijra*) from Mecca to Medina, where a political constitution came into place. Later, during the Umayyad (661–750) and the Abbasid (750–1258) caliphates, the caliph was expected to defend the Islamic religion, although the religious class was separate from the political class, even if the two classes went hand in hand.

In addition, it is important to note that the link between philosophy and religion in Alfarabi has been discussed by scholars and has an extensive literature devoted to it. He is committed to the Greek and Hellenistic philosophical tradition, but also to Islamic tenets. Some authors have emphasized the Islamic themes in his works, for instance, in *The Virtuous City* (*The Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City, Mabadi' Ara' ahl al-madina al-fadila*) (Rudolph 2008). Indeed, he often discusses the connection between philosophy and religion in a way that would be foundational for future generations of philosophers, for instance, in Averroes but also later in the history of philosophy. In *The Virtuous City*, his main work—though possibly not his last (Campanini 2011)—he clearly states that philosophy and religion express themselves in different ways, religion using metaphorical language and philosophy expressing itself in scientific or more accurate language. In *The Attainment of Happiness* (*Tahsil al-sa'ada*), he claims that "according to the ancients, religion is an imitation of philosophy" and he distinguishes, as Averroes (d. 1198) would do later, the two stages in acquiring knowledge (forming an opinion and assenting to it) and the use of the imagination in religion, that is, using persuasion in religion and demonstration in philosophy (Alfarabi 2001, 44).

Some scholars found that Alfarabi made religion subservient to philosophy in this way, since philosophy is for a minority and the ruler of the political state is necessarily a philosopher—philosophy being identified with the elites. Moreover, it is required of the population of the virtuous city to have the correct ideas about the universe and its hierarchy. The religious element is clear in Alfarabi's philosophy and it is an indispensable one.

The political element is prominent in Alfarabi's magnum opus, *The Virtuous City*, but also in the *Political Regime* (*Al-siyasa al-madaniyya*) and other works. Some scholars have wished to subordinate philosophy or

metaphysics to the political element in Alfarabi's philosophy. However, it would be difficult to see how Alfarabi would defend such a view. In *The Virtuous City*, it is clear that the political is grounded in the metaphysical, since the work starts with and makes clear Alfarabi's metaphysics. Moreover, it is clear that Alfarabi does not propose to change the traditional hierarchy between practical and theoretical philosophy, or between the practical and the theoretical intellect. Because the practical intellect deals with particulars, as well as practical philosophy, the theoretical intellect (and philosophy) must tower above the practical intellect. Consequently, metaphysics must be superior to politics, which is a part of practical philosophy, complemented by ethics. Indeed, the foundation of the political system is metaphysics, or philosophy, but also religion. For religion is one of two ways of understanding reality. Clearly, then, philosophy or metaphysics, which is first philosophy and the most important part of philosophy, grounds both religion and politics, and mediates between them. A true concept of reality is essential for practical purposes also. Hence Alfarabi's contention to the effect that everyone in the perfect city must have an adequate conception of reality, either through philosophy (a minority, those who have the ability to study and practice philosophy) or through religion. The practical does not stand without the theoretical and the theoretical grounds the practical domain.

VIEWS ON ALFARABI'S POLITICAL THEOLOGY

In an article recently published, Massimo Campanini defines the concept of political science according to Alfarabi, with its metaphysical connotations. Campanini draws on several texts by Alfarabi and engages in a discussion with those who favor Alfarabi's focus on politics, over and above his metaphysics (Campanini 2011).

After delineating the concept of political theology and the place of politics within classical Islam, he describes the role of politics within Alfarabi's philosophy, and the link between politics and theology. Political theology would mean the link between politics and theology, and the theological source of political concepts.

More specifically, Campanini describes the concept of political theology in general as the grounding of politics in theology. He explains that this term, which originated with Carl Schmitt (d. 1985) in the 1920s, means that theological concepts and political concepts are interrelated, in the sense that politics and theology imply each other (Campanini 2011, 35). Quoting also Michele Nicoletti, who holds that political theology is "an affirmation of political power" and further states that this is not possible in Christianity, since the political organization does not come directly from theology,

Campanini argues that, except for the early Islamic community in Medina, there was no theocracy in Islam (Campanini 2011, 36).

In comparing Christianity and Islam, Campanini argues that although there is no "incarnation" of the divine in human beings or in political power in Islam (except perhaps in the Shiʻa sense of a perfect imam), nevertheless, political power and religion are closely connected.

With regard to the concept of political theology, Campanini argues for the link between juridical and theological concepts, rather than theological hermeneutics in analyzing political theory. He states:

> Political theology as *theological hermeneutics in contemporary times* is unknown in Islamic thought. Rather we are able to detect political theology in Islam as a *structural analogy between juridical and theological concepts*, in conformity with Carl Schmitt's argument that political concepts are borrowed from theology. The juridical dimension is essential in Islam. In Islam, jurisprudence is pivotal for religion, and religion, even more than theology, takes shape in jurisprudence. Conversely, Islamic political language always resorts to metaphors and images borrowed from religion. It does not mean, however, that in Islam *political theology is hermeneutics of politics* insofar as it reveals, in the light of a hermeneutics of politics, an element of transcendence within the same politics. (Campanini 2011, 38)

Campanini further states that in Alfarabi, political theology specifically means, on the one hand, "achieving the theological legitimacy of a political order" and "determining how God has sanctioned and prescribed a political order through the Law" (Campanini 2011, 39). More generally, he argues that political order implies the link between religion, politics, and philosophy. In this sense, this link does not appear to be controversial. Politics features prominently, as we have seen, in Alfarabi's works and it is closely linked to philosophy. And politics does not appear dissociated from religion. This is clear, particularly in *The Virtuous City*, in the way the leader of the political community is seen also as a religious figure with prophetic powers. It is also seen in the way the inhabitants of the perfect state should have a correct grasp of the cosmos and reality in general; the majority of those will access that reality through religion, while a minority will be philosophers. Campanini refers to Alfarabi's definition of political science in the *Enumeration of the Sciences* (*Ihsa' al-ʻulum*):

> Political science investigates the sorts of voluntary actions and ways of life—the dispositions, moral habits, inclinations and states of character—from which those actions and ways of life come about; the goals for the sake of which they are performed; how they ought to exist in a human being; how to order them in

him according to the manner they ought to exist in him; and the way to preserve them for him. (Campanini 2011, 39)

Based on *The Attainment of Happiness* (*Tahsil al-sa'ada*), Campanini defines political science as "the inquiry into those intellectual principles leading human beings, as political animals, to cooperate in order to achieve happiness" (Campanini 2011, 41). Here, the principles of this science are understood as being theoretical, but the outcome is of a practical nature and it involves practical means (cooperation among human beings). Campanini also discusses the possible hierarchy among the three domains of philosophy, politics, and religion. As part of his defense of a political theology in Alfarabi, he asserts that politics draws its legitimization from religion, and further that religion is an imitation of philosophy. He further compares Alfarabi's position on the connection between philosophy and religion to that of Averroes, in the sense that both hold that the content of philosophy and that of religion are the same and as such they portray the same reality (Campanini 2011, 43). Campanini also argues that politics is the link between philosophy and politics. More specifically, he states,

Philosophy formulates the right concepts regarding God, the universe, and the human being, and religion makes use of them as presuppositions useful for implementing the social and political goal of managing the society and the state. Thus, religion is the driving belt between philosophy and politics. Political science is a religious science whose basis is philosophy. (Campanini 2011, 45)

Accordingly, jurisprudence comes under political science, as stated in Alfarabi's *Book of Religion* (*Kitab al-milla*), which, according to Campanini, also states that religion forms part of philosophy through political science, and that religion includes both practical and theoretical elements (Campanini 2011, 47–48). He concludes by saying that political theology in Alfarabi's view does not mean that politics has a religious value but that religion has a political dimension. This position means to give due weight to politics and religion within Alfarabi's philosophy, although the stress on religion is apparent. He argues that "Alfarabi was a political theologian insofar as religion is the basis for his political program. On the other hand, he developed political science as a means to understand the nature of political things" (Campanini 2011, 49). Campanini highlights the role of religion in Alfarabi's philosophy and politics in contrast to a Straussian position, adopted by Muhsin Mahdi (d. 2007) and by Charles Butterworth, which downplays the role of religion in Alfarabi's system.

In the same collection, this article is followed by one written by Charles Butterworth, which aims at denying the possibility of a political theology in

Alfarabi. He argues that, according to Campanini, politics in Alfarabi comes under the umbrella of theology or religion, while Mahdi and Strauss (d. 1973) strongly defend the view that religion is subordinate to philosophy in Alfarabi (and in that sense they are not equal as Campanini argues). Stating the two opposing views, he argues:

> [T]he view opposed to Strauss and Mahdi (as well as to Alfarabi, I will argue) is that religion provides adequate knowledge of the way things are. Consequently, religion can be subordinate neither to philosophy nor to politics. Rather, religion—deemed equivalent to political theology—is said to set forth the correct interpretation of the human dilemma. It, not philosophy, explains how we ought to live. Such a view is erroneous insofar as it unduly neglects the way Alfarabi criticizes theology and replaces it with a religion that is free of theology. Moreover, it assumes what Alfarabi leaves enigmatic, namely, that theoretical science is available to human beings. Finally, it wrongly posits political science as the means for attaining ultimate human happiness. Alfarabi embraces none of these positions. Rather, he follows in the footsteps of his two great predecessors—Plato and Aristotle—and strives to revive philosophy because it has fallen into desuetude in his day. The philosophy he revives is most emphatically political. Religion is merely a handmaiden to it, and theology is tolerated only as a necessary tool of communication. (Butterworth 2011, 54)

He construes Muhsin Mahdi's argument as stating, in the Straussian tradition, that Islamic philosophy is primarily political philosophy, and that religion is subsumed under politics and essentially serves a political purpose.

Butterworth downplays the metaphysical aspect of Alfarabi's writings, stating that "none of Alfarabi's writings leads to that kind of knowledge [i.e., metaphysical knowledge]" (Butterworth 2011, 51–52). Butterworth mentions *The Virtuous City* and the *Political Regime* as works that do not provide that kind of knowledge.[1] He stresses that religion is subordinate to philosophy and politics is guided by philosophy, and in that sense there is no political theology in Alfarabi, given the diminished role of religion in his system (Butterworth 2011, 63). The relative role of religion is emphasized by Butterworth in the way that several different religions are possible and acceptable, as stated in Alfarabi's *Book of Religion* (Butterworth 2011, 64). He further states that the role assigned to theology is reduced by Alfarabi. He argues that Alfarabi was not a precursor to Averroes on these issues but that Averroes accepted Alfarabi's subordination of religion to philosophy.

ALFARABI'S VIEWS ON PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

In my view, a close analysis of *The Virtuous City* on this issue will clarify the possibility of a political theology in Alfarabi.

In order to elucidate the notion of political theology and how it relates to Alfarabi's philosophy, it is important to distinguish the different terms involved, and particularly the way in which they were used by Alfarabi.

By "philosophy," the various disciplines in the Aristotelian tradition are meant. This would include a natural theology which comes under metaphysics. In that sense, metaphysics, which is first philosophy and a part of philosophy, includes ontology, the science of being as being, and theology, the science of the supreme being, God. This latter sense of theology is a natural theology, which is attainable by reason. It is clear that this kind of theology is present in Alfarabi's *The Virtuous City*, as we shall see.

However, in the medieval Islamic tradition, "theology" has a different meaning. Medieval Islamic theology is known as *'ilm al-kalam*, which means speculative (rather than dogmatic) theology. It consisted in a debate concerning God, human action, and nature, and its most famous exponents in the medieval period were the Mu'tazilite school and the Ash'arite school.[2] Some of the issues debated were God's attributes, the Qur'an and whether it was created or the eternal word of God, and the nature of human action, whether it was free or not. There are traces of this kind of theology in Alfarabi, not least in the way he describes the First in *The Virtuous City* and the relation between the First and its attributes. In particular, he appears to follow the Mu'tazilite view in identifying God and His attributes, regarding God's nature as absolutely one while taking into account God's multiple attributes.

The term "religion" (*milla*) is broader than theology. It embraces both theoretical and practical aspects. It also includes ethical issues, the individual relations between human beings, and particular religious communities. Jurisprudence (*fiqh*) deals with practical matters of worship and the relations between human beings.

When speaking of political theology and whether it is possible, it appears that neither Campanini nor Butterworth has in mind this specific sense of theology, but religion (*milla*) in a broader way, not only as something theoretical but also the practice of religion. Religion in Alfarabi is certainly something theoretical, because it consists in one's views on God and creation, including man. In this broad sense, theology is very much present in Alfarabi's works, and is specifically addressed, not least in *The Virtuous City*.

With regard to politics, theology consists of practical philosophy and comes under philosophy in general, as we have seen. In a sense, both theology, in the broader sense, and politics are part of philosophy, so it is natural that they should be related. Simply because theology or religion may be

subordinate to philosophy, it does not mean that religion does not play an essential role, particularly when it comes to the political organization of the state. But theology is important even at a theoretical level and not just at the political level. It is impossible to downplay the role of religion in Alfarabi's works. Its tenets serve not just for grounding the political organization of the state, but they are important at the individual level, for instance, in the matter of the salvation of the soul.

In this sense, Alfarabi's work prefigures that of Averroes, who appears to expand on Alfarabi's linkage between religion and metaphorical language. In *The Virtuous City*, Alfarabi stresses that religion is a valid way of understanding reality for the majority, while philosophy is for a minority. *The Virtuous City* he presents clearly a philosophy and a theological description of reality. Presumably, all the inhabitants of the virtuous city must know its contents, since the full title reads *The Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City*. However, only a minority of people is acquainted with philosophy, and the majority uses religion to reach the nature of reality.

In his *Decisive Treatise*, Averroes espouses a similar view, although he does not mention Alfarabi, and he expands on it, unraveling the Aristotelian aspects of the different ways of understanding and speaking about reality. Both Alfarabi and Averroes believe that religion is for the majority and philosophy for a minority. Both believe that they express the same content but in different ways. Moreover, Averroes expressly identifies religious discourse with rhetorical speech, while identifying theology (in the narrow sense of "kalam") with dialectical discourse. The similarity between the two philosophers' approaches is not far to seek, with the proviso that Averroes expands on it with details of the different kinds of speech (indicating that this distinction is based on Aristotle's Organon, in particular, *Posterior Analytics*, *Topics*, and *Rhetoric*). Averroes also understands the link between religion and philosophy in connection with particular readings of the Qur'an.

> We say: Since what is intended by the Law is teaching true science and true practice; and teaching is of two sorts—forming a concept and bringing about assent—as those adept in dialectical theology have explained; and there are three methods of bringing about assent for people—demonstrative, dialectical, and rhetorical—and two methods of forming concepts, either by means of the thing itself or by means of a likeness of it; and not all people have natures such as to accept demonstrations or dialectical arguments, let alone demonstrative arguments, given the difficulty in teaching demonstrative arguments and the lengthy time needed by someone adept at learning them; and since what is intended by the Law is, indeed, to teach everyone, therefore, it is obligatory that the Law comprise all the manners of the methods of bringing about assent and all the manners of the methods of forming a concept. (Averröes 2001, 24)

One may argue that both philosophers think of philosophy more highly than of religion (*shar'*, in this passage by Averroes), although they consider the content of the two disciplines to be the same, namely reality, or God and creation. However, the role of religion or theology cannot be downplayed.

If we understand theology broadly as religion, one can indeed speak of a political theology in Alfarabi and also in Averroes, in the sense of a religious basis to politics. And if religion is subsumed under philosophy, so is politics.

While I concur with Campanini's analysis of the place of a political theology in Alfarabi, with the primacy of the religious or theological, I would like to focus specifically on the text of *The Virtuous City* to illustrate the theological foundations of Alfarabi's politics.

POLITICAL THEOLOGY IN *THE VIRTUOUS CITY*

The role of religion in *The Virtuous City* can be seen in three main instances: (1) in his description of the First at the start of the work; (2) in the description of the prophet, with the later description of the ruler, especially the first ruler, as also a prophet; and (3) in his description of the nature and role of religion in the virtuous city and in its citizens. The correct perception of reality also impinges on the possibility of the soul surviving death. These religious or theological aspects have political implications, and the political aspects are based on the religious aspects. In discussing the ruler of the virtuous city, toward the end of the work, Alfarabi states that the ruler stands to the city as God to the universe (Alfarabi 1985, 36–37). After discussing the faculties of the soul, and the role of imagination, it is clear that the first ruler of the virtuous city is also a prophet. In other words, in the description of the first and perfect ruler we find echoes of Alfarabi's metaphysical and psychological theories.

In *The Virtuous City*, the place of religion or theology is immediately apparent. Alfarabi begins by discussing the nature of the First, which can clearly be identified with God. Alfarabi proves that the First can only be one and that it necessarily exists (Alfarabi 1985, 56–57). There are several attributes which are ascribed to the First, not least life and beauty. Clearly, the First is a philosophical designation of God. The First has no deficiencies and is a purely spiritual being. In the First, essence and existence are identical. The First is not composed of form and matter, is simple and is one or unique. The underlying proof of God's existence and oneness would not be out of place in a theological manual. The First is pure intellect, and in it subject and object of thought as well as the activity of thinking are one and the same: "it is intellect and intelligized and thinking, all this being one essence and one indivisible substance" (Alfarabi 1985, 70–71). The First is knowing and

wise, by its own substance: "its substance suffices for it to be knowing and to be known" (Alfarabi 1985, 72–73). The First is real and true, but it also possesses some attributes that may not seem as obvious. The First is living and therefore it possesses the attribute of life. This is clearly not biological life, which would have to be supported by a soul which managed a body, but a spiritual life. And there is nothing bodily or material associated with the First. The various attributes are linked together, and in this case life is tied to thinking and knowing, and in particular with a kind of apprehension which is not sensible and does not require a body: "in the case of the First, the meaning of 'living' is that it intelligizes the most excellent intelligible through the most excellent intellect, or that it knows the most excellent knowable through the most excellent knowledge" (Alfarabi 1985, 74–77).

The First does not have a body, since it would entail being composed/composite and therefore caused. The unity of the attributes appears to follow Muʻtazilite doctrine on this issue. According to this theological school, the attributes are not distinct realities from God but are one with God.

Other theologians who prefer to stress the reality of the attributes per se would claim that this position would amount to a denial of the divine attributes. Al-Ghazali (d. 1111) later would claim in his *Incoherence of the Philosophers (Tahafut al-falasifa)* (particularly in Question 6) that the philosophers deny the divine attributes (Al-Ghazali 2000, 96–106). It is clear that Alfarabi appears to follow the Muʻtazilite approach on this issue, for he states that the divine attributes are one with God. Although Alfarabi uses a neutral term to refer to the supreme being, whom he designates as the First (being or the first cause), it clearly has theological overtones. The First is not merely intellect but is also all-powerful, and an individual being. In addition, it has some attributes which are not merely abstract designations of some universal force. Rather, life and beauty and enjoyment are attributed to it. Alfarabi also ascribes greatness, majesty, and glory to the First, as well as beauty, brilliance and splendor, and pleasure, delight and enjoyment (Alfarabi 1985, 82–85). While listing and describing the attributes of the First, Alfarabi contrasts them to the qualities we have. In us, these qualities or attributes are accidental. This means that we can lose them. However, in the First, they are identical to its essence and cannot change. It possesses them to the utmost degree, or rather to an infinite degree, in contrast to all other creatures. In that sense, there is nothing truly in common between those attributes in the First and in us.

> And since our apprehension and its apprehension have nothing in common nor do the object of our knowledge and the object of its knowledge nor the most beautiful on our level and the most beautiful in its essence—and if they had anything in common, it would be very insignificant—for how can that which is

only a small part and that whose extension is unlimited in time have anything in common, and how can that which is very deficient have anything in common with that which is of utmost perfection? (Alfarabi 1985, 86–87)

This description of the First is not purely metaphysical or theological. Later, the political implications are clear to be seen. The philosopher-king stands to the virtuous city as God to the cosmos.

Another clear theological theme in *The Virtuous City* is found in the chapters on prophecy. According to Alfarabi, who follows the Aristotelian account of the soul, human beings have a soul and a body, and the soul consists of several faculties. When it comes to the human soul (for him as for Aristotle, animals and plants also have souls, since the soul is the principle of life), like Aristotle he focuses on the intellect. However, a great emphasis is placed on the imagination or representation. The reason for this is that the intellect deals only with universals, and the imagination deals with particulars. In order to predict individual events or to know particular individuals, the prophet must have a highly developed faculty of the imagination. The faculty of imagination stands between the senses and reason. It retains the impressions of sensible objects on the senses (it thus constitutes a kind of memory), but it also combines the impressions of the objects of the senses. Therefore, it has both a passive or receptive role, and an active or creative role (Alfarabi 1985, 68–71). Although the rational faculty deals with knowledge, knowledge is also provided by the faculty of representation or imagination. Although the faculty of the imagination is subordinate to the rational faculty, the former has its specificities, and in Alfarabi it clearly has a religious purpose too.

In his theory of knowledge, and in particular his theory of the human intellect, which possesses different stages, from potential to actual, Alfarabi combines Aristotelian and Neoplatonic elements. While the senses perceive particulars and that information is conveyed to the imagination and then to reason, as intelligibles and universals, he also adopts a theory of illumination of the soul by an external intellect, according to which an external intellect furnishes the human intellect with intelligibles. A way of reconciling the two theories is by stating, as Alfarabi does, that the human potential intellect requires an external agent to become actually intelligizing (Alfarabi 1985, 198–201). That external intellect is the tenth emanated intellect from God. It is the last emanated intellect and does not have a sphere. It is always in actuality and therefore can "activate" the human intellect and provide it with universals and intelligibles.

After discussing the intellect in detail, Alfarabi focuses on the imagination, which also has different functions. It preserves the sensibles and can also mix them. In addition, it imitates them (Alfarabi 1985, 210–211). It also imitates the other faculties and their objects, including particulars and universals

(Alfarabi 1985, 216–219). Alfarabi stresses that this faculty can act on its own, particularly during sleep. On the one hand, the Active Intellect illuminates the rational faculty which deals with theoretical and with practical intelligibles, but it also delivers them to the intellect and to the imagination. In fact, it also delivers particulars to the imagination (Alfarabi 1985, 220–221). This allows the person receiving these particulars to have true visions of things or events in the present or in the future. The universals that one receives allow one to fathom divine realities: "But divinations concerning things divine will arise from the intelligibles provided by the Active Intellect, which it receives by taking their imitations instead" (Alfarabi 1985, 210–211). One can receive these visions during sleep (which is more common) or while awake. The imagination represents what it receives from the Active Intellect (the angel of revelation according to the *Political Regime*) (Alfarabi 2015, 30) as particulars, since it is the intellect which deals with universals. "This man will obtain through the particulars which he receives 'prophecy' (supernatural awareness) of present and future events, and through the intelligibles which he receives prophecy of things divine. This is the highest rank of perfection which the faculty of representation can reach" (Alfarabi 1985, 224–225).[3]

Later in the work it becomes clear that the philosopher-king who is the founder of the virtuous city is also a prophet and requires a highly developed faculty of the imagination in order to formulate the particular laws which will govern the city. His imagination will also enable him to render religious truths intelligible to the majority of the inhabitants of the virtuous city. He is thus both a philosopher and a prophet, and has very strong faculties of both reason and imagination (Alfarabi 1985, 240–241).

Whether awake or asleep, he receives visions of particulars and universals from the Active Intellect. This allows him to lead his subjects to happiness. This ruler is also named the Imam, with clear theological connotations (Belo 2017, 3–13).

If we look closely at Alfarabi's description of the first ruler and his successor, we find that the explicit need to be a philosopher actually applies to the first ruler's successor, although the first ruler must have a perfectly developed rational faculty. The first ruler is more akin to a prophet. The theological dimensions of politics are clear to be seen, and philosophy mediates between politics and religion.

Chapter 17 of *The Virtuous City* specifically addresses the questions of philosophy and religion, stating that they portray the same reality, albeit in different ways, with religion using symbols to understand God and creation, as we have seen. According to Alfarabi, every person in the virtuous city must know the First, the celestial intellects and the celestial bodies, as well as the natural bodies. In addition, they must know the nature of the human being and the human faculties of the soul. They must know the first ruler and the

nature of revelation and the subsequent rulers. Finally, they must know the virtuous city and the cities contrary to them. He states, "now these things can be known in two ways, either by being impressed on their souls as they really are or by being impressed on them through affinity and symbolic representation" (Alfarabi 1985, 278–279).

He also holds that there are different symbols for the same reality, and this explains the existence of different religions.

CONCLUSION

The theological aspects are clear to be seen in Alfarabi's conception of politics as described in *The Virtuous City*, as well as in other works, and in that sense we can speak of a political theology in Alfarabi.

Regarding three particular aspects, namely the description of the First, the description of the prophetic process, and the qualities of the first ruler, the religious themes are clearly evident.

Moreover, there is no valid political state (no virtuous city) without strong religious underpinnings. While a minority understands reality through philosophy, the majority of people use religion as a means to understand reality. The political ruler is also a religious figure and uses both philosophy and religion to communicate religious and political realities to his subjects.

NOTES

1. *The Virtuous City*, considered to be Alfarabi's final work and magnum opus, deals with all aspects of reality, including God, the world, and human beings. As such, it discusses the nature of being, necessity and causality, which are the subject matter of metaphysics. In other works, Alfarabi's discussion of metaphysical themes may be more recognizably Aristotelian, but in *The Virtuous City* presents his philosophical system and his views on such varied philosophical disciplines as metaphysics, biology, and politics.

2. These were the two main schools of medieval Islamic theology (*'ilm al-kalam*), the older one being the Mu'tazilite school. The Ash'arites favored a more literal reading of the Qur'an which they considered to be the eternal word of God.

3. The connection between Aristotle's and Alfarabi's conception of dreams and true visions is analyzed by Rotraud Hansberger in "How Aristotle Came to Believe in God-given Dreams: The Arabic Version of De divinatione per somnum," in L. Marlow (ed.), *Dreaming across Boundaries: The Interpretation of Dreams in Islamic Lands*, Ilex Foundation/Center for Hellenic Studies, Washington; Cambridge, MA, 2008, pp. 50–77.

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Chapter 2

Ibn al-Tiqtaqa's End of History

The Just Ruler according to an Imami Shiite after the Fall of Baghdad

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1

As an expression of political dissent, Shiism has represented an outstanding objection to the majoritarian construction of legitimacy and authority since the birth of the Muslim community. The political defeat marked by the rise of the Abbasids to the caliphal power in the eighth century led 'Ali's party (*shi'at 'Ali*, hence the term Shiism) to rethink, over time, the relationship between power, authority, and legitimacy, claiming for 'Ali and Fatima's offspring, the Imams, a religious and spiritual leadership founded on their exclusive knowledge of the revealed law and of its exegesis (Dakake 2007). By turning the defeat into pivotal evidence of the rightfulness of its claim (refuted by Sunnism), Shiism has remolded the focus of its political culture by acknowledging the distance between what authority and legitimacy are, on the one hand, and what sovereignty is, on the other hand. According to the Shiite point of view, the Sunni refusal to comply with the Prophet Muhammad's will (or even God's will, supposedly revealed in the original, uncensored Qur'an; cf. Amir Moezzi 2011: 63–100) would have been the beginning of a wrong history, founded on a sort of original sin.

If, according to the basic assumption of Carl Schmitt's political theology, all significant political concepts (of the modern theory of the state) are secularized theological concepts (Schmitt 2005: 36), Shiism seems to have taken the reverse path: from politics as an expression of the divine will to theologization as the rationalization of a political right denied by majority. The Shiite itinerary appears closer to Jan Assmann's perspective, namely a theological-political attitude according to which theological concepts

deriving from politics would have also existed in Antiquity (Assmann 2000): 'Ali's claim to leadership—based on the Prophet's kinship—after political defeat was defined, in neoplatonic style, as having originated by means of the charismatic belonging to a sacred genealogy along which a particle of divine light passed from Adam to Muhammad, and then to 'Ali and Fatima, then to their offspring.

Analyzing the historical processes and intellectual categories within which, in the past, the reality was conceived and depicted by following modern conceptual frameworks, taken from the interpretation of modernity, might represent a dangerous approach. At the very least, one would run the risk of decontextualizing, or dehistoricizing, meaningful fragments of thought that belongs to modernity and shaping them on historical dynamics that are alien and inhomogeneous. However, if (1) we accept the risk; (2) we keep in mind Paul Kahn's definition—albeit arguable—of political theology as a phenomenological description of "the sacred, wherever it appears" (Kahn 2011: 25), and (3) we take Schmitt's political theology as a methodological approach (Marulewska 2014), and assume Schmitt's political theology as a flexible tool to understand something more about the multifaceted relationship between religion and politics in medieval Islam (where Islamic historical experience does not seem to constitute an alterity at all), it might become clear that some key concepts of the Schmittian conceptual system—words like *sovereignty*, *miracle*, and *exception*—can help understand some aspects of Imami Shiite attitudes to the Mongols after the fall of Baghdad in 1258. In doing so, we might attempt to deconstruct the Sunni historiographical prejudice according to which Shiite sympathy for the Mongols would represent evidence of a conspiracy. We shall seek to attempt it through the lens of an Imami Shiite intellectual who experienced the turn of an epoch after the 1258 catastrophe, and reversed his own views about the new order imposed by the Mongols in a rather singular book on the art of government.

2

In 1301, the prominent Imami Shiite Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Tabataba Ibn al-Tiqtaqa (b. 1262 ca.) set out on his journey from Baghdad to Tabriz. His family tree dated back to Hasan, son of 'Ali and Fatima, the second Shiite Imam. Such noble descent had earned his father the title of *naqib* (spokesman, superintendent) of the Alids in Hilla, Kufa, and Baghdad. Ibn al-Tiqtaqa left behind him a city which just a few decades earlier had suffered a tremendous attack by the Mongols. They razed Baghdad to the ground and put an end to the Abbasid caliphal dynasty. This epochal event politically and symbolically marked a profound break in Islamic history (Hope 2016; Jackson 2017). As

is known, Iraqi Shiism welcomed the arrival of the Mongols, attributing messianic significance to the catastrophe: finally, the supreme injustice committed by Sunnism had come to pass, and nemesis had fallen upon the Abbasid usurpers, destroying them. Although not far from the truth, this is the mainstream Sunni historiographical version. The Mongols no doubt, even though in a discontinuous way, pursued a policy of religious tolerance and favor toward Imami and Christian minorities (Bausani 1968). When Ghazan Khan converted to Sunni Islam in 1295, even he did not cease to show reverence toward the Shiite communities and their places of worship in Iraq.

Returning to Ibn al-Tiqtaqa's journey to Tabriz, bad weather forced him to stop in Mawsil, where he stayed from February to June (*jumada II-shawwal 701* (h.) (*Fakhri*: 7). He sought to repay the generous hospitality shown to him by Fakhr al-Din 'Isa, Ghazan Khan's governor of the town, by dedicating a book to him divided into two sections: the first is a treatise on the art of government; the second is a history of the caliphal institution, from the first four rightly guided caliphs to the Omayyads up to the last of the Abbasids, and the ministers who accompanied them in the exercise of their power. The book, known as *al-Fakhri fi'l-adab al-sultaniyya wa'l-duwal al-islamiyya* ("On the Etiquette of Government and the Islamic Dynasties, dedicated to al-Fakhr), enjoyed some fame among twentieth-century scholarship, yet it is still rather undervalued (with the exception of Kritzeck 1960, who considers Ibn al-Tiqtaqa an important source for the fall of Baghdad).

Ibn al-Tiqtata was by no means the first Muslim intellectual to write a work in homage to a Mongol sovereign. Before and after him two eminent Persian writers worked for the new conquerors but had a very different cultural impact. 'Ata' Malik al-Juwayni (d. 1283) accompanied Hülagü as a chronicler of the military campaign that saw the Mongols first annihilate the Ismaili stronghold of Alamut, and then Baghdad; he wrote the *Ta'rikh-i Jahan Gushay* as a tribute to Chinghiz Khan and his successors (Boyle 1952). Shortly before Ibn al-Tiqtaqa, Rashid al-Din al-Hamadhani (d. 1318), historiographer at the Il-khanid court in Tabriz, paid homage to Ghazan Khan and then his son Öljaytü with a world history entitled *Jami' al-tawarikh*. Compared with those works of great historical and literary value, *al-Fakhri* seems to be much more modest—not only due to the minor importance of the dedicatee. At first glance, it might seem to be a masterpiece of flattery. Ibn al-Tiqtaqa addresses hyperbolic epithets to his patron—the supreme sovereign, the most revered patron, the best of kings and the most powerful among them, the most munificent of rulers and the wisest among them (*Fakhri*: 7)—which are totally disproportionate when compared to his political profile. Nevertheless, what is really surprising from the beginning and throughout the pages of the book is the lack of bias or condemnation against forms of power that Shiism had always despised.

In fact, Ibn al-Tiqtaqa clearly states that he compelled himself to favor only the truth, speak only justly, avoid being driven by passion, and distance himself from the influence of the environment and education (*Fakhri*: 15–16). But beyond an understandable touch of flattery, which is always present in every act of homage, the Shiite political imaginary *after* the end of the Abbasid dynasty shines through in Ibn al-Taqtaqa's work, and some Schmittian concepts help us to make it emerge.

The first key concept appears in the very *incipit* of *Political Theology*: "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception" (Schmitt 2005: 5). From the tenth century onwards, after the final disappearance (or the retirement in *ghayba*) of the twelfth Imam—the last representative of a genealogy to whom power should have legitimately been due—Imami Shiite religious, theological, philosophico-political and historiographical thought relegated the longing for the reestablishment of authority and legitimacy to the messianic and spiritual realm, while the issue of sovereignty, and the terms under which a just ruler should complete the ideal of a just society, were constantly rethought and negotiated with the powers in charge. All this happened in a historical period in which, after al-Mawardi (d. 1058), Sunni political thought also seemed to stress legality rather than legitimacy: the just ruler is he who acts according to the interest of the common good, by ensuring compliance with the law. From the Imami Shiite perspective, the Mongols fit such a condition: they achieved it the moment they decreed the end of the caliphal institution. Ibn al-Tiqtaqa wrote: "No dynasty [before the Mongols] had ever managed to annihilate the Abbasids. [. . .] When Hülagü conquered Baghdad and brought the caliph to an end, he erased all traces of the Abbasids, and changed their rules (*maha athar Bani al-ʿAbbas kull al-mahw wa-ghayyara jamiʿ qawaʿidihim*)" (*Fakhri*: 167).

As a Shiite, in witnessing the fall of Baghdad Ibn al-Tiqtaqa saw an "end of history"—not so much in the postmodern sense according to Francis Fukuyama, as in the classical one, which recurs cyclically as a concern of historiographical thought: the recurrence implies a recapitulation of the historical narrative. Indeed, Ibn al-Tiqtaqa re-narrated the whole history of power (or better, power as it was managed) during the Islamic age; however, all experiences of power which Muslim culture named as *khilafa* are therein qualified (or dismissed) with the term *mulk*—and in doing so, the author seems to anticipate Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), who roughly a century later would state the same concept, although in a more sophisticated manner. That is to say, Ibn al-Tiqtaqa considered every form of power after the succession to the Prophet Muhammad as secular and lacking any religious features or charisma. The four rightly guided caliphs made a difference (in accordance with Ibn Khaldun's opinion): to the author, they were the only ones with religious dignity (*ashbah bi'l-rutab al-diniyya min al-rutab al-dunyawiyya*) (*Fakhri*: 33).

According to Ibn al-Tiqtaqa, therefore, the Mongols were indeed sovereigns, as they acted under a regime of exception. Schmitt thus writes: "The exception, which is not codified in the existing legal order, can at best be characterized as a case of extreme peril, a danger to the existence of the state, or the like. But it cannot be circumscribed factually and made to conform to a preformed law" (Schmitt 2005: 6). We now need to introduce the second key concept: "The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology. Only by being aware of this analogy can we appreciate the manner in which the philosophical ideas of the state developed in the last centuries" (Schmitt 2005: 36). From an Imami Shiite perspective, we may find the transfer of the religious idea of miracle into the juristic idea of exception exemplified in an event that had no precedent in the history of Islam: after annihilating the Abbasids, Hülagü—after performing the miracle—summoned the most important *'ulama'* of Baghdad in order to obtain a legally founded answer (*fatwa*) to his question. Ibn al-Tiqtaqa described the event thus (*Fakhri*: 19–20):

> When sultan Hülagü conquered Baghdad in 656 [h.] asked the *'ulama'* for a legal opinion to this question: Which of the two is more excellent: an infidel just sultan or a Muslim unjust sultan (*ayyuma afdal al-sultan al-kafir al-'adil aw al-sultan al-muslim al-ja'ir*)? They gathered in the madrasa Mustansiriyya, but they hesitated to issue the *fatwa*. Radi al-Din 'Ali Ibn Tawus was present at the session; he was authoritative and respected. Looking at their reluctance, he issued a *fatwa* according to which the just infidel sultan must be preferred to the unjust Muslim sultan, and signed it. Then the others followed him, and signed it.

The Mongols created the exception, and they imposed it. Ibn al-Tiqtaqa did not feel the need to add that the venerable Ibn Tawus (d. 1266) was an Imami Shiite (Kohlberg 1992: 10–11). In fact, the behavior of the prominent jurist, before the infidel sultan who presents himself as one bringing justice, is consistent with a line of thought that characterized Imami Shiism after the mystery of faith—the occultation of the twelfth Imam—had been proclaimed. As the Imam was absent, and hence his interpretative charisma too, how the Imami community could have known and applied the right meaning of the revealed law?

Between the tenth and the eleventh centuries, Imami Shiism underwent a period of intense development. Stressing the juristic aspect of the Imams' intellectual and spiritual legacy, the Imami elite developed a philosophico-political theory centered around the *Wilayat al-Faqih*, that is to say, the authority of the jurist. This theory conferred to the social body of the jurists of Imami communities increasing freedom and independence of judgment, based on a presumption (*zann*) of interpretative accuracy ideally as close as possible to

the Imam's judgment. While medieval Sunnism narrowed the jurist's independence and his personal interpretative expertise (*ijtihad*), Shiism stressed the impact of the jurist's authority on the social and legal life of the community. Reacting to the disappearance of the historical person of the Imam, medieval Shiism emphasized his absence—beyond the metaphysical and theological realm—by shifting the political meaning of the guide enlightened by divine grace to the social role of the jurist, who mediated between the law, the ruler, and the community (Calder 1986; Sachedina 1988).

In renouncing the achievement of a legitimate government, therefore, Shiite juristic discourse theologized to the point of paradox the shift from legitimacy to legality: if the new ruler brings justice, he may even be an infidel. In this sense, the Mongols were invested with a messianic role. Between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, not only did the Shiite elite historicize the rise of the Mongols by giving their conquest political significance, but they also interpreted it at theologically. In other words, at the secular level the Mongols won over the injustice embodied by the Abbasids; they did what the *mahdi*—once he returned from *ghayba* at the end of time—should perform at the transcendental level.

It is within this framework that Ibn al-Tiqtaqa wrote his unusual handbook for rulers, giving a voice to a premodern end of history.

3

Ibn al-Tiqtaqa's *al-Fakhri* is a guide for rulers, in which a standard of political success or failure is set and illustrated, according to the rhetorical and stylistical conventions of the "Mirror for Princes" genre, through anecdotes and edifying stories from the past. As Rosenthal noted (1963: 67), earlier treatises belonging to this genre usually centered exclusively around the sovereign, and his personal interest overlapped precisely with state interests. Ibn al-Tiqtaqa adhered to the rhetorical resources of that genre, but something new comes to light in the book: it was not political philosophy in the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic sense of Alfarabi and Avicenna, nor was it the empirical philosophy of Ibn Khaldun. Rather, in between these two extremes, there was a shift in the political culture of the time, promoted by al-Mawardi (m. 1058) and his *Ahkam al-sultaniyya* (*The Ordinances of Government*). The courtly and literary image of the political advice mirrors this change: the ruler's adviser is now the jurist, no longer the philosopher. The Seljuqids were the very makers of the new political culture and of the consequent courtly image (Hallaq 2003–2004).

Ibn al-Tiqtaqa goes beyond the traditional dichotomy between *khilafa* and *saltana*. Let us follow Erwin Rosenthal's reading: his opinion of Ibn

al-Tiqtaqa as "the first to think of the state as an entity in its own right; [. . .] the state exists as an object of study" (Rosenthal 1968: 67) is relevant and highly stimulating. But when we read that, according to the scholar, "his Shiism does not influence the character of his general remarks. It may however partly account for the disregard he shows for the theory of the *khilafa* and the *saltana*" (Rosenthal 1968: 63), a doubt arises that things may possibly be more complex. What Rosenthal calls "a political realism guided by moralism" (Rosenthal 1968: 63) led Ibn al-Tiqtaqa to focus his concerns on *mulk*, that is, the form of government of his patron: a form of government outside of the standard of legitimacy as established by medieval Muslim political theory (especially by al-Mawardi).

Both *khilafa* and *mulk* pursue an ideal government underpinned by moral principles that rulers and subjects must respect. However, the hallmark of the difference between the two forms lies in the meeting point between a political guide and a religious guide. The *malik* is not required to defend religion, keep control of orthodoxy, wage *jihad*. Those duties pertain to the caliph, whose sovereignty is acknowledged by local governors during Friday prayer in the congregational mosque through a public manifestation of obedience (*khutba*) (as well as a private contract signed by the two parties). In whose name did Fakhr al-Din, ruler of Mawsil, deliver the *khutba*? The supreme *malik* whom Ibn al-Tiqtaqa was really thinking of, when writing *al-Fakhri*, was Ghazan Khan, who after his conversion to Islam assumed the Muslim name of Mahmud (Allsen 1991; Hope 2016: 155–168; Jackson 2017: 363–371). In fact, the spiritual authority the Seljuqids recognized to the Abbasid caliph, in order to obtain their legitimacy, had been erased. Ibn al-Tiqtaqa explicitly states that he does not speak about the origin of sovereignty (*asl al-mulk*), nor about the subdivision between religious authority and secular authority (*al-riyasa al-diniyya wa'l-dunyawiyya*), nor the connection between the forms of government and divine will (*shar'*). Indeed, his book deals with politics (*siyasa*), and (political) culture (*adab*), of which the sovereign takes advantage in order to rule his subjects, defend the territory, and enhance public moral (*islah al-akhlaq*) (*Fakhri*: 19).

A list follows of the ten conditions that must be fulfilled in order to feature the virtuous king (*al-malik al-fadil*) (*Fakhri*: 19–28). The well-weighted use of reason (*'aql*) is the first principle on which all other qualities depend. Then comes justice (*'adl*), which makes finances prosperous, districts flourish, and improves people's behavior. This is the context in which Ibn al-Tiqtaqa sets the event of Hülagü and Ibn Tawus's *fatwa*, which ratified the legality of the Mongol conquest. It is worth noting that here, as elsewhere in medieval Muslim juristic culture, justice per se is not a self-referential value: it is always perceived as contrasting injustice, abuse of power, and rebellion (which causes disorder: Rosenthal 1980). Previously, in praise of his patron

(who obviously possessed all ten virtues of the *malik fadil*), Ibn al-Tiqtaqa depicts his steady use of justice as consolation for those who suffer injustice, almost in a Machiavellian fashion (*Fakhri*: 9):

> As for the strength of his justice . . . do not be worried by his majesty: behind it, he can be kind towards the weak, sympathetic towards the poor, and a shelter for the unfortunate. As for the strength of his policy (*siyasa*) . . . it never inclines to injustice. Do not be fooled by his kindness and his smiling politeness: behind it, he hides courage that scares the lion, and steadiness that frightens the servant and the master.

Consequential to the first two virtues are (legal) knowledge, forgiveness and mercy, generosity, and majesty that inspire respect. Then comes politics (*siyasa*), perceived as the capacity to manage political affairs: it is the kings' capital (*ra's mal al-muluk*). Such a capacity is needed to prevent bloodshed, enforce the boundaries and rights of private properties, preserve good manners, avoid conflicts, discourage the wicked and troublemaker, fight the abuses that cause disorders and civil wars. Eventually, the ruler is required to pledge loyalty to the commitments (*al-wafa' bi'l-'aqd*): this in turn ensures the loyalty and trust of the subjects, and of those who seek an alliance.

These are the ten paramount qualities: he who is capable of embodying them is worthy of supreme power (*al-riyasa al-kubra*). Here Ibn al-Tiqtaqa criticizes the ideological sectarianism:

> If all those who are divided into the many schools of thought (*ashab al-ara' wa'l-madhahib*) saw things as they really are, and put aside their passions, then they should admit that only these conditions are valid to deserve the imamate (*hadha al-shara'it hiya al-mu'tabira fi ishtiqaq al-imama*).[1]

Only at the end of the passage does he add: "along with [conversion to] Islam and [descent from] Mecca. Any other virtue is useless" (*Fakhri*: 28). It is quite surprising that Ibn al-Tiqtaqa ranks belonging to Islam (usually taken for granted: for example, al-Mawardi did not feel the need to mention it)[2] and descent from Quraysh in such marginal position, out of the ten necessary conditions to be the just ruler. Furthermore, in order to mention kinship to the Prophet Muhammad, he chooses a preciosity of the Arabic language—or better, he expresses himself in a convoluted way. He writes: *al-islam wa'l-'arshiyya*, where the second word is one of the many names for the city of Mecca (cf. Lane 1974: I, V, 2000).

Beyond the necessary qualities to be a just ruler, obedience represents proof of the one who deserves power (*Fakhri*: 32–33). Obedience to those who hold power (*ulu'l-amr*) is a religious duty, as Ibn al-Tiqtaqa recalls, and as also stated

in the Qur'an (IV: 62). Founding his argument on obedience, he starts to speak in praise of the Mongols. The ruler to whom the praise is addressed is Ghazan Khan, "sultan of this age (*sultan hadha al-'asr*)" (*Fakhri*: 33, 39). As mentioned in "chronicles and histories" (*al-tawarikh wa'l-akhbar*), no dynasty has never attained so much obedience from its subjects as the Mongol dynasty. From Sasanids to the subsequent Muslim dynasties, passing through the four rightly guided caliphs, the Omayyads, and the Abbasids, including the Buwayhids and the Seljuqids, all have been affected by disobedience and rebellion. The just king (*al-malik al-'adil*) is in fact the one who, contrasting injustice, prevents upheavals and rebellion, and in so doing deserves obedience.

As we have seen, Ibn al-Tiqtaqa denies religious charisma to all forms of governments, except the four rightly guided caliphs. However, their piety was not in accordance with the customs of the secular sovereigns; it rather resembled the behavior of the Prophets. According to the author, this resulted in weaknesses and disobedience, as witnessed in the case of the Omayyads and Abbasids. Among the uprisings that weakened Abbasid power, he does not hesitate to include those led by his own Hasanid ancestors, al-Nafs al-Zakiyya and his brother Ibrahim in 762 (Elad 2015; *Fakhri*: 35, 193–198). The author dates the hatred of the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur (d. 775) toward the Alid family back to those events.

In order to command obedience, sovereigns have duties toward their subjects: they must take care of the territory, defend and enhance the boundaries, make roads safe, prosecute robbers and bandits. Under those conditions, obedience is an obligation for the subjects. Within this framework Ibn al-Tiqtaqa explains 'Ali's political mistake: when he accepted Mu'awiya's request to stop the fight during the Battle of Siffin in 657, thereby facilitating the rise of the Omayyad dynasty, he disappointed some of his followers. According to Ibn al-Tiqtaqa, in fact, the Kharijites rebelled against 'Ali accusing him of not defending the Syrian border, and failing in the duty of obedience (*Fakhri*: 40–41).

The obedience of the subjects is, therefore, to Ibn al-Taqtaqa a right acquired by the ruler in exchange for his duties toward them. Once again, the ruler's capital duty is to be just, and the subjects are entitled to require this from him. As we have seen, justice intrinsically means repression of injustice: the ruler has to protect the weak from the strong, defend the humble against the abuses by the powerful, impose legal punishments (*hudud*), keep the subjects' rights within their limits, defend victims of injustice, listen to those seeking help, and provide balanced judgments of both who are close to him and those who are further removed from him (*Fakhri*: 42).

The grace that God grants to the sovereigns and that pervades them is one of the divine attributes (*min khawass ilahiyya*). He who obtains God's favor must acknowledge it publicly. At this point, Ibn al-Tiqtaqa sets forth a theory of divine grace (*ni'ma*): this theory, he writes, was also accepted

by theologians and philosophers (*'inda jami' ashab al-milal wa-'inda al-hukama'*) (*Fakhri*: 42–44)[3]: when a particle of divine grace descends upon the souls, he who is invested becomes a Prophet, an *imam*, or a king (*fa-inna al-'inaya al-ilahiyya 'idha sadarat dharra minha ila'l-nufus sara dhalika al-insan nabi, aw imam, aw malik*).[4] However, there must be a secret deal (*mu'amala sirriyya*) between the ruler and his Lord, and only God knows it. In his prayers, the ruler must express his gratitude, thanking God for choosing him as his lieutenant (*istakhlaftani 'ala ardika*), raising him above the nations, and trusting him with the reins in order to guide his creatures.

4

Although the first section of the book continues with anecdotes and edifying stories of the past, Ibn al-Tiqtaqa's discourse on politics culminates in the theory according to which God makes a deal—which only God knows—with a man imbued with divine grace. In this conception of the divine will, which elects in a given historical period whoever God wants, it is easy to recognize the praise of the man of providence. In Ibn al-Tiqtaqa, Ibn Tawus' *fatwa* for the infidel Hülagü seems to be still alive, and still valid—beyond its immediate impact.

Within this framework, it is possible to understand the modest (if compared with that of al-Juwayni or Rashid al-Din) yet meaningful relevance of Ibn al-Tiqtaqa's work, and his personal view of the end of history. All three writers let us perceive the fascinating ambiguity of their situation, that of the heir to a great civilization that shows its world to the master who has come to reign over it.[5] Both Ibn al-Tiqtaqa and Rashid al-Din present their patrons with a recapitulation of history. However, while for Rashid al-Din the Mongols are but one chapter of a universal history formed by a succession of peoples and nations, to Ibn al-Tiqtaqa—who more modestly offers the Mongol ruler a short history of the Muslim political institutions—Mongols bring an end to a political history that went wrong. Although from a literary and historiographical point of view the outcome was not excellent, from a political and philosophical perspective the views of a fourteenth-century Imami Shiite, as expressed in his guide for rulers, sound a little bit disquieting.

NOTES

1. The term *imamate* here is to be taken in the general sense of "leader," as it is currently used in the Muslim philosophico-political and juridical-political tradition which Ibn al-Tiqtaqa seems completely aligned with.

2. Cf. the seven qualities, or conditions, according to al-Mawardi (1996: 4): justice and probity; (legal) knowledge; sound hearing, vision and speech; physical fitness; prudence; dauntless courage; notable Qurayshite descent.

3. Ibn al-Tiqtaqa never reveals his sources. In his theory of the divine grace, and in his brief reference to theology and philosophy, only a pale echo of Alfarabi can be perceived. Even when quoting historical works, the author always vaguely refers to the *ashab al-tawarikh wa'l-akhbar*. Evidently, Ibn al-Tiqtaqa's work was not intended for the highly educated; hence he wrote in a simple and clear manner (*Fakhri*: 16). His ideal reader (Fakhr al-Din or Ghazan Khan) might have been a barbarian to whom the learned Muslim explains (as in the case of 'Ata' Malik al-Juwayni with Hülagü, or Rashid al-Din al-Hamadhani with Ghazan Khan and Öljaytü) the splendors of the civilization he has conquered. The reading advice is rather interesting (*Fakhri*: 16–17): Avicenna's *Canon* is too obscure and his difficulties are to no avail; Abu Tammam's *Hamasa* and the *Maqamat* by al-Hariri and al-Hamadhani are very popular, but not so useful for a ruler. Ibn al-Tiqtaqa warmly suggests that his reader study the *Nahj al-balagha*, attributed to 'Ali, and the *Kitab al-Yamini*, a collection of biographies of sovereigns compiled by Muhammad al-'Utbi (m. 1036) in homage to the Ghaznavid ruler Yamin al-Dawla 'Ali ibn Subuktegin.

4. Here the use of the term *imam* is rather ambiguous (cf. above, n. 1).

5. Arnold Toynbee (1934–54: X, 67–69) recognized in Ibn al-Tiqtaqa the same feature of another fascinating character: Flavius Josephus. Beyond the fascination that this kind of historical characters are able to emanate (as in the case of al-Juwayni, Rashid al-Din, as well as the Ismaili—or Imami?—Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, one of the greatest mathematicians and astronomers of all time, who after the fall of Alamut became an adviser at the service of Hülagü), there is a suspicion of infamy upon them: cf. Vidal Naquet 1977, and his concept of the historian as an eternal traitor).

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Political Theology of Violence

Religion and Revolution in a Few Contemporary Islamic Thinkers

Massimo Campanini

This chapter deals with the controversial idea of *jihad* and of legitimate violence in Islam, starting from a Qur'anic and traditional basis but especially focusing on contemporary thinkers. Violence is a constituent of political theology (see Assmann 2000; Schmitt 1922). I will explore here whether and how political theology could become a theology of liberation through legitimate violence. Recognizing that the abolition of war and violence, albeit desirable, is merely wishful thinking, conflict has been, is, and will be in the future an engine of history, as Hobbes, Machiavelli, Hegel, Marx, Schmitt, and Gramsci, and indeed many others like Ibn Khaldun, have argued. Heraclitus said that Πόλεμος πάντων πατήρ, πάντων βασιλευς, "war is father and king of everything," meaning that conflict produces everything in life, both human and natural.

Two presuppositions must be stated from the beginning. The first is that, as stated by Max Weber, the state must retain the legitimate use of violence. The second is that, from the point of view of Islamic political theology, the state is the outcome of the dialectics between worldly rulership and divine rulership. Now, war is permissible in Islam under precise limitations and conditions. The resort to violence is, first, far from universally recognized as legitimate, and secondly, can have revolutionary outcomes. In the last decades of the twentieth century, radical thinkers foreshadowed an Islamic alternative to the present status quo. Unfortunately, this Islamic alternative was later obscured by terrorism (Campanini 2012). In order to achieve a balanced approach to such a sensitive issue, it is important to quote extensively from primary texts; this is also far more productive than reasoning in the abstract.

QUR'ANIC BASES

As always in Islam, it is necessary to start with the Qur'an. Radical Muslims and theoreticians of armed *jihad* cite a select number of Qur'anic *ayas* (verses) to support their argument: in particular Q. 2:190–193 (urging Muslims to fight people who are fighting them, albeit within precise limitations); Q. 4:95–97 (claiming God's preference for the fighters of *jihad*, the *mujahidun*, and suggesting the choice of emigration in order to avoid persecution); Q. 22:39–40 (allowing the oppressed to fight in order to vindicate their rights and defend religion—a verse quoted everywhere) and Q. 9:5 and 29 (commanding to fight the idolaters, *mushrikun*, and everybody, even people of the Book, who do not comply with the orders of God).

All these *ayas* are Medinan and therefore historically contextualized in the second phase of the Prophet's message. In the Meccan period of revelation (*tanzil*) and call (*da'wa*), war was by no means either an object or an instrument of the Prophet's message. It is only after the *Hijra* in 622 that war became an option, or later, over the years, even an obligation. The reason is that in Medina the Muslim political, as well as spiritual, community was born, and the community needed to defend itself, to counterattack and to make the religion of God supreme against oppression, tyranny (*taghut*), dissension (*fitna*), and infidelity (*kufr*). Q. 22:39–40 were possibly the first *ayas* to be revealed after the migration, authorizing fighting (not *jihad* but *qital* in Arabic) in response to Qurayshite hostility which compelled the believers to escape from Mecca. Q. 2:190–193 were revealed not long thereafter, but stressed the obligation to fight (always *qital* and not *jihad*) only if attacked and in order to avoid persecution (this is the interpretation of Muhammad Abdel Haleem of the Qur'anic term *fitna*). Q. 9:5 and 29, on the contrary (*ayas* of the *sura* that was possibly the very last to be revealed), prescribed fighting (again and again *qital* and not *jihad*) in order to vanquish idolaters and enemies and bring them into submission. Undoubtedly, there is a progressive sharpening of aggressiveness toward the "others," although many *ayas* from approximately the same years encourage instead the practice of religion by well-doing and ethical effort (e.g., Q. 5.48—one of the last *suras*: "[Prophet,] Judge (*ahkum*) among (men) by what God revealed and do not follow your wicked desires instead of the truth that came to you. We have given a law (*shir'a*) and a way (*minhaj*) to all (people). Had God willed, he would have made of you a single community (*umma wahida*), but [He did not do so] in order to test you in what has been given to you. Thus, keep steadfast in [doing] good works because all of you must return to God."[1]

These *ayas* express the positive value of ethical struggle in order to build society in accordance with God's will. However, a different Qur'anic passage can be adduced here: Q. 4:58–76, usually neglected when the issue of *jihad* and struggle is analyzed. Let me suggest my own interpretation of these *ayas*:

58. *God commands you to return the deposits given in trusteeship (*amanat*) to their rightful owners and to judge along with justice (*'adl*) when you judge among people, because God's injunctions are the best ones. Indeed, God is All Hearing and All Seeing.*

59. *And you, O believers!, obey God and obey the Messenger and those among you who have authority (*uli'l-amrminkum*), and if you disagree about something, bring it back to God and the Messenger, if you really believe in God and the Last Day. [. . .]*

64. *We [God speaking] did not send any Messenger except to be obeyed with God's permission. And if they [sinners or hypocrites], when they do wrong against themselves, come to you [Prophet] asking God's forgiveness and the Messenger gives them forgiveness, they will find God most forgiving and compassionate.*

65. *However—by God!—they will not believe until they ask you [Prophet] to judge among them in all matters of dispute, and they will not find in themselves impediments [in obeying] what you have sanctioned, and they will submit submissively [to the Prophet's judgments].*

66. *Had We [God speaking] ordered them: Fight with your lives (*aqtulu-anfusakum*)! or Get out from your houses!—they would not have done it, except very few; on the contrary, if they had done it, this would have been a [spiritual] confirmation of the goodness and firmness granted to them.*

67. *We would have given them a great reward from Ourselves.*

68. *and guided them to the straight path (*siratmustaqim*).*

69. *Whoever obeys God and the Messenger will be in the number of those whom God rewards, as are the Prophets and the truthful and the martyrs (*shuhada'*) and the righteous. What lofty companions they are!*

70. *This is the highest degree granted by God. Nobody is knowing like God!*

71. *O you believers, be on your guard but hasten [to struggle] steady and united. [. . .]*

74. *Let anyone who wants to trade the life of this world for the life of the other world fight in the path of God (*yuqatil fi sabil Allah*) and whoever fights in the path of God will receive from Us a great reward—be he killed or victorious.*

75. *Why do you not fight in the path of God succoring those men, women and children who are oppressed (*mustad'afin*) and cry: Our Lord! Let us get out from this city and its wicked dwellers! Give us on your behalf a patron (*wali*)! Give us on your behalf a helper (*nasir*)!*

76. *Those who believe will fight in the path of God (*yuqatiluna fisabil Allah*) and those who disbelieve (*kafaru*) will fight in the path of the tyrants (*taghut*). So, fight the friends of Satan (*Shaytan*), but the deceitful plot of Satan is very weak.*

A close analysis of the Qur'anic text reveals the following points:

1) Obedience is due to rulers if justice reigns supreme. If the rulers are just and obey God's commands, the normal behavior is peace, not war, even to the extent of quietism and passivity. Therefore, *jihad* and war are exceptional conditions.
2) Messengers are conveyors of God's will: obedience to them means obedience to God and His Law.
3) If the believers are commanded to fight, it is for the purpose of strengthening their faith and well-being.
4) Striving in the path of God (fighting, i.e., *jihad*, although the word is not used or found in the text) assures rewards and lofty positions among the chosen friends of God.
5) Striving in the path of God strengthens the community's cohesion and firmness.
6) Striving in the path of God is desirable and mandatory to rescue the oppressed, help the weak and make the schemes of the Evil One ineffective.

The Qur'an is a Book revealed in order to disclose God's presence and self-identity (Campanini 2016) and lead humans to the right path (Rahman 2001). In the Islamic view, in particular circumstances, pursuing the right path involves fighting. Fighting in the path of God is sometimes called *jihad*, but seemingly more often *qital*, as in the previous passages. In any case, it is a multifaceted and controversial concept.

David Cook (2005) strongly emphasizes that the call to *jihad* and violence in order to subdue unbelievers and even peoples of the Book (Jews and Christians) to one faith (Islam) is clearly proclaimed by the Qur'an, especially in *sura* 9, *al-Tawba*. In Cook's view, violence is intrinsic in the Islamic message and led Muslims to conquer foreign lands and impose religion by sword. That Islam was imposed by Arabs through the sword is, broadly speaking, untrue or at least debatable (Kennedy 2007), although it is possible that religious zeal, ideologically supported by the concept of *jihad*, led them to conquer foreign countries by claiming to be fighting a holy war. According to Claudio Lo Jacono, "Although the motivation of the first volunteers had been essentially booty (*ghanima*), under the caliphate of 'Umar [634–644] the path of God, *jihad*, was followed with increasing conviction in order to widen—even spiritually—the boundaries of *Dar al-Islam* (the Abode of Islam), gaining in case of death the eternal reward of Paradise" (Lo Jacono 2003, p. 48). Obviously, the duty of *jihad* as armed struggle according to the theoreticians of terrorism, like 'Abd al-Salam Faraj (whose organization assassinated Sadat in 1981) or 'Abdallah 'Azzam, the true ideologue

inspiring al-Qaeda, would seem the natural outcome of the idea that Islam must be victorious and dominant by any means, even violence (Faraj 1986; AA.VV. 2005).

Asma Afsaruddin takes a more nuanced position than Cook. She underlines the complexities of the concept of *jihad*. "The main thesis of [my] study," she writes, "is that the conceptualization of *jihad* as *primarily* [emphasis in the text] armed combat and of *shahada* as *primarily* military martyrdom are relatively late and contested ones, and deviate considerably from the Qur'anic significations of these terms" (Afsaruddin 2013, p. 5). On the other hand, the concepts of *jihad* (with the essential distinction between the *jihad* as *fard 'ayni*, individual duty, and *fard kifaya*, communal duty—potentially involving first the offensive thrust for expanding religion, and second the main defensive action to protect religion and community) and martyrdom (*shahada*) have an overwhelmingly juridical meaning. Thus, *jihad* is more adequately understood as "legal" war than "holy" war. Afsaruddin draws an interesting parallel between the two apparently unrelated concepts of *jihad* and *sabr* (patience, a virtue greatly appreciated by the mystics): "In the Qur'anic context, patient forbearance is an attribute not only of the peaceful, nonmilitant striver in the path of God, but also of the combatant who takes up arms in response to the aggression of the enemy. *Sabr* is the constant, defining attribute of the believer in any and every circumstance which aids him or her in carrying out the simplest to the most arduous of quotidian and exceptional tasks in obedience to God" (p. 179). Carrying out *jihad* in its broad sense is a sort of virtue, like "patience" or *sabr*, and the Qur'an ties them together to point out the ongoing duty of the human being to struggle in order to "forbid the wrong and command the right" (see Qur'an 3:104 and 110). The relevant point for the present analysis is that, according to Afsaruddin, *jihad* is something more than striving or even fighting in the path of God: it is a paradigm of liberation. The so often-quoted Qur'anic verse 22:39–40 ("Those who have been attacked are permitted to take up arms because they have been wronged, [. . .] those who have been driven unjustly from their homes only for saying: Our Lord is God," translation by Abdel Haleem) has been cited by many Islamic thinkers in the context of liberation theology as well as by many Islamic combatants in the context of holy war to legitimize their struggle.

CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM THINKERS ON JIHAD AND VIOLENCE

Jihadism is a complex phenomenon that cannot be trivialized as a mere insurgence of "medieval irrationality." It has political, socioeconomic, and

ideological causes (Volpi 2011). This is not the place for a historical study
of the phenomenon, but in order to understand the radical attitude of a
number of contemporary Muslims, it cannot be forgotten that the Muslim
world was subdued and colonized for more than a century by imperialist
Europe. Colonialism represented a breakdown in the history, civil life, and
consciousness of Muslim (or in general Asian and African) peoples. And it
is really frightening to remember the words of one of the most influential
thinkers of the twentieth century, Edmund Husserl, a father of contempo-
rary Western thought, who could write in 1936 in the middle of the Nazi
era: "English Dominions and the United States can be considered part of
Europe, in the spiritual sense, but not the Eskimos or the Indians exhibited
at the fairs or the gypsies who vagrantly wander throughout Europe. [. . .]
Belonging to Europe is something highly peculiar, something perceived
also by other human groups who willingly, to preserve their spirit and even
without considering the utility of it, can aspire to become Europeans. We
[Europeans] on the contrary, if we are fully aware of ourselves, will hardly
try to become Indians" (Husserl 1975, pp. 332–333). A spirit of racist Euro-
centrism breathes from these words. In a sense it explains Western policies
in Africa and Asia before and after the two world wars, leading to their cur-
rent predicament.

   Sayyid Qutb deserves attention on this issue because of his long-standing
influence over radical-minded Muslims. Speaking of Qutb in this context is
particularly meaningful precisely because he has been labeled as "the philoso-
pher of terrorism" (Berman 2003). Qutb was hanged in Egypt in 1966 after
twelve years of hard detention—without having committed any crime, solely
for his political opinions, although he called for armed struggle against oppres-
sion. In Qutb's view, struggle against oppressors, and particularly unbelieving
leaders and governments, was and is a duty in order to restore religion and jus-
tice. *Jihad* is a path of liberation, not only in defending religion from external
attacks but in asserting religion (Islam) as paramount over other ideologies.
Afsaruddin (2013, pp. 212–213) writes: "[the] idea of 'liberation' pervades
[Qutb's] chapter on *jihad* [of his] *Maʿalim* ['Signposts' or 'Milestones,' the
militant pamphlet by Qutb], imparting a certain chiliastic or messianic tenor
to the whole work." Qutb's terminology "betray[s] a strong debt to twentieth-
century Christian liberation theologies, suffused with messianic fervor, as well
as to Marxist-socialist notions of totalitarian political systems."

   On the one hand, considering that any state form is valid if the Law
of God is implemented, the permissibility, or even the duty, of rebellion
against a ruler who does not apply the law and defend the people's welfare
is juridically well established, from Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) onward (see
Michael Cook 2000; Rapoport 2010). From this point of view, the struggle
against corrupt countries and oppressive political systems in order to defend

legitimate social rights is *the* essential form of *jihad* and is prescribed by the Qur'an itself. A legitimate struggle for human dignity and the implementation of the divine order will conclude with the liberation of human beings, *on this earth*, from any power but the power of God:

> This religion [Islam] is really a universal declaration of the freedom of man from servitude to other men and from servitude to his own desires, which is also a form of human servitude; it is a declaration that sovereignty belongs to God alone and that He is the Lord of all the worlds. It means a challenge to all kinds and forms of systems which are based on the concept of the sovereignty of man; in other words, where man has usurped the Divine attribute. Any system in which the final decisions are referred to human beings, and in which the sources of all authority are human, deifies human beings by designating people other than God as lords over men. This declaration means that the usurped authority of God must be returned to Him and the usurpers be thrown out—those who by themselves devise laws for others to follow, thus elevating themselves to the status of lords and reducing others to the status of slaves. In short, to proclaim the authority and sovereignty of God means to eliminate all human kingship and to announce the rule of the Sustainer of the universe over the entire earth. [. . .]
>
> This universal declaration of the freedom of men on earth from every authority except that of God, and the declaration that sovereignty is God's alone and that He is the Lord of the universe, is not merely a theoretical, philosophical and passive proclamation. It is a positive, practical and dynamic message with a view to bringing about the implementation of the *shari'a* of God and actually freeing people from their servitude to other men to bring them into the service of God, the One without associates. This cannot be attained unless both "preaching" and "the movement" are used. (Qutb 1983, pp. 66–67 and 68, my translation)

In Qutb's case, *jihad* is undoubtedly an aggressive vindication, because activism (which is how I interpret the Arabic word *haraka*, which in itself means "movement," so often used by Qutb, who speaks of Islam as *din haraki*, "a religion of movement/activism") is the characteristic mark of the Islamist credo.

> God Most High wanted to lay the foundations of a community (*jama'a*), a movement (*haraka*) and a belief (*'aqida*) simultaneously. He wanted belief to be the actual expression (*waqi'*) of a dynamic and active community. (ibid., p. 45)

And again:

> if we insist on calling Islamic jihad a defensive movement, then we must change the meaning of the word "defense" and mean by it the "defense of man" against all elements which limit his freedom. (ibid. p. 62)

This does not involve any constriction in faith (in accordance with the famous Qur'anic *aya* Q. 2:256: "There is no compulsion in religion (*la ikrahfi'l-din*)," for, after having liberated people from their chains, Islamic *jihad* will permit them to profess the religion they want. Qutb writes:

> They say, "Islam has prescribed only defensive war!" and think that they have done some good for their religion by depriving it of its method, which is to abolish all injustice from the earth, to bring people to the worship of God alone, and to bring them out of servitude to others and become the servants of the Lord. Islam does not force people to accept its belief, but it wants to provide a free environment in which they will have the choice of beliefs. What it wants is to abolish those oppressive political systems under which people are prevented from expressing their freedom to choose whatever beliefs they want, and after that it gives them complete freedom to decide whether they will accept Islam or not. (ibid. p. 64)

Not long after Qutb's death, at the beginning of the Seventies—the Sadat years of declining Egyptian hegemony over the Arab world—the great *shaykh al-Azhar* 'Abd al-Halim Mahmud claimed that *jihad* must be waged "for the sake of principles" (*min ajl al-mabadi'*):

> Jihad in Islam is waged for the sake of the ideal (*min ajlfikra*). The ideal consists in what has been uttered by God—praise be to Him—regarding the path of God. The path of God consists in doing good (*khayr*), justice (*'adl*) and truth (*haqq*). Struggle (*qital*) in Islam is waged for the sake of: 1) making religion entirely directed to God; 2) avoiding divisive discord (*fitna*); 3) the oppressed (*mustad'afin*), men, women and children, who do not enjoy power or strength so that they are subjected to the tyrants' (*taghut*) violence; they invoke God— praise be to Him—to side with them against evil; 4) those who are expelled from their homes unjustly only because they say: Our Lord is God [literal quotation of Q. 22:39]. (Mahmud 1988, pp. 5–6, my translation)

These are commonplaces on the surface. However, 'Abd al-Halim Mahmud understood *jihad* in the framework of Sadat's struggle for the vindication of Egypt. He explicitly compares the Battle of Badr (the great victory of the Prophet against the Qurayshites in 624) with the Yom Kippur war in 1973 (the Egyptian half-victory against Israel in order to recover the Sinai Peninsula conquered by the Israeli army in the 1967 Six Days war), claiming that Egypt's struggle against Zionism and imperialism was protected by God (ibid., p. 154).

So far, I have discussed Sunni thinkers. Now I shall deal briefly with a Shiite thinker. Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah (d. 2012) has formulated *verbatim* the concept of "logic of force" (*mantiq al-quwwa*). He has been

considered the ideological mentor of *Hezbollah*, although he never admitted to being the spiritual guide of the Lebanese Shi'ite Party of God (Sankari 2005; Di Donato 2014, 2018). In his major book *al-Islam wamantiq al-quwwa*, he set forth the milestones of legitimate struggle:

1) The oppressed must not surrender and resign themselves to accepting the status quo. They must rebel.
2) Islam is favorable to the use of force against tyrants.
3) The oppressed who do not rebel will be punished in the Hereafter in accordance with the Qur'anic verses Q. 4:97–100.
4) Struggle (*jihad*) and emigration (*hijra*) are closely connected in order to achieve liberation.
5) After all, this has been the example and the behavior of the Prophet.[2]

A few years ago, I had the opportunity, through the intercession of a Lebanese Shiite friend, to put to the *shaykh* Fadlallah the question of *jihad* and martyrdom. He kindly issued a short *fatwa*,[3] translated as follows:

1) There is no difference as to the principles; the difference may rather be in the details and vocabulary. [The concepts of] martyrdom and martyr and some of the principles on which they are grounded can be found in the books of both groups, even though each of the groups places different conditions on them.
2) Martyrdom is voluntary in regard to the premises, because it is tantamount to a commissioning of people in whom the conditions of *jihad* come together, while it is involuntary regarding its occurrence and its effects upon certain individuals rather than others, whether in terms of conditions or events.
3) The relation consists in the fact that *jihad* is the necessary domain to achieve victory or martyrdom, since *jihad*, with regard to its effects, leads either to victory or to martyrdom and both are fine things.

In my book *L'alternativa islamica* (Campanini 2012), I interpreted *quwwa* not as "force" but rather as "power," meaning that *jihad* and struggle are conducive to a new political order. In that sense, *jihad* is a powerful constituent principle.

CONCLUSION

From the previous discussion, I believe that it is possible to deduce at least three pivotal conclusions:

1) First, that is a common ideological (or theological-political, if one prefers) and even linguistic framework between Sunni and Shiite thinkers, despite their different origins and orientation in many other issues. *Jihad* is mandatory in whatever sense we understand it, and the use of force—strictly justified within well-established boundaries—is a possibility or even a necessity.

2) However, the aim of violence must be liberation, defense against oppression, and vindication of rights, not unjustified massacre. There can be no gratuitous violence because, as the Qur'an says (Q. 5.32), "anyone who kills a man unjustly, it is as if he kills all mankind." Therefore, a wide, unbridgeable gulf exists between this constructive idea of *jihad* and the blind terrorism of al-Qaeda and Daesh.

3) There is a theoretical—almost philosophical—dimension/capability of *jihad* and force. Summary condemnations of the same idea of *jihad* from the bias that Islam is by nature aggressive and violent do not take into account historical situations, nor do they grasp the substance of the Qur'anic message. Dynamism, emigration, and fulfillment of God's superior will and design should be the factors that orient and engage human action.

These were, in my view, the theoretical presuppositions of the Islamic alternative in the last three or four decades of the twentieth century. The Islamic alternative put forward a model of religious reconstruction of political and social reality wherein the concepts of force and *jihad* were the activating constituent powers. Khomeini's revolution in Iran has obviously been the (only) successful outcome of the Islamic alternative. In the Sunni world the conditions were less favorable, because the exclusion and severe repression of the dictatorial regimes were far more effectual (with the self-interested help of the Western governments cynically supporting the dictators in a neocolonial perspective), although the marks and the effects of neo-Islamization—of the return to Islam, broadly speaking—have never disappeared from the Muslim consciousness.

Unfortunately, since the 1980s neo-Islamization and Muslim consciousness have too often taken the shape of hyper-conservative Salafism or of the blind violence of terrorism, which both obscured the logic of power of the Islamic alternative. There is no room here for a historical analysis of the motives of the Islamic alternative's involution. Rather, it is important to stress again the constituent power of conflict. To this end, I quote at length Fazlur Rahman (1919–1988), one of the most influential Muslim thinkers of the twentieth century:

> There is no doubt that the Qur'an wanted Muslims to establish a political order on earth *for the sake of creating an egalitarian and just moral and social order*.

Such an order should, by definition, eliminate "corruption on earth" (*fasadfi'l-ard*) and "reform the earth." To fulfill this task, to which every people whose vision is neither limited nor turned inward pays at least lip-service, the Qur'an created the instrument of *jihad* [. . .]

How can such an ideological world-order be brought into existence without *jihad*? Most unfortunately, Western Christian propaganda has confused the whole issue by popularizing the slogan "Islam was spread by the sword" or "Islam is the religion of the sword." What was spread by the sword was not the religion of Islam, but *the political domain* of Islam, so that Islam could work to produce the order on the earth that the Qur'an seeks. One may concede that *jihad* was often misused by later Muslims whose primary aim was territorial expansion and not the ideology they were asked to establish; one must also admit that the means of *jihad* can vary—in fact, armed *jihad* is only one form. But one can never say that "Islam was spread by the sword." There is no single parallel in Islamic history to the forcible conversion to Christianity of the German tribes *en masse* carried out by Charlemagne, with repeated punitive expeditions against apostates. *Jihad*, indeed, is a total endeavor, an all-out effort—"with your wealth and lives." as the Qur'an frequently puts it, "to make God's cause succeed" (Q. 9:40). (Rahman 2001, pp. 62–64 passim)

Fazlur Rahman—a philosopher and an activist—is important because he demonstrates with his very work and person that contemporary Islamic thought is directed toward praxis (Campanini 2015). The logic of force is thus understandable in this framework, as I have tried to show in this chapter.

NOTES

1. Most of the Qur'anic translations are mine.
2. M.H. Fadlallah (2003). My translation. As far as I know, the book is not translated into any Western language.
3. Originally published with the Arabic text in Campanini (2006).

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Chapter 4

Art and Political Context in Islam

Some Methodological Issues

Oliver Leaman

We tend to think that material objects are expressive of much deeper spiritual and emotional ideas. A very successful series of books and talks recently by Neil MacGregor called *A History of the World in 100 Objects* is based on precisely this idea, that we can discuss an object and work back to how it was created, and why. This will tell us a good deal about the cultural context and its political features. It has become quite commonplace to take an object or objects and read back from them a great deal of information about the culture within which they emerged. This is especially the case for art objects. In general, this is obviously right, but it will be argued here that the information this theory produces is slight and does not warrant many of the claims that are made on its behalf.

There is much confused thinking on this topic. For example, in the excellent book *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* by Stephen Dale, we find a clear analysis of some of the major events in the histories of these often-competing empires. The description of the book the publishers provide, however, is full of the confusions to be criticized here with respect to the link between culture and the political system. We are told:

> Between 1453 and 1526 Muslims founded three major states in the Mediterranean, Iran and South Asia: respectively the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires (Source: https://www.cambridge.org/it/academic/subjects/history/middle-east-history/muslim-empires-ottomans-safavids-and-mughals?format=HB&isbn=9780521870955). By the early seventeenth century their descendants controlled territories that encompassed much of the Muslim world, stretching from the Balkans and North Africa to the Bay of Bengal and including a combined population of between 130 and 160 million people. This book is the first comparative study of the politics, religion, and culture of these three empires between 1300 and 1923. At the heart of the analysis is Islam, and how

it impacted on the political and military structures, the economy, language, literature and religious traditions of these great empires. This original and sophisticated study provides an antidote to the modern view of Muslim societies by illustrating the complexity, humanity and vitality of these empires, empires that cannot be reduced simply to religious doctrine.

So at the heart of everything is Islam, we are told, and yet the empires went beyond this, which seems to contradict the previous claim. In fact, the book shows that Islam is at the heart of nothing. The empires were Muslim in a variety of ways, often different ways, and this is no more crucial to understanding them than is the fact that I am writing this sentence in English rather than in some other language. This is symptomatic of the vague remarks that are constantly made about the relationship between a culture and the underlying conditions on which is rests.

SUPERSTRUCTURE AND BASE

There is a whole range of different Marxist views of how the material conditions of production and exchange lead to the cultural superstructure. They tend to differ on how close or distant the relationship is, so that some commentators see the links as direct and fairly simple, while others allow for much more autonomy culturally, while at the same time insisting that eventually the causal chain leads to something distinctly material. On the other hand, there are also views that analyze the relationship between culture and its material underpinnings as actually going in the other direction. We have a variety of spiritual and religious commitments and these direct us and those creating things for us to produce certain sorts of material things. There seems to be good evidence in Islamic history for both types of viewpoints. Often the new Islamic rulers would appropriate existing buildings or currency and change the old to reflect the new political realities. So instead of having the head of a ruler, a coin might be changed to have some Arabic on it with some religious quotation or just a word. An old temple would be altered to remove some of the icons and made much barer to reflect the new aesthetic along with the new political reality. It is worth adding that even when something new is created, it may be to symbolically replace what was there in the past, as with the Ummayad buildings in Jerusalem in the Temple Mount neighborhood. Here the direction of causality seems to come from ideology to the material; the ideology has changed and it has an impact on the material aspects of culture.

On the other hand, this could be seen as something quite different, where a new political power with serious material resources seeks to impose itself on an environment in which it was to remain a minority for some time. The

force of an army is important, of course, but then so is what is often called the soft power of the beliefs of the new rulers, and their ability to broadcast those beliefs takes place through their material objects. They replace the old with the new, and people may come to think that they had better go along with how things are since the alternative may look a lot worse. The situation with Islam is a bit more complicated here, since Islam sees itself as the original monotheistic religion, so instead of replacing the old with the new, it is in fact replacing the new (and erroneous) with the old and genuine. So, for example, Adam created the Ka'ba as an altar for the one God, and it was later on defiled by polytheists who worshipped many deities there, and the Prophet Muhammad restored the status quo ante. Yet, he was changing things from how they had been in the immediate past, and it is worth pointing here to all those passages in the Qur'an that criticize tradition, the idea that something is worth doing if it was done in the past. As the Qur'an suggests, this is dubious unless it has a solid foundation in something validated by the divine. What this is helpful in pointing out is that Islam and tradition do not really go together well according to the Qur'an, and what is new and what is old are questionable also. This further complicates the issue of what comes first, the material or the ideological.

ISLAMIC ART AND REPRESENTATION

A claim is often made that Islamic art is aniconic, or at least opposed to the representation of human beings. There certainly was an iconoclastic period in Islam as there was in some forms of Judaism and Christianity, and no doubt other religions as well. There are hadith that are hostile to representations of people, and of course a severe attitude is taken in the Qur'an to *shirk*, idolatry, and this could be broadened out to include representations of living things. After all, some idolaters did worship such idols, and even today relying on things other than God, as most of us do, can be seen as idolatry. It is worth noting that the all-merciful and all-gracious deity finds idolatry a sin for which there can be no forgiveness (4.48). So was the critical attitude to such representations of living things a reflection of the desire to avoid idolatry and emphasize the *tawhid* that links the university with God as just one thing that He directs? This would be a good example of the ideological affecting the material, since if we believe that it is inappropriate to create representations of living things, this will result in the creation of objects without such representations, on the whole. On the other hand, it might be worth looking at the issue a bit more closely and asking the question of whether representing a living thing really is *shirk*. Using an image is not necessarily equivalent to worshipping it or denying the overwhelming power of God to control every

aspect of our lives. We may not see it as an intermediary in any significant way, just as the machine on which I am typing this is not something I am tempted to worship or regard as the creator of what I am writing. It is the means by which the writing takes place, but other things could be the means instead—I could be using pen and ink, speaking into a tape recorder, carving words onto blocks of stone, and so on, and in none of those cases would we say that they were creators or even shared in the creation. They share in the production, and that is very different.

So why was there this move away from representation in Islamic art? First of all, let us acknowledge that there was no such move for much painting, textile work, and of course literature. There are plenty of stories and poems with people in them, and paintings of those people and the dramatic lives they led. This only seems like *shirk* to those who take such a serious attitude to religion that anything apparently nonreligious is immediately ruled out as *shirk*. What is important about the attack on images by Islam, where it exists, is on the type of images being attacked and replaced, and also on trying to find a new language of representation. This could be a result of a profoundly different metaphysical and spiritual worldview, or it could be more like a marketing strategy. There are competing religions, like competing products, and one has to be presented as different from the other, and one way of doing this is to present it in a different way, like Coke and Pepsi, for example. Consumers need to appreciate that on the market there are alternatives and the aim of the advertisers is to push a particular alternative, often by representing it as distinctive. Interestingly, in the soft drink market often the generic store brands try to use a design on their cans and bottles that make them look similar to the major brands. Since they are cheaper they might benefit from such association. After all, there is otherwise often a stigma in being the cheaper generic brand. What is worth noting here is that the actual design and slogans that are used have nothing essential to do with the contents of the product itself. Soft drinks and our choice of which to drink are not important parts of our lives, despite what we are told by the marketers. The right design would help us to believe they are and here we find the real motivation behind the slogans and the art. It is a desire for success, for consumers and for a sound economic performance by the producers of the drink. There is nothing unIslamic about this, the Prophet was himself a merchant and the Qur'an praises commerce and those who conduct it.

ISLAMIC EXCEPTIONALISM

This approach goes very much against the idea that religion is holistic, Islam especially so, and so everything about the symbolism fits in with the

central ideas of the religion. The problem with believing in holism is that the evidence is against it. Take textiles like prayer rugs, for example, an object we are very familiar with from the marvelous artifacts made for Muslims in regions where weaving was practiced. It is very easy to recognize such a prayer rug, and the larger carpets sometimes to be found in mosques, and yet their design varies enormously, largely based on where they come from. One assumes that these differences have much to do with the differences among the consumers and what they expected to find in such an object. Some contain *mithrab*-like shapes, some geometrical patterns, some add animals and even people, sometimes these images are naïve, but sometimes they are not. Some are bright and lively, others more solemn and of course we need to take account of the fact that over time many of them must have darkened with age and use. Some have a very dense weave content while others are more casually put together, and of course the choice of what sort of fabric to use has nothing Islamic about it. It looks like there is nothing inherently religious about a religious object except for the fact that it has a religious function. The same comment may be made about the links between an object, religious or otherwise, and its political origins. No doubt politics has an impact on what is produced within a particular ideological context, but what that impact or link is remains vague. The concept of influence is so loose and overdone that it is probably best avoided in any case (Leaman 2010).

It is popular to see objects as signs of something else, and there are many books and programs with this theme (MacGregor *ibid* and Hornak 2015). You choose an object and read back into it when and how it was made, for whom, why and so on, and so end up with questions like Walid Raad's "Do we really need another artwork to show us, as if we did not already know, that the financial, cultural and military spheres are intimately linked?" (Raad 2016). This is taken to be a rhetorical question the answer is supposed to be affirmative. Of course it is true but tells us very little. The problem is how the signs come to have the meaning that they have. Commentators tend to have rather naïve views on this issue. For example, Robert Irwin calls the Alhambra "an inhabitable book" (88, 119) since it is full of Arabic writing from the Qur'an, a phrase much quoted by others and a very fetching expression. The idea is that for Muslims it is the word, the word of the Qur'an, that is overwhelmingly significant and they want to have words around them all the time, even engraved on their living spaces, hence the ubiquity of the word in Islamic culture. People will often refer to the holistic character of Islam and this emphasizes the rather romantic idea that Muslims have their religion at the forefront of their minds whatever they are doing and wherever they are. It is worth being cautious here—just because people see signs that are words it does not mean that they read them like books. Is a subway train with advertisements a traveling book? When words are used as decoration, as they often

are, they have a range of uses beyond the ordinary one of presenting information and ideas. They are there to comfort, illuminate, entertain, prettify and so on, not necessarily like words in a book, although books do contain such words and aims also. The words in the Alhambra project the idea of a particular language and its religion having a special status; they represent power, the power of the Nasrids, and that is not like reading a book. Some text is quite boastful of the building it is in, entirely appropriately, but this is hardly an argument that the words are there to foster a sense of awe before the deity and humility. The regime was rightly proud of its building and celebrated it in language as well as with the structure itself, the tiles and mosaics, and so on. The Nasrids knew the difference between a book and a building.

On the romantic view of Islam those words represent the power of God and His message and are designed to make the inhabitants of the building feel humble and dependent on their creator. The decoration is based on words since they are so important for Muslims and the omnipresence of words reminds us of the omnipresence of God (2: 115 refers to God's face being everywhere). It is difficult to take this pious sort of story about the Nasrids seriously, charming though it is. How plausible is it to see the Nasrids as walking humbly through their magnificent palace, a palace they had built? This was a tense time politically; the Christian rulers in the neighborhood were encroaching on them and would eventually throw them out of the peninsula. Culture is a means of promoting status and becomes even more crucial when times are bad. But political authority rarely intervenes in choosing what the cultural product will be, the repertoire of possibilities already exists and the task is merely to choose something from it. The words are there to encourage those seeing them and invoke the blessing of God, very different from words in a book, although of course such words can also occur in a book. It would not be a very interesting book, though, given the paucity of the text and its unremittingly stirring nature.

CARPETS

To give an example that nicely links Islamic and Christian political history, there are a number of carpets made in al-Andalus that have come to be known as Spanish Holbeins. They are given that name because they are often represented in European paintings, when a sumptuous interior is part of the subject. A question that has been much discussed is why Christian countries should give such prominence to products of the Islamic world, and one authority has argued that these carpets are actually in line with Christianity since they originate in an Armenian design (Gantzhorn 1998). Their margins, hitherto linked with kufic prose, can be seen on the contrary as consisting

largely of crosses. The conclusion is that there was then no problem in their entry into Western art. This is an argument similar to many others that try to portray Islam and its products as dependent on a different culture, so the Qur'an we are told is based on the bibles or on Syriac texts or can only be understood by reference to their earlier texts (Neuwirth, Reynolds). There are many problems with this suggestion, and with the whole tradition of arguing that Islam is a derivate religion and owes anything significant in it to other religions, languages, and culture (Leaman 2013).

The astonishing claim that Europeans were attracted to the Spanish Holbein carpets because of their Christian iconography is that there is absolutely no evidence either that they were so attracted or that the iconography is surreptitiously Christian at all. Surely what attracted the Europeans at the time was the beauty of the carpets, and part of their attraction was their exotic nature, their origination precisely not in a Christian environment. These were widely regarded as expensive and rare artifacts, highly appropriate for the rich interiors being portrayed. Actually, this was true in al-Andalus also, since the carpets originally came from much further east, and then that design and the skills associated with it were fostered and developed locally and continued for some time after the Reconquista with *mudejar* textile workers. Why should we expect the new political power in Iberia to reject such products? After all, the new political power in the early years of Islam went on to adopt many of the artistic ideas and aspirations of the civilizations it overwhelmed as its own. We really need to be more sophisticated in discussing how politics and art interact. There is obviously a link, but the link is rarely an obvious one. Referring to a link in general does not usually provide us with any useful information.

One has to be careful not to overemphasize any link, especially one that is incompletely understood. So, for a period, the oriental carpet was popular in Europe and in its paintings, but then it largely disappears, from the paintings at least. The carpet starts to be used more as an actual carpet; there is some evidence that during the Renaissance it was hung on walls or over objects and viewed rather as something to look at, not use. What often happens in art is that there is a trend to employ certain imagery, a few paintings do it and it is admired by other artists and their patrons, and so it spreads. It becomes a common feature, but at some point perhaps it is felt that the possibilities of expression here are exhausted and something else takes its place. We could look for some political reason for the sudden disappearance of this oriental accessory, but there is none. Was it suddenly discovered that some of these carpets were prayer rugs and so inappropriate in Christian households? One of the reasons we are given for their popularity was the absence of obvious representational material on them and so their ability to fit into a different cultural environment. This is a poor argument since one of the motivations we are told

for the appreciation of such carpets is their exotic origin. They were attractive because they were unusual. Political relationships between the Christian and Islamic worlds varied during this period and could not be at the heart of the change of representation. Surely there is a much simpler explanation for the enthusiasm for the carpets. They are beautiful objects, and so people wanted them. They make for a dramatic addition to paintings, and so painters used them for that purpose. Eventually, styles changed and that theme was no longer found effective. Perhaps by then, the carpets had become more common and no longer were so interesting to represent. After all, they are difficult to paint, complex, and with a large variety of colors and textures, and once artists had mastered the difficult technique of painting canvas to represent textiles, they moved onto some other topic and skill. It is just as vapid to look for a political reason for the absence of such images as for their sudden appearance. These vague and loose claims really do not tell us anything valuable at all.

PAINTINGS

Let us take another example, the fact that the style of painting favored in the Mughal, Ottoman, and Persian Empires was similar. Themes sometimes changed; the Mughals were perhaps more given to animals and images from nature, while the Safavids and the Shi'a states in India sometimes used as subjects Shi'a characters, hardly surprisingly since they were Shi`i in orientation. The style was very similar, and in fact, in the warfare between the empires, booty was often taken in the shape of the artists themselves, who were brought from one empire to work in another, in itself a potent indication of a similarity in style. One should not ignore the commercial implications also, especially in areas such as textiles, where trade was so important. In painting presumably it was more a matter of status and competition between the courts and the familiar aim to project power, always potent as a motive in cultural politics. A similar phenomenon is a contemporary enthusiasm in the Gulf and even Saudi Arabia for modern art. Suddenly, apparently, out of nowhere, parts of the world that were completely cut off from the contemporary art world have spent huge resources on buying works of art, displaying them, and even touring them. Very expensive museums have been constructed and close relationships have been developed with some of the leading museums in the rest of the world. Agreements have been signed to host paintings from overseas and even set up museums with the names of significant Western institutions. Saudi Arabia even financed a tour of the United States of local artists, including women, and a whole category of cultural work that had previously been very much underground or at the very least not publicized came to the fore.

Of course, for several decades, Iran has had a lot of success portraying itself as a sophisticated modern cultural center and both its paintings and sculptures, but especially its films, have won many plaudits out of the country. For an isolated regime, this has brought many advantages and is cheap; it leads to encouragement in the Iranian community overseas and the attitude that perhaps the regime is not as bad as it is often portrayed. It is not surely chance that has led Saudi Arabia to suddenly become interested in being a film center, both as a producer and a consumer. This closely resembles the period of the empires in the past, where competing for influence often used culture as a potent way for the Safavids, Ottomans, and Mughals to interact, sometimes peacefully and sometimes less so. Artists were sometimes induced to move by being offered more money; sometimes they were snatched. Shah Abbas moved Armenian artists from their distant region on the border with the Ottomans to Isfahan. The descriptions of the event often describe it as his inviting them to come, but this was presumably an invitation one had to accept. Had they been captured by the Ottomans they might have been forced to move west or been allowed to stay in a Jufa under Ottoman control. The important thing to note here is that although the conflict between political entities may be intense, it is not ideological. It would be perfectly understandable for Qatar, for example, to say that as a Wahhabi state, one of only two in the world, it was going to reject art as *shirk* and as a distraction from traditional religious virtues such as *taqwa* and *tawhid*. Art could easily be seen as *fasad*, corruption, and in earlier times certainly was. There is little data, but my impression is that the native population of the Gulf states is not very interested in art beyond perhaps a certain fascination with Orientalist art, which is indeed represented in some of the public collections and in particular in Sharjah. There are many paintings hanging in private houses, and there is a tendency not to display in public the more risqué and fantasy-driven works depicting ideas of harems and so on.

ORIENTALISM IN THE ORIENT

What is ironic about this appetite for Orientalist art in the Orient is that the whole genre has been under sustained attack for many decades, and the concept of orientalism itself is not positive. These works embody all the prejudices of the West about the exotic East, decadent, soft, and occasionally dangerous, with countervailing ideas of the noble savage and the beauty of romantic ruins and the local architecture. It is easy to explain how this genre of art came about: during a period of imperialist expansion, it is very much in the interests of the colonial powers to represent the inhabitants of their new possessions as very different and requiring direction if they are to flourish. A variety of motives

have been offered to explain the new enthusiasm for this type of art by those living in the Middle East. Some say that whatever can be said about it, the naturalistic style does provide us with something of a view of the region in the past. There is a suggestion that some consumers of this art just do not recognize how questionable and condescending it is. Linked with this is the possibility that some consumers are so Western in attitude due to their education and upbringing that they largely see the art through Western eyes. It is said that by the second decade of this century, many Gulf Arabs no longer feel comfortable in Arabic, having spent most of their lives either abroad or at home in a bubble surrounded by expatriates and foreign TV and movie channels. Orientalist art does not portray the Middle East in a negative way; of course, on the contrary it often presents a highly romantic image of the region and there is no reason why those who live there should not be attracted, as were Europeans, by such a portrayal. It has to be said that Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab would probably raise more than an eyebrow at the ways in which some of his putative followers are buying, displaying, and viewing the representative visual arts.

This enthusiasm for art, now and in the past, has very little to do with religious motivation. Politically it serves a useful purpose—it links a particular country and its rulers with the current culture and seeks to impress as a consequence. We need to remember here how many of the so-called Islamic artists were not themselves Muslims but were instead working within the style of a particular art form. In the early years of Islamic expansion, the only people who could do the detailed art work were not (yet) Muslims, and even today the builders of the new mosques throughout the world and the museums in the Middle East which copy Islamic design motifs are often not Muslims either, as well as the architects and others involved in the project. Why should they be? What tends to pass for Islamic artifacts nowadays are often rather kitschy reproductions of what predominated in Islamic countries in the past, with each country or organization financing the work trying to push its own design traditions. So, in modern times, mosques in Europe for Turkish communities tend to have an Anatolian shape, Saudi mosques are similar to those in Arabia, and so on, which is not so much evidence of an attempt at promoting certain political ideals as the desire to project a rather narrow national sense of power. Innovative design does have a part to play but often has difficulties getting financed since the only idea it seems to project is good architecture, a notion with rather limited political implications.

TRADITION AND CHANGE

There is always a problem when working within a particular cultural tradition in getting the balance right. It is not difficult to go along with the familiar

ideas of the past, and just tweak them to take account of local conditions and the particular interests of the client. It is after all nice to be paid and have a design accepted and a project advance to completion. On the other hand, it is not difficult to produce a work that makes vague references to the past or to some familiar religious and/or historical theme and then do what you want. For example, the singer Umm Khulthum tended to have secular and even risqué themes to much of her music, and the words are not at all obscured by the music. This was because, she said, she had practiced Qur'anic recitation with her father, and managed to bring the same degree of clarity to her vocal career in general. This is a good example of a vague reference to something that covers up what some would regard critically as rather improper songs. She tries to give her art a religious imprimatur, not because it is appropriate but because she hopes that the association with tajwid will help people accept it and her. This is a very common strategy when a culture disapproves of certain behavior; the technique is to link that behavior with something more positive and hope that no one notices what is being contemplated. Of course, some people will notice, but so long as most people do not, or the most important people do not or pretend not to, all is well. There is a lot of discussion of art as subversive, and sometimes it is, but often it is supportive of the status quo and is quite cynically used by the political system. Art is highly useful to foster political change, as when the Saudi government sent a group of local artists, men and women, to tour the United States with their work. The message was "look how modern we all are," since until quite recently Saudi Arabia took a very different attitude to the visual arts, as one would expect from a Wahhabi regime whose founder was highly critical of anything linked with *shirk*. As usual, the Saudis are a long way behind their traditional rivals in the Islamic world, the Iranians, since the latter have used their cinema industry to portray an image of a beautiful country with sensitive citizens trying to cope with the difficulties of modern life.

The problem in linking art with politics is that one ends up saying things that are so vague and general they are unhelpful. When one looks at a particular art form or work and tries to establish a link, it is possible to be more specific, but even here it is difficult to know what level of connection exists. Much of the writing on this topic is loose and speculative, and there is a good reason for this. It lies in a phenomenon that affects art, in particular, its autonomy. There is a story that in the early years of Islam, a group of travelers who did not understand Arabic heard the adhan and were so impressed with its beauty that they prostrated along with everyone else. How could they think it was beautiful if they did not understand it? Yet, this is a familiar experience for us, appreciating, to a degree, art that we know nothing about. When we walk through a museum we are constantly brought face-to-face with art we know nothing much about; we may read the labels but they do not tell us a

great deal, and we could just look at the objects and take it from there. Those who work in galleries of Islamic art are familiar with visitors who admire, to put it no stronger, the calligraphy of Arabic manuscripts and yet have not the least notion of what the writing actually means. Even if we can read and understand the text, the aesthetic quality of the shape of the letters and the colors act independently of the meaning. It might be thought that understanding the meaning enhances the aesthetic experience, and this could be true. On the other hand, some of the most beautiful opera is heard and enjoyed by an audience that has no idea of the language it is sung in, and that can sometimes include the singers themselves. They know what to sing but not necessarily what it means. In some ways, this is fortunate since the libretti are often banal while the music is magnificent. The plots are certainly often risible and understanding them might detract from the enjoyment of the performance. The same goes for religious performances, many Muslims do not understand the Arabic of the prayers they recite, and it might be that the performance is experienced as more impressive precisely because of this fact. It should be noted that most Muslims are not Arabs, after all. Anyone who has attended *tajwid* events is immediately aware that many of the young participants have no idea what they are reciting. This does not interfere with the skill and style of their delivery.

THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE ART OBJECT

This offends against the idea in religion that it is very important for participants in a religious ritual to understand what they are doing. In aesthetics, by contrast, it is important to abstract oneself from the actual meaning of the activity and concentrate on its more superficial features. The point is to transcend the personal, the local, and produce a work that resonates across space and time. That is why someone can see a vase created in an entirely distant and unfamiliar context as very beautiful, yet all the observer has to go on is its appearance. Religions encourage us to look beyond the surface of things, but then so does art; it is just a matter of looking in different ways. For religion we are to investigate the link between something and God, while for aesthetics it is the link between it and categories like grace, fluidity, disquiet, harmony, and so on, all characteristics that tell us a lot about the thing, but not necessarily obviously *religious* things. In the familiar story of the Egyptian women cutting themselves by accident when they gazed at the beauty of Joseph, Zulaykha is said not to have cut herself. She was to a degree prepared for that beauty. She understood eventually how the beauty of Yusuf was connected with his love, friendship, piety, and so on, how it reflected the beauty of the world and of its creator. There are two types of passion

going on here, what becomes the calm and considered attitude of Zulaykha, who understands the divine source of Yusuf's beauty and so puts it within its wider context, and the women of the court who suddenly see it and are overcome by it. In the Jami poem, Zulaykha is at first just as confused by love as they are, but she comes slowly to an awareness of how it can be used to peel away the veils that hide reality. Jami suggests that we are like Zulaykha, at the mercy of our changeable emotions and with little grasp of the deeper reality that lies behind them. In the Qur'an, Yusuf is tempted, but in the picture he remains impassible throughout; he knows what is going on and is above it all. The seduction scenes thus become rather farcical; Zulaykha initially gets him to spend the night with a hundred young women, hoping to encourage lewd behavior in which she could participate, and not only does nothing like that happen, but by the next day they have all become pious Muslims!

There are many Sufi elements in this poem, and as we know, at particular times the political authorities fostered Sufism, perhaps as a way of gathering together supporters and extending their influence to other parts of the empire. In the Bihzad illustration of the Yusuf and Zulaykha story based on the *Bustan* of Sa'adi in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, there is a wonderful image of the palace and its many rooms, and the magnificence of those rooms. This clearly resonates with the Sufi notion of a path to spiritual growth and the need to retain one's integrity despite the trials of human desire and temptation. We know that these sorts of books and pictures were often used as a sort of instruction manual for rulers how to conduct themselves, part of the "Mirror for Princes" tradition. The Naqshbandi *tariqa* is particularly appropriate for rulers since it involves its members participating in the everyday events of the world and yet at the same time maintaining their spiritual separateness through their elevation from such mundane matters. It is relevant here since although the poem being illustrated is ostensibly by Sa'adi, it is a more contemporary Timurid poet, Jami, who was Naqshbandi and who wrote on Yusuf and Zulaykha, whose influence seems more apparent in the illustrations. Another observation worth making about Jami is his political astuteness. Although he was firmly part of the Timurid establishment and resisted all attempts at being tempted away by the Ottomans, he nonetheless did dedicate work to them when safely back in Central Asia. He is said to have been careful about coming into contact with emissaries from Istanbul while returning from the hajj, which of course was in Ottoman territory. Art then as now was used as a political implement to impress and persuade, and a largely common aesthetic reigned in much of the Islamic world. Yet, while this gives us far more information about the background of the objects we see before us, it really does not help us evaluate the art itself.

The point of writing these sorts of books and poems is to impress on rulers the importance of pursuing justice in the realm and linking that with

balance in the individual. That is why the message is not limited to rulers; everyone needs to embody the same virtues of pursuing good and avoiding evil, which for Sufis is very much about turning away from the material toward the spiritual. Rejecting the world and following God is how it is often phrased, and yet this might seem to be in conflict with the idea of Ibn al-ʿArabi that the world and God cannot be separated. It is for the Sufis a matter of emphasis. We tend naturally to be caught up in the material, and the story of Yusuf is a good example of this, and need to avoid this sort of attachment, not with the end of rejecting the material as a whole but rather rejecting its overwhelming importance. We are physical creatures, God created us in that way, and yet we are also capable of being more than that; hence we need to establish some sort of balance between our orientation toward God and our obligations to this world and those in it. Yusuf rejects the carnal desires of Zulaykha, and yet he does not reject her and in the end they get married, which symbolizes the acceptable regularization of events in the material world. Passion is dangerous, a message of both the illustrations and the poetry associated with Yusuf and Zulaykha. It is clear what the political and personal implications are of such a principle, but then all art tends to embody balance in its depiction of events even if the events are very chaotic in themselves.

THE ROLE OF POLITICAL THEOLOGY

The notion of political theology going onto form attitudes to art is plausible and often cited but is just not usually true. That is because there are usually more general principles that allow the rules of that theology to be suspended or altered. As Alagha (2014) has shown, both Shiʿi and Sunni theologians have argued that rules of modesty can be set aside on the appropriate occasions, when it is necessary to do so and there is something to be gained by such a suspension. All sorts of forbidden things, like dancing, music, associating with members of the opposite gender, are proscribed in general, but on particular occasions they are allowed. Morality has an ultimate aim, after all, and this is often linked with our welfare, and if on a particular occasion it is to the general advantage that a rule is altered, then that should be done. After all, Islam is not supposed to be a hardship for its followers, quite the reverse (2: 185). This is an entirely reasonable strategy, but it implies that the only theological principle of significance is *maslaha* or something similar, that the only important question is what the consequences of behavior are. That would make for a very thin political theology. It would be problematic also since assessing welfare is a difficult process in itself and does not really lend perspicuity to moral calculations.

Writers on Islam constantly emphasize the effect of the religion on everything that goes on in the Islamic world. There is often a reference to a kind of Islamic exceptionalism, whereby the religion plays a far deeper role in the culture and lives of Muslims than is the case with other religions and their cultures and followers. Islam is holistic, we are told, and insists on shaping the lives of its adherents, while other religions have much looser links with behavior. There is no evidence for such a claim. All religions make claims on how their followers should live their private lives; some are much more intrusive than Islam. When we look at objects their religious affiliation is sometimes obvious. For example, on armor and weapons there are often inscriptions and quotations from the Qur'an. Some add phrases calling on protection from the *ahl al-kisa*, the people of the cloak, referring to the family of the Prophet who sheltered under his cloak, or directly to 'Ali, and these are obviously designed for the Shi'a. If we follow the reasoning that sees the Arabic writing in the Alhambra as describing an inhabitable book, perhaps we should regard Muslim warriors as fighting with books? If the other side use weapons without religious inscriptions, does it mean they are not as sincere believers in their religion? If they have inscriptions but cover less space does that mean they are then less religious? If they should be seen as fighting with books, some of the books might be regarded as bigger than others, and some presumably blank (weapons without any inscriptions). Once we start to raise these questions we realize how ridiculous this whole way of dealing with the topic seems to be.

The conclusion is that we need to get away from making broad claims about the connection between politics, theology, and the objects produced within the context of a particular culture. Specific claims are acceptable and, as such, based on evidence and argument, but general claims are so vague as to be unenlightening. They sound impressive and publishers often think they work as ways of attracting customers to their books, but they are best avoided. They raise expectations that cannot be satisfied and seriously misrepresent what we can learn about society from examining its objects.

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Chapter 5

Muhammad 'Abduh and the Doctrine of *Tawhid*

From Theology to Politics

Margherita Picchi

DEFINING *TAWHID*

In the opening lines of his *Risalat al-tawhid* (1898), Muhammad 'Abduh notes that in its original meaning, the word *tawhid* refers to "the belief that God is One and has no associates (*la sharik lahu*)" ('Abduh 1994: 17). This is the fundamental pillar of Islam, the one that every Muslim acknowledges through the *shahada*, the profession of faith: *la ilaha illa Allah*, "there is no god but God." This concept's importance was so crucial that the entire science of theology was named after it: the main goal of the *'ilm al-tawhid* is indeed "the demonstration of the unity of God in Himself and in the act of creation."[1]

Translatable as "monotheism," the word *tawhid* is—grammatically—the verbal noun of *wahhada*, itself a derivative in the second form of the root *w-h-d*, which contains the ideas of unity, oneness, singleness, or solitude. In Arabic, the second form imparts an intensive, causative, or declarative meaning to the verbal root. As Kenneth Cragg remarked in his English translation of 'Abduh's treatise, *tawhid* does not refer to divine unity as an abstract state but rather refers to the positive, active, even "aggressive" assertion that God is One. Furthermore, it holds that He alone deserves worship (*ibada)* and excludes the other so-called gods of this world (Cragg 1966: 12).[2] The violation of *tawhid*, either through the worship of other natural or supernatural beings or by conceptualizing God as multiple or dualistic, is called *shirk*. A derivative of the Arabic root sh-r-k, whose meaning includes the ideas of sharing, associating, or participating, *shirk* is defined in the Qur'an as the worst possible form of unbelief, the only unforgivable sin which inevitably dooms those who commit it to Hell:

God does not forgive the joining of partners with Him: anything less than that
He forgives to whoever He will, but anyone who joins partners with God has
fabricated a tremendous sin. (Q. 4:48)[3]

Curiously, while the Qur'an repeatedly mentions *shirk* and its derivatives, the
term *tawhid* does not appear as such, nor do other derivatives of the second
form of the root *w-h-d*. However, *al-tawhid* is one of the most renowned
among the numerous names given to the Qur'anic *sura* 112.

Say: He is God the One
God, the eternal
He begot no one nor was He begotten
No one is comparable to Him

Another name by which this *sura* is commonly known is *al-ikhlas* (purity
of faith): both titles are unusual, as they do not typically refer to terms men-
tioned in the body of the *sura* but rather to its overall meaning. Note also that
al-tawhid and *al-ikhlas* are part of a more substantial number of titles (twenty,
according to theologian and philosopher Fakhr al-Din al-Razi).[4] This number
itself reflects the great theological value accorded to this *sura:* indeed, "the
greater the number of titles [a thing has], the greater the merit [associated
with it], and convention bears witness to what we have [just] said."[5]

The importance of this short *sura* cannot be overestimated. A well-known
prophetic *hadith* states that reciting it is equivalent to reciting a third of the
Qur'an, and these verses were "seen by the exegetes to encapsulate the spirit
of the Qur'anic guidance in its entirety, not only in guiding the believer upon
the path to the 'purest monotheism'—adherence to which constitutes the
minimal requirement for salvation in the Hereafter—but also in protecting
him or her from the sundry potential obstacles strewn across the same path"
(Hamza and Rizvi 2008: 492).

All significant issues that inflamed theological disputes in the formative and
classical ages of Islam—such as the speculations over God's attributes *(sifat)*
in relation to His essence *(dhat)*, the arguments over the state of the Qur'an
of being created or eternal, or the disagreement regarding human capacity for
action and its relation with God's omniscience—directly stemmed from the
necessity to reconcile the plurality of this world (and God's signs) with the
uncompromising affirmation of *tawhid* as found in this *sura.*[6] That being said, a
thorough analysis of the premodern theological debates over divine unity goes
beyond the scope of this chapter. It would suffice to recall the notorious dispute
that took place in the ninth century of the Christian era between the Mu'tazilites
and the Hanbalites over the nature of the Qur'an as God's word. The Mu'tazila
set the issue of *tawhid*—alongside that of divine justice (*'adl*)—at the very

center of their theological reflection, to the point of defining themselves as *ahl al-'adl wa al-tawhid*, "the people of justice and unity." To defend the absolute transcendence and unity of God against any suspicion of multiplicity, the Mu'tazilites concluded the Qur'an had been created. Instead, the Hanbalites claimed that because the eternal reality of God's names and attributes was mentioned directly in the Qur'an, belief in that reality was obligatory. Any speculation on the "how" of this apparent paradox should be avoided.

Debates over the nature and meaning of *tawhid* were not a theological prerogative: classical philosophers also discussed at length the subject of divine unity and the relation between the One creator and the multiplicity of the creation. This debate reveals Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neoplatonic influences (Janos 2017). Moreover, contemplation over the divine unity and the realization of the ultimate unity of existence (*wahdat al-wujud*) represent the ultimate goal of the Sufi path, and a central focus of Sufi thought, as elaborated in particular by the followers of the Andalusian mystic Ibn Arabi (Chittick 1994).[7]

These debates flourished throughout the Muslim world at least until the eighteenth century. By the time of 'Abduh, however, theological reflection had entered what he described as a process of decline and fossilization. He viewed this decline as caused by the general abandonment of "reasoned reflection" (*ijtihad*) in favor of the blind imitation of past scholars (*taqlid*). As it were, 'Abduh saw the revival of theological reflection and the Muslim capacity for rational reasoning in general as his lifelong goal.

RISALAT AL-TAWHID: THE CONTEXT AND THE CONTENT

In 'Abduh's treatise, *tawhid* is referred to both as the founding concept of Islam and as the discipline of theology. The latter represents the declared focus of the book, which originated in a series of lectures on theology that 'Abduh held in a secondary school in Beirut in 1886. The purpose of this treatise was mainly educational: according to 'Abduh's own words, he was convinced that "compendia on this discipline fell short on their objective of benefitting the students; major works were beyond their comprehension, and intermediate text books were written for a different time than their own" ('Abduh 1994: 13).[8] Consequently, clarity and ease of comprehension are the book's mainstays, reflecting 'Abduh's professed intention to provide his students—and the general public—with a simplified outline of classical Islamic theology.

The *Risalat al-tawhid* enjoyed almost immediate success, and to this day it is considered the *summa* of Muhammad 'Abduh's thought, as well as "one

of the most prominent programmatic texts of late-nineteenth-century Islamic reformism" (Bussow 2017: 141). Nevertheless, from a strictly theological point of view, the ideas put forth by 'Abduh did not substantially depart from classic Asharite orthodoxy, although tempered with a marked rationalist approach that is more akin to the most moderate currents of Mu'tazilism.[9]

Indeed, the originality (and modernity) of 'Abduh's theoretical work did not consist in positing radical or innovative theological concepts, but rather in his ability to combine elements from different theological and juridical schools in order to find a point of compromise among what he believed to be "extremist" interpretations of Islamic tenets. He was deliberate in making "only remote allusions to controversial matters, of a kind that only mature men could understand" ('Abduh 1994: 14), and repeatedly stressed how intellectual dissent could be harmful to the well-being of the *umma*, the Islamic community. 'Abduh was particularly harsh in condemning those "silly discourses that led people astray, dividing the paths of brothers who were marching toward the same destination and ended up meeting again in the darkest night" ('Abduh 1994: 55). He considered these quarrels, along with the "mentality of *taqlid*," to be significant factors leading to the stagnation (*jumud*) of Islamic thought and the consequent social, moral, and political decay of his contemporary Muslims.

To quote Albert Hourani's words,

> He does indeed give the impression of picking and choosing out of the mass of Islamic ideas those which best serve two purposes: first, to preserve the unity and social peace of the *umma,* concern for which led him to blur intellectual distinctions and refuse to reopen old controversies; and secondly, to reply to certain questions posed by the religious debates of the Europe of his time [. . .] in particular the great debate about science and religion. (Hourani 1970: 143)

Indeed, the selective reappropriation of diverse elements from the Islamic tradition and their creative re-elaboration in order to respond to the challenges of modernity represent the core of the sociocultural project of the *Salafiyya*—the reform movement of which 'Abduh is considered the most important ideologue, alongside his mentor Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (d. 1897) and his pupil Rashid Rida (d. 1935). The Egyptian *Salafiya* was part of a larger intellectual current that argued for the necessity for reform (*islah)* and renewal *(tajdid)* of Islamic thought as the only way to counter the cultural and political subjugation to Western colonialism that most of the Islamic world was facing at the turn of the twentieth century. In this context, the purpose of the *Salafiyya* was to assert the validity of Islam as the moral basis for a modern and progressive society. However, to do so Muslims needed to "liberate thought from the shackles of *taqlid* and

understand religion as it was understood by the elders of the community (*Salaf*) before dissension appeared; to return, in the acquisition of religious knowledge, to its first sources, and to weigh them in the scales of the human reason."[10]

The term *Salaf*, from which the noun *Salafiyya* and the adjective *Salafi* are taken, is used to define the first three generations of Muslims: the Companions of Muhammad (*sahaba*, those who met the Prophet in person), their Followers (*tabi'un*), and the Followers of the Followers (*tabi' al-tabi'un*). Due to their closeness to the Prophet and their allegedly faultless conduct, the *Salaf* represent the role models to be followed by Muslims at any time or place. Although Muhammad's Companions are historical figures whose existence is universally accepted, it goes without saying that the *ideal model* of the *Salaf* must be considered an idealized transfiguration, a rhetorical construction, or an "invented tradition," to borrow Eric Hobsbawm's now-classic concept (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

The religious dimension of the *Salafiyya* experience is not easily separated from its social, cultural, and political elements, as clearly appears in 'Abduh's works. The *Risalat al-tawhid* does not examine theological inquiries into the nature of God and the Prophecy of Muhammad as abstract concepts detached from reality but rather does so as a tool for social reform and cultural transformation. In other words, 'Abduh's approach to the concept of *tawhid* is more functional than epistemological; his intellectual effort aims at transforming what had become a mere theological concept into an agent of social change, as it once was in the "golden age" of the Islamic civilization, during the historical-mythical age of the *Salaf*.

This sociopolitical dimension of theology appears more clearly in the second part of the *Risala al-tawhid*, dedicated to the fundamental role that the advent of Islam has had in the history of humanity. While the first six chapters of 'Abduh's treatise explore classical debates over God's nature and attributes, with the explicit purpose of demonstrating the essential harmony of reason, revelation, and individual temperament (*fitra)*, the discussion of Muhammad's mission and its historical function is implicitly aimed at highlighting the liberating potential of Islam.

In reading 'Abduh's reference to mankind's "urgent need for a trumpet call that shakes the thrones of the kings, shatters the foundations of their tyranny and makes them lower their gaze from high heaven to ponder the conditions of their wretched subjects" ('Abduh 1994: 119), or his comments on how "religious leaders affirmed in its name that religion was the enemy of reason and of all theoretical works, unless tied exclusively to commentary on the Holy Scripture" ('Abduh 1994: 120), one wonders if he was writing about the seventh-century Arabian Peninsula or instead alluding to the political and cultural situation of his own time. Either way, the subtext is clear:

what happened before could happen again, on the condition of reviving the true spirit of the religion that God revealed to the human race through the Qur'an.

> [The Prophet Muhammad] called upon the leaders of men to humble themselves to the common rank and submit to the One sovereign power, the architect of heaven and earth, who holds their life spirit in the temples of the body. He confronted those who laid claim to an intermediary position between the high God and His worshippers, and proved to them, in the light of Revelation, that before God the greatest of them was no more than the least of those who gave them credit. He demanded that they come down from their pretentious "lordly" stations to the lowest rung of service, to participate with every soul of man in adoring the One Lord, before whom every creature is equal, save in their different endowments of knowledge (*'ilm)* and virtue (*fadila*). ('Abduh 1994: 126)

In 'Abduh's thought, the sociopolitical value of *tawhid* operates in two main dimensions: first, it instills a sense of unity in the *umma*, reinforcing "group solidarity" (*'asabiyya*); secondly, it functions as the starting point for the liberation of the oppressed against abuses of tyrannical powers. In fact, since God's Oneness and Self-Sufficiency do not allow for intermediation between the Divine and the human, *tawhid* becomes the basis for invoking an egalitarian political ethos: everyone is equal before God, and subject only to His will as expressed in His revealed law—any social hierarchy based on class, race, or nationality is illegitimate.

Revolutionary tone notwithstanding, it would be a significant exaggeration to view 'Abduh as a supporter of radical egalitarianism. These passages from the *Risala* were dictated to his students while he was in exile on the charge of having participated in the 'Urabi nationalist revolt (1882) and reveal the contentious attitude he held at that time toward Egypt's ruling classes.[11] This view was strongly influenced by that of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. Indeed, Afghani has rightfully been labeled a "professional agitator and propagandist" (Lockman 2004: 82), as he spent his life traveling across the Islamic world urging Muslims to join against colonial domination and intellectual stagnation. However, 'Abduh was certainly more accommodating than his mentor in confronting power, and he became increasingly so with the passing of time. When he was allowed to return to Egypt (1888), 'Abduh took up a position of compromise toward both British occupiers and the class of the religious scholars. He carefully avoided overt confrontations out of principle; this caution certainly helped him in climbing the rungs, ultimately bringing him to become Grand Mufti of Egypt in 1899, a position he held until his death in 1905. He became increasingly critical toward al-Afghani's positions on politics and revolution, effectively putting an end to their collaboration

and friendship: "when al-Afghani died, he wrote no word of eulogy or affectionate commemoration" (Hourani 1970: 158).

It should also be noted that 'Abduh never developed his ideas on politics in a systematic political theory or program. On the contrary, "when the more specific issues of constitutional organization and the source of political authority were at stake, 'Abduh's views were fragmentary and changing" (Kerr 1966: 147). They shifted from early opposition to authoritative power and appreciation for representative government to later declarations such as "only a just dictator can cause the East to progress" (Kerr 1966: 135); an ambiguity that is reflected by his own life choices. Moreover, it is worth remarking that a poorly concealed intellectual chauvinism always tempered the egalitarian outbursts found in the *Risala al-tawhid* and other earlier works of his. Evidence of this can be glimpsed in statements such as that "humans are not equals in their ability to know God or the life to come" ('Abduh 1994: 76) since "some intellects are superior to others, and the lowest can only superficially grasp what the wisest know" ('Abduh 1994: 103). 'Abduh invests the "wise men" (*al-'urafa*)—whom he considers superior to ordinary people in terms both of education and natural temperament—with the fundamental historical function of assisting the Prophets in guiding humanity. This role appears in contradiction with the proclaimed refusal for any and all hierarchy among men.

Finally, it should be stressed that the egalitarian spirit promoted by 'Abduh was assumed to be among *male* Muslims: non-Muslim believers and women could not fully participate in the "social contract" of Islam. Christianism and Judaism were depicted as "intermediary" stations in the teleological process of divine education that God provided to humanity: when the Torah was revealed, humankind was in its infancy and needed a law centered on its bodily needs and desires, while Jesus was the response to the needs of humanity when it reached a status of "higher sensitivity," comparable "to what women feel in their heart, as well as to young boys' tendencies" ('Abduh 1994: 148). 'Abduh tried in several occasions to demonstrate that Christianity was inferior to Islam due to its fundamental irrationality, and used roughly the same argument to justify the legitimacy of gender inequalities: "he was the first exegete to adapt a relevant biblical reference when he stated that 'a man is like the head, and the woman is the body,' and it is 'no shame for a human being to have his head better than his hand' " (Abou Bakr 2015: 54). That being said, 'Abduh's re-elaboration of *tawhid* as an agent of social change and the basis for egalitarian ethics represented a marked epistemological break in Islamic exegetical history, one that had an enduring effect on subsequent Islamic political thought.

Referring to the concept of *break* does not imply that premodern theology was disconnected from the social and political contexts that produced it, nor

that making use of theological concepts such as *tawhid* for social or political purposes was an absolute novelty introduced by *Salafiyya* in the nineteenth century. On the contrary, *tawhid* has always been instrumental in setting the boundaries of the Islamic *umma* by defining who was "in" and who was not, in a process of identity construction that has always implied a parallel process of Othering (Tanner Lamptey 2015). In this sense, the doctrine of *tawhid* has played a leading role not only in Muslim polemical refutations of Christianity and Judaism, but also in shaping the discourse of orthodoxy; scholars referred to the concept of *tawhid* in order to establish *internal* boundaries between those who actually follow "the right way" (*al-sirat al-mustaqim*) and those who are "led astray" (*al-dallin*). Creating boundaries implies promoting the Self by devaluating the Other, a process that brings the inherent risk of promoting various forms of intolerance toward the latter, ranging from ridicule and disapproval to militant opposition. When this process of Othering is directed toward a declared Muslim, the opposition may even involve *takfir*, accusing one's opponent of being an unbeliever deserving of persecution as an enemy of Islam.[12]

The practice of defending doctrinal positions by reclaiming one's adherence to *tawhid* and condemning the tenets of others as *shirk* or *kufr* has been widespread throughout Muslim history; in some cases, these theological strivings had important political consequences. The most notorious of these cases in premodern history is, without doubt, the previously mentioned controversy between the Hanbalis and the Mu'tazilites. The latter referred to themselves as the *ahl al-tawhid*, and although they generally refrained from accusing individuals of unbelief, it was often implied in their writings that the theories of Others were in violation of the most basic tenets of Islam. When the caliph al-Ma'mun (d. 833) joined the debate and sided with the Mu'tazilites, this accusation led to the public prosecution of the Hanbalis. This included a series of interrogations known as the *mihna* (literally meaning "ordeal," "trial," a derogatory term chosen by later critics of this policy), which lasted fifteen years and led to the imprisonment of numerous scholars of renown fame. The intervention of a caliph into a theological controversy is nearly unique in the history of Islam, and modern historians have heavily debated al-Ma'mun motivations in instigating the *mihna* (Hurvitz 2016). Some scholars have claimed that al-Ma'mun was led by a sincere belief in Mu'tazilite rationalism that pushed him to attempt reshaping Islamic theology;[13] others have emphasized the political dimensions of the *mihna* and interpreted al-Ma'mun actions as an attempt to strengthen the caliphal spiritual authority by undermining the scholars' monopoly on religious interpretations.[14] Whichever angle takes, the study of *mihna* is particularly useful "to examine how scholarly power was constructed, what means of persuasion the scholars devised, and how they applied them to different socio-cultural strata" (Hurvitz 2016: 658).

'Abduh was well aware of the danger inherent in accusing fellow Muslims of *shirk* or *kufr*: his constant criticism toward "useless controversies" can be understood in this light. He relentlessly promoted the need to find a compromise between apparently contradictory theological positions and to overcome the differences between the various schools of jurisprudence (*madhahib)*, rationalism and mysticism, and even between Sunnis and Shias. He consistently avoided employing the accusation of *kufr* or *shirk* against specific groups of individuals: to him, "the only real *kafir* is he who closes his eyes to the light and refuses to examine rational proofs" (Hourani 1970: 148).

The philosophy of the Enlightenment, and particularly universalism and rationalism, had a marked influence on 'Abduh's conception of *tawhid:* he "read widely in the European thought of his age" and "had some contacts with European thinkers" (Hourani 1970: 135). Pointing to his admiration for European Enlightenment, some early Western commentators of his work have tended to overlook 'Abduh's creative agency and to suggest, more or less subtly, that he did little more than translate the dominant ideas of modern Europe into Islamic terms, even risking "to distort if not to destroy the precise meaning of the Islamic concepts, or to lose what distinguished Islam from other religions and even from non-religious humanism" (Hourani 1970: 144). More recent scholarship has contested these claims in the context of a more general criticism toward a teleological view of modernity as a product of the West, holding an inherent value.[15] This scholarship has claimed that late nineteenth-century Islamic reformism was "the product of a process of confluence, [. . .] a tale of 'transition,' not of 'translation'—and one that remained unfinished" (Arsan 2013: 377). 'Abduh was not a blind imitator of European thought, nor was he an uncritical follower of the Islamic tradition; his universalist and humanist conceptualization of *tawhid* was the result of the overlapping and intertwining of elements from both worlds, a "synthesis between classical rationalism and modern socio-political awareness" (Abu Zayd 2006: 31). In comparing his theology with that of the classic scholar al-Ghazali (d. 1111), Malcolm Kerr has remarked how "Abduh describes material well-being as having an importance on its own which even 'takes precedence' over acts or expressions of devotion. [. . .] for Ghazali, the need is to show that worldly prosperity is no impediment to religion, and is in fact necessary for it as a means to an end; and the end is faith" (Kerr 1966: 118).

In short, 'Abduh's main contribution to the conceptual history of *tawhid* can be recognized with this marked shift in emphasis from the theological to the sociopolitical articulation of faith, from a theocentric conception of religion to a distinctively humanist one.

THE LEGACY OF MUHAMMAD ʿABDUH

The conception of *tawhid* as a tool for social change and a symbol of religious as well as political unity became increasingly central in Muslim thought as the Islamic world continued to experience political fragmentation and socio-economic setbacks. The issue of political Islam, which made its appearance under colonial occupation, erupted in the aftermath of World War I. One of the consequences of the war was, in fact, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the partition of its former Middle East territories into the League of Nation mandates, and the correspondent emergence of an assorted galaxy of anti-colonialist nationalist movements. Corollary to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire was the abolition of the Caliphate by the newly founded Turkish parliament in 1924, a move widely considered to be "one of the key events of the political genesis of the modern Middle East" (Guida 2009: 275). At the time of its abolition, the Caliphate had long since lost its political power. However, it had maintained the fundamental symbolical function of representing the unity of the *dar al-Islam*, of being the "flag holder" of the Islamic *umma*. The symbolic void left by the loss of the Caliphate pushed Muslim thinkers to increasingly raise questions concerning the nature, the features, and the function of a legitimate Islamic political authority: for instance, should a single overarching political structure such as the Caliphate rule the *umma* to preserve its unity, or should politics be left to national states? What modern political system could best fit the requirements of Islam? Was there such a thing as an "Islamic" political authority?

Muhammad ʿAbduh's intellectual heirs discussed these issues extensively, and scholars often draw a distinction between "liberal" followers of his thought and "conservative" or "radical" ones through their different political conceptions. ʿAli Abd al-Raziq (d. 1966) is cited as one the first models of the former group; in his famous book *Al-Islam wausul al-hukm*, he pushed the audacious claim that no mentioning of the Caliphate—in its specific meaning as a political institution—could be found in the Qurʾan or the Sunna; hence, "political authority and government, however indispensable for implementing Islamic ideals, do not belong to the essence of Islam and do not constitute any of its cardinal principles" (Enayat 1982: 64). On the other side of the spectrum is Rashid Rida, ʿAbduh's direct disciple and coauthor of the Qurʾanic commentary *Tafsir al-manar*, whose role was crucial in the development of political Islam, especially as he introduced the idea of a national Islamic state as a viable alternative to a global Caliphate (Enayat 1982; Abushouk 2019).

In the following decades, *tawhid* became more and more popular in Islamic political literature, with scholars of very different backgrounds and positions reclaiming it as the fundamental pillar of the Islamic worldview. Sayyid Qutb

(d. 1966), the most influential of the radical followers of 'Abduh's teachings, made *tawhid* the center of his understanding of Islam and the cornerstone of his entire theology.[16] In Qutb's thought, *tawhid* became the foundation of a totalitarian view of Islam, according to which not only God and the cosmos but also *society* is conceived as an organic whole that does not allow for internal division—be it social, ethnical, tribal, or national—nor any form of sovereignty (*hakimiyya*) that belongs to something other than God. In Qutb's view, *tawhid* became the theological basis for affirming the need for a rigorous Islamic state where God was the sole legislator and His law, the *shari'a*, the ultimate source of any political or juridical authority. Little room is left for tolerating diversity, although it should be stressed that the primary focus of Qutb's radical criticism is society, not individuals. The exceptional emphasis conferred on the sociopolitical aspects of the doctrine of *tawhid* and its fundamental role in guiding an Islamic revolution can also be found in radical Shi'i discourse: for instance, 'Ali Shariati (d. 1977) transformed *tawhid* into a platform for revolutionary action, the foundation for the achievement of social justice and political change (Machlis 2014). The *tawhid*-based revolutionary worldviews of radical thinkers such as Qutb or Shariati were driven by an absolute idealism that left no room for doubt or compromise with the ruling power; an ethical intransigence that contains within the seeds of extremism. Their followers have sometimes taken this radical intransigence to its most tragic conclusions: for instance, violent Sunni extremists have often made reference to Qutb's theory to launch accusations of *takfir* against anyone deemed to be an enemy of Islam, as well as to justify taking up arms against those in power.[17]

If some Islamist groups and thinkers have relied on *tawhid* to justify religious chauvinism, totalitarianism, and political violence, others have reclaimed it as a conceptual tool for addressing differences, in order to promote religious pluralism and uphold social justice and gender equality. For instance, South African scholar Farid Esack has referred to *tawhid* in denouncing the Apartheid policy as *shirk* and used it to promote interreligious solidarity among the oppressed, making the concept one of the fundamental hermeneutical keys of an Islamic theology of liberation (Esack 1997). In her gender egalitarian exegetical work, the African American scholar amina wadud has developed what she calls "the *tawhidic* paradigm" as a tool to contrast the dominant discourse that has constructed gender relations in a vertical line that sees God at the top, the male figure in the middle, and the female individual at the bottom. In her words, "the *tawhidic* paradigm becomes the inspiration for removing gender stratification from all levels of social interaction: public and private, ritual and political. Not only does it mean the I and Thou are equal, but also it means that I and Thou *are one within the oneness of Allah.* Social, liturgical, and political functions become determined by the

capacity of both women and men in a larger realm of education, dedication, and contribution with no arbitrary exclusion of women from performing any of these functions" (wadud 2006: 32).[18]

CONCLUSIONS

Tawhid, defined as the belief that God is One and has no peers, is considered the fundamental pillar of Islam. All major issues that inflamed the theological disputes in the formative and classical ages of Islam stemmed directly from the necessity to reconcile the plurality of this world (and God's signs) with the uncompromising affirmation of *tawhid* as found in the Qur'anic text. By the nineteenth century, however, theological reflection had entered a process of decline and fossilization. Therefore, reviving the religious discourse and generally the Muslim capacity for rational reasoning became a fundamental task for Islamic reformist thinkers such as Muhammad 'Abduh.

The *Risalat al-tawhid* was conceived with this precise purpose. It was part of an intellectual effort aimed at reviving Islamic thought as the only way to contrast cultural and political subjugation to Western colonialism. 'Abduh viewed *tawhid* not merely as a theological concept but rather as a tool for social reform and cultural transformation. In doing so, he represented a marked epistemological break in Islamic exegetical history, which had a lasting effect on subsequent Islamic political thought.

In fact, *tawhid* emerged as a powerful symbol of religious and political unity after the political fragmentation that resulted from the colonization of the Muslim world and continues in the postcolonial era. Throughout the twentieth century, Muslim thinkers have generally agreed on the fundamental importance of *tawhid* in defining the sociopolitical ethos of Islam but have sharply disagreed on how to put it into practice. This has given rise to exclusivist, inclusivist as well as pluralistic interpretations.

Muhammad 'Abduh was a precursor to all these tendencies, and it would be rather futile to engage in a debate over which interpretation should be considered closer to the original or even "truer" to the Qur'anic text. Rather, it would be beneficial to answer Farid Esack's call for a "conscious denial of objectivity" (Esack 1997: 103) and to reformulate the question in terms of *for whom* and *in whose interest* are certain interpretations preferred over others: "truth, for the engaged interpreter, can never be absolute" (Esack 1997: 111).

In the end, as the Qur'an itself states, "God leaves whoever He will to stray and guides whoever He will—no one knows your Lord's forces except Him" (74: 31).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTES

1. Theology is also known as *'ilm al-kalam*, "because the chief point on which the scholars were in disagreement was whether the Qur'anic word (*kalam*) was created or pre-existent, and also because [theology] is based on rational demonstration." 'Abduh (1994: 17).

2. Given the time of its translation, it is unsurprising that Cragg's use of language—which describes the theology of *tawhid* as "aggressive," "militant," or even "crusading"—bears signs of the Orientalist assumption that Islam was spread by the sword. Linguistic choices notwithstanding, Cragg makes a valid point in highlighting the assertive character of *tawhid*.

3. All Qur'anic translations of verses cited here are by M.A.S Abdel-Haleem (2004).

4. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1209) was a Persian Sunni theologian. A critical Ashari and a philosopher, al-Razi wrote *al-tafsir al-kabir*, a commentary widely considered to be the most notable expression of the methodology of *tafsir bi-l-ra'y*, in which the authors examine the Qur'an relying on the methods of dialectic theology and rationalist philosophy.

5. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *al-tafsir al-kabir*, translated in Hamza and Rizvi (2008: 535).

6. Not surprisingly, given the fact that the belief in One God is the basis of all Abrahamic religions, very similar controversies have also developed in Christian and Jewish theological disputes. For a comparative exploration of the concept of *tawhid* in classical Islamic theology and earlier Christian and Jewish commentaries on Genesis, see Aradi (2013). For a short introduction to the history of *Kalam* in the formative age of Islam, see van Ess (2006).

7. Ibn Arabi (d. 1240) was an Andalusian philosopher, theologian, and mystic, whom the later tradition called *al-shaykh al-akbar*, "the greatest master" for his extraordinary contribution to the development of Islamic philosophy and Sufi thought.

8. All translations from 'Abduh's treatise are mine.

9. 'Abduh's ambiguous attitude toward Mu'tazilism is best exemplified by his early defense of the Mu'tazili doctrine of the creation of the Qur'an, which was included in the first edition of the *Risala* but removed from later editions. To quote

Malcolm Kerr, "Abduh appears to accept the spirit of the Mu'tazilite rationale but carefully eschews Mu'tazilite terminology" (Kerr 1966: 111).

10. 'Abduh's autobiography, translated and quoted in Hourani (1970: 140–141). Influenced by the sharp criticism of *taqlid* and the emphasis on *ijtihad* promoted by reformist scholars such as Muhammad 'Abduh, Western scholarship on the topic has historically tended to conceive *taqlid* and *ijtihad* as binary opposites. This perspective has been criticized by more recent works, which have re-evaluated the relation between *taqlid* and *ijtihad* as more complex than it is usually understood (Ahmed 2013).

11. Rallying behind the slogan "Egypt to the Egyptians!," the so-called Urabi revolution sought to overthrow the rule of the aristocratic elite, a minority of Turkish-Circassian origin, over the majority of the Arab-speaking population, that was essentially excluded from all centers of power. Worried that the new Urabi government would have curtailed its economic interests in the country, the British imperial power then intervened with a military action, first bombing the city of Alexandria and then occupying all Egypt, proclaiming it an English "protectorate." For more information on the Urabi revolution, see Cole (1999).

12. The doctrine of *takfir* has received growing attention from Western scholars, mainly because of the centrality it holds in contemporary Islamic radicalism. For a thorough examination of the subject of *takfir* in a diachronic perspective that spans the entirety of Muslim history, see Adang et al. (2016).

13. The very first monograph published in English on the topic (Patton 1897) advanced this thesis, and heavily influenced later literature.

14. For a recent work that put the *mihna* in the broader context of a struggle between political-religious authority in the formative and classical ages of Islam, see Turner (2013).

15. Recently published Kateman (2019) focuses specifically on Muhammad 'Abduh. For a more general analysis of the complex relations between modern thought and Islamic reformism, see Abu Zayd (2006).

16. A few scholars have depicted the relation between Qutb's thought and that of the *Salafiya* as one of rupture rather than continuity; this view is shared by centrist (*wasati*) Islamic thinkers such as Yusuf Qaradawi and Tariq Ramadan as well as by secular observers (Ramadan 1998; Moussalli 1992). I nevertheless agree with Olivier Carré that there is a "direct filiation" between Qutb's radical ideas and earlier Islamic reformism (Carré 1984). Filiation does not imply full agreement: Qutb's might indeed be labeled 'Abduh's most rebellious son, but the family resemblance remains undeniable.

17. To some analysts, this connection between Qut'bs writings and contemporary violent extremism is so evident that the word "Qutbism" is considered more proper than "Jihadism" to describe Islamist groups that legitimize and use weapons in the fight against secular powers to establish an Islamic state. As I have argued elsewhere (Picchi 2017), this identification of Qutb as the forefather of modern violent Islamic extremism, which led many self-declared "moderate" thinkers and groups to distance themselves from his writings, is the result of a partial reading of his thought. It does not take into account his writings as a whole, nor the complexity of his theories.

18. The I-Thou-God model is borrowed from the work of the Christian philosopher and theologian Martin Buber (1958).

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Chapter 6

The Shiite Islamic Political Theology

The Debate between Ruhollah Khomeini (d. 1989) and Mehdi Bazargan (d. 1995)

Pejman Abdolmohammadi

The relationship between religion and politics in the Shiite Islamic political thought became more vibrant during and after the 1979 Revolution and the foundation of the Islamic Republic in Iran. In such a context, various Shiite Islamic thinkers, coming both from the intellectual world and from the clergy, started to elaborate and to speculate on the political theology and on the relationship between Islam and politics. From the intellectual Shiite world, notable figures such as Jalal-e Al-e Ahmad (d. 1969), Ali Shariati (d. 1977), Abolhassan Banisadr, and Mehdi Bazargan have raised between 1950s and 1970s, while on the Shiite clergy Hojjatoleslam[1] Mahmud Talaghani (d. 1979), Hojjatoleslam Morteza Motahhari (d. 1979), Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri (d. 2009), and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini became significant figures.

All these intellectuals, religious scholars, and, broadly speaking, thinkers, started to discuss the role of Islam in public life, discussing mainly the role that this religion should have in the political sphere. They started to argue whether Islam, particularly in its Shiite interpretation, could exercise an influence on politics and on the shaping of political institutions. And if the answer is yes, then how much could this influence be? Or to what extent could it be exercised? And also, which are the main sources of legitimization of power in an Islamic state?

It should be of course highlighted that this sort of debate started to become central in the Iranian Shiite cultural environment because of the historical and social context of Iran in those years. A context that brought thousands of hundreds of Iranians, coming from several generations and various social classes, to adopt Islam as the political ideology in their social movements

and revolutionary actions against the Shah during the mid- to late 1970s. The adoption of Islam, mostly its Shiite version, as a symbolic source of power among the Iranian revolutionary forces and its predominance during the 1979 Revolution, offer a major space to the above-mentioned categories to elaborate, in a more significant way, over the Shiite Islamic political thought and about the role of political theology in the contemporary era within the Islamic world.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND THE
RISE OF AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI

During the second part of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's (d. 1980) reign (1953–1979), political Islam transformed the clergy from a pressure group relying on various political forces to defend their prerogatives and their values into a full-fledged independent political entity. In other words, it underwent a kind of "genetic mutation" under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's leadership, both ideologically and organizationally. On the ideological front, political Islam became the standard-bearer for social justice. More importantly, it was able to obtain the support of the marginalized urban classes in the least developed parts of the country, and those who previously might have only aligned themselves with Marxist factions also welcomed political Islam. In addition, political Islam raised the flag of nationalism in defiance of Western interference in the country's politics.

Moreover, Ayatollah Khomeini gradually became a political figure who started to challenge the Shah. In other words, after the fall of Mohammad Mosaddegh (d. 1967) in 1953, few political personalities stood against the Shah until 1963–1964 when Ayatollah Khomeini began his first political declarations criticizing Shah's foreign and domestic policies. With regard to internal policies, Ayatollah Khomeini considered the Shah's political and cultural agenda liberal and far from the Islamic morality and ethics.

Khomeini was convinced that the *fuqaha* (the Islamic expert of Islamic law), relying on their influence on the people, can obtain relevant political power: "You all know that if the mullah were able to spiritually assert themselves among the population, they would remove you from power. God willing, one day the people, finally awaking from its numbness, will show you all its rage."[2]

Khomeini was, for instance, against any external interference or meddling in Iran's political life. Some of the Ayatollah's watchwords, in fact, extolled the virtues of independence and self-sufficiency. As he perceived it, the "West," which included Israel, had always sought to exploit Islamic nations, preventing their economic and industrial development.

He believed that the moment had finally come for the whole Islamic world to rebel against Western imperialism, and in order to achieve this goal, Muslims would have to return to original and "pure Mohammadian Islam" (in Persian *Eslam-e nab-e moḥammadi*) which, after the end of Ali's imamate, had fallen into deviation. If a return to true faith was to happen, according to Ayatollah Khomeini, Shariʿa must finally predominate in Islamic communities, because obedience to Islamic law would lead to the freedom and independence of the Islamic *umma*. He believed that the destruction of tyrannies could only take place if true Islam reemerged in the form of a perfect state.

Ayatollah Khomeini was first arrested and imprisoned for thirteen months in 1963 because of his direct statements against the Shah. He was then sent to exile in Bursa in Turkey in 1964, and after a few months, he was relocated to the Shia holy city of Najaf in Iraq, where he stayed until September 1978. During this period, Ayatollah Khomeini continued his opposition to the Shah and developed his main political view of the "Islamic Government" or the "Government of the Islamic Jurist" (in Persian Velayat-e Faqih). Between 1969 and 1970, he frequently addressed young religious scholars during a cycle of seminars and elaborated the basis of his theory of *Velayat-e Faqih*, which he clearly considered an alternative model of the state in Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini's ideas were innovative even for the Islamic Shiites school of thought, as most of the Shi'a jurists were the supporters of a Quietist school which was based on noninterference of *Shariʿa* jurists in public and political spheres.[3]

After the rise of Saddam Hussein (d. 2006) in Iraq in 1978, Ayatollah Khomeini had to leave Najaf as the new Iraqi president, being an authoritarian and radical secular and an anti-Shi'a, did not accept to keep him in Iraq anymore. As a result, Ayatollah Khomeini was relocated to France, where he spent the last months of his exile before coming back to Iran as the leader of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

He succeeded in becoming the leader of the revolution not only as a result of his personal ability but also due to the particular organizational structure of the Shi'a clergy. Unlike in the Sunni world, the Shiites have a hierarchical organization that has proved extremely effective in coordinating and controlling political actions. Ayatollah Khomeini made use of this characteristic to direct and implement his political project, through first transforming the Shi'a clergy into an organized political force and then into one of the essential components of the state structure after the revolution. His agenda was also facilitated by the weak institutionalization of the state and, above all, by the diminished strength of the army, which, in the wake of the revolution, was unable to effectively tackle the insurrection. One could argue that the success of Ayatollah Khomeini's strategy could be attributed to a combination of

three social factors: left-wing ideals of social justice, conservative traditional-ism, and the rediscovery of national pride in the form of anti-Americanism, thus weakening the appeal of political pluralism and freedom.

Ayatollah Khomeini may not have been one of the greatest theologians, but he had the charisma and excelled in communicative ability.[4] He was able to interpret the moods of Iranians and address them in a manner that achieved his objective of establishing a form of Islamic state, albeit a formally repub-lican one.

Accordingly, during the 1970s, an important social network arose in Iran within the mosques, which was able to easily spread the political mes-sages of Ayatollah Khomeini. Being a skillful communicator, he was able to send his messages to the population through the network of imams in the mosques, thereby influencing some parts of the Iranian public opinion, particularly that of the less affluent classes, known as "the Oppressed" (in Persian *Mostaz'afin*). One of the founding principles of Khomenism was that of "social justice." He advocated struggling capitalism and the arrogance of the Shah by means of Islamic political theology. The idea was to achieve an Islamic political system that respected justice. Finally, there were the *Bazaari*, who were traditionalists opposed to the Shah's economic liberaliza-tion.[5] They were among the supporters of the Shi'a clergy from an economic and political point of view.

In 1979, facing continuous series of internal revolts, the Shah was forced to leave the country. A few months later, Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran from France after sixteen years in exile (before he was in Turkey and Iraq). With his arrival, the foundations were laid for the birth of a proper and peculiar Islamic Republic in the Middle East. During the first three years of Khomeini's leadership, he succeeded gradually to eliminate all the other political factions, who participated in the 1979 Revolution, such as the secu-lars, leftists, and the moderate Islamists, from the political scene, setting a hegemonic power mainly led by the Shiite clergy.

AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI'S POLITICAL IDEAS AND THE VELAYAT-E FAQIH

Ayatollah Khomeini did not deal only with the question of a state where material well-being would be guaranteed, but he also spoke of a new public ethics based on Islamic principles. The Shi'a Ayatollah in fact succeeded in effectively convincing the Iranian people that, with the collapse of the Pahlavi monarchy, and through his leadership, a utopian Islamic state would be established in which people's lives would be organized along ideal lines. His undisputed charisma, together with the historical predilection of Iranians

for religion and spiritualism, encouraged Ayatollah Khomeini in creating his political project. In fact, a good part of the Iranian population in 1979 experienced a moment of spiritual euphoria. Convinced of the return of the Messiah, they had an idealized perception of Ayatollah Khomeini. It seemed as if Ayatollah Khomeini was the predestined savior of Iran against tyranny.[6]

Ayatollah Khomeini believed that the Shah's monarchy had to be overthrown and replaced by an Islamic government for it to embody all the characteristics of the city-state of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina. In Khomeini's view, the Islamic government had to follow Imam Ali's model of government as epitomized during his four and half years of Imamate in Kufa (AD 657–661). According to the theory of *Velayat-e Faqih*, it is only the imam who, after the death of the Prophet, has the right to lead the Islamic community. More particularly, it is the twelfth Imam, the *Mahdi* (the "awaited"), who is entitled to lead the Islamic government. But during the Mahdi's occultation,[7] the clergy, according to Shi'a doctrine, can become the legitimate representative of the Mahdi and take on themselves the responsibility of guiding the Islamic community.

Under the Islamic government ruling, the Vali-ye Faqih (the Government of the Islamic Expert), recognized as the wisest among all religious scholars, becomes the head of the state. He can also influence the judicial and legislative powers in the Islamic government system, although only indirectly. In other words, and as envisaged by Ayatollah Khomeini, the only legitimate government in the absence of the Mahdi is an Islamic Imamate run by the Vali-ye Faqih, having God as the only source of legislation and the Jurist as the only executor of the divine law. The Vali-ye Faqih, the Guardian Jurist, would play a central role in such a government, representing the Prophet and the Imams on earth and exerting the same authority as would the Shi'a twelve Imams. It was also envisaged that the actions and statements of the Vali-ye Faqih would establish new orders, which meant that such actions and statements could not be countermanded by any legal authority and would be implemented.

Clearly, the Islamic Republic emerged as a compromise between secular and religious political forces, both being the protagonists in the 1979 Revolution. This compromise also resulted in changes at an institutional level where a system was born in which constitutional bodies representing the republican foundation coexisted with bodies representing the Islamic soul. However, due to the stronger influence of Ayatollah Khomeini and his associates, the Islamic front was able to carve out a greater role, both institutionally and politically. This led to the application of the republican principles, listed in the Islamic Republic's Constitution, being limited by the Islamic values. In other words, the provisions of the Islamic Republic's Constitution were drawn up in such a way as to guarantee full adherence to Islamic principles

and Shariʿa rules. Ayatollah Khomeini also conferred enormous power on the Vali-ye Faqih, whose authority was believed to lie not in the hands of the people but in God's will, further undermining the values of a republican system. As a result, the Islamic Revolution created a state based on fundamental Islamic core values.

By employing the term Islamic "republic" (in Persian *jomhouri*) instead of Islamic "government" (in Persian *hokoumat*), Ayatollah Khomeini attributed to the state not only the divine legitimacy of the Vali-ye Faqih, but also a popular legitimacy. The Jurist's absolute sovereignty, as theorized by Ayatollah Khomeini, was partially diluted by popular sovereignty, which could make its will known through the ballot box while always respecting the limitations imposed by Shariʿa rules. Islamic republicanism, therefore, created an institutional duality: on the one hand, constitutional bodies such as parliament and president of the Republic together with his ministers; on the other, the "Council of Guardians," the "Assembly of Experts," and the "Expediency Council, to ensure adherence of the republic to Islamic principles and the divine sovereignty of the Vali-ye Faqih.[8] This unique political model, unlike the "Islamic government," aimed at facilitating the coexistence of secular and religious principles.

MEHDI BAZARGAN'S POLITICAL IDEAS ON POLITICAL THEOLOGY

The Islamic opposition ranged against the monarchy was not a monolith. On one side, there were conservative forces, as highlighted above, which included supporters of the Shi'a clergy, members of the less well-off social classes and the *bazari*. On the other side, there were sections of the middle class and students who were drawn to political Islam, thanks to the dissemination of values of a more modern Islam by the so-called Islamic intellectuals.

However, there existed another Islamist power bloc made up mostly from the middle class and students, who did not consider the political line of the Shi'a clergy to be adequate. As a consequence, they called for a new and modern political theology that would incorporate within itself the teachings of Islam. Islamic intellectuals, such as Ali Shariati and Mehdi Bazargan were among the most prominent Islamic intellectuals who gave rise to this ideology.[9] Both studied in the West and were familiar with Western political culture, while remaining devoted to Islam due to their traditional upbringing. As a result, they were able to offer a more modern and reformist idea of Islam, the precursor of what is today known as "Islamic democracy." Shariati, being influenced by Marxism, formulated the so-called

"Islamo-marxism," which attempts to reconcile the common elements of the two great ideologies. He supported social justice and championed the impoverished classes in the face of the capitalists and imperialists. Bazargan, on the other hand, having been one of Mosaddegh's colleagues, had a more moderate and nationalist vision, and his views were attractive to the seculars, though not left-wing, part of the middle class, bringing them closer to political Islam.

Mehdi Bazargan,[10] also known as (Mohandes Bazargan), was one of the most important leaders of the Iranian revolution. Beginning in the 1950s, criticizing traditional Shiite studies that—in his opinion—were interested in useless and minor matters, rather than dealing with the main themes of religion, he tried to present a new image of Islam. He considered Islam a pragmatic doctrine capable of adapting to the modern world. After the end of World War II, Bazargan became a close associate of Mosaddegh and was appointed president of the committee for the nationalization of oil. After the fall of Mosaddegh, Bazargan continued his political opposition to the Shah. In 1961, flanked by one of the most important figures in the religious world, Ayatollah Talaghani and a veteran of the national front of Mosaddegh, Yadollah Sahabi (d. 2002), Bazargan founded "The Movement for Liberation" (in Persian Nehzat-e Azadi). The movement rapidly became one of the most active anti-government forces in the country.

The purpose of the new movement[11] was to demonstrate to young people the "true Islam," considered a source of inspiration for the struggle against despotism on the domestic front and imperialism on the external front. The main objective of Bazargan and his companions was to lay the foundations of a new society that contained authentic religious values, reconciling Islam with politics; indeed, Bazargan rejected the idea of the separation of the spiritual dimension from the temporal one. According to Bazargan, the idea of separation had indeed entered into Islamic thought through the Christian religion and was therefore not an Islamic concept. Bazargan sustained that there must be no borders between religion and politics: religion must control and inspire politics, not vice versa. The task of religion is to solve the problems of men and this can only be achieved through the channel of politics.[12]

In the course of history, Islam has lost its original values and it is necessary, through a rereading of the *Shari'a* sources and historical events, to create a renaissance that is based on the authentic principles of the Qur'an. The rebirth called for by Bazargan must be in harmony with Iranian culture and cannot be achieved without an active and conscious participation of the population. According to Bazargan, the Iranians must then reconsider their history and radically change their thinking in order to realize "true Islam" on earth. He sees Islam as an ideology through which it is possible to achieve industrial development, political independence, and personal freedom.

Bazargan admires and at the same time criticizes the West: on the one hand, he considers Western countries a good example to follow both from a technical and scientific point of view and for their secular political and social principles (democracy, human rights, and humanism). On the other hand, Bazargan is critical of Christianity, which he says is unable to provide believers with concrete prescriptions about political and social life. This "neglect" of Christianity, according to Bazargan, has led Westerners to approach doctrines and political philosophies like socialism and Marxism. This cannot happen in Islam, which he considers a complete religion, both in the political and the spiritual fields.

Bazargan's attempt is to reconcile Iranian nationalism with Shiite Islam by finding a convergence between the two realities present on Iranian territory. Although a critic of traditional Islam, fossilized by a part of the Shiite clergy, Bazargan is an imami Shiite believer who is convinced that the clergy should be more involved in the public life of the country and take an interest in issues concerning culture, economy, and politics. He is convinced that the formation of a democratic Islamic state is possible. Bazargan's ideas sparked a new circle of Iranian intellectuals who sought to develop a political theory, later called "Melli-Mazhabi" (National-Religious), through which attempts were made to reconcile Islamic and nationalist values. This political trend abandoned the absolute secularism of the 1930s and 1940s, which saw Iranian culture and thought in opposition to Islam. Although Bazargan was one of Mosaddegh's closest collaborators, it would be inaccurate to consider these two personalities from the Iranian political world as also close from an ideological point of view. Mosaddegh is a fully secular man convinced of the separation of religion from politics. He has a formal respect for Islam, while Bazargan is convinced that religion and politics are inseparable and, in his thinking, the very concept of secularity of the state has no meaning. According to Bazargan, the *Shariʿa* incorporates all the rules and laws necessary for Iranian society and its application is indispensable. His strong respect for the *Shariʿa* appears evident when, during the white revolution, he opposes the conferral of the right to vote to women considering it, like the ulama, anti-shariatic. The formation of a category of "Islamic intellectuals," favored above all the clergy, succeeded in obtaining, in addition to the support of the lower middle classes and the Bazarii, the support of the more moderate part of the middle class and the academic world, who were fascinated by the idea of the constitution of a pragmatist Islamic state. These categories did not trust the clergy, defining them more as a backward category, but they were welcoming an Islamic government promoted and made by the so-called Islamic intellectuals. Bazargan had thus become the link between the clerical and the secular part of society, since modernity and religion could coexist in his thought.

BAZARGAN AND KHOMEINI: AN ANALOGICAL COMPARISON OVER POLITICAL THEOLOGY

In February 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini chose Bazargan as prime minister of the post-revolutionary interim government, as he was a politician acceptable to both the nationalists and the religious establishments. But his government resigned abruptly in November 1979, following, among other things, the seizure of the US Embassy in Tehran and the US hostage crisis (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi 1987, pp. 108–129). Despite their exclusion from elections, its party members continue to be involved in the political activities in the country. This is the moment that signs the major differences between Ayatollah Khomeini and Bazargan. They were strong allies before and during the revolution because they shared various political views; however, they also have some fundamental differences which provoked their harsh divorce in the early post-revolutionary era.

They both believed that Islam and politics have to cohabit and that, within the Islamic theology, it is impossible to separate religion from politics. In other terms, Khomeini and Bazargan wanted to introduce a sort of Islamic ethic code within the society. They were both critics of the monarchy of Mohammad Reza Shah and were aiming to build a sort of state based on Islamic principles. They also shared a relatively common foreign policy views by condemning imperialism coming from the West and the role of Israel, as occupier, in the Islamic world.

However, these two relevant personalities of contemporary Iran have also relevant differences. As Saeed Barzin highlights in his article: "Bazargan's contribution to Iranian politics has been made through the extensive works which he has produced and in which he has emphasized the themes of a religion based on natural law, the modern labor ethic, the freedom of man (as an individual and a social being), religious social identity, moralism, and the necessity of reforming and limiting state interference in civil society. Bazargan has represented these ideas within the Iranian intellectual climate of modernism, communism, traditionalism, authoritarianism and popular religious culture. What makes Bazargan stand out, however, in comparative terms, is his reformation of religious notions, allied with his efforts at legitimizing a constitutional and democratic paradigm in Iranian politics" (Barzin 1994, p. 101).

From these citations, we could summarize some relevant part of Bazargan's political thought which are not compatible with Ayatollah Khomeini's thought:

a) One of Bazargan's main ideas is to create a form of "Islamic Democracy," where the individual rights should be respected and that the state

cannot interfere within the private sphere of the people. In other terms, Bazargan's idea of the state is not the Velayat-e Faqih of Khomeini. The state should be based on Islamic principles but has to be governed by the people legitimacy fully basing its governance on it. It means that, according to Bazargan, the Jurist should not be the head of the state and the role of clergy has to be limited in politics.

b) Ideologically speaking, contrary to Khomeini, whose main paradigm was Shiite Islam, Bazargan wants to have a balance between Iranian nationalism and Shiite Islam. Bazargan does not want to abolish the pre-Islamic identity of Iran, while Khomeini does not have any sympathy toward the pre-Islamic Persian civilization. Some excerpts of the message sent by Khomeini to the Iranian people on the occasion of the celebrations of Persepolis can help us in understanding how Khomeini was criticizing the basis of Iranian nationalism:

> Only God knows how many disasters and crimes the Iranian monarchy has committed since its establishment. The crimes of the Persian monarchs have overshadowed all the history books. The Persian kings were the ones who used to order the killing of their own population. Even those who are known as "good" were nothing but cowards and cruel monarchs [. . .] Islamic tradition states that according to the Prophet, Shahanshah [King of Kings] was the most hated title and contrary to God's will. Islam is absolutely opposed to the concept of monarchy. The monarchy is one of the most miserable and reactionary systems. Is it fair [then] that millions of tomans belonging to the people are spent to celebrate such an absurd and frivolous tradition? Is it appropriate that the Iranian people have to support a festival that commemorates a monarchy that, over its entire history, has caused scandal and committed crimes? (Khomeini 1971, pp. 200–201)

Khomeini discourse expresses his critique toward pre-Islamic Persian history and civilization, considering all Persian rulers and especially the founder of the Persian Empire, Cyrus the Great, war criminals. Everything connected with the pre-Islamic civilization is considered "evil" and becomes a symbol of injustice, whereas in fact everything that represents the Shiite Islamic history assumes a positive value.

On the contrary, Bazargan is trying to find a sort of balance between Iranian identity and the Islamic one. Of course, he privileges the Islamic identity, but he is not so radical against the Iranian nationalism. He argues that national (secular) identity emerged around the time of the constitutional revolution and as the result of contacts with Europeans. This modern identity, Bazargan believes, is a superficial imitation of Western concepts of nationalism which has failed to penetrate popular

culture. In his idea, there should be a new social identity reconstruction in which Islam should be central, without eliminating the national features of Iran.

This is a very important difference which somehow also explains how Bazargan and his movement did not manage to continue their alliance and collaboration with the Khomeini's religious and political forces after the first year of the revolution.

c) On the foreign policy, even though Bazargan and Khomeini shared a sort of anti-imperialism, Bazargan was more pragmatic than Khomeini and did not want to cut all the bridges with the Western world, particularly with the United States. On the contrary, Khomeini's view toward the West was far radical and no tolerance or cooperation had to be done. One of the relevant historical episodes, which brought to the marginalization of Bazargan, was the invasion of the American Embassy in November 1979 in Iran. Bazargan, as prime minister, could not accept this and gave his resignation.

d) Bazargan was a reformist and moderate intellectual whose vision was to create a national-religious form of Islamic state which would offer a new model of "Islamic Democracy" to the world. Bazargan wanted to promote a sort of inclusive modern Islamic model where tradition and modernity could have coexisted, while Khomeini wanted to recover a puritan version of hegemonic Shiite Islam where secular values had to be marginalized from the state and the inclusiveness had to be limited in a significant way.

NOTES

1. *Hojjattoleslam* is a word of Arabic origin which means "the reason of Islam." In Imami Shiite Madhab (School of Islamic Law), Hojjattoleslam is one of the ranks of the Shiite clergy hierarchy. Usually, this rank is reached after completing studies at religious schools and starting research and teaching of subjects relating to Islamic religion, ethics, and philosophy. After the rank of Hojjattoleslam, the Shiite Islamic scholar reaches the rank of Ayatollah, which means "the sign of God." An Ayatollah enjoys considerable prestige and has normally made extensive religious studies. Not all Ayatollahs are marja'e taqlid (source of imitation). An Ayatollah achieves this position if he publishes a religious dissertation (Resaleh) which is approved by at least three other competent Ayatollahs. As can be deduced from the meaning of the expression "source of imitation," the marja'e taqlid is imitated in the practices related to *shariʿa* by its followers. Often there are more Ayatollahs of this level: in these cases, every Shiite Muslim is free to choose which Ayatollah to follow.

2. Khomeini, Ruhollah (1943). *Kashf-e asrar (The Revelation of Secrets)*. Tehran: Zafar Publication, p. 304.

3. Also, during the Safavid Era (1501–1736), when for the first time Shiite Islam was institutionalized in Persia, the *fuqaha* were not directly intervening in the political sphere. They were legitimizing the empire and the Shah as the God's elected sovereign in the earth. On the Safavid dynasty, see Bianca Maria Scarcia Amoretti, *Sciiti Nel Mondo*, Roma, Jouvence, 1994.

4. On the political biography and thinking of Ayatollah Khomeini, see Baqer Moin (2000). *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*. New York: St. Martin's Press; Amir Taheri (1989). *Lo spirito di Allah: Khomeini e la rivoluzione islamica*; H. Ansari (1373/1994). *The Narrative of Awakening: A Look at Imam Khomeini's Ideal and Political Biography (From Birth to Ascension)*. Tehran: Centro culturale specializzato nelle opere dell'Imam Khomeini; Pejman Abdolmohammadi (2009). *La Repubblica Islamica dell'Iran: il pensiero politico dell'ayatollah Khomeini*. Genoa: De Ferrari Editore; Arshin Adib-Moghaddam (Ed.) (2014). *A Critical Introduction to Khomeini*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

5. For example, as a part of his modernization policies, the Shah tried to promote the concept of supermarket chains across urban centres in Iran; a policy that was not well-received by the traditional merchants.

6. Indeed, in the Iranian millennial tradition, both in the pre-Islamic era (with Zoroastrian philosophy) and in the Islamic period (with the adoption of Imami Shi'a Islam), Iranians cultivated the idea of the so-called Messiah (the Sushians in its Zoroastrian meaning and the Mahdi in its Islamic-Shi'a sense), who would one day rise to save them from the darkness of tyranny and bring the light of freedom back to the earth. In 1979, at some point, the Iranian population was convinced that Ayatollah Khomeini was the Mahdi.

7. The concept of occultation in Shi'a Islam refers to the belief that the twelfth Imam, the Mahdi, has disappeared and withdrawn from earthly matters, but will return during the Last Day or Day of Judgment.

8. On the Islamic Republic Constitution consult Asghar Schirazi (1997). *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic* (trans. O'Kane, John). London-New York: I.B. Tauris.

9. On the political biography and thoughts of Shariati, see J. Pajum (1992). *Shakhsiat va Andishe-yeDoctor Ali Shariati* (*La personalità e il pensiero del dott. Ali Shariati*). Tehran: Chapaksh; Ali Rahnema (1998). *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shariati*. London-New York: Routledge.

10. On the political activities of Bazargan, see Bazargan, M. Shora-ye enqelab-vadowlat-e movaqqat (The Revolutionary Council and Provisional Government), (Tehran: FMI, 1982).

11. The Freedom Movement of Iran was characterized by the absence of a real party structure. Instead, the party's activities were associated with the individual initiatives of the most prominent members of the organization, especially Yadollah Sahabi, AyatollahTalaqani, and Mehdi Bazargan. In 1963, many of its members were arrested and others fled abroad.

12. Some of the most important works of Bazargan are the following: [1946] Kar dar Eslam (The concept of work in Islam), Houston, Book Distribution Center, 1978; [1947] Rah-e teishodeh (The Gone Way), Houston, Book Distribution Center,

1977; [1963], Modafe'atdardadgah-e gheir-e saleh-e tajdid-e nazar-e nezdam (The Defences Speech in the Non Just Court," Bellville, Modarres Publications; [1966], Be'satvaIdeolozhy (The Be'that an Ideology), Houston, Book Distribution Center, n.d.; [1982], Moshkelatvamasa'el-e awalinsal-e enqelab (The Issues and Problems of the first year of the [1979] Revolution), 2nd ed., Tehran, FMI, 1983; Enqelab-e Eslamidar do harakat (The Islamic Revolution in Two Movements), Tehran, 1984.

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Chapter 7

Critique of the Islamic Political Thought in the Middle Ages

Revisiting Abdessalam Yassine's Political Theory

Driss Makboul and Mohamed Elghazi

INTRODUCTION

Abdessalam Yassine (d. 2012) is one of the most outstanding Muslim scholars who have been critical of the political heritage throughout Islamic history. In his analytical philosophical approach, concepts and conceptions are not admitted unless they are assessed and restructured. The credibility of this approach comes from the fact that it implicitly or explicitly begins not only by analyzing the prevailing knowledge systems, perceptions, and theories, but also by seriously examining and deconstructing their consistency and reliability. In his method, Imam Yassine does not preoccupy himself with studying scattered parts separately, but he often criticizes the foundations upon which the whole paradigm is based.

A close consideration of his entire works reveals that Yassine's critical approach is based upon a variety of analytical tools that do not only challenge the ideas of his opponents but also go beyond the mere and naïve confrontation of the adversaries for the sake of self-triumph. Imam Yassine believes that historical issues are more complex than the pros and cons of idealism. He thinks that they have a moral character in their roots.

In this study, we address aspects of Abdessalam Yassine's critique of the Islamic political thought across various religious sects and ideological trends. We first show how he refused the Sunni interpretations that produced the ideas of "the legitimacy of the triumphant" (*shar'iyyat al-motaghallib*) and "the Hereditary Rule" (*al-hukm al-wiratii*) which reflects a kind of submission to those who have power and the means of oppression putting an end to

the era of the Islamic democracy (*shura*). Then, we discuss how he criticized the Shii doctrine of the "Holy Testimony" (*wilayat al-ahd*) and the "Awaited Mahdi" (*al-mahdi al-muntadhar*), as they both reflect historical lethargy and monopoly of the truth. Afterward, we consider the reasons why he condemned the extremism of the *Kharijites* (*al-khawarij*) sect that produced the ideas of "Atonement of Authority" and "Armed Uprising" against the rulers. Finally, we will see how heal so criticized the mystical naivety of the Islamic Sophism that produced the ideas of "passive submission" to the governing regime regardless of how despotic it might be.

By the same token, Abdessalam Yassine called for adopting an approach of renovation and reform inferred from Qur'anic values and guided by the prophetic tradition. That is why a kind of systematic balance is clearly discernible in his proposed project. For instance, he called for anti-corruption activism, but by peaceful means. He encouraged a kind of opposition against despotic regimes that should be framed by the agreement between sincere factions and wings to restore power legitimacy, or the restoration of the people's "right" to indirectly participate in governance. He insisted that the foundational agreement between the "sovereign" and the "subjects" should be based on justice in return of loyalty, and on freedom in exchange for duty. Only then, the authority gains or loses its public consensus or its "public quality" as Kant calls it (Reiss 1991).

IMAM YASSINE'S APPROACH TO HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Some analysts in political sciences and socio-politics like Aksikas (2009) consider Abdessalam Yassine as one of the exceptional intellectual (Ideologue) and most successful activists of contemporary Islamism in North Africa and the Arab world. He wrote more than thirty books in Arabic and French to display his comprehensive and authentic interpretation of Islam, which integrates his proposed project about social change, spirituality, Islamic history, and the state. He did not confine himself to the limits of theorizing, but he was also a charismatic political leader. He founded and wisely led the largest and most organized Islamic group in Morocco (*Al Adlwa Al Ihsan*/Justice and Spirituality). His *Jamaa* (Islamist group) is seen as a serious opposition and sincere challenge to the Moroccan monarchy, especially that the latter pretends to be based on religious foundations (cf. Roy and Sfeir 2009).

In his project of Islamic revival, Yassine was interested in criticizing the political and social history of the Muslim nation. On the basis of historical analysis, he made a great scientific effort to disclose the causes of underdevelopment and the decline of Islamic civilization. He exposed a bundle of

stipulated conditions for renaissance. Although his analysis was based on the situation of the Muslim *umma*, the outcomes can be generalized to other nations experiencing the same conditions.

In his study of Islamic history, Yassine concluded that the radical character behind the changes that happened later can be traced back to the early beginnings of Islam. It was at that era when the most deviations in Islamic history started. They resulted in considerable transformations in the paradigms of thinking, spiritual education, and governance.

It is clear that the terrible events in the early history of Islam had a deep and everlasting impact on Yassine's thought. He focused mainly on the events of *fitna* (the era of political disorder during the rule of the second and the third caliphs, *'Uthman* [d. 656] and *'Ali* [d. 661], respectively). He deduced that the Muslim mind must never neglect the principles of causality and scientific logic in dealing with worldly events. Likewise, he emphasized the role of spirituality and moral values in building the nation's glorious history. Unlike the *Jabriyyah*, who maintain that Allah does not interfere in our good or evil actions, Yassine (2005) believes that Man can make History. So, "it is Man alone who is responsible for both his achievements and his failures" (p. 277).

To figure out both the renaissance causing conditions and the underlying causes of transgression, Yassine (1989) advocates a method of study that is based on historical analysis, but he suggests starting the exploration by looking at historical events from their "high position," (in Arabic: *min a'ali al-tarikh*) (p. 49). Temporally, the "high position" starts from the prophetic era. Methodically, it is framed by Qur'anic verses and/or quotes from the prophetic tradition warning about forthcoming tribulations or revealing some indications about future events Yassine (ibid.).

Constantine Zureik (1985), the Arab historian, coined the Arabic expression *Fawkatarikh*, meaning "over history." It reflects his conviction that "historical creativity does not come from absolute submission to the stream of historical events. Rather, it emerges from a feeling of emancipation which makes man rises and transcends history so as to control it" (ibid. p. 185). It seems that Zureik's concept of *Fawkatarikh* (= above history) and Yassine's expression "min a'alitarikh" (i.e., conducting historical analysis from a "high position") both allude not only to the importance that should be given to the first major causal events behind historical evolvement but also to the spiritual and psychological factors that prevail in the historical era under study. It appears that both of them are convinced of Sir John Seely saying: "When we read history, we do not just learn about the past, but (we also understand) the future" (Jayapalan 2008, p. 6). That is why psychological and ethical structures must be examined; mentalities and cultural aspects must as well be considered in order to reorganize the real motives behind historical

events by linking them to the new values that emerged on the political, social, and cultural surface.

ISLAMIC HISTORY AND MORAL VALUES

Submissive obedience was rooted in the Muslim mind. Imam Yassine explains that it is due to two important historical reasons: first, the misinterpretation of the *Qur'anic* verses and *ahadith* (quotes of the Prophet) that require ordinary Muslims to be loyal and obedient to their rulers. This loyalty is symbolically and morally reflected by the concept of *bay'a*, which is apolitical and ethical agreement between the ruler and the people. The latter must show *ta'a* (= lit. obedience) to the former. For Imam Yassine (2000), the principle of *ta'a* does not mean passive submission to the decision makers. Rather, "it is a moral value through which each partaker of the *bay'a* agreement should consciously fulfill his obligations and accomplish his duties" (p. 72).

The second reason behind the submissive character of the Muslim mind comes from the brutalities and oppression inflicted on rebels against early political regimes of the Umayyad and the Abbasside dynasties. The successive atrocities committed against political opponents prevented the majority of the *umma* from positively participating in political accountability and criticism of the rulers. The latter as well encouraged education based on a fallacious understanding of prophetic guiding hadiths such as the one narrated by Al-Tirmidi (d. 892) saying that "a good Muslim is he who minds his business and does not interfere in other people's affairs."

In the prophetic era, political involvement was a moral obligation, and preoccupation with Muslim problems was considered as part and parcel of good faith. The Prophet of Islam made it clear that "he who is not constantly thoughtful of God is not a good worshiper of God; and he who is not concerned with Muslim affairs is not a member of the Muslim nation."[1] The new Umayyad and Abbasside culture turned this requested engagement into a type of inactivity and idleness. The collective and dynamic faith has become a hollow form without meaning. Politics was then separated from religious values and morals and the way was paved for the first signs of secularization in the history of Islamic political practice.

It is worth recalling that Yassine (1989) considers the crises of history as a moral crisis. To cure the ailments of the *umma*, an adequate Qur'anic diagnosis must be made first. In Yassine's view, the analysis revealed that "materialistic or idealistic approaches must be abandoned" (p. 25). Instead, a realistic approach based on what he called the Prophetic Method (*minhaj-noubouwa*) must be adopted.

To overlook internal psychological aspects and to neglect people's ambitions that appear on the surface in human history is an analytical mistake that results in distorted visions. That is why in Yassine's (1972) approach, there is a clear emphasizes on an analysis that "seeks to account for historical events by making resort to the psychological background, moral values, and religious beliefs" (p. 33). The outcome of this approach is a serious critique of the views and stands of most prominent religious sects in Islamic history.

In the following sections, we present Abdessalam Yassine's critical vision of the most influential doctrines and Islamic sects and his analytical study of important events in Islamic history.

Imam Yassine's Critique of the *Kharijites* log and "the judgment and command are to none but Allah."

The so-called *Kharijites* is a religious sect identifying themselves as "the people of faith," "the group of the believers," or "*al-shura*" (the Exchangers). The latter name is interpreted within the context of Islamic tradition and philosophy. It simply means "those who have traded the mortal life for the other life [with God]" (Martin 2004, p. 390).

However, their opponents used to call them *Marikit*, or *Kharijites*, meaning "offensive outsiders." Both these attributes do reflect the same connotation: the group of Muslims that revolted against the fourth khalif *'Ali in Abu Talib* after he agreed to arbitration with Mu'awiya (d. 680) to settle the problem of the succession to the caliphate at the outset of the second half of the seventh century.

The *Kharijites* rejected the negotiated settlement as a means to choose a new ruler on the grounds of their famous slogan stating that "judgment and command are to none but Allah." Such motto means that it is not permissible for people to negotiate or decide upon what is already decided and settled by God. So, they "left out" the Muslim community and revolted against the existing system of government, and they were known for their extremism and intolerance with their opponents. When this name became popular, they accepted it, but they reinterpreted it as a kind of disobedience to unjust rulers. For them this is a kind of *jihad*, a sacred struggle for the cause of God.

Imam Yassine like other Muslim scholars (Almodaris 1999; Kamel Ibrahim 2004; Al-Risouni 2013) distinguishes between two types of *khuruj* or "insurrection": "doctrinal rejection" and "political rejection." The first type reflects the *Kharijt* perception. It is based on a literal reading of the texts. For them all those who accepted arbitration between *'Ali* and Mu'awiya were in principle *kuffār* (disbelievers, the ungrateful); an accusation that justifies killing. They considered Muslims not sharing their point of view as apostates;

according to them, this was a sufficient pretext to legitimize blood shedding and to fight against their opponents.

The second sort of *khuruj* is "political rejection." It was founded on the view that the caliphs are not necessarily *kuffār*; but they must lead an exemplary life and be chosen electively among the best Muslims, especially among the descendants of Imam 'Ali—the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet. Otherwise, tyrant rulers should be fought and overthrown. This position was taken by *ahl al-bayt*, the descendants of the Prophet.[2] Imam Yassine believes that their *qawma*, meaning rising against unjust rulers in a kind of rebellion, was a practical establishment of the principles of change and reform according to Qur'anic principles.

Therefore, the leaders of previous *qauwma* as "legitimate revolts" against the Umayyads and Abbasids were outstanding pious descendants of Imam 'Ali. They were also considered as Sunnis, since Shi'ism was not yet distinguished at that time as an independent religious sect. All of them went out to fight against the Umayyad or Abbasid unjust rulers in compliance with the principles of the Qur'an to rise against injustice.[3] According to Yassine (1989), rebels such as "Hussein bin 'Ali may Allah be pleased with them and those after him Zaid bin Ali, Muhammad, Idriss, Ibrahim, Yahya . . . were the leading exemplars of political rejection against despotic rulers rather than doctrinal rejection" (p. 39).

This distinctive analysis has been missed by many scholars of medieval Islamic political thought, especially the Westerners.[4] Imam Yassine's distinction between the two types of "rebels" was not the first. His defense and support for the "people of the House" *ahllbayt* who stood up against the Umayyad and Abbasid authorities was in fact preceded by previous Muslim scholars such as al-Shawkani (d. 1839), who vehemently supported all the Imams who "struggled to correct the path and to defend the legitimacy of the *umma*" (Ash-Shawkani 1973, p. 362).

Abdessalam Yassine was critical of the *Kharijites* thought both in its past and modern versions. First, he criticized their fragmentary way of reasoning. Second, he highlighted that they were far from a comprehensive understanding of the foundations of Islam. Third, they rushed to accusing their opponents of disbelief, and unfaithfulness regardless of the repercussions of their accusations. Last, they broke up the unity of the Muslim nation to live in isolationism.

Black (2001) described the *Kharijites* behavior by "the march in the opposite way" (p. 16). They have departed out of the Muslim community to inhabit the caves and establish a fossilized society. Yassine says, "the method of takfir (= accusing Muslims of being unbelievers, unfaithful to their religion) was first adapted by those who were called *Kharijites*; they revolted and 'went out' in a brutal refusal of the Muslims nation" (Yassine 1989, p. 264).

He concluded that today's *Kharijites* take various shapes: they accuse moderate and orthodox Muslims of unfaithfulness to religion and they provoke moderate Muslims to rebel against their rulers regardless of the devastating repercussions that might result (ibid. p. 264).

Imam Yassine acknowledged that the *Kharijites* were characterized with a high level of religiousness, though they were radical and aggressive rebellions. He also admitted that their political position was right against unjust rulers. The *Kharijites* believe that all Muslims are equal and no one has any privileged autocratic and religious right to become caliph. Unlike many Muslim scholars, they stipulate no ethnic or honorable conditions as to the aptitude of a person to govern the Muslim *umma* except being pious and just.

However, Imam Yassine also reproached the *Kharijites* of being void of the mercy of Islam and arid of the ethics of well-educated believers. He emphasized that their biggest flaw was their narrow-fragmented understanding of Islam and their use of violence as a means of social and political change. That is why they see no harm in overthrowing a ruler by the sword if he violates the conditions of allegiance and justice.

What the *Kharijites* really needed was a thoughtful perception of the true meaning of justice in its relation to ethical and spiritual behavior in Islam. Because they were deprived of that meaning, they excessively resorted to violence and blood shedding to face their opponents. They revolted against corrupt political systems and they rejected the whole Muslim community, and even the whole world. Their political and religious crisis is the expected result of their negligence of the ultimate objectives of the Islamic *shariʿa*, and their fragmentary interpretation of the principles and foundations of Islam.

Imam Yassine criticized the contemporary Salafi-Takfiri groups. He says they are the modern-time representatives of their *kharirjt* predecessors. They adopt the same principles; they have the same superficial method of text interpretation; they share the same positions and they seek change via the same violent and aggressive means.[5]

Imam Yassine pointed out that the emergence of contemporary *takfiri jihadists* in the Arabo-Islamic world can be attributed to other reasons. One of them was the persecution and torture suffered by moderate Islamist movements in the 1960s in Jamal Abdennacer's prisons. They could not conceive of how a Muslim can be tyrannically maltreated by another one; and how a Muslim society accepted or admitted such atrocities. So, in analogy with the *khariji* refusal of arbitration between ʿAli and Muʾawiya, the current *takfiri* groups consider both those who were cruelly violent toward them and those who were indifferent toward their sufferance as non-Muslims. Consequently fight hem and reject their beliefs become a sacred duty. Accordingly, they

boycotted society and all the institutions of the state. They also called for struggle to overthrow the current political regimes in the Arab world.

Imam Yassine's Critique of Shi'a Imamia's *Mahdism* or the Theory of Waiting

At the very outset, it is worth pointing out that Imam Yassine criticizes Shiism with respect to two politico-doctrinal ideas: First, the idea saying that legitimate authority in Islam must be attributed to the Prophet's offspring; second, the doctrine of the awaited *al-Mahdi*. The majority of Shiite today, especially those called Twelvers or Imams, believe that *Muhammad al-Mahdi* is an awaited saver who will come and rule over all Muslims. He is expected to remove the rampant hostility and oppression and establish justice and equity in the globe.

In most traditions, it is believed that al-Mahdi will come with *'Isa* (Jesus) to fight against *Al-Masih ad-Dajjal* ("the false Messiah," or Antichrist). They will triumph over him and hence justice and tranquility will prevail in the globe. The doctrine of the awaited al-Mahdi is less important in Sunni Islam, but it is not denied. Like Shi'ites, Sunni Muslims do also believe in *al-Mahdi al-Muntazar*, but they do not completely agree on his attributes.

According to Imam Yassine, both Sunni and Shi'ite sects agree that Mahdi is an awaited ruler who will bring justice and peace with him to the world at the End-Times. It is worth noting that the same creed is held in Christianity: the belief that Christ the Savior will return one day to save humanity prevails among almost all Christian sects. Without ignoring the differences between them about his characteristics, functions, conditions of absence, and his impact in history and politics.

Some Sunni Muslims are also waiting for *al-Mahdi al-Muntazar*, though they usually expect him to be a contemporary religious leader who will suddenly proclaim himself as such. Some Sunnis did so in the past and led armies against their enemies, such as Muhammad Ahmad in Sudan, who succeeded in ending Egyptian occupation in 1881–1885 (Warburg 2003).

In the Islamic culture, the term *Mahdi* is derived from the Arabic consonantal root /h-d-y/. In the Qur'an, this trilateral base is used by reference to divine guidance. However, in political philosophy, *Mahdism* is a doctrine entailing that Islamic nation gets into a period of waiting for a loyal hero to come by order from heaven (Beattie 2013).

Yassine criticized the doctrine of political waiting in Shi'ism by analogy to his criticism of the worship of heroes in previous eras of history as analyzed by Carlyle (1841). In some bygone communities, the awaited hero was always an inspired strong and undefeatable leader. For Yassine (1989, p. 92), this whimsical illusion was an aspect of the crisis in the mental structure of

every defeated and feeble society. According to Beattie (2013), such wait-
ing has always been used to "justify idleness and to explain dismissal from
constructive work and positive activism since a heroic leader is expected to
appear and save the nation at any time! Such futile way of reasoning lays the
ground for indolent hollowness" (p. 90).

Actually, the belief in the awaited Mahdi finds its roots in authentic pro-
phetic tradition both for Sunnis and Shi'ites. But instead of backing up an
optimistic interpretation paving the way for a possible glorious future, it has
introduced great confusion over the Muslim mind over the centuries and
became an excuse for false construal and collective dismissal from social
responsibility.

Imam Yassine states that "the most dangerous threat comes from the
laypeople's understanding of the promised Mahdi" (In various periods of
Islamic history), there appeared some reformists who pretended to be the
awaited Mahdi. In most cases, they succeeded in mobilizing the people for
their sociopolitical projects because of various complementary reasons. Thus,
in addition to their strong personal determination and charismatic character,
their followers were susceptible to accept the idea of the awaited savior which
was already engraved in their minds. Moreover, the circumstances of disorder
and injustice that prevailed worsened their sufferance and intensified their
aspiration for change. Yassine (2005) remarked that "it is a grievous dogma
to always wait in idleness for a heroic saver to come" (p. 35).

The Shi'ites' belief in the awaited Mahdi is associated with special events:
at the age of five, Muhammad Ibn al-Hasan al-Askari—the Shi'ites very
young twelfth Imam—was said to have gone into minor occultation. Then,
after the age of sixty-five, he went into the major occultation. They believe
that he is still alive and that he will come back at the end of times.

The Shi'ites have stood still for centuries and their "waiting" was a heavy
psychological barrier for every political move. Therefore, one of the most
important advances in modern political Shi'ism was Khomeini's (d. 1989)
idea of *Wilayat al-Faqih*. The concept means that the Islamic power, legisla-
tive, judicial as well as executive, must come under the *Faqih* and only from
him. The word *Wilayat* means the exercise of the Faqih's authority over the
people like the exercise of the father over the son. In other words, the *wali
Faqih* becomes a deputy of Mahdi till the latter comes out of his occultation.
So, the essence of Khomeini's theory is to remove the obstacle "waiting"
for Mahdi, the savor, and put it in its due historical place, so that "waiting"
becomes an incentive for work.

To answer the question of change in political history, Yassine consid-
ers activism and the feeling of responsibility as stipulated prerequisites.
Communities that do not bear responsibility in history are deemed to die
and fade. The inevitable outcome of its absence would be either external

colonialism or internal tyranny. Such a result has already been experienced in the history of Muslims.

Yassine (2005, p. 37) claims that to start any political change, the masses must be mobilized for collective participation; each and every individual is to contribute his share of the breakthrough in the horizon of liberation and development. Accordingly, the awaited *Mahdi* must be considered as the heavenly goddess hovering over the transcendent reality, urging the people for a historical struggle to establish the promised nation using modern and democratic political peaceful means.

Yassine's Critique of *Al-'Assabiyya* (racist tribalism) and the Theory of Hereditary Monarchy

Al'asabiyya in Yassine's thought is described as a feeling of ethnic chauvinism which is different from social solidarity as used in Ibn Khaldoun's (d. 1406) thought. It is a direct threat to the principle of equality among human beings. All bodies of laws have been set up to defend equality. However, tribalism instigates the exaggerated superiority of some individuals or ethnic groups over others because of some illusory traits. The danger of such unreal beliefs lies primarily in the fact that it instigates a corrupted desire to dominate and control. This is exactly what happened in the very beginnings of the history of Islam in the name of *Qureyshi* ethnicity, *Alaouites* family, or other tribal connections.

Abdessalam Yassine criticized the monarchical dynasties that were founded by Muslims in their early history. This criticism finds its support in the reservations of the first founders of Islam. Thus, according to Ibn Khaldun (1992, p. 213), monarchies were never recognized at the beginning of Islam and kingship has always been pejoratively mentioned. He claims that the majority of Muslim scholars say that monarchies "subsume injustice and shield disbelievers and enemies of religion." Monarchial regimes were always deemed to incorporate a bundle of *Jahilit* (pre-Islamic) values, from which corruption originates, and out of which tyranny emerges.

These tyrannical systems create a "theological despotic rule," which develops and rises but ultimately collapses because of its intrinsic corruption and perversity. This is what Yassine (1996) alludes to in his analysis to the experience of monarchies in Western history; he says, "The hereditary despotic rules (in Europe) have always ended up with revolutionary atrocities and blood shedding that sweeps away the hereditary remnants of previous hierarchical systems" (p. 66).

Imam Yassine refused the religious foundation of the "divine right to rule," which is embodied in the so-called *wilayat al-'ahd* (Possession of Covenant or hereditary right of a monarch to rule, or even the right to rule by the

possession of Covenant) that emerged at a crucial period of Islamic history; though it was not restricted to it but emerged in medieval Western contexts. Thus, exactly like the English philosopher John Locke, Yassine criticizes Filmor (2009), author of the famous book entitled *Fatherly Rule* in which he defended the "absolute rule of monarchies."

Wilayat al-'ahd (hereditary right to rule) is one of the ideas that were vehemently criticized and absolutely rejected by Imam Yassine. He worked hard to deconstruct its religious and philosophical foundations by highlighting the extent to which it constitutes a real threat to the spirit of religion embodied in the principles of *shura* (democracy framed by Islamic principles), individual and collective freedom, and the sovereignty of the nation. For Imam Yassine, the beginning of *Wilayat al-'ahd* as a means to succession in the caliphate system is a moment of historical break and the most important event of detour that happened in the history of the Islamic nation. He also criticized the conjured consent among Muslim scholars like al-Mawardi (1989) on the idea of hereditary rule in Islamic tradition and the books of jurisprudence such as *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniaw'al-Wilayat al-Diniyya* (The Ordinances of Government) written by *Abu al-Hassan al-Mawardi*.[6]

It is inconceivable how such historical political deviations crept into the inner collective consciousness of the Muslim *umma* until it became the unquestionable accepted norm. That is why, al-Mawardi noted that *Mu'awiya*, the first monarch in Islamic history, established the hereditary monarchy in Islam, but as a reaction to his contested decision he paradoxically laid the ground for revolutionary opposition that never ceased since it was launched by the opponents.

The Muslim sultan used to come to the throne by mere inheritance. He knew nothing of the state of affairs except that he has the inherited right to rule. Therefore, it was quite normal that he would favor all opportunists to support him in the consolidation of his legacy in return. The caliphate at the era of the *rashidun* (the first four caliphs) was based on credible selection and agreement but then "the caliph succession became a theatrical absurdity" (Alouardi 1989, p. 267). There is no doubt that any regime based on the so-called *wilayat al-'ahd* violates the Islamic *shura* which depends on the nation's free choice of the ruler.

Yassine (2000, p. 111) asserts that since the *Umayyad* dynasty, and all other dynasties that came afterward, the true meaning of the caliphate disappeared and only its name and superficial customs were left. Even the shallow bay'a (oath of allegiance) vanished, and the masses were deprived from direct participation in governance.

Wilayat al-'ahd is a political procedure that reflects tribal and ethnic superiority. It flagrantly breaks up the principle of equality in all aspects of life. It stagnates the masses in the dim cellars of the dark ages. Durant (1935)

states that "social class differences prevailed in the eighteenth century to the extent that they even reached religious institutions. The rich, for instance, had special seats near the pulpit, but the general public used to sit or stand in the back. Once the prayer was over, the laymen were obliged to stand still in their places until the privileged row came out slowly and elegantly" (p. 168).

Imam Yassine's refusal of the right to rule via *wilayat al-ʿahd* has other precedents in the history of political Morocco. It has been rejected by Mohamed Ben Abdelkrim Al-Khattabi in several contexts, including his letter from Cairo in 1962, in which he criticized the "granted" constitution: "The institutionalization of the Possession of Covenant in the current constitution is a mere manipulation, and disregard for the religion of Islam and wisdom of Muslims" (Idrissi 2007, p. 264).

The question of the *Imamate* (the office of leadership in Islam) has always been the subject of disagreement between scholars of Islam. This is only because the *Imamate* was not explicitly and thoroughly structured by any divine law. The same for the idea of the Possession of the Covenant (*wilayatal'ahd*); it is considered a blatant transgression of the principles of Islam. Therefore, "its rejection becomes a religious obligation and every pledge or oath to allegiance based on it must also be considered invalid" (Yassine 2000, p. 111). The system of governance in Islam is mainly founded on morals and based on the freedom of choice instead of coercion and falsehoods.[7]

Imam Yassine emphasized the fact that the succession to rule that took place in the era of the *rashidun Caliphs* was different from the experiences that came after. The difference between the two experiences must be made clear: the successors in the first era were never descendants or even relatives of the predecessors. However, the right to rule by the Possession of Covenant that established hereditary succession to the crown at the outset of the *Omayyad* dynasty was defended by the Sunni jurisprudential system and founded a political system centered on family relations, although it completely contradicts the spirit of the Islamic religion.

Imam Yassine links the idea of the Possession of the Covenant (and the way it violates the principles of *Shariʿa* seeking to establish the nation's freedom to choose its leaders) to racist beliefs that religion strives to weaken because it concentrates on "ancestry" and "race" but according to their ethnic and blood relations. Most of the time, Imam Yassine alludes to the Qur'anic verse that asserts this idea: "In no way is Muhammad the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Messenger of Allah, and the last of the Prophets; and Allah has full knowledge of all things" (Qur'an 33: 40).

The issue of being proud of one's ancestors and the feeling of superiority of one's ethnic origin has been settled by Islam since its early beginnings. In the Quran, God says: "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male

and female, and have made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Indeed, the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted" (Qur'an 49: 13). The Prophet Mohammad clearly stated: "O mankind, your Lord is One and your father is one. You all descended from Adam, and Adam was created from clay. He is most honored among you in the sight of God who he is most upright. No Arab is superior to a non-Arab, no colored person to a white person, or a white person to a colored person except by *taqwa* (piety)."[8]

Therefore Yassine (1989, p. 451) confidently concludes that any form of hereditary rule or the right to govern by Possession of Covenant or any forms of oath to allegiance are nonsense in the Islamic tradition because all of them are "misleading catchphrases dictated by tribalism and ethnic fanatism and based on family bounds" (Yassine 1989, p. 451).

CONCLUSION

In his project of Islamic thought revival, Imam Yassine insists on the necessity of studying history. It is crucial to understand the present and to prepare for the future. However, the political history of Muslims cannot be adequately assessed unless the interpretation of its pivotal events adopts a multidimensional approach, an approach that combines causal analysis and rational explanations without neglecting the effects of religious and ethical values.

Islamic history cannot as well be objectively considered unless the researcher leaves apart the approval of every glorious event while closing his eyes on the moments of failure and ignoring the eras of weakening. An objective method must take into account the fact that the clash between the interests of rivaling groups and other internal factors are as much important and active as external factors of adversary communities in triggering great historical changes.

It is in this respect that Imam Yassine criticized the political trends and positions in Islamic history. His critique started from the early era when the *Kharijites* sect appeared and sought to legitimize political change by sword and blood shedding. The religiousness of their behavior can in no way excuse their atrocities against their opponents. Islam can never allow change to be achieved by coercion and force but by conviction and satisfaction.

Afterward, he argued against the concept of *WilayatAl'ahd* that was brought about by the Omayyad and the Abbasid dynasties. Hereditary rule violates the principle of equality in Islam and perpetuate the superiority of a race over others while God created all people equal.

Last but not least, Imam Yassine displayed the vulnerability of the theory of waiting or Mahdism in Shi'ite doctrine. In his critique of the political theory

of in Shi'ism, Abdessalam Yassine links the idea of the awaited Mahdi with criticism of hero worship as analyzed by Thomas Carlyle. The theory of waiting has always been used to justify the dismissal of masses from constructive activism. When heroic leaders are awaited to come and save the nations, the principles of responsibility and accountability are annulled in Islam.

Imam Yassine did not confine himself to criticizing previous political concepts and ideas in Islamic history; he also set forth an alternative proposal for the aspirated Islamic rule. Imam Yassine's proposal is based on two key concepts: *al-'Adal* and *Ihsan*, meaning justice and spirituality (benevolence).

NOTES

1. Reported by Imam Hakim, Bayhaqui, Tabarani and other credible narrators of *hadith*. Please have a look at Al-Hakim al-Naysapouri, (1990) Al-Mustadrak 'ala alSahihayn, 1st Ed. Tahkik Mustapha Abdulkadir 'Ata, vol. 4. Lebanon, Beirūt, Dar al-kutub al ilmiyah, p. 356.

2. In the Muslim tradition, "ahl al-bayt" (lit = the people of the house) and for both Sunnis and Shiites, Ali's descendants are among the people of the house. Sunnis also include the widows of the Prophet, their descendants, the Hashemites, and all their descendants until now.

3. "Let there arise out of you a group of people inviting to all that is good (Islam), enjoining Al-Ma'ruf (i.e. Islamic Monotheism and all that Islam orders one to do) and forbidding Al-Munkar (polytheism and disbelief and all that Islam has forbidden). And it is they who are the successful" Qur'an (3: 104).

4. Cf. for instance, Bernard Lewis (2001), Daniel W. Brown (2009), Jeffrey T. Kenney, (2006).

5. Contrary to what Nelly Lahoud claims in her study that those who opposed the Islamic state in the past are themselves those who return to struggle for its return. This is a biased generalization as she ignores the difference between the Kharijites and the modern Islamic movements, and she puts them in one basket.

     See. Nelly Lahoud (2013), 63.

6. Known in Latin as Alboacen (972–1058 CE), he was an Islamic jurist most famous for his works on government, the caliphate, and public and constitutional law.

7. Abderrahman Ibn Khaldoun, *al-Mukaddimah*, (Beirut 1992), 213.

8. Authentic hadith narrated by Imam Ahmad and Imam At-Tirmithi.

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Chapter 8

The Political Theology of Taha Abderrahmane

Religion, Secularism, and Trusteeship

Mohammed Hashas

ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces some major aspects of Taha Abderrahmane's political theology as presented in his various works, with major reference to his *The Spirit of Religion: From the Narrowness of Secularism to the Openness of Trusteeship* (2012). The chapter centralizes his concept of "spiritual self-criticism," which he uses as an apparatus for the formation of what I refer to here as "trusteeship society"; the latter is a critical synthesis of the secular and religious societies and ways of governance of human affairs. Abderrahmane's "trusteeship paradigm" briefly engages with secular-religious analytical frameworks as proposed by Cox Harvey, Talal Asad, Olivier Roy, Asef Bayat, and Charles Taylor. The argument here is that trusteeship paradigm faces serious limitations to be implemented in the Arab-Islamic plural societies, let alone the Euro-American secular-liberal societies; the *homo moralis* it calls for to lead spiritual self-criticism for human renewal may not be appealing to the plural religious and philosophical views present in society. Still, its call for a radical ethos remains relevant for societies in predicaments, be they secular, religious, or secular-religious societies.

INTRODUCTION

It did not take Cox Harvey a long time to revise his ideas, first penned in *The Secular City* (1965), about the triumph of secularism, the rise of secularization, and the decline of religion, as he saw it in the 1960s. Twenty-five years

later, he revised his views about his earlier claim; then, half a century after, he writes that religion has still a role to play in the present and future; it is not a "return" to religion but an "affirmation" of a human dimension that has always been there, and it is reappearing, particularly because of globalization phenomenon; this affirmation has multiplied the versions of secularism as well, and is no longer limited to the "Western" versions(s), as he says in the new introduction of the same book (Harvey 2013). He also hopes that civilizations will converge in the future, and "[I]t is for this goal that a new theology of the secular/religious should strive" (Harvey 2013: p. xxxix).

Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007) opens a window beyond the strict secular/religious divide, when he speaks of the experiences of belief and unbelief, and their conditions, and the "middle way" that tries to overcome the sense of "fullness" of belief or its counterpart, the sense of "exile" or *ennui* and emptiness. He calls this the "immanent frame" or "immanent order" or "immanent real" (Taylor 2007: pp. 542–543); it is a form of "post-secular/post-religious" order, to rephrase it as such, whereby the modern person remains open to the idea of the "transcendent" but at the same time does not negate it and keeps focused on human society and what humanity does and achieves independently.

This condition of the "middle way" is not far from the idea expressed sociologically by Asef Bayat in his argument of the "post-Islamist" society, whereby believers in an ideologized context of political Islam, that is, Iran in his case, move from what could be referred to here as "fullness"—in the words of Charles Taylor—to the sense of "middle way"; that is, secularity creeps into the once very religious public sphere and society to allow for alternative ways of seeing the world, society, and politics; in such a way the orthodox comprehensive view of religion, Christianity in the study of Taylor and Islam in the study of Bayat, become part of other possible ways of belief, and unbelief, in society. Certainly, a difference between the two analyses surfaces: Taylor analyzes an already secular context, the modern Western context, while Bayat analyzes a secularizing context, the Iranian, and by large Islamic, context. But since these two contexts have different histories of religion and their implementation in society, it is not impossible that their current and future comprehensions and experiences of religion-secularism intertwine; societies do not have to go through the same historical periods and chronological developments; their developments can intertwine intellectually without going through the same historical events or experiences; that is why this reference to two contexts and concepts—Taylor and Bayat, the middle way or immanent frame, and post-Islamist society, respectively—is not far from corresponding to current realities. I will return to this point by the end of the chapter. These intertwining territories of the religious-secular were previously also captured in distinctions in the phases of secularization

Jose Casanova proposed in his work of 1994, and further clarified since then (Casanova 1994, 2009). The anthropologist Talal Asad has navigated the formations of Christian and Islamic secularization processes to argue that the religious and the secular are not fixed and stable categories, cannot be spoken of as one that comes after the other, and that they depend on each other; they overlap (Asad 2003: pp. 25–26).

It is with these frameworks in mind that one can, in retrospect, understand the thesis of the political sociologist Olivier Roy: the "failure of political Islam," which is the title of his book of 1992, first published in French (Roy 2007). Roy summarized this failure in two factors: intellectual, and historical, or practical; intellectually, political Islam failed to produce a different society that could charm its adherents, the Muslims, and the non-Muslims alike; it failed to be revolutionary or a real alternative to the capitalist-liberal or socialist versions of society; it thus failed to be a successful model where it has seized power till then (the year of 1992), that is, in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and in different ways in other societies; this failure does not mean its end or demise; it just means that it has failed to "invent a new society," in the words of Roy. The slogan of "Islam is the solution" that the Muslim Brotherhood, and other religious-oriented movements raised, failed to deliver prosperity and liberty to their followers and societies when they reached power in few Arab societies like Egypt and Tunisia during the so-called Arab Spring revolts of 2010–2011, though they hardly ruled for long and alone; they were soon overruled by the military, as in Egypt, or had to cohabitate and rule in coalitions as in Tunisia. Obviously, political Islam is plural, and works within certain historical backgrounds of the geography wherein it functions, and blaming it for all the predicaments and crises in Muslim majority societies does not stand; various internal and external factors influence its functioning and dysfunctioning, especially on the historical/practical level; still, its failure on the intellectual level remains visible and undeniable, as Roy, among others, noted. Similarly also goes the argument of Massimo Campanini in his *The Islamic Alternative* [*L'Alternativa islamica*, 2012]; within the globalization phenomenon, whereby local identities emerge to face hegemony, Campanini explains the failure of this "alternative" in three major reasons: (1) the unending neocolonial interference of Europe, the United States, and Israel in the region, (2) terrorist extremism, and (3) the failure of the Arab Spring (Campanini 2012, 2019). Local scholars have responded to these sociopolitical predicaments differently since the second half of the nineteenth century, either through pan-Islamism, pan-Arab nationalism, pan-liberal leftism, or, after 1967, through national Islamism, national secularism, or radical extremism. All these major tendencies have grappled with religion either to use it as their ideology of renewal or to domesticate it to overcome its power. In the Arab world in particular, and until the recent Arab revolts

of 2010–2011, the dominant winning ideologies and political systems were either the authoritarian-secularism in the "republics" or conservative-state-Islamism in monarchies (Hashas 2018).

Beyond the religious versus secular schism in the intellectual debate as well as the political scene, one particular view has profoundly theorized a third way in which the two (religion and secularism) intertwine substantially; this third way is known as "trusteeship" (*al-i'timaniyya*, in Arabic), or equally as "trusteeship paradigm" and "trusteeship critique," as proposed by the Moroccan philosopher Taha Abderrahmane (b. 1944, also written as Abdurrahman Taha), whose work is only recently being known gradually in non-Arabic scholarship (Lahoud 2005; Hallaq 2013, 2019; Hashas 2013, 2015, 2019a, b, 2020; Moosa 2014; Kigar 2015; Bevers 2016; Borik 2016; Mimouni 2016; Belhaj 2018). This chapter introduces some major aspects of Taha Abderrahmane's political theology as presented in his various works, with major reference to *The Spirit of Religion: From the Narrowness of Secularism to the Openness of Trusteeship* (2012). The chapter centralizes his concept of *tazkiyya*, which I translate as "spiritual self-criticism," a concept he uses as an apparatus for the formation of what I refer to here as "trusteeship society"; the latter is a critical synthesis of the secular and religious societies and ways of governance of human affairs; the "trusteeship paradigm" contributes to the current scholarly discussions on the "secular-religious" as proposed by scholars like Cox Harvey, Talal Asad, Olivier Roy, Asef Bayat, and Charles Taylor. The argument here is that trusteeship paradigm faces serious limitations to be implemented in the Arab-Islamic plural societies, let alone in the Euro-American secular-liberal societies; the *homo moralis* it calls for to lead spiritual self-criticism for human renewal may not be appealing to the plural religious and philosophical views present in society. Still, its call for a radical ethos remains relevant for societies in predicaments, be they secular, religious, or secular-religious. The first part of this chapter introduces five premises of this framework, then it introduces the two major ways of seeing that it works within, the "world of presence" and the "world of transcendence," to be followed, thirdly, by the introduction of the concept of *tazkiyya*, or "spiritual self-criticism," as the apparatus of "trusteeship paradigm"; finally, a reflective closure synthesizes this call and presents both its limitations and potential in the current discussions and polarized debates over the secular and religious.

THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND: FIVE PREMISES

The world of trusteeship of Taha Abderrahmane is based on some premises that he considers fundamental from an Islamic worldview. I synthesize them

in the following. First, when speaking of theology, and when proposing a project for thought for the public, one cannot be neutral; one has to situate his-her stance, and Abderrahmane asserts both his belief in Islam and his project as being true to the Islamic faith and spirit. It is not possible to be neutral in discussing human affairs, and it is not a fault to be subjective, he says, while at the same time maintaining acknowledgment of the other and their right to differ, and to be joined in their causes when they are right and just (Abderrahmane 2012: pp. 16–18).

Second, oblivion is a primordial human characteristic; human beings do forget their responsibilities and contracts with their Creator first, and with their peers second. Modern times may be one of the most human ages of oblivion, "greater oblivion," but for each oblivious world there is an alternative to remedy it. In the "oblivious world," man forgets his "vertical memory" that connects him to the original world; there are "oblivion apparatuses" that work for the empowerment of such oblivion. The way of confronting this oblivion is through "vertical memory" by means of "dhikr" (i.e., constant spiritual invocation of the divine) (Abderrahmane 2012: pp. 13–15). The approach Abderrahmane proposes then is a "spiritual and invocative approach," "vertical and not horizontal," as he calls it (Abderrahmane 2012: p. 17); "invocation is existence and oblivion is non-existence" (*al-dhikru wujudun wa'l-nisyanu 'adamun*), he says (Abderrahmane 2012: p. 14).

Third, this world is called "the world of presence/testimony" (*'alam al-shahada*), while the other-world is called "the world of transcendence" (*'alam al-ghayb*). In a later work, Abderrahmane uses the concepts of "the world of sovereignty" (*'alam al-mulk*, literally "the world of possessions/property") and "the world of divinity" (*'alam al-malakut*, literally "the world of metaphysics") to refer to this-and-other-worlds, respectively (Abderrahmane 2017). Or, simply put, "the world of divinity" could also be referred to as "the world of intimate connexion with the Ultimate Reality" or "the world of sublime 'ishq [pure and elevated passion]," in contract to the world of "possessions" and "sovereignty." More on this distinction of worlds will be said below.

Fourth, human existence is "expansive" and "two-dimensional"; it does not limit itself to either/or, this-world or the-other world; human existence comprehends both worlds. The "vertical man" invokes transcendence in the present world, while the "horizontal man" sees only the present one, and his life is then "limited" or "contracted" (Abderrahmane 2012: pp. 14, 31). There is an "original unity" (*wahda asliyya*) between the two worlds, thus between the secular and the religious (Abderrahmane 2012: p. 19); this original unity is a "trust" (*amana*), a divine trust, hence the name of "trusteeship" as a framework of this theological outlook.

Fifth, the relationship between religion and politics is "existential"; there are no clear moments or fields of their separation; they originally intertwine though there are laws that separate between the two spheres; when man is active with body and soul in the present world, his existence is being actualized, in a process of "actualization" or "activation" (*al-inwijad*); and when he is active with his soul in the transcendent world only, his existence is existent, in a process of "existentialization" (*al-tawajud*) (Abderrahmane 2012: p. 36). The horizontal man keeps moving toward the expansive world, in a form of "constant voyage" (*al-irtihal al-da'ib*) (Abderrahmane 2012: p. 33). This voyage is, or is supposed to be, ascending, from the world of testimony/presence to the world of divinity/transcendence, for the sake of guarding the "trust" and thus the well-being of man, society, and the world. But this is not always the case; there is ascension and descension. And here comes the religious versus secular divide.

When man seeks ascension, he seeks perfection, the sublime; ascension is the way of making the world of transcendence—and its infinite ways of interpretations and experiences—descend to this-world of presence; it is a form of calling transcendence to become apparent in this world, and close to people and their intellectual abilities and sensations; it is a form of "testifying" (*tashhid*) transcendence, that there is an absolute that humans seek to achieve and grasp; this shows a form of interaction between the religious and the secular; there are no real boundaries between the two. This is a form of navigation, or existentialization (*al-tawajud*) referred to above. Man here seeks expansion, through the activation of the "vertical memory" that reminds him of "original unity" and "trust" (Abderrahmane 2012: pp. 51–90).

Contrariwise, when man seeks descension, he seeks sovereignty, and possession of the world; descension is the way of making the world of presence dominate over the world of transcendence, to the extent of demurring or veiling it; it is a form of *invisibilizing* the transcendent, and making it absent (*taghyib*)—or "absenting it from," as it were—from the present, absent from sight, and thus from being visible and practicable. This movement, or voyage, shows a form of interaction between the secular and the religious, the profane and the sacred; here, too, there are no strict boundaries between the two spheres. This is a form of actualization (*inwijad*) in the present world at the expense of the transcendent. Man, here, seeks dominion over man and nature by the activation of his egoistic and selfish desires, devoid of ethical guidelines and service to the different other and nature. The horizontal man here is limited in sight, and sees only this-world to reign over and control, and does his best to veil the possibilities of the world of transcendence that could challenge his dominion and ego. Such a form of unethical dominion reflects the "greater oblivion"—referred to earlier—of trust over the responsibilities toward humanity and the cosmos (Abderrahmane 2012: pp. 91–131).

TWO WAYS OF SIGHT: PRESENCE
AND TRANSCENDENCE

These premises set, now comes the axis around which all revolves: man in social life. For a world of trust, ethics, and sharing—or what Abderrahmane calls the awaited for "civilization of ethos" in *The Question of Ethics: A Contribution to Ethical Criticism of Western Modernity* (Abderrahmane 2000: p. 146)—man has to change from within, moves from a self-centered image of his sovereignty over the world to an image of responsibility toward it. Such a change would impact the dialectics between the way of presence and transcendence, descension and ascension, described above. And it is here that he takes more time to theorize these dialectics, their interaction, and the permeation of each other. Briefly, Abderrahmane contends that there are two major ways of managing or governing (*tadbir*) human social affairs: either through religion or through politics. These are two different ways of seeing the world, two ways of sight, two ways of testifying and marking one's presence and-or transcendence: the way of religion *testifies* the presence of transcendence in the present world, and the way of politics *invisibilizes* transcendence and makes presence the only way of seeing and managing the world.

The first way of testimony (*tariq al-tashhid*)—that is, the way of religion—is based on three principles: (a) the principle of innateness or naturalness (*mabda' al-fitra*), which protects the human bond with the transcendent world through the idea of tawhid or Oneness of God; (b) the principle of differentiation or preferability (*mabda' al-tafadul*), which believes in a faith that is advanced in its rationality and norms compared to other faiths, without this leading to denigrating or condescending to the latter; and (c), the principle of complementarity (*mabda' al-takamul*), which demonstrates the comprehensiveness of the religion and its harmony when looked at fully and not partially; particular laws and prescriptions make sense when considering the whole worldview of the religion in focus. These principles allow for the attainment of different levels of human expansion, happiness, and eternity through ethics and spiritual elevation (Abderrahmane 2012: pp. 22–90).

As to the way of invisibilization (*tariq al-taghyib*)—that is, the way of politics—it is equally based on three principles: (a) the principle of appropriation (*mabda' al-nisba*) of things and energies, by which man believes that what he has or is endowed with is one's own creation from eternity; here man gradually empowers himself with comprehensive sovereignty and authority attributes that are originally those of the Creator; this usurps human power, and is often used to one's own benefits; this opposes the idea that there is One Lord, and human beings are vicegerents on earth and not its absolute lords; (b) the principle of sovereignty or power (*mabda' al-sultan*), by which

man uses the powers delegated to him by his people or through some form of sociopolitical or religious legitimacy to claim sovereignty over people as if he were their Lord; here, he seeks to divinize his powers, which gains him more and more powers, and can lead him to oppress the minorities or the ones different from him and his clan/tribe/party/culture/religion/thought, and so on; (c) the principle of contestation (*mabda' al-tanazu'*), by which the political stakeholders enter into tough competition for the sake of maintaining presence in society and power over it as much as possible; for this reason, various means of political maneuver are used, apparently all under the umbrella of laws, but under the table illegal, and unethical, means are used, as if it were a war, a war of words (*harb kalamiyya*). Here Abderrahmane invokes and cites some classical texts of modern political philosophy to speak of Manichean standards, the general will, the sovereign, willed servitude, and use and abuse of minority-majority concepts (Abderrahmane 2012: pp. 91–179).

Overall, Abderrahmane considers that man in the way of religion seeks a spiritual path to answer innate human needs, individual and social, and keeps absolute sovereignty to be the domain of the absolute sovereign, God, while his counterpart, the man in the way of politics seeks self-gratification to answer appetitive needs, and thus wears the mask of the Absolute Sovereign, though he does not believe in such a sovereign, since he focalizes this world of presence, and not that of transcendence; if ever he refers to the latter, he does so to use it for his own possessive appetites, even when he claims to be working for the public good and the social contract he is bound to (Abderrahmane 2012: pp. 91–179).

TWO WAYS OF GOVERNANCE: THE SECULAR AND THE RELIGIOUS

In *The Spirit of Religion*, Abderrahmane distinguishes between two common forms of managing social affairs in detailed argumentation: the secular, and the religious. Succinctly, I synthesize some major points on each here. For secularism: (1) it has multiple definitions, one of the most common is it's separation between religion and politics; the other one is the dominance of reason and science in the management of human affairs; it centers this-world, and the other-world is for individuals to think freely, in the private sphere, individually or in community; Abderrahmane lists the Arabic equivalent translations of secularism: *al-'ilmaniyya* (from the root *'ilm*/science) and *al-'almaniyya* (from the root *'alam*/world), and prefers the term *al-dahraniyya* as a more appropriate Arabic equivalent (from the root *dahr*/time or lifetime); so, when the term *secularism* is used here to refer to Abderrahmane, its Arabic equivalent in original references is *al-dahraniyya*;

(2) there are multiple forms of secularism, like the radical French *laïcité*, and the soft one like American secularism; (3) there are historical and intellectual stages of secularism in the so-called West; (a) it started with separation from the Catholic Church, with the maintenance of faith in Christianity, as was the case during the Reformation period; (b) then it moved to separation from Christianity as such, with the maintenance of the idea of faith as a source of ethics and morality; here appeared the idea of "civil religion" of Rousseau and "positive religion" of Auguste Comte; (c) subsequently, secularism dissociated itself from religion but maintained the idea of ethics, like the fundamental values of love, solidarity, liberty, and equality, which became secularized since the French Revolution. In *The Misery of Secularism: Trusteeship Critique of the Separation of Ethics from Religion* (2014), Abderrahmane details four forms or stages of this separation, and critiques them from within his trusteeship paradigm apparatuses; the fourth stage, after the three previous ones (a-b-c above), is distantiation from ethics (Abderrahmane 2014: pp. 31–70). In *Post-Secular Loss: Trusteeship Critique of Deserting Religion* (2016), he describes and critiques this fourth stage in a long text that grapples with figures like Marquis de Sade (d. 1814), Friedrich Nietzsche (d. 1900), Sigmund Freud (d. 1939), Georges Bataille (d. 1962), Jacques Lacan (d. 1981), and Luc Ferry (b. 1951) (Abderrahmane 2016). These intellectual projects fall within the stage of overcoming ethics, according to him, which is the latest stage of secularism and human ultra-centrism. The point here is that secularism, which claims to separate religion from politics, takes the comprehensive place of religion, and issues laws and permeates human life, public and private, as does religion; it enters and grapples with the space religion has in human life; it, therefore, cannot claim neutrality nor a sharp distinction of its sphere from that of religion. Secularism also privatizes religion, its competing field of energy, in rituals and spirituality. Abderrahmane says that secularists cannot be neutral; they bear memory and come with a tradition or worldview in mind; and the laws they make permeate not only the public life but also the private life of individuals in society, and this blurs the boundaries between the secular and the religious.

As to religion, Abderrahmane gives it primarily a spiritual role, even when it permeates social life with its rituals, teachings, and legal prescriptions. However, after his critique of "Western" secularism, as well as its deformed applications in Islamic majority societies, he launches his critique to two major forms of using religion in politics. He coins various concepts but I synthetically simplify his critique here. Abderrahmane argues against two main versions of political Islam, each of which is of two types, but to avoid over-conceptualization and intricate translations from Arabic, I leave them stretched out in four categories; the English rendering is my own:

1) *The secular-religionists (ahl al-tasyis)* who *use religion for politics*, as do most political leaders in Islamic majority societies; according to this view, religion follows politics; only some rituals are maintained at the state level to keep a reference to religion and the transcendent, while the rest is managed without such a reference.

2) *The religio-secularists (ahl al-tadyin)* who *use politics for religion*, as do major Sunni Islamic movements and parties; accordingly, politics follows religion; followers of this trend work within secular institutions and defend only some religious rituals for identity affirmation; Youssef al-Qaradawi (b. 1926), Muhammad 'Imara (b. 1931), and Mohammed Salim al-'Awwa (b. 1942) are theorists of such a trend (Abderrahmane 2012: pp. 344–355); they have used concepts like the Islamic state, the civil state, and Islam as religion and politics; hence, they have worked within religion versus secularism framework, as if they were antagonistic entities with no intertwining territories.

3) *The hakimists or sovereignists (ahl al-tahkim)* are literalists, as were the Kharijities in early Islamic history, and Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi (d. 1979) and Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) in modern times (Abderrahmane 2012: p. 367); according to Abderrahmane, these literalists have misunderstood what *hukm* and *hakimiyya* mean, and what are their conditions; these interpreters remain at the outer level of the meaning of applying legal rules and obligations (*al-amiriyya* level), while true *hakimiyya* means a profound understanding of God's sovereignty (*al-hakimiyya* level) over all His people and Creation; God's sovereignty/*hakimiyya* requires an understanding of what transcendence means, and how its attributes could be implanted and implemented in the world of presence; literalism can do utter injustice to transcendence.

4) *The fiqhologists or the Khomeinists (ahl al-tafqih)*, who interpret God's sovereignty as a top-down approach, as applied by the Khomeinist interpretation of the Twelver Shi'a thought since the Iranian Islamic revolution of 1978. Abderrahmane critiques them for being literalists, too, and for focalizing law instead of ethics and the inner side of man, and for the monopoly of religious thought in the hands of few experts of *fiqh*; he proposes the "live jurisconsult" (*al-faqih al-hay*), who centralizes ethics and spiritual guidance and their relevance to the modern individual and society, instead of the "technical jurisconsult" (*al-faqih al-sina'i*), who centralizes law from a top-down approach. The "live jurisconsult" is the epitome of the profound internal and external ethics of the early pious "imams," and is different from the "technical jurisconsult" who focalizes law and seeks to impose it through the modern *Wilayat al-Faqih* (Abderrahmane 2012: pp. 399–445).

In *Posts of Resistance: A Trusteeship Approach to the Current Struggles of the Umma* (2018), Abderrahmane comes out, for the first time, with a direct and staunch critique of especially Wahhabi Islam of Saudi Arabia, and *wilayatal-faqih* (guardianship of the jurisconsult) of Khomeinist Iran; in the book, he critiques how their rivalry for power and hegemony, through the use of religion, has played against the ethics of religion, and the well-being of the Islamic community, especially against the Palestinian Cause. *Posts of Resistance* may be considered a case study of his theory and critique as introduced especially in *The Spirit of Religion*; in *Posts of Resistance*, he clearly restates that the so-called Islamic state is impossible, and is a contradiction in terms; the nation-state is secular and seeks the full sovereignty of man, and the states in the Islamic majority societies are like the European nation-states, and worse in their use of violence. As to the application of shari'a, he says, "the application of shari'a within the framework of the state as known in modern times is impossible" (Abderrahmane 2018: p. 221). This goes in full line with the argument of Wael Hallaq in *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (2013), where he argues that shari'a as known in premodern times has nothing to do with the way it is applied by some states and political Islamic movements in modern times; it lacks the classical moral compass that was its core message (Hallaq 2013); this argument is further developed in *Reforming Modernity: Ethics and the New Human in the Philosophy of Abdurahman Taha* (Hallaq 2019). As to the violent radicals like al-Qaeda and ISIS (the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria), Abderrahmane does not consider them within the "Islamic" framework since they are utterly violent; he devotes a space to refute violence in *The Question of Violence* (Abderrahmane 2017d).

Abderrahmane argues that all the four types of politicizing religion above use the same apparatuses and methods secularists use; he does not see them as different from each other. They both seek power and sovereignty; religionists invoke the transcendent world in the present one, and the secularists focalize only the present, all for power and dominion, but they both neglect the axis of any change they seek: the individual. To borrow a phrase from Heidegger's interview that he asked to be published posthumously—conducted in 1966, and published in 1976, five days after his death—"[O]nly a god can save us" (in Wollin 1993), Abderrahmane thinks that only a "new man" (Hallaq 2019), the vertical man, can save us, religionists and secularists, Muslims and non-Muslims. This new man needs a moral compass, to become a *homo moralis* of the awaited for "civilization of ethos." Below are basic characteristics of this new man whose way can correct the errors of the first two ways, the secular and the religious, always according to Abderrahmane.

THE WAY OF TRUSTEESHIP: THE *HOMO MORALIS* AND SPIRITUAL SELF-CRITICISM

After having sketched out some basic definitions of the religious and secular ways, Abderrahmane proposes that "spiritual practice" (*al-'amal al-tazkawi*), and not only spiritual belief devoid of practice, is the way to enrich man with new energy; the new man needs change from within, and religious elevated ethics, internal and external, have this power. At the heart of this apparently simple thesis are the premises of the worldview underlined in the beginning of this chapter, in the lead of which is the concept of "trust," thus the whole paradigm of "trusteeship." In a definition, he says, "trust *(al-i'timan)* is then a form of deposit by which all that God has created for man are deposits in his hands, which he can possess as he wishes, and use as he likes, on the condition that he guards their rights" (Abderrahmane 2012: p. 474). The condition of guarding rights here means that there are ethics to follow to realize it; and these ethics are originally religious, revealed to man, unveiled to him. In an earlier text, in *The Question of Ethics*, he says, "religion and ethics are one; there is no religion without ethics and no ethics without religion]" (Abderrahmane 2000: p. 52). He adds, "there is no man [i.e., human being] without ethics [. . .]; there is no ethics without religion [. . .]; so, there is no man without religion" (Abderrahmane 2000: pp. 147–149). Without going into details about the three levels of rationality, and the three levels of ethicality he develops in other works (Abderrahmane 1989; Hashas 2019a, b), suffice it to underline the idea that, according to him, ethical practice expands human rationality and understanding of the world, and with it grows, more and more, one's spirituality, or what I translate here as one's "spiritual self-criticism" (*al-'amal al-tazkawi or al-tazkiyya*, which literally means "self-purification doing/practice"). It is because Abderrahmane's spirituality—and its various levels, inspired by his Sufi background and solidified through his academic background as a logician—is very rational, constantly on the move for the better and engaging with modern scholarship, that I translate the concept of *tazkiyya* as "spiritual self-criticism." The new man, the *homo moralis* he calls for, cannot be spiritually irrational; on the contrary, he is engaged intellectually with modernity and its challenges, and with humanity, its predicaments and its future. The new man's mission is to work for good, ethically, while keeping the divine as the source of inspiration and guidance; his sovereignty on earth knows it has beyond it the ultimate sovereign; this recognition of the ultimate prevents it from abusing its sovereignty and powers in this world of presence; this recognition is spiritually liberating, and not self-centered and egoistic (Abderrahmane 2012: pp. 469–491); this recognition is a form of worship in its core; thus, the man of trust, the trustee, or the vertical man, is a man of transcendence, humility, sight, and testimony (Abderrahmane

2012: p. 504). Spiritual self-criticism makes human life a space of the sacred, of transcendence, wherever and whenever (Abderrahmane 2012: p. 501). Without this spiritual self-criticism, it is easy to fall under the influence of "unconscious secularism" (*al-'ilmaniya al-ghafila*) that does not appear different from religiosity at the surface (Abderrahmane 2012: p. 212). The space between the secular and the religious becomes blurred, that is why constant spiritual resistance is the way to distinguish between the two worlds, and to tread through them reflectively.

Abderrahmane argues in length about some major features of "spiritual self-criticism" (*al-'amal al-tazkawi*). He describes it as such: (a) it is radical, and not superficial; it touches the deepest side possible in man; (b) it is complete/ full, and not partial, so that it moves the whole of man and not only his parts; (c) it is transformative, and not only altering or influential; (d) it is revolutionary and not only progressive; (e) it is permanent, and not only temporary; it does not have an ending point; (f) it is gradual, continuously gradual, and not interruptive; (g) it is peaceful, and not violent; man has to choose it as a path at will and not by force (Abderrahmane 2012: pp. 264–68).

According to Abderrahmane, "spiritual self-criticism" brings "spiritual resistance" (*al-muqawama al-tazkawiyya*), which is different from two other types of resistance, which are violent according to him. Spiritual resistance differs from "power-seeking resistance" (*al-muqawama bi'l-sultan*); the latter takes form in three ways: revolution (*thawra*), rebellion (*tamarrud*), or coup d'état (*inqilab*); all the three are violent, and seek power (*sultan*), and lack spiritual in-depth and ethos. Spiritual resistance also differs from "rational or demonstrative resistance" (*al-muqawama bi'l-burhan*), through "elections" because the electoral process is often violent too, psychologically and linguistically violent, since the competing camps often use rough language, and sometimes unethical means to win over their competitors; even this most common means of rotating powers in modern societies is critiqued in this paradigm since it seeks power for the sake of power; hence it uses illegitimate means whenever it has the chance to (Abderrahmane 2012: pp. 289–291).

Spiritual resistance is based on the practice of "spiritual disturbance" (*al-iz'aj al-ruhi*)—which he sketches out in other subcategories—for the sake of justice, liberty, good, and excellence; it is the apparatus the *homo moralis* uses for justice and liberation. It requires a profound inner exercise of self-criticism and spirituality; that is why it is profoundly nonviolent. Abderrahmane, however, says that violence is not avoided for fear; it is avoided because the new man does not seek power, but only change for good; that is why it seeks the change of man (Abderrahmane 2012: pp. 296–315). Spiritual disturbance is more powerful and efficient than "physical *jihad*." Physical *jihad* could be allowed in utmost cases for defense only, though it could have negative consequences even in the cases of defense; that is why

"spiritual disturbance" is of the highest ethical value and of the profoundest efficacy (Abderrahmane 2012: pp. 312–313). For instance, after the Second Palestinian Intifada of 2000, Abderrahmane wrote *The Arab Right to Philosophical Difference* and defended two ideas from within his ethical framework: the need for a philosophical awakening (*qawma falsafiyya*) in the Arab world, and the need for a political awakening (*qawma siyyasiyya*) based on it, otherwise the Arab world would remain mimetic and consumerist of both philosophic and political external ideas (Abderrahmane 2002: pp. 171–186). At the more local level, for the Arab world, he proposes the "living nationhood" (*qawmiyya hayya*), and not nationalism, as the concept that can unite energies ethically for a revival; this national awakening is impossible without a profound ethical impetus, that is why he proposes internal change first, and the physical change is its complementary and practical side (Abderrahmane 2002: pp. 193–203).

Abderrahmane has further developed this paradigm of trusteeship in later works (Abderrahmane 2014, 2016). For instance, he has used the trusteeship paradigm in his trilogy published in 2017 as *din al-haya'*, which can be rendered literally, roughly, as *The Religion of Piety*, but *The Religion of Sight and Testimony* is more an adequate translation, if his philosophy is wholly taken into account. In this trilogy he, again, underlines the importance of spiritual self-criticism (*al'amal al-tazkawi*) for any individual and societal change, be it in Muslim majority societies or in modern societies at large. He also argues at length against the permeation of epistemic secularism, and takes the media as well as the female attire of the veil (*hijab*) as case studies of such a permeation (Abderrahmane 2017a, b, c). Most recently, he has further developed his concepts of the trusteeship paradigm in communication with and in opposition to the concepts of secularism (Abderrahmane 2020a, b).

REFLECTIVE CLOSURE

This said, what does Taha Abderrahmane tell us precisely about the state and change in Islamic majority societies? Is his call feasible? Can his paradigm, and his various concepts, be used as state apparatuses to change society and state institutions? Or is his call directed toward free individuals and communities, away from state institutions and apparatuses? In nondemocratic contexts, how far can fee individuals and communities enhance change using trusteeship paradigm and, for example, its apparatus "spiritual disturbance" to promote change? Can this paradigm be used differently, according to contexts, democratic and nondemocratic? Where can it fare well?

Answers to such questions have to read this philosophical-theological paradigm in two different contexts, which intertwine and confluence: (1) the internal context, that is, the context in which this new paradigm speaks to its own tradition and vital domain, the Arab-Islamic majority domain/context, and (2) the external context, that is, the domain where the Islamic tradition is a minority, an important minority, and more precisely, I propose, the European liberal-secular context. Only with such a differentiation can answers to the above questions make more sense. The applicability of trusteeship paradigm in secular-liberal contexts is examined at length in *The Idea of European Islam* (Hashas 2019a). As to the Arab-Islamic context, two major notes could be made here.

One, the intricately overlapping territories between the religious and the secular make it difficult to convince all stakeholders in society to uphold one major interpretation of the tradition—the religious ethos interpretation—for sociopolitical reforms. As seen earlier, in especially *The Spirit of Religion*, Abderrahmane has made the two ways of governing human affairs talk to each other; he has gone deeper into the internal complexities and premises of what the secular and the religious could mean, and to how far each of them permeates the realm of the other, despite their diverging worldviews. Their convergence takes space in the heart and mind of man, man that seeks ascension (transcendence) and descension (presence), depending on the worldview, but also on various circumstances and contexts. It is these circumstances and contexts that make the two "opposing" worldviews converge, as if to meet in the middle. This middle is not necessarily the center in geometric terms but is a space of interaction, influence, and confluence. Talal Asad has recognized this interaction, as seen in the introduction above. More particularly, in his famous article of 1986, he used the concept of "discursive tradition" when speaking about the anthropology of Islamicity and what it means for an act or ritual to be Islamic, and what it means to speak of a tradition when it replicates itself over time and centuries; the transformations of traditions and the inability to give it one definition is what he meant when he wrote, "[A]ny representation of tradition is contestable" (Asad 1986: p. 17).

What I mean with this reference is that though Abderrahmane is very aware of the convergence of the two realms of the religious and the secular, he, however, fails to see—or ignores—that in the modern context, including in the changing Arab-Islamic majority societies, man cannot, and does not, distinguish sharply between the two realms. Current socio-anthropological data, as well as historical experiences, tell us that not all Muslims represent religion the way Abderrahmane does, nor do they wish to make of it the only source of social transformation, not necessarily because they wish to distance themselves from religion but because their definition of the tradition differs, and their view of reform differs. The same thing applies to the secular

tradition, however old or new it is in the Islamic context; not everyone would agree with the way Abderrahmane examines the idea behind secularism, which turns out to be atheism at the end of his analysis, since in Europe it historically moved from a separation of religion from politics to overcoming not only religion and belief but ultimately ethics as well. Abderrahmane's framework, for instance, apparently does not give space to secular believers, that is, the believers who still hold a religious ethos but who also hold a secular view of the political space. One can understand the reason why, if his examination of the history of secularism in Europe is remembered: secularism does not stop at separating religion (or religious authority and law) from politics; it does that in the first stage only; afterward, it moves on to erase the religious ethos from the public as well as private sphere, to give space to pure reason, pure emotion, pure science, and this-worldly focus and consumption. Abderrahmane does not tell us that pure reason and pure science are evil in themselves, but he tells us that man loses ethics as he gains more dominion over nature, the world, and society; man's ethos dwindles away, and gives space to his ego-centrism, possessiveness, and ultimately full sovereignty over man and the world, and this is the worldview that Abderrahmane does not agree with, since it is not ethical, not caring for the other, and thus not Islamic. Man is here as vicegerent and has to keep the "trust" of this world in good shape. That is why there is a constant need for transcendent guidance. That all society should be highly ethicist to carry out this paradigm of ethos collectively is a far-reaching aim, not to say utopic, unless it turns out to be a civic ethos that is as plural and inclusive as possible, and is not only a religious ethos. We have to remember that the role of leading intellectuals and philosophers is to raise the level of human thought, expectations, and endeavors so as to solve concrete problems and predicaments. Abderrahmane is aware of this fact. In the closing chapter of *The Spirit of Religion*, he says that his project/paradigm is not utopic; it is realistic and rational; it just requires from human beings profound internal change (Abderrahmane 2012: pp. 493–508).

Two, there is no guarantee that a religious ethos can bring about sociopolitical unanimity about the way ahead for reforms; spiritual self-criticism and spiritual disturbance apparatuses of trusteeship paradigm enhance individual liberty, and liberty brings about diversity; this means that the religious ethos will also be interpreted differently. Among the first fruits of spiritual liberation and political liberty is diversity in opinions and ways of governing oneself and society; the first Muslims immediately after the death of the Prophet Muhammad took to disagreement, and some three decades afterward—considered the model period for Islamic liberation, ethics, and justice—they went to civil war for disagreement over the interpretation of the Prophetic and Islamic tradition about governance; this means that religious ethos does not

necessarily bring unanimity and political agreement, unless it is accompanied by supportive apparatuses that can maintain peace, the minimum condition that allows liberty to flourish in society intellectually, spiritually, artistically, and so on. The same critique goes to secularism; it does not necessarily mean that without it society falls into civil war; human societies before the birth of the nation-state were religious or semireligious societies, and they governed themselves accordingly, maybe better than modern secular societies, or at least *sometimes* better than modern secular societies. For instance, there have always been religious, ethnic, and linguistic minorities in the Middle East; they broadly coexisted well for centuries under a dominant religious ethos, or under various religious "ethoses"; this means that what Taha Abderrahmane is proposing is not strange to the history of the region he belongs to.

For the last two centuries, the religious ethos and its power has been shaken by modern secularism and the notion of the nation-state; new doors of diversity and liberation have been opened, and apparently they cannot be closed soon, and the classical religious ethos is finding it difficult to respond to such challenges adequately. Unless the religious ethos of this domain/context is expanded to be more plural, it may fail to talk to secularism, which seems to be winning more grounds; this religious ethos needs to turn into a civic ethos; *secularization* as a process has permeated the changing Arab-Islamic societies, and one cannot be sure if this will end up in *secularism* as a worldview, or merely in *secularism* as a state/institutional apparatus for political adjustments and democratization; the profound philosophical exercise of Taha Abderrahmane shows that the religious ethos still has a role to play, maybe a leading role to play in such dynamics of secularization and confrontation with secularism, especially when looked at also from a critical note in the age of globalized neoliberal capitalism. To close with this note, whether the future is secular, religious, or secular-religious, the coming society in the Arab world is already "post-Islamist"—to borrow the term from Asef Bayat (Bayat 1996)—even if religion remains visible in the public and the private; by "post-Islamicity" here I mean that while religion in the orthodox sense no longer governs all individual and social affairs, it still impacts one's view of the world; maybe it could be also called a "society of trusteeship" or "trusteeship society," a society of the bond with the transcendent, but not necessarily in the full sense that Taha Abderrahmane intended (Hashas 2016).[1] A society of trusteeship could be a recipient of the idea of the "immanent frame" of Charles Taylor, but probably only minimally so far, since trusteeship *requires* the idea of transcendence, an idea which is only *optional* in the "immanent frame"; trusteeship society is closer to the political society Muktedar Khan has in mind when he speaks of "good governance" according to the Islamic value of *ihsan* (i.e., beautiful acts or deeds; benevolence to the level of excellence); Khan calls Muslim

majority societies to use *ihsan*—a major value and concept in the Sufi tradition of Islam—to be the apparatus to defend social justice beautifully, kindly, compassionately, and lovingly (Khan 2019). However, how able is Abderrahmane's trusteeship spiritual self-criticism, or Khan's *ihsan*, to provoke real change in authoritarian regimes is a real challenge for any project that does not clarify the boundaries between religion and politics and the apparatuses of consultation and reconciliation in times of conflict. Sufism, as well as philosophy and thought inspired by the Sufi tradition in modern times, has not always sided with the oppressed for social justice (Piraino and Sedgwick 2019).

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NOTE

1. In an essay entitled "A Treatise on Trust State for a New Arab World" (Hashas 2016), I have tried to speak of "Trust State" in the Arab world where I navigate between some reformist projects different in their line of thought; I have used the concept of "trust" of Abderrahmane but opened it up to the modern state realm as also defended by Mohammed Abed al-Jabri (d. 2010). A small group of scholars have reacted to this essay (Massimo Campanini, Sonja Hegasy, Michael Bevers, Nicholas Roberts, and Harald Viersen); for more, see: https://www.resetdoc.org/?s=Trust+State

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Chapter 9

Rethinking Political Theology in the Islamic Context

The Case of Iran

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ABSTRACT

This chapter mainly aims to examine the relevance of political theology for contemporary Islamic studies, with a special focus on Iran. First, I will discuss the applicability of the concept of political theology, in its various denotations, for analyzing the complex relationship between Islam and the political. After evaluating different conceptions of so-called Islamic political theology, I will argue that, in the Islamic context, we may not speak of political theology in the strict sense of the term as the key terms such as *theology* and the *political* may have a different meaning in the Islamic context. Then, I will confine my analysis to Iranian intellectual history. Drawing on some contemporary conceptions of political theology, I will offer an account of the relationship between religion and the political in Iranian Islam. I will demonstrate that Iranian political theology has unique features that make it impossible to accurately understand in the framework of a general Islamic political theory equally applicable to Arab-Islamic nations.

A CONTROVERSIAL CONCEPT

In recent decades, there has been a significant increase of interest in political theology, especially as it examines concepts such as sovereignty, the state of exception, post-secularism, and re-enchantment.[1] Despite the propagation of political theology and its related concepts, the most important problem faced by scholars remains in the controversial features of the concept of political

theology itself. The first difficulty relates to the problem of defining the concept. There is no consensus definition among scholars of political theology, and consequently, each scholar utilizes to some extent his own definition, which is often different from others currently in use (Cole 2017). Part of the problem of providing a consensus definition stems from the variety of theories elaborated by the leading philosophers and theologians of the mid-twentieth century who pioneered the subject. Among just German thinkers, we see a large variety of approaches in the works of Carl Schmitt (d. 11985), Erik Peterson (d. 1960), Hugo Ball (d. 1927), Leo Strauss (d. 1973), Hans Blumenberg (d. 1996), Ernst Kantorowicz (d. 1963), Jürgen Moltmann (b. 1926), J. B. Metz (d. 2019), and others. While some definitions are restrictive or narrow, there are also conceptions of political theology which are so expansive that they encompass nearly every kind of intersection between religion and politics. Some scholars even employ the expression in a pejorative manner, or deal with it as a kind of pathology, but still others attach an explicitly positive connotation to the term. Epistemologically, one encounters, variously, descriptive, normative, explanatory, heuristic, and critical accounts of political theology. Some scholars suggest that "political theology is as old as faith in revelation" (Meier 2006) and others consider it as a distinctly modern or even contemporary field of study (Newman 2018).

The other key difficulty entails drawing the appropriate boundaries between political theology and neighboring disciplines such as political philosophy, political theory, public theology, and theology itself (Stackhouse 2004; Laustsen 2013). These ambiguities have rendered the situation such that political theology, from the nineteenth-century debate between Mazzini and Bakunin onward, has always been a polemical concept, or, to borrow Heinrich Meier's terms, a weapon to be used in the wars between Satan and God (Meier 2006).

Despite these academic challenges, we may provisionally accept a couple of statements concerning political theology as it relates to the subject under consideration. First: neither an expansive definition, which treats any intersection of politics and religion as the concern of political theology, nor a restrictive one, which confines political theology to an expression of the historical situation of the Christian world, helps us to understand the relationship between religion and politics in the context of Islamic intellectual history. On the other hand, some accounts of political theology are closely linked to either the Christian—or, to a lesser extent, the Jewish—political situation, specific to Western societies. It is also so that, in the study of Islamic thought, as will be demonstrated, one ought to speak of political theologies, not political theology, since there are so many competing notions of the relationship between religious faith and devotion with political ideals and institutions—in different schools of thought, different geographical regions, and different historical moments in Islamic civilization.

The main question related to Islamic political theology would be the following: How can we formulate the relationship between Islam and politics? Not only was Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, himself a political ruler, but Islam almost from the very beginning was inseparable from its political arrangement: the *umma* as a congregation and a state rolled together into one (Crone 2006: 13). In medieval Islamic history, there are few doubts among Muslims about the political dimension of the faith, and the strong bond between Muhammad's political activity and his prophetic mission. This traditional view, in both Shi'ite and Sunni accounts, utterly changed during the twentieth century, when a variety of new interpretations emerged about the relationship between Islam and politics, almost all of them based on some element of the history of Islam, the Prophet's manner and life, and the actions of his followers and companions (*al-sahabah*).[2] However, that Islam has a broad political aspect could be broadly construed as a fact.

MONOTHEISM *AND* POLITICAL THEOLOGY

The great scholars of political theology paid little attention to Islam, since their knowledge of Islamic theology was minimal. The academic debate in the German-speaking countries occurred almost completely in a Christian context. A particularly interesting and potentially relevant aspect of this debate is the critique of Peterson of the possibility of political theology (Peterson 2011), and Schmitt's reply in *Political theology II*. In *Monotheism as a Political Problem* (written in 1935), Peterson rejects the possibility of Christian political theology in particular and argues that political theology is possible only in Judaism and paganism, or strict monotheism or polytheism. Peterson identifies Judaism with monotheism, but without any particular mention of Islam (Peterson 2011: 72). Schmitt replied:

> Islam, whose political relevance is immense and whose theological significance is undisputed, is completely ignored, although its God deserves this title more than the One of Aristotelian or Hellenistic metaphysics. "Monotheism as a political problem" does not mean anything more, for Peterson, than the Hellenistic transformation of the Jewish belief in God. (Schmitt 2008)

Although Schmitt did not discuss Islamic political theology, he considered its possibility, and, unlike Peterson, he did not confine his arguments to Christianity and Judaism. According to him, there are many political theologies because there are, on the one hand, many different religions and, on the other, many different ways of conducting politics (ibid). Moreover, in the contemporary Jewish context, unlike Islam, political theology *has* been

taken seriously. Walter Benjamin's (d. 1940) "Critique of Violence" (written in 1921) and "Theologico-Political Fragment" (written in 1920–1921) were among the first contributions to the subject, and exerted a considerable impact on Jewish political thought (Benjamin 1978). On the other hand, influential texts aside, global events such as the Holocaust and the Zionist movement paved the way for serious discussions on the relationship between Judaism and the political (e.g., see: Novak 2005).

The relationship between monotheism and politics, as the key question in political theology, is very complex, and consensus is elusive. Two questions especially are raised here. The first is theological: which religions count as monotheistic? The second question is political: does monotheism imply a particular political theology? As mentioned, Peterson answered the first question by insisting on the uniqueness of Christianity. According to him, Christianity is *not* monotheistic, since the key ideas of the Incarnation, Christology, and the Trinity resist this simple classification—yet it is obviously not polytheistic, either (Gereby 2008). We can trace the same idea to the works of some contemporary Christian theologians of the "anti-monotheism movement" like Metz, Moltmann, Gunton, and Milbank, all of whom inherited Peterson's contrast between Jewish and Islamic monotheism on the one hand, and an authentic Christian understanding of the oneness of the triune God on the other (Rosentock 2014). However, some distinguished scholars of political theology assume that the three "Abrahamic" religions, despite their differences, share a common monotheism and its political consequences (Assmann 2005). The second question has been answered in a variety of ways. Peterson and his followers argue that political theology *per se* is only possible under monotheism, while a thinker like Jean-Luc Nancy, in his scheme of the "deconstruction of monotheism," influenced by Jacques Derrida's (d. 2004) philosophy, states that the "unicity of God" signifies withdrawal of this God away from presence—and also, consequently, away from political power. God's hiddenness divorces God from politics (Nancy 2008). Finally, some scholars think that the classification of religion into monotheism and polytheism is a contrived modern invention, vague and unclear (Al-Azmeh 2004).

In the contemporary Islamic studies, the concept of political theology has been used in various contexts and has denoted a variety of meanings. Some scholars use the political theology of Carl Schmitt as a theoretical framework for analyzing certain contemporary political issues concerning Muslim-Western encounters, for example, American conservatism and Islam (Turner 2002), the scarf affair in Europe (Benhabib 2010), debates about blasphemy (Moosa 2012), and radical Islam and terrorism (Kofmel 2007; Arrigo 2017; Scheuerman 2006). According to some scholars, political theology is construed as the justification of a political order based on theology, or, the interpretation of certain theological features of religion for public use

(Sadri 2001; Hashas 2014; Ghobadzadeh 2018). Some have tried to draw analogies between Western or Christian political theology and some disciplines or practices in the Islamic world. According to Nader Hashemi, for instance, the intellectual schemes of thinkers and politicians such as Soroush[3] and Khatami[4] can serve as a vehicle for the reinterpretation of religious ideas to promote and defend democracy and human rights, and pave the way for political modernity in Iran—just as Locke's so-called political theology did in seventeenth-century Britain (Hashemi 2009).

As Carl Schmitt accurately mentioned, in a bipolar field like political theology, serious discussion is only possible when the arguments, definitions, questions, and answers are precisely defined (Schmitt 2008: 66). But in the Islamic context, this problem is even more complicated than in the Christian or Jewish ones. We will therefore next examine some of the different aspects of the question of Islam and political theology.

THE RELEVANCE OF POLITICAL THEOLOGY IN ISLAM

The term "political theology" was coined in a Christian historical context, and has continued to be a significant idea primarily within Christian discourse (Scott & Cavanaugh 2004). As we have discussed, some scholars use the term to discuss the relationship between politics and religion in Islamic societies, while others believe that political theology as a concept may not be directly applicable in Islam (Khir 2004). The use of this expression in the Islamic context would be challenging at least for two reasons, which may be summarized in two pivotal concepts: the concept of theology, and the concept of the political. Contemporary accounts of political theology are usually connected to these notions, whether explicitly or implicitly. In what follows, we will examine the applicability of these crucial concepts to the Islamic context.

Theology in Islam

The most serious challenge entails the use of the term *theology* in a non-Christian context. Carl Schmitt accurately states that

> Misuse always remains possible, but within Christianity it would be something different from what it is in other, still monotheistic but not Trinitarian religions. Those are expressly conceded to have the potential for a political theology. It is not clear to what extent non-Christian religions could have a genuine theology at all. The Jewish Old Testament has its prophecy, but not theology. (Schmitt 2008: 77)

Schmitt's purpose is to argue, against Peterson's claims about monotheism and paganism, that non-Christian religions lack the concept of theology as such, and *a fortiori*, that of political theology. Still, among commentators of Schmitt, there is no consensus on what he means by "theology." While Heinrich Meier (2006) claims that Schmitt's notion of political theology is rooted in the idea of divine revelation, and so is intimately connected to religion, others, like Gavin Rae, argue that for Schmitt, theology should be conceived more in the sense of "epistemic faith", that is, nonrational knowledge. Thus, the stress would be on faith and not necessarily on religious doctrine (Rae 2016). Nevertheless, in Islam, like Judaism, the emphasis is on external obedience to the divine law more than the cultivation of private faith, in contrast to the Christian promise of liberation from divine law. In Carl Brown's words, the hallmark of Islam is epitomized not so much in its emphasis on orthodoxy, as on orthopraxy (Brown 2000: 24).

Thus, Islam has prophecy and Christianity has theology, with its unique teachings about the Trinity, Christology, and doxology. The emphasis on prophecy within Islam has important political implications. Since the Incarnation is not a feature of Islam, the manifestation of God in an earthly body or institution would be impossible. The fact that Islam, especially Sunni Islam, rejects any idea of an immanent God is of high importance to political theology. Moreover, Islam ultimately seems more this-worldly than Christianity, since Muhammad, the ideal Muslim, was fully human with no divine attributes, unlike Jesus in Christianity, who is both God and man.

Moreover, Christian theology has had no counterpart in Islamic Civilization. In Islamic intellectual history, there is a clear-cut distinction between the *falsafa* and *kalam*, at least before Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (d. 1274) in the thirteenth century. Philosophers such as Alfarabi (d. 950), Avicenna (d. 1073), and Averroes (d. 1198), as the heirs of Greek philosophers, were essentially rationalists. Even when they wanted to discuss prophecy, their concern was not so much with defending Islamic doctrines, but rather in providing rational or philosophical explanations for religious phenomena. The relationship between Alafrabi's intellectual system and Islam is very different from the place of Christian dogma in Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), or even Jewish doctrines in the work of Maimonides (d. 1204). The debates between philosophers and religious scholars (including jurists or *fuqaha* and scholars of *kalam* or *mutikallimun*) are well known for any student of Islamic intellectual history. That is why sometimes philosophers were condemned as heretics by religious *'ulama'* and *mutikallimun*. So neither *falsafa* nor *kalam* may be conceived of as theology," which perceives itself as welcoming and containing the insights of philosophy.

Some scholars find just such a counterpart in *kalam* (Oberman 1935), while others maintain that the discipline which addresses *shari'a*, namely *fiqh*

(Islamic Jurisprudence), would be the counterpart to theology (Ralston 2018; Diamantides 2012; March 2013). According to this notion, the chief practical knowledge in Islam is *fiqh*, which plays more or less the same role as theology in Christianity. Against this background, Ebrahim Moosa tried to elucidate Islamic political theology in terms of the Prophet's "two bodies," which is reminiscent of Ernst Kntorowicz's account of political theology in his well-known *The King's Two Bodies* (Kantorowicz 1957). The two imagined bodies of the Prophet, according to Moosa, paralleled the two primary roles and functions he performed in his earthly role. The first was the Prophet's political body in his capacity as the political axis of the Muslim community, and the second was in his role as the teacher of the transcendent good, and whose life practices (*sunna*) became the exemplar of that transcendent good. With the death of Mohammad, his political body was manifested in *khilafat*, and the body of knowledge was transferred to the *'ulama'* (Moosa 2012). This account of Islamic political theology is primarily applicable to Sunni Islam, whose hallmark can be summarized in two key concepts: the prophetic tradition, and the primacy of the Muslim community (*sunna wa al-jama'a*).[5] This doctrine can be briefly summarized as follows:

> The Muslim community was the *umma*, it was governed by a *Caliph*, who ruled them by the revealed *Shariah* law as articulated by the Ulema (legal scholars) using the process of *shura* (consultative governance). The changes that needed to be addressed were addressed through *Ijtihad* within the legal schools. That was it, a consensual, settled and rarely contested political paradigm. (Khan 2019)

Nevertheless, political thought in the Islamic world never has been monolithic. There were other dimensions for political theology in the Shi'ite or *Batini* tradition, particularly in Iran. Henry Corbin (d. 1978), for instance, claimed that there is bipolarity in Islamic intellectual history corresponding to the two faces of prophecy: the prophecy of legislation (*nubuwwate tashri'i*) and esoteric prophecy (*nubuwwate bateni*), which in Shi'ism and Sufism has been called *wilayat* (Corbin 1971: 15). According to Corbin, one should not reduce Islam to its juridical aspect. Thus, *fiqh* only constitutes one side of Islamic political theology, while the other side is what Corbin dubbed as "theosophy" (Corbin 1972b). This conception keeps an equal distance from strictly juridical idea of Islam as well as the implications contained in the Christian idea of divine incarnation (Corbin 1971). What is of decisive importance in Corbin's phenomenological account is its capacity to explore aspects of Iranian Islamic intellectual history across the centuries. According to this account, on which my discussion is based, the division is not necessarily and always between Shi'ite and Sunni conceptions of Islam. Rather, the

focus should be on "Iranian Islam," or, the Iranian understanding of Islamic doctrines, which is different from that of the other regions of Islamic civilization, yet which is not merely reducible to a Shi'a-Sunni split. This special understanding has been crystallized in various forms, including religion, philosophy, mysticism, *kalam*, literature, and politics, and represents the unique Iranian consciousness, which has persisted for centuries, despite conversions and divergent modes of religiosity.[6]

However, the political theology of Iranian Islam cannot be justified by recourse to ordinary theories of theology. Thus, it seems that a new account is necessary. Among scholars of political theology, Jan Assmann points to this deeper question in monotheism:

> In preferring the term "theology" to religion, I distinguished between "explicit" and "implicit" theology. By explicit theology I mean a discourse about God and the divine world that, in contrast to "mythology," is not structured according to the rules of narration but rather those of argumentation. Explicit theology is a specific phenomenon that does not necessarily exist in every religious tradition. There are doubtless many tribal and traditional religions that did not develop an explicit theology. . . . Implicit theology . . . is a necessary prerequisite of every cult or religion "in the narrow sense" in the same way that grammar is a necessary prerequisite of every language irrespective of whether an "explicit" grammar of that language exists. (Assmann 2008)

In his *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*, Assmann, influenced by scholars such as Maurice Halbwachs (d. 1945), Peter Berger (d. 2017), and Thomas Luckmann (d. 2016), makes use of a number of ideas to describe this implicit theology: cultural memory, connective structure, political imagination, and symbolic networks (Assmann 2011). He illustrates the concept with examples drawn from ancient civilizations such as Egypt and Greece.

> *Maat* signifies the principle of harmony that manifests itself in cosmos as order and in the world of human beings as justice. Such concepts exist also in other cultures in order to describe the totality of meaningful order on the highest plane of abstraction. Examples are the Greek concept *kosmos*, the Indian *dharma*, and the Chinese *tao*. (Assmann 2006)

This broad conception of theology, which represents history's intellectual infrastructure, is in agreement with what, in the sociology of religion, has been labeled as "invisible religion." Luckmann distinguishes between visible and invisible religion. Whereas visible religion encompasses institutionalized practices, rituals, and rules, invisible religion signifies a "worldview."

It determines the relationship of the individual to society and the world, and articulates a space-time schema overarching and exceeding the empirical space-time coordinates in which concrete activities and events occur (Steinmetz-Jenkins 2011: 516). A visible religion is usually framed within and through the invisible religion. Recent scholarship in political theology has therefore focused not only on the classic concepts of theology and religion but also on this broad concept of religion as a tool for exploring the many faces of the complicated relationship between politics and divinity. For instance, Paul Kahn, in his reworking of the concept of political theology, uses terms such as *social imaginary* (following Charles Taylor) and *historical a priori* (Kahn 2011). According to his account, only with recourse to theology as a broad concept (as a *social imaginary* or invisible religion) can political theology make sense, because these frameworks explain the persistence of forms of the sacred in a world that seemingly no longer relies on God. Ideas do not sustain themselves; they are sustained in the *social imaginary*; they are sustained only within an entire network of beliefs and practices (Kahn 2011: 106).

Based on the framework that I briefly sketched, two considerations are especially worth noting with respect to political theology in the Islamic context:

First, *fiqh* or *shariʿa* constitutes a significant part of Islamic theology, especially with regard to social and political life. Consequently, Islamic political theology may be defined as a political order due to the presence of divine law (*siyasa al-shari'yya*). However, it also should be noted that, in Middle Eastern societies as elsewhere, divinity or sacredness is a complicated and multifaceted phenomenon, so that one may not reduce it to a single dimension, whether juridical, ritual, or even doctrinal. In order to understand and analyze Islamic political theology, we need a deeper understanding of the sacred, which the theories of invisible religion (or social imaginary) provide an appropriate theoretical framework.

Second, the Islamic world is not monolithic. A variety of cultures, worldviews, and imaginaries, all subject to different historical trajectories and traditions, has made it so that we encounter various kinds of association between politics and religion within Islam. These slight nuances, and on occasion clear differences, between patterns of political theology in an Islamic context are not merely rooted in ethnic or geographic differences. Rather, they were formulated on the basis of different social imaginaries. Similarly, there are different religions, denominations, and sects which may share a common imaginary background, that is, the same invisible religion. Explicit theology is important, but the background against which a religion is framed is of more importance to political theology.

Islam and the Political

The fact that sovereignty in Islam belongs to God alone is a key principle on which all Muslims agree. However, since in Islam, there is no divine incarnation in the form of an earthly institution or a human person, a political theology based on the immanence would be impossible. On the other hand, some scholars like Jan Assmann claim that monotheism is political by nature, and political theology is an inevitable consequence of all monotheisms (Assmann 2005b). He also states that among three monotheistic religions, only Islam, due to its globalizing dynamics, shows an intemperate political expression (Assmann 2005a). But, even if one considers *shari'a* as divine, there is always an unbridgeable gap between God's will and human deeds in Islam. For example, it has been claimed that there is no such thing as divine sovereignty or the rule of God's law since all divine laws need to be articulated, interpreted, and organized by humans (March 2013). *Shari'a* is a set of divine laws whose implementation is necessary, but it lacks any political framework or any specific form of state which can be attributable to the Islamic sources. Accordingly, a strategy could be to distinguish between the state and politics, claiming that although Islam has political dimensions, there is no such thing as Islamic state (An-Nai'm 2008). Based on this idea, others defend a "civic" political theology on the basis of the prioritization of ethics over religious law (Park 2017).

In order to study political theology in Islam, it is necessary to focus on the political, rather than politics. Thus, as abovementioned, one should not confine the study of Islamic political theology to *shari'a* and its political implications. Rather, I will be trying to investigate more deeply the significance of the political in Islamic political thought.

Among scholars of political theology there is a debate whether, in political theology, the theological enjoys priority over the theological or *vice versa* (Hollerich 2004). Carl Schmitt, as the most important figure of the field, was also an outstanding scholar of public law and political thought whose conception of the political as the distinction between friend and foe is very well-known. There are some interpretations of his political theology that, on the basis of his entire corpus, argue that, for Schmitt, the political precedes the theological. However, what is certain is that, for Schmitt,

> The political is the total, and as a result we know that any decision about whether something is *un-political* is always a *political* decision, irrespective of who decides and what reasons are advanced. This also holds for the question whether a particular theology is a political or an un-political theology. (Schmitt 2005: 2)

Schmitt's idea, according to which the political is total, has been developed in his later writings, particularly in *The Concept of the Political* (Schmitt

2007) which is his most influential and controversial book. Political theology deals more with the political than politics. In this respect, French philosopher Claude Lefort, draws a distinction between *le politique* (the political) and *la politique* (politics), as the first constitutes the *form* of the latter:

> Interpreting the political [*le politique*] means breaking with the viewpoint of political science, because political science emerges from the suppression of this question. It emerges from a desire to objectify, and it forgets that no elements, no elementary structures, no entities (classes or segments of classes), no economic or technical determinations, and no dimensions of social space exist until they have been given a form. Giving them a form implies both giving them meaning (*mise en sens*) and staging them (*mise en scene*). They are given meaning in that the social space unfolds as a space of intelligibility articulated in accordance with a specific mode of distinguishing between the real and the imaginary, the true and the false, the just and the unjust, the permissible and the forbidden, the normal and the pathological. (Lefort 1991)

Thus, the political constitutes the basis for politics, political institutions, and political values in a historical society. As Lefort mentioned, political science cannot address the deep structures of the political. This leads us to other fields of research such as "political ontology" or "political phenomenology," that engage with the ontological and anthropological questions on social life and political order (Legros 1996).

Thus, in order to study the political in the Islamic context, it would be necessary to discuss the ontological foundations of political order in the background of Muslim societies, that is, the study of the symbolic network through which the historical formulations of government, politics, and society have been made possible. Although Islamic and Western societies may have similar political institutions, their political imagination is different. The study of this difference may lead us to a better understanding of the deep roots of Islamic political theology. Such an outlook is crucial prior to, not only analyze political theology but also to understand other social and political doctrines and movements in the Islamic world throughout its long history.

In Western thought, from Aristotle's (d. 322) *Politics* onward, the political has been imbued with a "civic" worldview, that is, social organization revolving around the idea of the city or *polis.* Membership in the political community of the *polis* was considered essential to complete human flourishing. However, the idea of the *polis* or city is not confined to Greek thought, and the history of political thought itself is not separable from this concept in its various forms across cultures. In contemporary political philosophy, terms such as city and *polis* have been used for describing the general Western concept of the political (Lefort 1991: 11).

Nevertheless, the genealogy of political ideas in the Eastern civilizations demonstrates that politics has been conducted using a different set of ideas and concepts. In these ancient empires, political life was not framed in the form of the city. Similarly, political ideas were not "civic" ones, since there was no *polis* representing all at once the common community, government, religion, and tradition. Historians of ideas have indicated that, in these cultures, political and social thought is presented within a "cosmic" form. In a cosmic worldview, everything, including the order of material world, has to be understood as a part of a greater cosmic order, and ruled by cosmic principles. This worldview, especially in ancient Iran, was highly prevalent, and framed the basic beliefs and ideas, including the political doctrines, of many nations and cultures. According to this cosmic view, political order, as microcosm, should be understood and ordered within the cosmic structure, or macrocosm, rather than through civic institutions. In Islamic political thought in Iran, the relationship between religion and politics is enclosed within this cosmic view. Marshal Hodgson (d. 1968) describes this *Weltanschauung* as follows:

> The rich heritage of mythic figures in the Irano-Semitic tradition had already been made use of in the Qur'an. Already Muhammad seems to have conceived his mission in terms of patterns that were present in the monotheistic tradition: a heavenly book of which extracts could appear on earth as scriptures, angels as intermediaries between the Creator-god and human beings, the sending of Prophets on explicit missions. All these elements implied a rather elaborate cosmic structure which, already in the Qur'an, carried overtones suggesting a cosmic drama more integrated and involved than the prosaic Shari'ah-minded commentators were willing to allow when they reduced everything to arbitrary individual acts of God. The Batini speculations had already developed further just such Qur'anic elements. The Batinis had interpreted the figure of Muhammad as a link in a great cosmic action, in which an initial disruption of God's order was being repaired—carrying forward a cosmic myth common to many monotheistic traditions. (Hodgson 1974)

Hodgson, Like Henry Corbin, distinguishes between two conceptions of religious doctrine in Islamic civilization: the cosmic conception, with its own implications in religion and politics, and a *shariʿa*-based conception that insists on the divine law in the practical administration of the social and political life of Muslims.

In the history of Iranian political thought, the cosmic conception has played a notably significant role. In this conception, two intertwined questions are of particular importance. The first question relates to the features of the ideal political order; the second question to the features of the ideal ruler.

The answer posed by the Iranian tradition to the first question is that a just political order should follow the pattern of the cosmic order. Its answer to the second question is that the ruler must be someone who can make a connection between the earthly world and the cosmic circle. This pattern of thinking shows itself again and again among Iranian philosophers, Sufis, Shiites, Isma'ilis, and other sects until the nineteenth century.

Although the political as an independent (or civic) domain has never been present in Islamic thought, one cannot claim that there is no distinctly political dimension in Islam. Yet, it must be emphasized that the political dimensions of the various schools of thought are rooted not merely in doctrinal elements, but in cosmic assumptions and the cultural imagination. Much of *shariʿa*-based theology has been developed on the basis of certain Arab-specific cosmological assumptions (Watt 1969: 36), and similarly, much of Iranian-Islamic political theology has roots in pre-Islamic cosmological ideas. The so-called Islamic political theology in every region is the synthesis of some aspects of Islamic doctrines and other assumptions drawn from pre-Islamic cultural memory.

We must also take into account the idea of secularization, a key concept in the literature on political theology in the Western, Judeo-Christian context. Scholars of political theology insist on the relationship between political theology and secularization in modern European and North American societies. In this conception, political theology has been the reaction to, or the result of, modernity and liberalism. According to the oft-cited statement of Carl Schmitt, political theology is defined as a representation of theological concepts in a secularized form under the modern theory of state and sovereignty (Schmitt 2005: 36). Based on this point, some scholars assume that political theology is a methodological approach toward intellectual history, or a kind of sociology of concepts, which is appropriate for secular modern societies where theological concepts, although having lost their apparent religious authority, still persist.

Nevertheless, the Islamic world (as a part of the so-called periphery world) has followed a trajectory nearly opposite to the Western process of modernization and secularization. Unlike the Western experience, the pathway to secularization in the Muslim world has been a state-imposed and top-down imposition (Hashemi 2009). On the other hand, in the twentieth century, some Muslim societies underwent changes toward making room for nonreligious ways of life and social organization. These changes, despite their importance, must not be construed as secularization in the strict sense. Rather, they are instances of disenchantment, which is not always the same as secularization (Monot 2016). In such a historical and intellectual situation, politics in these Muslim countries is neither traditional and religious nor modern and secular (Matin-Asgari 2018). The relationship between such a "troubled modernity"

and the religious tradition is too complex to understand with recourse only to Western accounts of political theology. That is why some scholars prefer to use the concept of "political religion" (Assoudeh 2019; Hansen 2009) or "ideological religion" (Shayegan 1982) as theoretical tools for clarifying this relationship in contemporary Islamist ideologies. It should be stressed that an ideological or political religion has little to do with religion and may not be directly attributed to it. Thus, the application of Carl Schmitt's account of political theology to the Islamic context is not helpful since the relationship between modern political philosophy and Christian tradition is not the same as the relationship between Islamist ideologies and Islam.

THE CASE OF IRANIAN ISLAM

As discussed above, the sheer variety of political imaginaries does not allow us to study all accounts of political theology in the Islamic context under the same theoretical roof. Therefore, strictly speaking, there seems to be no applicable unifying typology of Islamic political theologies. Historians of Islamic political thought, without mentioning the term *political theology*, have divided political theories in medieval Islam into three main approaches: political philosophy, mirrors for princes, and the treatises of *siyasa shari'yya*, insisting that all of them are subcategories or branches of theology (Lambton 2002), or at least closely connected to theology (Rosenthal 1971). There are two striking problems with this notion. First, these scholars do not consider theology in its meditative sense, and usually reduce it to legalism, focusing on juristic doctrines or *fiqh*. They confine themselves to studying the relationship between politics and exoteric theology. Secondly, they consider the Islamic world as a unified whole, overlooking the fundamental differences between various manifestations of Islamic political thought in different cultural regions. Historiography of Islamic political ideas requires not only a linear or historical vision but also a horizontal approach, in order to explore and classify the variety of regional and national trends.

Based on the theoretical framework sketched above, in this final section I would like to briefly discuss political theology in Iran as one of the most important contributions of the so-called Muslim world. The idea of a post-Islamic Iran is interesting, since several scholars have demonstrated the continuity of Iranian culture after the conversion of the Iranian to Islam. Ehsan Yarshater, for instance, states that:

Having played their part in developing and enriching Islamic civilization during its Arabic phase, the Persians then began to recover their cultural identity, focusing their attention chiefly on the creation and development of a new mode

of Islamic culture with deep roots in Iranian consciousness. . . . In no other part of the Islamic world did attachment to national traditions and resistance to the obliteration of these traditions, exhibit such strong roots as Persia. (Yarshater 1998)

What has been called "Iranian Islam" was a symbiosis of the two cultural traditions, a coming together, rather than absorption into the Arab-specific Muslim tradition, as was the case in the other parts of the newly shaped Islamic civilization. In the context of theology, this continuity can be understood only by recourse to the concept of invisible religion, since it represents the permanence of a symbolic and mythic sacred relationship between humans and the world, which in this case is different, or much broader, than visible religion alone. As I mentioned above, such a conception of political theology should be capable of residing in the perpetuity, or the *longue durée*, of theological institutions and doctrines, unlike the Schmittian account which, by insisting on the exception rather than norm, lacks this feature (Rust 2012).

The continuity of certain theological elements in the history of Iranian Islam has been more meticulously studied by Henry Corbin. According to Corbin, we cannot understand this persistence unless we consider the "Iranian spiritual world" as forming a whole, both before and after Islam (Corbin 1972b: I). He saw basic Iranian concepts reemerging or rather continuing in Shi'ite and Ismai'li doctrines, theoretical mysticism, Sufism, Oriental philosophy, Persian literature, and other forms of religious expression in Iranian Islam. Distinguishing between legalism (*shari'a* based theology) and esotericism (*batini* theology), Corbin shows that Iranian consciousness has always tended to the latter by recourse to *ta'wil* or esoteric hermeneutics. That is why, in the Iranian context, Corbin prefers to use terms such as *theosophy* and *theophany* rather than to speak of theology and incarnation (Corbin 1972a). In Iranian Islam, submission to God's will is not confined to the implementation of *shari'a*, and God's divine truth cannot be reduced to the juristic dimension. Iranian theological tradition, in this respect, falls between two ancient traditions: on the one hand, it was not compatible with the Semitic understanding of monotheism, and on the other hand, it was not exactly like East Asian nature-based religions.

The idea of an invisible and persistent Iranian religious outlook over the course of the centuries has always been connected to the Persian tradition of kingship, whose persistence in Islamic civilization was most recognizable. This continuity can be seen both in theory and practice. For instance, as Bosworth mentioned, Persian dynasties, whilst remaining faithful to their religious connection with Islam, also sought to establish links with the Iranian hero-glorifying past (Bosworth 1973). Javad Tabatabai has illustrated this continuity in Persian political thought, insisting that it is an anomaly

in the Muslim world. According to his account, the Iranian elites, from the very beginning, did not define themselves as part of the Islamic community (*umma*) due to its culturally Arabic connotations. Great scholars of Persian political thought, despite their close connection to Islamic *shariʿa*, did not support the political theory supporting the caliphate, or *al-siyasa shari'yya.* An interesting example was Nizam al-Mulk Tusi (d. 1092), an orthodox Sunni wazir (vizier) in the service of Seljuq sultans and the founder of the Nizamiyyah schools,[7] who in his famous treatise of politics *Siyar al-Muluk* (Nizam al-Mulk 1960) provided an account of kingship inspired by ancient Persian traditions, instead of discussing the caliphate theory or *shariʿa*-based politics (Tabatabai 2013). That means Iranian political theology in the Islamic period was not compatible with, or reducible to, a general Islamic political theology based on *shariʿa* and the institution of the caliphate. After examining all this, it is clear that we are in need of a different and better account of Iranian political theology.

Based on the theoretical and historical points mentioned above, we could instead speak of an Iranian-Islamic context, rather than trying to force an understanding of Iranian thought into a general Islamic paradigm. From the strictly theological point of view, we must distinguish between religion and the sacred. Whereas the former is based on divine revelation and visible religion, the latter is connected to cosmic truths: the distinction between *shariʿa* and *haqiqa* (the eternal Truth) in the works of Iranian mystics, poets, and theologians illustrates this duality. As some scholars have demonstrated, an author of Persian mirrors for princes, "persuades rulers to follow Islamic values and to seek outcomes consistent with Islamic notions of justice unlike the *shariʿa*-based politics approach which advocates rulers to apply the law forcefully on the populace and rather than the social outcomes themselves they are more interested in the realization of the letter of the law" (Muqtedar Khan 2019). In this conception, the social and political order, as microcosm, must be submitted to a higher cosmic realm, the macrocosm. Even though this political doctrine is not based on *shariʿa* or even on revealed religion, this does not mean that political thought manifested in Persian mirrors for princes was "secular," as Patricia Crone (d. 2015) claimed (Crone 2006: 150), because in the final analysis, this political doctrine was based on the divine will manifested in a cosmic order. The distinction between religion and the sacred is of high importance for understanding Iranian political theology. The former was based on revelation and the latter was drawn from cosmology. Various features of this cosmological doctrine are manifested in Iranian mythology and Persian literature, especially Ferdowsi's (d. 1020) *Shahnameh*.[8] But the most important aspect, which is also crucial to our discussion of political theology, is the political aspect, that is, the Persian theory of ideal kingship.

As mentioned above, the concept of *umma* was crucial to Islamic political theology, since the divine power is said to be manifested in the Muslim community. Caterina Bori, drawing on the account provided by Jan Assmann and Jacob Taubes (d. 1987), according to which in Judaism divine sovereignty was incarnated in the Israelites, states that there is an analogy between Islam and Judaism in this respect. Thus, according to the Islamic doctrine, divine sovereignty has been represented in the Muslim community as a whole (Bori 2007). In the Iranian political theology, however, the representation of divine sovereignty has been crystallized in the kingship. According to a well-known expression oft-cited in the Persian texts,

> Kingship and religion are twin brothers; there is no strength for one of them except through its companion, because religion is the foundation of kingship, and kingship the protector of religion. Kingship needs its foundation and religion its protector, as whatever lacks a protector perishes and whatever lacks a foundation is destroyed. (Ansari 2014)

The theme of the togetherness of kingship and religion, which in this text is attributed to Ardeshir I[9] counseling his son about the nature of power, has been repeated in several Persian texts on politics, from the Sassanid dynasty to the Islamic era. In this theory, kingship, as the crucial political institution, enjoys an independence from religion and theology. Thus, the concept of the political in the Iranian intellectual history has to be understood within this framework. Despite the claim of Al-Azmeh, according to which there is no crucial difference between Muslim kingship and the other forms of sacral kingship that preceded it (Al-Azmeh 2004), this Persian pattern of kingship, which is cosmic rather than religious, has been the dominant idea of political theology in Iran, and following it, some other parts of Islamic civilization.

CONCLUSION

According to Persian political theology, the king is chosen by God. He enjoys the divine grace/glory (in Farsi *farre izadi*) which is transmitted from one king to the next, like the chain of Prophets in hagiographies. The king is the shadow of God on earth, who draws his legitimacy not from religion or theology but from God and through a cosmological hierarchy. Although submission to religious laws is necessary for a king, *shariʿa* is neither the legitimating element of his authority nor even the guiding idea of his government. So, in post-Islamic political theology in Iran, politics (in the form of kingship) and theology (in this case *shariʿa*) are two autonomous and at the same time interconnected elements. Despite this distinction between the realms of

politics and religion, this political doctrine cannot be construed as secular, however, because in the final analysis, the kingship is connected to the sacred, even though this connection is not established through the explicit theology based on *shariʿa*. This account of political theology had been dominant in Iranian intellectual history until the emergence of the Islamist ideologies in the twentieth century. The theory of "the guardianship of the Islamic jurist," which entails the fusion of religion and politics, represents another account of political theology which is compatible neither with *shariʿa*-based politics nor with Iranian cosmological doctrine.

NOTES

1. Among others, the names such as Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, Jean-Luc Nancy, John Milbank, Slavoj Zizek, Simon Critchley, and Victoria Kahn are worth mentioning. Despite a general inspiration from Schmitt, their theories are based upon different underlying assumptions and conceptions about both theology and the political. For a brief overview of this new interest, in the domain of political and social theory, see: (Cistelecan 2014). For a recent account of political theology from the theological perspective, see: (Sanchez 2019).

2. The alternative interpretation, for the first time, has been provided by Ali Abdel Razek, an Egyptian scholar, who, in his very influential book *Islam and the Foundations of Political Power*, claimed that political rule had not been part of the prophetic mission of Muhammad, and that religion and government should be separate in Islam. Islam is a spiritual message from God, rather than a state or a system of government (Abdel Razek 2012). The idea of an Islamic state, as well as any other kind of Islamic political theology, would be impossible in this account (An-Nai'm 2008; Hallaq 2013).

3. Abdolkarim Soroush (b. 1945) is Iranian Islamic thinker and public intellectual. He is well known for his reformist interpretation of Islam and his critique of the theory of religious government in Iran.

4. Mohammad Khatami (b. 1942) was the reformist president of Iran (1997–2005). During his two terms as president, he run on a platform based on reform, liberalization, democratization, and dialogue among civilizations.

5. Based on Kantorowicz's account of political theology, Joshua Sabih, like Moosa, has attempted to define Islamic political theology in terms of the two bodies of the Prophet, considering him as a servant-messenger and as a Prophet-king, similar to body natural and body politic in Kantorowicz's theory. According to Sabih, these two bodies are "politically the same but theologically distinct" (Sabih 2019: 77). However, partly due to the quasi-Christian connotations of the concept of body, neither of these accounts seems accurate.

6. The concept of "Iranian Islam," coined by Henry Corbin, represents a specific worldview which puts emphasis on some aspects and interpretations of Islamic doctrines, attempting to combine them with some aspects of Iranian culture and civilization. For instance, the Shiite conception of Imam, according to this account, could be

construed as another variant of ancient Persian wisdom insisting on the king-sages who possessed the light of glory (Xvarnah). However, Iranian Islam should not be confined to Shiism. Esoteric teachings of Persian Sufis and poets (who were both Sunnite and Shiite) are also instances of this Iranian Islam. In the works of Ahmad Ghazzali, Ruzbihan Baqli Shirazi, Seyyed Haydar Amoli, Ain al-Quzat Hamadani, and many others one can notice such a conception. Beside Corbin, other Islamic scholars such as Richard Frye, Marshal Hodgson, and Clifford Bosworth discussed this Iranian school.

7. The Nizamiyyah were a group of the Sunni theological institutions of higher education established by Nizam al-Mulk in the eleventh century at the beginning of the Seljuq Empire. They are considered to be the model of later seminaries or Islamic religious schools.

8. Shah-Nameh (the Book of Kings) is a long epic poem written in Persian between c. 977 and 1010 CE. As the national epic of Greater Iran, it tells mainly the mythical and to some extent the historical past of the Persian Empire from the creation of the world until the Arab conquest of Iran in the seventh century.

9. Ardeshir I (AD 180–242), also known as Ardeshir the Unifier, was the founder of the Sassanian Empire. He had an outstanding role in developing the royal ideology, trying to show himself as a worshiper of Mazda related to god and possessing Khvarenah (the divine glory).

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Chapter 10

Political Theology in the Nineteenth and Twenty-First Centuries

Josep Puig Montada

INTRODUCTION

Carl Schmitt begins his *Politische Theologie* (Schmitt 2015) with a striking categorical sentence: "Sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception," and although his assertion recalls the neutral Latin maxim *necessitas non habet legem*, "Necessity has no law," it is the starting point for a doctrine of "personalized decisionism."[1] On the opposite side, Hans Kelsen sees the *Grundnorm*, "basic norm" as the origin of sovereignty (Kelsen 1976). The *Grundnorm* is neither an expression of natural law nor a product of free invention. The basic norm is a transcendental logical presupposition, which gives validity to the constitution and to all norms derived from it. Its function is "the foundation of the objective validity of a positive legal order." As for the validity of the basic norm itself, effectiveness is a condition because "the principle of legitimacy is limited by the principle of effectiveness."

Carl Schmitt rejects Kelsen's "pure theory of law" and blames him for denying the concept of sovereignty instead of answering the question; Schmitt thinks of one man, of an organized community. No need to say that the Muslim thinkers we will consider in the chapter were not aware of Carl Schmitt, but his decisionism would fit well into traditional Islamic ideologies. When he says that "all significant concepts of modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts," and that the miracle corresponds to the exception, it is very easy to identify the doctrine among traditional Muslim thinkers.

As a historical reference, it must be noted what the Andalusian theologian and jurist Ibn Hazm (994–1064) said regarding sovereignty, namely that God alone decides what is good and what is bad, and only God can choose to reveal it.

If someone had professed the belief that wine drinking was illicit before God had revealed His prohibition, this man would have been unbeliever and committed a sin of faithlessness, provided that he knew for certain that the Prophet considered wine drinking something permitted. By contrary, this faithlessness later became orthodox faith. (Ibn Hazm 1980, vol. 3, p. 111)

WAHHABISM

Ibn Hazm lies far and long away from our times, but there are later thinkers who are as radical and who have influenced contemporary thought. Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792) stands out among them. He and Muhammad Ibn Sa'ud (1710–1765) formed a lasting alliance that has made Wahhabism the dominant force in Arabia since 1800. His works have not only been repeatedly printed, but many have also been translated into English and other languages.[2]

His book on the *Oneness of God* (*tawhid*) is devoted to fighting polytheism and the frequent references to astrology, soothsayers, and sorcery clearly indicate that these practices were common in Arabia in his time. Nevertheless, the condemnation of those who make pictures extends to those who make and spread the images of the rulers. In spite of sovereignty not being the subject matter of the book, there are indications of its significance.

Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab condemns people who worship scholars *'ulama'*, and rulers, *umara'*, since they follow views contrary to revelation. Worshiping anything other than God is *shirk*, polytheism.

Did they not make prohibited what Allah made permissible, so you then made it prohibited, and did they not make permissible what Allah made prohibited and you therefore made it permissible? I said, "Yes." He said, "That is worshipping them." (Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab 2008, p. 109, § 102)[3]

God is the only source of law and He is the only authority who possesses all power, political and otherwise. Chapter 46 bears the title of "To be named *Judge of Judges* and the like" and Ibn al-Wahhab repudiates calling any human authority a supreme judge or a king of kings: "The most perfidious name to Allah is calling a man 'the king of kings' (*Malik al-amlak*). There is no king but Allah" (Ibn 'Abd aal-Wahhab 2008, p. 125).

The establishment of an Islamic state was his main purpose and the alliance with Ibn Sa'ud was the instrument to achieve it; Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab forbids worshipping the imam but orders obedience to him. In a book on the *Kitab al-kaba'ir*, that is, *Deadly Sins* that gives the impression of not being related to the issue of authority, he orders obedience to the imam, and he

uses the Qur'anic words: "O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you" (Al Imran 3: 59) (Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, Kaba'ir, n.d., p. 45).

Absolute respect for the authority received from God prevails. He recalls a sound *hadith* in which Hudhayfa ibn al-Yaman (d. 656) asked the Prophet:

> There will be leaders who will not be led by my guidance and who will not adopt my ways? There will be among them men who will have the hearts of devils in the bodies of human beings. I said: What should I do Messenger of Allah, if I live in that time? He replied: You will listen to the ruler (*amir*) and carry out his orders; even if your back is flogged and your wealth is snatched, you should listen and obey.[4] (Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, Kaba'ir, n.d., p. 46)

Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab was influential in the development of the Salafiyya movement,[5] and Wahhabism itself has found a fertile breeding ground in Saudi Arabia and the University of Medina.

Shaykh 'Abdal-'Aziz Ibn Baaz (1910–1999) was born in al-Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; he memorized the entire Qur'an before the age of puberty and studied the Qur'anic sciences; he lost his eyesight at the age of nineteen. He was a Qur'anic judge and professor of *fiqh*, and in 1992 he was appointed the Grand Mufti of the kingdom and head of *Majma' al-Fiqh al-Islami*, the national Council for Jurisprudence.

'Abdal-'Aziz Ibn Baaz stunned people when, in 1974, he affirmed that the earth is standing still and that: "The earth is flat, and anyone who disputes this claim is an atheist who deserves to be punished." His website, https://binbaz.org.sa/, reproduces a book of 1982 (2nd edition) whose English title is "Textual and visual proofs of the rotation of the sun and the moon, and of the state of rest of the earth, and the possibility of ascension to the planets" (Ibn Baaz 1984).

While Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab focused on political power in general terms, Ibn Baaz faced the long fragmentation of Islam in many, often opposed, states. The Islamic *umma*, the nation of Islam, is alone entitled to have the form of a state. Nationalism is the cause of division thwarting the rise of the *umma*-state. The idea is found in many of his writings, inclusive fatwas, and the means to reach this *umma*-state may be peaceful:

> Islamic unity can only be achieved through the unanimous agreement of the Muslim rulers to the religion of Allah, their holding fast to the Rope of Allah, and their helping one another in righteousness and piety. Their objective should be maintaining the truth, guiding human beings, and taking Allah's Shari'a (Law) as judge among people. (Ibn Baaz 2012, vol. 3, p. 133)

In other texts, the Muslims are called to demolish all these non-Islamic nationalistic independent states and create an Islamic world state. However,

the model to apply that he defends is Saudi. In a letter of Safar 1415 A.H. [1994] addressed to "His Honorable Eminence Shaykh ʿAbdul Rahman ibn ʿAbdul Khaliq"[6] he tells him:

> Thirdly: You mentioned in your book *Khutut raʾisiyah li-baʿth al-umma al-islamiyah* (ʿAbd al-Khaliq 1973, pp. 72–73): "Our Arab and Islamic countries do not generally apply Shariʿa (Islamic law) except to some of the personal status issues. However, all our countries with no exception follow laws of the West or the East regarding all financial transactions and political and international laws. The same applies to criminal laws such as *hudud* (ordained punishments for violating Allah's Law) are imported and fabricated etc. [*sic*]." (ʿAbd al-Khaliq 1973, p. 78)

> Such generality is incorrect for, all praise be to Allah Alone, Saudi Arabia applies Shariʿa, establish *hudud*, and Shariʿa courts have been founded all over the Saudi Arabian Kingdom. Nevertheless, I do not claim that Saudi Arabia or any other country is infallible (Ibn Baaz 2012, vol. 8, pp. 240–243).

Ibn Baaz was well aware that his universal Islamic state was not in sight, and that he had to deal with numerous states and rulers. He insisted on having rulers and scholars sharing power insofar as the ruler must listen to the views of the Wahhabi scholars. If a ruler, he may be a king or a president, wants to deserve the title of Commander of the Believers (Amir al-Muʾminin), and be the legitimate authority, he needs the assent of the scholars:

> According to the scholars, Amir al-Muʾminin only refers to those who rule over people according to what Allah has sent down, orders people to abide by, and prevents them from breaching His rulings. (Ibn Baaz 2012, vol. 1, p. 117)

Abu ʿAbd Allah Muhammad bin Salih al-ʿUthaymin might be the second most representative scholar of the Wahhabi doctrine grounded at the University of Medina. He was born in 1925, in ʿUnayzah, Saudi Arabia, and died there in 2001.[7] Concerning the question "does the sun revolve around the earth?," Ibn al-ʿUthaymin did not take a personal position, but he produced all the Qurʾanic evidences affirming that it is the sun which revolves around the earth (al-ʾUthaymin 2003, pp. 78–82). As Ibn Baz he was very productive in issuing fatwas, filling twenty-nine volumes in the Saudi official edition.

Al-ʿUthaymin encouraged the *daʿwah*, or missionary activity inviting both Muslims to the true Islam and non-Muslims to Islam. A successful missionary must have good knowledge of what he is calling for and he must know the person he is inviting to, and "how good is such a person in arguing and debating" (al-ʿUthaymin 2006, p. 33). He urges everyone to always act with

kindness and gentleness and if an evil is perpetrated, one must raise the problem "to the people in authority, *sulta*" (al-'Uthaymin 2006, p. 50).

The political aspects of his *da'wa* are highly revealing of his true attitude. "Those who are in authority" are always respected and generally deserve obedience according to Muhammad bin Salih al-'Uthaymin. He refers to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) and his definition of *muta'*: someone who deserves obedience either according to the Law or according to the power (al-'Uthaymin 1413/1992, nº 268; p. 198). Al-'Uthaymin contemplates four situations by taking the distinction into consideration:

1. He who has the power of restraint (*wazi'*) regarding the faith and who is the deterrent regarding the authority is strong in both aspects. This is the best situation for the community.
2. He who is weak in both aspects. Anarchy is intellectually, morally, and practically pervasive. This is the worst situation for the community.
3. He who has the power of restraint is weak regarding the faith and who is the deterrent is strong regarding the authority. The situation is intermediate and externally looks better.
4. He who has the power of restraint is strong regarding the faith and who is the deterrent is weak regarding the authority. Although the situation looks worse than the preceding, it is better for the relationship between man and his Lord (al-'Uthaymin 1413/1992, nº 268, p. 200).

The Muslim can only refuse obedience to commands that are against the faith, the message of the Prophet, and he must yield obedience to the authorities even if their commands are unjust.

THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

The pan-Islamic activist Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839–1897) spent seven years in Egypt, 1872–1879, and surrounded himself with a group of friends and disciples. The most famous was the shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh (1849–1905). When Al-Afghani was expelled from Egypt and moved to Paris, they both published a journal in 1884 called *Al-'Urwa al-Wuthqa*, "The indissoluble bond." While only eighteen issues were printed, its influence was seminal. Muhammad 'Abduh was in his turn the master in Egypt of Islamic reformers of both directions, liberal and fundamentalists. Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935) was his closest disciple and he was more conservative in religious matters than his master. Rashid Rida strongly vindicated the legacy of the Salafiyya and it is no wonder that Hasan al-Banna (1906–1949), the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, found inspiration in Rashid Rida for

his message. Moreover, the Muslim Brethren sustain that Rashid Rida is the chain link between them and the Islamic renewal.

For centuries, the mosque and university of al-Azhar was the center of learning in the Islamic world. Muhammad 'Abduh was admitted there in 1865 and studied the Islamic sciences of exegesis (*tafsir*), traditions (*hadith*), theology (*tawhid*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), sufism (*tasawwuf*) and in addition, grammar, semantics (*ma'ani*), rhetoric (*bayan*), and traditional logic. In 1872, 'Ali Pasha Mubarak established the Dar al-'Ulum as an institution of higher education whose aim was to prepare students of al-Azhar as teachers in the schools.

Rashid Rida was born in a village near Tripoli (Lebanon 1865) and he got his education in what is present Lebanon; when he read *Al-'Urwah al-Wuthqah* in 1892–1893, almost ten years after its publication, the reading changed his life (Arslan 1937). When 'Abduh visited Lebanon in 1894, a friendship began that lasted until his death. He moved to Cairo in 1897 and started the journal *al-Manar* "The Lighthouse" in 1898. Together with Muhammad 'Abduh he wrote an incomplete Qur'an commentary ending (or ending only) with the sura Yusuf. Among his other works, I would mention "The Caliphate and the Great Imamate" (Rida 1923) and *Al-Manar wa-l-Azhar* (Rida 1934), his last book, which was a criticism of al-Azhar's backwardness.[8]

"The Caliphate" begins with a definition of Islam: "Islam is spiritual guidance, and social and civil politics by means of which God perfected the religion of the Prophets" (Rida 2013, p. 9). The revealed text and the Prophet's words and actions concerning the text form the spiritual guidance. However, Islam defines only the foundations and guidelines of social politics since its particular conditions differ according to place and time.

Rashid Rida affirms the age of the Righteous Caliphs to be the age in which the highest degree of perfection was achieved, putting into practice "right and justice" (Rida 2013, p. 9). Many people believe that since then Muslim civilization has dwindled away and that the European civilization, *al-madaniyah al-ifranjiyah*, has taken an eternal place in history. However, he mentions that thinkers like Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) argue for the corruption of the European civilization. He writes that the Great War of 1914–1928 has shown that this civilization is "plagued by countless heinous acts" which caused a reactive motion among European and other peoples.

In the context, the renaissance of the Turkish people is, for Rashid Rida, a historic opportunity for an Islamic revival. He defends the pan-Islamism of the Ottoman Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid (1842–1918) and addresses the Turkish people with the following words:

> Oh, the lively Turkish people! Islam is the greatest moral power on earth and it is who can revive the Eastern civilization and rescue the Western one because

civilization endures only through virtue, and virtue materializes only through religion, and no religion other than Islam harmonizes with science and civilization. (Rida 2013, p. 10)

Turkey, under the leadership of Kemal Atatürk, headed in another direction and the Turkish National Assembly abolished the Caliphate on February 20, 1924. In Egypt, King Fu'ad made some attempts at obtaining the title of Caliph. But the ideas of Rashid Rida did not fall on barren ground.

Hasan al-Banna was born October 14, 1906, in Mahmudiyya where he received his first education; his father Ahmad al-Banna was engaged in religious scholarship for his own sake and read Rashid Rida's *al-Manar*. Sheikh Muhammad Zahran, who taught him the Qur'an, was very influential in his personal growth (Banna 1981, p. 66). In 1923, Hasan graduated from the Damanhur elementary teachers' training school in the same year he passed the admission exam to Dar al-'Ulum (from which he graduated in 1927). After graduation, he was assigned as a/the Arabic teacher to a primary school in Isma'iliyya. He did not want to be sent to this Suez Canal town; he could not expect Isma'iliyya to be the founding place of the Brotherhood in 1929 (Courants actuels 1981–1982, p. 7).

The members the Brotherhood registered as a welfare association in 1930 and opened a mosque and a school in Isma'iliyya. In 1932, he was transferred to a school in Cairo and the headquarters of the organization moved there. *Da'wa*, missionary activity, *irshad*, guidance, and *tarbi'a*, education constituted the main objectives of the organization, although to pursue them in Cairo it relied more on communication through the press and on political activity.

The Muslim Brotherhood became a powerful organization with well-ordered cadre structure able to face state repression and to survive the elimination of its leadership. During World War II, al-Banna opposed the British presence in Egypt and he made contacts with the "Free Officers" and in particular, with Anwar al-Sadat, who later would become president of Egypt. In 1981, Sadat was assassinated by an Egyptian "Islamic Jihad group" which maintained connections to the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Muslim Brotherhood continued its activities against the government and on December 8, 1948, the Egyptian government outlawed the organization. A chain reaction followed: on December 28, Prime Minister al-Nuqrashi was assassinated by a young member of the organization, and on February 12, 1948, Hasan al-Banna was killed on the street. Doctrinal coherence was essential to the aims of the Muslim Brotherhood and its founder expounded the ideas in some twenty pieces of writing that were collected and published under the title "Collection of the Epistles of the Imam the martyr Hasan al-Banna" (al-Banna 1988); some of them have been

translated into English (see *Five Tracts of Hasan Al-Banna* (*1906–1949*) in the bibliography).

In January 1939, the organization held its fifth general conference in Cairo. Hasan al-Banna' addressed the participants and defined the essence of what a Muslim brother is in eight main features: (1) *Da'wah salafiyyah*, the call to return to "the pristine Islam," (2) *Tariqah sunniyah*, "the traditional path" in beliefs and practices, (3) *Haqiqah sufiyah* "the Sufi truth" as the Sufis know "the purity of the soul and of the heart,", (4) *Hay'a siyasiyah*, "political structure" insofar as the Muslim Brothers pursue the reform of the government in the interior and want to restore the place of the Islamic nation among the others, (5) *Jama'a riyadiya*, "sports association," as bodily fitness is essential to accomplish the Islamic duties, (6) *Rabitah 'ilmiyah thaqafiyah* "Scientific and cultural society because Islam makes the search for science a duty," (7) *Sharikah iqtisadiyah* "Commercial company" "because Islam means administration of wealth," and (8) *Fikrah ijtima'iyah* "social thinking because they look after the medicine of the Islamic society" (al-Banna, Majmu'at rasa'il 1988a, pp. 174–175).

For Hasan al-Banna the eight paragraphs represent a comprehensive doctrine, but we see that political elements outweigh the others, so that the missionary activity of "the call" is encouraged. According to Hasan, the foundations of Islam are the Qur'anic verses, the traditions containing sayings of the Prophet, and the practice. There are unavoidable disagreements in their interpretation and the missionary activity cannot be distorted by insisting on one interpretation. The Muslim Brothers must free themselves from the dominance of the powerful and distance themselves from the political parties and institutions. Their project would run gradually in three stages: first, the call: introducing the masses to the *Ikhwani* doctrine; second, building companies "kata'ib" and preparing their members for action; and third, implementing the project (al-Banna 1988a, pp. 176–179). He considered that 300 companies needed to be ready before stepping into the executive stage (al-Banna 1988a, p. 181).

When the organization met for its fifth conference, Egypt was ruled by King Faruk, and 'Ali Maher of the Ittihad Party was his prime minister. Egypt had been given a liberal constitution in 1923. What position did Hasan al-Banna' take on it? His attitude was mainly positive as he said:

> The principles of the constitutional system are summarized as follows: safeguarding the personal freedom in all its kinds, giving advice and appealing to the authority, responsibility of the rulers before the people and their being accountable for their actions, showing the limits of any authority. These principles appear to the observer as fully compliant with the teachings of Islam. (al-Banna 1988a, p. 192)

How sincere he was when he expressed these views is not clear. Hasan al-Banna had published a treatise "On Jihad" (al-Banna, Risalat al-Jihad, n.d.) in the late 1930s, thus shortly before his speech at the fifth conference. He begins it with a radical affirmation: "Allah has imposed Jihad as a religious duty on every Muslim, categorically and rigorously, from which there is neither evasion nor escape" (al-Banna, Risalat al-Jihad, p. 273). He produces arguments from the Qur'an and from the prophetic traditions showing that *jihad* is not against polytheists alone but against the people of the Book and all who are not Muslim. And the four legal schools agree on the obligation of *jihad*. But al-Banna knows the objections claiming that fighting is no longer mandatory and complains: "The belief is widespread among many Muslims that fighting the enemy is the lesser Jihad, and that there is a greater Jihad, the Jihad of the spirit (al-Banna, Risalat al-Jihad, p. 289)." He shows that such belief is sustained by weak *ahadith* and that these are minor, preparatory exercises. "Nothing in them confers on their advocate the supreme martyrdom and the reward of the strivers in Jihad, unless he slays or is slain in the way of Allah" (ibid.). And the way of Allah means to present to the enemy one option: Islam, tribute, or combat.

When Hasan al-Banna was killed in February 1949, Sayyid Qutb was living in the United States; he was in hospital in Washington, DC, where he was struck by hearing people rejoice over the assassination (Qutb 1951). Sayyid Qutb was born on October 9, 1906, in a town called Musha, near Assiut. He graduated from the Dar al-'Ulum college in 1933 and became an employee of the Minister of Education. From 1948 to 1950, Qutb lived in the United States on a scholarship to study the American educational system; he recorded his experiences in a small book, *The America That I Have Seen*. The following lines, taken from another book, summarize his views of Christian religions and Western societies:

> Look at these concepts of the Trinity, Original Sin, Sacrifice and Redemption, which are agreeable neither to reason nor to conscience. Look at this capitalism with its monopolies, its usury and whatever else is unjust in it; at this individual freedom, devoid of human sympathy and responsibility for relatives except under the force of law; at this materialistic attitude which deadens the spirit; at this behavior, like animals, which you call "Free mixing of the sexes" at this vulgarity which you call "emancipation of women." (Qutb, Milestones 2006, p. 155)

No later than 1953 he became a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. The attempted assassination of Nasser on October 26 by a member of the organization triggered the Egyptian government to imprison Qutb and many other Brotherhood members. He spent ten years in prison (1955–1964), during which he wrote the thirty volumes of his Qur'anic commentary.

Qutb was set free in 1964, and he continued his work for the organization. He was arrested again, put on trial and sentenced to death. On August 26, 1966, he, 'Abdal-Fattah Isma'il, and Muhammad Yusuf Hawash were hanged.

Qutb authored twenty-four books, *Milestones* (or *Signposts*), which is a manifesto of political Islam which will be considered in particular. *Milestones* came out in press in 1964; since then it has been reprinted many times and translated into several languages. Qutb begins the book with a diagnosis which he does not prove but about which he has no doubts:

> Mankind today is on the brink of a destruction, not because of the danger of complete annihilation, which is hanging over its head—this being just a symptom and not the real disease—but because humanity is devoid of those vital values which are necessary not only for its healthy development but also for its real progress. (Qutb, Milestones 2006, p. 23)

Since he wrote these lines, mankind has undergone many calamities, but not complete annihilation. On the contrary, it has made real progress; Europe and the West are no longer the only world powers since China and India have joined them, but the vital values he refers to are neither present in the old nor in the new potencies. We may assume that his words were addressed only to the Islamic countries, or even more particularly to his own country, Egypt, but he insisted on calling to mankind, and he concluded: "Islam is the only system, which possesses these values and this way of life."

What are then the life-giving values mankind needs to progress? He stresses that "the way of living, the values, criteria, habits and traditions, are all legislated and affect people" (Qutb, Milestones 2006, p. 108) and the relevant legislative source is the *shari'a*. Although he distinguishes between Islamic and *Jahiliy* values and morals, he emphasizes that only the Islamic ones are truly human.

"Jahiliyyah" originally means the period before Islam, but Sayyid Qutb extended the meaning to all societies that are not Islamic. "These values are not idealistic but are practical values which can be attained through human effort, by applying the teachings of Islam correctly" (Qutb, Milestones 2006, p. 118). We are referred to the revealed law, to the Shari'a, for knowing the teachings:

> By "the Shari'a of Allah" is meant everything legislated by Allah Almighty for ordering man's life; it includes the principles of belief, principles of administration and justice, principles of morality and human relationships, and principles of knowledge. (Qutb, Milestones 2006, p. 120)

Sayyid Qutb specified from whom a Muslim should learn morals, principles of economics or political affairs, namely, "from a Muslim whose piety and character, belief and action, are beyond reproach" but since knowledge

embraces further sciences, and among them the military ones, he authorized their learning from a non-Muslim. He makes a distinction between philosophy and natural sciences that are permitted to the Muslim as long as they do not go into speculative philosophy (Qutb, Milestones 2006, pp. 121–123). Philosophy is futile knowledge as it is not based on faith and even worse, philosophy becomes the enemy of Islam because its doctrines are "generally against religion and in particular against Islam" (Qutb, Milestones 2006, p. 129).

The division between Jahiliyya and truly Islamic society is accompanied by the traditional division of the earth between Dar al-Islam (the land of Islam) and Dar al-Harb, the "land of war." Sayyid Qutb defines the latter as the place where the Islamic way of life and its laws are not practiced (Qutb, Milestones 2006, p. 144). Sayyid Qutb wants to make Islam triumphant and extend the Dar al-Islam to the outmost limits of the world. He knows that God will assist the believers, but only once their hearts are pure, so pure that they do not "fix their sights on something of this earth" and they are "not seeking anything except the pleasure of Allah Almighty" (Qutb, Milestones 2006, p. 175). Sayyid Qutb considers that this happened when the Believers did not look for earthly rewards in the times of the Prophet and he admits that to firmly enroot this conviction in the hearts of the modern Believers is a difficult task:

> This intricate point requires deep thought by all callers toward Allah Almighty, to whatever country or period of time they belong; for this guarantees that they will be able to see the milestones of the road clearly and without ambiguity, and establishes the path for those who wish to traverse it to the end. (Qutb, Milestones 2006, p. 176)

For Sayyid Qutb the issue is on faith, and faith gives the Believer superiority, superiority of an eternal kind, as it is based on the permanent truth, that is, the divine truth. In spite of declaring the earthly truth trivial, the Muslim Brotherhood has never given up its fight to achieve worldly supremacy, namely, to seize power and take control of the political institutions. Although Sayyid Qutb was not as candid in encouraging military Jihad as Hasan al-Banna was, many of his followers would understand him clearly as showing the direction toward active combat (Calvert 2009).

THE CRITICAL POSITION: MARXISM, HUSAYN MURUWA

After Sayyid Qutb's execution, the Muslim Brotherhood continued in Egypt and neighboring countries and other thinkers contributed to its doctrinal strengthening. Because of the restrictions of the book, I cannot go into more

authors of political theology here but I need to point to the import of those
active in the Indian subcontinent and Pakistan, Abu al-Aʻla Mawdudi (1903–
1979) being among them. Room must be made here for authors critical of
Islam. Husayn Muruwa (d. 1987) serves as a representative of such criticism
from a Marxist point of view.

Muruwa was born in 1908 or 1910 in the village of Haddatha in the
Nabatieh province of South Lebanon, in one of the oldest Shiʻi communi-
ties in the Muslim world (Muruwa 1990). "Born a Shaykh" he was sent to
Najaf, Iraq, in 1924, to receive a clerical Shite education. Once in Najaf he
was subject to sweeping influences ranging from the Arab literary renais-
sance to the social Darwinism of Shibli al-Shumayyil (1850–1917). In 1928,
he suffered from an intellectual crisis, left Najaf and studied in Damascus.
Only in 1934, Muruwa returned to Najaf where he completed his religious
education in 1938. He worked as a teacher in Iraq and associated with mem-
bers of the pan-Arab movement and the Communist Party. In 1948, he took
an active part in the protests against the signing of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of
1948 by the Iraqi king and was stripped of his Iraqi citizenship and expelled
from the country. His family settled in Beirut and Husayn Muruwa joined
the Lebanese Communist Party. In 1968, he traveled to Moscow to work
on his doctoral dissertation, which he completed in 1974. The dissertation
evolved into an often-reprinted book, the title of which can be translated as
"Materialist Tendencies in Arab-Islamic Philosophy" (Muruwa 1978).

The Lebanese Civil War began in 1975, and in the 1980s the Lebanese
Communist Party was in a bloody conflict with *Amal*, the Syrian backed and
armed organization of the Shiite cleric Musa al-Sadr. This was the back-
ground of Muruwa's assassination on February 17, 1987, at his home in West
Beirut.

His "Materialist Tendencies in Arabic-Islamic Philosophy" resulted from
a personal project: to interpret the Arabic Islamic intellectual legacy, or heri-
tage, by means of the methodology of historical materialism. Muruwa dis-
tances himself from what he denominates "nationalistic bourgeois positions"
toward the Arabic Islamic legacy. These positions forcibly adjust thoughts of
the past to those of the present, obviating the intermediate stages in a blatant
instance of anachronism. They develop "innovative" creations and Muruwa
mentions many examples, such as the "Islamic Socialism," and an opposite
view, that Islam is the source of capitalism, or that the Qur'an contains all the
natural sciences (Muruwa 1978, p. 14). He qualifies the position as "a modern
form of Salafiyya."

He pledges for the historicity of thinking and refers to Hegel, who submits
the relation between ancient and new philosophy to the dialectical law of
Negation of Negation; Hegel considered this formulation to be the basic law
of dialectics and Muruwa picks up his image of the tree as an instance of

negation of the negation (*Widerlegung*) (Hegel 1833, vol. 13, p. 51). He goes further and joins the Marxist interpretation, applying the "historical materialistic method" in his book and explains:

> Our work in the research does not restrict itself to enquire on the materialistic tendencies within the foundations of the Arabic-Islamic philosophical heritage, leaving out the idealistic and leading forms of this heritage, but also we affirm that such a restriction—even if we wanted it or tried it—is not possible in the practice, aside from not being methodologically right. (Muruwa 1978, p. 40)

Muruwa gives his reasons for not neglecting the external aspects, and he eventually concludes that his endeavors to uncover "the hidden places (*maka-min*) of the materialistic tendency up to the innermost of the revelations of the idealistic tendency, and the relations of the struggle between them both" (Muruwa 1978, p. 41), since he assumes a permanent struggle between ideas and matter.

The project is carried out in hundreds of cumbersome pages. The four volumes cover historical events and ideological creations from the pre-Islamic period to Avicenna. The Salafi and Ikhwani authors laid great import on the legislation enacted by the Prophet. Muruwa analyzes it, and the case of the Medinan legislation by the Prophet (*tashriʿ*) (Muruwa 1978, pp. 401–404) chooses it here as an exemplary instance of his Marxist analysis.

Muruwa reminds that legislation was prompted by the great emigration from Mecca to Medina, the *Hijrah*. Islam evolved from a stage in which the Islamic dogma was proclaimed and preached to a stage in which the predication extended to instruction based on legal norms, from pure faith to law. The law is intended to organize the community and in the case of the Medinan community, to organize a new community different from the preexisting, a tribal society.

Muruwa distinguishes two stages in the legislation. He calls the first "provisory" because it attended to the needs of the destitute emigrants when they fled to Medina and it was a legislation of "fraternity" (*ukhuwah*) between the immigrants and the Medinan helpers. This legislation was morally motivated, but it was also an instrument to solve an issue. Once the state of need was overcome, the legislation was abrogated and replaced by what Muruwa calls "general legislation."

Before the advent of Islam, commercial relations and the bounds of tribal solidarity coexisted and sought unification under one institution. Islam was the institution, that is, the state (*dawlah*), and legislation was needed. Since war was the means to extend Islam, Muruwa says, fighting had to be regulated, and first of all, the law of war (*sharʿat al-qital*) had to be dictated. Legislation pursued two principal aims: to organize and to instigate, namely,

to organize the military effort and to instigate people to fight, as Muruwa ponders:

> Maybe the purpose of instigating is the most effective because the definite pieces of legislation create a material stimulus which turns out effective in the praxis of conquest and expansion." (Muruwa 1978, p. 403)

Muruwa adds a third functionality (*waẓifiyah*) of the legislative activity, consisting in rooting the unitarian theory firmly in the conscience of the combatant Muslims. The theory is anchored by fighting "for the sake of the one comprehensive institution"—and not the tribe, by waging warfare "to increase the human capacities"—instead of wasting them in actions of revenge, by transforming the concept of "revenge" insofar as the institution itself takes revenge—and not the individual. Hence, Muruwa argues, war was legally regulated (*shuri'at*) and became an instrument to expand a "social, political, ideological institution" (Muruwa 1978, p. 404).

His analysis of the Medinan period is of an entirely different kind than the Salafi or Ikhwan interpretations that considered the period the ideal regime to be restored. Muruwa does not want to reconstruct it and he often blames them for their anachronism. However, his analysis offers the attentive reader some clues to interpret a phenomenon of unprecedented historical success as some hints on how to build a modern Islam.

THE CRITICAL POSITION: HERMENEUTICS, HASAN HANAFI

Hasan Hanafi was born on February 13, 1935, in Cairo, Egypt. When he was 5 years old, he learned the Qur'an by heart in the "kuttab" of Shaykh Sayyed, in the Bab al-Sha'riyah quarter, a popular neighborhood in Cairo. He tells us in his memories that already in elementary school he experienced "national consciousness" and he was enthusiastic about the army-led revolution that overthrew King Farouk (d. 1965) on July 23, 1952.

After graduating from the Teachers College, he entered Cairo University in 1952. Hasan Hanafi was inclined to the Muslim Brotherhood, and when Muhammad Naguib (d. 1984), the new head of state, met students at Cairo University, the Communist ones shouted "Constitution, constitution!," but he reacted exclaiming: "What could Constitution mean when compared with Islamic unity?" Gamal Abdel Nasser (d. 1970) became the second president, serving from 1954 until his death in 1970. Hasan Hanafi was ideologically committed both to the Muslim Brotherhood and to Nasser.

Hasan Hanafi earned a BA in philosophy from Cairo University in 1956. After graduation he suffered from a spiritual crisis; he went to a mosque to recite the Qur'an and became aware of the need for an "Islamic renewal."

On October 11, 1956, Hasan Hanafi left the harbor of Alexandria for Marseille, France. He arrived penniless in Paris, and the Algerian janitor of the main mosque took him to some Arab friends who sheltered him, and he struggled to survive. Hanafi registered at the Sorbonne university, and two years later, Louis Massignon (d. 1962) helped him to get a scholarship so that he could devote all of his time to studying. He avidly read, and Spinoza and Kierkegaard inspired his admiration. Massignon opened his eyes to the *usul al-fiqh*: the science of the derived legal rules as acquired from their particular sources, which would inspire his intellectual endeavor (Hanafi 2013, p. 8).

Jean Marie Guitton (1901–1999) had been in Egypt in the 1930s; he was a Catholic thinker who was appointed professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne in 1955. Pope John XXIII chose him to participate as a layman in the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). Guitton became Hanafi's friend and introduced him to Pope Paul VI. In 1965, Hanafi completed his doctoral studies with the/his main dissertation on "The Exegetical Methods," and/his the secondary one on "The Hermeneutics of Phenomenology." Phenomenology and hermeneutics have singularized his thought since then.

After coming back from France, he was appointed assistant professor in the Philosophy Department of Cairo University, and he started the lifelong project "Heritage and Renewal." Anwar Sadat succeeded Nasser, served as president from October 15, 1970, until his assassination on October 6, 1981. From 1971 through 1975, Hasan Hanafi was a visiting professor at Temple University where he composed most of his *From Dogma to Revolution* (Hanafi 1988) devoted to the fundamentals of religion.

Sadat signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1974, and Hasan Hanafi disagreed with his policy. One year after Sadat's assassination, he moved to Fez and taught at the University for the years 1982–1984. He was expelled because of a public lecture he gave and went back to Egypt.

His stay in Japan, 1984–1997, gave him the opportunity to see how an ancient society coped with highly developed technology, but his experience in Indonesia was the most enriching. Indonesia is the most populated Muslim country and Hasan Hanafi discovered a vigorous Islam, away from the so-called Islam of the Arabs, and that was receptive to his leftist positions.

He calls the years 1988–1992 a period of "Standstill and subjection," and here his autobiography ends. Since then, almost thirty years have elapsed and Hasan Hanafi has been publishing articles and books, and the days of the Tahrir Revolution, 2011–2013, were fertile in disseminating his ideas through online publications, such as the journal al-*Misri al-yawm*.[9] In 2015, he was

awarded the Nile Award in Social Sciences.[10] Here follows a list of some of his most important publications:

1965. *Les méthodes d'exégèse. Essai sur la science des fondements de la compréhension, Usûl al-fiqh [fundamentals of jurisprudence].* French.

1966. *L'exégèse de la phénoménologie. L'état actuel de la méthode phéno-ménologique et son application au phénomène religieux.*

1966. *La phénoménologie de l'exégèse. Essai d'une herméneutique existentielle à partir du Nouveau Testament.* Supplementary dissertation. 2 vols. French.

1988. *From Dogma to Revolution. An attempt at reconstructing* the Usûl al-dîn [fundamentals of religion]. 5 vols. Arabic.

1988–1989. *Religion and revolution in Egypt, 1952–1981* (cultural and social history of Egypt). 8 vols. Arabic.

1995. *Islam in the Modern World.* Collected papers, 2 vols. English.

2001. *From Tradition to Creativity* (an endeavor of Islamic intellectual history). 9 vols. Arabic.

2004. *From the Text to Reality* (a new approach to his PhD main dissertation). 2 vols. Arabic.

2006. *Hermeneutics of the Phenomenology. The present stage of the phenom-enological method and its application to the religious phenomenon.*

Phenomenology of the Hermeneutics. An attempt at an existential hermeneu-tics of the New Testament (updating his PhD supplementary dissertation), 2 vols. and a 2nd edition in 2013. Arabic.

2009–2012. *From Tradition to Reason* (research on the Qur'an and the Qur'anic sciences, expanding the project on the fundamentals of religion to building up a science of the fundamentals of wisdom). 3 vols. Arabic.

2018. *The thematic commentary on the Holy Qur'an.* Arabic.

Many titles of the list above illustrate how phenomenology and herme-neutics as methodological instruments have always been present in Hasan Hanafi's lifelong work. He studied European phenomenology and related it to hermeneutics, following the steps of Paul Ricoeur (Ricoeur 1975). He often justifies this option, one instance being the following lines:

> The phenomenological method is most suitable for tackling the conflict between modern philosophy and dogmatic theology. It places the feelings as a first spon-taneous manifestation, it starts with the present and not with the past, from the moment and not the history, from the Me and not from the other, God or the event. (Hanafi, Ta'wil 2013, p. 535)

Hasan Hanafi applied these instruments to the principles of both religion and jurisprudence. In *Les méthodesd'exégèse*, he equated jurisprudence with

"compréhension," as understood in the sense of "Verstehen," the German historicism and Dilthey's philosophy in particular. Understanding is a kind of knowledge that is opposed to exact science: "Understanding is perfection of the intellect, *jawdat al-dhihn*" (Hanafi, Fondements 1965, p. xxxix). It is personal, conjectural, hypothetical, and it belongs to the logic of what is probable because its subject matter results from daily life and human condition. While universal science is theoretical, understanding is the source of practical behavior. *Fiqh* is clearly defined as a philosophy of behavior and moral improvement so that "Perfect existence, supreme blessedness, is the final stage of understanding" (Hanafi, Fondements 1965, p. xli).

Therefore, Hasan Hanafi converts the terms of classical jurisprudence into terms of phenomenology. Consciousness for Hanafi is individual reality, but it never appears unqualified in his texts. The results of the exegetical method applied to "comprehension" show three dimensions of consciousness: historical (*rawi*), eidetic (*mufassir*) and active consciousness (*mukallaf*) which are not separable from one another (Hanafi, Fondements 1965, pp. 429–430). Historical consciousnesses found in the ways of how religious information is transmitted; its contents is always experience, and prophetic experience is the privileged one; anonymous, individual, and intersubjective consciousness are the other forms. Historical consciousness has an objective content, which is proven by the process of abrogation (Hanafi, Fondements 1965, pp. 125–154).

Eidetic consciousness is generated when the individual apprehends the religious information supplied by the historical consciousness. The data is subjected to contrastive processes, and the contrast general-particular is most relevant among them (Hanafi, Fondements 1965, pp. 198–208). Causal reasoning belongs to this kind of consciousness and plays a key role to prove objectiveness.

The third step is the active consciousness. After receiving the text, or information, consciousness becomes aware of it and results in historical consciousness; next it gains understanding and becomes eidetic. Finally, it turns into action. In *fiqh*, the term *hukm al-wad'*, "judgement of execution" is an instruction dictated by the legislator, but here it is changed into an "acte positionel" in developing his interpretation (Hanafi, Fondements 1965, pp. 332–356) and in general, Hasan Hanafi extends the active consciousness as the backbone of all his interpretations.

Hasan Hanafi moved into the field of principles of religion too. In 1988, he released five volumes under the title *From Dogma to Revolution*, and subtitled it *An attempt at Reconstructing the* Usul al-Din (Hanafi, From Dogma 1988). The fundamentals of religion, *usul al-din*, of the traditional belief system divide into six sections: God, the angels, the books, the Prophets, the Last Judgment, fate and predestination. Furthermore, he summarized the

main ideas in a book section entitled "Hermeneutics, liberation, and revolution" within his work *Islam in the Modern World* (Hanafi, Modern 1995, vol. 2, pp. 103–201).

The concept of "historical consciousness" changes its meaning when he uses it in the reconstruction of the fundamentals of religion, as it designs the psychological self-representation inherent to a particular society. According to Hanafi, conservative "historical consciousness," which prevails in a traditional society, is expressed by cultural conservativism, and in turn, cultural conservatism is defined by life according to the tradition "as a historical continuum" (Hanafi, Modern 1995, vol. 2, p. 105). Hanafi pleads for reconstructing the tradition, while deconstructing the traditional power structure.

According to Hanafi, the traditional power structure identifies the Divine Will with the will of the Sultan and produces a political theology in a blatant way. It dictates a *'Aqida* or dogma, what one must believe in, but Hanafi reshapes it as "belief system." This is a modern concept and Hanafi defines it as the conceptual framework by means of which man interprets the world and from which he gets motivations for his actions. Aided by this new concept, he can turn the traditional and revolutionary beliefs against one another:

> The purpose of this new construction of the traditional belief system is not to obtain eternal life by knowing the truth, but to acquire success in this world by fulfilling the hopes of the Muslim world for liberation, freedom, justice, social equality, reunification, identity, progress, and mass mobilization. (Hanafi, Modern 1995, vol. 2, p. 110)

Hanafi transforms the traditional term *tanzih* into transcendence and identifies transcendence with the Divine. *Tanzih* means the elimination of human attributes in God's essence. In Islamic theology, *tanzih* is opposed to *tashbih*, or *tajsim*, "anthropomorphism," while transcendence opposes immanence in philosophy. Hanafi distinguishes between the ideal and the material world, and *tanzih* brings them both together and gives them unity. However, he asks:

> How does the transition from this pure intellectual conception to reality occur? How does the transfer from thought to existence occur? For this reason, "transcendence" needs an ontological proof that establishes the Divine (*al-Mu'allah*) as the only one who conjuncts thought and existence. (Hanafi, From Dogma 1988, vol. 2, p. 221)

The so-called ontological proof is bound to power as well as to action and integrates Transcendence in social life. Islam is not submission or servitude

but rather the "revolution of Transcendence," a dynamic structure working for the individual consciousness, for the just social order, and for the progress in history. Hanafi defends a revolutionary concept of Islam, and hermeneutics is the instrument that articulates it.

CLOSING REMARKS

The chapter necessarily focused on a few authors as representative as possible for the main currents of Islamic political thought. First, we examined Wahhabism, the Saudi form of Salafiyyah and two of his key representatives, Ibn Baaz and al-ʿUthaymin. Then we considered the Muslim Brotherhood that remains an Egyptian formation, and two of his intellectual fathers, Hasan al-Banna and Sayid Qutb. For the critical directions in modern Islam, we divided them into the Marxist and the Islamic ones.

The exposition of the radical interpretation of Islam by Salafism and the Muslim Brotherhood have supported the initial assumption that the "personalized decisionism" of Carl Schmitt is extensible to both Salafism and the Muslim Brotherhood. However, Salafism accepts the established ruler and faithfully abides by the Saudi monarchy while the Muslim Brotherhood wants to replace the ruling power.

The two examined critical positions cannot be easily aligned with Kelsen's "pure theory of law." Husayn Muruwa contemplates material forces driving historical movements, and these movements require authority and generate legislation. Kelsen and Muruwa agree on the need for social consciousness.

Although Hasan Hanafi does not embrace a "pure theory of law," his phenomenological method is a flexible tool for implementing a system which integrates theory and action. In spite of the obvious differences, Hanafi's definition of the transcendent can be set in harmony with the transcendental logical presupposition of Kelsen.

NOTES

1. I wish to thank Brett Yardley, Marquette, for editing the text. The remaining errors are obviously my own.

2. Many of them are available online, for instance, https://www.noor-book.com/en/ebooks-Muhammad-Bin-Abdul-wahab-pdf Accessed July 2020.

3. It is considered by the author a *hadith hasan* "good," not as valuable as a *hadith sahiḥ* "sound" but the Cairene editors remark that it is just "weak," cf. their footnote no. 7.

4. Authentic, sound *hadith*, see Muslim: Book 20 Government: Hadith 4554: https://muflihun.com/muslim/20/4554 Accessed July 2020.

5. The Salafi movement that developed in Egypt in the nineteenth century has extended to many Islamic countries. Their adherents strive to emulate "the pious predecessors" as closely and in as many spheres of life as possible.

6. 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn 'Abd al-Khaliq was born 1939 in the province of the Manufiya in Egypt, he studied and graduated from the Islamic University of Medina, and has spent most of his life in Kuwait as a professor and researcher.

7. Extracted from his official website http://binothaimeen.net/content/publics Accessed July 2020.

8. In 1911–1912, Rashid Rida opened the Dar al-Da'wah wa-l-Irshad, a school to train teachers and missionaries, independently from al-Azhar but that lasted only a few years.

9. Accessible online https://www.almasryalyoum.com/

10. *Dhikrayat, 1935–2018*, Cairo: al-Jam'iyyah al-Falsafiyyah al-Misriyyah, 2018.

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- *Preparation and coordination of a research project* on "Teaching Overcrowded Classes: Organizational Problems, Pedagogical Challenges, and the Role of ICT; The Case of Ibn Zohr University"; this project was approved and funded by the scientific committee of the Ibn Zohr University.
- *Cofounder* and *Coordinator of the Master Program: Applied Linguistics and Language Studies*, at the Department of English Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Ibn Zohr University—Agadir/Morocco.

- *Elected Member* of the University Council and the Faculty council for three terms.
- *Cofounder* and *Vice-Director* of the *Laboratory of Values, Society and Development* (LVSD) situated at the Faculty of Humanities, Ibn Zohr University—Agadir/Morocco.
- *Cofounder* and *Vice-Director* of the *Research* Journal in Humanities issued by the *Laboratory of Values, Society and Development* (LVSD) situated at the Faculty of Humanities, Ibn Zohr University—Agadir/Morocco.

  Publications

- Mohamed Elghazi and Naima Omari, 2018 (on press): *Issues on Language and Society.*
- Mohamed Elghazi, 2018 (June): *Language and Current Issues, Issue 1: "Language and Education."* Proceedings of the international conference on *Language and Current Issues* organized by the Laboratory of Values, Society and Development (LVSD) on May 4–5, 2017.
- Mohamed Elghazi, 2017 (March): *Language Policy in the Arab World: Visions and Perspectives, (in Arabic).*
- Mohamed Elghazi, 2012: *Sociological and Educational Aspects of Language Contact in Morocco*, Study Day Proceedings organized by LCLP Research Group in collaboration with LVSD, June 28, 2012.

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profeta Muhammad ad oggi. Mondadori—Le Monnier Università, Milano-Firenze, 2018.

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