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STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL PLURALISM

Peter Lang

# Thinking Between Islam and the West

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The Thoughts of Seyyed Hossein Nasr,  
Bassam Tibi and Tariq Ramadan

Chi-chung (Andy) Yu

In this book, the author assesses the social vision of three western Muslim intellectuals, Seyyed H. Nasr, Bassam Tibi and Tariq Ramadan. He finds that the thoughts of Nasr and his students promote a kind of tradition-based society, which is in harmony with the Divine Law in Islam and a hierarchical structure of society. The thoughts of Tibi advocate the concept of Euro-Islam, which tries to rationalize Islam and renders it a personal religion in the private domain. Finally, the thoughts of Ramadan emphasize a communicative society, in which dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims on public affairs is crucial. The author tries to understand how these three social orders can complement each other. He compares and contrasts their ideas in order to show that modern Islamic thought is not monolithic but pluralistic, and that they present different social visions for Islam in the West. However, Muslims are often labelled as a minority group and so implicitly excluded from being part of the West: the thoughts of Muslim writers help reflect this problem. The author maintains that these Muslim intellectuals in the West should be fully recognized as western intellectuals.

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# **Thinking Between Islam and the West**

# Studies in the History of Religious and Political Pluralism

## Volume 8

Edited by Richard Bonney



PETER LANG

Oxford • Bern • Berlin • Bruxelles • Frankfurt am Main • New York • Wien

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RICHARD BONNEY

## Series Editor's Preface

### Three Western Muslim Thinkers on the Challenges of Modernity

Andy Yu's study of the thought of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Bassam Tibi and Tariq Ramadan is both original and timely. Here are three Muslims who live in the West and whose thought, to a greater or lesser extent, reflects the situation of Muslims in a minority position. This is a new context in which Muslim thinkers find themselves: almost all the great thinkers of previous generations, whether or not they sought to address challenges which Islam faced, reflected upon a situation in which Islam was the majority religion in the country concerned.

This book also addresses from a different perspective the much vaunted 'conflict of civilizations' between a supposedly unified 'Islamic civilization' and the West. In reality, given the varied responses of Muslim thinkers in the West, the idea of civilizational homogeneity is rendered illusory. The more influential clash of opinion is *within* civilizations, which makes a single, unified, approach unattainable. The differing responses to the Arab Spring are a case in point. A Saudi writer, Mshari al-Zaydi, writing in 2011, called the Arab Spring 'the Muslim Brotherhood Spring' and 'a political Islamist tsunami'. Addressing the issue of 'double speak', al-Zaydi asked 'what guarantee do we have that these religious fundamentalists will relinquish power once their failure is revealed, particularly as all the elements of power will be in their hands? Did this work out in Iran which has been ruled by Khomeneist disciples for over three decades? ... The struggle is between revolutionary Islamists who want to impose a repressive Shari'a state and

those Western useful idiots who help them against everyone else.<sup>1</sup> Rachid Ghannouchi, the leader of the Tunisian Islamist party Ennahda, claims: ‘we are conscious that the practices we adopt now, of consensus-building and power-sharing between parties and between Islamists and secularists, provide a model for the future democratic governance of the whole Arab world.’ Since the Islamist party Ennahda won only 41 per cent of members in the Constituent Assembly, it was obliged to share power.<sup>2</sup> Ghannouchi was thus making a virtue out of necessity by proclaiming consensus-building and power-sharing as the objectives of an Islamist party.

In *Thinking between Islam and the West: the Thoughts of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Bassam Tibi and Tariq Ramadan*, Andy Yu shows that shared sacredness (Nasr), shared secularity (Tibi), and a shared platform of communication (Ramadan) between Muslims and non-Muslims represent these thinkers’ intellectual contributions to our thinking about Islam in the West. Nasr argues for an Islamic return to the sacred, a kind of religious reformation, while Bassam Tibi also intends to reform Islam, but in the opposite direction. For Tibi, such reform should involve a return to the secular, for it is the politicization of Islam that is his chief concern. For Tibi, modernization, globalization and the universalization of norms and values will be harmonized through a specific rational and secular version of Islam.

In the past, Muslim modernists such as al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh welcomed the achievements of sciences, technology and modern institutions stemming from modernization but rejected the world-view they sprang from (i.e. cultural modernism). This means that modern institutions, including science and technology, are globalized but that the modern world-view underpinning these institutions is not universalized. This partial adoption is what Tibi calls ‘structural globalization and cultural fragmentation’

- 1 Barry Rubin, ‘A Muslim writer explains the “Muslim Brotherhood Spring”’ (16 Nov. 2011): <http://pjmedia.com/barryrubin/2011/11/16/a-saudi-writer-explains-the-%E2%80%9Cmuslim-brotherhood-spring%E2%80%9D/>
- 2 Rachid Ghannouchi, ‘A new Society beckons. Tunisia will be a beacon for the Arab world if we resist attempts to derail the democratic transition’, *Guardian* (29 October 2013): <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/oct/28/tunisians-ballots-not-bullets-secure-revolution>.

or, in a simpler term, 'semi-modernism'. The adoption of Islamic rationalism by so-called 'rational' Muslims will cause them to abandon the Islamist world-view accordingly. Ramadan argues that authenticity lies in the connection between being a European Muslim practising a European Islam, the particular geographical and cultural religion, and being a member of the universal *umma*. What Ramadan implicitly tries to do is to play down the influence of specific Muslim communal-cultural ways of life (e.g. Algerian, Egyptian, Indian, Pakistani) by arguing for a universal Islamic way of life; as a result, the traditions and cultures of individual Muslims are explicitly excluded in his approach, which is at variance with the observed reality in European cities.

Should Muslims follow divine law or human law? Should they be loyal to the *umma* or to the state in which they are the citizens? These are the religious mental stumbling blocks that may impede Muslim citizens from actively engaging in society or, worse, may mean that they are radicalized by Islamists who would segregate potential converts from their non-Muslim fellows. Muslims are a minority: they may therefore be the victims, the neglected or even the oppressed communities in Western society. The concept of being part of a minority introduces questions such as coexistence, pluralism, assimilation and persecution. For Ramadan, Muslims have no right to breach state laws unilaterally, and they cannot justify violent or radical actions simply because there are persecuted Muslims in the state or in Muslim countries elsewhere. Their actions in helping persecuted Muslims at home or abroad must be bound by the laws of the state.

Many Muslims have little or no 'predicament with modernity'; but others, of a more conservative viewpoint, certainly do. It used to be thought that these were purely internal discussions within the Islamic world, which had no bearing on the host communities in Europe. The increase in the number of Muslim immigrants in the last twenty years, however, has demonstrated that this is not, and cannot be true: what the Muslim minority thinks, whether it is predominantly of a conservative or mainstream viewpoint, has a considerable bearing on how it is regarded by the rest of the population. In addition, as Andy Yu argues forcibly, the three writers discussed here should be regarded not just as Muslim authors but as Western authors too.

This leads us to the question of authenticity, both within the Islamic tradition and in the world today. Tibi quotes approvingly the viewpoint of the recently deceased Moroccan Professor of Philosophy, Mohammed al-Jabri, who addressed the ‘struggle for reason and rationality’ in Islamic history and argued that ‘the survival of our philosophical tradition ... can only be Averroist ... the Averroist spirit is adaptable to our era, because it agrees with it on more than one point: rationalism, realism, axiomatic method and critical approach.’<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, Tibi sees this heritage as of critical importance, because it points to a ‘virtual separation of religion and politics.’<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the Islamist position of linking the two is akin to a ‘new variety of *jihad* fought against rationality.’<sup>5</sup> The fight against western knowledge is an essential part of the *jihad* against unbelief (*kufr*). The Islamist strategy is to combine the ‘Islamization of knowledge’ with the ‘shari’atization of law’ in a fundamentalist project to de-Westernize the Islamic world and indeed the world at large.

Bassam Tibi questions both aspects of the Islamist strategy. Advances in knowledge result from cross-cultural and inter-religious fertilization, such as in the period of greatness of Islamic civilization. This, Tibi asserts, is the essence of the intellectual heritage of the whole of humanity. What Tibi calls the ‘Islami[st] dream of semi-modernity’ – the rejection of rational knowledge while adopting modernity’s techno-scientific accomplishments – is dismissed as an unrealistic splitting of modernity into two unrelated components.<sup>6</sup>

3 Mohammed al-Jabri, *Arab Islamic Philosophy* (University of Texas Press: 1999), 124, 128, quoted at Tibi, *Islam’s Predicament*, 52 and *Islamism and Islam*, 236. In contrast, Tariq Ramadan, who is criticized by Tibi, argues that Averroës ‘is mentioned obsessively while several dozen scientists, thinkers, philosophers, and artists are neglected although they not only lived in Europe but deeply influenced European mind-sets as well as scientific, philosophical and even legal and political practices’. Tariq Ramadan, *What I believe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 81.

4 Tibi, *Islam’s Predicament*, 100.

5 Ibid., 79.

6 Ibid., 75.

Similarly, the idea that the *shari'a* is absolute is dismissed by Tibi, since 'it stands in antithesis to the idea of the project of modernity, according to which all knowledge is revisable.'<sup>7</sup> 'The core issue today,' he argues, 'is no longer the earlier, anti-colonial defensive-cultural ideology (*jihad* as a response to the imperialism of the West),<sup>8</sup> but rather the offensive claim of a remaking of the world in accordance with divine precepts based on Islamic law.'<sup>9</sup>

The Islamists' 'politicization of *shari'a* (civil law) and its advancement to the status of a constitutional law (*dustur*) results in a totalitarian state,' Tibi asserts.<sup>10</sup> It 'legitimizes totalitarian rule in the name of religion.'<sup>11</sup> In his view, 'there can be no democratic, *shari'a*-based rule of law,'<sup>12</sup> while '*shari'a* and democracy are incompatible.'<sup>13</sup>

Tibi goes on to infer that 'there is a lack of religious pluralism in Islam, which claims superiority for itself' and reduces non-Muslim monotheists to an inferior status of *dhimmitude*.<sup>14</sup> The notions of the 'house of war' or the 'house of unbelievers' (*dar al-harb*, or *dar-al-kuffar*) – under which the non-Muslim 'other' is an enemy to be subdued by *jihad* – are 'offensive and aggressive and they should be abandoned by Muslims altogether.'<sup>15</sup> The apostasy (*riddah*) doctrine 'clearly indicates [a] lack of freedom of faith in Islam, because it forbids conversion, under penalty,' the penal code of *hudud*.<sup>16</sup> *Shari'a* allows 'great room for arbitrary law making in the guise of an interpretation of God's revelation'. Moreover, whereas 'a secular legal rule can be altered by any parliament in a legislative act ... sacral law cannot be changed'.

7 Ibid., 85.

8 Richard Bonney, *Jihad from Qur'an to Bin Laden* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 172–95.

9 Tibi, *Islam's Predicament*, 98.

10 Ibid., 104.

11 Ibid., 107.

12 Ibid., 102.

13 Ibid., 97.

14 Ibid., 105. Bonney, *Jihad from Qur'an to Bin Laden*, 83–6.

15 Tibi, *Islam's Predicament*, 236.

16 Ibid., 105, 110. Bonney, *Jihad from Qur'an to Bin Laden*, 207.

The Muslim Brothers are a totalitarian movement, Tibi contends;<sup>17</sup> they have adopted the Shi'i concept of dissimulation (*taqiyya*,<sup>18</sup> which the Brothers call *ihām*) to act as cover for their activities. Whereas Tariq Ramadan described the coup against President Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood on 30 June 2013 as orchestrated by a US-Zionist conspiracy,<sup>19</sup> Tibi calls such a view 'Islamized antisemitism.'<sup>20</sup> 'Many Western experts fail to grasp this new *taqiyya* and therefore take the pro-democracy pronouncements of Islamists at face value, without noticing the act of deception that is involved,' he pronounces.<sup>21</sup>

'Without doubt,' Tibi contends, 'the elevation of *jihad* in a new interpretation of *jihad* as jihadism (i.e. terrorism) is an accomplishment of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers.' Tibi sees al-Banna, and particularly Qutb, with his concept of '*jihad* as a permanent Islamic world revolution,'<sup>22</sup> as the progenitors of violent jihadism. Tibi argues that 'the Islamist attempt to impose [a] monolithic *shari'a* in the form of a rigid code that will be implemented as an integral system has no basis in history. The claim that such a *shari'a* existed in the past is the epitome of an invented tradition.'<sup>23</sup>

17 In an interview given on 14 January 2012, he stated: 'I see the Muslim Brotherhood as a totalitarian movement, and not as a democratic movement. The Muslim Brotherhood is organized on the basis of ten levels of membership. Starting out in the movement only earns one the status of a "sympathizer". To reach the highest levels requires 5–6 years. This time is used to test your absolute loyalty to the movement.' <http://gatesofvienna.blogspot.co.uk/2012/01/muslim-brotherhood-is-totalitarian.html>

18 Bonney, *Jihad from Qur'an to Bin Laden*, 227–8, 232.

19 <http://counterjihadreport.com/2013/07/10/tariq-ramadan-says-morsi-overthrown-by-us-zionist-conspiracy/>

20 This view claims that a Jewish conspiracy against Islam has existed since 622; that Jews want to rule the world and thus deprive Islam of its own claim to rule the world; that Jews employ a variety of 'secret' forces (such as Freemasonry) to further their goal of world domination, the chief of these being Zionism; that since the Crusades, Jews have used Christians as their proxies; and that America is today ruled by Jews. Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, 90. <http://www.globalmbwatch.com/2013/07/08/egyptian-muslim-brotherhood-says-new-president-is-secretly-jewish/>

21 Tibi, *Islam's Predicament*, 279.

22 *Ibid.*, 146, 162.

23 *Ibid.*, 160.

'The Islamization of law', he contends, 'violates the rights of non-Muslims, or women, or intellectuals, of Sunnis in Shi'ite areas and Shi'a in Sunni areas, of Muslim followers of other sects such as Baha'i or Ahmadiyya – and ultimately of everyone outside the ruling elite.'<sup>24</sup>

Where Andy Yu is cautious is in relation to the heated debate between two of his three Western Muslim authors: Tibi is dismissive of Tariq Ramadan's espousal of a version of 'Euro-Islam' and his credentials as a Muslim reformer. Al-Afghani (1838/9–1896) and Hassan al-Banna (1906–49), Ramadan's own grandfather, presented radically different directions in Islam although Ramadan tries to suggest linkages between them.<sup>25</sup> In interview with Alain Gresh, Tariq Ramadan stated in 2000: 'I have studied Hassan al-Banna's ideas with great care and there is nothing in this heritage that I reject.' Since he mentioned specifically al-Banna's views on 'law, politics, society and pluralism' this acceptance must have included his espousal of *jihad*.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, when Ramadan presents Orthodox Islam as Euro-Islam, for Bassam Tibi it must 'presumably [be] with the intent to deceive'.<sup>27</sup> Europe cannot be called *Dar al-Shahada*, as Ramadan calls it, without effectively regarding it as part of the House of Islam (*Dar al-Islam*)

24 Ibid., 175.

25 Ibid., 51 n. 16. Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, 39. Tariq Ramadan's *Aux sources du Renouveau Musulman. De al-Afghani à Hasan al-Banna* (Paris: Bayard, 1998), linked the two as 'reformers' in its title. Cf. Ramadan, *What I believe*, 19: '... my lineage was attacked. Being the grandson of the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, I was dangerous by definition and I must not be listened to. Islam, people said and still repeat, allows dissimulation (*taqiyyah*) and so I practised it in the extreme ...' For al-Banna's views on *jihad*: Bonney, *Jihad from Qur'an to bin Laden*, 211–15.

26 Tariq Ramadan and Alain Gresh, *L'Islam en questions* (Actes Sud, 2000). Also Ibn Warraq, 'The Pious Fraud. Tariq Ramadan, Islamist and Equivocator' (29 Feb. 2008): <http://www.city-journal.org/2008/bc0229iw.html>

27 Ramadan argues that 'there exists a strictly religious debate, couched in the language of Islamic jurisprudence and the fundamentals of faith, over the notion of moderation. If this is grasped – as it must be – it becomes possible to approach the more relevant political questions with far less prejudice and naivety. We should never forget that religious moderation, however it is defined, is perfectly compatible with a radical, non-violent, democratic political stance that rejects all forms of domination, exploitation and oppression.' Ramadan, 'Good Muslim, Bad Muslim',

and thus an expansion of the Islamic world.<sup>28</sup> True Euro-Islam ‘seeks to make Islam part of Europe and share its identity, and not the other way round.’<sup>29</sup>

Tibi argues that ‘Islam is changeable, not essentialist’ and that Muslim jurists need an ‘Islamic Reformation’ to come to terms with cultural modernity. Here he could reinforce his argument by reference to what Iqbal called the ‘principle of movement in the structure of Islam,’<sup>30</sup> or *ijtihad*, the power of independent reasoning.<sup>31</sup> It was this, Iqbal contended, that made change possible in Turkey at the time of the reforms of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.<sup>32</sup> Tariq Ramadan does discuss *ijtihad* in some detail, but unfortunately in the

*New Statesman* (12 Feb. 2010): <http://www.newstatesman.com/religion/2010/02/muslim-religious-moderation>

- 28 Cf. Ramadan, *What I believe*, 51: ‘I have suggested the concept of “abode of testimony” (*dar ash-shabadah*), which expresses the idea that Muslims, like all people of faith and convictions, should strive to be “witnesses” of their messages and principles through their presence and by behaving consistently with those principles.’ He continues (Ibid., 52): ‘the whole world has become a space, an abode, of testimony. The witness is no longer a stranger in the other’s world, neither is he linked to the other by a contract: he is a home, among his own kind, and he simply tries to be consistent with his beliefs and in harmony with the people with whom he lives and builds his future.’ Cf. Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, 41: ‘the term (*dar al-shabadah*) indicates an Islamic expansionism, and it envisions a mapping of Europe into the Islamist project.’
- 29 Tibi, ‘Europeanisation, not Islamisation. Bassam Tibi argues for Euro-Islam as a bridge between civilizations’ (22 March 2007): <http://www.signandsight.com/features/1258.html>. Cf. Ramadan, *To be a European Muslim. A Study of Islamic Sources in the European Context* (Markfield: the Islamic Foundation, 1999), 163: ‘... in the context of a philosophical debate, an individual is a *Muslim of British or French or Belgian nationality* ... If the discussion is carried out on the social and political level, then this individual is *British, French or Belgian and of Muslim faith* ... As a matter of faith, the dispute over a terminological choice between “a French Muslim” or “a Muslim Frenchman” is actually pointless.’
- 30 Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Based on lectures delivered in the 1920s, then published in 1930, this has been republished recently with a new introduction by Javed Majeed (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 117.
- 31 ‘Progressive Muslims,’ Tibi writes, ‘also allow the tradition of *ijtihad* (free reasoning) as a source of lawmaking.’ Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, 174.
- 32 Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 121.

analysis of the prospects for a contemporary *ijtihad*, he quotes the views of the Islamist Yusuf al-Qaradawi.<sup>33</sup> Qaradawi is denounced by Tibi as one of guardians of Hassan al-Banna's heritage and as the man who calls *shari'a* not just a code of morality revealed in the Qur'an but a 'law' legislated by Allah and therefore binding on all Muslims. He also considers that dissidents have no place but are 'disbelievers ... wrongdoers and truly wicked'.<sup>34</sup> There is therefore a danger at present that the prospects for a contemporary *ijtihad*, or 'Islamic Reformation' have been hijacked by the hardline Islamists, who wish to interpret it in their own terms.

The danger is that Tibi requires Muslims in Europe to make more concessions, and to make them more rapidly, than they feel capable of, with the result that there is mass rejection of his approach rather than constructive dialogue. Commenting on Bassam Tibi's work, Michael Wolffsohn argues that 'Enlightened Islam is a necessity for the survival of Western democracy. It would form a new polity, society, and theology. Never has Islam as a minority developed theological and political tools to be just part and partner of a non-Muslim majority instead of ruling it. Enlightened Islam would be an Islamic revolution – something totally new.' A 'focus on "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness" of the Islamic individual and soul rather than on death, repression, and unhappiness of Islamic and non-Islamic collectives ... Dichotomies such as black or white, friend or foe, believer or non-believer, and right religion or wrong religion, must be eradicated.'<sup>35</sup>

Yes, we may agree: this would be a fine and worthy outcome. The danger, however, is that the debate with conservative Muslims never begins. Instead, the less demanding self-proclaimed 'reformer', Tariq Ramadan, is likely to be more successful in convincing Muslims of change along the lines he suggests – not necessarily because he is right; not necessarily because he advocates dialogue (though he does: a difference with Tibi that is correctly

33 Ramadan, *To be a European Muslim*, 93–9.

34 Tibi, *The Shari'a State*, 7, 81. Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, 43, where he calls Qaradawi 'the spiritual heir of Qutb'. Qaradawi presided at the funeral of Ramadan's father.

35 Michael Wolffsohn, 'Tibi's Euro-Islam', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 11 (2011), 323.

stressed by Andy Yu); but simply because he deploys his arguments in traditionalist terminology that they can understand.<sup>36</sup>

In his conclusion, Andy Yu observes: ‘it is not unusual to find a basic introduction to the thought of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) or Ibn Rushd (Averroes) as examples of Islamic philosophy in the Middle Ages. To a certain extent, they are part of the history of Western philosophy. In my view, contemporary Muslim thinkers should be presented as part of the modern history of both Western philosophy and Western religious thought in the same way. I believe ... that this reflects, in fact, another hidden prejudice (or unconscious ideology) of academics (and book publishers) regarding Western Muslim thinkers, one which views them as the “Other” of the West *even though they actually are Western thinkers*.’ By placing Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Bassam Tibi and Tariq Ramadan each within their intellectual background and inherited worldview, he succeeds admirably in demonstrating his case.

36 ‘Those of us who consider ourselves reformists are often attacked in internal Muslim debates for having “gone out of Islam” in our search for context and new understandings of religious texts. In the west, as well as in Asia and Africa, including in some Muslim-majority countries, I have repeatedly been called a *kafir* (disbeliever), a *murtad* (apostate) or an impostor seeking to adulterate Islam and destroy it from within. This happens to a large number of Muslim reformists – who, paradoxically, are at the same time considered “fundamentalist” and “extremist” within some right-wing circles in the west. More troubling, perhaps, and making outside categorisation even more hazardous, is the tendency for some reformist, rationalist or mystic groups to develop, internally, the same dogmatic attitude towards their Muslim co-religionists, casting doubt on their legitimacy in the most categorical and exclusivist fashion. Moderation is multidimensional, and is not expressed only with reference to the west or to “non-Muslims”’ Ramadan, ‘Good Muslim, Bad Muslim’, *New Statesman* (12 Feb. 2010): <http://www.newstatesman.com/religion/2010/02/muslim-religious-moderation>

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儒家思想重視家庭，《論語·里仁》有云：「父母在，不遠遊，遊必有方。」父母在堂，做兒子應該侍候在旁，但我卻留英約五年之久，雖說是有方，但心裡還是感到難過！說實話，父母不懂英語，更非伊斯蘭教徒，這本書對他們來說，並沒有什麼意義。父親年青時受過文革前三反、五反的逼迫，逃難到香港定居，自幼就不信神；母親從商，做事多以成本掛帥，利益為先。從事宗教研究對於他們來說，相信是毫無價值或難以餬口的事業吧！但他們對我的支持卻是毫無保留。沒有他們，我根本沒有條件在英國修讀博士課程，更不用說完成此書！他們沒有考慮兒子的工作是否有市場價值，也沒有理會親戚、朋友或屬下的閒言閒語，單純以愛子的心來支持我的理想。但願他們身體健康，長命百歲，好讓我能回饋他們的愛！這裡我要特別多謝三姨丈郭鴻鈞博士及三姨郭玉英女士，母親與他們共事多年，在公在私，他們都關顧著母親，甚至我們一家。最後還要多謝哥哥余冠峰先生，我在英國多年，他則留在父母身旁，代我服侍雙親，付出了雙倍的孝道。這本書是我送給他們的禮物。

多謝其他香港朋友，對我的關心及支持，心裡無限感激！他/她們包括中學同學思榮和兆恩，保羅團的錦明、彩儀、智生、雪儀、珮璇、迎德、家聰、子健、敏潔、喜文、健偉、淑芳、玉蘭、穎思、Rebecca 和 Susan 等等。理大團契的靜儀、阿庭、阿蔡、Chris、Jenny、兆偉、志輝、馬草、啟賢、Rachel、Grace 和家寶及已返天家的GCF幹事陳榆。

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# Introduction

## Thinking Western Muslims as Westerners

Phrases such as ‘American Muslim’, ‘European Muslim’ or ‘Islam in the West’ bring to mind two questions. One is the relationship between Islam and modernism, and the other is the current situation of Muslim communities in the West, especially Western Europe and North America.<sup>1</sup> These two questions also inspire us to ponder whether we can consider Muslims in the West as Westerners; and also, under what conditions can we call them Western Muslims. Modernism itself is an idea which has been discussed repeatedly. For some scholars, the spreading of modernism promotes a progressive, rational and free society. However, not every Western intellectual thinks in this way. Religion and tradition are not always seen as inferior or backward, nor as obstacles to progress, rationality and freedom in the modern world. The relationship between religion and modernism is, in fact, multiple and complicated. There is a sizeable Muslim population which has settled permanently in the West, and we recognize that its relationship with Western modernism stimulates questions which force us to rethink modernism in a new way: What is the social vision of Muslims in the West? How do Muslims and non-Muslims live together without fear and anxiety? What is the (Western) Muslim intellectual response to modernism? This book addresses these questions.

1 Meanings of ‘the West’ are multiple. In this book, I will use the term geographically, i.e. as referring mainly to America and the European states or societies. Alternatively, it can be understood as referring to Muslims in a minority context, in the sense of Muslims being in a numerical minority not an ideological minority (i.e. not oppressed by the majority).

## Aims, Purpose and Nature of the Study

The aims of this study are twofold. First, it scrutinizes the intellectual approaches or conceptual frameworks adopted in response to modernism by three prominent Muslim thinkers in the West, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Bassam Tibi (both of whom currently live in the USA), and Tariq Said Ramadan (who currently lives in the UK). The focus, then, is broad rather than on their opinions on individual cases involving differences between Islam and the West. Second, on the basis of their respective academic interests, the study delineates their social vision for Muslims in the West and demonstrates their intellectual contributions in identifying and resolving the problems of modernism. It also compares and contrasts their approaches and so attempts to compare and contrast their thoughts.

To put it simply, what I intend to do is to reconstruct the approaches of Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan towards modernism, and then explore their intellectual contribution, and the relevance of Muslim thought in contemporary Western society. My motive for addressing this topic is relatively simple. Since 9/11, the image of Muslims and the faith of Islam have been increasingly negative or politicized in the Western media and academic publications. Muslim thought is made to appear purely destructive with regard to the modern world and irrelevant to modern intellectuals. Therefore, instead of negative or political criticisms of Islam, I want to articulate a different Muslim voice in response to modernism in order to see whether it is possible to have a constructive relationship between Islam and modernism, and also between Muslims and Western societies. For myself, studying Islam is also an opportunity to introduce Islamic studies to Hong Kong universities, which are at present dominated by studies of Christianity and Chinese religions. Educated and raised in this capitalist society – an international financial centre which is one of the most secular cities in the world – I am attracted by this religio-political force, which can sometimes appear as a resurgence of the Islamic voice *against* the modern world. However, this is only the beginning of my understanding. The more I study the relationship of Islam with the modern world, the

more I question the ontological division between Islam and modernism, or the placing of them in opposition to each other. The desire to question this division is furthered by studying these three Muslim thinkers together, and this leads to a deeper level of analysis as well as providing a direction for further investigation in this area.

## Focus and Scope of the Study

It is no doubt too ambitious to examine comprehensively the relationship between Islam and modernism in one book. Instead, the focus will be on the modes of thought of Seyyed H. Nasr, Bassam Tibi and Tariq Ramadan in response to modernism and on articulating some possible relationships between them. Prior to any detailed study, initial selection of the field of investigation is somewhat intuitive in nature since there are many possible subjects available for research. My choice of Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan arises for four main reasons. First, the area of their ideas on which I am concentrating is that of Muslims living in the West rather than in Middle Eastern countries (i.e. I have concern for the Muslim minority context). Second, all of them are highly educated in Western universities and erudite in Western thought and philosophy. Their ideas in response to modernism are profound and intellectually grounded, not just simple-minded opinions. Third, Nasr, born in 1933, Tibi, born in 1944, and Ramadan, born in 1962, represent the response to modernism of three different Muslim generations. Finally, no comparative study between the three thinkers has been undertaken before. After an in-depth study of their works, I discovered that although they are living in the West and concerned with modernism, their responses to modernism are totally different. Secular or politicized Islam in contemporary Western societies cannot completely explain away the differences of Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan in their approaches, since the three of them experience a similar situation. There is a system of thought or world-view behind each

of these three scholars, which leads them to adopt different approaches in response to modernism. This further reinforces my interest in studying their thoughts.

Research on Nasr and Tibi involves careful and analytical study of their many academic works. Regarding the thought of Nasr, I will also examine some works of his students. Nasr and Tibi are far more prolific writers than Ramadan. Compared with Nasr and Tibi, Ramadan is more of a public figure; although all three are professors at universities, the image of Nasr and Tibi is more 'academic' than that of Ramadan. Moreover, Ramadan is a very controversial figure. Many people accuse him of double-speak, saying one thing to one party and its opposite to another. He denies this charge and argues that it is, in fact, a distortion of what he says. In fact, most of the so-called secondary sources about Ramadan are accusations and defences written by journalists and writers. This book does not intend to examine his personal life or investigate these accusations. Our focus is on his conceptual framework as expressed in his written works; whether his thought corresponds to what he represents in public and how he conducts his personal life are not relevant to this study. Therefore, the focus is on considering him (together with Nasr and Tibi) as an intellectual in the West and on analysing his thought in comparison with others'. In view of this, investigation of Ramadan will focus on his written works, supplemented with his essays and speeches (in English) available on his official websites. Moreover, although Nasr is Iranian, Tibi Syrian and Ramadan Egyptian by origin, their most important works relating to this topic were written or have been translated into English; therefore, in this book, their works in English will be the primary sources.

To the study of the Muslim situation in the West, my approach is also selective rather than comprehensive, since I focus mainly on the concept of the 'Muslim minority', and the nature of this study is also not empirical research but a philosophical study of the social vision proposed by Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan. Therefore, research on Muslim lifestyles or standards of living, topics such as population, education, employment, housing and other welfare benefits or regional situations within a country, will not be included in this book.

## Literature Review

In this section, our literature review only focuses on the research on Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan, and the Muslim responses to modernism. The reviews of the concept of modernism, the concept of the authenticity of Islam, and the works of Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan, appear in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 respectively. As regards Nasr, there are two substantial and important collections of articles about his thought. The first is *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, published in 2001. It contains 29 articles that address different aspects of Nasr's thought and influence, including Islamic theology and philosophy, Sufism, the *philosophia perennis*, and science and human knowledge. In this volume, there is only one essay, written by Lucian Stone Jr, which tries to force Nasr to express his opinion on the issue of political authority in Iranian society or, more broadly, the political authority of Muslim society. But at that time, Nasr refused to become embroiled in the discussion.<sup>2</sup> Two years later, another collection, entitled *Beacon of Knowledge: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, was published in celebration of Nasr's life and works by his students and by other leading academics. Similar to the first collection, it contains 35 articles which cover various aspects of Nasr's academic and personal interests, but in comparison with the first study it is less critical and focuses more on praising Nasr and lauding his achievements. In this volume, there are five articles expressing, directly or indirectly, the political and economic concerns of Nasr's thought. One of them, written by Waleed El-Ansary, is a traditionalist critique of Western economic theory.<sup>3</sup> In this article, we can clearly see the thought of Nasr appropriated to the economic domain. To a degree, we can say that after 9/11, traditionalists including Nasr have shifted their concern from the

- 2 L. W. Stone Jr, 'Perennial Philosophy Now: The Case of Wilayat-i Faqih', in L. E. Hahn, R. L. Auxier and L. W. Stone Jr., eds, *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2001), 813–30.
- 3 W. El-Ansary, 'Islamic Economics and the Science of Nature: The Contribution of Seyyed Hossein Nasr', in Mohammad H. Faghfoory, ed., *Beacon of Knowledge: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2003), 491–520.

principles of or reality in Heaven to social and political issues on Earth, but research on their new approach is as yet unavailable in the public domain.

There are three important studies concerning the thought of Nasr. The first is *Islamization of Science: Four Muslim Positions Developing an Islamic Modernity*, written by Leif Stenberg, which addresses the issue of modern sciences. It is a comparative study of four Muslim intellectuals – Ziauddin Sardar, Nasr, Ismail al-Faruqi and Maurice Bucaille – and their ideas of relationship between Islam and science. In the section on Nasr, Stenberg offers a detailed explication and criticism (through other Muslim intellectuals) of his idea of Sacred Science. The second study is *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy: The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, by Adnan Aslan. It compares and contrasts the approach of religious pluralism as proposed by John Hick, a Christian theologian, with that of Nasr and his concept of universal religion or Ultimate Reality, which is shared by all traditional religions. Aslan himself is more inclined to the position of Nasr. The final study is *Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Vision of Traditional Islam: Reformulation and Revival*, by Richard M. Smith. This is an unpublished Master's thesis submitted at the University of Exeter. It explicates clearly Nasr's concept and vision of traditional Islam as being the essential reviver of Islam in the modern world, but it does not examine the political and social dimension of traditional Islam. From the above three studies, we can see that there is still a noticeable research gap regarding the social implication of Nasr's thought. In Chapter 2, I will explore this area on the basis of the achievement of the above pieces of research and collections of articles.

In the case of Tibi and Ramadan, my research will be easier since their thoughts directly respond to the relationships between Islam and modernism in the public sphere and we can simply study their own writings in order to reconstruct their thought within their own conceptual frameworks. As regards Tibi, his way of thinking about Islam and Islamism is clear and central as a response of Islam towards modernism. He repeatedly constructs and presents this idea consistently in his different books. Although he has written many articles and books in German, he himself has provided a good articulation of his approach in his ten books in English, which provide the basis for Chapter 3. In addition, compared with Ramadan, Tibi is not

as controversial or as sought-after by the media. His critics usually come from within academic circles, and he usually responds to their critiques in his books. In the case of Ramadan, there are two main approaches to discussing his thought. As was mentioned above, the first is concerned with whether he is a radical Islamist or a moderate Muslim. Critics taking this approach discuss whether what he says is in line with other well-known fundamentalists, using his works to prove or disprove this.<sup>4</sup> Currently, all substantial studies of Ramadan in book form fall into this category and they are written mainly in French or German.<sup>5</sup> To his critics, Ramadan is simply a radical Islamist or fundamentalist and, no matter what he says, his ideas are ultimately reduced to encouraging the Islamization of Europe. The critics' primary interest is in attacking Ramadan's thought, which is claimed to be either radical or contradictory. These books are simply attacks on or defences of Ramadan's personality and identity, rather than serious studies of his thought. Another approach is to study Ramadan as a social

- 4 This approach is usually adopted by journalists and professional writers. For supporters of Ramadan, see Paul Donnelly, 'Tariq Ramadan: The Muslim Martin Luther?', *Salon.com*, <[http://archive.salon.com/people/feature/2002/02/15/ramadan/index\\_np.html](http://archive.salon.com/people/feature/2002/02/15/ramadan/index_np.html)> accessed 25 Sept 2012. For opponents of Ramadan, see Paul Berman, 'The Islamist, the Journalist, and the Defense of Liberalism: Who's Afraid of Tariq Ramadan?', *The New Republic*, <<http://www.tnr.com/doc.mhtml?i=20070604&s=bermano60407>> accessed 13 July 2007.
- 5 For example: E. Ayoub, *Tariq Ramadan ou la tentation de Dieu* [Tariq Ramadan or the Temptation of God] (Paris: JML, 2004); L. Favrot, *Tariq Ramadan dévoilé* [Tariq Ramadan Unveiled] (Paris: Lyon Mag, 2004); C. Fourest, *Frère Tariq: Discours, Stratégie et Méthode de Tariq Ramadan* [Brother Tariq: The Doublespeak of Tariq Ramadan] (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 2004); J. Léger, *Tartuffe fait Ramadan* [Ramadan is a Religious Hypocrite] (Paris: Denoël, 2004); P. Landau, *Le sabre et le Coran: Tariq Ramadan et les Frères musulmans à la conquête de l'Europe* [The Sword and the Koran: Tariq Ramadan and the Muslim Brotherhood Conquering Europe] (Paris: Editions du Rocher, 2005); A. Zemouri, *Faut-il faire Tariq Ramadan?* [Is It Necessary to Silence Tariq Ramadan?] (Paris: L'Archipel, 2005); R. Ghadban, *Tariq Ramadan und die Islamisierung Europas* [Tariq Ramadan and the Islamization of Europe] (Berlin: Schiler Verlag, 2006); I. Hamel, *La Vérité sur Tariq Ramadan: sa Famille, ses Réseaux, sa Stratégie* [The Truth about Tariq Ramadan: His Family, Its networks, Its Strategy] (Paris: Favre Sa, 2007).

phenomenon in relation to the religious authority of traditional Islamic preachers and Islam in the modern world.<sup>6</sup> Both of these approaches, however explicitly or implicitly, neglect to study his thought systematically, as if it is not worth doing so. In the current scholarship, I can identify only limited sources concerning research on his thought, including three articles, criticisms made by Tibi, and one book.<sup>7</sup> All of these merely discuss or repeat his thought without further elaboration, leaving a more complete study of Ramadan still to be written. In Chapter 4, I will fully examine his thought on the basis of his works. In what follows, I review some Muslim responses to modernism.

El-Affendi indicates that '[r]eflections about the confrontation between Islam and modernity have dominated Muslim thinking for nearly two centuries'.<sup>8</sup> There is no doubt that there is a long history concerning the relationship between Islam and modernism, but it is not necessary to

- 6 K. Minhsen-Finan, 'Tariq Ramadan: Voice of a New Religiousness', in W. Shadid and S. van Koningsveld, eds, *Intercultural Relations and Religious Authorities: Muslims in the European Union* (Leuven and Dudley, MA.: Peeters, 2002), 208–14 and K. Minhsen-Finan, 'Promoting a Faith-based Citizenship: The Case of Tariq Ramadan', in R. Leveau, K. Mohsen-Finan and C. W. De Wenden, eds, *New European Identity and Citizenship* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 133–9.
- 7 J. Nielsen, 'New Centres and Peripheries in European Islam?', in B. A. Roberson, ed., *Shaping the Current Islamic Reformation* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2003), 69–76; P. Mandaville, 'Sufis and Salafis: The Political Discourse of Transnational Islam', in Robert W. Hefner, ed., *Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 318–20; Erkan Toguslu, 'European Public Sphere, Islam and Islamic Authenticity: Tariq Ramadan and Fethullah Gülen', in Paul Weller and Ihsan Yilmaz, eds, *European Muslims: Civility and Public Life: Perspectives on and from the Gülen Movement* (London and New York: Continuum, 2012). For Tibi, see Ch. 5. The only book that examines his ideas is Gregory Baum, *The Theology of Tariq Ramadan: A Catholic Perspective* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009). To some extent, Baum repeats what Ramadan says without constructing his thought in a methodological way, as in this study.
- 8 A. El-Affendi, ed., *Rethinking Islam and Modernity: Essays in Honour of Fathi Osman* (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 2001), ix.

assert that it has always been one of 'confrontation'. Confrontation usually happens when either Islam or modernism is under threat from the other. However, is confrontation always negative? Can we have a constructive confrontation? Islamic scholars have different responses. For Al-Azmeh, modernism is a universal reality and there is no Islamic modernism as such but only a different degree of modernization in different Muslim countries.<sup>9</sup> Islam in the West, therefore, must also be rationalized and secularized completely, as Tibi proposes for what he calls Europeanizing Islam.<sup>10</sup> But the problem is: what kind of Europeanization? Unlike the geographical usage of the term 'Europe', Tibi uses it ideologically. For him, Europeanization mainly refers to rationalization. In view of this, we can say that Tibi, and also Al-Azmeh, essentialize a particular model of modernism (cultural modernism in Tibi's terms) and force Islam to be conflated with it. Moreover, for them, Islam is simply a personal morality or spirituality, and should be separated from the public domain, or what Tibi calls the privatization of Islam.

On the other hand, instead of the privatization of Islam, Soroush proposes a rational way to connect Islam and modernism, or what he calls religious democracy. For him, democracy can have secular and religious versions and Islam also has many different interpretations. Muslims therefore have an obligation to identify what is essential and true and what is important in contemporary socio-historical situations, from both Islamic and modern secular perspectives. We can say that the thought of Soroush reinterprets both Islamic discourses and concepts of modernism in order

9 Al-Azmeh does not believe in the idea of multiple modernities, i.e. that different cultures or subcultures can produce their own version of modernity, instead of following the same pattern worldwide. For him, the meaning of 'modernities' refers only to the different degrees of modernization in different countries. A. Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities* (London: Verso, 1996), 2nd edn, 41–58.

10 Bassam Tibi, 'Europeanizing Islam or the Islamization of Europe: Political Democracy vs. Cultural Difference', in Timothy A. Byrnes and Peter J. Katzenstein, eds, *Religion in an Expanding Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 204–24.

to connect them in harmony.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Arkoun goes further, arguing that Muslim intellectuals should explore the areas he calls the ‘unthought’ or ‘unthinkable’ in Islamic thought in order to hear the heterodox and minority voices. This exploration of ‘unthought’ is undertaken through a critique of various kinds of modern secular knowledge such as anthropological, historical, modern linguistic and philosophical studies.<sup>12</sup>

Broadly speaking, the above four Muslim intellectuals represent two different ideas of Islam in the West: the privatization of Islam, and Islam’s reconciliation with modernism. However, they do not emphasize the constructive nature of the confrontation of Islam with modernism. They implicitly accept that confrontation should be corrected in various degrees. (The thought of Nasr, in fact, articulates the necessity for confrontation between Islam/religion and modernism/secularism. We can say that it goes beyond the privatization–reconciliation approach when compared with the position of modern Muslim intellectuals; we will see subsequently how Nasr explicates this necessity for confrontation in modern society.) The thought of Tibi, as mentioned above, represents the secularization and privatization of Islam in the public sphere, and Ramadan’s idea of a European Islam represents an attempted reconciliation of Islam with modernism, with the focus on the revival of rational and secular tradition in Islamic terminology. It may be argued that each thinker sees the same destiny for Islam in the West, that is, a rational and secular Islam, but with a different emphasis.

After a general review of the Muslim response to modernism, and an introduction to Nasr’s, Tibi’s and Ramadan’s thought as compared with this, in the next chapter I will develop an analytical framework for the conceptualization of religion in relation to modernism.

11 See A. Soroush, *Reason, Freedom & Democracy in Islam: Essential Writings of Abdolkarim Soroush*, ed. and trans. Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

12 M. Arkoun, *Islam: To Reform or To Subvert?* (London: Saqi Essentials, 2006), updated edn, 15–52.

## CHAPTER I

# Situating Islam among Modernisms

## Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to develop an analytical framework for the conceptualization of religion in relation to modernism. I shall seek, first, to delineate and differentiate the concepts of the Enlightenment, modernity and modernism, and then to study the position of religion in the modern world. I identify and characterize three main trends, namely, the radical, counter- and moderate trends of religion corresponding to modernism. The purpose of doing this is to justify a pluralistic view of religion as an analytical framework for examining the situation of Islam in the West and comparing the thinking of Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan studied in the following chapters.

## Enlightenment, Modernity and Modernism

The terms 'Enlightenment', 'modernity' and 'modernism' are now often used quite interchangeably in many subject areas, but I want to define clearly how they are used in this book in order to compare and contrast them with the notions that Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan consider. The term 'Enlightenment' is defined by Immanuel Kant in his short essay *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?*:

Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of enlightenment is therefore: *Sapere aude!* Have courage to use your *own* understanding!<sup>1</sup>

To a degree, Kant's definition turns a new page in history, the 'Age of the Enlightenment', which is understood as a historical process of mental change diffused at different speeds among the peoples of different European countries.<sup>2</sup> Progress in science, knowledge and technology was accumulated to a degree that challenged traditional beliefs, morality and religion. Rationality and the autonomy of human subjectivity liberated humans from authority in the period of the Enlightenment.<sup>3</sup> Scholars usually study the Enlightenment in a particular country such as Italy, Germany, France, Britain or America, and so the origins and the historical and philosophical strands of the Enlightenment are traced back and connected with events such as the Italian Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation and the scientific revolution (from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries); the French Revolution (1789–99); the British industrial revolution (around 1760–1830); and the American War of Independence (1775–83). In all cases, a unified and one-directional intellectual movement is constructed.<sup>4</sup>

- 1 I. Kant, *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. H. Reiss and trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 54.
- 2 N. Hampson, 'The Enlightenment as a Way of Life', in *The Enlightenment: An Evaluation of Its Assumptions, Attitudes and Values* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 128–61.
- 3 See L. G. Crocker, *The Age of Enlightenment* (London and Melbourne: Macmillan, 1969); P. Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, Vol. 2 (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969); D. Kolb, *The Critique of Pure Modernity* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986); A. Renaut, *The Era of the Individual: A Contribution to a History of Subjectivity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); M. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Enlightenment World* (London: Routledge, 2004).
- 4 However, Israel argues that the Enlightenment should not be understood as a unified single intellectual movement, which occurred at a particular time and in a particular place, for which we can trace a definite origin. Instead, it should be studied as an international phenomenon occurring in different parts of Europe at different times.

Therefore, we may describe the Enlightenment as the spirit, as well as the historical movement, against ignorance, which is constituted by irrational or unexamined traditions, be they cultural, political, moral or religious. Humans, moreover, should examine critically such traditions of bondage by their own rationality. Understood in this way, the concepts of modernity and modernism each offers a different emphasis.

The word-family *modernity*, *modernism* and *modernization* derives from the same English root-word ‘modern’, which is in turn derived from the earlier Latin word *modo*, which means ‘now, just now or recently’. The late Latin word *modernus* first appeared in the fifth century in order to distinguish the Roman and pagan past from the Christian present.<sup>5</sup> The very original notion behind it is a self-reflection upon the present time that is different from the past. In this sense, every generation will indeed recognize some sort of ‘modern’ in various aspects of their life when compared with the past. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term ‘modernity’ first appeared in English in the writing of George Hakewill in 1627: ‘it indicates the quality or condition of being modern.’<sup>6</sup> Therefore, in this book I will use ‘modernity’ to denote the contemporary conditions of Western society, a society with present-day science, technology, social concepts and institutions such as an elected government, a mixed economy with capitalist and welfare systems and basic rights for its citizens, and so on.<sup>7</sup>

The concept of modernism is quite different. Nowadays, it usually relates to cultural studies such as arts, architecture, cyber and visual activities, fashion, festival, film, literature, music and the like, and is a

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See I. J. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), v–vii.

5 Jürgen Habermas, ‘From Modernity – An Incomplete Project’, in P. Waugh, ed., *Postmodernism: A Reader* (London: Arnold, 1992), 160.

6 J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, eds, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol. 9 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 2nd edn, 949.

7 But I do not mean that modernity is exclusive to the West alone; I articulate it in this way simply because my research focus is Islam in the West, not other areas. For studies of non-European modernity see D. Sachsenmaier, J. Riedel and S. N. Eisenstadt, eds, *Reflections on Multiple Modernities: European, Chinese, and Other Interpretations* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

near-synonym for modernity. However, I distinguish ‘modernism’ from the above, and define it as a belief, attitude or interpretation regarding the modern world in order to differentiate it from modernity. The meaning of being modern, circulating among various philosophical discourses, originates in the writings of Charles Baudelaire, especially his *The Painter of Modern Life* of 1863.<sup>8</sup> As Berman says blatantly, ‘Baudelaire’s reputation in the century since his death has developed along lines de Banville suggests: the more seriously Western culture is concerned with the issue of modernity [modernism], the more we appreciate Baudelaire’s originality and courage as a prophet and pioneer. If we had to nominate a *first modernist*, Baudelaire would surely be the man.’<sup>9</sup> In *The Painter of Modern Life*, Baudelaire distinguishes between two types of painters; one he calls the *flâneur*, the idler, and the other the painter of modernism. The idlers, according to Foucault, are the ones who are satisfied with what they paint from their memory only.<sup>10</sup> The painters of modernism are the ones who search and strive to paint something that is indefinable, transient, fleeting and contingent, however light it may be – that is, the things which had not been established for a long time in the past. Baudelaire conceived of this state of affairs as modernism.<sup>11</sup> The aim of the painter of modernism is ‘distilling from it [the world] the mysterious element of beauty that it may contain, however slight or minimal that element may be.’<sup>12</sup> Therefore, modernism implies an attitude or belief that the present is *always* better

8 Baudelaire, Charles, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1964).

9 M. Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1983), 133. The italics are mine.

10 Michael Foucault, ‘What Is Enlightenment?’, in P. Waugh, ed., *Postmodernism: A Reader*, 101.

11 ‘La modernité, c’est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l’art, dont l’autre moitié est l’éternel et l’immuable.’ In English, ‘By modernity/modernism, I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable.’ Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, 13.

12 *Ibid.*, 13.

than the past and that, while it may be difficult to struggle for, doing so will ultimately be worth it.

If the aim of the Enlightenment project is to conquer ignorance, then modernism is an optimistic advocacy of that conquest based on a belief in the progress of modern science, technology and knowledge. Human reason will be the final justification of truth and reality. The distinction between modernity and modernism is similar to that between plurality and pluralism in religion, for example. The former is the contemporary situation of there being many religions in the world (plurality or diversity), while the latter is a belief or attitude that all religions are legitimate methods of offering positive values, truth claims and vehicles for salvation to their adherents. The former is not worth questioning, while the latter is fervently debatable. The optimistic attitude of modernism is, then, controversial as well. This distinction also narrows the scope of modernism, in the sense that it is only one particular interpretation of modernity. People living in the West have no place to stand besides modernity or contemporary Western life, whether they like it or not. However, they can choose their own attitude towards that situation. In the following, I will identify three main trends of religion in relation to modernism, namely, the radical, counter- and moderate trends.

## Religion and Modernism

In this section, I identify and characterize three major trends of religion in relation to modernism. The term 'trend' here serves two main functions. In theory, it is possible to imagine numerous interpretations of modernism posed by different thinkers since every interpretation should have its own emphasis or specificity. However, these interpretations may share a similar direction towards modernism and the differences may be only a matter of degree, which in turn constitutes their particularity. Therefore, it is first used to classify the numerous interpretations into different major categories for simplicity. Second, unlike with the dialectic of Hegel's

negation of the negation (thesis—antithesis—synthesis), the intention is not to characterize these three major trends in terms of the dialectic of a particular period arranged in a historical sequence or phases, one replacing the other. In fact, they coexist in history because of the presence of each other. Therefore, the ‘trend’ is also used as a heuristic tool to articulate the heterogeneous nature of modernity as a whole. What I do is to essentialize the characteristics of each trend in order to show the plurality and multi-directional nature of religion within modernity. However, it is possible to argue about the classification of each trend because, first, it might be considered arbitrary to decide whether a particular thought is radical or moderate;<sup>13</sup> and second, a thinker may be radical in one aspect but moderate in another.<sup>14</sup> But this ambiguity does not overturn the whole classification, for two reasons. First, it only reminds us that our classification or essentialization is merely an analytical assumption, which does not exist in the real world. In reality, these three trends indeed merge together, or overlap in a dynamic way. Second, our essentialization does not aim to justify which trend is correct but to show that there is a plurality of trends. Therefore, no matter how ambiguous the classification is, as long as we can identify the trend in one particular aspect of a thinker, the classification remains valid. In the following analysis, I shall start with the radical trend.

13 For example, the thought of John Locke is classified as moderate by Israel in *Radical Enlightenment*; however, Locke’s materialist thought (no innate ideas but sense impressions) is not moderate. This sensualism contributed to the views of radical philosophers such as Spinoza.

14 For example, according to G. Garrard, Jean-Jacques Rousseau is the first counter-critic of the Enlightenment in certain aspects of sciences and the arts. Garrard, G., *Counter-Enlightenments: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2006). However, according to M. Berman, Rousseau is ‘the first theorist of radical liberalism’ in political areas. M. Berman, *The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971), 207. This is why the thought of J. G. Hamann, instead of that of Rousseau, is discussed in the section considering the counter-trend.

*The Radical Trend*

There are three general but interrelated values that radical proponents of modernism propose. First, they are attached to the ideal of a self-responsible reasoning faculty, which enables people to be free from all authorities. Second, it is significant to pursue happiness, not from religious asceticism or transcendence of nature, but through ordinary human life. Third, they believe in the ideal of universality and impartiality, which challenges superstitions, customs and morality.<sup>15</sup> A self-responsible reasoning faculty means the unbiased examination of fact and evidence independent of tradition, authority, and one's moral and spiritual considerations, such as the immateriality of the soul, providential guidance and immorality. These proponents' ethics are purely and completely based on the principles of utility. Therefore, radical thinkers turn in favour of atheism and materialism. If human beings are purely materialistic and there is no transcendence, then the pursuit of human happiness should be, and should only be, sensual or bodily and utilitarian in principle. As Taylor says, 'Sensualism was what made Enlightenment naturalism radical.'<sup>16</sup> The universal moral principle or ultimate good of modernism is to pursue sensual happiness based on one's self-responsible reason, which in turn is not difficult to link with scientific or empirical reason, as Taylor puts it.<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Israel ascribes the origin of the radical trend to Benedictus de Spinoza, whose thought, although it was criticized as dangerous and irreligious, spread across Europe in different forms. According to Spinoza, the meaning of God was reduced to an immanent cause and power of Nature or Universe. Religion was only a social function or psychological effect, which existed naturally in society. Holy Scripture and theology did not tell people anything about reality and humanity, only philosophy and sciences did. Miracles or divine commandments did not exist, and so morality was only a set of relative ideas about

15 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 322.

16 *Ibid.*, 329.

17 *Ibid.*, 331.

men.<sup>18</sup> If we say that Spinoza was the starting point of the radical trend, then one of the peaks or milestones should be considered to be the British naturalist Charles Darwin, with his book *On the Origin of Species*, which was first published in 1859. Apart from putting forward the idea of natural selection that reinforces the faith in progress, this *tour de force* inspired people to think in a particular way and lay the foundation for an atheistic world-view that is a scientifically and academically workable alternative to the long-held belief in divine creation. In the past, what Spinoza or, later, David Hume argued was only a sort of philosophical or speculative possibility of a purely natural, materialistic and atheistic world-view, while the natural sciences of the time did not necessarily reject the existence of God. It was Darwin who, significantly, turned this speculation into an empirical scientific study, which appeared to eliminate not only the role of God (remaining only as an immanent cause in Spinoza's system), but even the name of God from human knowledge. Philosophically, rationalism is the spirit of the radical trend. With regard to religion, rationalism entails secularism. In the contemporary West, the British biologist Richard Dawkins, the American philosophers Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris and the Anglo-American journalist Christopher Hitchens continue this trend.<sup>19</sup>

### *The Counter Trend*

According to Garrard, the term 'counter-Enlightenment' (the counter-trend to modernism) first appeared in passing in the writings of William Barrett in 1949.<sup>20</sup> Scholars recognize this term mainly through the writings

18 See I. J. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750*, Chs 11–15, 197–274.

19 See their books, e.g. R. Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam, 2006); D. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (London: Penguin Group, 2006); S. Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and The Future of Reason* (London: The Free Press, 2005); C. Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: The Case Against Religion* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007). It should be added, however, that by no means all scientists accept this radical position.

20 Garrard, *Counter-Enlightenments: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, 2.

of Isaiah Berlin, a famous political philosopher and historian of ideas, and in particular his essay 'Counter-Enlightenment,' published in 1973.<sup>21</sup> The counter-trend is of course in opposition to the promotion of modernism, such as the autonomy of reason or rationalism and the universality of the natural sciences. In this essay, Berlin ascribed this counter-notion to the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico, who, in his book *New Science* (*Scienza Nuova*), had criticized the Cartesian view that the principles of mathematics corresponded to objective reality. Mathematics, in Vico's view, was only a method, not the truth itself. Religions and even myths could be expressions of reality: they were not simply false or irrational statements since they also followed the guidance of rationality in their times. Therefore, every culture should be studied seriously in order to understand reality. Berlin says, 'His [Vico's] revolutionary move is to have denied the doctrine of a timeless natural law the truths of which could have been known in principle to any man [*sic*], at any time, anywhere.'<sup>22</sup> Another proponent of counter-modernism was the German Romantic thinker Johann Georg Hamann, who was born during the rule of the Francophile Frederick II.<sup>23</sup> Hamann experienced a spiritual crisis in London in 1758, in which his piety won over against his modernism as a result of his direct experience of God. After this, Hamann started to criticize the Frederician state and the rationalism proposed by his friend Immanuel Kant. He says, in allusion to Kant's word, 'True enlightenment consists in a departure of the immature man out of a supremely self-incurred guardianship.'<sup>24</sup> For Hamann, true enlightenment or genuine philosophy was not hostile to faith; he admired Socrates, whose philosophy was humble and accepted human ignorance. Reason should have its proper place, but unfortunately it was inflated and purified by various kinds of autonomy such as independence from tradition

21 Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 1–24.

22 Ibid., 5.

23 Frederick II was fascinated by Enlightenment philosophy and employed controversial figures such as the French philosopher Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet) and the radical materialist and atheist Julien Offray de la Mettrie.

24 Garrard, *Counter-Enlightenments: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, 30. The 'guardianship' is referred to Kant, who imposed his rationality on others.

and custom, from experience (Kant's rationalism), and from language itself. Therefore, everything was dominated and measured by reason and science alone, which ultimately would shrink the richness of human civilization. In politics, Hamann also criticized Frederick II and his policy for lacking a spiritual dimension and faith. He believed that the ultimate solution to all these problems was to return to the traditions of belief in God, spirituality and Christian faith as closely as possible. In his interpretation, instead of facing elimination, religion returned to be the foundation of morality and of national solidarity.

Hamann's thoughts went on to be the forerunner or critic of later generations of scholars like Johann Gottfried von Herder, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, Hegel, Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the counter-trend also embraces atheism. The notion of the Death of God originated with Nietzsche.<sup>26</sup> It may be understood as atheism or anti-theism, but further, it represents a radical challenge to rationalism, a death of metaphysics and a loss of the philosophical foundation for everything.<sup>27</sup> Nihilism in turn constitutes a new intelligence of reality.<sup>28</sup> The discovery of reality or truth is based on what Nietzsche called the 'will to power'.<sup>29</sup> All rationalities are only a system of persuasion supported by the will to power. The boundary dividing the sciences from religion as promoted by

25 Ibid., 29–35. I am aware that there are theoretical differences between romanticism and the existentialism of Nietzsche, but what I wish to emphasize here is the counter-trend proponents' suspicion of rationalism compared with the views of the radical proponents.

26 'God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.' F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 181.

27 A. Touraine, *Critique of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 107; D. Lyon, *Postmodernity* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994), 8.

28 J. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 77.

29 The will to power can be understood as the genuine essence of being, human life and the driving force to determine all things including the physical, psychic and intelligible characters of the world. See F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Random House, 1968), nos 88, 692–3 and *Beyond Good and Evil* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), no. 36.

Kant (see below), therefore, is an illusion. Doctrines of religion and principles of morality are a construction of persuasion, to allow those who make such religious or moral claims to place themselves above others (master morality) and to dominate them (slave morality). This radical challenge to the belief of modernism also occurs in the contemporary sciences, such as in the paradigm shift proposed by Thomas Kühn, who suggested that scientific knowledge is not a linear accumulation of new knowledge, but is instead based on periodic and abrupt revolutions.<sup>30</sup> Kühn's idea articulates the significance and effect of particular human incidents towards the development of natural sciences, which are supposed to be objective and universal. A more radical view of the counter-trend is proposed by Bruno Latour, a sociologist of science who argues that scientific studies are in fact socially constructed within the laboratory and that scientific activities are not different in kind from other cultural practices.<sup>31</sup>

Hans-Georg Gadamer, following from the thought of Martin Heidegger, is concerned with the 'problem of being', or ontology. Instead of putting forward the methodology for understanding a text or meaning, he asks, 'What is understanding?' and 'What does it mean when a person understands a text?' This change of focus prompts Gadamer to argue that, when people read a text, they enter into a dialogue with the text but they never understand it in a vacuum; instead, they understand it in their own history or tradition. No one can escape the influence of tradition when reading a text, a concept which Gadamer calls 'historically affected consciousness' (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*). Therefore, reading is a dialogue between a text and the belonging to a tradition, and the outcome of interpreting a text must involve a synthesis between the subject (the interpreter's tradition) and the object (the text), a process he calls the 'fusion of horizons.' The intention of Gadamer is not to argue that all interpretations are relative or that no objective truth or reality exists. What he wants to

30 T. Kühn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 3rd edn.

31 B. Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

articulate is the process of what people do when they seek to ‘understand’ texts. Gadamer’s ontology of understanding therefore dissolves the subject/object dualism. Truth, reality and tradition are never completely objectified and independent from the subject or from the interpreter. When people are involved in using language or participating in any game, for example, they cannot separate themselves from the language or the game. Speaking dissolves the separation between the speaker and the language, the playing dissolves the separation between the player and the play. Understood in this ontological way, for Gadamer, understanding or hermeneutics is in fact the whole enterprise of philosophy; or, philosophy is by nature linguistic and not just the study of technical rules of interpretation, which Gadamer calls ‘the universal aspect of hermeneutics’. Gadamer’s concept of interpretation as a dialogue with a text and a belonging to a tradition also has implications for the first question mentioned above, the subject/object dualism in the public domain. For Gadamer, people can enter into dialogue because there is a shared and canonical understanding of truth and reality between participants, the common horizon of dialogue. This does not mean there is a naïve agreement on everything without critique, but rather a critique or dispute within a tradition, which is the authoritative understanding. When recognizing a dispute occurring in a particular situation, the participant will first learn a new understanding of his or her own tradition, then question and resort to the tradition for this dispute and make appropriate responses; a good and correct decision is never made in the human mind or traditional rules, but in concrete situations. Finally, the participant will learn how to enter into a tradition of questioning tradition or competing traditions. All this had a significant impact on the thought of Alasdair MacIntyre, who, in the area of morality, disagrees with any form of universal rationality and puts forward his Aristotelian Thomist theory of morality based on tradition-constituted/constitutive rationality.<sup>32</sup> To a degree, the philosophies of Gadamer and MacIntyre should be classified

32 J. Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 96–9. Also see M. R. Foster, *Gadamer and Practical Philosophy: The Hermeneutics of Moral Confidence* (Atlanta, GA.: Scholars Press, 1991), 45–78.

as the counter-trend to modernism since they emphasize the influences of 'situatedness' and 'tradition' in shaping human understanding, dialogue and morality, instead of the objectivity and universality of human rationality.

### *The Moderate Trend*

It is difficult to define the moderate trend concept precisely, but it is reasonable to define it as a balance between the radical and the counter-trends and, as such, it lies between the two. Notions like the 'Two Kingdoms' proposed by Martin Luther and the 'Two Books' put forward by Galileo Galilei are possible articulations of the moderate trend as they are used to facilitate the coexistence of religion, politics and sciences. The two kingdoms represent the spiritual kingdom that is signified by the Church and the earthly kingdom as signified by the State. People live not only in this world but also in the Hereafter; therefore, they are obliged to obey and perform well in both Church and State. Even though both are ultimately under the sovereignty of God, Church and State are separate and never interfere in the realm of each other; the State is responsible for setting laws and maintaining the social order, while the Church preserves and proclaims the Gospel.<sup>33</sup> The Two Books are the Book of Scripture and the Book of Nature, both of them supposed to be true or applicable in their own realm. A saying of Galilei's is worth citing: 'The Bible was written to show us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go.'<sup>34</sup>

We can separate the institutions of religion, politics and sciences so as to preserve their own realms of activity, but what about reason, morality and supernatural revelation? Before Kant, the notion of reason was disputed by two main camps. Constructivism, represented by René Descartes, asserted that all types of knowledge could only be ascertained by human

33 For details, see D. C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 112–26.

34 G. Galilei, *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*, trans. Stillman Drake (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), 186.

reason, since experience was contingent and uncertain. Empiricism, represented by Francis Bacon, believed the opposite: all human ideas were derived from senses and experiences. Kant synthesized the two notions by what he called ‘transcendental reasoning’. Modern science informed Kant that mathematics and Newton’s physics were universal. Therefore, there must be something that empowered humans to determine this universality of science, and so Kant asserted that the human mind must be capable of perceiving the universal rather than just accumulated experiences. He asserted that human perception of the world was the interaction between two realms, the first the category of understanding in alliance with the form of sensibility in time and space, and the other external reality. Therefore, reality existed and was not purely constructed by reason as Descartes had asserted; rather, reason determined the way in which people understood reality, and so human knowledge was not purely determined by sense and experience as Bacon had asserted. The world was divided into the world as it appeared to people (phenomenon) and the world in itself (*noumenon*). People could know the phenomenon but not the *noumenon*. The separation between phenomenon and *noumenon* leaves a measure of space for religion. As Wood says, ‘Kant does *not* deny that we have a supernatural realm. Such a denial, he thinks, would be just as presumptuous as the claim to know that some particular experience is of special divine origin. Both equally transcend our cognitive capacities.’<sup>35</sup>

Morality, according to Kant’s understanding, should be independent from religion, and reason alone could determine what was right and wrong. Basically, the autonomy of reason made morality autonomous too; however, Kant admitted that people in general could not sustain this morality as it could not guarantee the good result of being virtuous. This implies that although morality itself can be autonomous from religion, it alone cannot motivate people to be passionately virtuous. Kant concludes, then,

35 Allen Wood, ‘Rational Theology, Moral Faith, and Religion’, in P. Guyer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 412.

that 'morality thus inevitably leads to religion.'<sup>36</sup> Apart from the separation between phenomenon and *noumenon*, there is another level of separation, that between cognitive or empirical science and morality/religion, which places them in different realms. In each realm, they belong to different objects of study and, accordingly, there are different methodologies or rationalities (pure or practical reasons) of examination, and each has its own autonomy. But all these rationalities and separations are finally unified under the same human subjectivity, and therefore subjectivity becomes the highest authority to coordinate the truth and reality and religion is subsumed under it. The submission of religion to subjectivity encourages the privatization of religion in the contemporary West, though to what degree it is difficult to be certain. Separation, distinction and reconciliation between religion and secular knowledge are, therefore, the spirit of the moderate trend of modernism. To a degree, many Christian theologians follow the Kantian path of reconciling Christianity and modernism.

In the history of the West, from the late Middle Ages up to the contemporary era, we can identify at least three trends in religion in relation to modernism. Some argue in favour of religion and some against it, either implicitly or explicitly. Therefore, modernity as a whole cannot be characterized as monolithically secular, anti-religious or atheistic, as there is a pluralistic view of religion within modernity. As one might expect, Islam in the contemporary West should also have such a pluralistic image. However, in the media and in academic discourse, there is an increasingly negative image of Islam and Muslims. On the basis of the above analysis, an analytical assumption that modernity does not necessarily equate with secularism is reasonably justified, and I would therefore like to argue that modernity, or the West, geographically speaking, is also not necessarily incompatible with Islam; and also that any discourse or ideology which tries to essentialize Islam to the extent of seeing it as 'the Other', or in opposition of the West, must be examined thoroughly to see whether the

36 I. Kant, 'Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason', in A. Wood and G. Di Giovanni, ed., *Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 59.

claim corresponds to the social reality or not. If we situate the thought of Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan in relation to these three trends, we can see that the thought of Nasr is more inclined to the counter-trend, emphasizing the significance of tradition. Tibi and Ramadan are more inclined to the moderate trend. And if we compare the thoughts of Tibi and Ramadan, we see that Tibi is definitely more radical than Ramadan in terms of emphasizing secularism and rationalism.

In this book, then, I compare the thought of three Muslim intellectuals with three different orientations towards modernism. Apart from the four reasons mentioned in the chapter of introduction, this is another analytical reason why they are chosen for comparison. Having set up the foundation for the subsequent chapters, in the following, I outline the intellectual biographies, influences upon and key works of Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan before proceeding to examine their thought.

## Seyyed H. Nasr, Traditional Islam and the Return to the Sacred

### Introduction

Having reviewed the concept of modernity, I now focus attention on three Western Muslim intellectuals, Seyyed H. Nasr, Bassam Tibi and Tariq Ramadan. In the following chapters I will examine and evaluate their thought and articulate and highlight their intellectual contribution to Islam in the West.

In this chapter, the focus is on Nasr. The starting point for Nasr is the concept of tradition, since he emphasizes and frequently employs this concept in response to modernism, and his idea of tradition is primarily moral and religious. The main purpose of this chapter is to extend his concept of tradition in the social and public domain. Therefore, I shall not examine Nasr's thought on topics such as sacred science and religious pluralism, something which has been done by many other scholars (see the intellectual biography below), though we will come across them in the course of the study. My focus, rather, is on the social implications of Traditionalism or Traditional Islam. Moreover, compared with studies of the ideas about Islam of the other two thinkers (Tibi and Ramadan), presentation of the ideas of Nasr is not new, but exploration of the social implications of these ideas is. Therefore, in the case of Tibi and Ramadan my study is mainly based on their primary sources, while in the case of Nasr my approach is based on the development from the 'known' (Traditionalism) to the 'unknown' (its social implication), and I must appropriate both primary and secondary sources in this chapter. Finally, I try to understand the ideas of Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan on the best possible interpretation; therefore,

I will defend their positions or articulate their contributions first and then pose criticisms later.

Chapter 2 examines the concept of Traditionalism proposed by Nasr. First, I shall outline Nasr's intellectual biography, with an emphasis on his works and its implications for and influence on a Traditionalist social order. Second, I analyse the Traditionalist movement and its metaphysics in relation to Nasr. Finally, I articulate Nasr's concept of Traditional Islam as a social order with the help of other Traditionalist ideas.

## Intellectual Biography of Seyyed H. Nasr

There is no shortage of articles concerning the intellectual life or biography of Nasr.<sup>1</sup> My purpose here is, therefore, not merely to present another concise biography of him but to relate his direct involvement in the current

- 1 The most authoritative and detailed account is undoubtedly the biography written by Nasr himself, 'An Intellectual Autobiography', in Hahn, Auxier and Stone Jr., eds, *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, 3–85. It is also worth consulting the books edited/written by Zalian Moris (written for Nasr's 66th birthday) and Aslan since they were published before the authoritative account and are based on their own research and acquaintance with Nasr. Boroujerdi situates Nasr as an Iranian intellectual, and there are accounts written by a pro-traditionalist, Oldmeadow, and an anti-traditionalist, Sedgwick. *Beacon of Knowledge* contains articles concerning Nasr's life in its different stages, written by his friends. A. Aslan, *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy: The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1998), 13–26; M. Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 120–30. Mohammad H. Faghfoory, ed., *Beacon of Knowledge: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, xxiii–27; Z. Moris, ed., *Knowledge is Light: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Chicago, IL: ABC International Group, 1999), 9–32; K. Oldmeadow, *Traditionalism: Religion in the Light of the Perennial Philosophy* (Columbo, Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka Institute of Traditional Studies, 2000), 49–50; M. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 153–9.

Traditionalist movement in the West and his inspiration to his followers or students as the new generation of Traditionalists. From this, we can better understand the social and political implications of present-day Traditionalism.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr was born to a noble family in Tehran in 1933. His father was a famous physician, scholar, parliamentary deputy and minister of education. As Nasr says, 'He [his father] became the head of Persia's educational system from the end of the Qajar dynasty into the Pahlavi period [...].'<sup>2</sup> Nasr himself received a traditional Persian education up to the age of twelve, and was then sent to the USA for his education, from elite preparatory school up to doctoral level. He obtained his BSc degree in Physics and Mathematics at MIT in 1954, an MSc in Geology and Geophysics at Harvard University in 1956, and a PhD in the History of Science and Philosophy at the same university in 1958. His thesis was later (1964) published as *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*. After receiving his PhD, between 1958 and 1979, Nasr lived in Iran and worked as an associate professor (1958–63) and full professor (1963–79) of the history of science and philosophy at the University of Tehran. During this period, he was appointed or promoted to several posts, such as first Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Studies at the American University of Beirut (1964–5), Dean of the Faculty of Letters (1968–72) and Vice-Chancellor (1970–1) of the University of Tehran, Chancellor/President (1972–5) of Aryamehr University of Technology (now called Sharif University of Technology) and Founder President (1974–9) of the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy (now the Iranian Institute of Philosophy), among many other positions in cultural and education affairs to which he was appointed by the government. As Boroujerdi says, Nasr was a 'cultural Mandarin in the Pahlavi

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Finally, information about Nasr's life (and thought) can also be found in his own recent book: Seyyed Hossein Nasr (with Ramin Jahanbegloo), *In Search of the Sacred: A Conversation with Seyyed Hossein Nasr on His Life and Thought* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger; ABC-CLIO, 2010), parts 1–4.

- 2 Nasr, 'An Intellectual Autobiography,' in Hahn, Auxier and Stone Jr, eds, *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, 4.

royal court'.<sup>3</sup> Sedgwick even characterizes Nasr as a 'staunch supporter of the shah's regime' because, first, he believes that Nasr, as a Traditionalist, supports monarchy as a Traditionalist form of government. Second, there was a clear connection between the royal court and his father, and Nasr received the benefits from various appointments given by the royal court.<sup>4</sup> He himself also realized that '[a]ll the positions which I had accepted, such as deanship and presidency of the University, presidency of the Imperial Academy of Philosophy, and cultural ambassador, were of an educational and cultural nature. Of course, in countries such as Iran even these positions possessed a political dimension [...].'<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, during the Iranian Revolution of 1979, nearly all his assets, property, books and notes were confiscated or destroyed and he and his family were forced into exile. The Revolution permanently brought Nasr to the USA. Before 1979, Nasr had already been a visiting professor at Harvard (1962–5) and Princeton Universities (1975), but when he suffered great financial difficulty during his exile, he did not receive the hoped-for support from these two universities, even his *alma mater*. Only the University of Utah gave him a helping hand by offering him a position of distinguished visiting professor (1979). Later, he was offered a full professorship in Islamic Studies at Temple University (1979–84), and finally he became University Professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University in 1984, a post he has held since.<sup>6</sup>

During his undergraduate studies, Nasr had already displayed his disappointment with the existing paradigm of studying physics at that time, which was only concerned with mathematical structure rather than with the ontological nature of physical reality. For Nasr, not pursuing the ultimate truth/reality created an unsettling spiritual and intellectual crisis which finally terminated his interest in physics, but on the other hand initiated his interest in studying sciences historically and philosophically. With this

3 Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West*, 120.

4 Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 159.

5 Hahn, Auxier and Stone Jr, eds, *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, 72.

6 University Professor is a very prestigious endowed position at George Washington University. Currently, there are only nine University Professors at the University.

academic turn in mind, Nasr attended courses in areas of the Humanities such as philosophy, history of science and literature taught by Giorgio de Santillana (1902–74), an Italian philosopher and historian of science at MIT. Under his teaching, Nasr was first introduced to the works of René Guénon and this was also the beginning of his journey to Traditionalism. Apart from Guénon's, the works of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Frithjof Schuon, among others, also helped Nasr to discover traditional metaphysics and the *philosophia perennis*, which settled not only his epistemological crisis, but his ontological or spiritual crisis as well. To a certain extent, Nasr has devoted nearly all his academic life to the promotion of Traditionalist thought. In Iran, under his presidency of the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, a multi-language journal, *Sophia Perennis*, was published from 1975, which mainly carried articles of well-known Traditionalists and therefore provided a more international (multi-language) forum of Traditionalist thought; unfortunately it came to an end with the closure of the Academy after the Iranian Revolution.

In 1979, Nasr settled in the USA and continued to participate actively in the Traditionalist movement. In 1984, having cooperated with other Traditionalists, he established and has since then occupied the Presidency of the Foundation for Traditional Studies, which has published *Sophia: The Journal of Traditional Studies (Sophia)* since 1995, which is now the most representative Traditionalist journal in English.<sup>7</sup> There is also another foundation with a similar Traditionalist purpose, called the Seyyed Hossein Nasr Foundation.<sup>8</sup>

Apart from being the president of foundations and advisor on Islamic cultural activities, Nasr promotes and inspires people to understand Traditionalist thought mainly by his writings, which are voluminous. For clarity and for my own research purposes, I classify them according to three main categories.<sup>9</sup> The first category represents his ideas on the problems

7 <<http://www.traditional-studies.org>> accessed 25 Sept. 2012.

8 <<http://www.nasrfoundation.org>> accessed 25 Sept. 2012.

9 In this book, I exclude for the most part the categories of Islamic Science and Philosophy, Sufism, and Persianate studies. The three-category classification is unavoidably simplified because the topics Nasr discussed in different books have

and crises of the modern world in areas of modern science, religion and spirituality, works such as *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, *The Need for a Sacred Science* and *Religion and the Order of Nature*. The second represents his construction of Traditional Islam, works such as *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, *Islamic Life and Thought* and *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*.<sup>10</sup> All the books in the above categories have been examined in *Islamization of Science: Four Muslim Positions Developing an Islamic Modernity*, *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy: the Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, and *Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Vision of Traditional Islam: Reformulation and Revival*, by Stenberg, Aslan and Smith respectively. Finally, the third category includes *A Young Muslim's Guide to the Modern World* and *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity*, in which Nasr is inclined to promulgate Traditional Islamic social and political order in the West.

*A Young Muslim's Guide* offers general guidance to Muslims living in the West. It includes discussions not only of art, religion, philosophy, science and technology in the modern West but also of political, economic and cultural life. In this book, Nasr strongly advises young Muslims to be firmly rooted in their own religious-ethical values and Islamic practices in contrast to modern secular values. 'The Message of Islam' (Part I of the book) is totally separated from 'The Nature of the Modern World' (Part II). For Nasr, it is therefore completely wrong to alter (Traditional) Islam to adapt it to the modern world. Nearly ten years later, after 9/11, Nasr wrote another book, *The Heart of Islam*. The approaches of these two books are quite similar. First they start with discussions of the message or core values of Islam and then they examine issues in the modern world. However, in societal domains, the second book is much less confrontational

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always overlapped across these three categories. Also, the listing of the books in each category is not intended to restrict my usage of other materials of Nasr.

- 10 In 2010, a new edition was published: Nasr, *Islam in the Modern World: Challenged by the West, Threatened by Fundamentalism, Keeping Faith with Tradition* (New York: HarperOne, 2010). The main argument did not change, and there were no new elaborations regarding the social and political aspects either.

even though his argument against secularism is still applicable. In this book, Nasr emphasizes the communal relations, integration and coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims in the West under freedom of religion and justice. Instead of asking Muslims to be adamant about their own religious-ethical values, Nasr asks them to pursue peace, love, beauty and responsibility, which can be shared with non-Muslims. The change of focus is no doubt due to the development of political Islam and the progressive growth of the negative image of Islam and Muslims after 9/11.<sup>11</sup>

9/11 not only produced *The Heart of Islam* but also a new context for the new generation of Traditionalists, a context no longer focusing on the secularization of the modern world but on the representation and politicization of Islam. Therefore, instead of merely examining the issues of metaphysics, spirituality and modernism in terms of culture, religion, science and secularism, the new generation of Traditionalists are now more willing to relate the principles of Traditionalism to political issues. In *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (2001), apart from Stone's essay there is, as was mentioned in the introductory chapter, no essay which discusses Nasr's ideas about political issues. However, two years later, in *Beacon of Knowledge*, a whole section called 'On History and Politics' (five essays in total) was written for this purpose.

Another result is shown in the publication of *Islam, Fundamentalism and the Betrayal of Tradition: Essays by Western Muslim Scholars*, in which the issues of globalization and political Islam are addressed.<sup>12</sup> In fact, most of the authors in this book are Nasr's MA or PhD students at Temple and George Washington Universities; he also wrote a foreword to support the publication. Nasr himself witnesses and motivates this new development of Traditionalist thought. To a certain degree, Nasr is situated in the middle of the Traditionalist movement: on the one hand, he inherited the thoughts and topics discussed by the first generation of Traditionalists

11 For Nasr, the politicization and 'ideologization' of Islam always represents a problem for Islam in the modern world.

12 J. E. B. Lombard, ed., *Islam, Fundamentalism and the Betrayal of Tradition: Essays by Western Muslim Scholars* (Bloomington: IN: World Wisdom, 2004).

such as Guénon, Coomaraswamy and Schuon, while on the other hand, he carries the thoughts to the younger generation in a new context, which is concerned more with the development of Traditionalist economic, political and social orders on earth than just with the Ultimate Truth/Reality or *Scientia Sacra* descended from Heaven.<sup>13</sup>

In the above, our focus is limited to the direct involvement and influence of Nasr himself as a leading intellectual in the Traditionalist movement. In the following, I will scrutinize more broadly the development of the Traditionalist movement in order to include other significant Traditionalists.

## The Traditionalist Movement and Metaphysics

In this section, I shall first briefly clarify the meaning of Traditionalism in the understanding of Nasr, and then examine the two current approaches to studying this movement. For my research purposes, I adopt the first one of these, which posits it as an intellectual movement, rather than a cultic or esoteric order. I then elucidate the ideas of Traditionalist Metaphysics and evaluate its pros and cons.

### *Studying Traditionalism as an Intellectual Movement*

The term 'Traditionalism' is not the one we usually understand in relation to the political or sociological theory of modernization, which defines traditionalism as 'validation of current behaviour by reference to immemorial

13 This shift also affects Sufis such as Tim Winter at Cambridge, but the focus here is on Nasr's students since the connection of influence is more obvious.

prescriptive norms.<sup>14</sup> It implies that the process of innovation and modernization will be highly successful when it is developed from or linked with the prescriptive norms, which mainly refer to locally respected habit, custom, practice and belief. Even within an Islamic context, Traditionalism does not mean the *Isnad* system, which is the authoritative connection between Islamic thought from generation to generation back to the foundation of the Qur'an and *Sunna*.<sup>15</sup> For Nasr, Traditionalism refers to a particular conception of tradition circulated in the West by Guénon, Coomaraswamy and Schuon, and understood as

a set of principles which have descended from Heaven and which are identified at their origin with a particular manifestation of the Divine, along with the application and deployment of these principles at different moments of time and in different conditions for a particular humanity. Tradition is therefore already sacred in itself [...]. Moreover, tradition is both immutable and a living continuity, containing within itself the science of Ultimate Reality and the means for the actualisation and realisation of this knowledge at different moments of time and space.<sup>16</sup>

In this connection, we should consider the three above-mentioned Western Traditionalists as the starting point of this Traditionalist movement.<sup>17</sup> Currently, there are two approaches to studying Traditionalism. One is the intellectual or Traditionalist approach, which mainly focuses on the thought of individual Traditionalists and the fora or foundations they have established in various Western countries. It is the major approach of

14 D. E. Apter, *The Politics of Modernization* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 83.

15 W. A. Graham, 'Traditionalism in Islam: An Essay in Interpretation', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23/3 (Winter 1993), 495–522.

16 Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (London: Longman, 1976), 73. Also see Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 65–92.

17 Their idea, however, has a history much longer than that. It can be traced back to the *prisca theologica* (pristine theology) of Marsilio Ficino, an Italian Catholic philosopher and founder of the Platonic Academy of Florence, and it is Agostino Steuco, an Italian Augustinian monk, who first coined the term '*philosophia perennis*' in his book of 1540.

existing scholarship, usually written by Traditionalists.<sup>18</sup> The second is the historical or anti-traditionalist approach, which is mainly represented by the book of Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*.<sup>19</sup>

The first approach emphasizes the significance of individual Traditionalists and their priority in the pattern of a circle. In general, Guénon, Coomaraswamy and Schuon are the concentric circle in the Traditionalist movement; then, Titus Burckhardt, Marco Pallis, Martin Lings, Whitall Perry and Nasr are the first inner circle; and finally, other Traditionalist circles continue to radiate outwards from the concentric circle.<sup>20</sup> This genealogical relationship also represents authority status: that is, the thought of Traditionalists from the concentric circle is the most authoritative.

Sedgwick, however, ignores this hierarchical connection among Traditionalists. He starts studying from the life of Guénon, and then constructs the whole Traditionalist movement, including both the activities of persons who have a direct connection with Guénon and those who simply read his books or are influenced by him in various degrees. This approach therefore implicitly ignores the difference between (a) promulgators of Traditionalism or Traditionalists such as Nasr; (b) those who promulgate similar ideas but without directly referring to the term 'Traditionalism', such

18 J. Borella, 'Rene Guénon and the Traditionalist School', in Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman, eds, *Modern Esoteric Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1992); K. Oldmeadow, *Journeys East: 20th Century Western Encounters with Eastern Religious Traditions* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2004) and *Traditionalism: Religion in the Light of the Perennial Philosophy* (Columbo, Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka Institute of Traditional Studies Press, 2000); W. Quinn, Jr, *The Only Tradition* (New York: SUNY, 1997); and many other books published by World Wisdom Books (a major Traditionalist book publisher).

19 Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*. See also Muhammad Legenhausen, 'Why I am not a Traditionalist', *Religioscope*, <<http://www.religioscope.com/info/doc/esotrad/legenhausen.htm>> accessed 25 Sept. 2012.

20 Oldmeadow, *Traditionalism*, 45–50.

as Huston Smith;<sup>21</sup> and finally, (c) those who write *about* Traditionalism, such as I myself.<sup>22</sup> For Sedgwick, Julius Baron Evola, an Italian esotericist and occult author with some contact with fascists during World War II, and Alexander Dugin, a Russian political activist and ideologist of contemporary Russian anti-American political thought ('neo-Eurasianism'), therefore, may be the most important Traditionalists, while according to the first approach they are not.<sup>23</sup> Another major difference is that the first approach emphasizes the purity and unity of Traditionalist thought and movement, and the second syncretism and schism.

To a certain extent, Sedgwick portrays Traditionalism as a problematic ideology and movement, but he expends very little effort in discussing its intellectual aspects (since he considers that it is a betrayal of authentic Sufism). At the religious level, Sedgwick argues that Traditionalism splits into many secret and isolated religious or cultic orders in the name of Islam in European countries, similar to many Christian cults which believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ or the end of the world. His main purpose in writing about these orders is to tell the reader that they are not Islamic. They are simply a kind of syncretism of various occult philosophies or heresy (the term he uses is 'irregularity') of Islam according to *his* interpretation of so-called mainstream Islam. At the political level, he wants to associate Traditionalism with a dangerous and anti-American/modern political strand of thought or movement such as fascism and neo-Eurasianism, which is why he considers Evola and Dugin to be the most important Traditionalists and discusses them in such detail.

However, contrary to what Sedgwick assumes, whether they are Traditionalists is, first and foremost, definitely questionable, especially in

21 H. Smith, *Forgotten Truth: The Common Vision of the World's Religions* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992). What I here refer to is the book of Smith, which does not directly use the term 'Traditionalism'. I am not suggesting that Smith himself is not a Traditionalist.

22 Quinn, *The Only Tradition*, 67.

23 For the connection between Traditionalists and right-wing politics, see S. M. Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton, NJ and Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1999).

the case of Dugin. Second, in the case of Evola, what Sedgwick shows is only a kind of historical connection, rather than evidence, or a direct relation of his activities to the Fascist party. What interests me is Sedgwick's final conclusion. He says that it is not accurate to characterize Evola as a fascist.<sup>24</sup> This conclusion shows that his attempt to correlate Traditionalism with fascism is unconvincing. Moreover, he is unable to offer a theoretical inference from Traditionalist thought to support his allegation that Traditionalism is a politically dangerous thought.

Finally, at the moral level, the most 'problematic' thing about the Traditionalist School concerns Frithjof Schuon who, as Sedgwick says, was photographed with some young women in bikinis, was seen naked in another photo, and had painted a naked Virgin Mary.<sup>25</sup> Even if the story is true, it does not provide any important or relevant historical information for my purpose (i.e. studying Nasr as an *intellectual*, not as a cultic leader), and so I prefer to consider the first approach as the primary perspective in studying the Traditionalist Movement, while using Sedgwick's approach as secondary. Before examining Traditionalist metaphysics, in the following I will briefly outline the biographies of Guénon, Coomaraswamy and Schuon, since, first, they are the most influential Traditionalists on whom these two approaches concur, and secondly, the thought of Nasr himself is highly influenced by them, especially Schuon. I then discuss some Nasr-related Traditionalist fora founded in the West.

René Guénon was a Frenchman who was born into a strict Catholic family. His early education was in Jesuit-run institutions. In 1902, he obtained his baccalaureate and, a year later, his Bachelor of Philosophy with honours. In 1904, he studied mathematics in Paris, but after two years he withdrew because of poor health. Withdrawal from the university, however, initiated a new phase of life. Between 1906 and 1922, he started to study occultism and actively participated in different occult and theosophical groups and societies. This participation encouraged him to study various esoteric traditions and sacred writings of the East such as Taoism,

24 Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 108–9.

25 *Ibid.*, 9.

Hinduism and Islam. His doctoral thesis, submitted to the Sorbonne, was a study of Hindu doctrine but, according to Sedgwick, it was rejected.<sup>26</sup> He attended and also gave public lectures at the Sorbonne, wrote and published widely and maintained an active intellectual life. During that time, he adopted Islam and became a Sufi. In 1922, he lost his strong interest in studying occultism and spiritualism and began to develop his own ideas concerning what he called *la Tradition primordiale*, the Primordial Tradition. In 1930, he moved to Cairo and remained prolific in writings but maintained a low profile in public life. He died in 1951.

Another promulgator was Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, who was born in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and moved to England when he was two years old. In 1900, he graduated from University College, London, with a BSc degree in Geology and Botany with First Class Honours, and then he continued his graduate studies. During this period, he had a strong desire to return to Ceylon to learn the culture and world-view of his father. This directed his research topic. Between 1902 and 1906, Coomaraswamy did his fieldwork in Ceylon, which in 1906 earned him a doctorate in Geology for his study of Ceylonese mineralogy. Also, he was deeply attracted to Ceylonese arts, architecture, customs and religion, and finally, his own geological researches also gave way to the task of resuscitating Ceylonese culture. Therefore, he resisted the corrosive effects of British colonialism in Ceylonese culture and became involved in the Indian nationalist movement against the British Empire. As a result of his conscientious objection in World War I, he moved to the USA in 1917 to serve as curator of Indian and Asian Arts at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Apart from developing the museum, writing about various topics in art, culture and religion, from 1932 until his death Coomaraswamy directed his intellectual energy mainly on the exposition of the concept of *Philosophia Perennis*,

26 The title is *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines* (*Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues*); the work was recommended by the Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain for publication and published in 1921. Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 22–3.

the Eternal Philosophy, but unlike Guénon and Frithjof Schuon he had much less connection with Islam or Sufism.

Finally, the third promulgator was Frithjof Schuon, who was a poet and painter. Born in Switzerland to a German family in 1907, unlike Guénon and Coomaraswamy Schuon did not receive a higher education since he left school at sixteen to work as a textile designer in Paris. But he was deeply interested in reading in the arts, philosophy, metaphysics and religion, both Eastern and Western. In Paris, from 1930 onward, he began to study, and finally adopted, Islam and visited some Muslim countries such as Algeria, Morocco and Egypt, where he met Guénon and started a correspondence with him which continued for many years. However, his spiritual master was not Guénon but Sheikh Ahmad al-Alawi, an Algerian Sufi and founder of the Alawi order (or Alawiyya).<sup>27</sup> According to Sedgwick, Schuon later became leader of the order in Europe; Nasr is currently one of the leaders of this order.<sup>28</sup> This also explains one of the reasons why Nasr promulgates the thought of Schuon more than that of Guénon or Coomaraswamy.<sup>29</sup> During World War II, Schuon served in the French army and, after having been taken prisoner by the Germans, he sought asylum in Switzerland, which was to be his home for forty years. During this period, he devoted his time to writing and promulgating his Traditionalist concept, *Religio Perennis*, the Eternal Religion. In 1980, he emigrated to Bloomington, where he continued to live and write until his death in 1998.<sup>30</sup>

As educated persons in the West, all three of these Traditionalists understood well the power, ideas and future development of modern sciences, technology, democracy, human rights, rationality, and the like. However, they placed their hope for the future of humankind in esoteric religions and cultures handed down from the past, and they believed more in metaphysics than in observable scientific achievement. The two World Wars may have destroyed their confidence in the self-correction of the modern world and humanity, but a more detailed and sophisticated study,

27 Guénon was also a member of this order.

28 Sedgwick, 'The Maryamiyya', in *Against the Modern World*, Ch. 7.

29 Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1966), xxv.

30 In America, Schuon and his followers in Bloomington are more inclined to the study of native American ritual.

which is not the purpose of this book, is needed to clarify and contextualize their individual thought. However, their thought initiated an intellectual movement lasting up to the present, in which Nasr is the most important living follower and expositor.

If we accommodate what Sedgwick suggests of the Traditionalist movement as involving some Sufi or cultic orders in Europe, then Traditionalist activities may be massive, as they are by nature secret, private and isolated. Therefore, instead of following Sedgwick, I will focus more on those activities in relation to Nasr. For him, Traditional thought is lost in the modern world and so it needs a revival. Therefore, when I discuss the Traditionalist movement, I focus on the means and the sequence Nasr suggests to revitalize Traditionalist thought and then the channels for actualizing it. In *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, Nasr prioritizes the development of a Traditionalist movement. First and foremost is the revival of Traditionalist religion, philosophy and science (the spiritual and intellectual domain), then the revival of Traditionalist arts, literature and architecture (the artistic and cultural domain) and, finally, the revival of Traditionalist social, economic and political life (the societal domain).<sup>31</sup> Nasr does not provide a timetable for development, which is assumed to evolve naturally from one stage to another. In the first period, Traditionalism is primarily a movement of thought, not a political or social movement. It does not intend to mobilize a mass of people to fight against modernism politically and socially, but to educate a small group of people to address the problems of modernism at the religious or spiritual level:

This force is the revival of the Islamic tradition from within by those who have encountered the modern world fully and who, with complete awareness of the nature of that world and all the problems of a philosophical, scientific and social nature which it poses, have returned to the heart of the Islamic tradition to find answers and to revive the Islamic world as a spiritual reality amidst the chaos and turmoil created throughout the world by what is called modernism. The number of this group has of necessity been small. This theatre of action has been not mass meetings or political gatherings, but the hearts and minds of individuals gathered in small circles.<sup>32</sup>

31 Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 11–25.

32 *Ibid.*, 91.

For Nasr, in order to revive Traditionalism, the practice of spirituality in religions, education in Traditionalist thought, and the establishment of a new class of scholars who can criticize modernism in the perspective of Traditionalism are clearly vital at the beginning of the Traditionalist movement. Interestingly, instead of as many people being involved as possible, this group of scholars should be small in number. From the perspective of Nasr's developmental stages, in my opinion the role of this new class of Traditionalists is in fact that of the potential theological reformer who later becomes the leader of other people (Muslims, in the case of Islam), leading them towards a Traditionalist (Islamic) society in the final stage, which is one of the reasons why their number is small. The other reason relates to Nasr's Traditionalist metaphysics of human beings and rationality, but this certainly attracts a charge of elitism (to be discussed later). In view of this, the promulgation of Traditionalism is an indispensable process in actualizing this new class of reformer.<sup>33</sup>

To actualize the Traditionalist movement, Nasr and others have established fora or centres in various Western countries to promulgate their thought, which include establishing (1) foundations or organizations to publish journals or magazines and organize conferences; (2) publishers; and (3) websites. Furthermore, for Traditionalists, the difference between these fora is only geographical. They share the same message regarding what they promulgate, and so, even though the fora are in practice not formally connected around the world, in conception there is only one Universal Forum for Traditionalism.<sup>34</sup> The relationship between Nasr and these fora is mainly educational, based on the publication of his works through the fora, his presentations in their conferences or his presidency of the foundation. The two earlier fora were in France and England, since the works of

33 If we understand this new class of Traditionalists as being merely the leaders of the Traditionalist community, then it is not necessary for there to be a huge promulgation movement. Instead, the leaders, if they are identified as potential candidates, should be educated secretly in a small circle. However, the movement of education and promulgation is based not only on the rationale of leadership training, but also on the development of a Traditionalist society as a whole.

34 Quinn, *The Only Tradition*, 37–9.

Guénon and Coomaraswamy were written in French and English, respectively. Before formal establishment of the Traditionalist forum, the articles of Guénon had already been published widely in a number of different journals, including *Le Voile d'Isis* (The Veil of Isis). After Guénon had been offered an associate editorship in this journal, his articles transformed this formerly theosophical journal into an exclusive Traditionalist forum, which was renamed *Études Traditionnelles* after Guénon left for Cairo in 1935.

Later, the regular contributors to *Études Traditionnelles* established an English forum as well. The first English journal for Traditionalist studies, called *Studies in Comparative Religion*, was published in the UK in 1963. Similar to *Études Traditionnelles*, it transformed another journal, which was previously called *Tomorrow*, into a Traditionalist journal.<sup>35</sup> The headquarters of this journal were moved to the USA (Bloomington, Indiana) and it was sponsored by another American Traditionalist book publisher, World Wisdom, Inc.<sup>36</sup> Another English forum is *Temenos*, established by the poet and scholar Kathleen Raine in 1980, which published a Traditionalist journal called *Temenos Academy Review* and has now established an Australian forum called The Barbara Blackman Temenos Foundation.<sup>37</sup> In North America, *Parabola* (USA) and *Sacred Web* (Canada) were published in the 1970s and 1990s respectively.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the Fons Vitae Foundation (USA), which has a strong connection with the Islamic Texts Society, Quinta Essentia and other pro-Traditionalist organizations, was established in 1997.<sup>39</sup> As was mentioned above, in 1984, the Foundation for Traditional Studies was also established and published the Traditionalist journal *Sophia* in the USA. Apart from publishing books, Nasr promotes Traditionalism and Traditional Islam mainly through his publications in the above-mentioned English journals for Traditional studies and also in

35 <<http://www.studiesincomparativereligion.com/Public/default.aspx>> accessed 25 Sept. 2012.

36 <<http://www.worldwisdom.com/public/home.aspx>> accessed 25 Sept. 2012.

37 <[http://www.temenosacademy.org/temenos\\_home.html](http://www.temenosacademy.org/temenos_home.html)> accessed 25 Sept. 2012.

38 <<http://www.parabola.org>> and <<http://www.sacredweb.com>> accessed 25 Sept. 2012.

39 <<http://www.fonsvitae.com/about.html>> accessed 25 Sept. 2012.

some other non-Traditionalist journals and magazines such as *The Islamic Quarterly*, *Philosophy East and West* and *Cross Currents*.<sup>40</sup> Nasr multiplied the number of Traditionalist fora in North America when he settled in the USA.<sup>41</sup>

## Nasr's Traditionalist Metaphysical Critique: Pros and Cons

For Traditionalists, the ideas of Guénon, Coomaraswamy and Schuon are similar to, and complement, each other, the only difference being a matter of emphasis, or the style or vocabulary used in the writing; as such, there is no real disagreement between them.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the terms they emphasize, namely, *la Tradition primordiale* of Guénon, the *Philosophia Perennis* of Coomaraswamy and the *Religio Perennis* of Schuon, should be understood as the different expressions of the same Traditionalist thought.<sup>43</sup> Traditionalists are not 'making' a Traditionalist world-view or principle; rather, they 'rediscover' that which was lost. Strictly speaking, they are only the messengers, not the founders, of Traditionalism, and as Kelly says, 'To follow Guénon is not to follow the man, but to follow the light of traditional truth.'<sup>44</sup> The thought itself is therefore separate and independent from the Traditionalists, and resembles that of many Eastern religions,

40 <<http://www.uhpress.hawaii.edu/journal/pew>> for *Philosophy East and West*, accessed 28 Dec. 2007; <<http://www.iccuk.org>> for *The Islamic Quarterly*, accessed 25 Sept. 2012; <<http://www.crosscurrents.org>> for *Cross Currents*, accessed 25 Sept. 2012.

41 Apart from the fora mentioned above there are many others, but their relationships with Nasr are not so clear. For more information see the website of World Wisdom Inc., <<http://www.worldwisdom.com/public/home.aspx>> accessed 21 Oct. 2013.

42 Oldmeadow, *Traditionalism*, 41; Quinn, *The Only Tradition*, 4–6.

43 Another term which carries a similar meaning is '*Sophia Perennis*', the Eternal Wisdom.

44 B. Kelly, 'Notes on the Light of the Eastern Religions', in Seyyed H. Nasr and W. Stoddart, eds, *Religion of the Heart: Essays Presented to Frithjof Schuon on His Eightieth Birthday* (Chicago, IL: ABC International Group, 2000), 160–1.

including Islam. In the following, I first articulate the contribution of the Traditionalist metaphysical critique of modernism and then I examine its problems, one of which is elitism. This is problematic at the social level and therefore, in order to overcome this problem, I reinterpret it as a qualitative social critique of modernism, which is more compatible with contemporary society.

### *Scientia Sacra, Ultimate Reality and the Critique of Modernism*

To understand the Traditionalist ideas of Nasr, we have to start with his idea of *scientia sacra* since it is the gateway to his thought. Nasr distinguishes the term *scientia sacra* from the English equivalent, 'sacred science'. The former denotes the ultimate or supreme science of the Ultimate Reality; the latter is the science of the sacred nature of the manifested and cosmic order, and the supreme science is in fact the background of it.<sup>45</sup> In *The Need for a Sacred Science*, Nasr articulates the concept of sacred science more clearly in order to articulate the multiplicity or hierarchical structure between *scientia sacra* and sacred sciences, and the problem of secularization. He writes, 'To speak of sacred science or the traditional metaphysics which provides the necessary and essential background for the cultivation of sacred science, necessitates discussing the question of the multiplicity of sacred forms as well as the denial of these forms by secularized man [*sic*].'<sup>46</sup> In *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Nasr points out that *scientia sacra* is the 'sacred knowledge which lies at the heart of every revelation and is the centre of that circle which encompasses and defines tradition.'<sup>47</sup> This knowledge cannot be understood and obtained by quantitative and empirical reasoning (*ratio*), which operates within the relativity of this world; it is gained through the

45 Nasr, 'Reply to Ibrahim Kalin', in Hahn, Auxier and Stone Jr., eds, *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, 464.

46 Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 45.

47 Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 130.

revelation of the source of sacred science to the human intellect or intuition (*intellectus*), which is the pure and higher form of human rationality.

Therefore, *scientia sacra* is not merely knowledge as we understand it in modern times; for Nasr, it is also the Ultimate Reality, which unfolds itself to the human intellect: 'what we have designated as *scientia sacra* is none other than metaphysics if this term is understood correctly as the ultimate science of the Real.<sup>48</sup> The concern of *scientia sacra* is with the nature of Ultimate Reality and the methods for the realization of this Reality, and therefore different sciences, anthropology, physics or psychology, can be sacred sciences as long as they do not deny the *scientia sacra* or Ultimate Reality. In other words, the sacred sciences should consider all scientific activities as operating within a metaphysical framework of the *scientia sacra*. Ultimate Reality is 'something' independent from humans and unfolds itself to human rationality, and therefore, critique or diversity must operate within this Reality, rather than deny it. In the following, I examine the basic metaphysic of Ultimate Reality.

As was mentioned above, the thought of Nasr is particularly influenced by Schuon, and therefore Nasr also emphasizes the Ultimate Reality as primarily religious. For Nasr, the basic metaphysics of Reality, which includes both Supra-Being (non-Being or Beyond-Being) and Being, are both transcendent and immanent, both Supreme Object and Innermost Subject: as he says, 'Only God as Being can allow man [*sic*] to experience the Godhead as Supra-Being.'<sup>49</sup> Nasr therefore offers a connection between a particular God, Allah in Islam for example, as Being and universal Godhead as Supra-Being, which is the same for all traditional religions in an absolute and ultimate level of Reality.<sup>50</sup> In *The Need for a Sacred Science*, Nasr expresses the idea of Reality as follows:

48 Ibid., 132.

49 Ibid., 137.

50 The discussion of Nasr's views on religion is not concerned with religions after Islam. Therefore, the term 'traditional religion' used here refers to religions before Islam, such as Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Taoism. It refers to the 'historical' religions rather than to the *Religio Perennis*, which is universal, hence my use of lower case.

[...] reality is not exhausted by the psychological world in which human beings usually function, nor is consciousness limited to the everyday level of awareness of the men and women of present-day humanity. Ultimate Reality [...] is beyond all determination and limitation. It is the Absolute and Infinite from which issues goodness like the rays of the sun which of necessity emanate from it. Whether the Principle is envisaged as Fullness or Emptiness depends upon the point of departure of the particular metaphysical interpretation in question [...] The Principle can be envisaged as the Pure Object but also as the Pure Subject or the Supreme 'I', in which case ordinary consciousness is then seen as an outward envelope of the Supreme Self rather than the descent of the Supreme Reality into lower realms of the universal hierarchy. But in either case, whether seen as the Transcendent or the Immanent, the Principle gives rise to a universe which is hierarchical, possessing many levels of existence and of states of consciousness from the Supreme Principle to earthly man and his terrestrial ambience.<sup>51</sup>

Understood in this way, no matter whether viewed from outwards inwards or in the hierarchical perspective, Ultimate Reality consists of many grades or levels of existence in a structure and is finally unified as the One as the ultimate foundation and source of everything, including the cosmos, the world, humans, and, especially, religion, in the thought of Nasr.<sup>52</sup> Similar to the concept of *scientia sacra*, there is also a universal Religion or *religio perennis* in the study of the transcendent unity of religions of Schuon.<sup>53</sup>

Following Schuon, Nasr constructs an esoteric–exoteric or 'Absolute-in-itself'–'relatively absolute' dichotomy in every traditional religion.<sup>54</sup> The exoteric domain represents the separate, distinct religious traditions such as Buddhism, Christianity or Islam in terms of their particular history, dogmas or rituals, while in the esoteric domain, different religious

51 Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science*, 55–6.

52 Islamic cosmology, according to Huston Smith, may posit five levels of reality, but discussion of this is beyond the scope of this research. Huston Smith, 'Nasr's Defence of the Perennial Philosophy', in Hahn, Auxier and Stone Jr., eds, *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, 148.

53 F. Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, trans. P. Townsend (London: Faber, 1953), 33–60.

54 Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 18–19.

traditions show the way towards the same Absolute and converge on the Truth through their spiritual disciplines, intellect and contemplation. The exoteric domain, even if it is the far side of the esoteric domain, is the only way to reach the esoteric domain. In a similar way to Kant with his distinction between *noumenon* (thing-in-itself) and phenomenon, Nasr rediscovers the Ultimate Reality (the Absolute-in-itself) behind and shared by all religions (the relatively absolute). This means that even though Islam believes in a personal God, while Buddhism posits an impersonal principle, there is still an independent 'Supra-Being', which transcends and unifies them. But unlike with Kant's separation between *noumenon* and phenomenon, Nasr asserts that people can experience or reach the level of universal Religion through a particular traditional religion. This metaphysical hierarchy of existence, which in fact is not confined to religion, but operates also in the fields of science, the arts, literature, architecture, economy, politics and society in this contemporary world, is like a tree with its root (Sacred Knowledge, religious revelation), trunk (saints and prophets), and finally branches and fruits (arts, philosophy, science and social institutions).<sup>55</sup> Some are more important (the roots) while some are less so (fruits), but all of them constitute a living organism. According to this kind of understanding, in the modern world there is a twofold denial of Traditionalist metaphysics. The first denial is that of Ultimate Reality, which is equivalent to the denial of *scientia sacra* and *religio perennis*, and the second is the denial of the sacred dimension or form of all sorts of sciences and traditional religions, which is derived from the Ultimate Reality. Both of these lead Nasr to be critical of modernism.

It is no exaggeration to say that modernism, for Nasr, is secularism, no more, no less. Secularism destroys the multi-level or grade of reality and knowledge, and reduces them to one dimension, the empirical or worldly dimension. To a degree, this complaint is similar to the complaint of Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), that one-dimensional man has lost revolutionary and critical thought in an advanced industrial and capitalist society. For Nasr, modernity represents only one level of reality in the West at

55 Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981), 1.

the present time, but it is neither universal nor immutable. Since it started during a particular historical period in Europe, that is, the Enlightenment, it will continue to change when technology and social infrastructure change, and so when compared with the Ultimate Reality, modernity is secondary but not necessarily evil. Modernism, however, promotes a belief and attitude that there is no level except this earthly one, which dominates and transforms this contemporary world into a secular world.<sup>56</sup> The fundamental *differentia* between the sacred and the profane levels in various areas is therefore deteriorating in favour of secularism in the modern world. In view of this, modernity constituted as one level of reality must be unified with the higher level of reality, the Sacred Reality, in order to rescue people from the modern plight.

For example, in the field of science, it should be the *scientia sacra* leading empirical science (if not, it is only scientism), or sacred knowledge leading secular knowledge.<sup>57</sup> In the case of architecture and other similar artistic activities, there are traditional architectures, which can lift people up to the sacred level and harmonize with nature while the secularized kind cannot.<sup>58</sup> In the case of the human body, there is the transcendental or heavenly self (spirit and soul) and empirical or earthly self (psyche and body), and people therefore should be a bridge between heaven and earth (Pontifical persons) rather than rebels against heaven (Promethean persons).<sup>59</sup> In the area of human rationality, apart from *ratio*, there is *gnosis* or *intellectus* (intellect and intuition), a higher faculty of human rationality,

56 Contemporary society/world does not equate with modern society/world. The former refers only to a society at the present time, i.e. a society with present-day technology, science and social infrastructure, while the latter refers to an ideological society – a secular society. The meaning of ‘modernity’ is nearly equivalent to that of ‘the contemporary world’. Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 98. See also A. Schleifer, ‘The Problematic Ironies of Islamization’, in M. H. Faghfoory, ed., *Beacon of Knowledge: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, 319.

57 Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 130–59.

58 Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 239–50.

59 Smith, ‘Nasr’s Defence of the Perennial Philosophy’, in Hahn, Auxier and Stone Jr., eds, *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, 148; Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 160–88.

connecting to the sacred knowledge.<sup>60</sup> Originally, in traditional society, the sacred and the profane function in harmony; however, people in the modern age eliminate the sacred dimension of existence, and the world becomes one-dimensional with the remaining of the profane, which more easily degenerates into evil.<sup>61</sup>

For this reason, humans are suffering from chaos in spirituality, morality and nature in respect of their meaningless and purposeless life, increasing the trends of crime, war and environmental crisis in the world. For Nasr, a revival of Traditionalist metaphysics means a restoration of hierarchy in every possible sense for the whole world; within this hierarchy, the centre and position of humans in relation to this centre, to other humans and to nature can be ascertained. The Absolute in this hierarchy, which incorporates all other religious realities, functions similarly to the Ultimate Reality, which is not fixed or completely known at the present moment. Each religion under this hierarchy offers its standards of right and wrong, true or false to its followers, and therefore moral justification can be vindicated.

At the social level, if everyone realizes that there is a religious or spiritual significance in every moment, event and work in their life and recognizes that there is an Ultimate Reality as the centre of their life, then they not only have reason but also have the passion to distinguish the authentic from the inauthentic and the true from the untrue according to the moral and spiritual teachings of their religions, since they will finally be judged or returned to this centre. It is therefore not only an epistemological recognition but also a life-and-death, ontological commitment. The Sacred Reality

60 Nasr, 'Intellect and Intuition: Their Relationship from the Islamic Perspective', in Salem Azzam, ed., *Islam and Contemporary Society* (London: Longman, 1982), 36–46.

61 Nasr, *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968), 17–50. Nasr does not mean that only the sacred is important and everything else is useless. A person with sacred or spiritual knowledge must also possess a high level of virtue and the spiritual disciplines required by their faith, and the high living standard enjoyed by humans in the modern world is good as well, but the point is that it is not achieved at the expense of diminishing the sacred. See Nasr's replies to 'Shu-hsien Liu', and 'David B. Burrell', in Hahn, Auxier and Stone Jnr., eds, *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr* at 270–6 and 658–68 respectively.

offers a strong foundation to the question 'why moral?'. Therefore, people can resist modern materialism and consumerism since their temptation to fulfil personal desire will be controlled by their religiosity and spirituality. The work ethic is also no longer a pursuit of economic gain, power and status, and external goods, but is oriented by the art and vocation in work or practice. Instead of being a cog in a machine owing to over-specification in the modernized economy, people can easily realize the meaning of their work, because it possesses a religious significance and a sacred dimension assigned by the Divine to the selected person.<sup>62</sup> The drive to harmonize with the environment and be integrated with humans is more easily justified from the perspective that the environment and all human beings originate from the same Sacred Source.<sup>63</sup> Traditionalists have a strong passion to set up society according to their vision since it is Real/True in an absolute and ontological sense. However, this metaphysical critique also creates many problems.

### *Against the Modern World*

Legenhausen and Liu criticize Traditionalism as posing a sweeping generalization against everything in the modern world, and ignoring the superiority of the modern world in terms of science and technology, for example. For Legenhausen, it is a self-defeating criticism since Traditionalism is also a modern ideology founded before World War II. Traditionalists, including Nasr, on the one hand oversimplify modernism as secular or evil and uncritically glorify traditional society on the other; moreover, they focus

62 Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 35–46. My own experience is that, in the case of many of my Christian friends, the more they are committed to Christianity, the more they are reluctant to change their current job or career since they always think that there is a divine 'purpose' behind their job or the industry they enter. To a certain extent, this 'purpose' exists behind everything.

63 For more about the benefits of restoring this Traditionalist Metaphysics, see Quinn, *The Only Tradition*, 247–306, which devotes three chapters to discussing its benefits and the problem of modern culture.

on metaphysical principles but ignore the significance of historical and social studies. Finally, for the critics, what Traditionalists promulgate only results in their irrelevance in the modern world.<sup>64</sup> Such criticism, especially that of Legenhausen, constitutes a radical or extreme interpretation of Traditionalism. As was mentioned above, Nasr does not argue that there is nothing useful in modern social life, or in modern science and technology. These become useless only when they deny the Sacred Reality, a higher level of reality leading them to fulfil a higher level of purpose, be it ethical or spiritual, but never merely empirical. Therefore, it is not a sweeping generalization against modernity, but against modernism. Modernity is also a level of reality, only not an ultimate reality. For Nasr, both traditional and modern societies contain evil and suffering, but traditional society has the sacred power to support ethical or spiritual correction and reformation, while modern society is weak in this respect as it experiences a process of desacralization. What Nasr proposes is to revive the sacralization of contemporary society under Traditionalist metaphysical principles.

Finally, cultural, historical, political and social studies of religion, in the case of Nasr, are also necessary in order to articulate the difference between the sacred and profane levels of knowledge, and therefore they occupy a secondary position *only* when compared with metaphysical study, and there is no doubt that they have their own significance. These radical critics do not consider seriously one of Nasr's aphorisms: 'Not everything that is non-traditional is anti-traditional.'<sup>65</sup> This non-traditional category is a conceptual 'buffer' to lessen an extreme generalization of Traditionalism as being against the modern world, and so it is particularly useful at the social level (to be discussed later). In short, these critics oversimplify the rationality of Traditionalist Metaphysics in order to set up a straw man they can demolish easily. However, it is correct to argue that Nasr does not believe in the optimistic advocacy of modernism and secularism and in a

64 Legenhausen, 'Why I am not a Traditionalist', 9–15 and Liu, 'Reflections on Tradition and Modernity: A Response to Seyyed Hossein Nasr from a Neo-Confucian Perspective', in Hahn, Auxier and Stone Jr, eds. *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, 253–69 and Nasr's reply at 270–6.

65 Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 120.

self-corrective mechanism of the modern world in response to the chaos it created. This description of Nasr's response to the modern world should be compared with the thought of other Muslim intellectuals in order to make Nasr's uniqueness clear.

In *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise*, Ahmed asserts that, on the one hand, postmodernism is a predicament for Muslims because they are living in an 'increasingly secular, cynical, irreverent, fragmented, materialistic and, therefore [...] hostile' environment, but that it promises 'hope, understanding and toleration' on the other.<sup>66</sup> For Ahmed, this is the place where postmodernism and Islam can meet. First of all, Muslims should not interpret postmodernism or the modern world merely in a negative sense; there are positive sides, 'like diversity, the freedom to explore, the breakdown of establishment structures and the possibility to know and understand one another', and this is a time 'that holds the possibility of bringing diverse people and cultures closer together than ever before.'<sup>67</sup> For the non-Muslim, Ahmed argues against any stereotype of the Muslim image, be it due to imperialistic assumptions or to events such as 9/11. He argues for a genuine dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims in order to overcome shortcomings and promote the best of each. However, in his *Postmodernism and the Other: The New Imperialism of Western Culture*, Sardar paints a more pessimistic picture of postmodernism. Unlike Ahmed, with his idea of postmodernism as a new hope for Muslims in the West, Sardar argues that postmodernism

continues the exponential expansion of colonialism and modernity. It is a worldview based on that pathological condition of the West, which has always defined reality and truth as its reality and truth, but now that this position cannot be sustained it seeks to maintain the status quo and continue unchecked in its trajectory of consumption of the Other by undermining all criteria of reality and truth.<sup>68</sup>

66 A. S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise* (London: Routledge, 1992), x.

67 *Ibid.*, 27–8.

68 Z. Sardar, *Postmodernism and the Other: the New Imperialism of Western Culture* (London and Chicago, IL: Pluto Press, 1997), 40.

As in Said's thesis of Orientalism, for Sardar the Other (including the Muslim) does not have a hearing in this modern world, as they are only an object (the Other) consumed and appropriated by Westerners. Ironically, since there are no universal but only relative values, truth and reality, then everything perceived as Other, both Western and non-Western cultures, can turn into 'commodities, out there for its own consumption'.<sup>69</sup> What Sardar wants to achieve is a 'visible alternative to the West' by finding resources for change within the culture and tradition of the Other; in Islam, he argues for the resuscitation of the tradition of independent reasoning, *ijtihad* (see Chapter 4).<sup>70</sup> Finally, in *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism*, Sayyid argues that the 'emergence of Islamism (or political Islam) is based on the erosion of eurocentrism'.<sup>71</sup> The voice of Muslims becomes audible because the symbolic status of being the universal of the West is waning; the West is no longer the centre or standard for the world. Islamist voices are a challenge to 'the Age of the West', and in fact Sayyid has a hope in Islamism since '[it] is a project that draws much of its strength from a conviction that there is no need for a detour through the labyrinths of Western history, before one can arrive at a vision of the good life and a just order: universal values can be generated from Islam'.<sup>72</sup>

What makes Nasr's idea different from these three Muslim intellectuals' is that Nasr does not have any hope or trust, whether in the modern or the postmodern world, since it is impossible for the world to be self-corrected without the 'enlightenment' of the Sacred Knowledge/Reality. He is therefore neither optimistic nor pessimistic. Moreover, the Traditionalist metaphysical principles are unchangeable in nature but the world is changeable, and therefore for Nasr it is not a correct approach to force Islam or traditional religions to come to terms with this secular world. On the contrary: the contemporary world should be reformed according to the metaphysical principles shared by all traditional religionists. Therefore, Nasr does

69 Ibid., 126.

70 Ibid., 281–3.

71 B. S. Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism* (London: Zed Books, 2003), 2nd edn, 155.

72 Ibid., xxii.

not intend to essentialize a confrontation between Islam and the West or between Muslim and non-Muslim, but a confrontation between the Sacred and the Secular.<sup>73</sup> With this primary confrontation against secularism in mind, all traditional religionists should work together and consider their cultural, ideological and religious differences as secondary, which in fact pulls closer and consolidates the relationship between Muslims and other religionists in the West.

### *Unorthodox View of Science and Reductive Religious Pluralism*

In this section, I extend the criticisms of Sardar and Legenhausen in another aspect. The criticism of Sardar is primarily concerned with Nasr's scientific view, but it extends to his religious view as well, and Legenhausen, who promotes a non-reductive religious pluralism in Islam, criticizes Nasr's religious view as reductive religious pluralism. Before we can examine Sardar's criticism, we need to know more about his idea of science. Sardar, with his training in physics and information science at City University London, considers that the nature of science is

[first] a set of human activities [...] [second] simply a method, an objective methodology for establishing verifiable facts. [Third] the coherent, growing body of public knowledge that has resulted from cumulative application of this methodology. We consider science to be a complex combination of all three partial views. But more than that: we consider all aspects of science to be value-oriented and science as a whole to be a cultural activity, an activity that is shaped by the world-view of the actor.<sup>74</sup>

The above understanding of science has two implications, the first relating to the nature of science and the second to culture. First, the nature of science has both objective and subjective aspects, methodology and

73 From this perspective, Traditionalist Metaphysics must be pluralistic in nature in order to gather the power of all traditional religions to confront the secularism of the modern world.

74 Sardar, *Science, Technology and Development in the Muslim World* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 21.

verifiable fact constitute the objective aspect and the world-view of the scientists constitutes the subjective one. Understood in this way, Sardar can develop his idea of 'Islamic science', a scientific methodology or knowledge that operates under the Islamic world-view. Second, only with this idea of Islamic science can Islam continue to be a living culture or public knowledge in society. Therefore, culture does not refer to the traditions in the past, but to 'an attitude of mind, a mental outlook, a world-view', which is constantly developing through the process of independent reasoning, the *ijtihad* mentioned above.<sup>75</sup> For Sardar, the scientific view of Nasr is simply wrong, unorthodox or insignificant as regards the real science since it does not pay any attention to modern sciences except those which are immersed in the gnostic world-view. Similarly, when Nasr essentializes (rediscovers) the Absolute unifying all other religions, for Sardar, it looks like a new religion (gnosticism or occultism) rather than like Islam, one which just *uses* Islamic terminology. Sardar therefore criticizes Nasr strongly, asserting that he is 'a nowhere man occupying a nowhere land and his discourse is *neither about Islam, nor about science*, but ultimately is part of a totalitarian enterprise that would *submit all knowledge to the authority of the Gnostics* and others who know the truth.'<sup>76</sup> In addition:

Add Islamic terminology, and you have the gnosis of Nasr. So where does Islam figure in all this? It is clear that there is little Islamic content, but as Greek gnosticism is able to fasten like a parasite on Islam, it is able to present the whole thing in Islamic terminology. It is hardly surprising then when it comes to the actual history of Islamic science, Nasr presents it essentially as a history of esotericism and occult, interpretation and adaptation of Greek mythology by the Muslims, and takes every opportunity to glorify gnosticism.<sup>77</sup>

However, first, there is no criterion by which Sardar can distinguish clearly whether Nasr has created an unorthodox science and religion ('gnosticism', as Sardar claims) or an authentic interpretation or superior form of Islamic science and Islam, as Nasr claims, *scientia sacra* and Traditional Islam.

75 Ibid., 51ff.

76 Sardar, *Explorations in Islamic Science* (London: Mansell, 1989), 128–9. Italics mine.

77 Ibid., 119.

Second, Nasr does not disregard the significance of modern science and non-traditional Islam. They are problematic only when they deny the *scientia sacra* and *religio perennis*. Finally, Sardar himself also does not accept a completely objective and empirical scientific view; therefore the difference between Sardar and Nasr is only a difference in their world-view. Sardar is arguing that his world-view is Islamic while Nasr is un-Islamic or Gnostic, but the criticism of Sardar does not go to the core of Nasr's thought, the idea of *religio perennis*, in order to argue whether Nasr's Traditionalist world-view is correct or not.<sup>78</sup> In the following, I therefore discuss the criticism of Legenhausen, since he is concerned with the concept of *religio perennis* rather than with Islamic science.

Legenhausen criticizes the concept of *religio perennis* as reductive religious pluralism, which constitutes an 'attempt to identify a common element among different religions on the basis of which the religions are successful in some specific way', whereas in non-reductive religious pluralism 'God guides whomever He will, not only by virtue of features common to several religions but also by their unique divine qualities'.<sup>79</sup> The concept of non-reductive religious pluralism that he promotes, however, is ambiguous since it is semi-pluralism as well as semi-exclusivism. On the one hand, he asserts that Islam is the correct religion ordained by God and admits that it is exclusivist, but on the other, he says that the teachings of previous religions such as Judaism are sufficient to guide their believers to salvation since, for him, Judaism is a member-religion of 'general Islam', which refers to all divinely revealed religions in the general sense of complete submission to the commands of Allah (Islam in the specific sense refers to the

78 For more detail regarding the differences of Sardar or Ismáil Faruqi with Nasr in relation to modern science see: I. Kalin, 'Three Views of Science in the Islamic World', in Ted Peters, Muzaffar Iqbal and Syed Nomanul Haq, eds, *God, Life and the Cosmos: Christian and Islamic Perspectives* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 43–75; L. Stenberg, *Islamization of Science: Four Muslim Positions Developing an Islamic Modernity* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1996).

79 M. Legenhausen, 'A Muslim's Non-Reductive Religious Pluralism', in Roger Boase, ed., *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 51.

final version of general Islam). But what about those religions that do not look like general Islam, such as Taoism or Buddhism? For Legenhausen, the answer is unknown to humans; only God knows.<sup>80</sup>

There are three main criticisms that may be made of Legenhausen. The first concerns the difference and contradiction between religions, which cannot be explained away as secondary or insignificant. Second, methodologically, Legenhausen argues that *religio perennis* commits the logical fallacy of *petitio principii*, which literally means ‘postulation of the beginning or principle’ (a premise is assumed to be true without warrant), or, in his own words, a fallacy of question begging (a proposition to be proved is assumed implicitly or explicitly in one of the premises). Finally, Legenhausen criticizes *religio perennis* for viewing all religions from outside, from a neutral vantage.<sup>81</sup>

As regards the first criticism, Legenhausen on the one hand emphasizes the cultural, doctrinal and practical contradictions between religions and the differences within religion, including Islam, but on the other, he emphasizes the universality of the Qur’an.<sup>82</sup> This means that although he articulates many differences within Islam, he still admits that the Qur’an constitutes the commonality of Islam. What Nasr does is to ask a further question: is there commonality behind all religions? For Nasr, the answer is affirmative and this is the fundamental idea of essentializing or rediscovering the Ultimate Reality. Nasr expends a lot of effort in essentializing this level of Reality through the universality of science, of Supra-Being, of spirituality or religiosity, of symbolism or arts, eternity and so on. The purpose of all of them is to point to this level of existence. If Legenhausen asks ‘How can I know that the Real (exists and) manifests itself through the cosmos, humanity and religion?’, to such a question Nasr has no answer. He just asserts and expects to be confirmed as if stating the obvious; explanation or philosophical discussion is irrelevant.<sup>83</sup> Either people believe it

80 Ibid., 65–6.

81 M. Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism* (London: Al-Hoda, 1999), 127–50.

82 Ibid., 131ff.

83 Aslan, *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy: The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, 169.

or deny it, but they cannot prove it.<sup>84</sup> If Legenhausen can accept that it is beyond human rationality to know the will of God in his argument of non-reductive religious pluralism, then I think that he should also accept that the belief in Ultimate Reality can also resort to human ignorance. If not, he is promulgating a double standard.

Similarly, Legenhausen is promulgating a double standard when he criticizes Nasr for entertaining the logical fallacy of *petitio principii*. Legenhausen argues that Nasr has first assumed the existence of common esoteric essence among all traditional religions before reading the religious texts or doctrines, and so he only discovers the similarity of religions, but dismisses all the differences or contradictions (both esoteric and exoteric differences) among them as being simply secondary, inessential, corruption or cultural. This a priori conviction is question-begging, in his words.<sup>85</sup> In short, for Nasr, the differences between religions are complementary and secondary (when compared with the ultimate level), while for Legenhausen they are contradictory and primary.<sup>86</sup> However, this criticism is not fair because in his theory of non-reductive religious pluralism Legenhausen finally resorts to human ignorance, which is definitely a logical 'black hole', an area where logic does not apply. If his non-reductive religious pluralism is not logically perfect then why does he demand the existence of Ultimate Reality in Traditionalism to be logically flawless? He is relying on a double standard again.<sup>87</sup> However, it is correct to say that in Traditionalist metaphysics, reality or ontology is primary while methodology is secondary. For

84 I recognize that Nasr on some occasions tries to reconcile the contradictions between religions in order to support their commonality at the level of Ultimate Reality, but this is simply unnecessary since, at this ultimate level, it transcends rational or philosophical human arguments.

85 M. Legenhausen, 'Why I am not a Traditionalist', 8–9.

86 For a similar criticism see M. Ruzgar, 'Islam and Deep Religious Pluralism', in David Ray Griffin, ed., *Deep Religious Pluralism* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 158–77.

87 Religious pluralism is in my view a highly debatable topic. Neither non-reductive nor reductive religious pluralisms offer a completely perfect argument, and my intention here is therefore not to support Nasr's idea of religious pluralism as the correct argument, but to argue that the non-reductive religious pluralism of Legenhausen

Nasr and other Traditionalists, there is no methodology or religious criterion with which to assist people to believe in Traditionalist Metaphysics, and so whether a person believes what they promulgate or not is ultimately subject to personal intuition, esoteric and historical experience or even fate (in religious terms, chosen by God) rather than methodological or rational proof.

Finally, *religio perennis* creates a neutral vantage from which to view all religions from outside. For Legenhausen, this vantage simply does not exist. This criticism is valid, but it ignores the qualitative difference between *religio perennis* as the ultimate level of Reality and other traditional religions at the level of this world. Nasr does not argue for exoteric neutrality, that is, different religious beliefs or morality are all correct. If we want to use the term 'neutrality' then Nasr in fact argues for esoteric neutrality, but we must remember that the concept of neutrality in this world cannot be directly applied to the esoteric domain of Ultimate Reality since it is beyond human rationality as mentioned earlier. Having examined the criticisms of Sardar and Legenhausen, I will now turn to discuss the issue that, I think, is the most problematic in the thought of Nasr, religious elitism.

### *Religious Elitism*

As was mentioned above, Traditionalists ought to be few in number. Nasr explicitly admits that he is elitist in the sense that 'if by this charge is meant that the traditional school accepts the saying of Christ that "many are called but few are chosen", then yes, it is elitist'.<sup>88</sup> He also says, 'But there is another type of knowledge (sacred knowledge), possible for all men [*sic*], but in practice attained only by the few.'<sup>89</sup> From the metaphysical viewpoint, it is possible for everyone to attain a higher level of knowledge through spiritual

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is not good enough to outshine or replace that of Nasr, since Legenhausen finally resorts to an argument of human ignorance similar to Nasr's.

88 Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science*, 59.

89 Nasr, 'Intellect and Intuition: Their Relationship from the Islamic Perspective', in Salem Azzam, ed., *Islam and Contemporary Society*, 43.

practices and disciplines according to each religion, but, in reality, attainment is not guaranteed even if people follow their religious traditions, since the attainment of a higher level of knowledge is only based on 'direct and immediate [knowledge] without the help of any intermediary concepts and ideas'.<sup>90</sup> The lack of any methodology to attain a higher level and to ascertain which level a person has attained creates an unbridgeable hierarchy among humans, and the only way to authorize a person having attained a higher level of knowledge is through a master–disciple system.<sup>91</sup> Only the master, having knowledge at a particular level, can determine what level of knowledge disciples have attained. A master–disciple (apprentice) system constitutes the authority of the Sacred Tradition. There are, from the perspective of Nasr, some 'false masters' who do not agree with Traditionalism and lead disciples in a wrong way, and therefore, for Nasr, it is important to promulgate a correct or authentic version of Traditionalism. However, even with this master–disciple system to 'rationalize' the attainment process, it is still possible that someone could be chosen to be a master without going through this system.<sup>92</sup>

However, at the social level, this spiritual elitism becomes problematic. First of all, Nasr defends his elitism by analogy with someone who can master the knowledge of physics, for example, while others cannot.<sup>93</sup> Nasr wants to argue that elitism merely refers to the different levels of knowledge or ability a person attains. But this is misleading since, from Nasr's and the Traditionalist's perspective, knowledge is not only horizontal in nature but also vertical or hierarchical, and religious knowledge is situated at a higher level than earthly knowledge such as of physics or politics. Knowledge and reality are unified at the sacred level and are separated only because of desacralization.<sup>94</sup> Understood in this way, sacred knowledge, when people have it, refers not only to their superior knowledge but also to superior human beings in an ontological sense. For example, it is simply impossible

90 Ibid., p.43.

91 Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 147–63.

92 Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man*, 71–100.

93 Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science*, 59.

94 Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 1.

for Nasr to *know* that mercifulness is morally and spiritually significant, but he *himself* is not a merciful man, ontologically speaking.<sup>95</sup> To a degree, this ontological nature of hierarchy is the reason why Nasr supports the caste system as a stabilizing social system, in which everyone has a role to play, whether religious scholar, political leader or follower.<sup>96</sup> Although Nasr does not emphasize the hierarchical nature of the caste system, it must be assumed to be hierarchical since everything in Traditionalist metaphysics is so. Unlike with the caste system in Indian culture, Nasr does not accept that caste should only be given according to birth, so theoretically the system can facilitate people moving from one caste to another, in a similar way to what we refer to as moving up the social ladder.<sup>97</sup> However, it is definitely more difficult for people to be mobile in this society since, as was mentioned above, every position also has a religious significance.

On the positive side, this explains the meaning of work and motivates people working in this or that job, but on the negative side, it weakens the motivation to search not only for a new job, but also a new role, a new identity and a new social class, because the search represents rebellion against the religious vocation as well. In short, Traditionalist society is more stable than modern society because people are more willing to accept, both ontologically and religiously, their present life or status according to certain norms and beliefs established in the society. However, no matter how possible or achievable social mobility is and no matter how hard Nasr tries to minimize the hierarchy or glorify its function, in order to be consistent with Traditionalist metaphysics he cannot deny that the religious are ontologically superior to the secular, and that some who have attained a higher level of sacred knowledge/reality are also ontologically superior to others who have not. This hierarchical superiority of humans based on

95 Shah-Kazemi calls it the 'ontological imperative' of mercy. R. Shah-Kazemi, 'Recollecting the Spirit of Jihad', in Joseph E. B. Lombard, ed., *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2004), 124–7.

96 *Ibid.*, 179.

97 Nasr later is more reluctant to accept the criticism of elitism in *The Heart of Islam*, and argues that social mobility in Islam is achievable. Nasr, *The Heart of Islam* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 172–81.

religious or sacred knowledge is a kind of 'religious elitism', no matter how mercifully and justly the superior class treats the lower one.

To overcome this religious elitism but appropriate the contribution of Traditionalist metaphysics at the social level, I will consider three opinions. First, the superior human being is only realized in the afterlife, not now. Second, we deliberately reserve the application of this hierarchy to human beings (not the human body). Finally, we try to restrict the scope of this hierarchy as a qualitative critique of a particular aspect of society, rather than a comprehensive critique of society as a whole, and therefore no social class will emerge. However, the first opinion will normalize the desacralization or imperfection (the separation between knowledge and reality/being) of the temporal world, which in turn encourages Traditionalists to withdraw or isolate themselves from this world; accordingly, their social critique will become passionless. The second choice is pragmatic but results in theoretical inconsistency when critics ask why human beings are excluded. Therefore I wish to choose the third opinion, and will reinterpret the hierarchy as a critique of the difference between quality and quantity – in Quinn's phrase, the *Complexio Oppositorum* of Quality and Quantity.<sup>98</sup> Apart from hierarchical knowledge/reality, the dichotomy between quality and quantity is in fact another way to describe Traditionalist metaphysics, but it definitely sounds less hierarchical. By choosing the third opinion, I also deliberately exaggerate, but do not distort significantly, Nasr's idea of 'non-tradition' mentioned above in order to lessen the opposition between the sacred and the earthly worlds.<sup>99</sup>

For Nasr, the sacred is the quality, which cannot be measured in terms of quantity, number or money. Every thing or event has both qualitative and quantitative aspects, which are complementary, and therefore the problem of the modern world is the reduction of quality into mere quantity.<sup>100</sup> In the modern world, however, the concept of quality is not alien to people;

98 W. Quinn, Jr, 'The *Complexio Oppositorum* of Quality and Quantity', in *The Only Tradition*, 43–53.

99 What I want to emphasize is the significance of 'non-tradition' in the thought of Nasr. He has mentioned this concept, but its significance is not elaborated properly.

100 Nasr, *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, 17–50.

we can find many examples which can demonstrate what Nasr means by 'quality', such as the right to life and liberty, freedom of thought and expression, equality before the law, the right to participate in culture, the right to work, the right to education or concepts such as justice, obligation and happiness. These are rights or concepts that cannot be reduced to quantity or to financial terms and traded in the market. For Nasr, the highest quality is, of course, sacred knowledge/reality, but my point is that this approach in which quality in the modern world is re-articulated can be applied as economic, political and social critiques of Traditionalism. This qualitative social critique of modernism is ontologically based on the correspondence with Truth/Reality, rather than on the rationality of subjectivity as with Kant. Before I explicate the social vision of Traditional Islam in the following, I must first explain the meaning of the term 'Traditional Islam'.

Nasr says, 'Basing itself on the knowledge provided by the *philosophia perennis*, the traditional school judges between grades of Divine manifestation, various degrees and levels of prophecy, major and minor dispensations from Heaven, and lesser and greater paths even within a single religion.'<sup>101</sup> Therefore, for Nasr, in Islam, the greater path is what he calls 'Traditional Islam'. Other religions will have their own Traditional form and, as was mentioned above, they are superior religious forms, leading believers to the level of Ultimate Truth or Reality, which is not supposed for every believer. In view of this, Traditionalist metaphysics creates an elitist class in every single traditional religion, which refers to the differentiation between Traditional and non-Traditional form.

In *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, Nasr describes explicitly the meaning for him of Traditional Islam, but it is only an inclusive and general description of Islam rather than the one he rediscovers according to Traditionalist metaphysics, which manifests a greater path or higher grade within Islam, as mentioned above.<sup>102</sup> According to Smith, Nasr rediscovers this greater path of Islam not from Islam itself but from the influence of mystical Hermetic philosophy on Islam since, in the works of Nasr, Muslims

101 Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science*, 60–1.

102 Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 11–25.

recognized the prophetic status of Hermes and believed that he was the founder of philosophy and the sciences.<sup>103</sup> For Smith, Nasr's version of Traditional Islam is equated with Hermetic theosophy, Islamic philosophy, Sufism and, especially, what he calls Persian Islam (i.e. the philosophy of Mulla Sadra).<sup>104</sup> For Nasr, Sadra's philosophy is 'the last original traditional school of wisdom in Islam'.<sup>105</sup> Understanding in this way, we can see, when we examine the social vision of Traditional Islam, that it is also structured as a hierocracy.<sup>106</sup>

## The Social Order of Traditional Islam

In this section, I first explain three different ideas of Nasr, namely, anti-tradition, counter-tradition and non-tradition, in relation to Traditional Islam, examine the social order or vision implied by Nasr's Traditional Islam, and, finally, elaborate on the studies by students of Nasr, which demonstrate the qualitative approach in addressing contemporary issues such as political Islam and globalization. Among Nasr's students, I particularly focus on Waleed El-Ansary, who criticizes terrorism, Western neo-classical economic theory and industrial capitalism.

103 Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought*, 102–19.

104 R. M. Smith, 'Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Vision of Traditional Islam: Reformulation and Revival' (unpublished MA thesis, University of Exeter, 2000), 19–28.

105 Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought*, 164.

106 It is impossible for me to discuss any detail of Islamic philosophy or Sufism in this book, since they are so sophisticated and profound in nature and what is indicated here is only the meaning of Traditional Islam elaborated by Smith and, to a certain extent, supported by Nasr's own works. Whether Nasr's Traditionalist view of Islamic philosophy or Sufism is correct or not (and, especially, the so-called Hermetic heritage in Islam, which is highly questionable) is not my concern here.

*Anti-tradition, Counter-tradition and Non-tradition*

In the contemporary West, adherents of Islam are in a numerical minority. Islam is only one of many among religions and secular communities. Furthermore, Traditional Islam is not the only representative of Islam in the West; there are other representatives of Islam which play a more dominant role. Apart from Traditional Islam, Nasr identifies three other Islamic groups, namely, modernist, fundamentalist and Mahdiiist. These are not mutually exclusive, and only the first two groups are relevant in the West.<sup>107</sup> For Nasr, modernist Islam is anti-traditional or, more precisely, anti-Traditional Islam, and fundamentalist Islam is counter-traditional. Islamic modernism is anti-traditional since it tries to alter universal Islamic messages to match secular modernism, while Islamic fundamentalism insists on Islamic messages but in a wrong way, because it also has been infiltrated by secular elements and so is classified as counter-traditional.<sup>108</sup> There is another category, non-tradition, which Nasr mentions in passing and which does not point to any particular Islamic group. I understand it as a concessive period of time or space addressing this contemporary world when Traditional Islam is not fully grown into the final stage as a Traditionalist society such as was mentioned above.

Generally speaking, both the modernist and the fundamentalist movements are products of the encounter with the modern West starting from the French conquest of Egypt in 1798. The experience of defeat and, later, of colonization forced Muslims to reflect upon the reason for their failure. For Nasr, the reforms suggested by Muslim intellectuals and philosophers such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh in Egypt, the Young Turk movement in Ottoman Turkey and Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muhammad Iqbal in India/Pakistan are all to be characterized as Islamic modernist movements.<sup>109</sup> What they did was to change, modify and adapt

107 Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 92. See also Nasr, *A Young Muslim's Guide to the Modern World* (Chicago, IL: Kazi, 1993), 117–31.

108 Smith, *Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Vision of Traditional Islam*, 48–52.

109 Nasr, *The Heart of Islam*, 103.

Islamic messages to suit the conditions of the modern world, to imitate the modern West, in the hope of overcoming Western domination. In order to achieve this adaptation and imitation, Arabism, rationalism, nationalism, socialism and Marxism have permeated Muslim intellectual discourses. For Nasr, these ‘-isms’ are ultimately anti-traditional since they are derived from secularism.<sup>110</sup> In the contemporary West, those Muslims who prefer to privatize religions as a personal preference and focus more on rationalism than on the sacred level of reality/knowledge are no doubt anti-traditional in the eyes of Nasr.

Nasr traces Islamic fundamentalism back to Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia and later to Salafism in Egypt. The fundamentalists believed that ‘Muslims had ceased to follow Islam properly and should return to the practice of their religion in its pure form and with full vigour so as to defeat the non-Islamic forces and escape the punishment ... of God’.<sup>111</sup> However, unlike adherents of Traditional Islam, they forgot their priority of focus. They emphasized only the re-establishment of external legal and social norms, such as Islamic laws and ways of life, rather than internal purification of heart and intellectual and philosophical maturity in response to modernism; accordingly, they did not understand – and in fact disliked – the mystical tradition of Sufism and Islamic philosophy that Nasr treasures most. Like the modernists, they introduced secular elements into their movement as a kind of revolutionary and violent thought borrowed from

110 This classification and stereotyping is no doubt over-simplified and self-serving. For example, how can Nasr define Iqbal as a modernist without considering his religious and philosophical ideas? His purpose is simply to point out a feature of Traditional Islam, i.e. its focus on the multiplicity of knowledge and reality, on the basis of an exaggeration of the features of modernism (secularism) and fundamentalism (the social structure of Islam and violence). For more detail and more sophisticated studies of Islamic modernism see e.g. A. H. Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); A. Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing: A Study into the Religious Ideas of Sir Muhammad Iqbal* (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1989); H. Malik, *Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muslim Modernism in India and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

111 Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 81.

Marxist theory and practice.<sup>112</sup> Since fundamentalism has a strong desire for the religious or Islamic way of life in the West, critics will count the Traditional Islam of Nasr, which also urges the sacralization of the modern world, as part of this.<sup>113</sup> Certainly, however, Nasr strongly distances himself and Traditional Islam from fundamentalism as much as he can, even though on the topic of secularism they do have some similarity.<sup>114</sup>

For Nasr, neither of these Muslim responses to modernism is the correct way to successfully establish a real Islamic society. The only way is his way, the Traditional Islamic way. However, before we explore his social vision of a fully-fledged Islamic community in the next section, we have to understand that Nasr's Traditional Islam is not merely a mystical or heavenly religion which is completely withdrawn from this earthly world like the image of some medieval monks living in an isolated monastery or desert. As was mentioned above, Nasr has said that not everything that is non-traditional is anti-traditional. In my opinion, non-tradition has a twofold meaning. First, for Nasr, modern science and technology such as computerization and the Internet are not completely anti-traditional in nature; he just wants to remind people about their negative impact on human religiosity. It is only the critics of Traditionalism who radicalize his rationality into absurdity. Even modern technology has not fulfilled a higher level of purpose, the sacred purpose. It is not necessarily anti-traditional until it has subsequently degenerated into fulfilling an anti-traditional purpose.

There is no doubt that, at the social level, it is difficult to locate or define clearly the non-traditional society, but between a mature Traditionalist

112 Ibid., 85. This is no doubt only the interpretation of Nasr, rather than a self-description of fundamentalists.

113 D. Zeidan, *The Resurgence of Religion: A Comparative Study of Selected Themes in Christian and Islamic Fundamentalist Discourses* (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2003); Legenhausen, 'Why I am not a Traditionalist', 16–19.

114 Similarly with the Islamic modernist movement. For a more detailed study of fundamentalism see Y. Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism* (London: Pinter, 1997), rev. edn and A. Moussalli, ed., *Islamic Fundamentalism: Myths and Realities* (London: Garner, 1998).

society and a completely secular society there are always religious societies in varying degrees. Some are more religious and some are less, and all of them are waiting to be sacralized in order to fulfil a higher level of purpose (and if not, they will all degenerate sooner or later). If there is really no such conceptual place as non-tradition waiting to be transformed or redeemed, then we will have difficulty in understanding why Nasr asks Muslim scientists to 'speak with an authoritative voice in the modern sciences *before* being able to criticize these sciences and transform them in accordance with the Islamic perspective'.<sup>115</sup> If modern science is by nature completely anti-traditional, then this implies that Nasr is actually asking his fellow Muslims to engage in this anti-traditional practice and become an 'expert' in anti-tradition first, before their criticisms and transformation; it sounds simply ridiculous.

The meaning of modernity is therefore more inclined to Nasr's meaning of the contemporary or present-day world, which is non-traditional or secondary when compared with the Ultimate Reality, but not necessarily anti-traditional in nature. A society waiting to be sacralized or secularized therefore functions as a spiritual vocation, calling or mission for Traditionalists and other religionists, whereby they can criticize the secularism of the modern world on the basis of their sacred and heavenly principles. In view of this, the heavenly Reality is not an excuse for Nasr to withdraw from the world; instead, it is the divine power behind his living in this world. Therefore even though, in the following section, Nasr continues to use the traditional communal divisions between Islam and the world, namely the Abodes of Islam, of War and of Treaty or Peace, the concept of non-tradition and cooperation with other religionists in the West weakens the effect of isolation between Muslims and non-Muslims. In the following, we will see how Nasr envisages his fully-fledged Traditionalist society.

115 Nasr, 'Islam and the Problem of Modern Science', in Ziauddin Sardar, ed., *An Early Crescent: The Future of Knowledge and the Environment in Islam* (London: Mansell, 1989), 131. Italics mine.

*Vision of a Religion-based Community*

Even though Nasr has not studied the economic and political aspects of modernism in detail, and even though he is sensitive about becoming involved in practical political discussion, we cannot conclude that his ideas do not have political messages or implications; nowadays, Traditionalists are more willing to discuss and explore the political or economic aspects of Traditionalism.<sup>116</sup> In *A Young Muslim's Guide to the Modern World*, Nasr emphasized the historical development of political systems and economic ideas in Europe. For Nasr, the change in political systems means a rebellion against 'upper-class' people, or a transfer of power, initially from the priestly class to the noble family (aristocracy), then from the noble family to the bourgeoisie and, finally, from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat. However, it also represents a gradual transfer of ultimate power from God to people, from theocracy to democracy.<sup>117</sup> Nasr accepts democracy in the sense of 'the participation of people and various social groupings in the process of political rules'.<sup>118</sup> However, reading between the lines, we can see that he wants to maintain a certain level of hierarchy within society similar to the monarchies of the UK and Japan, and therefore he always emphasizes the multiplicity of meanings and institutional forms of democracy in different countries, which are all democratic in nature, so it is not necessary for Muslim countries to follow one particular form of society and political system in order to be democratic, especially one without a clear social hierarchal structure such as America.

As for economic ideas, Nasr argues that Islamic economic thought is always ethical in nature, as it focuses on human relationships and moral obligations (qualitative) such as family and community, rather than merely on profit and loss. However, modern economic theory reduces human behaviour to a cost–benefit analysis (quantitative), and the ethical and

116 M. Mesbahi, 'Reflections on an "Ecumenical Foundationalist"', in Muhammad H. Faghfoory, ed., *Beacon of Knowledge: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, 357.

117 Nasr, *A Young Muslim's Guide to the Modern World*, 195.

118 *Ibid.*, 197.

religious dimensions are simply not counted. For Nasr, the market-price and profit-and-loss systems, which constitute present-day capitalist societies, together with a particular, non-hierarchical form of democratic system, have spread all over the world, especially the Muslim world, through globalization. This trend ignores the specificities of different countries. To resist this trend in Muslim world, Nasr argues that an understanding of law in Islamic tradition is essential since 'Islam is a nomocracy, that is a system of rule by divine law'.<sup>119</sup>

In *Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity*, Nasr's tone is much more friendly, in the sense of promoting shared compassion and mercy, love, peace, beauty, justice, spirituality, human responsibility and freedom between Muslims and non-Muslims. However, the demand for hierarchy is still valid, be it ethical, social or religious, and the hierarchy is ultimately founded on the authority of the Divine Law, *sharia*.<sup>120</sup> Nasr places emphasis on the relevance and completeness of *sharia*, writing, 'the injunctions of Divine Law are permanent, but the principles can also be applied to new circumstance as they arise. But the basic thesis is one of trying to make the human order conform to the Divine norm, not vice versa' and 'the Divine Law embraces every aspect of life and removes the distinction between sacred and profane or religious and secular'.<sup>121</sup> Therefore, unlike Muslim modernists such as Sardar and Tariq Ramadan (discussed in Chapter 4), he discusses only in passing independent legal reasoning (*ijtihad*) and the flexibility of the Divine Law regarding new context, though he does not explicitly object to this. Instead of focusing upon the rationality of the Divine Law, Nasr is more concerned with its hierarchy and authority. For Nasr, *sharia* is also hierarchical, in terms of there being a Traditionalist circle with the Divine Truth at the centre, the Spiritual Path as the radii and finally the Divine Law as the circumference. The centre is the origin of the other two components.<sup>122</sup> This implies that those people who can

119 Ibid., 62, 206–7.

120 For a more detailed explanation of the concept of Islamic Law see Ch. 4.

121 Nasr, *Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity*, 117–18, 119.

122 Ibid., 60.

attain the level of the 'centre' can have the highest authority in interpreting and explaining the *sharia* to Muslims in general; and needless to say, these are the Traditionalists. For Nasr, the problem of authority in interpreting the *sharia* seems to be resolved, and so it is time to establish an Islamic community or society.

As for many Islamic fundamentalists, for Nasr religion and politics are not distinct. In Islam the religious community is expressed in the concept of *umma* and all communities in the world should be classified according to their religious affiliations, such as the *umma* of Moses for Judaism, the *umma* of Christ or later Christendom for Christianity and the *umma* of the Prophet or, later, *dar al-Islam* (abode of Islam) for Islam. *Umma* is therefore not simply a religious association or foundation that people can join or leave voluntarily, as understood in modern times. Apart from religious identity, it embraces all the other identities of human life starting from brother-/sisterhood in the family, relationships between relatives, neighbourhood, friends, communal relationship, the workforce in the economy and, finally, citizens in politics. It is therefore more inclined in meaning towards the concept of empire if it is large enough, or a self-contained polity. Each community is regulated by its own Divine Law, rather than imposing its laws on others. Within the framework of law, human rights and responsibilities in the *umma* can be ascertained. *Umma* and the abode of Islam are closely related and for Nasr, the abode of Islam is 'the geographic area in which the Islamic *umma* lives as a majority and where Islamic Law is promulgated and practised, although there may be other *umam* [plural of *umma*] such as Jews and Christians living within its borders'. At present, only the central part of the Arabian Peninsula is in this abode.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, the Muslim community can have other relationships with other religious communities, which can be either good or bad. *Dar al-harb*, or the abode of war, is a region where 'Muslims could not live and practice their religion easily because the *sharia* was not the law of the land', and *dar al-amn*, or the abode of peace or safety, where 'Muslims could practise their religion

in peace'.<sup>124</sup> For Nasr, the Muslims of America and Europe are living in the abode of peace, and as a minority in the West, Muslims should act as a bridge between Islamic and non-Islamic cultures. Before discussing the criticisms of his ideas, I need to emphasize two features of Nasr's idea of political community.

First, for Nasr, there is no such thing as a 'secular' community, be it called communitarian, communist, democratic, liberal or socialist. All polities must be expressed in religious affiliations, and Nasr also dislikes the concept of the modern nation-state since it secularizes the religious dimension of the polity and, therefore, instead of peaceful coexistence, religious polities must be always in conflict with secular ones since the latter are simply a corruption of reality. Second, Nasr is more concerned with the authority of following the Divine law than with the rationality of interpreting it since the Divine Law is ultimately founded on Truth/Reality, not human reasoning. Therefore, the injunctions and punishments of Islamic Law – such as stoning for adultery – and the hierarchy of social class – such as 'the learned and the scholarly (*ulama*), the ruling and military class, the merchants, the guilds [...] the peasantry' – are also based on ontological reality rather than custom or habit changing over time, and so even the modern humane, democratic and egalitarian values cannot change this 'reality'.<sup>125</sup> In view of this, religious diversity and the social critique of Traditionalist society must be conducted within the authority of this metaphysical framework.

In the above, I outline a general framework of a religion-based community that Nasr envisages for a Traditionalist society; we can see clearly that it is designed particularly for Traditionalists so that they may become the leaders of Islam and the upper class in society since they are the authoritative expositors of the *sharia*. In the following, I shall explicate the ideas of

124 Ibid., 163–4.

125 Ibid., 151–4, 172–81. As regards the punishment, instead of emphasizing rationality and the general objectives of Islamic Law, Nasr always emphasizes that it is 'rare' and that there are 'restrictions of application' regarding stoning or hand cutting hand in traditional Islamic society. He seems to avoid considering whether it is humane to have such punishments or not.

the new generation of Traditionalists to see how they apply the qualitative critique to specific topics, namely, *jihad*, globalization, and neo-classical economic theory and industrial capitalism. Their ideas echo strongly those of Nasr.

### *A Qualitative Social Critique of the Modern World*

Most of the contributors (five out of eight) to the edited book *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition* are MA or PhD students of Nasr at Temple and George Washington Universities. However, I will not focus only on the studies of Nasr's students since the ideas of the whole book are relevant to our concerns. This book represents a preliminary attempt at using the Traditionalist principle to debate the social issues relating to modernism. It includes regional studies like that of Naeem on the influence of modernism in India, general topics such as Traditionalist critiques of modernism and Western misconceptions of Islam (Lumbard and Kalin), and finally, specific topics such as the problems arising from *jihad*, militant Islam or terrorism and the impact of globalization (Dakake, Shah-Kazemi, El-Ansary, Akram and Winter). The last category is the focus of this section. Also, I will underscore the studies of El-Ansary, who develops his Traditionalist critiques of neo-classical economic theory and industrial capitalism, which were published in *Beacon of Knowledge* in 2003 and *Sophia* between 2005 and 2006.

Following Nasr's dissatisfaction with the Islamic modernist and fundamentalist approach in the West, Dakake does not accept that *jihad* is purely non-violent (i.e. the greater *jihad*, to manage the inner self or soul spiritually), as modernists suggest, or purely militant as fundamentalists present to the media. In fact, he emphasizes the spiritual or qualitative conditions for performing *jihad*, namely, balance, modesty, restraint and tolerance when using military action *in* context. Balance, modesty, restraint and tolerance (in relation to other religionists) are not reasons in the epistemological sense but ontological conditions or states that Muslims have to maintain before and in the course of conflict. Fighting against secularism, crime, injustice or oppression are no doubt oft-cited reasons for waging *jihad*, but these

must be understood *in* context, and this is the reason Dakake explicates the Qur'anic verses in order to demonstrate contextually the misinterpretations of the real causes for performing *jihad*.<sup>126</sup> Shah-Kazemi places *jihad* in historical context. He studies the practices of Muslim warriors such as Saladin at the time of the Crusades and the Emir Abd al-Qadir in resisting French colonialism in Algeria in the nineteenth century. If we interpret the qualitative conditions of Dakake as passive, then those of Shah-Kazemi can be understood as active. He says, 'Mercy, compassion, and forbearance are certainly key aspects of the authentic spirit of *jihad*; it is not simply a question of fierceness in war, it is much more about knowing when fighting is unavoidable, how the fight is to be conducted, and to exercise [...] the virtues of mercy and gentleness.'<sup>127</sup> For Shah-Kazemi, these two Muslim leaders fulfil these qualitative conditions of *jihad*.

Finally, El-Ansary studies the cause of terrorism through the speeches of Osama bin Laden. For him, the action of bin Laden is purposive for a religious reason, even though the religious reason itself cannot justify his actions. This reason is the Palestine–Israel conflict in general and the struggle for the city of Jerusalem in particular. El-Ansary argues that these struggles should be understood as a consequence of the ideology of the 'Crusader-Zionist' Alliance against Islam. Therefore it is not simply a separate issue, but it becomes a common cause with or, in his terms, an 'Israeli Multiplier' of fighting against the West, especially America, in other Middle East conflicts. (Two examples he cites are those of US troops being stationed in Saudi Arabia and US sanctions against Iraq.) To resolve the problem of present-day terrorism, El-Ansary suggests reading this conflict in a 'sapiential perspective', which is in fact the perspective of his teacher, Nasr, who believes that there is a spiritual significance of Jerusalem which is essential and not negotiable (qualitative) for Muslims, including terrorists like bin Laden. For El-Ansary, the motive of *jihad* behind bin Laden is therefore

126 D. Dakake, 'The Myth of a Militant Islam', in E. B. J. Lumbard, ed., *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition*, 3–37.

127 Shah-Kazemi, 'Recollecting the Spirit of *Jihad*', in E. B. J. Lumbard, ed., *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition*, 124.

to recapture Jerusalem as purely an Islamic city from the Crusader-Zionist Alliance. In view of this, the solution lies in recognizing the Traditionalist viewpoint that Jerusalem is shared by all monotheistic faiths and that they are in fact worshipping the same God, be it called Yahweh, the Trinity or Allah. The 'Ultimate Divine' is the same. Following the light of this sapiential or Traditionalist perspective, the so-called Crusader-Zionist Alliance against Islam will be dissolved accordingly and, ultimately, so will terrorism.<sup>128</sup>

Apart from the topic of *jihad*, this new generation of Traditionalists also applies the qualitative critique to the phenomena of globalization and economics, which are interrelated. Reading Akram's article on globalization, I think that he is quite an extreme Traditionalist in a sense that he does not find any positive consequences of globalization. For him, it represents a decline of religion or sacredness starting in Europe. His extreme position results from his twofold equation of, first, globalization with modernity and, second, modernity with modernism/secularism, and he therefore makes a complete opposition between globalization and Traditionalism. But, as was mentioned above, for Nasr Traditionalism is only opposed to modernism or secularism, not modernity in itself, which only refers to 'present-day' science, technology and social institutions. Like Nasr, Akram argues that globalization is a particular historical phenomenon like modernity, and that its purpose is to intensify these particularly human (Western and secular) living conditions (political, economic and social aspects) into a standard of living for all humankind, and so it becomes universal and is implemented all over the world, as Fukuyama asserts.<sup>129</sup> For Akram, globalization is therefore by nature homogeneous and hegemonic, which forces the multi-qualitative differences of various societies, mainly Muslim and other religious societies, to reduce themselves into one single qualitative

128 W. El-Ansary, 'The Economics of Terrorism: How bin Laden is Changing the Rules of the Game', in E. B. J. Lumbard, ed., *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition*, 191–235.

129 Fukuyama, F., *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 2006). In fact, Akram starts with strong criticisms of Fukuyama's view of modernization and globalization in this article.

condition, that is, the secular quality. Akram argues that globalization, understood in this way, will never usher in the economic growth, political and social equality imagined by its champions; instead, it will only impoverish living conditions by destroying and polluting nature and eroding the profundity of the human mind and virtues by over-quantification of the world and human behaviour.<sup>130</sup>

Finally, we now return to El-Ansary's Traditionalist critiques of neo-classical economic theory and industrial capitalism. El-Ansary asserts that there is a qualitative aspect to human behaviour in economic activity. This qualitative nature is spiritual and ethical and therefore non-negotiable. However, neo-classical economists ignore this 'objective qualitative fact' and reduce quality to mere quantity, and therefore, everything is possible and open for negotiation, substitution and exchange. In *Beacon of Knowledge*, by criticizing the famous economic theory, the Coase Theorem, El-Ansary demonstrates the qualitative aspect of human behaviour. The case he imagines is that there are two parties in an economy; one is a laundry and the other is a factory emitting pollutants into the air, which in turn makes the clothes in the laundry dirty. I will explicate this case in my own way: the pollution costs the laundry £3,000 in total, while it would cost the factory £10,000 to eliminate the pollution. The Coase Theorem states that 'the initial allocation of legal entitlements does not matter from an efficiency perspective so long as they can be freely exchanged [...] (or) transaction costs of exchange are nil [...] (or) can be exchanged in perfectly competitive markets.'<sup>131</sup> It implies that no matter whether the right to clean air belongs to the laundry or the factory, as long as the right is clearly delineated the parties can trade the right in order to settle the pollution issue in a cost efficient manner.

130 E. Akram, 'The Muslim World and Globalization: Modernity and the Roots of Conflict', in E. B. J. Lumbard, ed., *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition*, 237–79.

131 W. El-Ansary, 'Islamic Economics and the Science of Nature: The Contribution of Seyyed Hossein Nasr', in Mohammad H. Faghfoory, ed., *Beacon of Knowledge: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, 509.

For example, if the right belongs to the laundry, then it can sell it or ask for compensation for a price between £3,001 and £9,999 from the factory to allow the pollution to continue. If the price is higher than £10,000, the factory will not pay the laundry; instead, it will eliminate the pollution by itself since it is cheaper (the pollution will be minimized in this case).<sup>132</sup> On the other hand, if the right belongs to the factory, then the laundry does not have the right to ask for compensation. The laundry's willingness-to-pay (WTP) for stopping the pollution is only £2,999 while the price for the factory's willingness-to-accept (WTA) to eliminate the pollution is at least £10,001, and so no transaction occurs. What the laundry will probably do is to buy a filter (with a maximum price of £2,999) to protect its clothes. From the perspective of the Coase Theorem, even if the transaction does not occur, it is still cost-efficient because if the transaction is forced to occur (by environmental law), then the factory owner will suffer a loss by *not* polluting the air instead. This is the famous Coase's doctrine of reciprocity: the factory harms the laundry by polluting, just as the laundry harms the factory by *preventing* pollution, in terms of cost efficiency.<sup>133</sup> Therefore, in the Coase Theorem, the preconception that the factory is the inflictor and the laundry the victim no longer exists. To a degree, the political implication of this theorem is that any environmental law will ultimately bring cost inefficiency to the society.

There is no doubt that the Coase Theorem is controversial and it has been criticized within the circle of economists in the areas of identification of transaction (bargaining) cost between the parties and the difficulty of delineating the right properly, which cannot be discussed here, but

132 For simplicity's sake, a judicial court is not involved and therefore I have already assumed that the right itself is binding on each party in this economy.

133 Before Coase, nearly all economists believed that the factory should compensate the laundry or the government should intervene by imposing a tax on pollution (even up to now). However, Coase changed this fundamental economic thinking by introducing the idea of reciprocity. From the perspective of cost efficiency, government intervention will finally harm the society as a whole by not allowing the pollution. This innovative idea in my opinion merited Professor Ronald Coase receiving the 1991 Nobel Prize in Economics.

El-Ansary provides another critique, a qualitative critique. In the above case, the negotiation or equation between the WTP and WTA of these two parties is significant for the success of the transaction. If WTP falls outside the acceptable range of WTA, the transaction will fail. El-Ansary points out that WTP is ultimately quantitative since it is finally restricted by the money the party has on hand, and WTA is qualitative, since acceptance of something or a transaction is not merely based on pecuniary factors. People can also have ethical, religious and, in this case, environmental concerns, which can be non-negotiable in quantitative terms. It is only neo-classical economists who reduce WTA to mere quantity, which is also only a subjective and arbitrary assertion. Just as in the case of the Coase Theorem, it is only concerned with cost (quantitative) efficiency. For El-Ansary, every individual has in fact both WTP and WTA to consider in every economic activity since they have different natures and thus cannot be reduced to each other.<sup>134</sup> For Traditionalists, WTA is of course situated at a higher level than WTP. El-Ansary's critique is a moral critique rather than one from an economic angle.

On the basis of this qualitative critique, El-Ansary criticizes industrial capitalism. For him, the design of industrial capitalism is not spiritual-neutral or, in my term, non-traditional, and cannot fulfil the economic objectives of work that humans should have. He first expresses the (Traditionalist) objectives of work: (1) to provide necessary and useful goods and services; (2) to enable every one of us to use and thereby perfect our gifts like good stewards; and (3) to do so in service to, and in cooperation with, others, so as to liberate ourselves from our inborn egocentricity.<sup>135</sup> Fulfilment of the second objective is the most important because its failure will lead to 'immediate failure on the third goal and to ultimate failure on the first goal'.<sup>136</sup> For El-Ansary, industrial capitalism cannot achieve the second objective since humans have degenerated into mere economic instruments in the industrial

134 W. El-Ansary, 'The Traditionalist Critique of Contemporary Economic Theory', *Sophia* 11/1 (Summer 2005), 115–55.

135 El-Ansary, 'The Traditionalist Critique of Industrial Capitalism', *Sophia* 12/1 (Spring/Summer 2006), 55.

136 *Ibid.*, 65.

process and have detached themselves from the products they produce and the markets where they sell, and thus have lost the role of good steward in modern commerce or trade. Accordingly, they lose direct contact with other participants in the same economy, and their economic activities are simply based on indirect coordination through the signal of market price. This encourages inborn human egocentricity in the short term (failure of the third goal) and produces less useful goods but more luxury goods, owing to price and market orientation, in the long term (failure of the first goal). Like Nasr, El-Ansary prefers a small and manageable community or guild system in order to facilitate the coordination of economic transactions, not based on price alone but also on human interaction. Direct contact among humans encourages moral qualities such as 'the principle of justice, or that property rights are respected, the principle of contract, or that contracts (promises) are kept, and the principle of allegiance or that one loyally supports a government that enforces the principle of justice and contract.'<sup>137</sup>

Following Nasr's idea of developing a Traditionalist society, El-Ansary first emphasizes the education of Traditionalist thought before the establishment of Traditionalist economy. Putting forward a very similar idea to that of Nasr that was mentioned above, El-Ansary argues that only through multiplicity of reality/knowledge embedded in human rationality, can an economy achieve the second objective since, in this economy, every labour and industrial process not only has a material quality but also a religious one connected to the Sacred Reality. The division of labour or specification is only justified when it fulfils a higher level of ethical and spiritual purposes. At the social level, the economy is therefore religiously and communally linked; everyone has a religious and ethical obligation to serve and discharge the material needs of others through their profession and, therefore, it finally overcomes human egocentricity and produces useful goods for people.<sup>138</sup>

Unlike with the qualitative critique of specific areas such as *jihad* and the neo-classical economic theory or the Coase Theorem, we can see clearly

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 66–73.

that in criticizing the whole industrial capitalist system El-Ansary, following from Nasr's principle of multiplicity, uses the hierarchy of reality to justify his criticism and exaggerates the anti-traditional nature of capitalism. His critique is to a great extent true, since to overthrow an existing system he does need another *system* to replace it in total, and so he exaggerates the problem in order to justify the replacement. It is therefore different from a critique of a particular issue. El-Ansary, in fact, also follows Nasr's distrust of the self-corrective mechanism of the modern world, but before criticizing his ideas we have to consider the unique contribution of El-Ansary and other Traditionalists. In my opinion, apart from criticizing modernism like Nasr, this new generation of Traditionalist have been more concerned with and have studied thoroughly the economic, political and social contexts of the West before raising their Traditionalist critiques.

In the case of El-Ansary, he studies the Coase Theorem, the development of neo-classical economic traditions and various Western, mainly American, discourses about terrorism. For Akram, there is a need to study the works of Fukuyama, a prominent political scholar, and the impacts of globalization in political, economic and social domains. Dakake and Shah-Kazemi have to contextualize the concept of *jihad* in history and Islamic traditions. Therefore, research on social context at different levels becomes essential in their critiques, and so it is not simply a metaphysical critique but a societal critique as well, which opens the way to a comparison later with the thought of Tibi and of Ramadan. This does not mean that their critiques are flawless. In the following, I will discuss them together with those of Nasr.

## Critique of Traditional Islam

Before I present what I take to be the major limitation of Traditional Islam at the social level, I will first point out some minor problems. The first is the capacity for self-correction of the modern world. Traditionalists do not believe that the modern world can cure the chaos created by itself and so the project of Enlightenment has to fail as well. It is only cured by the

enlightenment of Sacred Knowledge/Reality, but the point is, how can the two be distinguished? Nowadays, there is an increasing trend towards working at home or in the form of proprietorship or partnership in a knowledge-and-service-based society. People engaging in this form of work are more flexible in time management, more independent and more experienced as human beings, instead of being mere cogs in a machine. Similarly, modern companies are more concerned than formerly with the spiritual, religious and psychological health of their staff. Can Traditionalists clearly distinguish this trend as being a self-correction of the modern world or enlightenment by Sacred Knowledge, or is it simply ambiguous?

Second, many Western societies have gradually transformed themselves from industrial to post-industrial or knowledge-and-service-based societies. This process has already happened in the USA, but Traditionalists cannot catch up with the changing world in which they live: for example, El-Ansary continues to criticize industrial capitalism in 2006 with a piece published in a US journal. Third, when we consider that some parts of the USA (or other states in developing regions such as China, India or Africa) do experience industrialization, and people really do work like cogs in a machine as described by El-Ansary, their critiques are still one-sided. In reality, many people in China, to my knowledge, eagerly hope to become 'economic instruments' in order to earn a living, feed their children and provide them with a basic level of education. I really cannot see the problem in being an economic instrument when people are suffering from poverty and hoping for a better future. Finally, I appreciate the new generation of Traditionalists who are more concerned with the social contexts in which they live, but they are blinded by their own 'sapiential perspective' when examining society, and therefore, all the solutions they suggest are finally reduced to the revival of spirituality or sacred knowledge/reality, and accordingly, their so-called critiques are simply high-sounding, middle-class, simple, naive 'thinking in the armchair'. These criticisms, in my opinion, are minor since they can be corrected by putting more effort and research into understanding the real world.

As was mentioned above, Traditionalism is not simply a system of knowledge but also a reality; similarly, the identity or qualification of being a Traditionalist does not merely refer to the belief in this system, but also

demands recognition from other senior Traditionalists in order to authorize one's identity. It therefore involves authority, a sense of belonging and commitment to the Traditionalist movement. I have no problem with this process of recognition or identification within a spiritual or religious organization. However, it is problematic if it is substantiated at the social level.

As mentioned above, I have strong reservations about the religious elitism deriving from Traditionalist metaphysics. People may argue that in every social system, be it capitalist or socialist, there are always implicit or explicit criteria for classifying or discriminating between people as at different levels. Broadly speaking, in the capitalist system the criterion is wealth and living standards, while in the socialist system it is political power, which can control social resources. Methodologically, we therefore should not exclude the criterion based on religious or sacred authority. Nasr believes that authority can finally be ascertained among Traditionalists since, in the real world, there is always a process to establish it, just as with the election of Catholic Popes or Grand Ayatollahs in Shiite Islam, no matter how complicated. However, my concern is not the process for discerning the religious clerics who lead the other classes, but why it is *religious* people or Traditionalists who do so.

In capitalist and socialist societies, class division has its own corresponding fact or reality as a foundation, which is unquestionable in the modern world, whether people like it as a criterion or not. Upper-class capitalists do have *more money or wealth* (fact) than lower-class ones in order to justify themselves as upper-class people. Similarly, upper-class socialists do have *more power* in terms of their rank in the government than the lower class. But what is the foundational fact of being *religious* or, more specifically, being a qualified Traditionalist? To a certain extent, religious fact is by nature not observable or is simply imaginary, and so the indirect fact of being religious is a person's moral conduct and character. However, this concept of being religious is not clear, in the sense that a very nice and friendly person without any respectable moral conduct can also be religious. We cannot characterize people who do not engage in respectable moral conduct like Mahatma Gandhi or Mother Teresa as irreligious. For example, Nasr did not engage in any noble moral conduct that we can identify when he was facing the Iranian Revolution, but he still

enjoys a highly regarded spiritual position in the circle of Traditionalists, and he would definitely be in the upper class of a Traditionalist society. Similarly, the qualification of being a Traditionalist is also arbitrary since it is authorized or recognized by senior Traditionalists such as Nasr rather than by any standard or method. As suggested earlier, Traditionalism is ultimately founded on hierarchy and authority (i.e. seniority), rather than on rationality or methodology.

On the best interpretation of Nasr, I have to accept that, from his perspective, this ambiguity in being religious or Traditionalist is also due to the influence of secularism on the authority of religious knowledge or an authorization system (such as the master–disciple system) in a religious institution. In the perfect religious world of Nasr, possession of religious knowledge itself is already sufficient for people to be the upper- or special-class in society since religion is highly respected, but this is not the case in the modern world. This explains why the thought of Nasr emphasizes religious authority to such an extent. Therefore, we must understand that, as with money and power in the modern world, in the perfect world the authority of religion is a ‘given’ (of course subject to challenge or monitoring), rather than an argument for debate such as we engage in in modernity, and it is therefore unnecessary in that perfect world to transform the Traditionalist society into qualitative social critiques.

Personally, I have no problem in asserting the multiplicity of realities or higher levels of reality; it makes me more humble and passionate to be just, kind and respect other people. But it is problematic to essentialize this hierarchy to justify the class division in society, since the concept of being religious or Traditionalist is ambiguous or arbitrary, and therefore debatable in the modern world. Unfortunately, nowadays we have no way to live in the perfect religious world Nasr so admired. This is why I have to change the Traditionalist hierarchy into a qualitative critique in order to narrow it down into particular social aspects and abandon any attempt at a comprehensive critique of society as a whole. The qualitative critique is a powerful and passionate tool in articulating social problems, motivating reform and pursuing a good life, and we should not abandon it; but it has to be complemented and strengthened by human rationality and interpersonal communication on an equal footing in order for us to know

the real world from below, not merely reality and authority from above. In the following chapters, I will therefore introduce the idea of Euro-Islam proposed by Bassam Tibi and the idea of the European Muslim proposed by Tariq Ramadan in order to explore a theory or theology which is both rational and Islamic in nature.



## Bassam Tibi, Civil Islam and Cross-civilizational Bridging

### Introduction

Having examined the thought of Nasr in the previous chapter, I turn now to examine another source of Muslim rationality exercised in relation to Islam in the modern world. If we say that Nasr argues for an Islamic return to the Sacred, a kind of religious reformation, then the thought of Bassam Tibi also intends to reform Islam, but in the opposite direction. For Tibi, such reform should involve a return to the secular, rather than a return to the Sacred. Both Nasr and Tibi are concerned with the transformation of Islam in the modern world. Nasr is worried about the secularization of Islam, while for Tibi it is the politicization of Islam that is most worrying. Tibi argues that Islamic fundamentalism is indeed a kind of politicization of Islam, which does not simply consist of suicide bombing or violent activities, but has also developed as a defensive reaction against cultural modernism and as an alternative global order against the civil order in the West. For Tibi, the promotion and formation of a civil Islam is the only way out of the politicization of Islam in the modern world.

In this chapter, I examine and evaluate the thought of Tibi in detail. This chapter consists of three parts. First, I will discuss Tibi's intellectual biography, with a focus on his educational background, that is, the Frankfurt school of critical theory and its application in international relations (IR). Second, starting from his studies and an understanding of the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism, I will formulate how his idea of a Euro-Islam or Civil Islam can be a response to this unique phenomenon. Finally, the significance of his theory for the predicament of Islam in the modern world will be assessed.

## Intellectual Biography of Bassam Tibi

The following intellectual biography of Bassam Tibi is based on the information provided by his official website and material such as the prefaces and introductions to his books, in which he explains the rationales behind his books and offers some personal notes in relation to his thought and academic life.<sup>1</sup>

Tibi tells us that he was born into a centuries-old noble family, *Banu al-Tibi*, in Damascus in 1944. He was brought up in a Muslim family, and received his education in both Islamic and Western schools and completed his high school education with the French *Baccalaureat* in 1962. His parents then sent him to study in Germany when he was eighteen. In Germany, he spent ‘the years 1964 to 1970 physically and in person studying with the great Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Jürgen Habermas, as well as with the political philosopher Iring Fetscher. The latter was the supervisor of [his] first PhD in Frankfurt (the second – Dr habil. – was obtained from Hamburg University).’<sup>2</sup> There is no doubt that the Frankfurt school of critical theory became one of the sources of intellectual inspiration in his thinking.

The promotion of Professor Tibi in his academic career in Germany was smooth and fast. After obtaining his first PhD in 1971, he became Assistant Professor at the University of Frankfurt between 1971 and 1972, then in 1973 Associate Professor at the same university. In the same year, he obtained a fully tenured Professorship in IR at the University of Göttingen and worked there up to retirement in 2009; he also served there as Director of the Center of International Affairs after 1988. Since 2009, Tibi has been Professor Emeritus of IR at this university. He has also had a very strong connection with US academia. He was appointed visiting Koret Foundation Fellow at Stanford University during 2011 but he returned to retirement in 2012. In 2008 and 2010, he had two opportunities to serve as the Judith B. and Burton R. Resnick Senior Visiting Scholar at the Center for Advanced

1 His official website is <<http://www.bassamtibi.de>> accessed 25 Sept. 2012.

2 Bassam Tibi, *Islam's Predicament with Modernity: Religious Reform and Cultural Change* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 17.

Holocaust Studies in Washington, DC. In the years 2004 to 2010, he was the Andrew Dickson White Professor-at-large at Cornell University. He also had opportunities to do research and lecture at around thirty US universities, including Yale, Stanford, Harvard, UCLA, MIT, Berkeley, Duke, Emory, Columbia and Georgetown, just to name a few. In addition, he obtained numerous visiting professorships, affiliations, fellowships and lecture opportunities at various universities or academic institutions across five continents, including West Africa (Accra, Dakar, Lagos, Yaoundé, Kinshasa), East Africa (Nairobi, Khartoum, Addis Ababa), North Africa (Tunis, Alger, Rabat, Casablanca, Marrakech), Cameroon, Cape Town, South Asia (Karachi, Calcutta, New Delhi, Colombo), Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Singapore), Japan, the Middle East (Amman, Cairo, Israel), Australia (Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane), Turkey, Europe (Vienna, Stockholm, Rome, Oslo, Paris, Brussels) and Latin America (Buenos Aires). In 1995, the former German President Roman Herzog awarded Tibi the Federal Cross of Merit 1st Class (*Bundesverdienstkreuz Erster Klasse*) for his work in scholarship and media on Islam and the West, and in 2003 Tibi as a Muslim professor shared the annual Award of the Swiss Foundation for Western Consciousness (*Schweizer Stiftung für Abendländische Besinnung*) with a Jewish professor, Michael Wolffsohn, for dedication to the advancement of European values.

Tibi's life has been quite simple and peaceful compared with that of the other two Muslim scholars. Unlike Seyyed H. Nasr who suffered during the Iranian Revolution, Tibi did not experience in person any political turmoil with such a level of historical significance. Unlike Tariq Ramadan who has received high media coverage, both positive and negative, Bassam Tibi, though he was once a columnist in the print media, enjoys no great popularity among the public at large or within the media. But viewing Tibi positively, we can also say that he does not provoke the extent of controversy in the Western media that Ramadan, whose life will be discussed in Chapter 4, does. Though all three Muslim scholars work in university settings, I would argue that Tibi is more devoted to a lifetime of research, writing papers and books and presentations in conferences, and he is also more concerned with academic achievement. Therefore, his exposure or audience is mainly academic, instead of Muslim communities or the general public. If we describe the image of Nasr as spiritual and religious (his status

in the Traditionalist movement), and Ramadan's as popular and controversial (in the media), then the image of Tibi is rational and theoretical (in academia). In addition, having read several of his books written during different periods, I find that there is in them a conceptual framework for studying Islam in the modern world that is gradually and consistently constructed over time. This framework is more clearly explained and refined in the later books and repeated from different perspectives. This consistency, clarity and repetition of the conceptual framework also helps facilitate my research. In the following, I draw upon his ten books in English to introduce the focuses of his thought.

There are two key issues in all the writings of Tibi. His first concern is the politicization of Islam, that is what he calls 'Islamism', and the second is the 'reformation' of Islam. These two themes are studied in nearly every book of his, but with different degrees of concern, and so the following classification of books under these two themes is simply for the sake of simplicity. In my opinion, there are five books which concentrate more on the theme of Islamism, namely, (1) *Arab Nationalism: Between Islam and the Nation-state*; (2) *Conflict and War in the Middle East: From Interstate War to New Security*; (3) *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder: Political Islam*; (4) *Political Islam, World Politics and Europe: Democratic Peace and Euro-Islam versus Global Jihad*; and (5) *Islamism and Islam*. All of these studies are concerned with the emergence of Islamism and its threat to the modern world.<sup>3</sup> For Tibi, the emergence of Islamism is mainly due to the failure or de-legitimization of modern Arab nationalism after the Arab defeat in the Six Day War of 1967. Islamism as a political ideology gradually emerged as an alternative to Arab nationalism in the Middle East. This political ideology in the name of Islam advocates neo-absolutism against secularism, tolerance and pluralism and proposes the Islamization of public institutions such as law, government and education. It constitutes a security threat to the region of the Middle

3 For Tibi, terms such as 'Islamism', 'Islamist internationalism', 'political Islam', 'fundamentalism' and 'jihadism' are more or less interchangeable, though each has its own focus of emphasis.

East and to the world as a whole, in that Islamism appears as a global disorder. In addition to the security problem, the globalization of Islamism also triggers a serious conflict in world-view or ideology between Muslims and non-Muslims in the name of a conflict of ethnicity and a dispute about the authenticity of Islam in the Muslim-minority regions. Tibi proposes that Islam must be reformed in line with cultural modernism in order to escape from this predicament.

There are another five books dealing with the theme of reforming Islam, namely: (1) *The Crisis of Modern Islam: A Preindustrial Culture in the Scientific-technological Age*; (2) *Islam and the Cultural Accommodation of Social Change*; (3) *Islam between Culture and Politics*; (4) *Islam in Global Politics: Conflict and Cross-civilizational Bridging*; and (5) *Islam's Predicament with Modernity: Religious Reform and Cultural Change*. Islam originated in the seventh century in a pre-industrial culture, and so Tibi argues that it needs to undergo religious change or reform when entering into the modern world; if not, it will continue to create serious conflicts among Muslims and non-Muslims. Therefore, in order to minimize the degree of conflict, Tibi proposes that Muslim communities must recognize and internalize the values of cultural modernism as Islamic thought, and he calls this version of Islam a Civil or Euro-Islam. He believes that it can only be accomplished by what he calls the revival of Islamic rationalism or humanism. Before going into detail about his project of reform, we need to have an understanding of his intellectual sources of inspiration, that is, the Frankfurt school of critical theory and its application in IR.

## Critical Theory and IR as Sources of Tibi's Thought

In this section, I first introduce the intellectual background to the emergence of critical theory and then the main ideas of its spokespersons, such as Horkheimer, Adorno and Habermas. Finally, I discuss its development in the field of IR; this will help us understand the thought of Tibi in a wider intellectual setting. The school of critical theory is a response to the

assertion of the primacy and universality of reason and optimism for the human future starting in the age of the Enlightenment. Max Weber characterizes the modern time by rationalization and intellectualization and above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world'.<sup>4</sup> In the following, I discuss the mutations of modern life according to his theory.

### *Intellectual Background to the Emergence of Critical Theory*

Rationalization and intellectualization are measured in terms of an idea's coherence and consistency with modern knowledge; an idea no longer relies on mystical explanations or incalculable forces from religion or moral tradition. In principle, all things are managed by calculation and so people can learn at any time and repeat the result by correct means, and so from now on can manipulate the natural world. This is the meaning of what Weber calls the 'disenchantment of the world'. According to Weber, rationalization not only disenchant the natural world but also has an effect on the economic, political and religious sectors of the human world. The first effect is capitalism, the second bureaucracy and the third irrationality of religion and morality.

From the eighteenth century onwards, as Adam Smith indicated, the way to material plenty has depended on division of labour and on an impersonal market mechanism by which common people can gradually emancipate themselves from the bondage of masters or nobles by labour power and the power of commerce and manufacture. The rise of capitalism therefore changes the mode of living. With the advance of technology in the era of the Industrial Revolution, instead of working independently, more and more people need to work together in order to produce more to meet the growing volume of commercial transactions, and machinery is needed for the mass production. The general public becomes a crucial

4 Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1948), 155.

force in the market-based economy. In order to maximize profit and efficiency, a series of rational and impersonal procedures is needed to control worker activities – the time of coming to work, finishing the task and leaving the post – and the roles of each person in harmony with the flow of machines. This impersonal working mechanism indeed distinguishes people in terms of their efficiency and productivity, and they will be paid accordingly. Human value, therefore, can be measured in pecuniary terms and each individual can be compared and paid objectively in purely economic value. This is a hierarchical system of management established in terms of competence, rather than by relationship and heritage, and Weber calls it ‘bureaucratic management.’<sup>5</sup> The rise of capitalism also serves as a platform for nationalism, a concept that a person belongs to and obeys the authority of a nation and its legal authority. At the level of economic activity, market transactions depend on trust and trust must be secured. Under feudalism, trust might be secured by the social status of king and knight, but under capitalism, trust is ultimately based on the law of the society because this appears to the general public to be the fairest instrument. To be implemented effectively, law must have authority over the people and therefore it must have a limit or boundary. This facilitates the establishment of a nation.

The key features of capitalism are summarized by Ray Huang as follows:

The advent of capitalism is synchronized with a wide extension of credit, impersonal management, and the pooling of service facilities. So, capitalism stands as a kind of organisation and a movement. All the three conditions hinge on trust; but trust cannot go very far without being sustained by law. Thus capitalism has to exist within each nation’s boundaries [...]. When a country fulfils these conditions, it becomes ‘mathematically manageable.’<sup>6</sup>

- 5 Weber, ‘Bureaucracy’, in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, 196. The term ‘bureaucracy’ in Weber’s writing is not used exclusively in politics as it is now; it can also apply to the economic sector, to indicate the hierarchical ordering and administrative system.
- 6 Ray Huang, *Broadening the Horizons of Chinese History: Discourses, Syntheses, and Comparisons* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1999), 171.

Bureaucracy, according to Weber, is only fully developed in the modern state. He characterizes bureaucracy as: first, the regular activities of fixed official duties; second, the properly assigned authority of command to discharge these duties; third, the appropriate procedures to discharge these duties with qualified personnel.<sup>7</sup> These features of bureaucracy inevitably demand a clear and consistent hierarchical system, competent personnel, and much paper- and administrative work. Weber argues, 'Bureaucracy has a rational character: rules, means, ends, and matter-of-factness dominate its bearing.'<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the operation of bureaucracy needs the rule of law, rather than rule by man. Like the impersonal system of capitalism, bureaucracy requires competent officials to carry out the task, instead of nepotism. This expertise becomes a profession and so develops its own social esteem. Consequently, bureaucracy and capitalism jointly generate a levelling effect on social difference among the people in the society. This means that the common people are no longer held down in a specific class owing to their family heritage. They can move up to a higher social class through their own expertise and competence. Therefore, class boundaries, even though they still exist, are much more fluid than under feudalism. Furthermore, we can see that bureaucracy and capitalism based on the operation of law encourage the equality and right of the general public; but at the same time they also diminish gradually the distinction and significance of each individual in society.

However, if everything goes hand in hand rationally, then Weber's thesis will fail to explain why unintended consequences have happened in history. To explain the dynamic of history, Weber relies on the power of irrationality, namely, the authority of the charismatic leader and religion. First of all, Weber argues that rationalization has its influence on religion by making religion more purposive. Ideas such as rebirth, redemption and salvation all try to explain the need for religion and ideas like former life, sin and a day of judgement help explain why humans suffer and the scale of injustice in the world. They are more purposive and rational than

7 Weber, 'Bureaucracy', in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, 196.

8 *Ibid.*, 244.

purely magical force in the primitive religions and cults. Weber argues, however, that rationalization limits the scope and uses of religion and morality. People rely less and less on answers from religion and morality to explain the world. All phenomena should be explained by modern science, rather than by the world religions and morality. Therefore, he says, 'the general result of the modern form thoroughly rationalizing the conception of the world and the way of life, theoretically and practically, in a purposive manner, has been that religion has been shifted into the realm of the irrational.'<sup>9</sup> However, we should be cautious about the term 'irrationality' as used by Weber meaning simply a presupposition. Weber does not say that religion and morality will come to an end in the modern world despite rationalization. Rationalization will weaken the authority of religion and moral traditions, but this does not mean it will eliminate them. Like Kant, Weber also proposes that there should be a separation of knowledge (rationality) and religion/morality (irrationality) since they belong to different realms. For Weber, irrationality has its significant role to play in explaining the historical dynamics of the world. He asserts that irrationality is the chief explanation for the unintended consequences of history.

Religion promotes a kind of brotherly love, which is in contrast with the impersonal market and political systems of the world. Religion, according to Weber, is in conflict with rationalization. Similarly, the charismatic leader shares this nature of irrationality with religion. He works in a way that is creative, non-routine and unpredictable. Such leadership is based on personal appeal instead of following the official procedure in the hierarchy. In Weber's view, such leaders have a dialectical relationship with rationalization. On the one hand, they provide a drive for change and interrupt the 'routinization' of human life. On the other, they are not immune from rationalization. This means, once their ideas and actions appear in the world and changes are made they will also be routinized by worldly rationalization. As Weber observes, the process of rationalization will continue to

9 Weber, 'The Social Psychology of the World Religions', in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, 281.

increase its scope and depth of influence in the modern world, and therefore, charismatic leadership and religion (i.e. the realm of irrationality and the sources of change) will be gradually weakened. This means that it will become more and more difficult to change the world that we live by. In this regard, Weber believes that the meaning of life and the creativity of the human mind will be gradually eroded with the increase in rationalization. People will more and more concentrate on sciences, the economic value of humans, and procedural formality as these are rational, objective and measurable, while the emotional, moral, mystical and religious values will be ignored as they are irrational. Rationalization will finally replace the multiple dimensions of humanity with one scientific dimension alone. This is what Weber calls the notion of the 'Iron Cage' of the modern world.

Following the dialectical reasoning of Weber, we find that the ambiguity in or crisis of reason accelerated and came to its peak in World War II, when the whole world experienced the dark side of modernism. The advances of science and technology not only improve the quality of human life but also turn out to produce the most destructive weapons of war yet experienced. Capitalism not only multiplies choices regarding products and services but also encourages economic superiority. People therefore can be classified as inferior and discarded as useless. Democracy not only allows every single citizen to elect the person they like but also allows totalitarian ideology and oppression to emerge. Each individual seems to be free, but in fact is only a cog in the national machine. Weber's thought is dialectical, but results in a paradox: the greater the rationalization of society, the less distinction and significance will be accorded to each individual; on the other hand, one individual, like Hitler, can promote an ideology of violence greater than hitherto experienced and push his nation into war with the world. Where has human reason failed?

### *Horkheimer and Adorno's Critique of Reason*

To respond to this question, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, the founders of the Frankfurt school of critical theory, severely challenged the uncritical reception of modernism, especially after World War II. Against

Hegel's idea of progressive rationality and the truthfulness of the whole as a complete, self-sufficient system, Horkheimer argues that 'progressive rationalisation tends [...] to obliterate that very substance of reason in the name of which this progress is espoused',<sup>10</sup> and for Adorno, 'the whole is the untrue'.<sup>11</sup> Both fundamentally reject positive theories of modernism, concluding that the problem of humans is resolved neither by Hegel's dialectic of reason nor by Marx's dialectic of classes. They believe that the real crisis in Western society is the alienation of man from nature. This alienation began in the widespread recourse to the instrumental reason of science to subordinate nature.<sup>12</sup> As nature is studied systematically and empirically, it is seen increasingly as an object which can be manipulated by humans. The search for universality leads to various mathematically formalized theories, which in turn dominate reality and increase the power of human manipulation. Such manipulation extends to the human world as well. The urge for human domination is reflected in politics and the economy. The empowered manipulate the powerless as objects, so the powerless can be exterminated when necessary. Reason is by its very nature self-contradictory. Reason contains the ideas of the freedom and progress of human society; but it also contains elements to obliterate the intrinsic values of being a human. The authors' attitude to this predicament is pessimistic because, they think, it is insoluble.<sup>13</sup> In view of this pessimism about the possibilities of modernism, apart from maintaining their critique of any form of absolutism, they never propose any positive theory that can resolve the crisis of Western society since they believe that it would be ultimately turned into a new instrumental function of reason. In fact, both authors

10 Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), vi.

11 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 1978), 50.

12 Instrumental reason concerns efficient and effective ways of achieving an assigned task or specific end, but without reflecting whether the task/end should be achieved in these ways or not.

13 T. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1997).

propose a return to the theological tradition.<sup>14</sup> Their negative theory of modernism, however, provided the soil for Habermas to work out a more optimistic version.

*Habermas' 'Unfinished Project of Modernism'*<sup>15</sup>

In September 1980, Jürgen Habermas, as a spokesperson of the second generation of the Frankfurt School, gave a lecture upon receiving the Theodor W. Adorno prize, which was presented by the City of Frankfurt. This lecture was first published under the title 'Modernity versus Postmodernity' in the *New German Critique*.<sup>16</sup> In this article, Habermas explicates the problem of modernism as he perceives it in two opposite directions. On the one hand, following from Bell's ideas in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, Habermas explains that the crises of the West can ultimately be reduced to a split between modern culture and society. The everyday life of human society is penetrated by the values of modernist culture, but modernist culture and everyday life morality are not compatible. The former focuses on self-happiness and the expression of subjectivity while the latter focuses on convention and a purposive life of conduct.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, with the idea of Kant's and Weber's separation – science, morality and art – emerging during the rationalization of modern society, critics such as Habermas argued that the separation creates self-directed and independent spheres that have no interaction with each other

14 S. K. White, 'Reason, Modernity, and Democracy', in Stephen K. White, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 4–5; H. Peuket, 'The Philosophical Critique of Modernity', in Claude Geffré and Jean-Pierre Jossua, eds, *The Debate on Modernity* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 21.

15 Originally, the phrase was 'unfinished project of modernity'. Except for in references to published articles by Habermas, the term 'modernism' will be used instead of 'modernity'.

16 J. Habermas, 'Modernity versus Postmodernity', *New German Critique* 22 (Winter 1981), 3–14.

17 *Ibid.*, 6.

and with the laymen of society. These two opposite directions, however, converge in the same destiny – the negation of modernism. Therefore, Habermas says, ‘this splitting off is the problem that has given rise to efforts to “negate” the culture of expertise.’<sup>18</sup> In contemporary views, as Habermas analyses them, various philosophical thoughts are in line with this negation of modernism such as that of poststructuralists like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, post-industrial sociologists like Daniel Bell and Neo-Aristotelians like Leo Strauss.<sup>19</sup> While accepting a crisis in modernism, Habermas, however, refuses to follow the negation. For Habermas, the crisis in modernism originated from the subject/object dualism that ultimately leads to a domination of instrumental reason in the public domain. Placing this in the wider context of modern society, we can say that the domination of instrumental reason means a lack of coordination and differentiation of the social domains operated under non-instrumental reason from other domains operated under instrumental reason.

For Habermas, this problem is a result of the phenomenon of late capitalist society, beginning in the 1960s. What late capitalist society represents is increasing government participation in public domains such as housing, education, medical services, social welfare allowances, and even cultural facilities; however, it also represents an increasing control of the general public, and finally, government dominates the whole sphere of social life. For Habermas, the project of modernism can only be rescued through the ongoing critique of crisis in late capitalist society. His theories are therefore not purely philosophical but have a practical intent, to prevent authoritarianism and absolutism through the critique of political or social ideology. In view of this, following the Kantian and Weberian approach of separation, Habermas intends to separate the life-world from systems and strengthen the coordination between them by what he calls ‘communicative reason and power’. Therefore, the thought of Habermas should be classified as belonging to the moderate trend of modernism in our definition. Instead of Kantian human subjectivity, Habermas relies

18 Ibid., 9.

19 Ibid., 9–10, 13–14.

on undistorted inter-subjectivity as the foundation for communicative reason.<sup>20</sup> The major difference between Kant and Habermas is that the former is foundationalist, since he situated human subjectivity as the ultimate foundation of all kinds of knowledge, while Habermas is not. He situated inter-subjectivity as the ultimate foundation of communication, which is only the coordination of knowledge but not knowledge itself. His critique of ideology is therefore a critique of *existing* knowledge and ideology, rather than their foundation.

Unlike his predecessors Horkheimer and Adorno with their return to religion, Habermas proposes a hypothesis called the linguistification of the sacred, a hypothesis that explicates social evolution from an undifferentiated life-world to a rationalized one.<sup>21</sup> Basing himself on the studies of Durkheim and Mead, he argues that

the socially integrative and expressive functions that were at first fulfilled by ritual practice pass over to communicative action; the authority of the holy is gradually replaced by the authority of an achieved consensus. This means a freeing of communicative action from sacrally protected normative contexts. The disenchantment and disempowering of the domain of the sacred takes place by way of a linguistification of the ritually secured, basic normative agreement; going along with this is a release of the rationality potential in communicative action. The aura of rapture and terror that emanates from the sacred, the *spellbinding* power of the holy, is sublimated into the *binding/bonding* force of criticisable validity claims and at the same time turned into an everyday occurrence.<sup>22</sup>

The above idea clearly indicates that religious tradition will be replaced by reason and secularization. However, in *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, Habermas changed his mind to assert that ‘philosophy [...] will be able neither to replace nor repress religion as long as religious language is the bearer of a semantic content that is inspiring and even indispensable, for this

20 Habermas, *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press/Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 82.

21 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. II (London: Heinemann, 1984), 77–111.

22 *Ibid.*, 77.

content eludes (for the time being?) the explanatory force of philosophical language and continues to resist translation into reasoning discourses.<sup>23</sup>

In 1988, in a conference held at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, Habermas openly admitted that he ‘subsumed too hastily the development of religion in modernism with Max Weber under “the privation of the power of faith” and suggested too quickly an affirmative answer to the question as to “whether then from religious truths, after the religious world views have collapsed, nothing more and nothing other than the secular principles of a universalist ethics of responsibility can be salvaged”’.<sup>24</sup> At the conference, Habermas proposed what he called ‘methodical atheism’ to handle the relationship between religion and modernism. For Habermas, with the collapse of metaphysics as the absolute base, and the dominance of procedural and empirical rationality and the linguistic turn (all of these constitute what he calls post-metaphysical thinking), it seems impossible for religious people to put forth their religious truth-claims to scientific experts and their religious-moral values to secular politicians without any change. Methodical atheism is a programme of demythologization. It is, he says,

this way that leads to a programme of demythologization that is tantamount to an experiment. Without reservation, it is left to the realization of this program to see whether the theological interpretation of the religious discourse by virtue of its argumentation alone permits a joining to the scientific discussion in such a manner that the religious language game remains intact, or collapses.<sup>25</sup>

The spirit of methodical atheism is translation. Religious people must try their best to translate religious truth-claims into public arguments so that the claims are not only valid for believers but also can be discussed in the public sphere, to see whether they remain intact or collapse after public debate. Habermas also acknowledges that the idea of methodical atheism is risky in the sense that ‘religious discourses would lose their identity if they were to open themselves up to a type of interpretation which no longer

23 Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 51.

24 Habermas, *Religion and Rationality*, 79.

25 *Ibid.*, 77.

allows the religious experiences to be valid *as* religious.<sup>26</sup> Understood in this way, methodical atheism is intentionally designed to limit the authority of religion or church in the European context, be it purely spiritual or political, in the public domain.

In 'Faith and Knowledge' and 'Religion in the Public Sphere', Habermas shows himself to be highly aware of the political significance of religion.<sup>27</sup> The West is now situated in a time of what he calls the post-secular society, a society no longer secular. Habermas proposes that in order to connect religious traditions with the public sphere, religious reason must first be translated into public reason in a way permitting publicly accessible justification, after which it can be either vindicated or rejected in public debate. In the public sphere, which is supposed to have no political and religious interventions, translation is founded on human communicative reason and consensus is achieved through discourse, and so he believes that translation is the way of non-destructive secularization in a post-secular society.<sup>28</sup>

For the translation to be possible, Habermas suggests three basic premises:

Religious consciousness must, first, come to terms with the cognitive dissonance of encountering other denominations and religions. It must, second, adapt to the authority of the sciences which hold the societal monopoly of secular knowledge. It must, last, agree to the premises of a constitutional state grounded in a profane morality. Without this thrust of reflection, monotheisms in relentlessly modernized societies unleash a destructive potential.<sup>29</sup>

26 Ibid., p.76.

27 Habermas, 'Faith and Knowledge', in Eduardo Mendieta, ed., *The Frankfurt School on Religion: Key Writings by The Major Thinkers* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 327–37; Habermas, 'Religion in the Public Sphere', *European Journal of Philosophy* 14/1 (2006), 1–25.

28 Habermas, 'Faith and Knowledge', in Eduardo Mendieta, ed., *The Frankfurt School on Religion: Key Writings by The Major Thinkers*, 336.

29 Ibid., 329. It seems that Habermas has a bias towards monotheism (is polytheism not destructive?), but I am more inclined to think that it is the religious context of Europe that leads Habermas to see religion as only 'monotheism'.

Therefore, Habermas acknowledges the influential position of religion in modern society, especially in politics, while persisting in the Enlightenment tradition and secularization thesis. We can say that, as with his unfinished project of modernism, instead of abandoning the secularization thesis, Habermas asserts that secularization is still developing, subject to change and therefore not yet complete. Since religious justifications are welcome in the public sphere, it is therefore no longer possible completely to separate religious discourse from society.<sup>30</sup> For Habermas, the intimacy between religion and society is not dangerous, because there is the 'wild life' of the political public sphere for the debate of religious reason in religious language; the debate functions as a filter to 'allow only the secular contribution to pass through', and so 'the truth content of religious contributions can enter into the institutionalized practice of deliberation and decision-making only if the necessary translation already occurs in the pre-parliamentarian domain, i.e., in the political public sphere itself'.<sup>31</sup>

In sum, the concept of inter-subjectivity is the core of all Habermas's ideas, including the idea of cultural modernism and religion in the public sphere. Therefore, it is impossible for Habermas to exclude religious or secular people from the public sphere as they are one of the constituents of inter-subjectivity. Religious and political discourses therefore do not simply coexist in society, but in fact should engage actively in communicating with each other. It is essential that in the subsequent sections we compare and contrast his idea of inter-subjectivity and its appropriations in various public domains with the ideas of Tibi.

### *From Critical Theory to Critical IR Theory*

Just as in other fields of study, there are a variety of theories in IR, which have different foci and methodologies. Earlier, or conventional, IR theories are more positivistic and state-based in nature, such as liberalism, realism

30 Habermas, *Religion in the Public Sphere*, 10.

31 *Ibid.*, 11.

and neo-liberalism/neo-realism.<sup>32</sup> They are concerned mainly with conflict resolution in an anarchic or semi-anarchic world. Positivists are more in agreement with the positions of *realpolitik* and are not greatly concerned with normative or ethical premises. But the focus has changed in recent developments. The late Hedley Bull, a leading IR scholar of the English school, though he emphasizes the state system, introduces the concept of the international society, which refers to ‘a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, which form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions.’<sup>33</sup> The consciousness of common interests and common values is less positivistic since it leads towards certain common ethical premises. Against this background, there are two ways for critical theory to link up with IR theory, as Steven Roach states: first, ‘an internalized approach that works within realism or conventional IR approaches in order to formulate a critical realist theory; and [second] an externalized approach that works within the critical theory tradition to posit a self-standing theoretical approach, equipped with the methodological tools and governing principles to compete with other IR research programs or approaches.’<sup>34</sup> The first approach is therefore more positivistic and does not correspond properly to the core of critical theory since it ‘performs an ideological function in legitimising an order in which only certain interests (of states and the state system) are realized [...]. This leaves it void of emancipatory interests, of the humanist element that is central to critical theory.’<sup>35</sup> The core of critical theory, as was mentioned above, is the critique of any form of absolutism, whether state or non-state; it is no longer positivistic but normative. The second (externalized) approach seems more appropriate since critical theorists in fact bring a revolutionary change into earlier IR theories. The object of

32 Olivier Daddow, *International Relations Theory* (London: Sage, 2009), 60.

33 Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: a Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1977), 13.

34 Steven C. Roach, ed., *Critical Theory and International Relations: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2008), xviii.

35 *Ibid.*, xviii–xix.

critical IR theory is no longer state-based, but exists in relation to *anything*, including identity, ethnicity, culture, civilization and religion, that triggers an interest in relationships (coexistence and conflict) at the global level, as Edkins and Vaughan Williams explain:

A fundamental way in which current critical theory re-opens assumptions that have grounded our political thought has been by questioning the starting point of thinking politically. One of the traditional questions of politics has been how we can live together, or in other words, how individuals with a range of backgrounds, beliefs and interests can or do co-exist, peacefully or otherwise [...]. When translated to the international sphere – traditionally regarded as distinct from the domestic, and hence the rationale for a distinct field of study – these become the familiar issues of inter-state relations, configured as relations between distinct, bounded and sovereign domestic spheres. How can sovereign states co-exist in an international society or anarchic system?

A variety of critical theorists have challenged this starting point. Rather than thinking about how discrete entities, whether individuals or states, can live together, the question they want to pose is a different one. The challenge is one that is posed at the level of ontology. Instead of thinking of the world as made up of objects or entities that relate to each other in various ways, a number of thinkers want to attempt to put forward an ontology based on *a world of interconnectedness or being-with, a world in which there are no distinct objects – whether states, individuals or anything else* [...]. This clearly leads to a very different figuration of the international, and to adopt *this approach demands broadening the scope of concern, away from states and relationships between states to an interest in what might be meant by inter-relations in the first place, at whatever 'level' of social organisation.*<sup>36</sup>

In addition, when critical theory is extended to the global level, it is more in line with the optimistic version of modernism of Habermas; it requires 'individuals, states, and groups' shared moral commitments to international justice and freedom [...] and how actions of individuals are being directed toward the cosmopolitan ideals of justice, freedom and equality [...] [and] the idea that open-ended dialogue between and among citizens validates the opportunities for reasoned consensus at the global level.<sup>37</sup> There is no

36 Jenny Edkins and Nick Vaughan-Williams, ed., *Critical Theorists and International Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 2–3. Italics mine.

37 Roach, ed., *Critical Theory and International Relations*, 227.

doubt that universal morality or normativity as a theoretical principle is required in both critical theory and critical IR theory. Otherwise, there is only brutal competition for power and wealth among societies and states but no justice, ideal or vision to be pursued by all humanity. With the above conception of critical theory and its development in IR in mind, we can better understand how Bassam Tibi appropriates it to develop his own critical IR theory of Islamism and Islam. In the following, I first examine his ideas about Islamism, starting with its emergence, its nature and its impact on modern Islam. Second, I formulate how Tibi's idea of a Euro-Islam or Civil Islam can be viewed a response to this unique phenomenon of Islamism. Finally, I discuss its significance as a theory for Islam in the modern world.

## Islamism and Modern Islam

In this section, I examine the emergence of Islamism and its impact on modern Islam. For Tibi, Islamism and the failure of Arab nationalism are interrelated, and so we have to understand his interpretation of Arab nationalism and its failure in order to explain the emergence of Islamism. Second, I examine the nature of Islamism and its ideas, including its relations with violence and what Tibi calls Institutional Islamism. Finally, I investigate how modern Islam is affected by Islamism in the sense that modern Islam as a cultural system becomes more defensive regarding change in the modern world.

### *Failure of Modern Arab Nationalism*

For Tibi, modern Arab nationalism is not simply a local or regional movement for establishing an independent state; its emergence was a consequence of 'the European expansion and the processes of globalization

triggered by this expansive effort at Europeanisation of the world'.<sup>38</sup> It is therefore a response to or borrowing from the concept of nation in Europe. But the process of Europeanization in the Arab world is not straightforward. It generated several effects. First, starting from Napoleon's Expedition to Egypt in 1798, when modernization is said to begin in the Middle East, the French concepts of liberal freedom and secular democracy were also introduced as the core values for establishing a secular Arab nationalism in the pre-colonial period. However, under colonial rule, Arab nationalism became an 'apologetic, reactionary, populist and frequently aggressive ideology' against colonization.<sup>39</sup> Tibi articulates this change and argues that the reason for the change is the anti-colonial movement. French (and British) colonization of the Arab world changed the direction of Arab nationalism from following French–British liberalism to an anti-French, anti-British ideology offset by *germanophilia*, the positive predisposition toward German culture and ideology. However, Tibi further argues that this *germanophilia* is selective since Arab intellectuals mainly limited themselves to reflect upon the thoughts of German romanticism and populism instead of fully deliberating upon and absorbing German political thought.<sup>40</sup> These German-style Arab nationalists paved the way to Pan-Arabism because they followed the German romantic concept of nation: for them, the nation is a cultural community speaking a common language and sharing a common historical memory and the concept of the state is simply a political framework or institution, which does not deal with the existence and non-existence of the nation.<sup>41</sup> Understood in this way, the second result of Europeanization is therefore the emergence of Pan-Arabism. It is the vision of making one Arab nation represent Arab unity across the Arab world since Pan-Arabists romanticize the Arab peoples, as if they all shared the same language and

38 Bassam Tibi, *Arab Nationalism: Between Islam and the Nation-state* (Basingstoke: Macmillan/ New York: St Martin's Press, 1997), 3rd edn, 201.

39 Ibid., 116.

40 For Tibi, Sati' al-Husri is one of the most influential intellectuals to have synthesized the German idea of the nation and ibn Khaldun's philosophy of history into Arab nationalism.

41 Tibi, *Arab Nationalism*, 188.

the same historical memory. The concept of a Greater Syria and the establishment of the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1958 basically represent the spirit of Pan-Arabism. However, for Tibi, this runs counter to liberalism and the protection of individual human rights since the individual is conceived as being an organic part of the nation. The rights of individual Arabs cannot run counter to the rights of the Arab nation as a whole. For Tibi, this is a kind of absolutism.

The vision of unification did not last long and went into rapid eclipse with the defeat of the Arab cause by Israel in the 1967 Six Day War. Tibi himself summarizes the history of Arab nationalism in the following two perspectives:

(1) In terms of the history of ideas [...] Arab nationalism was based on a cultural revival in the nineteenth century resulting from a process of acculturation. The Arab awareness of the European concept of 'nation' led to the claim of an Arab *Kulturnation*. The politicisation of this concept culminated in the call for an Arab *Staatsnation*, i.e. one Pan-Arab state. Pre-1913 early Arab nationalism was francophone and anglophone, i.e. basically liberal. Following the colonisation of the Arab East in the aftermath of the First World War a turn to *germanophilia* took place [...].

(2) From another perspective, Arab nationalism can be looked at as an ideology of an evolving state system. In its earlier period (between the two World Wars) the Arab state system was royal in that it was carried out by dynasties [...]. They were the champions of the search for Arab unity. The early Arab state system unfolded in the years 1945–54. With the rise of Nasserism (1952) this regional system assumed a populist character [...]. This change marks a transformation of Pan-Arabism from royalism to populism. The Arab defeat in the Six Day War led to a deep crisis of the regional state system and contributed to unleashing the process called the end of Pan-Arabism.<sup>42</sup>

The final consequence of Europeanization stimulates the emergence of three different kinds of ideology in the Middle East, which are similar to those discussed in Chapter 2 concerning Nasr's classification of Islamic movements in the modern world. For Tibi, the first movement is secular nationalism, which follows upon the drive towards liberalism and human

42 Ibid., 202–3.

rights imported from European states in the pre-colonial period, as mentioned above. The second is what Tibi calls two forms of Islamic revival. One is traditionalist Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia, and the other is the Islamic modernism represented by al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh. Wahhabism represents an Islamic movement that seeks to purify Islam of any innovation or practice that deviates from the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Islamic modernism, on the other hand, tries to reform Islam through the use of Western sciences and technology but within the confines of Islamic doctrines and an Islamic world-view, which is what Tibi calls semi-modernism (we later discuss the reason why traditional forms of Islam such as Wahhabism and Islamic modernism failed to bring a form of Civil Islam into being). The third and final ideology is the politicization of Islam, which is related to the failure of Pan-Arabism. The Arab defeat in the Six Day War led to the de-legitimization of Pan-Arabism. Tibi argues that this politicization of Islam changes the ideology of Arab nationalism from Pan-Arabism to Islamist internationalism (or Islamist universalism). As was mentioned above, the ideology of Pan-Arabism is a selective and limited reflection of German romanticism and populism. Its theoretical foundation is so weak that nationalism is 'merely empty phrases and a loud hullabaloo'.<sup>43</sup> Facing the severe crisis of the Six Day War, the whole enterprise of Pan-Arabism gradually collapsed and new solutions were needed. As Tibi indicates, 'there were plenty of signs that such a development would take place'.<sup>44</sup> The emergence of enlightened debates within the Arab nationalist movement in books and journals was the sign of impending change. However, this did not last long because the political oppression of the totalitarian Ba'athist governments in Syria and Iraq, and Nasser's authoritarian regime, became a barrier to the transformation of the Arab Middle East. The study of Horsman and Marshall, as quoted by Tibi, shows that 'in the Arab world [...] states [...] have poor human rights records, little experience in peaceful transition between regimes and few of the liberal institutions of civil society. Many are authoritarian regimes led

43 Ibid., 213.

44 Ibid., 214.

by ruling, dynastic families [...] or praetorian regimes backed by force [...]. Equally these states have achieved the least economic reform.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, all these conditions eventually invited social unrest which, as Tibi argues, cultivates the soil for the rise of Islamist universalism or political Islam.

### *Islamism as Alternative Global Order/Disorder*

For Tibi, the problems of Islamism are not simply political and security concerns confined within the region of the Middle East, though it originated in this region. What Tibi most worries about is the ‘globalization’ of Islamism as it gradually becomes an alternative political order or ideology in conflict with the existing international political order, and finally, a cause of world disorder and social unrest. The tragic event of 9/11 is what Tibi believes to be the evidence of the challenge Islamism poses to international order.<sup>46</sup> Tibi defends the legitimacy of the existing global order. For Tibi, the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 helped bring about a new world order. First, ‘it established the sovereign state as the fundamental unit of international relations, and it decoupled the religious establishments from the individual states. Sovereign states, as secular entities, were henceforth forbidden to go to war over religious differences.’<sup>47</sup> Second, following the view of Charles Tilly in his book *The Formation of the National States in Western Europe*, Tibi argues that ‘almost the entire world is now the dominion of secular nation-states on the Westphalian model that originated in Europe. This is a political reality, not, as some Muslim scholars contend, a Eurocentric idea of international relations theory.’<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the separation of religious institutions and state and the secularity of the

45 Ibid., 216.

46 Tibi, *The Challenge of Islamic Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder* (Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 2002), updated edn, xiii.

47 Tibi, *Islamism and Islam* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 33.

48 Ibid., 33.

political order basically represent what Tibi calls the ideas of 'international order'. For Tibi, the international order is not the product of an earlier era of European ascendancy, but is potentially acceptable to all humanity. Its legitimacy is founded on the idea of what Tibi calls 'cultural modernity' (the phase 'cultural modernism' will be used instead and will be discussed later), an idea that he endorses and defends as a universal value.<sup>49</sup>

How, then, does Islamism pose such a challenge to this international order? First, Islamism declares that there is a universal Islamic order or system, and that it has been in decline since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1924. The Islamists' vision is to revitalize this universal Islamic order so as to challenge, and even replace, the existing Western one. For Tibi, Napoleon's expedition introduced the ideology of modern secular nationalism (no matter how it later developed in the Arab world), and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire led to the modern nation-state as the parallel institutional reality. However, the revival of Islamism has ended such transformation. The proponents of Islamism qualify the secular nation-state as an 'imported solution' from the West and call for an Islamic state or system as an Islamic solution. Finally, the synthesis of the universal Islamic order and anti-Western ideology produces an Islamic ideology as an alternative global order (or disorder in the view of Tibi) in conflict with the secular international order that has developed from the Westphalian model. In this light, we can argue that what Tibi tries to do is to articulate the view of Islamism 'travelling' around the world since its nature is universal and it is globalized as an international ideology regardless of its context or origin. He transforms the discourse of regional revival in Islamic ideology in the Middle East into a universal discourse of Islamism against the legitimacy and secularity of the world order. But what are the nature and ideas of Islamism? In the following, I articulate the arguments of Tibi when discussing the nature of Islamism, its relations with violence, and what he calls institutional Islamism.

49 Ibid., 47.

*The 'Invention of Tradition'*

Borrowing the notion of the 'Invention of Tradition' from the historian Eric Hobsbawm, Tibi uses it as a principal marker of the nature of Islamism. Hobsbawm defines the invention of tradition as 'a set of practices [...] of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past'.<sup>50</sup> Tibi follows his thesis to indicate that there are in fact many Islamic traditions or discourses invented by Islamists. The so-called traditions proposed by Islamists never existed in the history of Islam, but are simply imagined traditions. At best, there is a confusion of classical Islamic traditions with contemporary Islamist ones. For Tibi, Islamists invent these new ideas and promote them as 'traditions' in Islamic history in order to obtain the authority and authenticity of being 'Islamic' in nature. In his recent book *Islamism and Islam*, Tibi offers a thematic review of Islamist inventions of Islamic traditions in several areas, as follows:

1. the interpretation of Islam as *nizam Islami* (state order);
2. the perception of the Jews as the chief enemy conspiring against Islam, because they are believed to be pursuing a 'Jewish world order' in conflict with the Islamist goal;
3. democratization and the place of institutional Islamism in a democratic state;
4. the evolution from classical *jihad* to terrorist jihadism;
5. the reinvention of *sharia*; and
6. the question of purity and authenticity, which determines the Islamist view of secularization and desecularization.<sup>51</sup>

Tibi argues that 'the first step in the Islamist invention of Islamic tradition is to establish a new understanding of Islam as *din-wa-dawla*: religion united with a state order. When Islamists speak of *al-hall al-Islami* (an Islamic solution), they mean not democracy but rather a remaking of the

50 Eric Hobsbawm and Terry Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 2nd edn, 1.

51 Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, 6.

existing political order in pursuit of the Islamic *sharia* state.<sup>52</sup> For Tibi, this situation is what he calls the politicization of Islam. Before examining the above themes individually, we need to know the meaning of this phrase. Tibi uses the notion of politicization of Islam or religion together with another two, namely, the religionization of politics and the culturalization of conflict.<sup>53</sup> For Tibi, all these three notions are problems of Islamism in our present age. The first two notions can be explained by the same principle and I shall discuss the notion of the culturalization of conflicts later in the subsequent section. In addition to the confusion of classical Islamic traditions with modern-day Islamist ones, we can say that the politicization of Islam and religionization of politics represent another type of confusion, that is, confusion between the spheres of politics and religion. For Tibi, Islam should be understood as a private religiosity, a personal ethics or set of guidelines for spirituality, but Islamists make Islam a universal, divine political order or ideology, which in turn challenges the existing secular international order, as mentioned above. And the religionization of politics refers to the return of the sacred or the revitalization of Islam in all aspects of politics (in the area of Islamic law, Tibi calls it a 'shari'atization of the state', the claim of divine Islamic law that covers all areas). It is only another perspective for indicating the confusion between spheres of politics and religion.

The fundamental issue to which this confusion leads is the violation of secularity that Tibi defends as the norm or reality in modern politics. Tibi separates three terms in relation to *the secular*. The first is secularization, which indicates a process of separation between religion and politics in society, in other words the functional differentiation of society – religion and politics should have their own rules of rationality, types of authority

52 Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, 31. The themes above follow the sequence of Tibi's book, but in discussing his ideas of Islamism I will follow the line of thought that I think fits the subject instead of the original sequence. Also, since I do not discuss the problem of the Jews in this book, I will ignore Tibi's discussion in this area, for which see Ch. 3 of *Islamism and Islam*.

53 Tibi, *Political Islam, World Politics and Europe: Democratic Peace and Euro-Islam versus Global Jihad* (London; New York: Routledge, 2008), 114, 163.

and realms of activity, and should not interfere with each other. The second is secularism, which refers to an anti-religious ideology. Tibi embraces the notion of secularization as a social fact, but does not agree to secularism in the sense that he does not propose the abolition of religion. Therefore, he does not claim himself to be secularist in this second sense. The third and final term is secularity, which is simply a state of affairs in society supporting the order of a separation between religion and politics. Tibi argues that today Islamists confuse the idea of secularism with secularization or secularity, viewing the separation of religion and politics as the abolition of religion. In the light of Tibi's thesis, in the following, I will show how these types of confusion happen in different areas, as identified above.

In his interpretation of Islam as *nizam Islami*, Tibi argues that neither Islam nor the Qur'an determines any particular model of political system as the divinely inspired order for the state or system of government. If we review the formative years of Islamic rule, we can see that the Prophet Muhammad was in his time both religious leader and political ruler of the *umma*, the Muslim community or Islamic polity, and also exercised the role of both the interpreter and the executor of laws. To some extent, understanding with the knowledge of political science today, we cannot deny that the Prophet played an authoritarian role in the political system, no matter how lenient and open-minded he was, and his legitimacy and authority of rule is also divinely secured. In Sunni tradition, the successors of the Prophet Muhammad established the caliphate system, in which the ruler was chosen via a selective process limited to a group of senior Muslims of the tribe of Quraysh. The ruler, therefore, no longer holds an office to which he is simply appointed by divine power, but there is a selection based on merit and lineage. Later, when the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties were established, the political system was changed again. It became a form of hereditary rule, ruling from generation to generation, until the rise of modern nation-state as the contemporary political system. We can say that there is no fixed, pre-determined political system in Islam. The various political systems have just happened contingently in Islamic history. Therefore, there is no reason in Islam (as against in Islamism) to outlaw the international order developed from the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 that was mentioned above. It is only Islamists who try to essentialize a particular

model, the *sharia* state, as the only legitimate Islamic political system. For Tibi, the Westphalian model can be a suitable political system for Muslim-majority states in the contemporary era. However, the ambition of Islamists to remake the world motivates them to dogmatize and disseminate the idea of a universal Islamic system based on their understanding of *sharia*, that is, a polity placed directly under the rule of Allah. Tibi argues that this is a confusion of a universal Islamic order in the past with modern notions of popular sovereignty and world order, and secular relations among states: these two notions do not exist in traditional Islamic doctrines.<sup>54</sup>

Having introduced the notion of a *sharia* state, I should first clarify the meaning of *sharia* before going on to discuss Tibi's interpretation of it. The Arabic word *sharia* means camels or cattle entering into the watering place (i.e. a correct path).<sup>55</sup> In its technical sense, it refers to the law laid down by God, and so the English translation is 'Islamic Law'. However, there is another term, *fiqh*, sometimes used interchangeably with *sharia*. It means, in its verbal form, 'to know' or 'to comprehend', and its technical translation is 'Islamic Jurisprudence'.<sup>56</sup> The difference is subtle. *Sharia* is the name given to the divine will of God as revealed in the Qur'an and the statements attributed to the Prophet (*ahadith*), while *fiqh* is the methodology, rule or science used to deduce and infer the divine will of God from the Qur'an and other texts. This methodology includes the idea of *ijtihad* that has also been mentioned. In a strict sense, they are not identical. *Sharia* is Ultimate Truth, in Nasr's term, but *fiqh* is only the method for trying to establish the truth or divine will on particular issues and put it into practice in a precise historical period. It can therefore be wrong, dated and contestable, and so *sharia* is not as clearly a human construct

54 Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, 31–53.

55 E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1984), 1534.

56 Al-Abdin, 'The Implications of *Shariah*, *Fiqh* and *Qanun* in an Islamic State', in Tarek Mitri, ed., *Religion, Law and Society: A Christian-Muslim Discussion* (Geneva: WCC Publications/Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995), 20. Also see Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Vol. 2, 2,429.

as *fiqh* is.<sup>57</sup> This is why Al-Azmeh argues that the application of *sharia* is meaningless, as it is not a specific code or law but a general term designating good order.<sup>58</sup> As Nielsen says, '*Shariah* [...] is theological foundation and structure which the *fiqh* interprets and fills in. It is thus no coincidence that the phrase used for discussing the divine purpose is the 'intention of the *shariah*', rather than the intentions of the *fiqh*, for the role of the *fiqh* is to seek the implementation of those intentions.'<sup>59</sup> Understood in this way, the concept of *sharia* is more theological and ethics-oriented while *fiqh* is more legal and method-oriented, even though intellectuals and the media use these two terms interchangeably.

Tibi basically agrees with the above linguistic meaning and methodological implication of the term *sharia*. Therefore, he argues against any implementation of *sharia* as if it were a codified or written law for the state. For Tibi, *sharia* is simply a set of personal and ethical guidelines. But if we follow the above distinction between the concepts of *sharia* and *fiqh*, then we can suggest that Muslim intellectuals should use the concept of *fiqh* instead of *sharia* to formulate the new legal system for the Islamic world, since *fiqh* is more flexible regarding new changes and adaptable to the legal requirements of the modern world. However, Tibi argues against this since he does not agree that *fiqh* is flexible and adaptable to modern legal requirements. Following the study by N. J. Coulson, Tibi identifies four phases in the development of *sharia*. The first phase

[c]omprises post-Qur'anic development up to the ninth century, during which an Islamic legal system was developed. *In the second phase, which lasted from the tenth century to the twentieth, this law grew increasingly rigid, until it was thought to constitute divine truth, valid for all times and in no way modifiable by history.* The twentieth century, after the introduction of the European institution of the secular-state into the world of Islam, marks a third phase, in which modern states have been unable to maintain their regimes while relying on classical Islamic law. This form of law does not meet the requirements of the modern world, and this has been an element of

57 Though Muslim scholars debate the extent to which *sharia* itself is a human construct.

58 Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities*, 12.

59 J. Nielsen, '*Shariah*, Change and Plural Societies', in Tarek Mitri, ed., *Religion, Law and Society*, 27.

Islam's predicament with modernity. I would argue that the Islamic world has now entered a fourth phase, marked by a de-Westernisation of law as political Islam pursues its program of ideological shari'atisation of Islam with the aim of *tatbiq al-sharia*, implementing the law of the Islamist movement on state and society.<sup>60</sup>

For Tibi, instead of being flexible, the tradition of *fiqh* developed in the second phase was growing rigid and absolute as an Islamic legal tradition, and a revival of *fiqh* therefore simply runs counter to the secular legal system. Even if Tibi sets aside the history and accepts the assumption of the flexibility of *fiqh* in the past, he also opposes the dogmatic form of *sharia* proposed by Islamists today and therefore it is not for him a revival of classical *fiqh*. In addition, Tibi argues that in the past *sharia* was mostly restricted to civil law and a penal code, and that there is in fact no intact and complete Islamic legal system independent of the political influence of the Caliphs. Therefore, the shari'atization of the state order (the fourth phase) is no more than an invention of tradition, a complete novelty and also a confusion of Islam with Islamism. Finally, another issue is whether it is correct to understand *sharia* as the constitution of the state. The most important issue leading Tibi to reject the possibility of viewing *sharia* as the constitution of the state is concerned with individual human rights, especially freedom of faith. Tibi argues that the nature of *sharia* is totalitarian while the notion of modern constitutionalism is founded on respect for and protection of individual human rights, and therefore their conceptual natures are incompatible. As he says, 'the important questions are whether *sharia* could really function as a constitutional law and how consonant the related call for Islamisation would be with the vision of democracy for the world of Islam.'<sup>61</sup> In the following, I will discuss how Islamists confuse the modern notion of democracy with the Islamic notion of *shura*, private consultation among tribal leaders.

To some extent, Tibi uses a similar rationale to argue against the confusion between the notion of modern democracy and the notion of *shura* in Islamic tradition. The former is a recent addition to Islamic thought (i.e.

60 Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, 174–5. Italics mine.

61 Ibid., 165.

an invention of tradition), while the latter is simply a tradition of inter-tribal consultation among the leaders of ethnic groups, beginning in the pre-Islamic period, which was not adopted by the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties. Nowadays, democracy is not restricted to the consultation of a limited number of leaders but is concerned with the wills of, or decisions made by, a majority of people or citizens through voting. Again, their conceptual natures are not compatible. However, Tibi accepts that there are populist Islamists who are different from totalitarian Islamists. Populist Islamists are more concerned about the legitimacy endorsed by citizens in their vision of an Islamic state, while totalitarian Islamists restrict the power to God alone and claim God as the only legislator, which, for Tibi, will ultimately lead to the totalitarian rule of the state. Therefore, the populist Islamists' ideal of *shura* as a governmental system is more compatible with the present-day notion of democracy, and if this interpretation is right we can say that populist Islamism also relates to what Tibi calls institutional Islamism.

Tibi distinguishes two directions or pathways of Islamism. Both share the same ultimate goal in establishing an Islamic state and the same Islamic world-view of seeing unbelievers in opposition to believers. But one is 'peaceful and represent(s) a movement willing to participate within a democratic format'.<sup>62</sup> Tibi calls it institutional Islamism, while the other is jihadism, which uses violence or terrorist actions to accomplish its goal. For Tibi, the 'democratic feature' of institutional Islamism is superficial and instrumental since its world-view and goal pursuits are still Islamist in nature. In my opinion, Tibi is worried about the political stability of states with institutional Islamism as a guiding principle. This Islamist way of thinking may finally abandon democratic values if democracy is only used as a tool and there is no commitment to the culture, value system and world-view underpinning the operation of modern democracy: these are also the ideas of cultural modernism that Tibi proposes and defends as universal and legitimate in modern society. Therefore, Tibi is not optimistic about the future political development of so-called democratic Islamic states such as Turkey if they

62 Tibi, *Political Islam, World Politics and Europe*, 10.

continue to view modern democracy only as an instrument: this is what Tibi calls ‘creeping Islamization’. Understood in this way, the use of violence is the crucial element distinguishing terrorist jihadism and *jihad* in Islamic tradition. Before studying the concept of *jihad* in Tibi’s interpretation, we should first seek a general understanding of *jihad* in Arabic.

The semantic meaning of the Arabic term *jihad* has no relation to holy war or even war in general. It simply means to strive, exert oneself, or take extraordinary pains. *Jihad* is defined classically as ‘exerting one’s utmost power, efforts, endeavours, or ability in contending with an object of disapprobation.’<sup>63</sup> *Jihad* can therefore apply to different areas of life. In the area of *sharia*, the concept of *jihad* will become *ijtihad*, a term sharing the same linguistic roots in Arabic and which basically means a process of making an independent effort for a sound legal judgement.<sup>64</sup> Another example is the notion of gender *jihad*, which refers to the pursuit and struggle for equal rights and status for men and women. Further, in Islamic tradition, *jihad* can be divided into greater and lesser *jihad*, the former referring to the spiritual struggle for the purification or conquest of one’s own desires and the latter, with a lower significance, referring to the physical struggle. Understood in this way, *jihad* does not necessarily equate to the use of physical violence or fighting. It is a linguistic mistake to translate the term *jihad* as ‘holy war’, but this mistake serves also to reduce or ignore its multiple meanings in different contexts.

There is no doubt that Tibi understands very well the multiple meanings of *jihad* in Arabic, but when discussing the concept he is more concerned with the implication of war in the Islamic tradition. To put it simply, he defines the classical understanding of *jihad* as regular war for the purposes of Islamic expansion against non-Muslims, with the aim of spreading the faith of Islam. This kind of war ‘is subject to binding rules that also limit the targets. In contrast, contemporary jihadism is a pattern of the new

63 Reuven Firestone, *Jihad: the Origin of Holy War in Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 16; Richard Bonney, *Jihad from Qur’an to bin Laden* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

64 See Ch. 4 for a more detailed definition of *ijtihad*.

irregular war waged as global *jihad* by those Islamists who subscribe to violence for fighting against the West and its believed Islamic allies. It is a war without rules.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, global jihadism is also an invention of tradition and stems from confusion between the classical *jihad* and jihadism.

Finally, we come to the question of the purity and authenticity of Islamism. For Islamists, the notion of purity is the authoritative foundation for claiming authenticity in Islam. Purity refers to a complete refusal of everything claimed to be Western and secular. And this is the reason why Islamists fight for the return of the sacred or the Islamization of every sphere of life, including politics, law and knowledge, against the separation of religion and politics (i.e. the process of secularization). It is what Tibi calls the process of de-secularization. Similarly, Islamists also fight for the global political order against the secular international political order adopted by the West, which is what Tibi calls the process of de-Westernization. As was mentioned above, Tibi argues that Islamists demand a complete assimilation of the spheres of religion and politics and therefore that everything should be placed under Islamist rule. Only this assimilation will result in purity, and thus the authenticity of being truly 'Islamic' in nature. Tibi argues that there is in fact another authenticity within the Islamic tradition that does not demand this kind of assimilation, a tradition which he calls Islamic rationalism.<sup>66</sup> The 'new' Islamic authenticity proposed by Tibi will be discussed in the section on the Ideal of Modern Islam, together with his concept of cultural modernism. Change is problematic for every religion since it may not always lead to renewal but sometimes crisis. In the following section, I consider how the rise of Islamism affects the issue of change in modern Islam.

### *The Crisis in Modern Islam*

Before examining the crisis in modern Islam, we need to distinguish between cultural and civilizational levels of crisis and conflict. Tibi explains:

65 Tibi, *Political Islam, World Politics and Europe*, 41.

66 Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, 177–200.

in my study of International Relations I focus on culture and view it as a local system underpinned by a social production of meaning. Seen from this angle, cultures are related in each case to a socially relevant set of values pertinent to a local framework. In my enquiry into civilisations I look at cultures that have family resemblance and therefore tend to group together to form one civilisation. Mostly, civilisation is defined in terms of a shared view of the world.<sup>67</sup>

The study of culture therefore becomes a detailed case study of a particular region and civilization is a study of a shared world-view within one region. Conflicts of world-view can also be studied within one civilization and at the level of 'inter-civilization'. The conflict in Turkey between Islamism and secularism, for example, is one within Islamic civilization, while the conflict between Islam and Europe is inter-civilizational.<sup>68</sup> Inter-civilizational conflict is the concern of this book and so in the following, although I will discuss a number of regional issues, my concern with the crisis in modern Islam will be at the inter-civilizational (world-view) level.

For Tibi, there is no doubt that the crisis in modern Islam is the rise of Islamism. The latter is ultimately caused by the de-legitimization of modern Arab nationalism. Unfortunately, the changes occurring after the failure of Arab nationalism led to a crisis in modern Islam instead of a renewal. Yet there other aspects of the effect of Islamism. In the preceding discussion, I dealt with the vision of a global Islamist order against the West, shari'atization of the state order, jihadism and so on. These ideas and movements are the process of either de-secularization or de-Westernization and they are effects of Islamism upon the world. For Tibi, there is in fact another effect of Islamism, and this is the change of nature of modern Islam itself when facing the process and challenges of globalization. Tibi calls it 'Islam's predicament with modernism'. Following the thought of Clifford Geertz, Tibi argues that Islam is a cultural system, and as a cultural system religion is defined as '(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men (3)

67 Tibi, *Islam in Global Politics: Conflicts and Cross-civilisational Bridging* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2012), 169.

68 Ibid., 111.

by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.<sup>69</sup> Defining religion in terms of moods and motivations and conceptions of a general order of existence helps Tibi focus on studying the model of reality understood by Muslims. Models of reality represent abstract theories and doctrines of the human perception of reality.<sup>70</sup> Although Tibi recognizes the diversity of Muslim cultures, he insists that there is 'a specific Islamic view of the world shared by *all* Muslims.'<sup>71</sup> This is the understanding of history. Tibi writes:

it can be stated that Islamic doctrine has two different understandings of history: a forward-looking option for the future and humanity, which envisages humanity becoming united under the banner of Islam; and a backward-oriented utopia, bound up with the aspiration of restoring the Islamic community of the Prophet at Medina. Both concepts determine the Islamic worldview, which is based on dichotomising the globe in an Islamic and a non-Islamic territoriality.<sup>72</sup>

The above world-view or model of reality shared by all Muslims was discussed in Chapter 2: the division of the world into *dar al-Islam* (the abode of Islam), *dar al-harb* (the abode of war) and *dar al-amn* (the abode of peace or safety). For Tibi, the significance of this division is not simply as a regional classification but as a model for Islamic universalism, which refers to the complete unification of different regions of the world under *dar al-Islam*. Here, we have to distinguish the notion of Islamic universalism from that of Islamist internationalism. Tibi uses both terms, but they are in fact completely different. The former refers to an authentic Islamic world-view shared by all Muslims while the latter is a contemporary Islamist ideology that confuses traditional Islamic universalism with its own vision

69 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90.

70 Tibi, *Islam between Culture and Politics* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan in association with Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 2005), 2nd edn, 28.

71 *Ibid.*, 53. Italics mine.

72 *Ibid.*, 59.

of politicizing Islam as a global order today.<sup>73</sup> Islamic universalism does not demand a specific state order as divinely inspired or pre-determined, and therefore democratization all over the world can also be interpreted as the programme of Islamic universalism as well, if it is reformed according to cultural modernism, while the Islamist order cannot, since it demands a return of the sacred in all aspects of politics and the legal system, that is, a *sharia* state. Therefore, as has repeatedly been mentioned in discussing different themes above, the Islamist order is simply an invention of tradition. In my opinion, there are two important implications we have to consider. The first is what Tibi calls 'cultural fragmentation' in relation to Islamist internationalism, and the second is the universality of cultural modernism in relation to Islamic universalism.

Cultural fragmentation has resulted from the process of globalization. For Tibi, globalization is not simply having a McDonald's restaurant in the Middle East or a global platform for economic activities around the world. It 'does not only refer to the process linking the diverse parts of the world to one another, but also to the mapping of the world into one globalized system.'<sup>74</sup> In this globalized system, the states do not only share the sciences, technology and modern institutions that constitute the international system; this system also carries modern culture, values, norms, and the world-view, that constitute international society, as Hedley Bull argues above. The modern culture beneath the international society is what Tibi calls 'cultural modernism', and to Westerners the ideas of this cultural modernism are well-known. They include the primacy of human rationality, the secularity of society, the rule of law, secular democracy, tolerance of diversity, and individual human rights such as freedom of speech, of publication and of faith. Muslim modernists such as al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh welcomed the achievements of sciences, technology and modern institutions stemming from modernization but rejected the world-view they sprang from (i.e. cultural modernism). This means that modern institutions, including science and technology, are globalized but that the modern

73 Tibi, *Islam in Global Politics*, 58.

74 Tibi, *Islam between Culture and Politics*, 101.

world-view underpinning these institutions is not universalized. This partial adoption is what Tibi calls 'structural globalization and cultural fragmentation' or, in a more simple term, 'semi-modernism'.

When the Muslim world faces the process of globalization, it tends to interpret secularity as an anti-religious ideology, which is a confusion between the notions of secularity and secularism, and cultural modernism as a Western or imported solution. It rejects the cultural aspect of modernization and makes modern Islam appear to be defensive and reluctant to adapt in accordance with cultural modernism. As an alternative, defensive Islamists propose their own Islamist solutions in response to the cultural requirements of international society in what Tibi calls 'defensive cultural responses to global challenges'. As mentioned above, these responses include the search for purity and authenticity in Islam, the expansion of the Islamist order over the world, shari'atization of the state and jihadism and so on. The conflict is therefore between Islamist culture and modern secular culture, and this is what Tibi calls the 'culturalization of conflicts'. In short, we may say that the de-legitimization of Arab nationalism led to this defensive cultural response in relation to globalization, and it in turn led to the politicization of Islam or Islamism. It can be argued that the politicization of Islam and the defensive culture of modern Islam are in fact two sides of the same coin. Both of them are the result of the de-legitimization of Arab nationalism.

The second implication in relation to Islamic universalism is the need for cultural innovation. For Tibi, traditional Islamic universalism needs a new interpretation since 'some civilisations claim universal validity for their views. It is detrimental to dialogue when a civilisation claims for itself a world mission, as did the Islamic and the Western European civilisations in the past to their neighbours. In these cases there can be no real dialogue.'<sup>75</sup> There is a theoretical problem. If universalism is detrimental to real dialogue, does Tibi ask for the abandonment of traditional Islamic universalism as commonly held by all Muslims? The answer would seem to be negative. Instead, Tibi projects Islamic universalism as a religion for all people who

75 Tibi, *Islam in Global Politics*, 170.

would like to become Muslim: it is in fact the religious concept of *umma*. If this is true, then, since the ideas of cultural modernism are also held by humanity in general, the two things are compatible. In this perspective, when Tibi employs the term 'Euro-Islam', it does not mean that Islam is simply a European (regional) religion, though the concept is related to the migration of Muslims to Western Europe, but a Europeanized Islam free of *sharia* and of *jihad* (valid in all places and for all Muslims over the world).<sup>76</sup> Tibi sometimes uses Civil Islam as a synonym for Euro-Islam to indicate its universality. In the following section, I will discuss the significance of cultural modernism that Tibi embraces so unreservedly and its relationship with the notion of Civil Islam – the Ideal of modern Islam.

### *The Ideal of Modern Islam: Cultural Modernism and Civil Islam*

After discussing the crisis in or dark side of modern Islam, we now turn to the positive side of modern Islam that Tibi proposes. Tibi argues that Islam in our time must be reformed according to the spirit of cultural modernism. Therefore, I shall first examine the universal nature of cultural modernism and then the reform that Tibi proposes to connect Islam with this cultural modernism. Finally, I will discuss the extent to which this reform can gain authenticity or legitimacy in Islam.

First of all, we have to understand the theory behind the universality of cultural modernism for which Tibi argues. He draws upon the thought of Norbert Elias, the influential German sociologist, who proposes the idea of the civilizing process. Tibi states that 'Elias enthralingly reconstructs the European civilising process, showing the unique character that *may* lie behind Europe's ability to conquer the whole world, and thereby to establish a claim to universality for its own civilisation [...]. To be sure, Elias's approach has nothing to do with the Eurocentric history [...].'<sup>77</sup> Here we do not need to know the reasons why European civilization is

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>77</sup> Tibi, *Islam between Culture and Politics*, 18.

unique in history to the extent of having become the model of a universal civilization. Instead we need to know that, for Tibi, following the ‘civilizing process’ idea of Elias, there are ‘spill-over effects (globalized effects) of the European “civilising process” [that] have taken place in the context of the European colonial expansion.’<sup>78</sup> He further argues that ‘the wheel of history cannot be turned back, and the universalising and globalising effects of European expansion and its civilising process are now features of our present realities, like it or not.’<sup>79</sup> Therefore, the ideas produced by European civilization are no longer Eurocentric but universal for all humanity and this is the universal nature of cultural modernism. In addition, within the one civilizing process, Elias argues that ‘the contrasts in conduct [...] are reduced with the spread of civilisation; the varieties of nuances of civilized conduct are increased.’<sup>80</sup> For Tibi, this is the basic concept of cultural pluralism. Diversity of conduct must exist within the limits of a single universal cultural modernism.

For Tibi, the ideas and movements of Islamism today fall outside the limits of cultural pluralism and therefore Islamism cannot be endorsed under the excuse of pluralism or tolerance. Why cannot the ideas of cultural modernism be universalized all over the world? Tibi considers that Francis Fukuyama’s idea of the ‘end of history’ fails to articulate the gravity of the challenge of modern Islamism, underestimates the potential for conflict in the future, and so weakens people’s attention to its possible destructive power. Tibi is more pessimistic than Fukuyama. Instead of an optimistic end of history, what Tibi tries to articulate is the severity of conflict on the path to this end and what Muslims or humans need to do if they want to actualize a positive outcome from conflict. For Tibi, it is cultural fragmentation or semi-modernism that creates the conflicts between Islamism and cultural modernism. Fragmentation slows down or even terminates the universalization of cultural modernism. For Tibi, cultural fragmentation

78 Tibi, *Islam in Global Politics*, 46.

79 Tibi, *Islam between Culture and Politics*, 100.

80 *Ibid.*, 100.

exists even in Europe, and the current situation is not promising if Muslims living there cannot embrace the following concepts wholeheartedly:

1. Democracy: not only as the electoral procedure of voting (balloting), but rather as a political culture of civil society that entails the acceptance of the related core values.
2. The separation between religion and politics (secularity, not to be confused with the ideology of secularism): secularity does not advocate atheism or the abolition of religion. One can be secular (a separation between faith and politics) and at the same time be a faithful Muslim. This is no contradiction.
3. Individual human rights in the understanding of entitlement: in Islam there are *farā'id* (duties), not *huquq* (rights); one should beware of this confusion.
4. Pluralism of cultures and religions in society, that puts all religions on equal footing: Islam should not be placed above other religions, as Muslims commonly seek to do.
5. The issue of tolerance: the sort of tolerance referred to here not in the Islamic understanding of treating Jews/Christian monotheists as protected minorities or *dhimmi* (second class believers), but rather based on equality within the outlined requirement of pluralism. By current standards, the notion of dhimmitude in Islam is an expression of discrimination, not of tolerance, as Muslims would like to observe.<sup>81</sup>

To rescue modern Islam from fragmentation and to actualize the end of history, Tibi proposes the revival of Islamic rationalism or humanism. If there is a revival of Islamic rationalism, then Tibi believes that cross-civilizational bridging or dialogue can be reached. What is Islamic rationalism? Tibi argues that, starting from the late ninth century, the period of medieval Islam, Muslim rationalists, or philosophers such as al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd, had already adopted Hellenistic humanism. For Tibi, 'the substance of humanism is enlightenment which is the worldview that a human is, as a subject, capable to determine the self'.<sup>82</sup> The rationalization of a world-view that was founded on Hellenization produces Islamic rationalism. The blooming of Islamic rationalism is due to the willingness to engage in cultural borrowing from other intellectual sources such as Greek,

81 Tibi, *Islam in Global Politics*, 128. For more detail (albeit repetitive) see Tibi, *Islam's Predicament with Modernity*, Chs 6, 7.

82 Tibi, *Islam in Global Politics*, 93.

Persian, Syrian, Egyptian and Indian cultures so as to develop, improve and enrich Islamic civilization in numerous areas such as literature, philosophy, mathematics, medicine, astronomy, alchemy, architecture and so on. Unlike today, when Islamists argue for the purification of Islam against Western influences, Muslim rationalists at that time eagerly welcomed and absorbed Greek, Persian and other foreign influences into their own science and world-view, and also tried to separate the domains of religious knowledge and science in order to preserve each in its proper place.

Rationalism therefore provides the soil for change and reform in the history of Islam. Later, on the eve of the Renaissance, Islamic civilization transferred back the science and knowledge to Europe and thereby ultimately transformed European civilization into what Elias calls the model for universal civilization. This strongly inspired Tibi to argue that cultural borrowing and mutual fertilization between civilizations are the key for success in both Islamic and European civilizations. However, if Islamic rationalism was so successful, why did it decline in the history of Islam? Tibi blames the decline on *fiqh*-orthodoxy, that 'condemned rationalism as a heresy',<sup>83</sup> this blacklisted and outlawed *falsafa* (rationalism or rational philosophy in Islam) and excluded the influence of rationalism from the Islamic system of education, and from the curriculum of Muslim colleges and other institutions. Like the conflict between Islamism and secular Islam today, there were conflicts between *fiqh*-orthodoxy and *falsafa*-rationality in medieval Islam, which led to a crisis within Islamic civilization. Unfortunately, the result was the decline of the rational tradition of *falsafa*. The similarity between the medieval and the modern conflict between *fiqh*-orthodoxy/Islamism and *falsafa*-rationality/secular Islam no doubt concerns Tibi with regard to the future of Islam. He does not want the history of decline to repeat itself, and for this reason urges the revival of Islamic rationalism in order to 'establish it as an authenticity for embracing modernism'.<sup>84</sup>

What is the authenticity or the legitimacy of being Islamic? For Tibi, it is not a concept that can be 'discovered' from the Qur'an or that has

83 Tibi, *Islam's Predicament with Modernity*, 247.

84 Ibid., 309.

been divinely pre-determined in the various Islamic traditions. It is in fact a choice made by Muslims today. Either (1) they want to follow contemporary Islamists so as to Islamize the world by *sharia*, or (2) they want Islam to be rationalized (or Europeanized) and to flourish in the contemporary world. There is no third way for Islam in the future. To be rationalists, Muslims need to abandon Islamist ideologies. As for Tibi himself, instead of choosing *fiqh* or Islamism, he has taken sides with rationalism and secularity and he argues that it such a choice by Muslims that will make rationalism the authentic and legitimate tradition for contemporary Islam.

Having discussed Tibi's idea of Islamic reform, we come to the concept of cross-civilizational bridging or dialogue in the final part of this section. For Tibi, cross-civilizational bridging can only occur when there is a sharing of universal values. These values, mentioned above, include things such as individual human rights, secular democracy, pluralism, tolerance and civil society. On the basis of the foundation of these universal values, Tibi argues that Europe and Islam can reach a cross-cultural morality and a shared discourse based on rational knowledge.<sup>85</sup> Tibi may not be unaware of it, but the chief purpose of his cross-civilizational dialogue is *not* to reform Islam in order to create a sharing of universal values and so make Islam compatible with cultural modernism. Its main purpose is conflict resolution between civilizations. As Tibi says, within the framework of conflict resolution, 'a bridging between the civilisations is directed by the hope for global peace. This hope is associated with an agenda for a global democratisation [...]. [T]here can be no stable world peace without fulfilling the basic requirement for it, namely global democracy.'<sup>86</sup>

Understood in this way, before the bridging or dialogue, these civilizations have already shared universal values, and so the dialogue itself is not a means of facilitating a conceptual transition from the traditional Muslim, or even the potential Islamist, world-view to a rational and secular one. This can only be done by the adoption of Islamic rationalism, and so rational Muslims will abandon the Islamist world-view accordingly. In my

85 Tibi, *Islam in Global Politics*, 165.

86 Ibid., 162.

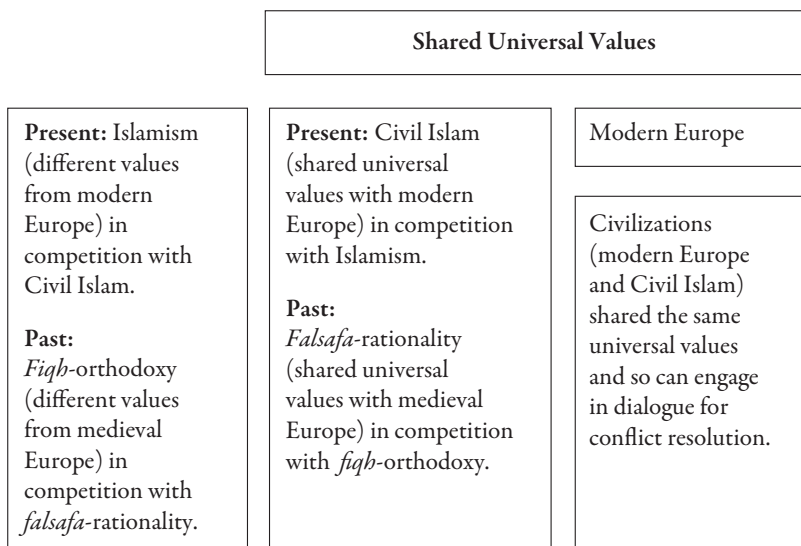
opinion, this is the most important difference between the ideas of Tariq Ramadan and of Bassam Tibi, and it will be discussed when I compare their thinking in Chapter 5. The second important thing to observe is the difference between Samuel Huntington's idea of the clash and Tibi's idea of conflict. Tibi argues that, for Huntington, there is a fault-line between civilizations and so their clashing is inevitable, but for Tibi this is not a clash but a conflict, which can be resolved by a revival of Islamic rationalism. But does Huntington really have no solution for the conflict? He proposes three requirements for countries which want to shift their civilizational identity in a successful way, and conflict can be solved accordingly when the countries both share the same civilizational identity. It is an idea similar to that of Tibi's urging of a revival of Islamic rationalism so that it can be compatible with cultural modernism. The three requirements are:

First, the political and economic elite of the country (which wants to shift its identity) has to be generally supportive of and enthusiastic about this move. Second, the public has to be at least willing to acquiesce in the redefinition of identity. Third, the dominant elements in the host civilisation, in most cases the West, have to be willing to embrace the convert.<sup>87</sup>

In the words of Tibi, these three requirements refer to the willingness of Muslim elites and mainstream Muslims to embrace cultural modernism and abandon Islamist ideologies (i.e. a shift of civilizational identity). If they do so, cross-cultural morality and rational discourse can be reached. The idea of cross-cultural bridging has already assumed something of a shift of civilizational identity (except that the third condition is not mentioned explicitly) as the foundation of dialogue. If bridging were understood in this way, I do not think that Huntington would have continued to insist on the clash or fault-line between Islam and the West if Islam shifted its civilizational identity successfully as the West has done. In my opinion, there is in fact no significant difference between the idea of a clash proposed by Huntington and the idea of conflict proposed by Tibi. Finally, what both

87 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 139.

Huntington and Tibi simply want to say is that the clash/conflict between two democratic states or civilizations (like the USA and the UK or Japan and India) is not so difficult to resolve, nor is consensus so difficult to reach as it is in the case of Iran and the USA, for example, which do not have a sharing of universal values. Before examining the implications of Tibi’s ideas as a theory for Islam in the modern world, we may represent the relationship between Islamism and Islam as follows:



## A Theory of Islam in the Modern World

After examining both the negative and the positive sides of Tibi’s thinking on Islam in the modern world, I now discuss the significance of his thought in the context of Islam in the modern world, and the criticisms that might be made of it. First, I shall examine the reasons why traditional Islam and modernist Islam cannot constitute Europeanized Islam

in Tibi's sense in order to show the significance of Civil Islam. Second, I discuss the contribution of Tibi's ideas in the area of conflict resolution and modern politics. Finally, I will articulate a criticism of his thought in order to pave the way for comparing it with that of Nasr and Ramadan in Chapter 5.

Tibi distinguishes four types of Islam in the modern world and in Europe specifically, namely, traditional Islam, modernist Islam, Islamism and, finally, Civil Islam. Examples of the first are Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia and conservative Muslims in Europe. Tibi says that they may not be Islamists or fundamentalists now, but he is worried about their potentiality or predisposition to become Islamists in the future. As he says in *The Crisis of Modern Islam*, 'Even westernized Islamic scholars have adopted a defensive posture vis-à-vis the menacing dominant culture they reluctantly confront. Seyyed Hossein Nasr summarizes his reflections on this problem in the following way [...]':<sup>88</sup> Although Tibi does not accurately understand the thought of Nasr in relation to modernism (see Chapter 2), it is obvious that he believes that Muslims like Nasr have a defensive mindset against some of the ideas of cultural modernism and so, though they are not Islamists now, they may be 'potential' Islamists in the future if their mindset does not change. As regards the second type of Islam, it has what Tibi calls modern Muslims such as al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh as representatives. Similarly, for Tibi, they too are potential Islamists since they are 'semi-modernists'. Tibi argues that

the only similarity between al-Afghani and the Islamists is that both related modernism to instruments and not to a rational world-view. The reform al-Afghani envisioned failed because he was not poised to change the Islamic worldview [...] al-Afghani was better than the Islamists, because he was sincere about the adoption of modernism and never engaged in a fake authenticity based on a fictitious and fickle ideology.<sup>89</sup>

88 Tibi, *The Crisis of Modern Islam: A Preindustrial Culture in the Scientific-technological Age* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1988), 5.

89 Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, 197.

Tibi also says, 'Indeed, there are many varieties of political Islam that compel [us] to speak in [the] plural of Islamisms. However, all of them are united by their approval of the instruments of modernism (modern science and technology) combined with a staunch rejection of the value system of cultural modernism.'<sup>90</sup> There is no doubt that modernist Muslims with the semi-modernist mindset have the potential to become fully-fledged Islamists as well. Seen in this light, the seeming four types of Islam in Europe are in fact reduced to two, that is, Islamism and Civil Islam, and this is the reason why Tibi is so passionate in urging Civil Islam, since if Muslims are not committed to it they become Islamists or potential Islamists because no viable third choice exists.

We turn now to examine the significance of Tibi's idea of the separation between rational and secular Islam and political Islamism. First of all, this separation helps establish a new area of research called Islamology. There are different fields in Islamic studies, such as textual and historical studies of Islamic traditions and cultural anthropological studies of present-day Muslim society, and current political science studies also examine identity politics and ethnicity in order to investigate the issues arising from political Islam, but there are 'only a few political scientists who are in a position to professionally study Islam and international conflict.'<sup>91</sup> This is a study which situates Islam as a civilization within an inquiry about global conflict, changing the perspective from international relations to that of inter-civilizational relations. It views Islamism as a political reality affecting present-day society and international relations, instead of just studying the Islamic faith as texts and as social practices. It is also a study which perceives regional and international conflicts as conflicts between world-views of Islamism and cultural modernism, instead of conflicts under the guise of rights, ethnicity and identity. For Tibi, studies of identity politics and ethnicity are going in the wrong direction, since their ideas implicitly legitimize the right to be Islamist and so make a bigger gap in

90 Tibi, *Islam in Global Politics*, 15.

91 Ibid., 75.

which Muslims may embrace cultural modernism and isolate themselves from mainstream society. It is a phenomenon he calls ‘ghettoization.’<sup>92</sup>

Finally, Tibi’s theory tries to offer an exit strategy for escaping these conflicts. The solution is perceived as being the revival of Islamic rationalism. In my opinion, given the influence of critical IR theory’s argument against absolutism as an intellectual source for Tibi, the contribution Islamology may make is to keep on adverting to the problems with Islamism (absolutism) today. This includes critiques of its influence upon the world order and the crisis regarding Islam itself and the reform of Islam in the light of the ideal of modernism (normativity or international morality proposed by critical IR theorists). It is highly probable that conflicts between Islamism and cultural modernism will continue into the future, as evidenced by the circulation on YouTube of *Innocence of Muslims* (2012), which causes violent attacks and demonstrations across the Muslim world. Therefore, it is still too soon to conclude that we are in the age of post-Islamism or the decline of Islamism, as some scholars have done.<sup>93</sup> In addition, Tibi’s framework of separation between Islamism and Islam is applied as a method for the political analysis of current events, so it is no longer a pure conceptual theory without application.<sup>94</sup> The dichotomy between Islam and Islamism can prevent criticisms of Islam itself. Tibi argues that all the bad things reported relate only to Islamism, not Islam. Tibi essentializes the nature of Islamism (not Islam) such as defensive cultural responses, Islamization of the world, jihadism and so on. Muslims can thus easily identify their own thought as Islamist, or not. He situates the ideas of cultural modernism as the ideal or normativity of Islam (not Islamism). Thus, the dichotomy between Islam (good) and Islamism (bad) gives us a very clear and simple

92 Tibi, *Islam’s Predicament with Modernity*, Ch. 5.

93 Tibi, *Islamism and Islam*, 13.

94 See e.g. Richard Bonney, ‘Pakistan: Islam’s Predicament with Modernity and the Issue of Self-Identity’, in Richard Bonney, Tridivesh Singh Maini and Tahir Malik, ed. *Warriors after War: Indian and Pakistani Retired Military Leaders Reflect on Relations between the Two Countries, Past, Present and Future* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), 329–46.

message: abandonment of Islamism is the only choice for Muslims today, like it or not.

*Is This Theory Communicative Enough?*

In the following, I will first discuss Tibi's responses to his critics, and then my concerns about his ideas. There are four main criticisms of his theory to which Tibi has responded, namely, orientalism, reductionism, cultural relativism and, finally, cultural standardization. To a certain extent, these criticisms can be seen as emanating from different perspectives: we may see them as different ways of handling the issue of Islamism, which help us to understand better the real concerns of Tibi.

First of all, the theory of Tibi is not a study of Islam as a religious faith or texts. As a result, it is completely irrelevant to argue against his ideas of Islamism by referring to the message contained in the Qur'an, Hadith or other Islamic sources. Muslim scholars disagree with Tibi on the ground that political Islamists misinterpret the message of the Qur'an and so go astray – for them, Islam is essentialized as the textual sources in Islamic traditions – but for Tibi, this is not the real issue. The interpretation of the Qur'an and the meaning of *sharia* may differ according to the scholar, but this remains a dispute about textual interpretation. Ironically, the real problem with Islamism does not concern the conflict of interpretation, but the totalitarian interpretation of Islam. The totalitarian interpretation 'only becomes adequately comprehensible in the context of change. The role of religion in socio-cultural change needs to move to centre-stage in every analysis on the addressed topic.'<sup>95</sup> For Tibi, this kind of criticism, whether he calls it orientalism or the 'essentialism' of Islam, simply ignores the context of studying Islam in a period of social change. In addition, Tibi also avoids essentializing the concept of Europe. Europeanization is not Christianization, and Europe itself also needs to be Europeanized since it is still not a completely rational and secular place. As with his 'essentialism' of

95 Tibi, *Islam between Culture and Politics*, 103.

Islamism, what he actually essentializes is the idea of cultural modernism as a theoretical assumption or guiding principle of his ideas, which is a legacy of critical IR theory. The second criticism is similar but goes to another extreme, and Tibi calls it reductionism. It reduces Islamism completely to a cultural, social, economic or political phenomenon. It 'denies the partial autonomy of religions by unhesitatingly placing them as cultural systems in a virtually causal relationship with the level of development of the respective society'.<sup>96</sup> As mentioned above, for Tibi, Islam as a religion is a cultural system, which generates a perception of reality for Muslims, but this does not mean that it is completely passive. Islam is both shaped by reality and shapes reality itself. Tibi does not completely agree with the reductionist approach, and so he articulates Islamism as if it were a context-free system.

Tibi advocates pluralism, since Islam (and perhaps Christianity as well) claims a kind of supremacy over other religions, and without pluralism and tolerance conflicts caused by religious fighting for supremacy will continue, with the result that global peace becomes unattainable. However, this does not mean that Tibi adopts the concepts of cultural relativism or postmodernism, which, for him, legitimate the existence of nearly all human behaviour and ideas without considering the objectivity and universality of knowledge. If Tibi were to agree with relativism, he would have no theoretical reason to seek to eliminate Islamism and demand that Muslims embrace cultural modernism: relativism cannot offer a standard for judging the pros and cons of Islamism and cultural modernism. Only pluralism within the limit of cultural modernism can do so: 'pluralism refers to the concept of people representing different views while at the same time strongly committed to common rules and, above all, to mutual tolerance and mutual respect as the binding value-based consensus'.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, pluralism within the limit of cultural modernism will not bring about a standardization of cultures even if all cultures or civilizations are committed to a sharing of universal values, since the universal values do not cover all aspects of society. It mainly affects the public or political system of values, and this

96 Ibid., 30.

97 Ibid., 209.

is also the reason why Tibi demands a dichotomy between religion (the private domain) and politics (the public domain).

Finally, my concern with Tibi's central idea relates to its communicative ability, how we would change the world view of Islamists or potential Islamists to that of rational and secular Muslims through dialogue. The reason for this concern starts from my understanding of his cross-cultural dialogue. At first, I understood that this dialogue or bridging to reform Islamism would be through communication. However, following more in-depth study, I recognize that this is not the case. It is the revival of Islamic rationalism that is to change the world-view of Islamists or potential Islamists, not cross-cultural dialogue, which is only aimed at conflict resolution between civilizations. The establishment of cross-cultural morality and rational discourse between civilizations is posited at the secondary level *after* the revival of Islamic rationalism. Tibi states this clearly: '*if* the revival (of Islamic rationalism) could materialize, *then* one would be in a position to truly speak of good conditions for a start aimed at bridging within the framework of a cross-cultural morality.'<sup>98</sup> Understood in this way, if there is no real communication among Muslims to persuade them to change their world-view, what is the possibility that they will change automatically? For Tibi, 'abandonment' is the key word for this sudden change. But why should Muslims abandon their old view suddenly, from the known (a potential Islamist view) to the unknown (a secular Islamic view) without a transitional struggle? Such a sudden change of mind without any conceptual transition would be unheard of, whether by Muslims or non-Muslims. Habermas strongly focuses on the idea of inter-subjectivity (instead of subjectivity as emphasized by Tibi). For Habermas, communication presupposes the dialogue of two parties while translation assumes two different languages. Translation is in fact a process of rationalization and secularization when Islamic discourses are translated for the public as understandable discourses while those which are untranslatable will remain private. The mere abandonment of an idea is not communicative enough for Habermas. Tibi fails to take this idea seriously, which is also the reason why

he claims that his ideas promote the return of the sacred since he cannot accept Islamists as partners in dialogue.<sup>99</sup> For Tibi, if Islamists can sit down truthfully for a dialogue about change, they are no longer Islamists. In my judgement, the ideas of Tariq Ramadan offer a more communicative way for Muslims today to pave the transition towards the ideas of rationality and secularity, one which is more in line with the thought of Habermas than with that of Tibi. In the next chapter, we will see how Ramadan's idea of *Being a European Muslim* works.

99 Tibi, *Islam between Culture and Politics*, 242–9.

## CHAPTER 4

# Tariq Ramadan, the European Muslim and a New 'We'

## Introduction

Whereas Tibi argues for an Islamic reformation, the Muslim intellectual introduced in this chapter, Tariq Ramadan, also seeks to reform Islam, but with a different rationality. Like Tibi, Ramadan emphasizes the significance of rationality; the ideas of both focus on economic, political and social activities, not just religious ones, and, most importantly, they articulate the necessity for communication and critique of ideology in society. However, Tibi also tries to distance his ideas from those of Ramadan, whom he believes is going in the wrong direction. (This will be discussed in Chapter 5.)

In this chapter, I shall examine and evaluate the thought of Ramadan in detail. This chapter consists of three parts. First, I will discuss Ramadan's intellectual biography and the history and philosophy of Salafism, from which Ramadan draws his inspiration. Second, I will reconstruct Ramadan's idea of the European Muslim as an overarching framework; then discuss the significant implications of being a European Muslim; and finally, examine Ramadan's practical suggestions in (mainly) political and economic areas in order to articulate the tension between this idea as a framework and as an ideology.

## Intellectual Biography of Tariq S. Ramadan

Born in Geneva in 1962, Tariq Said Ramadan, unlike other ordinary Swiss Muslims, has a well-known historical figure, Hasan al-Banna (1906–49), founder of the Society of Muslim Brothers<sup>1</sup> in Egypt, as his maternal grandfather. His father, Sayid Ramadan (1926–95), who was also one of prominent figures in the Society and was accused of treason and damage to the reputation of Egypt abroad, was deprived of his nationality in 1954.<sup>2</sup> Sayid Ramadan left Egypt in the same year and finally, in 1958, settled in Switzerland, where he recommenced his Muslim life and mission and raised his children in the Muslim faith. One of these is Tariq Ramadan.<sup>3</sup>

Tariq Ramadan received all his higher education at the University of Geneva. He studied philosophy, French literature and Islamic studies and completed his licentiate (equivalent to a master's degree in the UK<sup>4</sup>) in Philosophy with a paper on Søren Kierkegaard and French literature. He also studied the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche on suffering, and from

- 1 The Society of Muslim Brothers was allegedly accused of being a radical Islamic group, especially under the leadership of Sayyid Qutb (1906–66), another intellectual leader of the Society. For particulars see Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- 2 Hamel, *La vérité sur Tariq Ramadan: Sa famille, ses réseaux, sa stratégie*, 91. People generally believe that Sayid Ramadan was expelled because Gamal Abd el-Nasser (1918–70) wanted to suppress the activities of the Society of Muslim Brothers in Egypt after he gained power. Even though Nasser, President of Egypt from 1956 to 1970, was not yet President in 1954, he exercised *de facto* control of the government together with Muhammad Najib (1901–84) and Anwar Sadat (1918–81) after 1952, when they overthrew the King.
- 3 Tariq Ramadan, *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity* (Markfield, Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 2001), vii–xiv.
- 4 Unlike the UK education system, before the recent enforcement of the Bologna Convention, the Swiss higher education system did not make a distinction between bachelor's and master's degrees. Swiss students normally commence university study at the age of nineteen, and after completing four years of study obtain a licence, that is, a licentiate, which is equivalent to a master's degree in the UK.

these studies, acquired an in-depth knowledge of Western philosophy.<sup>5</sup> In 1996, he earned his PhD in Arabic and Islamic Studies. His thesis was subsequently (1988) published as *Aux sources du renouveau musulman: D'al-Afghani à Hassan al-Banna, un siècle de réformisme islamique*; it was a study of the role of his grandfather in the Islamic movement in Egypt, and other Islamic reformers.<sup>6</sup> Ramadan also received intensive one-to-one training in classic Islamic scholarship from scholars at Al-Azhar University in Egypt. He is fluent in Arabic, English and French. Between 1997 and 2004, he served as Professor of Philosophy at the College of Geneva and Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. In 2004, he was appointed Henry R. Luce Professor of Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding at the Kroc Institute at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, from which he was forced to resign owing to the revocation of his work visa in the USA. In 2006, he was elected to a two-year research fellowship at the European Studies Centre and Middle East Centre, St Anthony's College, University of Oxford, and he is currently Professor of Contemporary Islamic Studies at the Oriental Institute, St Antony's College, and also teaches in the Faculty of Theology at the same university. In 2007, he was offered a professorship in Islamic studies at the University of Leiden, but he declined. Apart from holding his academic post at the University of Oxford, he is currently senior research fellow at Doshisha University in Japan, Visiting Professor at the Faculty of Islamic Studies (Qatar), and Director of the Research Centre of Islamic Legislation and Ethics (CILE) (Doha, Qatar). He is also president of a European think-tank, the European Muslim Network (EMN) in Brussels.

- 5 A. Gresh and T. Ramadan, *L'Islam en Questions* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2002), 51. Ramadan's research on Nietzsche is indeed another PhD thesis, but it is not published. If the thesis is unpublished, according to Swiss regulations, Tariq Ramadan cannot be entitled to a PhD for the work in question.
- 6 According to Ramadan, Sayid Ramadan wrote his PhD thesis on Hasan al-Banna's idea of Islamic Law. He may also have been influenced by his father in choosing Hasan al-Banna as his PhD topic. See Ramadan, *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity*, x. This thesis, however, has been criticized as being a hagiography of his grandfather.

In relation to Islam and the West, Ramadan's most important works are *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity*, *To Be a European Muslim: A Study of Islamic Sources in the European Context*, and *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*. The first of these books focuses on how Islam as a religion can evolve a specific form of politics, economy and culture that is modernized but not Westernized. The underlying paradigm is more inclined to 'Islam and the West' than to the 'Islam of the West'. The second book puts forward the theoretical framework for the concept of the European Muslim, and is the most important book for this chapter. Ramadan examines how Islam and Europe can combine together as a unity without losing each other. The third book offers some practical proposals in various social domains for being a European Muslim.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike Seyyed Hossein Nasr's and Bassam Tibi's, most of Ramadan's articles are not recorded in the *Index Islamicus* or *ATLA Religion*, the most widely recognized academic databases of Islamic and religious studies in European languages. One reason for this may be that Ramadan's writings are not intended merely for the academy, but also for general readers through more accessible media like newspapers, magazines and websites (including YouTube and Wikipedia). This would explain why so many of his works are not recorded in academic databases while he enjoys great popularity among the general public and Muslim communities, especially in France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the UK and the USA.

The name of Tariq Ramadan is nowadays so popular that it constitutes a 'phenomenon'.<sup>8</sup> There are at least eight books about him; be they

7 A further three books in relation to Islam and the West have been published since the completion of this chapter: Tariq Ramadan, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); *The Quest for Meaning: Developing a Philosophy of Pluralism* (London: Allen Lane, 2010) and *What I Believe* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). Having reviewed these books, I do not find any fundamental change in Ramadan's conceptual framework or way of thinking in relation to Islam and the West, including in the most relevant work, *Radical Reform*. The subjects the books discuss are related more to application or applied ethics than to methodological concerns.

8 Hamel, *La vérité sur Tariq Ramadan*, 7.

positive or negative, this extent of popularity is still remarkable. He has received six prestigious prizes: (1) 100 Innovators of the Twenty-first Century (*Time Magazine*, 2000); (2) 100 Most Influential People of the Year (*Time Magazine*, 2004); (3) 100 Most Influential Intellectuals in the World (*Prospect Magazine*, 2005, 2008); (4) European of the Year (*European Voice/The Economist*, 2006); (5) Awards for Excellence (*The Muslim News*, 2007); and (6) FP Top 100 Global Thinkers (*Foreign Policy*, 2009). On Google, there are hundreds of references to him, including to his website, articles, speeches, debates and interviews.

Ramadan's success is due to two factors. The external environment, along with a chain of events that have happened in Europe – violence and terrorist attacks in France, Spain and the UK, and religious disputes over issues such as Muslim headscarves, Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, cartoons of the Prophet and Pope Benedict XVI's speech on Islam – has created opportunities for him to win popularity. The media ask for his opinions on these issues, and more academic conferences and courses are organized for the sake of understanding Islam at all levels, at which the organizers will invite him to speak. His success also stems from his identity. Being the grandson of Hasan al-Banna helps him to stand out among other Muslim leaders or preachers and makes it easier for him to catch the attention of the media, though for others this also makes him more suspect. Many people, including journalists, intellectuals and even governments, associate him with terrorist activities and the dissemination of radical Islam. The French government banned him from entering France in 1996.<sup>9</sup> His work visa – which allowed him to teach at the University of Notre Dame – was revoked in 2004 by the US Department of State, under the advice of the Department of Homeland Security, which claimed under a provision of the US Patriot Act that he 'endorsed or espoused terrorism.'<sup>10</sup> The irony is that he was an advisor to Tony Blair's anti-terrorism task force. Apart from

9 According to Ramadan he successfully challenged the ban, and in 1996 won a case proving that the claim to have 'links with an Algerian Islamist' is baseless.

10 Finally, in 2006, Ramadan learnt why the US government had revoked his work visa: between 1998 and 2002 he had donated \$940 to two humanitarian organizations supporting the Palestinian people, which support Hamas. The US government

association with terrorists, he is also accused of double-speak (promoting a radical Islam to Muslim audiences but a liberal one to Western media and academics), and of being an anti-Semite, a sexist, and a supporter of Islamic penal codes including the stoning of adulterers. Whether these charges are true or fabricated, they still make Ramadan popular or infamous in the media. Ramadan has rebutted these accusations in detail at least twice, and rebutted them in general terms in several articles and interviews.

So how should we understand this controversialist, Tariq Ramadan? As was mentioned in the introductory chapter, there are two main approaches to discussing him. The first concerns whether he is a radical Islamist or a moderate Muslim. This approach considers whether what he says is in line with the views of his grandfather or of other well-known fundamentalists, using excerpts from his works to prove or disprove the contention. In the case of those who consider Ramadan to be a radical Islamist, their agenda is to criticize his ideas about the Islamization of Europe. Therefore, their primary interest is to attack his thought, which is claimed to be either radical or contradictory.

Another approach to studying him is as a social phenomenon in relation to the religious authority of traditional Islamic preachers and Islam within the modern world (e.g. the secular tradition, *laïcité*, in France). In English, a comprehensive and fair study of his thought is still lacking. The aim here is not to examine his private life and his activities with various Islamic groups (the first approach) or his emerging personal influence in Muslim communities and the West (the second approach). What I am interested in is his thought, which is clearly set out in his books, articles and speeches. Therefore, I will put 'Tariq Ramadan' – his personality, the accusations against him, and what he actually does or represents in his personal life – into suspension and examine only what he says and proposes about Islam in the West.

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blacklisted these organizations in 2003, and Ramadan claims that he did not know that they were supporting Hamas at the time of the donation.

## Methodological Reconstruction of Ramadan's 'European Muslim'

The thought of Ramadan consists of two dimensions. One is methodological, and the other is his practical suggestions for being a European Muslim, and they correspond to his roles as a thinker and, at the same time, a public intellectual. The two dimensions are connected but not completely overlapping. In this section, the first part primarily focuses on the methodological dimension. First, I examine briefly the concept and history of Salafism since it is the source from which Ramadan draws his inspiration, leading him to develop his own version of Salafism, and then I reconstruct his concept of the European Muslim. then, I will focus on his practical suggestions for and his personal views about being a European Muslim.

### *Concept and History of Salafism*

In his article 'Sufis and Salafis: The Political Discourse of Transnational Islam', Peter Mandaville associates the concept of *salafi* with certain Muslim organizations operating in the UK such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, Al-Muhajiroun and the Supporters of Shariah (SOS). These, he writes, 'are only tangentially linked to networks such as al-Qaeda, [but] there is a large degree of intellectual ideological overlap between the former and latter'.<sup>11</sup> To a certain extent, the term *salafi* in this article is quite representative of the way most journalists and intellectuals in the West usually associate *salafi* with radical Islamists, terrorists or religious fanatics. However, the meaning of *salafi* is much broader than that. The term refers to a return to the traditions of the *al-salaf al-salih*, the righteous predecessors in Islamic history. This can mean the traditions of the first three generations of Muslims, the Muslims

11 P. Mandaville, 'Sufis and Salafis: The Political Discourse of Transnational Islam', in Robert W. Hefner, ed., *Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 303.

of the first and second Islamic centuries (seventh to ninth centuries), or the wider traditions of Sunni Islam up to the third and fourth Islamic centuries (tenth to eleventh centuries).<sup>12</sup> This ideology romanticizes the perfection of the predecessors' traditions and so criticizes traditions after them, which corrupt Islam and Muslim communities.

*Salafi* ideology was popularized by those who engaged in the movement originated by Islamic reformists such as Jamal al-din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida in Egypt and other Arab countries in the colonial period.<sup>13</sup> What they tried to do was to reform the Muslim states in order to make them strong so that they could compete with the West. They welcomed modern science, introduced reforms against damaging religious and social traditions, and emphasized the concept of *ijtihad*, which, in short, refers to developing new rules of law.<sup>14</sup> For the reformists, *ijtihad* was not only used in legal reform but also in Muslim intellectual pursuits. It was used to remove all forms of constraints of imitation (*taqlid*) that Muslims followed, which in the eyes of reformists would hinder the progress of the nation. Therefore, the *salafi* movement seems to be more like a national revival movement than the religious fanaticism that the West perceives.

However, the history of *salafis* is not so brief and the idea behind it is not so monolithic.<sup>15</sup> In *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967*

12 A. Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 149.

13 See 'Salafiyyah', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill; London: Luzac, 1960–2004), new edn, Vol. VIII, 900–9, and M. G. Fareed, 'The Salafiyya', in *Legal Reform in the Muslim World: The Anatomy of a Scholarly Dispute in the 19th and the Early 20th Centuries on the Usage of Ijtihād as a Legal Tool* (San Francisco, CA: Austin & Winfield, 1996), 79–104.

14 A more detailed definition is: 'In order to derive and systematize the legal implications of the Text [Qur'an and *Sunna*], we have to use human thought processes, ration, on it. This, to develop legal rules, is what is called *ijtihad*.' See K. S. Vikør, *Between God and the Sultan: A History of Islamic Law* (London: Hurst, 2005), 53.

15 Roy argues that the term '*salafi*' is misleading because there is no connection between the reform movement promoted by al-Afghani and the movements that I shall be discussing. (Roy emphasizes the disconnection between the reform movement and

*Arab Intellectual History*, Abu-Rabi classifies five main *salafi* trends in Islamic history.<sup>16</sup> The first trend, classical Salafism, goes back to the period between the third and eighth Islamic centuries, which is represented by figures like Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Ahmad ibn Taymiyya. Instead of being militant Islamists against the state, they promoted lenient ethics and pacifist politics.<sup>17</sup> The second trend is the Wahhabism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the political realm, Wahhabism was the ally of the al-Saud. They wanted to purify Muslim society from what they perceived to be polytheism, innovations, superstitions and negative social practices by returning to what they believed to be the authentic Islam of the *salaf*. To a certain extent, Wahhabism was more inclined to theological or religious movements than political ones.<sup>18</sup>

The third trend, colonial Salafism, is, as was mentioned above, the national revival movement originated by Jamal al-din al-Afghani and others. The fourth and fifth trends are post-colonial and post-1967 Salafism, but this division is not significant for our discussion. According to Abu-Rabi, after the defeat of the Arab countries in the Six Day War in 1967, the Arabs lost their confidence in nationalism, which was promoted by the third trend,

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the Wahhabi movement.) But instead of following Roy I suggest that the term, while it does not refer to a homogeneous entity, is not misleading because there is a fundamental meaning behind it, that is, the return to the traditions of the *al-salaf al-salih*: the dispute concerns only the interpretation of what is *al-salaf al-salih*, authenticity or truthfulness. See Roy, *Globalized Islam*, 233.

16 I. M. Abu-Rabi, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 65–72.

17 See also K. El Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 91–1, 96, 188–9 for the thinking of Ahmad ibn Hanbal, and 62–8, 271–9 for that of Ahmad ibn Taymiyya. Both insist on not rebelling against the existing political status quo in nearly all circumstances.

18 I do not mean that Wahhabism is not a political movement; what I emphasize here is its strong religious colour, which even scholars who study Wahhabism sociologically and politically do not deny. See K. S. Al-Dakhil, 'Social Origins of the Wahhabi Movement' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1998). For a more comprehensive study of Wahhabism see D. D. Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006).

and so the idea behind the second trend appeared again in the fifth trend. The religious themes of returning to authentic Islam, anti-secularism and *jihad* against the West became more dominant among the general public in the fifth trend.

Though the above trends need to be brought up to date, we can clearly see the diversity of Salafism. Some *salafis* are pacifists in the political realm or allies with the political status quo like Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia, but others are violent, as the West usually perceives. Some of them, like the reformist Muhammad Abduh, are open to the reinterpretation of religious texts and introduce necessary modernizations, but others refuse to make any changes that they perceive to be innovations.<sup>19</sup> Sometimes, it looks more like a national revival movement, but other times it is coloured by strong religious themes. The philosophical and political principles justifying the idea of *al-salaf al-salih* may be different. At the heart of the dispute is what may be included under this umbrella term after the Prophet's time: that is, what kind of Muslim thought is to be counted as the *al-salaf al-salih*. This is subject to different interpretations, and to power struggles.

Salafism, therefore, is a process of interpreting authentic Islam corresponding with historical and social change, and so it should not be seen as fixed to a particular thought or model. Since Salafism is so diverse, in the following it is more important to understand how Tariq Ramadan appropriates it, especially in a context which is no longer 'Islam and the West', but the 'Islam of the West'.

### *Ramadan's Salafi Reformism*

To some extent, we can study Ramadan as one of the present-day *salafi* representatives since he defines himself as a *salafi*, although this does not

19 For example, Oliveti argues that there is an ideology of Wahhabi-Salafism, which rejects nearly all commentaries and deductions or inferences from the Qur'an. All its adherents can do is to follow the Qur'an literally and, for Oliveti, this is the one of the sources of terrorism. See V. Oliveti, *Terror's Source: The Ideology of Wahhabi-Salafism and Its Consequences* (Birmingham: Amadeus Books, 2002).

mean that he shares all the ideas of Salafism. The following tendencies reflect how Ramadan understands and appropriates the ideas of Salafism on his own terms. First of all, he identifies six main Islamic tendencies in Europe and the world, as follows:<sup>20</sup>

- (1) Scholastic Traditionalism (ST)
- (2) Salafi Literalism or Salafi Traditionalism (SL)
- (3) Salafi Reformism (SR)
- (4) Political Literalist Salafism (PLS)
- (5) Liberal or Rationalist Reformism (LR)
- (6) Sufism<sup>21</sup>

In my interpretation, the purpose of my setting out this scheme is to indicate which one of these tendencies is most suitable for Muslims in Europe, though they are not completely mutually exclusive.<sup>22</sup> Such suitability refers not just to people living peacefully together, but also to compatibility with other world-views in connection with being a European Muslim. Ramadan accepts that there is a diversity of ways of defining Islam, but he also points out that it is useless to just identify this diversity without thinking about degrees of convergence. He therefore provides a principle to classify the above Islamic tendencies. He says, 'if it is unanimously admitted that the scriptural sources of Islam are indeed the Qur'an and the *Sunna* [the Texts] [...] it seems legitimate to investigate the various currents according to the manner in which they relate themselves in fact to the Texts.'<sup>23</sup> The factors that he considers are the status of the Texts, the margin of interpretation in a new context, and the application of reason by each tendency in relation to

20 Tariq Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim* (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1999), 237–47; *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 24–30.

21 I will not follow the order of his books, since my purpose is analytical rather than descriptive.

22 These six trends are not mutually exclusive, and Ramadan may choose to appropriate the intellectual resource of each trend.

23 Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim*, 238.

the Texts. I now examine how Ramadan interprets each tendency according to his principles.

The ST grouping is quite unusual, since it includes not only the traditional Islamic schools of law or theology such as Sunni Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi and Hanbali and Shii Zaydi and Jafari, but also modern Islamic theological and political organizations such as the Deobandis, Barelwis, Ahl al-Sunna, Taliban and Tablighi Jamaat. While these groups of people do not seem to have much in common, for Ramadan the commonality is that none of them allows a very wide margin of interpretation of the Texts, while the status of the Texts is for them very high and so the application of reason or *ijtihad* is limited. Since they are confined by their own interpretative tradition and social practices (e.g. dress codes), they are more reluctant to change in order to be involved in everyday European life, and so they live detached from the West as separate entities.<sup>24</sup> If European-born Muslims follow this tendency, they probably identify more with Muslim countries than with European ones, however surprising this may seem.

Similarly, proponents of SL and PLS are not well integrated with European life, since both groupings adopt a rather literal reading of the Texts, and their application of *ijtihad* is therefore limited. Instead of following their own traditional interpretations, they reject nearly all interpretative readings when they perceive them to deviate from authentic Islam. To a certain extent, these two tendencies accord with Wahhabism as mentioned above, but the latter, PLS, is more politically oriented: it hopes to establish

24 This classification of trends simplifies the complexity of Islamic thought and is self-serving. First, Ramadan has simplified the Sunni and Shi'ite schools of law: I do not agree that all of jurists or Muslim scholars are confined to their own tradition of interpretation or theology alone without referencing others. See W. B. Hallaq, *Authority, Continuity and Change in Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 79. Second, it is not correct to essentialize all Sunni and Shii schools of law as traditionalists or literalists who have more difficulty in integrating themselves into Europe. Finally, it is not necessary to distinguish Deobandis and Tablighi Jamaat since they are the same, and the meaning of Ahl al-Sunna here is not clear, in the sense that it is not a specific Muslim organization.

an Islamic state as its ultimate goal. Although Ramadan claims to be a *salafi* (Salafi Reformist), he keeps his distance from these two types of Salafism.

LR is highly influenced by Western modernism. Its proponents suggest modernizing the Islamic world through imitation of what has happened in Europe, such as the separation of religion and state. Ramadan cites the modernization project of the post-colonial Turkish government as an example of LR. In the European context, LR encourages Muslim communities to assimilate completely with European culture. LR also tries to marginalize the status of the Texts, religious beliefs and daily practices in politics and social life, and to privatize Islam as a merely 'spiritual' and inner domain, so that the application of reason rests on the individual rather than deriving from Islamic traditions. Another tendency is Sufism. Ramadan does not express any dislike of Sufism in general, but he emphasizes its spiritual and mystical readings of the Texts and implicitly criticizes the tendency of Sufism to develop an attitude of indifference to the social context in Europe.

Finally, Ramadan identifies what he calls Salafi Reformism as the best and most suitable Islamic tendency in Europe. The representatives of this tendency include al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, his grandfather, Hasan al-Banna, and Sayyid Qutb, among others. For Ramadan, these are *salafis* who focus mainly on the Qur'an and *Sunna* and so the commentaries and jurisprudence of the later schools are only for reference. They also emphasize *ijtihad* in order to develop new laws for new situations based on the aims and objectives or the spirit of the Islamic Law (*sharia*). Generally, the first three Muslim reformists are classified as Islamic modernists (especially Abduh and Rida), while the latter two (especially Qutb) are seen as fundamentalists since their philosophical foundations and political principles are quite different.<sup>25</sup> Recognizing their differences, Ramadan argues: 'but what unites them is, clearly, a very dynamic relationship with the scriptural sources and a consistent will to use reason in handling the

25 A. Moussalli, *Moderate and Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Quest for Modernity, Legitimacy, and the Islamic State* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1999), 19–45. See also C. Kurzman, ed., *Modernist Islam, 1840–1940: A Sourcebook* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); R. Jackson, *Fifty Key Figures in Islam* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

Texts so as to take account of the new challenges of their epoch and of the social, economic and political development of societies.<sup>26</sup>

We can disagree with Ramadan's classification where there is ambiguity (e.g. why does Sayyid Qutb not belong to PLS?) and with the simplification of various Islamic schools of thought in the tendencies; but this classification shows a very important concern of Ramadan's Salafi Reformism, that is, with creating space for rereading or interpreting of the Texts and Islamic Law in the European context. What Ramadan actually inherits from his Salafi predecessors of is not the solutions or ideas they proposed but the approach they left. We can say that this heritage in turn leads Ramadan to focus on constructing a clear approach, rather than just on proposing solutions.

Ramadan's idea of being a European Muslim is not an empirical theory, in the sense that we cannot test its validity as we can that of a social-scientific theory, but it is a normative theory or, more precisely, a theology. Instead of explaining the phenomenon of European Islam, it suggests a possible future normative relationship between Islamic and European values. Ramadan's theology of being a European Muslim has a clear framework which regulates the relationship between four concepts, namely, human reason, religious texts, context and critique. In the following, I will first reconstruct this framework piecemeal and then bring the pieces together to see how they are related to each other as a whole.

### *The Role of Reason in the Way to Faithfulness*

Without ignoring the spiritual dimension of reading the Qur'an, Ramadan says, 'it must be said over and over again that the Revelation of a Book, of a Text, would have no meaning if intelligence, human reason capable of grasping its meaning, were not taken for granted. There can be no revealed Text unless there is human intellect up to the task of reading and interpreting it.'<sup>27</sup>

26 Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim*, 241–2.

27 Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 20.

Ramadan therefore places human reason in a very central position, like a hub; its function is not only to discover our knowledge in this earthly world but also the eternal revealed Texts. However, unlike for Nasr, for Ramadan the notions of human reason and intellect are used interchangeably, and intellect is therefore not something mystical or intuitive but something common to all people, be they Muslims or not. But how can human reason do this? To answer this question, we have to understand what Ramadan means by revelation and *sharia*.

### *Ramadan's Idea of Revelation*

Like Nasr with his ideas of Ultimate Truth and the primordial religion, Ramadan also believes that there is the Transcendental (Ultimate Truth), and an original testimony or covenant (the primordial religion) connecting the Transcendental and human beings. However, 'humans are beings that have knowledge as well as ignorance, memory as well as forgetfulness', so they need to be reminded constantly and regularly of the existence of the Transcendental and the message of the testimony.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, there are two kinds of revelations. The first is the whole of creation: it comprehends the universe, everything in its most natural state and the laws of nature. As in the approach of natural theology, the universe is full of signs (*ayat*) to direct people to the Transcendental. The sign is always there, and so it is a perpetual reminder of the existence of the Transcendental. Humans can discover the Transcendental through the study of the universe. Therefore, unlike Nasr's view of modern empirical sciences, which he says are nearly useless when detached from the Ultimate Reality, Ramadan's view is that modern sciences are one of the ways to link humans to the Transcendental.

The second revelation is the Books. They are the reminders, sent by the Transcendental to remind people of the message of the original testimony. The Jewish and Christian Bibles and the Muslim Qur'an are the reminders of the message. There are three functions of revelation. The first is 'to

28 Ibid., 13.

recall and confirm what went before.<sup>29</sup> The second is ‘to put right what was forgotten, modified, and sometimes corrupted by human interventions in the previous Revelation.’<sup>30</sup> The third is ‘to reveal [...] the religious practices they [human beings] should follow [...] the specifics of moral teaching that were relevant to them, and, finally, the patterns of interpersonal and social relations that they should establish and respect.’<sup>31</sup> The final function constitutes the uniqueness of each religion. Without any concern for religious pluralism such as Nasr shows, Ramadan simply asserts that the Qur’an is the last revelation, and so it is the last one to recall the original message and put right what was corrupted in previous revelations.

For Ramadan, the realms of human reason and faith are not mutually contradictory. Instead,

the spark of faith, born in the original testimony, needs intellect to confirm that testimony and to be capable of being faithful to the original covenant [...] the two [realms] must be wedded, and each has a part to play: a living faith makes it possible for the intellect to accept signs beyond simple elements of nature, and active reason makes it possible for faith to understand and also to acquire more self-understanding, and in that way to draw closer to the divine.<sup>32</sup>

Now if we put the two revelations together, will the second overrule the first? What is the relationship between the revealed Books, the natural sciences and the human sciences (including the social sciences)? Methodologically speaking, Ramadan does not put them in a hierarchical structure as does Nasr, so there is no such issue of superiority among them. Ramadan wants to preserve their individual autonomy. He writes:

- i. The unity of the Source (God as revealed in the Texts), which is where ethics finds its coherent foundation, never implies a similarity of approaches or a uniformity of methodologies.

29 Ibid., 19.

30 Ibid., 20.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., 17.

2. Varieties of methodologies are constructed rationally, taking as the starting point the object of study, not the relation to the Transcendent or to a system of knowledge that He has preordained.<sup>33</sup>

The first point indicates that there is an ethical and coherent foundation linking the three, and the second indicates that they have their own autonomy unrelated to the Transcendental because of their different objects of study and independent rules and approaches. This means that Ramadan imposes, no matter whether modern scientists agree or not, an ethical or normative purpose on both the natural and the human sciences, and so their findings are supposed to point to the Transcendental in the way the revealed Book does.<sup>34</sup> If natural sciences are to discover the universal laws of the natural world, then in the same way human sciences exist to discover the universal laws of the human world, such as the notions of good, right, justice, welfare, love, beauty, etc. Since their ultimate goals are unified, even though their objects of study and methodologies are different, their findings are in no way to be interpreted as contradicting the message of the revealed Books. Furthermore, Ramadan asks people to consider the following questions when studying the natural and human worlds:

1. What are my intentions in engaging in the study of this science? There must be an active connection with *tawhid* (the Absolute Unity of God).
2. What ethical boundaries must I respect? The concrete application of the ethical teaching must be rationally connected with the scriptural sources.
3. What are the ultimate objectives of my research? Scientific activity must be integrated into 'the way of faithfulness', the path to the Source.<sup>35</sup>

The above questions and answers guarantee the unification of the realms of faith and human reason from the viewpoint of theists, but they can be interpreted as self-imposed academic constraint, self-censorship, and

33 Ibid., 58.

34 Modern scientists will not posit an ethical purpose behind the laws of nature; this is called the non-teleological approach of science. For Nasr, Ramadan and many theists, who believe in God's creation, the non-teleological approach is unacceptable.

35 Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 60.

placing human reason under faith from the viewpoint of atheists. Therefore, we can disagree with Ramadan's approach to handling faith and reason since the presupposition of theists and atheists is different, but what I want to point out here is that Ramadan does not criticize modern sciences as severely as Nasr. Instead, he adopts a more 'softly-softly' approach in recommending that modern sciences should go hand in hand with faith. His idea of two revelations in fact echoes the Two-Book theory, the harmony between the Book of Nature and the Book of Scripture proposed by Galilei. Ramadan's idea is also in line with the idea of Kantian (moderate trend) Enlightenment, which was analysed in Chapter 1. Like Kant, Ramadan separates the realms of faith and natural and human sciences as different objects of study and independent methodologies, but unlike Kant, Ramadan unites them by ethics, in particular Islamic ethics, rather than merely human subjectivity.<sup>36</sup> I turn next to his idea of ethics, which is inseparable from his interpretation of *sharia*.

### *Ramadan's Idea of Sharia*

Having discussed the meaning of *sharia* in Chapter 3, I shall now examine Ramadan's definition of *sharia* by way of comparison. In *To Be a European Muslim*, Ramadan describes *sharia* as a basic element, global path, methodology and philosophy of life.<sup>37</sup> He further elaborates that it is not simply a law but a way towards faithfulness, that '[t]here can be no *sharia* without a corpus of fundamental principles that set, beyond the contingencies of time, a point of reference for faithfulness to the divine will',<sup>38</sup> and that '*sharia* has been reduced [only] to a legalistic formulae in the minds of many, whereas its primary objective is to achieve justice [...] the people

36 Kant separates the realms of knowledge (pure reason), morality (practical reason) and taste (judgement) since they are different objects of study and so warrant distinct methodological concerns.

37 Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim*, 60.

38 Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 32.

who suffer most are the weak, the poor, the vulnerable and the women.<sup>39</sup> Understanding the concept of *sharia* in this way, Ramadan does not equate it with the law or penal code only, but views it also as a kind of theology and social ethics. Unlike many Islamic fundamentalists, Ramadan argues that for social actions to be *Islamic*, respect for ethics must come first, instead of an Islamic court having primacy, since this is only a sort of formalism.<sup>40</sup> Ramadan also follows the distinction between *sharia* (the divine will) and *fiqh* (human intellect toward the divine will) in terms of their meaning, nature and autonomy (cf. the discussion in Ch. 3).<sup>41</sup> Therefore, *fiqh* can be wrong or dated, and so needs to be reformed from time to time. Ramadan's approach is not dissimilar to that of other Islamic scholars whose ideas about *sharia* and *fiqh* were discussed in Chapter 3. In the following, I shall focus on one particular issue: the role of human reason in *sharia*, the way to faithfulness, in Ramadan's concept of the European Muslim.

*Sharia* covers two domains, (1) religious ritual (*ibadat*) and Islamic creeds (*aqida*) and (2) social and human affairs (*muamalat*), which is concerned more with social ethics and notions of good or bad and right or wrong in society. In the case of religious ritual and creeds, human reason plays a very limited role. For example, why do Muslims pray five times a day and not six or seven? The reason is given and decided by God alone and cannot be explained by humans. However, as regards social ethics, human reason determines what is ethical and what is not. Ramadan says, 'there is no moral quality good "in itself" attached to the "the soul in the body" (*al-nafs*), the heart, or the spirit and there is no moral quality bad "in itself" attached to the body, the senses, or the emotion. It is the human ability to control, to combine, and to guide that determines the ethical quality of individuals.'<sup>42</sup>

Islamic ethics, for Ramadan, does not propose ethical pre-determinism or dualism such as: spirituality is good, secularity bad (as Nasr does); soul

39 Emel Magazine, 'An Interview with Tariq Ramadan', in <[http://www.tariqramadan.com/article.php?id\\_article=341](http://www.tariqramadan.com/article.php?id_article=341)> accessed 8 Oct. 2007.

40 Ramadan, *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity*, 51.

41 Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim*, 60–1.

42 Ibid., 15.

is good, body bad; celibacy is good, sex bad; the poor are good, the rich bad. For Ramadan, the ethical quality of actions is determined only by the conscience of individuals. Human beings are therefore essentially responsible for their actions on the basis of their own reasoning and conscience, which are interactive with the Texts and with the context in which those human beings live. As regards notions of right and wrong, Ramadan prefers a diversity of opinions. In fact, there exist many religio-legal opinions (*fatwa*, or *fatawa* in the plural) issued by various Islamic scholars, some of which appear to be concurrently acceptable but some of which are mutually contradictory, so it is impossible for all of them to be true and correct. For Ramadan, there ought to be one correct answer or truth for each problem. However, even when not every opinion is correct, diversity is much better than uniformity or consensus, since the latter may force Muslims to follow blindly without reflection on the Texts and context. Diversity is also necessary as a test for Muslims to help them manage their differences.<sup>43</sup>

Ramadan therefore explains a number of Islamic principles in a way that accords with the idea of diversity. First, he emphasizes that everything that is not explicitly and absolutely forbidden in the Texts is permitted; this is what he calls ‘permissibility is the base.’<sup>44</sup> When the Texts are silent on particular issues, diversity of opinions is therefore permitted. Secondly, he emphasizes ‘moral imperative.’<sup>45</sup> Human beings are born innocent and linked to God. For Muslims, any reward or liability they get from God is dependent on how they manage and determine what is obligatory, preferable, permissible, reprehensible or absolutely forbidden in Islamic ethics, what is lawful and unlawful before God, and what they should do when

43 Ramadan, *Western Muslims and The Future of Islam*, 202–3.

44 Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim*, 62–5.

45 Ramadan refers to the concept of *al-abkam al-taklifyya* in Arabic, which he translates as ‘ruling outlining liability’. Mawil Izzi Dien translates the phrase *al-hukm al-taklifi* as ‘the dutiful injunction which focuses on the individual’. It stresses the individual will to act according to the proscription set by the Texts in the form of ‘Do’ or ‘Don’t do’. See M. Y. Izzi Dien, *Islamic Law: From Historical Foundations to Contemporary Practice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 161.

the Texts are silent on particular issues.<sup>46</sup> The human will to comply with or transgress ethical boundaries results in rewards or liabilities from an Islamic ethical viewpoint. However, the will to comply also goes hand in hand with a high level of human reasoning and contextual research to determine what is right or wrong or what action is required in which ethical category. In view of this, on the basis of a teaching of *hadith* Ramadan believes that if Muslims are sincere in their research or evidence, which in turn support their opinion or action, they should be rewarded, even though their opinions and actions may ultimately be wrong.<sup>47</sup> This explanation also encourages diversity.

Finally, since difference of opinion is preferable in order to legitimize diversity without falling into relativism, Ramadan clearly separates the 'way to the source (diversity)' from 'the Source itself (absolute Truth)', his distinction being similar to the Kantian distinction between *noumenon* (thing-in-itself) and phenomenon, and the distinction between *sharia* and *fiqh*. He says, '[t]he "way to the source" is *never* confused with the Source itself: the latter declares the absolute and the universal outside the confines of time, but everything along the way must consider itself in time, in change, in imperfection, immersed in the reality of humankind.<sup>48</sup> Unlike the domain of religious ritual, which is given and absolute in the Texts and unified and undisputed in the Muslim community, an opinion in relation to the human and social domain is constructed by human reason in history, and so it may be wrong no matter how authoritative it seems to be. Understanding the matter in this way, Ramadan tries to uphold both the concept of truth on the one hand and that of diversity on the other.

In sum, revelation and *sharia* are the fundamental concepts linking humans to the way to faithfulness and to the Transcendent, but in the human and social domain; neither of them can 'stand alone' without human reasoning. They become meaningful and functional only when they are interpreted, reread and applied by the human intellect in their context.

46 Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim*, 65–75.

47 Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 50–1.

48 *Ibid.*, 37. Italics mine.

Having discussed the significance of human reason, in the following I turn to examine a domain in which human reason plays only a very limited role – the domain of religious affairs.

### *Scope for Interpretation of Religious Texts*

As was mentioned above, Ramadan asserts that there would be no revealed Texts without the human intellect reading and interpreting them. The Texts and human reason are therefore connected, influenced by and dependent on each other in a two-way, back-and-forth process. However, this is not the case in the domain of religious rituals (*ibadat*) and creeds (*aqida*). Ramadan distinguishes the nature of religious affairs from that of human and social affairs. He states:

- (a) There is a difference in nature between the Islamic principles related to religious ritual and those that concern the affairs of the world and society: the first are very detailed and precise, while the second are, with very rare exceptions, general and give guidance in a certain direction, rather than fixing a restricting framework; (b) The methodologies in these two areas are the complete opposites of each other: only the text [the Qur'an] is to be relied on for deciding what is allowed in terms of ritual practice, while the scope for reason and creativity is very wide when it comes to social affairs, which are limited only by the prohibitions found in the scriptural sources, and these are in fact not numerous.<sup>49</sup>

Therefore, as regards religious affairs, the Texts and their interpretative traditions have already imposed precise and unequivocal doctrines or injunctions on Muslim communities. There is no dispute among Muslims – no matter where they are from or when they lived – over their legitimacy as the core values of Islam and Muslim identity (or, if there is a dispute, Ramadan believes it is peripheral and trivial). I think that to a degree, Ramadan does not want to spend time and effort elaborating the degree of rationality in this domain and so he argues that these doctrines and injunctions are all

49 Ibid., 144–5.

revealed and decided by God alone.<sup>50</sup> Humans only need to know and accept them as such.

This domain seems to be 'frozen' in a negative sense, but in a positive sense it constitutes the uniqueness or particularity of being a Muslim. Human reason and context are therefore without value since they cannot participate in its formulation. However, in the domain outside religious affairs (i.e. human and social affairs), except for a few Qur'anic prohibitions such as charging interest on loans or usury, no pre-determined model is imposed on Muslim communities.<sup>51</sup> They are free to reflect and develop their appropriate model along with their understanding of Islamic values derived from their interpretation of the Texts and their assessment of the context in which they live. These are interrelated and interactive in nature. In view of this, we can represent the relationship between the Texts and human reason as follows:

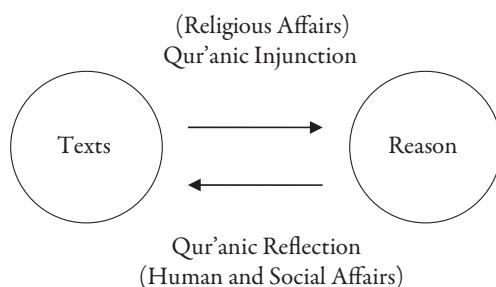


Figure 1.

- 50 Unlike for Ramadan, in Islamic theology there are rational theologies which try to rationalize Islamic religious affairs and so modify them accordingly in various degrees, such as the Mu'tazili and Ash'ari schools of theology. For Ramadan, the concept of Islamic creeds (*aqida*) includes only matters relating to faith, which is beyond sensory perception, and all matters relating to the six pillars of al-*iman* (God, His names, His attributes, the angels, the prophets, the day of Judgement and predestination). His concept of the European Muslim does not give any attention to this domain.
- 51 Ramadan is more concerned with the prohibition of usury at the global level than at the national level. He has an open mind in discussing the problem of interest in modern world.

We can see clearly that Ramadan deliberately limits the application of religious texts in human and social affairs. The religious texts provide not a model in every detail but a kind of general vision and set of fundamental principles, such as 'be just' and 'respect and care for others', which in general can be shared with all people, whether they are Muslims or not, and therefore loosen religious ties and pave the way for communication with non-Muslims in the West. However, this distinction between religious and social affairs does not mean to ignore religious texts. We must remember that in the mind of a European Muslim, religious texts are always one of the sources of Muslim reasoning, a source of critical thinking, inspiration and reflection in the modern Western context. They have a kind of ontological primacy. Another context Ramadan considers equally important is the secularized context of the West and the situation of the European Muslim community.

### *The European Context*

In this section, I articulate the viewpoint of Ramadan on Europe, which has two aspects. The first is his understanding of what European Muslims experience, and the second is his social analysis of present-day Europe in relation to the Muslim community. The understanding of experience is no doubt also a kind of social analysis, but the object of study is different. When Ramadan talks about 'experience', he is concerned only with the experience of European Muslims. But in the case of social analysis, his focus is the general European situation shared by both Muslims and non-Muslims. For Ramadan, the context is as important as the Texts: 'to achieve [justice], it is best to analyse situations one by one and not to apply absolute rules; for the *context* can make the most legitimate or the most logical law unjust or feeble so that it betrays in fact what it meant in spirit to defend.'<sup>52</sup> We can outline the relationship between reason and context in the following way:

52 Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 152. Italics mine.

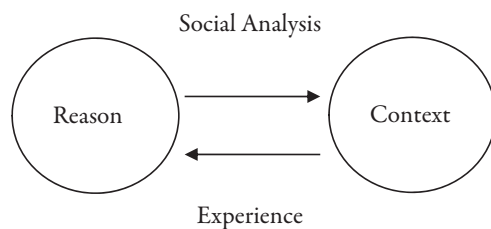


Figure 2.

The above relationship is constructed on the basis of an assumption that the social analysis of the European context is a response to European Muslim experience: I do not believe that Ramadan would have any interest in studying Europe if there were not a significant Muslim population there. Therefore, I shall consider first the Muslim experiences exposed by Ramadan and then evaluate his social analysis of Europe in reaction to these experiences.

### *The Experience of Separation in Muslim Community and Society*

Ramadan observes that there are two levels of separation among European Muslims in relation to their own community and to society as a whole. Muslims in the West originate from various regions of the world, such as South Asia and the Middle East, and they are so diverse and diversified that their sense of belonging and identity are often less convergent on the religion of Islam than they are on ethnic status and social class. Therefore, following decades of Muslim immigration to Europe, Ramadan still observes that 'there are mosques for Moroccans, and others for Algerians, for Pakistanis, for West Africans, for Afro-Americans, for Arabs from the Middle East, and so on';<sup>53</sup> local European converts establish their own mosques, as well. If Muslim communities are separated in terms of ethnic groupings, then it is natural for them to live together and stay within their own cultural

ways of life, not only inside but also outside the mosques, and this means that communication and interaction with other members of society may diminish and deteriorate.

Apart from ethnic division, there is also a class separation between Muslim communities. More wealthy and powerful Muslims have less concern with their poor and powerless fellow Muslims. The middle- and professional-class Muslims in business, academia and other such organizations portray themselves as first-class Muslims, while the poor and the powerless are second-class. For Ramadan, such types of separation are experienced in today's Muslim communities, whether in Europe or the USA, but without being properly managed. There is another level of separation, which results in the problem of minority consciousness or ghettoization in society. For Ramadan, the second level of separation is a mentality of isolation between Muslims and other members in society. Muslims continue to imagine themselves as minorities or outsiders in the West, either through the religious discourse of a three-territory division between Muslim and non-Muslim regime – the territories of Islam (*dar al-Islam*), of war (*dar al-harb*) and of treaty (*dar al-ahd*) – or through geographical division of home-and-host location (see Ch. 5).

Ramadan worries that these experiences and mentalities will finally lead to the thinking of the ghetto or to sectarianism, which always focuses on the interests of 'my religion', 'my culture' and 'my ethnic group' (cf. the worry Tibi has about identity politics and ethnicity) without considering the dimension of society as a whole, 'the good and justice for all'. For this reason, like other liberal political theorists, Ramadan interprets the idea of communitarianism as a recent political ideology in a negative way.<sup>54</sup> In his concept of the European Muslim, Ramadan has to modify the traditional teaching about the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslim regimes, and in the following I will discuss his social analysis of Europe, in

54 Ibid., 107–9, 168. The main critique of multiculturalism and communitarianism (these two concepts are closely related) lies in the ghettoization of ethnic or cultural groups in relation to the society as a whole. See 'Multiculturalism', in Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 4th edn, 310–32.

which he strives to abandon the mentality of isolation and the home–host dichotomy.

*Rights of Citizenship and Duties regarding Dialogue and Engagement*

The European context is a secularized context, so how can Muslims as religious people live genuinely in Europe? As was mentioned in Chapter 2, for Nasr secularism itself is a problem. But unlike Nasr, Ramadan understands the notion of secularism more at a political level than at an ontological or religious level, and so what he emphasizes as the features of secularity are the rights of Muslim citizens compared with those of their fellow non-Muslim citizens in terms of freedom, autonomy, equality, welfare, and employment opportunities in the society. To a certain extent, when Ramadan argues that there is no problem regarding Islam and secularized society, or what he calls ‘secularity in Islamic tradition’, he is in fact referring to civil society, not to an irreligious society.<sup>55</sup>

In this secularized or civil society, instead of Islam being silenced, Ramadan observes that there is actually a revival of religious spirituality. Islamic practices become more ‘visible’ and more Muslims become eager to study Islam.<sup>56</sup> In this context, instead of arguing against secularity in Europe as his social analysis, Ramadan identifies a very basic political fact of today. That is, many European Muslims are citizens of, not immigrants to, Europe. The starting point of Ramadan’s concept of the European Muslim is the assertion of Muslim citizenship in Europe. For Ramadan, a Muslim who is a citizen of Europe should see Europe as their home, not regard themselves as a guest or a stranger, and should remember that there is no such thing as second-class citizenship. The rights of all citizens, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, are the same. The minority consciousness of Muslims and

55 For more detail about Ramadan’s idea of secularity see Ramadan, *Les Musulmans dans la laïcité: Responsabilités et droits des Musulmans dans les sociétés occidentales* (Paris: Tawhid, 1994), 59–74.

56 Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 104.

their alienation in the European countries in which they live do not mean that they deserve to be deprived of their civil rights.

In *Muslims in France: The Way towards Coexistence*, Ramadan first identifies five fundamental civil rights in the French context; he then applies them in the European context in *To Be a European Muslim*. These rights are:

- (1) The right to practise Islam (all religions)
- (2) The right to knowledge (education)
- (3) The right to found an organization
- (4) The right to autonomous representation (Muslim representative council) and
- (5) The right to appeal to the law (to correct injustice and for protection)<sup>57</sup>

The above five basic rights to a certain extent guarantee the existence and protection of Muslim communities and the practice of Islam. Islam is not only a personal faith but also a representative council in the public domain, which has freedom to provide opinions and critiques on social issues under the protection and regulation of law. For Ramadan, Muslims should observe the local laws in the European states where they live, because there is no law in Europe which acts against the core values of Islam *per se*.<sup>58</sup>

Moreover, when Muslims emigrated to Europe, whether they were students, workers or refugees, they had implicitly or explicitly agreed to comply with the laws and constitutions in terms of the visa application or work contract they signed, and if they did not accept these laws they should not have entered the country.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, it is unconstitutional to bar Islamic discourses or practices in the public domain, even though the discourse may be radicalized by Islamists, such as in the case of *jihad*. This distinguishes the position of Ramadan from that of some moderate Muslim intellectuals or Islamic scholars, such as Tibi (see Ch. 3), who

57 Ramadan, *Muslims in France: The Way towards Coexistence* (Markfield, Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1999), 19–21; *To Be a European Muslim*, 135–7. See also *Les Musulmans dans la laïcité*, 148–64.

58 Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim*, 121. It should be remembered that the core values of Islam are the religious rituals and creeds discussed above.

59 *Ibid.*, 164.

demand that rational discourses be circulated in the public or political domain, instead of Islamic discourses.

In *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, Ramadan identifies another seven civil rights of Muslims. The characteristic of these rights is different from that of the fundamental rights mentioned above. They are not so fundamental in relation to the survival of Muslim community in Europe, but are fundamental in relation to a good and just society and are therefore more political in nature. They are:

- (1) The right to life and the minimum necessary to sustain it (decent life);
- (2) The right to family (healthy family life);
- (3) The right to housing (for family life);
- (4) The right to education (elimination of illiteracy);
- (5) The right to work;
- (6) The right to justice and;
- (7) The right to solidarity (harmony between the Muslim community and society)<sup>60</sup>

For Ramadan, Islam embraces and endorses all these social rights, and therefore Muslims have a duty to pursue these kinds of common good with other, non-Muslim members of society, whether by means of debate, dialogue, provision of social services or social engineering, which promote and consolidate the common values of society.<sup>61</sup> In fact, the essence of the concept of the European Muslim is to encourage this kind of engagement with non-Muslims by eliminating religious and social obstacles (the mentality of isolation) and by recognizing the commonality between Muslims and non-Muslims based on the foundation of citizenship and common good.

With this kind of understanding, dialogue is inevitable. There are two levels of dialogue for European Muslims as regards the purpose of

60 Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 149–52; See also *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity*, 39–43.

61 Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 157. Ramadan believes that what he is doing is the work of an Islamic jurist, who connects the texts to the context, and so he embraces the above values mainly on the basis of the general objective or spirit of Islamic law, rather than because they are supported by any particular school of law in Islam.

community cohesion. The first is inter-communal dialogue, dialogue between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens, which is, conceptually, the idea of being a European Muslim that we are now analysing. The other is intra-communal dialogue, which attempts to integrate the Muslim community locally or regionally. We can see that Ramadan eagerly promotes this intra-communal dialogue for three main purposes. The first is to reduce the separation between various Muslim ethnic groups and social classes mentioned above.<sup>62</sup> The second is to provide a platform of dialogue to bring reform in sensitive and controversial areas such as the Islamic penal code. For Ramadan, it is not very useful merely to stay at the level of condemnation of radical interpretations of Islam. What Ramadan tries to do is to reread the Texts and reform Islamic practice when it is no longer acceptable in the present-day context. We can see intra-communal debate and dialogue as a starting point for reform, clearly shown in the case of the 'moratorium on corporal punishment, stoning and the death penalty in the Islamic world' suggested by Ramadan. The purpose of this proposal is to stop the practices of Islamic penal codes by opening up a debate in the Muslim world on this particular issue in order to reform the whole Islamic legal system of penalties.<sup>63</sup>

The final purpose of intra-communal dialogue is to eliminate the home–host dichotomy. European Muslim communities imagine that they are still in exile after living in Europe for decades, and so their real home is not Europe but the Middle East or Muslim countries, and Europe is only their host country for a period of time. Even though European Muslims have settled and most have no intention of returning 'home' (especially those indigenous Muslims who in fact have no real 'home' anywhere outside Europe), this mentality continues to encourage them to rely on those Muslim countries, both financially and in religious terms, by receiving teaching and instruction from imams in Muslim-majority countries.

62 Ibid., 106.

63 Tariq Ramadan, 'A Call for a Moratorium on Corporal Punishment – the Debate in Review', in Kari Vogt, Lena Larsen and Christian Moe, eds, *New Directions in Islamic Thought: Exploring Reform and Muslim Tradition* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 163–74.

Theoretically speaking, with the exception of submission to God, European Muslims should be independent of all kinds of domination and manipulation. They may collaborate with, but should not be dependent upon, any Muslim countries or European governments. European Muslims should receive teaching from a European imam who knows the native language and culture in depth so that he or she can explain Islamic teachings in context, not just in principle. European Muslims should also try to sustain themselves financially and locally so as to avoid being politically controlled by other Muslim countries or governments of the West.<sup>64</sup> This can only be possible if there is an intra-communal platform of dialogue starting within local European Muslim communities, with Muslims helping each other to pursue independence not just at the elite but also at the grass-roots level. We can now put the Texts, reason and context together as follows:

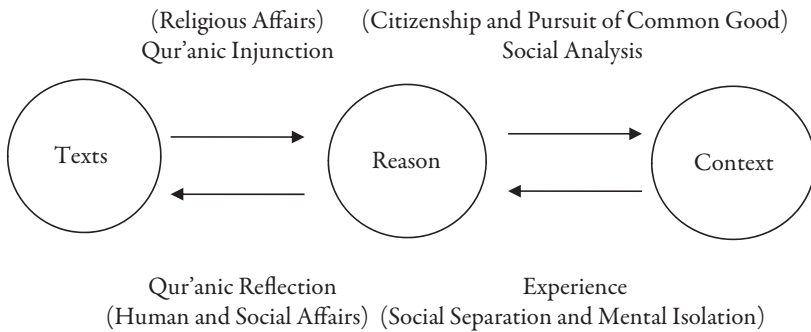


Figure 3.

In this relationship, religious texts offer fundamental principles for Muslims to apply reason to, and Muslims are obliged to reflect upon the Texts on the basis of their own experiences and of social analysis of the context. In Ramadan's concept of the European Muslim, ancient religious texts and modern context are therefore united by Muslim reasoning. However,

64 Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim*, 221–2.

metaphorically speaking, this is only 'one leg' of being a European Muslim. In the following, I will discuss the other 'leg'.

*Praxis in relation to Reason and Context*

The other 'leg' is praxis. Like Marx, Ramadan believes that philosophical or theological reflection upon the Texts based on an analysis of context is nothing if it is not put into practice, down to the grass-roots level, to reform the world. The notion of critique is therefore essential in the idea of being a European Muslim. For Ramadan, the notion of the legal rulings or opinions of Islam can be understood in terms of ethical or social critiques. He makes use of the idea of *ijtihad* to formulate his critique.

In the following, I will first analyse Ramadan's idea of *maslaha* (consideration of public interest or common good) as the fundamental objective of *fiqh* in the European context. Second, I will discuss Ramadan's use of *ijtihad* in order to achieve *maslaha*. Apart from the professional literature written particularly about *maslaha*, scholars seldom study *maslaha* and *ijtihad* alone, and they ignore *ijma* and *qiyas* in the field of *fiqh*, which are related concepts.<sup>65</sup> But in formulating *fiqh* for European Muslims, Ramadan does exactly this. We can say that Ramadan intentionally plays down the significance of *ijma* and *qiyas* as sources just after the Qur'an and Sunna in the traditional arrangement of *fiqh*. The reason for this is that the previous consensus occurring in Islamic history is not concerned with the European context, and also was not made by European Muslims, so it is justifiable to reconsider *ijma* thoroughly rather than accept it without reflection. As regards *qiyas*, Ramadan argues that the world is becoming more complicated and diverse, and so it is difficult and inappropriate to deduce a legal ruling or opinion on the basis of a single cause relevant in

65 According to many textbooks, there are four sources of Islamic Law. *Ijma* and *qiyas* are the third and fourth, after the Qur'an and *Sunna*. They are shown to be ostensibly independent from *ijtihad*. However, there is another classification which places *ijma* and *qiyas* in the category of *ijtihad*, since both are products of human reasoning; this is the classification Ramadan adopts. See Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim*, 84.

one country or region and apply it universally. Apart from the Qur'an and *Sunna*, Ramadan has always had reservations about the authority of other 'sources.' To a certain extent, these are simply methodologies, and their rulings are all subject to disagreement and can be changed when sufficient reason and evidence are provided.

Although the concept of *maslaha* can be traced back to the Maliki School of Islamic law, which is the viewpoint of Ramadan, not all schools agree on its applicability.<sup>66</sup> For many Islamic scholars, *maslaha* can be dangerous since it may be manipulated by people (especially politicians or rulers) who wish to achieve their personal goals in the name of public interest.<sup>67</sup> Worse, it may lead to a ruling generated in a way that is in conflict with or contradiction to the Texts. In order to implement *maslaha* properly, Ramadan suggests that, first, the analysis and identification of public interest must be taken seriously, so the purpose of the ruling or injunction is actually to remove the harm or to do good for the general public.

Second, the public interest must be beneficial for the society as a whole, not just for a class or group of people or for individuals. Finally, the public interest must correspond with the text of the Qur'an and the *Sunna*.<sup>68</sup> In these conditions, we can again see clearly Ramadan's consideration of three main elements in his concept of the European Muslim: human reasoning (serious analysis and identification), context (benefit to the society as a whole) and the Texts (harmony with the Qur'an and *Sunna*). But how can Muslims achieve the common good? Ramadan employs and enriches the idea of *ijtihad* in order to realize the common good, not only

66 W. Azhar Wan Ahmad, *Public Interests (Al-Masalih Al-Mursalah) in Islamic Jurisprudence: An Analysis of the Concepts in the Shafii School* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, International Islamic University, Malaysia, 2003), Ch. 1; Tariq Ramadan, 'Ijtihad and Maslaha: The Foundations of Governance', in M. A. Muqtedar Khan, ed., *Islamic Democratic Discourse: Theory, Debates, and Philosophical Perspectives* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 3–20.

67 See M. H. Kamali, *Equity and Fairness in Islam* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2005), Ch. 6; Azhar Wan Ahmad, *Public Interests (Al-Masalih Al-Mursalah) in Islamic Jurisprudence*, Ch. 2.

68 Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 41.

for the Muslim community but for society as a whole. In *To Be a European Muslim*, he discusses the concept of and the conditions for performing *ijtihad*. As was mentioned above, *ijtihad* refers to developing new rules of law. Ramadan follows the definition of Mohammad Hashim Kamali, a Malaysian law professor:

*Ijtihad* is defined as the total expenditure of effort made by a jurist in order to infer, with a degree of probability, the rules of *sharia* from their detailed evidence in the sources. Some *ulama* have defined *ijtihad* as the application by a jurist of all his faculties either in inferring the rules of *sharia* from their sources or in implementing such rules and applying them to particular issues. *Ijtihad* essentially consists of an inference (*istinbat*) that amounts to a probability (*zann*), thereby excluding the extraction of a ruling from a clear text.<sup>69</sup>

To be consistent with his distinction between religious affairs and human and social affairs, Ramadan also follows Kamali in arguing that *ijtihad* is not applicable to the issues regarding which there is clear textual evidence, whether that says ‘Do’ or ‘Don’t do’. However, Ramadan also says that ‘the great majority of the Qur’anic verses and the Prophet’s traditions are not of this very strict nature.’<sup>70</sup> For Ramadan, most of the legal rulings are subject to analysis, commentary and interpretation, and therefore there is always great scope for performing *ijtihad* in the human and social domain.<sup>71</sup> *Ijtihad* therefore functions like a council or a platform for deducing a legal ruling, opinion or social critique. But this platform needs participants. On the basis of his study of classical Islamic sources, Ramadan indicates seven conditions for people who are qualified to perform *ijtihad* (*mujtahid*):

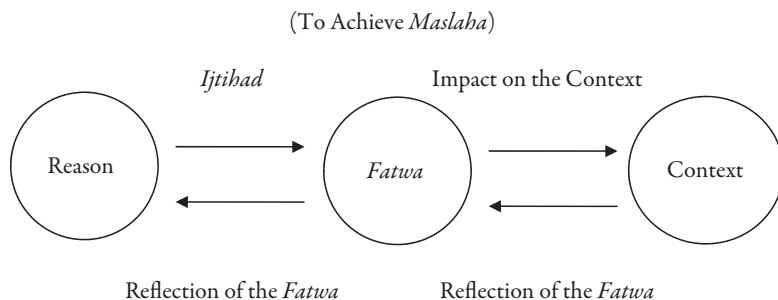
69 Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim*, 82–3; M. H. Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1991), 2nd edn, 367.

70 *Ibid.*, 83.

71 In no way does Ramadan believe that the gate of *ijtihad* is still closed and that Muslims are bound to follow the previous legal rulings, or that there is no need to make *ijtihad*. For references in support of the gate of *ijtihad* never closing in Islamic history, see Wael B. Hallaq, ‘Was the Gate of *Ijtihad* Closed?’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16 (1984), 3–41.

- (1) A high level of knowledge of Arabic in order to correctly understand the Qur'an and the *Sunna*;
- (2) A high level of knowledge of Qur'anic and *Hadith* sciences;
- (3) A deep comprehension of the objectives or spirit of Islamic Law including the classification and priorities of significance;
- (4) Knowledge of the detailed religious-legal regulations (*fiuru*) on which there is consensus of opinion;
- (5) Knowledge of the methodology and principles of analogical deduction;
- (6) Knowledge of contexts in terms of its culture, economy, history, people and politics;
- (7) Recognition of competency, honesty, reliability and uprightness.<sup>72</sup>

In line with his idea of consensus, which can be abrogated if sufficient reason and evidence are provided, Ramadan argues that the product of *ijtihad* (*fatwa*) is also a historical product made by the human intellect, and so may not always be correct at any particular time or in any particular place or community.<sup>73</sup> It is subject to revision, modification and even abrogation. A reflection on the *fatwa* is always necessary in view of changes in society and their impact on the context. In view of this, we can now outline the relationship between reason and *fatwa* and between context and *fatwa* as follows:



72 Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim*, 87–8.

73 Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim*, 84–5. Also see Ahmad Hasan, 'The Value of *Ijma* and the Problem of Its Abrogation', in *The Doctrine of Ijma in Islam* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1978), Ch. 11.

If we read the above conditions for being a qualified *mujtahid*, it is impossible for non-Muslim communities to participate in the formulation of legal rulings and opinions, since it is ridiculous to expect them to fulfil the above conditions. When Ramadan wrote *To Be a European Muslim*, following the discussion of Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a famous Egyptian Muslim scholar, on *ijtihad*, he believed that it was necessary to perform collective *ijtihad*, which includes both specialists in the Texts, that is religious scholars (*ulama*), and specialists in contexts, that is, those who have in-depth knowledge of various aspects of the society in which *ijtihad* is applied. At the time, Ramadan mentioned that it was no longer possible for the *ulama* alone to determine *ijtihad*, as the world has become ever more complicated and diverse. The knowledge they need in relation to the context is enormous, so they need the help and participation of context specialists in the formulation of *ijtihad*.<sup>74</sup> However, Ramadan does not mention who the context specialists are. Are they Muslims or non-Muslims? Do they have the same status and authority as the *ulama*? In *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, Ramadan states more clearly that *ijtihad*

cannot be the work only of the *ulama* and of specialists in law and jurisprudence [...] it is time to promote councils that bring together on an equal footing *ulama* and experts from various fields (the human sciences as well as the natural sciences) to make it possible to formulate legal positions in step with our time [...] bringing together *ulama*, intellectuals, associational bodies, and ordinary citizens [...].<sup>75</sup>

Ramadan in fact moves a long way towards the pursuit of the common good of society and the union of European Muslim and non-Muslim citizens through widening the scope of traditional *ijtihad* to incorporate the participation of non-Muslim citizens, and raising their status and the authority of their opinions. In my interview, Ramadan reconfirms this idea in a way that it is appropriate to inviting specialists in context, including non-Muslims, to join Islamic councils of *fiqh* in various European states in order to perform collective *ijtihad*.<sup>76</sup> Understood in this way, since the

74 Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim*, 97–8.

75 Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 163.

76 It might be argued that so-called collective *ijtihad* between Muslims and non-Muslims is not as gripping as it was around eighty years ago. Muhammad Iqbal promoted a

legal ruling or opinion is no longer given by religious scholars of Islam alone but by including non-Muslim participants, the term 'critique' is more appropriate than the term *fatwa* as representing the final product of collective *ijtihad*, so that we can modify Figure 4 as follows:

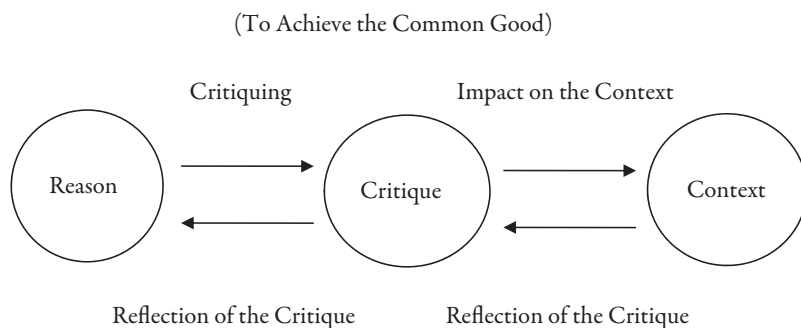


Figure 5.

The other leg of the European Muslim is now shaped. In the following, it is time for us to put these two legs together in order to examine further Ramadan's framework for being a European Muslim as a unified model.

### *Synthesis of Text, Reason and Context*

The synthesis of Texts, reason and context, which generates critiques and reflections on critiques, does not function in a part-by-part or standalone manner, as in our discussion above. As a unit, they work together and simultaneously, as shown in Figure 6. Therefore, the complete synthesis and the

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similar idea for the assembly of the Turkish government in his book *Reconstruction of Religion Thought in Islam*, but we must remember that the background here is Muslim-minority countries (Europe), not Muslim-majority Turkey. Ramadan seeks to overcome the 'minority' ideology and instead stresses preservation of Muslim identity; like others, he promotes a complete integration, even in the Islamic council of Fiqh. It would not be easy to promote such an idea in practice.

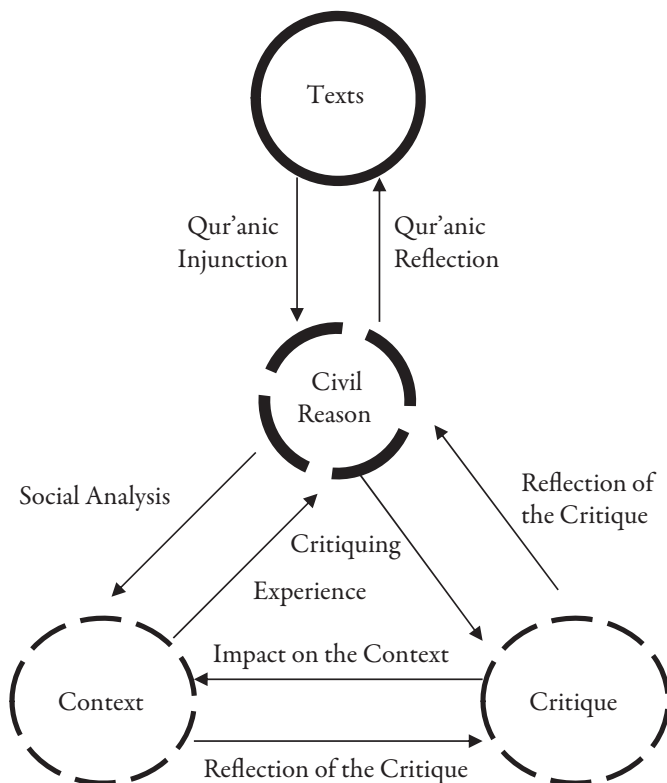


Figure 6.

respective parts of it require different analyses, since all the components of this synthesis are reciprocally affected by each other, with human reasoning as a central hub. However, there are two status levels, ontological and methodological. Religious texts occupy a higher ontological status than the other components, since for Muslims religious texts are an eternal revelation from God, while contexts and critique are always changeable (a broken line). In Nasr's terms, there is a qualitative difference here. Civil reason, however, represents a connection between these two, and so it shares both elements, the changeable and the unchangeable, analogous with Kant's

transcendental reasoning aimed at synthesizing both the rational constructivism of Descartes and the empiricism of Bacon. But at the methodological level, the two have the same status since there is no way of separating them. In the following, I shall describe the concept of each part in the light of the entire unit, rather than as individual parts.

As Figure 3 shows, human reason refers to Muslim reason; however, as a unit, it no longer refers to Muslim reason alone but to a collaborative effort of reasoning made by Muslim and non-Muslim citizens together: in view of this, we can call it 'civil reason'. In this model, the foundation of civil reason is citizenship in form and trust in substance, which leads to shape 'us' as an identity so 'we' can respect the diversity within the society and pursue 'our' common good. The difference between Muslims and non-Muslims is dissolved as the 'we' of the society. Civil reason promotes commonality while Islamic creeds and religious rituals constitute the uniqueness and particularity of being a Muslim or part of the Muslim community and are not mutually exclusive. The coexistence of civil reason and religious affairs is founded on freedom of and respect for religion, which is guaranteed in the European constitution. In this model, the emphasis is not on a strict separation between public and private life where Islam is confined within the domain of private life. Instead, it suggests a distinction in nature between religious affairs and human and social affairs. Therefore, Islamic discourses, as religious language, can still participate in and influence the development and progress of European public life by their general vision, fundamental principles and the inspiration they give to Muslim communities. To a certain extent, the process works in a similar way to the Christian Bible and the Classics in Western literature or philosophy, which still influence the majority of the West in the present-day public sphere.

The notion of context is now also enlarged to incorporate non-Muslim experiences, and the corresponding social analysis is therefore concerned not only with the Muslim community but also with society as a whole. In view of this, the content of experience is not limited to social separation or the mentality of isolation, but also includes the experience of being unemployed, divorced, sick and so on. The research undertaken by society is also not limited to the immigrant/citizen debate or to a European/Muslim insider/outsider dichotomy, but includes an analysis of unemployment,

family, health services and so on. The ultimate purpose of social analysis is to facilitate Muslims to engage actively in and contribute to the society as citizens. Finally, the process of *ijtihad* is not merely Islamic; it is the civil process of making critiques (critiquing) in order to reform the society. Conceptually, it functions as a platform for discussion, dialogue and debates in the public sphere and people from relevant sectors (including politicians or policymakers) are invited to participate and express their opinions in relation to human and social affairs. Therefore, this leg of the approach no longer invokes a monologue or reasoning based on one class, one group or one individual's interest and knowledge, but a collaborative or inter-subjective reasoning based on both religious and secular discourses.

As was mentioned above, Ramadan does undermine the significance of consensus, preferring the inclusion of all relevant participants and diversity of opinion, so, in my opinion, the functional priority of this platform is, first, to point out clearly the problems involved in and articulate the necessity for changing existing practices, whether Islamic or not; then to debate and argue in order to generate ideas and offer evidence; and finally, to let the conclusion or consensus emerge naturally on the basis of reason and evidence, but not at the expense of reasonable disagreement. We must remember that the platform or organization of this inter-communal dialogue (for example, *fiqh* councils or Muslim associations) is not in a parliament-like situation, where everything must receive a final decision by the agreement of the majority. In fact, it is situated in the public and social sphere, where both religious and secular discourses are equal in status and where they are free to articulate, explain and argue for their positions and thus achieve mutual understanding, though not necessarily consensus.<sup>77</sup>

From the discussion of purely religious concepts (revelation and *sharia*), the idea of being a European Muslim finally extends its scope to involve non-Muslim citizens in the process of participation and collaboration.

77 If people object 'But who takes responsibility or accountability for decision-making, Muslims or non-Muslims?', they do not understand the implications of inviting non-Muslim experts or experts in the context to join the Islamic council or organization. In that organization, the accountable party is 'we', not Muslims or non-Muslims.

This means that I can reconstruct it as a framework that may theoretically become a platform for inter-communal dialogue between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens; of course, this platform needs in practice to come about through the joint efforts and willingness of these two groups of participants. The point I need to emphasize is that even though I conceptualize this framework in my own way and do not follow Ramadan's arguments in sequence, I still find his arguments coherent and consistent within this framework. This does not mean that the framework is perfect, and its limitations are discussed below. In the following, I conclude the study of the intellectual dimension of the concept of being a European Muslim by discussing its contributions in comparison with those of other discourses of Islam and the West. Then, I will examine Ramadan's personal *fatawa* or critiques of the Islam of the West.

## Positive Contributions of Ramadan as a European Muslim

There is no neutral approach to this question. All methods are designed to fulfil some particular purposes, which in turn constitute their contributions. At its core, Ramadan's approach is an attempt to merge Islam and modernity in a spirit of common or universal values and disseminate the result down to grass-roots level. It contains both contributions to Muslim thinking and critiques of existing ideology in relation to Islam in the modern world. In the following, I shall first underscore its positive contributions. As an approach, it emphasizes communication between Muslims and non-Muslims in the formulation of critique. Moreover, it provides a rationale for determining a border between religious and social domains and so limits or de-radicalizes the over-application of religious concepts in the social domain. It is also Islamic in name and therefore can be more easily accepted by mainstream Muslims, so that the whole concept of the European Muslim can be disseminated down to the grass-roots level. Second, as a critique, it goes beyond the existing dichotomy between Islam and the West and is founded on the concept of 'European Islam' or 'Islam of the West', regarding

these as a single entity rather than two. Moreover, it goes beyond another dichotomy between Islam and Islamic political ideologies. In contemporary Western discourses in relation to Islam, many scholars try their best to differentiate Islam from Islamic ideology, which has many names such as Islamism, global Islamism, political Islam, (neo)fundamentalist Islam, radical Islam, activist Islam, militant Islam and jihadism. This framework blurs this separation and so, in my opinion, can provide a new perspective on Islam and the West that the dichotomy overlooks. In the following, I will discuss these issues in detail.

### *A Communicative, De-radicalized and Islamic Approach*

In Ramadan's idea of becoming a European Muslim, communication between Muslims and non-Muslims is essential, which constitutes the civil reason in the approach. If we compare Ramadan's thought with that of Fazlur Rahman, we can see that Rahman focuses on the contextualization of the Qur'anic or Islamic values in the modern world by Muslim intellectuals.<sup>78</sup> For Ramadan, however, this is only one side of his framework. He also examines a contextualization of Qur'anic values together with non-Muslims, and the ways in which the experts in context critique this or put it into practice. There is also no doubt that modernists, even Nasr, will emphasize dialogue or community cohesion between Muslims and non-Muslims, but what Ramadan articulates is the need for non-Muslim counterparts not only as part of society but, more importantly, as part of Islamic moral and theological reflection in a Muslim minority context. Ramadan's idea therefore offers a methodological foundation to constitute unified thinking by Muslims and non-Muslims in Western society.

The second contribution Ramadan's conception makes is to determine the relationship between the religious and social domains. For example, as regards the concept of *tawhid*, al-Muhajiroun, one of the radical Muslim

78 F. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

organizations which formerly operated in the UK, extends it in a way which declares Muslims who vote in a secular political system and support human law apostates or unbelievers.<sup>79</sup> In the framework of a European Muslim, strictly speaking, *tawhid* is simply the essence of God, revealed by God alone, and so it cannot be challenged by human reasoning. As regards the application aspect, *tawhid* only provides a general vision that all human-kind should be treated justly and equally, since there is only one God who discriminates against no one. The detail or model for achieving a just and equal society is not determined by *tawhid* or the Texts but by civil reason and the context. If Ramadan is consistent in applying his framework, he will never over-interpret the religious concepts, and it therefore can de-radicalize the extreme interpretation of Islamists.

The third contribution is the nature of Ramadan's framework. After reconstructing it, I first find that Ramadan's arguments are strongly rooted in and developed from the classical scholarship of Islamic studies (classical Islam). Most of his footnotes are verses of the Qur'an, the *Sunna*, and the statements or principles of jurists from the four schools of *fiqh*. However, Ramadan's intention is not to provide an in-depth study of classical Islam but to appropriate classical Islam in a way that supports his own theology of being a European Muslim. His interpretations of classical Islam may be controversial (at least one Muslim scholar disagrees with his interpretation of classical Islam).<sup>80</sup> What I want to point out here is that even if scholars disagree with him, his massive usage of 'Islamic' arguments constitutes a framework that is Islamic in nature. We can demonstrate the Islamic nature

79 XXX. Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 170–6.

80 Yahya Michot disagrees with Ramadan's interpretation on the position of ibn Taymiyya. Ramadan says that, in line with al-Dusuqi from the Maliki school, ibn Taymiyya accepts that 'the abode of Islam must be the property of Muslim where the Islamic legal system is applied (even if non-Muslims are in power). This is the current legal opinion.' See Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 65; Yahya Michot, *Muslims under Non-Muslim Rule: Ibn Taymiyya on Fleeing from Sin; Kinds of Emigration; the Status of Mardin; Domain of Peace/War; Domain Composite; the Conditions for Challenging Power* (Oxford: Interface, 2006), fn. 1, 47–8.

of Ramadan's framework by comparing it with the thought of another Islamic scholar, Mohammed Arkoun, who is highly influenced by French philosophy in general and Jacques Derrida in particular.

Arkoun promotes a deconstructive view of Islamic thought: 'thinking the unthinkable and the unthought in contemporary Islamic thought'.<sup>81</sup> This new thinking aims, at its core, 'to problematize the epistemic and epistemological framework underlying the articulation of each [Islamic] discourse',<sup>82</sup> or in short, to critique Islamic reasoning, which determines what is thinkable and what is not, and particularly the domain of the unthinkable/unthought, which contains 'themes [which] are currently known and debated in Western thought, while contemporary Islamic thought remains suspicious, more polemical and apologetic than critically concerned and challenged by them and by intellectual modernity in general'.<sup>83</sup>

There are two main problems with this new thinking. First, for many Muslim scholars, to problematize an already agreed Islamic thought or doctrine or its epistemological framework is simply 'un-Islamic' by nature. Ramadan indeed does a similar thing by problematizing the Islamic concepts of *ijma* and *qiyas*, but the difference is that he problematizes these two Islamic concepts not only via context and secular knowledge but also by using other Islamic concepts (*maslaha* and *ijtihad*), and so his problematization is still derived from Islamic tradition or reasoning. However, the critiques of Arkoun are mainly based on anthropological, historical, modern linguistic and philosophical studies (secular knowledge, like that of Tibi) and so, compared with the critiques of Ramadan, they lack the Islamic 'feeling' or vocabulary shared by average Muslims. To put it simply, the critiques of Ramadan seem insider's critiques while Arkoun's appear to be an outsider's.

Secondly, as a Christian Chinese with a higher education in Christian theology who was nurtured in Chinese culture, I find Arkoun's critique

81 M. Arkoun, *Islam: To Reform or To Subvert?*, 15–52.

82 *Ibid.*, 16.

83 *Ibid.*, 44.

attractive in rethinking or problematizing the Chinese and Christian discourses that I have learned, but it is difficult to draw the attention of the average Christian or Chinese person to this approach, since it is too sophisticated and philosophical and lacks methodical concepts to follow up on, as does Ramadan's. It therefore creates a difficulty to materialize what Arkoun says in a real-world situation. To a certain extent, Ramadan provides a more practical approach in realizing the critique of Islamic reasoning which Arkoun suggests, even though we may argue that the extent of his critique may not be as radical and complete as Arkoun's.

There is another, minor problem with Arkoun's critique of Islam reasoning. Although he denies that there is such a thing as 'Islamic' reasoning, his critique unavoidably articulates a kind of Islamic reasoning vis-à-vis Western reasoning throughout his anthropological, historical, linguistic and philosophical researches, while Ramadan does the same thing but in a purely religious dimension.<sup>84</sup> This implicit essentialization of Islamic reasoning leads to the topic discussed below, the dichotomy between Islam and the West.

### *Beyond the Dichotomy between Islam and the West*

To be fair to Arkoun, the essentialization of individual ideas or schools of thought is reasonable and necessary, especially for comparative purposes. However, it is problematic if it extends to stereotyping the whole religion of Islam and the whole geographical area of the West in opposition to each other. Here, I summarize three different positions in relation to Islam and the West in order to situate and highlight Ramadan's contribution.

The first is 'solutionism' or 'Islam is the solution', a position advocated by Yusuf al-Qaradawi. The second is the fear and ignorance of the West suggested by Fatima Mernissi and Daniel Pipes and the theory of defensive-cultural response to a universal modernity constructed by Bassam Tibi. These two positions are different, in the sense that the former advocates a

84 Ibid., 10.

return of authentic Islam in all walks of life in order to resist the challenge of the West, but the latter suggests a separation between Islam and politics as in the West as if it were universal. However, they are similar in the sense that both of them essentialize a similar 'Islamic' response to the West.

The third position is the 'clash of civilizations' between Islam and the West, a notion popularized by Samuel Huntington (and first suggested by Bernard Lewis), and followed by Martin Kramer, Judith Miller, Robert Spencer and the like. They essentialize a kind of 'Western' culture and reasoning that is exclusive to the West alone. Unlike Mernissi, Pipes and Tibi, they believe that Islam contains an inherent problem or attribute that prevents it from being modernized. Islam itself cannot generate systems and concepts of democracy, freedom of thought, individualism and so on, which implicitly justifies the political and even militant actions of the West in Muslim countries, since the West wants to 'help' them to develop these modern systems and values.

If we examine the first position in response to the West and, similarly, to Salafism, we see that al-Qaradawi demands the awakening of Islam and a return to the true source or authentic Islam. As was mentioned above, al-Qaradawi has discussed the idea of collective *ijtihad* since the world is globalized because knowledge is massive, but, unlike Ramadan's distinction between the religious and social domains, he emphasizes that 'in the final analysis [what] cannot be questioned is the recognition of Islam as a principle of cooperation and consensual communication in the search for the common good'.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, 'Islam has posed a value and has legislated on every domain of human action'.<sup>86</sup> In view of this, Salvatore argues that the position of al-Qaradawi is more inclined to conflate the religious domain with the social domain and places the needs of the community over those of the individual (Ramadan focuses more on individual conscience and responsibility), which leads to the necessity for 'Islamic solutions', the implementation of Islamic Law, and, finally, the establishment of an Islamic

85 A. Salvatore, *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity* (Reading, Berks: Ithaca Press, 1997), 205.

86 *Ibid.*, 206.

state. The separation of Islam and the West in the first position is founded on the persistence of Islamic discourse as a principle of the modern world.

The second position is the reverse. Islam can only be transformed or modernized like the West if rational discourse, instead of Islamic discourse, is recognized as the principle. On the basis of a review of Islamic history, Mernissi describes an Islamic response, which is scared of Western concepts because those Muslims who support these values have been violently persecuted by rulers in the past.<sup>87</sup> Pipes provides another reason for the resistance of Muslims to change: ignorance of Western concepts. Following many textbooks on the sociology of modernization, he calls this kind of Muslim resistance 'traditional Islam.'<sup>88</sup>

As was discussed in Chapter 3, Tibi constructs a theory to explain the phenomenon of political Islam, the politicization of Islam, which is at the root of the conflicts and violence between Islam and the West today. He asserts that political Islam is a defensive culture on the part of Muslim countries towards a universal modernism of the West, in which they resist being subservient. But unlike Huntington, Tibi believes that the conflict between Islam and the West (modernism) is not necessary if the Islamic civilizing process is rational, rather than political. For Mernissi, Pipes and Tibi, the fear, ignorance and defensive culture displayed by Islam can be overcome through a process of the rationalization of Islam. Therefore, they first separate Islam from the West and then demand the emergence of a moderate or secular Islam founded on rational discourse, not Islamic discourse. Ironic as this is, the main purpose of moderate Islam is therefore to exclude its own religious language from the public or political domain. As Tibi clearly says, 'Being a Muslim myself, my belief in Islam is spiritually based on the oneness (*tawhid*) of God and on a commitment to the ethics [...] but not on an adherence to some political ideology or personal rule.'<sup>89</sup>

87 Mernissi, F., *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 2002), 2nd edn.

88 Daniel Pipes, *Militant Islam Reaches America* (New York: Norton, 2002), 10–12. Pipes uses the term 'traditional' to mean 'backward, custom[ary] and not-urbanized'; this is totally different from the Traditionalism of Nasr that was examined in Ch. 2.

89 Bassam Tibi, *Islam between Culture and Politics*, 2.

The third discourse suggests a kind of ‘Islam is Islam, West is West and never the twain shall meet’ view. Unlike Tibi and others, it holds that there is no chance of generating a kind of moderate Islam that is harmonious with the West.<sup>90</sup> In 1990, Bernard Lewis embarked on this thesis by saying that in the Muslim world, the West faced ‘a mood and a movement transcending the level of issues and politics and the government that pursue them. This is no less than a *clash of civilizations* – the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against *our* Judaeo-Christian heritage, *our* secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both.’<sup>91</sup> Lewis clearly separates ‘We’ (Judaeo-Christian and secular traditions) and ‘They’ (Islamic tradition) as two distinct cultures, which will eventually lead to a clash of civilizations. Three years later, Huntington popularized this notion by stating bluntly that ‘western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, the separation of church and state, often have little resonance in Islamic cultures.’<sup>92</sup> In his 1997 follow-up book, he intensifies this thesis:

The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilisation whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture, and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power. The problem for Islam is not the CIA or the U.S. Department of Defense. It is the West, a different civilisation whose people are convinced of the universality of their culture and believe that their superior, if declining, power imposes on them the obligation to extend that culture throughout the world. These are the basic ingredients that fuel conflict between Islam and the West.<sup>93</sup>

For Huntington, Islam itself *is* the problem for the West and vice versa. Scholars and writers such as Judith Miller, Martin Kramer and Robert

90 For a general review see S. T. Hunter, *The Future of Islam and the West: Clash of Civilizations or Peaceful Coexistence?* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 4–7.

91 Bernard Lewis, ‘The Roots of the Muslim Rage’, *Atlantic Monthly* (Sept. 1990), 60. Italics mine.

92 Samuel P. Huntington, ‘The Clash of Civilizations’, *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993), 40.

93 S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 217.

Spencer maintain a similar criticism of Islam as a religion incompatible with Western values.<sup>94</sup> In my opinion, Ramadan's framework goes beyond the essentialization and opposition of Islam and the West by introducing the concepts of human reason and context in line with Ramadan's Islamic discourse.

For Huntington and others, the dichotomy between Islam and the West is founded on the exclusive nature of each culture or civilization. Democracy and other modern ideas are generated in the West and so they belong to Western culture alone. However, for Ramadan, the concepts of equality, human rights, justice, rationality and well-being are not cultural or geographical but universal, and so Islamic values are part of these universal values. The difference, therefore, does not lie in concept, but in presentation or structure, owing to the specificity of each social circumstance. Ramadan's approach intends to unify universal (Islamic) values with the specific (European) context in order to overcome the dichotomy. Therefore, we cannot clearly distinguish the proportion or significance that Islamic texts, civil reason and European context each have when we formulate a critique. All of them are always working and conceptualizing *together*. In view of this, the Islamic principles and values of European Muslim communities are always intertwined with European context and values. Islamic values are therefore found in Europe and European values are found in Islam, and so, instead of being mutually exclusive to each other, they are unified in Ramadan's approach.

Ramadan also promotes a kind of Euro-Islam similar to Tibi's.<sup>95</sup> Both of them accept and promote democracy, freedom and liberty, equality, individual human rights, pluralism, and civil society as universal values; Islam

94 J. Miller, 'The Challenge of Radical Islam', *Foreign Affairs* (Spring 1993), 43–56. M. Kramer, 'Islam and Democracy', *Commentary* 95 (1993), 35–42; Spencer, R., *Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions About the World's Fastest-Growing Faith* (New York: Encounter Books, 2002).

95 Bassam Tibi, 'Muslim Migrants in Europe: Between Euro-Islam and Ghettoization', in Nezar al-Sayyad and Manuel Castells, eds, *Muslim Europe or Euro-Islam: Politics, Culture, and Citizenship in the Age of Globalization* (Lanham, MD and Oxford: Lexington Books, 2002), 31–52.

as a religion does not have any inherent attribute hostile to the West or to modernity, but the two thinkers are different in the sense that Tibi cannot accept Islamic ideas such as *jihad* and *sharia* as public discourse, while what Ramadan does is to reinterpret and de-radicalize extreme Islamic ideas by presenting an appropriate Islamic discourse in the public domain. For scholars like Tibi and Pipes, Islamic discourse can easily be radicalized and politicized if it is articulated in the public sphere. In their view, the ideas of Ramadan are in fact promoting an Islamization of Europe at the same time as they are promoting a Europeanization (rationalization) of Islam. They propose to lock up Islam in the domains of history, personal ethics and spirituality, and so the relevance of Islam in modern public domain is nearly eradicated.

On the other hand, unlike al-Qaradawi, Ramadan strongly differentiates the nature of religious and social affairs from Islamic discourse, which is therefore not the 'solution' for everything in a society. Muslims have many things to learn from, and should be guided and corrected by the context and the secular knowledge of, Europe and other religions. In view of this, we can see that Ramadan's theology of being a European Muslim is an attempt to establish and manage a *normative*, but not mutually exclusive, relationship between Islam and the public domain. On the one hand, it continues to maintain the relevance of Islamic critical discourse in the modern world, but it is not immune from criticisms by others.

To a certain extent, the simple dichotomy between Islam and the West is difficult to sustain, since there are so many different representations of Islam in the West (many of them are silent, peaceful and cooperative). Therefore, many theorists of Islamic studies or political science, even Huntington, have refined their radical position.<sup>96</sup> Now, instead of the dichotomy between Islam and the West, they posit another conceptual dichotomy, that is, between Islam and Islamist political ideology.<sup>97</sup>

96 See John Esposito, 'Islam and the West after September 11: Civilizational Dialogue or Conflict?', in Aftab Ahmad Malik, ed., *The Empire and the Crescent: Global Implications for a New American Century* (Bristol: Amal Press, 2003), 118.

97 The relationship between these two dichotomies is not exclusive. Some writers criticize both Islam and Islamic political ideology (fundamentalism, for example), while some focus only on Islamic political ideology and ignore Islam itself.

*Beyond the Dichotomy between Islam and Islamist Political Ideology*

As was mentioned above, Islamist ideology in the West has many different names, such as Islamism and political Islam; the purpose of using so many names is the same – to differentiate Islamist ideology from Islam. For many intellectuals, the concept of separation between Islam and Islamism or Islamist political ideology is ‘self-evident’. It is true that many Islamic scholars (the thought of Tibi, as was discussed in Chapter 3, is more complex) accept this separation without proof. In his study of Islamism in Western Europe, Pedersen clearly asserts this separation as if it were no longer an assumption but a natural fact: ‘One can be a *Muslim* without being an Islamist. While the first refers to a cultural heritage that dates back centuries, the second refers to a political-religious phenomenon which has an associated historical character [...]. They use the term *Islamiyyin* to distinguish themselves from the rest of the *Muslimin* (the Muslims).’<sup>98</sup>

To a degree, it is not an exaggeration to say that most books analysing Islam and politics take this dichotomy as one of their analytical assumptions, or simply take it as a fact as Pedersen does. For scholars like Fred Halliday, their separation of Islamism from Islam is well-intentioned, since it can prevent criticisms of Islam itself.<sup>99</sup> Nearly all the bad things reported relate only to Islamism, not Islam. Second, the collapse of this dichotomy may weaken the difference between ordinary mainstream Muslims and political Islamists. And finally, Islamism is a powerful symbol with which to articulate political and moral projects, which are considered to be derived from the Islamic tradition.<sup>100</sup> If Islamism is understood in this way, I agree with essentializing it. However, my concern is that if we intensify this dichotomy to the extent that we narrow down the problem of Islamism and equate it with the problem of Muslims themselves, without considering other

98 L. Pedersen, *Newer Islamic Movements in Western Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 14.

99 F. Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996), 107–32.

100 B. S. Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism* (London: Zed Books), 17–18, 31–51.

relevant non-Muslim factors, and ignore the problems that this dichotomy creates, it becomes problematic. In the following, I will discuss four main problems created by this analytical separation.

First, like the dichotomy between Islam and the West, this dichotomy locks up Islam in the domain of history, or as Pedersen says above, 'the cultural heritage that dates back centuries'. It reduces Islam to historical memory, personal ethics and spirituality like Sufism, making Islam no longer relevant or constructive in the contemporary public sphere. Second, if scholars take the dichotomy as a fact, it is arguable whether we can really separate Islamic political ideology from Islam. As Salman Rushdie correctly objected, it is Islam that produces Islamism or, in his terms, paranoid Islam.<sup>101</sup> Fuller also indicates that political Islam as a phenomenon will never fully disappear since it is fuelled by Islam itself.<sup>102</sup> The social and political dimension of Islamic teaching cannot be separated from Islamism unless we reduce Islam itself by confining it to the private domain for ever. Moreover, this dichotomy will seduce some writers into shifting their position or criticisms from Islamism to Islam, without mentioning the shift explicitly.

Third, this dichotomy essentializes Islamism as an ideology to the extent that it can be separated from the local context (which is what Tibi does), and many research resources are put into studying topics such as the Society of Muslim Brothers, Salafism, Wahhabism, *jihad*, Islamic Law, Muslim politics, and modern challenges to Muslim mentality and culture such as secularization and globalization, seeing them as the roots of present-day Islamism or terrorism in the West, even though they all originate from non-Western regions. Worse, these kinds of research are inclined to ignore other equally important resources that generate and develop Islamism, such as: racism; various forms of (implicit and explicit) social discrimination against Muslims in the West; US and British foreign policies directed against Muslim majority states; ideological relations between Islamism and the West and economic inequality; and manipulation against Third World

101 R. Rushdie, 'Not About Islam?', in *Step Across This Line: Collected Non-Fiction 1992–2002* (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 394–7.

102 G. E. Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 14.

countries at the global level. It is difficult for many Western intellectuals to accept the West as part of the problem (they always think they are the solution) of Islamism, and so it is more comfortable for them just to criticize Islamism itself and not to examine the contributing factors of the West.<sup>103</sup>

To be fair to Tibi, Bernard Lewis and other scholars who study Islamism in Arab and Muslim countries, their dichotomy between Islam and the West or Islam and Islamism may, to some extent, be valid in these regions. However, the problem is that they 'export' the same idea into study of Islam in the West without considering the change in context as Ramadan does. And this leads to the fourth problem, which is that Islamism becomes more 'portable' and so can be exported globally. The discourse of the globalization of Islamism therefore continues to reinforce the necessity for the privatization of Islam, the detachment of Islamism from the local context, and oversight of contributing factors in the West. It is still unclear whether Islamism (not transnational Muslim organizations) can be globalized without considering local contexts, but what is most important is that, like Huntington's thesis of the clash of civilizations, this discourse is potentially dangerous, because it can be manipulated in a way that justifies US foreign policy with regard to the 'War on Terror' or 'pre-emptive defence' in the Muslim world.

Theoretically, the contribution of Ramadan's framework is to offer a more balanced and comprehensive picture of 'Islamism', one which includes all the factors mentioned above without emphasizing one side and ignoring the other. It contains a degree of flexibility in examining the factors arising from both the Muslim and the non-Muslim side.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, since it is not concerned with the separation between Islamism and Islam, unlike theorists of Islamism, it does not characterize social and economic issues

103 Tibi does not go to this extreme, since he believes that Europe also needs to be Europeanized and that it is still not a completely rational and secular place (see Ch. 3).

104 For Ramadan's critique of Islamism see Tariq Ramadan, 'Relations between Europe and Islamists', in Gema Martín Muñoz, ed., *Islam, Modernism and the West: Cultural and Political Relations at the End of the Millennium* (London: I.B. Tauris in association with the Eleni Nakou Foundation, 1999), 136–52.

as or reduce them to purely religious or Islamist issues. It therefore offers a more contextual and pragmatic study of Islamism rather than a merely ideological study.

In short, Ramadan's framework does not fall into the four traps that arise from the over-essentialization of Islamism. Although methodological concepts like religious texts, human reason, local context and the platform for making critiques are only a kind of common sense, it is already more subtle and sophisticated than the simple dichotomies between Islam and the West or between Islam and Islamism, no matter what academic materials scholars use to justify these dichotomies. Scholars may argue that the separation is only an analytical or conceptual assumption for the sake of convenience or research, but if there is a less problematic methodological assumption available (like Ramadan's), it is reasonable to ask for a change.

For Ramadan, Islam is not problematic in itself. It can be either critical and constructive or radical and dangerous to society, just like other religious and political discourses. In view of this, so long as religion cannot be eliminated totally, as proposed by some secularists, the issue is therefore not creating a complete separation between Islam and the public domain but instead managing an appropriate connection between the two. This brings us to the end of our examination of Ramadan's intellectual contributions to the relationship between Islam and the West. In the following, I shall discuss his personal critiques or political opinions, which are directly derived from the methodical construct of the European Muslim.

## Ramadan's Views about Being a European Muslim

As a Muslim intellectual, Ramadan has expressed his personal views on many social and international issues. In his books and on his website, we find that his articles and discussions address modernity, democracy, freedom of speech, citizenship, secularism, terrorism, globalization, and the relationships between Islam and the West. Some issues he addresses are more specific, such as the social problems facing the European Muslim

community, British or European policies on Muslims, Palestine and the Arab–Israeli conflict, anti-Semitism, Muslim headscarves, Danish cartoons of the Prophet, the Pope’s speech on Islam, women in Islam, *jihad*, the Islamic penal code, homosexuality, etc. I do not intend to offer a comprehensive summary of Ramadan’s views on the above topics, but will identify significant principles that are directly derived from the European Muslim approach.

We will divide the following into four parts. The first part – about the idea of ‘abode of testimony’ and the manifesto for a new ‘we’ – is the foundation because it is virtually implicit in Ramadan’s framework. The following two parts discuss the tensions arising from this methodical thinking: the tensions of Muslim citizens regarding Islamic law and the *umma* (community of faith). These are crucial, in the sense that they are the main ingredients of present-day radical Islamic discourse. Finally, I will focus on Ramadan’s practical suggestions for being a European Muslim and indicate the inclinations or positions that he holds, which cannot be directly derived from the approach itself, in order to articulate the tension between his approach and his practical suggestions.

### *The Idea of ‘Abode of Testimony’ and the Manifesto for a New ‘We’*

As was mentioned above, Ramadan has to modify his teaching in terms of the traditional three-abode divisions according to whether he is considering a Muslim or non-Muslim regime. Unlike Nasr, who follows the division, Ramadan argues that the abode of Islam (*dar al-Islam*), the abode of war (*dar al-harb*) and the abode of treaty (*dar al-ahd*) are not found in the Qur’an and *Sunna* and are, therefore, all subject to disagreement and modification if necessary, and that the permanent settlement of Muslims in Europe and the negative image of Islam in the West provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for critique and reform.<sup>105</sup>

105 Ramadan, *To Be a European Muslim*, 123; *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 63.

First, methodologically, Ramadan cannot accept these traditional divisions because the mentality of ‘Islamic’ and ‘non-Islamic’ territories is basically binary, which violates the unified idea of Islam and Europe which he himself promotes. Second, in his study of classical Islam, the factors he uses to determine whether a territory is Islamic or not are the population living in the country, the ownership of the land, the nature of the government, the law applied in the country, and, finally, the country’s levels of safety and security. Except with regard to the last of these factors, European Muslims cannot any longer claim that they are living in *dar al-Islam*, and so in religious terms they will never make Europe their home. And if Muslims are living in Europe simply for their safety and security, this will not encourage them to engage actively with other non-Muslims in society. Even the introduction of *dar al-ahd* or, as Nasr has it, *dar al-sulh* (abode of peace or peaceful arrangement) is still not useful, because this concept is also founded on the existence of the binary entities *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb*, which no longer homogeneously exist in the nation-state circumstance. The problem is that, in the modern world, no one can legitimately and collectively represent *dar al-Islam* to sign a treaty or agreement with *dar al-harb* to ensure peaceful conditions for Muslims living in Europe. For Ramadan, the traditional divisions are simply the product of Muslim empires and Christendom, and so are outdated in the contemporary era. He recommends the concept of an ‘abode of testimony’ to replace these traditional divisions.

The phrase ‘abode of testimony’ (*dar al-shahada*) has been popularized by Ramadan.<sup>106</sup> For many Muslims, the concept of *shahada* usually refers to the pronouncement ‘There is no god but God and Muhammad is His messenger.’ However, apart from this literal pronouncement, it serves a twofold function. First, it establishes the oneness of God and His revelation of Himself to the Prophet Muhammad as the fundamental core of Muslim faith and identity. To a certain extent, for Ramadan, others cannot

106 ‘Tariq Ramadan offers a new term, instead of those terms, and that is *Dar al-Shahadah*, meaning to be a role model (*Shahadah*) of the Islamic message before mankind.’ <[www.e-prism.org/images/tariqfinal291203.doc](http://www.e-prism.org/images/tariqfinal291203.doc)> accessed 22 Oct. 2013.

disqualify a Muslim as a disbeliever as long as he or she believes this fundamental core. Second, it elevates a 'consciousness that gives Muslims the responsibility to remind others of the presence of God and to act in such a way that our presence among them and with them is, in itself, a reminder of the Creator, spirituality and ethics.'<sup>107</sup> This is the social and ethical aspect of the idea of testimony. The concept of testimony is therefore not equal to *dawa*, which is usually understood as verbal preaching of or conversion to Islam. For Ramadan, *dawa* only means call, presentation and invitation to and preaching of Islam; people have the freedom to believe in Islam or not. However, *dawa* is often translated as conversion to Islam, which is misleading since it leads to accusations of the Islamization of Europe, which is why Ramadan is reluctant to accept some Muslim scholars advocating the concept of 'abode of *dawa*' to replace the traditional divisions for European Muslims.<sup>108</sup>

The focus of abode of testimony is a unified space of living for Muslim and non-Muslim citizens in Europe, and therefore, Muslims should use the identity and perspective of 'We' to preserve their faith, religious practices and spirituality and pass these on to the next generation in the new context, and discuss, examine and critique the society they live in, together with fellow, non-Muslim citizens. Their fellow citizens should have the right to address problems arising from or associated with Muslim citizens and vice versa, which is what Ramadan advocates as 'the Manifesto for a New "We"'.<sup>109</sup> The foundation of 'We' is based on common citizenship provided by a country's constitution and therefore must be treated with trust and respect rather than suspicion and fear. The abode of testimony and the new 'We' suggested by Ramadan are no doubt a direct implication of the

107 Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 74.

108 Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 73. For his detailed comment on Islamization see Ramadan, 'Europeanization of Islam or Islamization of Europe?', in Shireen T. Hunter, ed., *Islam, Europe's Second Religion: The New Social, Cultural, and Political Landscape* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 208–18.

109 Tariq Ramadan, 'Manifesto for a new 'WE': An Appeal to the Western Muslims, and Their Fellow Citizens' 7 July 2006, <[http://www.tariqramadan.com/article.php3?id\\_article=743](http://www.tariqramadan.com/article.php3?id_article=743)> accessed 30 Oct. 2007.

approach I have analysed above. The spirit of unification between Islamic principles (*dar al-shahada*), human reasoning (the modification of traditional divisions) and European context (citizenship) is vividly reflected. Of course, this is only Ramadan's personal opinion, but it is possible that in the future this will be reinforced by a European *fiqh* council, in which non-Muslim representatives have a seat.

In the following, I will discuss the tensions arising from this thinking about being a European Muslim in three important areas: the relationships between Muslim citizens and (1) Islamic Law, (2) the *umma* and (3) engagement in society. The first two are conceptually significant as they are close to the 'eye of the storm' in the discourses of Muslims in the West. Should Muslims follow divine law or human law? Should they be loyal to the *umma* or to the state in which they are the citizens? These are the religious mental stumbling blocks that impede Muslim citizens from actively engaging in society or, worse, mean that they are radicalized by Islamists who would segregate Muslims from their non-Muslim fellows. As regards the issue of social participation as suggested by Ramadan, in the following I articulate the tension between the idea of being a European Muslim understood as a framework and as an ideology.

### *Tension between Islamic and Human Laws*

Earlier in the discussion, I examined the role *sharia* plays in Ramadan's concept of a European Muslim. This emphasizes *sharia's* ethical aspect instead of its legalistic aspect, the ultimate objective being to achieve the common good or public interest of society. In this connection, Ramadan suggests that any system of law, be it European or American, *can* be Islamic law, because if the purpose of Islamic law is to pursue and achieve justice and good, any law that is just and good is Islamic law.<sup>110</sup> There is no such distinction between Islamic justice and non-Islamic justice, Islamic good

110 Also see A. Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

and non-Islamic good, Islamic rationality and non-Islamic rationality. These concepts are universal and are common to all human beings. This is one of the reasons why Ramadan suggests that there is no need to establish an Islamic court or Islamic school of law in the West.<sup>111</sup> The same legal system is applicable to both Muslims and non-Muslims if it is just, good and reasonable. As we all know, in the projection of the mass media, Islamic law is perceived by most Westerners as being uncivilized and brutal. On the other hand, European law is only human law, and thus is irreligious or lacking divine authority in the view of radical Islamists (and even Muslim scholars such as Nasr, as discussed in Chapter 2). Therefore this idea of combining the two kinds of law is challenging, both for Muslims who wish to revive Islamic law or establish an Islamic court system in the West and for non-Muslims.

If the criteria for bringing together Islamic law and European law are justice, goodness and rationality, then the tension between them will arise when either of them deviates from these universal criteria. For Ramadan, the solution is not to establish another (Islamic) type of legal system or court, but to appeal, criticize, and put forward the necessary reforms in the existing European legal systems, which is what 'testimony' and 'we' mean in the above discussion. However, at present, Ramadan is less critical of British and European laws; for him, these laws are by and large good and just. Problems arise only when they are not consistently applied to protect the rights and the status of Muslim citizens when compared with those of non-Muslim citizens. In view of this, we can say that Ramadan is more radical, demanding the reform of European Muslim communities in order to develop a European Islamic culture rather than the reform of European legal frameworks to recognize Islamic or Muslim culture. Therefore, he likes to articulate the latitude contained in British and European laws and the flexibility of Islamic law in order to find a balance between them, and is more inclined to demand that Muslims adapt to the laws if the laws are

111 The other reason for not having an Islamic court or Islamic school of law is to minimize the minority consciousness of European Muslim communities.

not opposed to the core religious values of Islam.<sup>112</sup> On the other hand, he does not abandon totally the concept of Islamic law, since doing so would lead to the loss of the role, or religious language, of Muslims in the public domain. The spirit of *sharia* should be reformed and sublimated at the level of common good and universal criteria in parallel with non-Muslim legal systems.

### *Tension between the Universal Umma and the Nation State*

The European Muslim is part of the universal *umma*. At question is whether Muslims should maintain a primary loyalty to the *umma* or to the state in which they live. The concept of *umma* is interpreted as 'one vast homogeneous commonwealth of people who have a common goal and a common destiny and who are guided by a common ideology in all matters both spiritual and temporal'.<sup>113</sup> Understanding *umma* in this way, Muslims around the world are connected by this intense religious brotherhood and passion. Ramadan does not have any new definition of *umma*, but he is more concerned with political manipulation by radical Islamists who place loyalty to *umma* higher than loyalty to the state, indoctrinating European Muslims in declaring *jihad* against European states or 'liberating' Muslim countries from the manipulations of the West.<sup>114</sup>

To prevent this extremely simplistic mentality of 'the West attacks the *umma*', Ramadan links the *umma* and the European states by the concept of the contract or social contract. In his study of classical Islam, Ramadan identifies three essential principles in the relationship between *umma* and non-*umma*:

112 Tariq Ramadan, 'Islam and Muslims in Europe: A Silent Revolution toward Rediscovery', in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, ed., *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 161.

113 A. R. I. Doi, *Shariah: The Islamic Law* (London: Ta Ha, 1984), 5.

114 W. Phares, *The War of Ideas: Jihad against Democracy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 30–8.

- (1) Muslims are not responsible for those of their coreligionists who choose to live elsewhere and are bound to another state (by an explicit or tacit agreement).
- (2) It is the duty of Muslims to react when their brothers or sisters are exposed to persecution because of their religious beliefs.
- (3) However, the duty to help persecuted believers cannot be carried out if there is a treaty (of alliance or non-intervention), for such an intervention would mean a unilateral breach of the obligations of the agreement.<sup>115</sup>

In modern times, we cannot find a 'treaty' signed between the *umma* and non-*umma* which echoes the discussion of *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb* mentioned above.<sup>116</sup> Ramadan's focus here is on using the concept of the contract to delineate the legal duties or obligations of a European Muslim. As was discussed above, for Ramadan, Muslims have already signed, implicitly or explicitly, an agreement to comply with the laws of the state and the constitution; therefore, according to the above principle (3), they have no right to breach state laws unilaterally, and they cannot justify violent or radical actions simply because there are persecuted Muslims in the state or in Muslim countries elsewhere. Their actions in helping persecuted Muslims must be bound by the laws of the state.

Therefore, in the case of wearing Muslim headscarves in public schools, for example, Ramadan asserts that when the law forbids the headscarf from being worn in public schools, Muslims should follow the law and go to school as usual. Ramadan himself is less radical with respect to amending British and European laws. However, the theology of the European Muslim does not prevent Muslim citizens from encouraging such change. Muslim citizens should not be silent; they have every (civil) right, the same as other fellow, non-Muslim citizens, whether to arouse public attention, to protest against the persecution or unfair treatment of Muslims or to negotiate and struggle for the amendment of law by peaceful political methods, if necessary.

115 Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 91–2.

116 I accept that European communities exhibit a degree of cohesion in the political or legal dimension, but Ramadan focuses on the degree of cohesion in the unified religious community.

Ramadan's opinion articulates the tensions of being both a Muslim and a European citizen. For Ramadan, everyone has multiple identities and multiple cultural origins. Take myself as an example: I am Chinese, was born in Hong Kong, believe in Christianity and am studying Islam as my academic profession. I have at least four cultural influences and ideologies to shape 'myself' as a unified identity. As regards some issues (such as religious affairs or the meaning of life), these can be unrelated to each other, but in others (e.g. politics, culture and economics), it is difficult to separate them.

It is always difficult to discuss the assimilation, integration or alienation of Muslims and European society. Ramadan makes it clear that Muslims need to integrate into society by following the law and constitution of the state as citizens, and so, within the limit of the law, they have their civil right to speak, act, dress, eat and drink in whatever way they like. To a degree, Ramadan uses the identity of citizen as an umbrella to cover other cultural identities.

In sum, according to my understanding of a fully-fledged theology of the European Muslim, as citizens of the state Muslim citizens are not just followers of the law but also authors of the law. Muslim citizens have a moral obligation to criticize social policy, amend laws and reform practices if they are unjust and oppressive to either Muslim or non-Muslim citizens; this is what Ramadan calls 'Civic Ethics'.<sup>117</sup> Finally, 'Muslim' or other cultural identities and citizenship are not mutually exclusive, but the former is subsumed under the protection of the latter.

In the following, I shall try to articulate the tension between the universality of Ramadan's framework and his ideology of social democracy, which is exposed in the areas of economics and globalization. The purpose of doing so is not to repeat Ramadan's views or critiques of these two topics but to highlight his personal inclination towards a particular kind of political or social thought, which cannot be derived from his framework as constructed above. The failure to substantiate a particular position in public affairs is an intellectual legacy handed down from Kant's (and also shared

117 Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 168–73.

by Habermas's) theories of universal proceduralism, no matter whether it is based on subjectivity or inter-subjectivity.

*Tension between a Universal Framework and Ramadan's Ideology*

Ramadan's framework offers a list of factors (texts, reason, context, critique) which European Muslims should consider when studying theology or thinking critically about European society. Several factors lead me to consider his framework universal rather than just designed for European Muslims. First, since this framework is procedural, it cannot by itself generate substantive moral critiques and principles. Second, it is conceptually founded on the assumption of the universality of human rationality, justice and goodness in Islamic and modern culture, not purely European culture.

Third, Ramadan emphasizes that Islam is not a culture but a religion,<sup>118</sup> and he defines religion primarily as the link or connection with God, which is the meaning of *religio* in Latin, instead of defining it as the Arabic *din*.<sup>119</sup> The meaning of *din* is more comprehensive than that of *religio*; it is not simply a personal link with God but a systematic religious belief and practice which characterize a particular tradition, community, custom, standard of behaviour and act of judgement.<sup>120</sup> Therefore, what Ramadan implicitly tries to do is to play down the influence of specific Muslim communal-cultural ways of life (e.g. Algerian, Egyptian, Indian, Pakistani) by arguing for a universal Islamic way of life; as a result, the traditions and cultures of the individual participants are explicitly excluded in his approach.

Finally, we can see that instead of restricting the application of this approach to the European context, Ramadan promotes it for the USA, Canada and Japan as well. We can conclude that, like the Kantian principle of categorical imperatives, the approach of 'being a European Muslim' is

118 Ibid., 214.

119 Ramadan, *To Be European Muslim*, 20; *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity*, 262.

120 A. Salvatore, *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity*, 15–17.

also supposed to be universal and culture-free. Therefore I can wear this pair of ‘Ramadanian eyeglasses’ to distinguish and criticize methodically various Islamic discourses in the previous section, whether I am a Muslim or a non-Muslim. Nevertheless, when examining Ramadan’s political and economic opinions,<sup>121</sup> we discover that he in fact holds to two different kinds of ideology: one is more liberal while another is more socialist. In discussing Ramadan’s ideas so far, I have not found his positions in relation to Islam and the West or religion and modernism to be very radical. He promotes democracy, equality, freedom of speech and action (including criticism and the changing of personal religious beliefs), inter-religious dialogue, observance of the law and constitution, pluralistic societies, secular education and knowledge, and the significance of individual conscience. Therefore, for example, Muslims, on the basis of their own conscience and analysis, have every right to engage in various Western cultural activities, such as music, film or art, as they think fit.<sup>122</sup> They can also join the army to fight against Muslim countries.<sup>123</sup> On the gender issue, Ramadan promotes equality of status between men and women.<sup>124</sup> It is in the area of economics and globalization, however, that Ramadan clearly shows his socialist position.

As regards Ramadan’s economic ideas at the global level, he says that globalization is largely an economic and financial phenomenon, rather than cultural, political or technological.<sup>125</sup> His main concern is to problematize the international financial relationship between the affluent nations (he calls them the North) and the destitute nations (the South). For him, globalization is an economic form of colonization by the North, which makes the South, a ‘long-distance’ slave, more dependent on the North.

121 Ramadan’s opinions on the abode of testimony and relations between Muslim citizens and Islamic law and the *umma* represent implications of his methodology and do not explicitly reveal his ideological position.

122 Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 214–23.

123 *Ibid.*, 96–101.

124 Ramadan, *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity*, 335–42.

125 Ramadan, *Globalisation: Muslim Resistances* (Lyon: Tawhid, 2003), 3; *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 174.

The economic policies of international financial institutions such as the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank do not help much, but maintain 'a terrible and chronic misery for millions around the world' through (de) regulation of the economy of the Southern nations.<sup>126</sup>

At the national level, Ramadan asserts that Islamic messages of justice and human nature have nothing to do with positive economic theory, which reduces human beings to things or tools without ultimate purpose or consideration of ethics. Liberal economic theory upholds the competition of the free market and the reward of individual achievement but Ramadan respects the rights of the poor, who should receive proper welfare support in order to be financially independent.<sup>127</sup> He respects the private property rights of individuals, but he also encourages the ethical spending of money or wealth and thus, for example, he proposes a better management of *zakat*, both locally and internationally, in order to help the needy instead of the money being transferred primarily to the building of mosques. Starting at the local and national level, Ramadan's ultimate economic vision is, through cooperating with Jews, Christians and humanists, to transform (from within) the existing global and national economic model into a more just system, balancing more equitably the rights/needs of rich and poor and North and South. Overall, his ideas about globalization and economic reform remain abstract, in my opinion. Apart from asking for a better management of *zakat*, dialogue, cooperation and creativity in order to generate an alternative model, he has nothing more concrete to add. His idea is always procedural, rather than substantial.

Nevertheless, it is clearly inclined towards a particular kind of economic thought. In the economic spectrum, Ramadan's position certainly cannot count as libertarian or liberal like the ideas of Ludwig von Mises, Milton Friedman and Robert Nozick, which emphasize individual rights and liberty. On the other hand, Ramadan is not a strong socialist or communist who wants to overthrow the system of private property rights and

126 Ramadan, *Globalisation*, 11. See also A. Mohammadi and M. Ahsan, *Globalisation or Recolonisation? The Muslim World in the 21st Century* (London: Ta-Ha, 2002).

127 Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 190.

establish a classless state with collective ownership of property. To a certain extent, his position lies between social democracy and democratic socialism, or the 'Third Way' popularized by Anthony Giddens in British politics.<sup>128</sup>

In view of this, what interests me is Ramadan's unconditional inclination to the rights of the poor and the Third Way vision in his idea of being a European Muslim, which in fact cannot be directly derived from the approach discussed above. Many liberals in the West argue that true justice and fairness are for those who are less capable and less intelligent and earn less money. Providing social welfare to the poor will only encourage them to remain poor for a longer period of time and so they in fact suffer longer, and that is unfair to those who are hard-working and pay taxes. Therefore, true equality consists in offering equal opportunities (mainly in education and employment) to all people rather than conferring any special privileges on the poor.

Understood in this way, being a capitalist or libertarian European Muslim is not necessarily in contradiction with the Islamic message of justice in which Ramadan believes so strongly. The untold assumption of the Third Way in Ramadan's practical suggestion for being a European Muslim highlights a theoretical question underlying his universal framework, that is, the omission of emotional attachment, personal experience, culture and tradition which nurture the rationality of a European Muslim. If Ramadan's framework is founded on a vision of the Third Way, does this mean that the Third Way is universal as well? This further relates to which version of modernism Ramadan is actually asking for in order to unite European Muslims with the so-called European Islamic culture. Does this modernism exist? If not, does this mean that Ramadan's whole framework collapses? In the following section, I will discuss the limitations of his idea.

128 Giddens, A., *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 1998). The core idea of the Third Way is to help citizens direct their lives in the era of globalization. Instead of being a utopian revolutionary process in society as a whole, it focuses more on 'small-piece' transformation in the home, workplace and local community. It positions itself between socialism and capitalism and so will collaborate with both sides, offering an appropriate amount of social welfare to support citizens maintaining a decent life.

## Rationality Is Power

In constructing Ramadan's approach, we find that he is not interested in incorporating the idea of cultural or religious power in his theology. He simply ignores or suppresses it through various universal concepts such as justice and goodness. In my opinion, Ramadan himself is reluctant to channel the existential interest of Muslim communities into legislative institutions, and therefore does not consider offering a concept of power in his theology. In view of this, he implicitly needs to essentialize the perfect individual or Muslim citizen in his framework: one who is free and unencumbered by his or her social, political, economic, cultural, familial and individual interests and power constraints and who can, therefore, be confident as a citizen, critically minded, consistent in principles, creative in developing alternative solutions, communicative in a rational way, and, finally, active in fighting oppression and misunderstandings, as if all these things were practically possible for everyone.<sup>129</sup> Interestingly, in his book *In the Footstep of the Prophet*, Ramadan also portrays the Prophet Muhammad, the Perfect Man in Islamic tradition, as virtually a European Muslim.<sup>130</sup> The assumption of such a perfect person is that *rationality is the only power*. Ramadan holds this belief too, and urges Muslims to embrace it as an ideal of human life. Therefore, for Ramadan, it is not the authority of religion or the communal tradition, nor the emotional attachment, passion or experience that deserves power. It is only human rationality that deserves to attain power.

Ramadan upholds the idea of a perfect person who has a very strong critical, communicative rationality and spiritual integrity with which to overcome problems, but also a romantic or perfect version of modernism,

129 This is what Ramadan calls the 'six-Cs' in a talk 'Changing the Present and Dreaming the Future', <[http://www.tariqramadan.com/article.php3?id\\_article=918](http://www.tariqramadan.com/article.php3?id_article=918)> accessed 18 Feb. 2008.

130 Tariq Ramadan, *In the Footstep of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

which is therefore not American, British, Canadian or European modernism. Islam is also conceived of as a perfect religion that can unite perfectly with this imagined modernism and can develop European Islamic culture. To some extent, this strongly echoes the rationalism of Tibi discussed in Chapter 3. The principles of this perfect modernism are therefore always rationality, constructive revolution and freedom.<sup>131</sup> In this ideal form of modernism, people always live together in harmony on the basis of universal justice, equality, well-being, love, respect and rationality, rather than with a concern for their own cultural, religious, national, communal or individual interests and desires. Ramadan's concept of a European Islamic culture can only be stabilized within this version of modernism.

Ramadan also tries to place concrete personal experience, tradition and identity under the universal concept of an imagined modern culture and citizenship. To a degree, the universalization and romanticization of modernism or utopia is the intellectual legacy of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School to which Tibi belongs, since this universal modernism and perfect individual will offer the power of critique and reform to the existing imperfect world or imperfect ideology. It is therefore also the power of critique underlying the framework of Ramadan. Even if we can object that it is a reification of modernism and human nature, in my opinion its absence would not result in the collapse of Ramadan's framework, since it acts merely as a utopian vision of the pursuit of human happiness.

However, if this modernism and this perfect person are simply imagined and do not really exist, then, as Tibi and Ramadan advocate, we have to ask if it is appropriate to limit and so weaken the religious tradition in the domain of this imperfect and corrupted world of human and social affairs. We must remember that in the modern world, containing numerous secular institutions, it is more difficult for an interest group or individual to manipulate religion than to manipulate the economic or political sectors because religious ideology has a long history of development, which is determined not individually but collectively or socially. Second, apart from government, secular institutions normally have no interest or intention in

131 Ramadan, *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity*, 1–8.

controlling religions. Third, religious discourses normally relate to Truth/Reality, and they tend to influence human passion in a certain direction since they have a totalizing effect on believers' world-views. Such discourses offer an independent and powerful religious critique regarding the other sectors of society.

In Chapter 2, I examined the thought of Nasr and his students in terms of how they essentialize a higher level of the Ultimate Reality in heaven, which unfolds its sacred and spiritual form of life to human beings at all levels of affairs in order to historicize and criticize the prevalence of modernism in various ways, political, social and economic. On the other hand, as was discussed in Chapter 3 and in this chapter, Tibi and Ramadan essentialize two different versions of universal modernism and limit the application of religion in social and human affairs. They are essentializing in an opposite direction: while Nasr orients towards heaven, Tibi and Ramadan focus on earth. My question is this: which Islam, or whose rationality, represents authentic Islam in the West? After examining the thought of my three Muslim intellectuals together in Chapter 5, I will introduce the concept of an authentic Muslim minority and its significance in the West, and examine whether the thinking of Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan can stimulate a new perspective in which to respond to this question. In my opinion, these contrasting Islamic discourses may complement each other, and so may stimulate a new direction for Islam in the West.



## Being an Authentic Muslim Minority in the West

### Introduction

The purposes of this chapter are threefold. First, it examines the concept of a Muslim minority, which is one of the leading ideas concerning Islam in the West. Second, it attempts to evaluate the ideas of Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan, seeking therein a positive implication for the presence of Muslim minorities in the West. Finally, on the basis of their reflections, I hope to demonstrate, in terms of four 'R's', the main factors that could improve the relationship between Islam and the West.

Just as with the multiple relationships between Islamic discourses and modernism discussed above, the presence of Muslim minorities also has multiple interpretations. Talal Asad argues that it is important for European culture to articulate a 'complex space and complex time that allow for multiple ways of life to flourish.'<sup>1</sup> Not everyone agrees with him, however. Critics of this point of view recommend that the minorities should merge totally with the mainstream society instead of recognizing their own needs or protecting their cultural rights, which in their eyes seem to be privileged rights.

The arguments supporting these two positions are numerous, similar in fact to those heard in the debate between multiculturalism and liberalism, and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss this debate.<sup>2</sup> My focus

1 Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam and Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 180.

2 See Modood, T., *Multiculturalism: A Civic Idea* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007).

in the following sections is on analysing the presence of Muslim minorities as a concept (the concept of a Muslim minority) in order to explore what this phrase actually means, instead of viewing it as a cultural or historical phenomenon as Asad does.

## The Making of the Muslim Minority

Gladney writes, 'Majorities are made, not born.'<sup>3</sup> It is also true that minorities are made, not born. 'Minority' is a loaded term, a majority being structurally made or defined according to constraints on access to economic, legal, political and social resources vis-à-vis the majority. Different countries therefore generate different minorities, and the concept of the minority brings us to a discussion of assimilation, persecution, or pluralism (multiculturalism).<sup>4</sup> However, this discussion may not always be constructive from the perspective of social integration. There is an online document reporting a debate between two Muslim intellectuals, Tariq Ramadan and Dyab Abou Jahjah, in Rotterdam in January 2006 discussing the situation of Muslims in the West.<sup>5</sup> In the debate, Abou Jahjah says that he agrees with 80 per cent of what Ramadan says, but he disagrees strongly when

3 D. C. Gladney, *Making Majorities: Constituting the Nation in Japan, Korea, China, Malaysia, Fiji, Turkey, and the United States* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 1.

4 A. Burguière and R. Grew, eds, *The Construction of Minorities: Cases for Comparison Across Time and Around the World* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 2–4.

5 R. Bechler, 'Democracy, Islam and the Politics of Belonging', *openDemocracy* <[http://www.opendemocracy.net/faith-terrorism/belonging\\_3317.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/faith-terrorism/belonging_3317.jsp)>, also published on Ramadan's official website, <[http://www.tariqramadan.com/article.php?id\\_article=601](http://www.tariqramadan.com/article.php?id_article=601)> accessed 24 Jan 2007. For Tariq Ramadan's biography, see Ch. 4. Dyab Abou Jahjah, a Belgian political activist of Lebanese origin, first came to Belgium as an asylum seeker and then obtained a citizenship. He is founder and president of the Arab European League (AEL) and an opponent of Muslim assimilation to European

Ramadan says that there is no such thing as the Muslim minority. Abou Jahjah asserts that the reason Western governments are unwilling to listen to the Muslim voice is that 'Muslims in these societies *are* ethnically in a *numerical* minority; they *are* a minority as immigrants or the children of immigrants [...] due to the *inequalities, exclusion and discrimination* they suffer, they are in a minority of citizens [...].'<sup>6</sup> In view of this, the reason there are so many controversies pertaining to Islam in the West is that Muslims are a minority: they are therefore the victims, the neglected or, even worse, the oppressed communities in Western society.

Like Abou Jahjah, many Muslim scholars take the concept of a Muslim minority as an accepted fact.<sup>7</sup> Even the prominent Islamic scholar Olivier Roy pinpoints the characteristic of Islam in the West as being that Muslims live as a minority in a modernized society. Roy calls this 'Globalized Islam', which, he says, 'refers to the way in which the relationship of Muslims to Islam is reshaped by globalization, westernization and the impact of living as a minority.'<sup>8</sup> However, first and foremost, we need to clarify what is meant by the phrase 'Muslim minority'. In the *Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern Islamic World*, it is defined in terms of population, or in terms of having a lesser degree of political participation and access to economic resources, or, finally, in terms of having a distinctive system of values and ideology different from that of the majority.<sup>9</sup>

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culture. He has been accused of demanding radical changes to European cultures to make them more congenial to Muslims.

- 6 Bechler, 'Democracy, Islam and the Politics of Belonging', italics mine.
- 7 See the articles published in *Journal of Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*. Originally published by King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah in 1979, and after 1996 by the international academic publisher Carfax Publishing (Taylor & Francis Ltd), the journal aims to provide regional studies of various Muslim minorities and explore the interactions between Muslim minorities and non-Muslim states.
- 8 Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press in association with the Centre d'Études et de Recherches Internationales, Paris, 2004), ix.
- 9 Syed Z. Abedin and Saleha M. Abedin, 'Muslim Minorities in Non-Muslim Societies', in J. L. Esposito, ed., *Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern Islamic World*, Vol. 3 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 112.

In fact, these three definitions are common parameters for making the concept of the (Muslim) minority more concrete for further discussion; in my opinion, the concept of the minority is misused by Abou Jahjah in a way that hinders the constructive integration of Muslims in the contemporary West.

### *Demographic Minority and Social Powerlessness*

From his statement quoted above, we can say that Abou Jahjah understands the concept of the Muslim minority in terms of the first two parameters. However, if we consider the demographic minority alone, then the concept of the Muslim minority does not have any significance at all, because everyone in the world can be argued to be a demographic minority. What I want to say is that 'minority' in this numerical sense exists everywhere. Demographic minority is simply a relative concept, one related to a particular standard. As the particular standard changes, a minority can suddenly change into a majority, and vice versa. For example, I am Chinese, so I am part of an ethnic minority in the West, but at the same time I am a Christian and so I may be in the majority in terms of the religious population. No individual or group in the world can always constitute a numerical majority in all contexts. Problems do not arise simply because one is in a demographic or numerical minority, and so understanding the concept of a Muslim minority in terms of population alone is misleading and meaningless. Nevertheless, I believe that minority exists, but not in terms of population. As Abou Jahjah says, 'inequality, exclusion and discrimination' continue to subsist in the West. Minority in this sense, I would argue, refers to powerlessness in seeking help and protection from the resources in a society.

Nowadays, people in the West who have their origins in Muslim-majority countries have already completely settled. Their second and third generations see themselves as Europeans or Americans. To understand the reasons for how and why discrimination against Muslim minorities developed, we need to go back to the beginning, in which they emerged as a permanent presence first in Europe and then in America.

After the Second World War, European states encouraged the influx of people coming from their former colonies in West/South Asia and Africa in order to provide the necessary labour force for economic recovery. Most of these immigrants came from low-income groups, and a number of them were Muslim. Some of them were guest labourers and returned home after earning sufficient money. However, others chose to bring their families and settle in Europe permanently, whether the European governments expected this or not. When the economic boom ended and unemployment returned (especially after the 1973 oil crisis), European Muslim citizens were no longer perceived as neutral participants in the economy, but as alien competitors with local people, whether for employment or, more importantly, for welfare. At the same time, the increasing flow of illegal migrants and asylum-seekers from Muslim countries also worsened the impression Muslims gave in the eyes of the Europeans.<sup>10</sup> These experiences shaped an unfriendly attitude towards Muslim communities which is still visible from time to time. In the USA, the picture is different. Muslim communities have existed in the USA for generations as oppressed ethnic minorities and even slaves, particularly in the African community. (If we count only the period after World War II, Muslim migrants to the USA generally came from the middle and professional classes.)<sup>11</sup> Therefore, their problems are to a lesser extent economic, and are more ideological and political, as represented by, for example, the emergence of a hostile attitude towards Muslims after 9/11, anti-terrorism campaigns, and US foreign policy on Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine and other Muslim countries.<sup>12</sup>

10 See Nielsen, J., *Muslims in Western Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 3rd edn; Haddad, Y. Y., ed., *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

11 Z. H. Bukhari, S. S. Nyang, M. Ahmad and J. L. Esposito, eds, *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square: Hope, Fears, and Aspirations* (Walnut Creek, CA.: AltaMira Press, 2004), xvi–xx; Malik, I. H., *Islam and Modernity: Muslims in Europe and the United States* (London and Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2004).

12 Here, I provide only a very general picture in order to explain the formation of social conflicts between Muslim minorities and the social majorities, which vary both in degree and in character in different countries and regions. There is, undoubtedly, a diversity of Muslim living standards and forms of status in the West; some

In *Des Wilson's Minority Report*, Wilson, a well-known British social campaigner, examined the positions of minorities in the 1970s and identified several minorities or neglected communities, such as families living below the poverty line, homeless people, senior citizens suffering from depression, people suffering from mental and physical disabilities, or discrimination (such as police harassment of gypsies), ethnic minorities with reduced job opportunities, homosexuals suffering oppression, and, finally, those imprisoned without trial.<sup>13</sup> More than thirty years later, the above minorities still exist, but the question is: have these situations improved? I believe that the answer is affirmative in terms of protection of principles and law. In our everyday experience and from the media, we know that European countries and America do not, in principle, exclude citizens from education and training, employment and housing opportunities. The rights granted by citizenship are protected by law, irrespective of gender, ethnicity or religion. Most countries in the West are liberal democracies with social welfare programmes, and their policies take care of the disabled, senior citizens, children and (other ethnic) minorities. In some situations, even positive discrimination is observed in favour of the minority.<sup>14</sup> However, it is always arguable, not in principle but in degree, whether welfare coverage is sufficient, whether the distribution of wealth and resources is fair, and whether government and politicians pay adequate attention to the voice of minorities and to implicitly discriminatory, racist practices. Indeed, poverty, like minority, is a relative concept. No matter how wealthy a society is, there is still a low-income class. Therefore, it is impossible for a society to get rid of the problem of poverty in an absolute sense, but it is more

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Muslims may be very wealthy and welcomed, but others may be extremely poor and discriminated against in society. We need in-depth area and case studies to help us understand different kinds of social conflict, and these are beyond the scope of this book.

- 13 Des Wilson, *Des Wilson's Minority Report: A Diary of Protest 1970–73* (London: Quartet Books, 1973), 47.
- 14 For actual details of legal protection, see Brownlie, I. and Goodwin-Gill, G. S., eds, *Basic Documents on Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 5th edn.

feasible to provide citizens with a decent living in society through a proper redistribution of social resources.

This is not to normalize or simplify social problems or to suggest that there is nothing worth discussing. I am keenly aware of how difficult it will be to provide a so-called decent living to citizens since various interest groups may have different expectations of what a decent life means, and will each make demands on government or lobby it for social resources. What I wish to indicate here is that the concept of a Muslim minority, in the sense of powerlessness in seeking social resources, does not indicate problems significantly different from those faced by other minorities or families living below the poverty line. All such people feel a similar kind of 'inequality, exclusion and discrimination' vis-à-vis the majority: this is not a unique experience of Muslims in the West. The concept of a Muslim minority should, therefore, be dissolved into the concept of 'minority' in general. In other words, for the sake of constructive integration in society, 'Muslim minority' must be studied and contextualized as one category of social minorities. To fight against the marginalization of minorities, Muslims must always cooperate with other minorities and see themselves as part of society.<sup>15</sup>

### *Islam as a Distinctive System in the West*

However, the situation of Muslims seems to be further complicated by the fact that social problems do not simply emerge as a result of competition for

15 Modood has highlighted an urgent need to include Muslims in contemporary society. He shows that inclusion is not possible within some of the narrow forms of liberalism and argues that different minorities need to be accommodated in different ways. Such differential accommodation or multiculturalism cannot be the task of the state alone but must be shared across different civil society sectors. In the above discussion, I do not argue against multiculturalism *per se* since it is characterized by different degrees of accommodation between minority and majority; what I argue against is the complete separation of a Muslim minority from other minorities. See Modood, T., *Multiculturalism: a Civic Idea* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007).

political and economic resources. They are also related to conflict involving religious ideologies and rights, which results in further clashes with other ideologies or value systems such as nationalism and Christianity in the West. Let us take some examples to illustrate this. Abdul Hadi Hoffmann is ethnically German and became a Muslim during a period of working for a political party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), as a press spokesman. He was then removed from office and expelled from the party for which he had worked for sixteen years, for the reason that he is now a Muslim. This is a blatant case of religious discrimination, but it also involves German nationalist prejudice against non-Christian religions, since Hoffmann was perceived not simply as a Muslim convert but as a 'defector'.<sup>16</sup>

Another example that illustrates the conflict between Muslim religious rights and European secular ideology is the French government banning the wearing of Muslim headscarves in state schools in 2004. The reason for the ban was to preserve traditional French secularity, or 'laïcité' (*laïcité*), in the public domain. Other, similar cases can also be interpreted in this way, such as the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad published in 2005, in which Islam was seen as antithetical to the publishing freedom contained in the Danish press tradition, and the controversy provoked by the speech of Pope Benedict XVI in Germany in 2006, in which the use or misuse of Christian–Muslim discourses in medieval times was at issue. In this regard, we must be aware that the problem of ideological differences is always historical, rather than purely theoretical. Therefore, in the following, when I examine the distinctive system which creates an ideological boundary between Muslims and non-Muslims, the examination is in fact methodologically one-sided, since I ignore the historical counterpart. However, since my purpose is not to examine ideology as an event but to understand how this ideology helps to essentialize another concept (Muslim minority), the discussion will not be distorted by a lack

16 A. H. Hoffmann, 'Muslim in Germany: The Struggle for Integration', in Tamara Sonn, ed., *Islam and the Question of Minorities* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1996), 41–56.

of historical study. Now, I will focus on two interrelated ideologies: first, the ideas of *umma* and *dar*, and, second, the home–host dichotomy or the concept of diaspora. These two interrelated ideologies both encourage Muslims to consider the authenticity of Islam.

### *The Ideology of Umma and Dar*

To a certain extent, the concepts of *umma* and the three-abode division (*dar*) between Islam and non-Islam are in fact religious imagination constituted by memory of the past in Islamic history (i.e. they do not have a corresponding social reality in the present-day world). The Arabic term *umma* means people and community, and its additional meanings can refer to a morally exemplary person and to acting. In the Qur'an, *umma* usually refers to communities sharing a common religion (such as the *umma* of Jews, the *umma* of Christians and so forth), but in later history it almost always means the Muslim community as a whole, with the addition of regional, essentially non-political expressions (such as 'the *umma* in North America').<sup>17</sup> Compared with the concept of the nation-state in modern politics, *umma* is, therefore, the transnational community.

Furthermore, it is not understood in the modern sense that people can *choose* either to be politically active or quietists, or either religious believers or atheists. *Umma* is more inclined to represent a sense of belonging, identity and an all-embracing way of life. *Umma* is not purely conceptual in nature; it is geographical as well. The area it occupied and ruled is *dar al-Islam* (abode of Islam), while its counterpart is *dar al-harb* (abode of war), or *dar al-kufr* (abode of unbelief). Between these two abodes, there is another called *dar al-sulh* (abode of peace or peaceful arrangement) or *dar al-ahd* (abode of treaty). The names of these three divisions and the detailed characteristics of each abode vary according to different Islamic scholars,

17 F. M. Denny, 'Umma' in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill/London: Luzac, 1960–2004), new edn.

and are not our concern here.<sup>18</sup> When we review the articles published in the *Journal of Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* in relation to the concept of a Muslim minority, we see that, first and foremost, nearly all of them are based on the concept of a numerical minority since this is an empirical fact (although, as I argue above, it is also meaningless). It is not difficult to see that the issue at stake is how the Muslim minority should live in the abode of war/unbelief. This can be through *jihad* (fighting) against the non-Muslim majority; or through *hijra* (migration) to the abode of Islam/peace; or through staying put when conditions for migrating elsewhere are weak (*istidaf*) but being prepared to leave whenever possible.<sup>19</sup> For modern scholars, the *jihad-hijra* choice is a choice between two extremes: either Muslims fight against non-Muslims or they leave the country. Scholars emphasize a space in between these two extremes, which is a space for the abode of peace or, in Masud's term, the model offered by Abyssinia (615–22)/Hudaybiyya (628–30), in which Muslims lived peacefully and constructively under non-Muslim government. The issue is whether religious freedom, Muslim identity and community are protected or not. Also, from a constructive point of view, it concerns whether the Muslim minority can provide a role model for moral behaviour – whether such Muslims can be missionaries offering the Islamic message to non-Muslims in the West.<sup>20</sup> The first of these arguments is, however, ambiguous, since to what extent can we say that religious freedom is protected?

For example, the matter of wearing Muslim headscarves in public schools can always be argued from two sides. It can be argued either that a

18 See K. El Fadl, 'Islamic Law and Muslim Minorities: The Juristic Discourse on Muslim Minorities from the Second/Eight to the Eleventh/Seventeenth Centuries', *Islamic Law and Society* 1/2 (1994), 141–87.

19 M. K. Masud, 'Being Muslim in a Non-Muslim Polity: Three Alternate Models', *JIMMA* 10/1 (Jan. 1989), 118–28; O. Khalidi, 'Muslim Minorities: Theory and Experience of Muslim Interaction in Non-Muslim Societies', *JIMMA* 10/2 (July 1989), 425–37; S. Z. Abedin, 'A Word about Ourselves', *JIMMA* 13/1 (Jan. 1992), i–xvi.

20 Siddiqi, M. Y. M., *The Prophet Muhammad: A Role Model for Muslim Minorities* (Markfield, Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 2006); Nadwi, S. A. A., *Muslims in the West: The Message and Mission* (Markfield, Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1983).

ban violates the performing of an essential Islamic practice, or, alternatively, that being a Muslim is an insignificant thing and so it is not compulsory to wear a headscarf. To a degree, these arguments may be quite manipulative since they may depend on the intentions of individuals who want to argue for or against the integration of Islam in the West. They can always either minimize or maximize the importance of any particular Islamic practice or belief to suit their own agenda. The second of these possibilities is irrelevant since theoretically speaking, Muslims, be they in a minority or not, should be role models and missionaries to non-Muslims, and so the status of being a numerical minority represents only the passion involved in being and remaining a Muslim and the urgency of preaching Islam, rather than a factor to be considered in living in a non-Muslim area. In short, the concept of a Muslim minority is constituted (or mutually constituted) by the meaningless fact of being a numerical minority, the passion/emotion of being a Muslim, and, finally, the ambiguous nature of the preservation of Islamic practice, Muslim identity and Muslim communities in the West. I believe that people will continue to use the concept of a Muslim minority in their arguments, since it is very difficult to eliminate a concept which is ambiguous and emotion-driven.<sup>21</sup>

### *The Home–Host Dichotomy*

The historical phenomenon of diaspora or exile constitutes what I call the home–host dichotomy. It normally refers to people who are forced to leave their home country and live in a host or receiving country, since their home country is occupied by another political power or suffering from intolerable hardship (economic or other) owing to war and conflict. Examples include the Jewish diaspora, the occupation of Iraq by American troops and the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Similarly, political dissidents such as the Chinese students or scholars of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests

21 I do not, however, argue against the use of ‘Muslim minority’ in a descriptive way, such as regarding Muslim-minority countries or contexts.

were forced to leave China and may also be classed as a kind of diaspora, even though China was not occupied by another political power. What I want to make clear is that not everyone who leaves their home country (e.g. someone who leaves to study overseas) is entitled to be in diaspora or exile. However, the concept of diaspora changes dramatically over time.

As Safran says, '[Diaspora] is used so widely that it has become an academic growth industry – not only in political science, but also in anthropology, sociology, psychology, religious studies, history, and even literature.'<sup>22</sup> As in our discussion, Safran indicates that the term 'diaspora' mainly relates to the uniquely tragic experience of the Jews, but it has now come to be used rather freely, because discourses around multiple identities and minorities are becoming more acceptable or popular as a phenomenon in various human or social sciences. The term 'Diaspora' with a capital 'D' (to connote uniqueness) has been changed to 'diaspora' with a lower-case 'd' in order to indicate the popularity of the concept. Safran also points out (and I strongly agree) that membership and experience of diaspora are now detached from *real* historical events and *real* homelands. All the so-called experience and memory of diaspora is simply figurative and imaginary – what Werbner calls 'Imagined Diasporas.'<sup>23</sup> In Islam, the concepts of *umma* and the three-abode division constitute such a 'diaspora' Islam in the West.<sup>24</sup> When a reasonable person considers seriously the phrase 'Diaspora Islam', he or she will, I think, immediately be lost as regards what it really means. To a certain extent, this is another way of referring to what Roy means by the phrase 'Globalized Islam', but in a more negative sense. Muslims are not merely a minority but are also homeless, or rootless, in the place they reside, since it is no longer an 'Abode of Islam'. The concepts of abode of Islam and homeland are mistakenly muddled together in order to develop

22 W. Safran, 'Deconstructing and Comparing Diasporas', in Waltraud Kockt, Khachig Tölölyan and Carolin Alfonso, eds, *Diaspora, Identity and Religion: New Directions in Theory and Research* (London: Routledge, 2004), 9.

23 Werbner, P., *Imagined Diasporas among Manchester Muslims: The Public Performance of Pakistani Transnational Identity Politics* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002).

24 Clinton Bennett, *Muslims and Modernity: An Introduction to the Issues and Debates* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 184.

this perplexing idea of diaspora Islam. As was mentioned above, many Muslims in the West are in fact second- or third-generation European and American citizens, so where are their homes if not in the West? In terms of their national identity and social life, they cannot find a homeland outside the West, but via their family memories, religious education and their own imagination, they can!

As was mentioned above, the concept of Muslim minority is empirically founded on population numbers, but is similar to the imagined *umma*, imagined abodes and imagined diaspora of Islam. It is also detached from reality and becomes imaginary since, as Roy indicates, a Muslim minority can arise even in Muslim countries. For example, in Turkey, a Muslim country with a very strong Islamic heritage, Islam may still be considered to have been ‘minoritized’ owing to the very thorough commitment to Western modernity. This is what Roy calls ‘deterritorialisation’. This means that the concept of a Muslim minority, in the sense of Islamic systems being minoritized, exists worldwide rather than geographically, because of the globalization and modernization of Muslim countries.<sup>25</sup> I agree that there is a deterritorialization that has emerged, but I disagree with Roy’s placing it in a framework of a majority–minority dichotomy since the only concept of minority that I accept is that of powerlessness vis-à-vis social resources, as discussed above. The phenomenon of deterritorialization should be understood as ‘pluralization’ of systems of thought, value and ideology instead of as ‘minoritization’.

There is no doubt that in a particular country like China and America, or in countries resembling European countries, people will have similar kinds of lifestyle, language and culture; they may even have similar patterns of thinking. In Wittgenstein’s terms, we may call this a family resemblance. Furthermore, from a psychological viewpoint, humans may feel more comfortable living with people having things or ideas similar to those they themselves have. However, this does not mean that we can wholly equate the meaning of family resemblance with that of dominance or majority, because the former belongs to a philosophical discourse while the latter,

25 Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, 17–21.

in Foucault's terms, is a discourse of power. Similar ways of life or thinking do not necessarily determine a majority in term of influence in society, since it is not necessary for them to exclude plurality within similarity. In the contemporary West, there are many organized and non-organized cultural, philosophical and religious systems of thought and patterns of lifestyle. Also, Islam itself is not a homogeneous religion; as Al-Azmeh says, 'it is simply wrong to stereotype or essentialize Islam into a particular culture and so make it become the "Other" of the West.'<sup>26</sup> Islam or Islams are simply part of the many in the West. Therefore, Islam is pluralized, but not 'minoritized' as Roy suggests. If we want to insist on using the term 'minority' in a reasonable way, parallel with the logic of a numerical minority, we have to admit that it is not simply Islam that constitutes an ideological minority but that all kinds of thought are minorities as well.

In sum, 'Muslim minority' is simply an imaginary concept which is being used as a tool to set Muslim communities apart from other communities or social minorities in the West so as to obtain influence in society or, in Foucault's terms, power in the economy of discourse. The concept is being reified in an imagined majority–minority dichotomy with the intention of essentializing the persecuting counterpart, the non-Muslim majority, on the one hand and inscribing as a victim the Muslim communities, the Muslim minority, on the other. Neither of these aid social integration. However, we should understand that from a positive side, whether it is question-begging or not, the concept of a Muslim minority does stimulate some Muslims in the West to think about the authenticity of Islam. In the following, I identify two approaches. One is a de-essentialist approach, represented by Eickelman and Piscatori, Roy and El-Zein.<sup>27</sup> The other is an essentialist approach, represented by Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan. For de-essentialists, the issue of the authenticity of Islam does not exist, but only Muslims or the discourses of Muslims. For essentialists, the authenticity

26 Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities*, 17–18.

27 In our selection of scholars, these two approaches are mainly applied in the area of politics, but they are not confined to this area. These approaches can also be discussed in the areas of theology, religion, social sciences, civilization and the media. See Rippin, A., ed., *Defining Islam: A Reader* (London: Equinox, 2007).

of Islam will be characterized on the basis of an alleged universal standard, foundation or framework of reference. I will then examine the elusiveness of the concept of authenticity as suggested by Lee and answer the question of what authenticity is by examining the ideas of Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan in this context. I will then examine their responses to modernism and their social concern for Muslim communities.

## The Authenticity of Islam

For Eickelman and Piscatori, authenticity is a process of objectification of Muslim consciousness along the lines of ‘What is my religion?’, ‘Why is it important to my life?’, and ‘How do my beliefs guide my conduct?’. Their focus, however, is not on offering a sound answer to these questions from an Islamic or a specifically Muslim perspective, but on the effects of printing, mass communication, education, and the accessibility of authoritative religious texts to individual Muslims, which creates a huge amount of competition over the sacred authority of interpretation of the religious texts.<sup>28</sup> Such a focus de-essentializes the authenticity of Islam into contemporary social conditions. Similarly, for Roy, the authenticity of Islam is purely a political classification. He is not concerned with whether there is an authentic Islam or not. He asks, ‘which Muslims and which Islam are we discussing? [...] How are we to designate a specific attitude as “Muslim” or “Islamic”?’<sup>29</sup> Without a definite theological position, Roy resolves this problem by referring to the books, articles, sermons, interviews and websites prepared by contemporary Muslim individuals and communities, which makes them ‘Islamic’ in Roy’s definition. The authenticity of Islam is therefore de-essentialized through existing books, articles, sermons, interviews

28 D. F. Eickelman and J. Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton, NJ and London: Princeton University Press, 2004), 2nd edn, 37–45.

29 Roy, *Globalized Islam*, 6.

and websites. Finally, there is another way of de-essentializing Islam. From an anthropological viewpoint, El-Zein, in his article *Beyond Ideology and Theology: The Search for Anthropology of Islam*, examines Islam in various regions and concludes that the existing diversity of Islamic cultures and practices proves that there is indeed no such a thing as Islam but only 'Islams'. The universal concept of Islam as a unified religion is therefore dissolved into particular cultures, traditions, practices and ideological positions.<sup>30</sup>

What, then, is Islam? Instead of searching for a real Islam, we may need to step back and ask some more fundamental questions, such as what is the meaning of authenticity, and why do Muslim need to search for authenticity? In *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity*, Robert Lee points out what he calls the elusiveness of the concept of authenticity. On the one hand, authenticity requires the recognition of localism, that is, a particular culture and sense of belonging: '[m]y authentic being depends upon my family, my language, my religion, my place on the map, and my position in the flow of history [...]. To lead an authentic life means to be free to fashion my own world and therefore to create myself from the context I am dealt [...].'<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, to be authentic demands truth, or an answer to the question of 'what really is'. The authentic is, therefore, not simply authentic to me only, but also to others. A kind of foundation or frame of reference is required in which standards themselves can be validated or rejected and through which one can differentiate between what is authentic and what is not. These foundations, therefore, 'must be broad and general'. They 'must at least reflect some minimum common denominator in a universe dominated by diversity', and as a result, Lee says, '[a]uthenticity requires modification of particularistic assumptions, because the world itself demands standards, and particularity cannot provide standards.'<sup>32</sup> The foundation of Islam therefore needs to demonstrate both particularity and universality in order to be authentic. Having investigated the thought

30 Abdul Hamid M. El-Zein, 'Beyond Ideology and Theology: the Search for Anthropology of Islam', *Annual Review of Anthropology* vol. 6 (1977), 227–54.

31 Robert D. Lee, *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity: The Search for Islamic Authenticity* (Boulder, CO; Oxford: Westview, 1997), 2.

32 *Ibid.*, 181–2.

of Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan in previous chapters, in the following, I aim to explore and compare their ideas about this particular issue, which has had a significant impact on Islam in the West.

We can see that Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan claim authenticity for Islam in this elusive way. For Nasr, authenticity lies in the connection between Traditional Islam as the particular, while at the same time Traditional Islam is a member tradition of the Universal Tradition, the Ultimate Reality. Therefore, Traditional Islam shares the same source of Universal Truth/Reality. Authenticity lies in the recognition of sacred tradition and its unfolding through all forms of entities and activities. This sacred tradition is therefore shared by both Muslims and non-Muslims, and what Nasr hopes is to form the authentic foundation for a shared standard through this sacred tradition shared, as Lee proposes, between these two parties living in the West. For Tibi, modernization, globalization and the universalization of norms and values will be harmonized through rational and secular Islam, a specific version of Islam. Therefore, he repeatedly emphasizes that we have to distinguish Islam from Islamism. The former is authentic Islam, while the latter is inauthentic. Like Nasr, Tibi hopes to make use of secularity as the authentic foundation of a shared standard between Muslims and non-Muslims in the West. Finally, Ramadan argues that authenticity lies in the connection between being a European Muslim practising a European Islam, the particular geographical and cultural religion, and being a member of the universal *umma*. Put another way, to be an authentic Muslim in Europe means to be authentically European as well. For Ramadan, the platform for communication and critique between Muslims and non-Muslims is the authentic foundation of a shared standard.

We have to ask whether these three pairs of particular and universal are mutually exclusive or not. In my interpretation they are not, since the concerns of Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan are different. For Nasr and his students, sacred tradition and sacred forms of life have primacy. They occupy a higher level of quality than does modernity, which is only secondary, albeit necessary, while for Tibi, human reason and secularism have primacy, which is why he mocks the modernism proposed by political Islamists as 'semi-modernism' which will not be successful. For Ramadan, what has primacy is the formulation of a communicative critique between Muslims and

non-Muslims through the interpretation of religious texts and contemporary contexts or modernity. One thinker, therefore, focuses on the vertical or hierarchical dimension and the other two on the horizontal. In view of this, Nasr may overlook the significance of the horizontal dimension that Tibi and Ramadan are concerned with, while Tibi and Ramadan may fail to notice the significance of the vertical dimension. It is therefore not contradictory to put them together so that they may complement each other.

Before proceeding further into this discussion, I will try to articulate how the three thinkers make use of the tension between the particular and universal in order to respond to modernism. As was mentioned in Chapter 1, Nasr should be classified as a proponent of the counter-trend of modernism, since he argues strongly against secularism (the radical trend) and proposes the sacred form of life at all levels of the human world, arguing that this ranks higher than rationality. Nasr does not have any hope in modernism unless it recognizes sacred tradition. In Chapters 3 and 4, we saw how Tibi and Ramadan intend to separate but maintain a normative relationship between Islam and modernism, and so they should both be classified as proponents of the moderate trend of modernism. But the thinking of Tibi is more radical than that of Ramadan, since Tibi asks for a complete *separation* between the spheres of religion and politics while Ramadan only indicates a *distinction* between these two spheres. For Nasr and Ramadan (though not for Tibi), modernism is not exclusive to one particular model, and therefore secularization or privatization of religion is not a prerequisite. Understood in this way, the ideas of both implicitly propose the concept of multiple modernisms, in which different societies or subcultures can develop their own version of modernism without the requirement of secularization.<sup>33</sup> For them, religion or Islam is always relevant in the modern public sphere, or Islam would not be able to stand alone without the human world. Therefore, they are articulating not only the authenticity of Islam, but at the same time an authentic version of modernism to reconcile with Islam.

33 S. N. Eisenstadt, 'Multiple Modernities', in S. N. Eisenstadt, ed., *Multiple Modernities* (Cambridge, MA: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2000), 1–29.

For Nasr, this authentic modernism is sacralized modernity with sacred tradition as its foundation. This modernism, therefore, offers authority since it corresponds to Truth/Reality; it generates the purpose, meaning, impulse and passion of human life, because people recognize that everything they do in this world has a religious or sacred significance corresponding to the Reality in Heaven, and that Reality in Heaven and individuals on Earth are therefore connected. However, both Tibi and Ramadan propose universal concepts of equality, justice, respect, trust, goodness and the like that coalesce different communities in a utopian future. For Tibi, authentic modernism is founded upon cultural modernism as the ideal for all of humanity; for Ramadan, authentic modernism empowers people with rationality to pursue commonalities shared by both Muslims and non-Muslims. Again, these two authentic versions (Nasr and Tibi–Ramadan) of modernism are not mutually exclusive, so they can complement each other in a similar way, as discussed previously. However, they place emphasis on different social classes.

In Chapter 2 I argued that, if we do not extend the thought of Nasr to societal domains, we may gain the impression that his thought is purely spiritual or concerned solely with a conflict of religion versus secularism. It does not have much social implication or relevance to Islam in the West. However, when we extract its social ideas, we find that it indeed supports an elitist approach to governing society.<sup>34</sup> Instead of listening to and following the voice of common citizens in a democratic society, Nasr and his students prefer a hierarchical social system such as the monarchies in the UK or Japan, but unlike the UK or Japan, whose monarchies are merely nominal, they propose a more substantial social hierarchy in which the monarchy or upper class (i.e. an aristocracy) has real ruling authority over the lower class. (Also, of course, religious clerics are the elite.) For Nasr and his students, social hierarchy, which generates authority, is authentic since it corresponds to the hierarchal structures of realities. It operates

34 The concept of an elite has multiple meanings. In the meaning consistent with the thought of Nasr, it mainly refers to those people who play a leading role or hold a position of influence in a particular profession.

under Divine Law, and the interpretation of the Law is the prerogative of the religious class. This upper-class or elite mentality is still valid for Muslims in the West. For Nasr, the concept of a Muslim minority is no longer understood in the negative sense discussed in this chapter, or in the way Tibi and Ramadan understand it as described in Chapters 3 and 4. Instead, upper-class Muslims represent a social elite, and that is why their number is small. These people should strive to move upwards in society, to form the elite or leading class in society in various fields, which is why Nasr asks Muslim scientists to occupy authoritative positions in the field of science in order to transform the modern secular sciences into sacred sciences. The concept of a Muslim minority is, therefore, positively constructed in the light of Nasr's Traditional Islam.

On the other hand, the thinking of Tibi and Ramadan seems less hierarchical; it is more concerned with the situation of average Muslims or, in Ramadan's terms, grass-roots Muslims, who are relatively passive, powerless, and isolated from upper-class Muslims and society. Unlike Nasr, they adhere to the negative connotation of the concept of a Muslim minority in the West, and therefore they deny it and promote equal and consistent treatment for all citizens. For Tibi, unless they accept rationalism and secularity, Muslims in the West will isolate themselves from mainstream society (i.e. ghettoization), and Tibi is also worried about the conflicts between Islamism and secular Islam. Secular Islam may have failed, since Islamism is empowered by ideas of identity politics and ethnic rights while secular Islam is weakened by ideas of cultural relativism and postmodernism. For Ramadan, the experiences and situation of average Muslims shape his thinking about European Muslims. Understood in this way, the ideas of both Tibi and Ramadan are not primarily predicated on an influential Muslim class in Europe. On the contrary: they support the growth of a sizeable class of 'average' European Muslims. Again, their (Nasr's and Tibi-Ramadan's) social concerns are not mutually exclusive, since the thinking of Nasr aims to encourage a Muslim elite to emerge in the West, while that of Tibi and Ramadan is concerned with change in the world-view of grass-roots Muslims.

If the thinking of both Tibi and Ramadan is promoting rationalism and secularity, as was discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, then why does Tibi accuse

the thought of Ramadan of being Islamist?<sup>35</sup> In my opinion, Tibi misinterprets the idea of *dar al-shahada* as simply another version of *dar al-Islam*, without considering the explanation of Ramadan for this new phrase and its implications for Islam in the West. *Dar al-shahada* must be understood together with the idea of the 'New We', which is based on equal rights and a status of common citizenship shared by both Muslims and non-Muslims in compliance with a country's constitution. Understood in this way, this new idea cannot easily be reduced to another version of *dar al-Islam*. In Chapter 4, I offered some thoughts regarding the dichotomies between Islam and the West and between Islam and Islamic political ideology, and these to some extent were indirect critiques of the thought of Tibi as well. My fundamental criticism relates to its communicative power. Following the analysis in Chapters 3 and 4, we can make a deeper evaluation of this problem. First of all, the accusation Tibi directs at Ramadan is similar to that of Habermas. There is no way Tibi can accept Islamist discourse such as that around *dar al-Islam*, *sharia* and *jihad* appearing in the public domain, but unfortunately, the term *sharia* is quite central to the thinking of Ramadan. In addition, the methodological distinction between science and religion, for example, and their unity in the purpose of the Islamic view, also constitute a kind of semi-modernism in the view of Tibi. Finally, Ramadan likes to discuss his concept of the European Muslim using Islamic terminology, and so it is difficult for Tibi not to think that his idea is Islamist.

Second, if my reading of Ramadan in Chapter 4 is correct, his idea is in fact to bring about a 'creeping secularization' (vis-à-vis the creeping Islamization of Tibi) among Muslims, starting from their own Islamic language (known world-view), followed by persuading them to gradually change their world-view to make it more rational and secular (unknown world-view: a distinction between the spheres of religion and politics), so helping them to make the conceptual transition from being potential Islamists to being rational and secular Muslims. And this is what Tibi wants to achieve as well. I will therefore classify the way of Ramadan as 'cultural translation' as against the idea of cultural borrowing proposed by Tibi. The

35 Bassam Tibi, *Islam in Global Politics*, Ch. 5.

idea of cultural translation is not new in cultural studies. It 'can be understood as a mode of self-understanding based on a relation to otherness.'<sup>36</sup> It is

a logic of mutations, innovations, appropriations, *borrowings*, recombinations, transferences and substitution. Cultural translation in this sense concerns the symbolic and cognitive process by which cultural aspects of a given collective identity are appropriated by a different one, which will variously adapt, transfigure, subvert it. In the resulting re-codification of identity, new symbolic orders, cognitive structures and social imaginaries are created.<sup>37</sup>

Cultural translation can be understood in terms of different degrees of appropriation and combination of two different cultures and the creation of a new identity and world-view. Therefore, it does not exclude the use of cultural borrowing such as Tibi prefers. Ramadan's way of thinking demonstrates a degree of cultural translation between Islamic and European civilizations, since it attempts to translate the ideas of rationalism and secularity into an Islamic world-view using Islamic terminology. Of course, compared with cultural borrowing, it takes a longer time to achieve the goal of rationalization and secularization, but I think it is worth waiting. In the following, I will outline the factors that may need to be considered if we wish to create a better relationship between Islam and the West.

## Islam in the Modern World: Four 'R's'

Congruent with the pluralistic view of religion in relation to modernism that I assert in Chapter 1, the relationship between Islam and modernism should also be multiple. The approaches to modernism of Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan represent only three specific models (albeit insightful ones) of this

36 Gerard Delanty, 'Cultural Translations and European Modernity', in Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Yitzhak Sternberg, eds, *Comparing Modernities: Pluralism Versus Homogeneity* (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2005), 447.

37 *Ibid.*, 448. Italics mine.

relationship, respectively: recognition of sacred tradition, or an emphasis on secularization, or an emphasis on human critique. I do not seek here to provide a grand or comprehensive theory or universal idea about Islam in the modern world; I will keep my summary concise and to the point, hoping to reserve a space for more creative imagining. After such an in-depth study of my three Muslim thinkers, in the following I wish to summarize the implications of their thought in terms of four 'R's': *relationship*, *recognition*, *religiosity* and *reflexivity*. These four R's, in my opinion, offer a good perspective in which to consider a healthy and constructive relationship between Islam and modernism.

### *Relationship*

In theory, the relationship between Islam and the modern world can be either constructive or destructive, but no matter what the relationship is, it is inevitable. People are caught in a web of relationships, and this is also true in Islam. The thought of Nasr proposes a vertical relationship between Islam and the modern world. Islam connects the sacred tradition in Heaven with modernity on Earth. Tibi and Ramadan, however, recommend a horizontal relationship: Islam not only connects various Muslim communities (the *umma*), but also includes relationships with non-Muslims in society. Relationship is therefore the most important implication. Without it, it will be impossible to maintain Islam as a living religion in the future, since it will become irrelevant for modern people. What they strive for is a constructive relationship between Islam and the modern world, and this is always possible, though difficult, in the contemporary West. Therefore, we cannot simplify the approach of Nasr as merely spiritual, or as withdrawal from the modern world. The three thinkers actually engage in modernism in order to bring about a mutual transformation.

### *Recognition*

Among various value systems or moral systems existing in the West, the Christian and secular systems are more often recognized than Islam, even

though Islam is one of the possible choices. From Nasr and Ramadan, we learn that recognition of Islam in the modern world can be twofold, either positive or negative. For Nasr, the sacred or spiritual values and practices of traditional religions must be recognized in order to create a good relationship between religion/Islam and modernism. This is a positive or active recognition, and is therefore confrontational in nature. By contrast, the thought of Tibi urges an opposite kind of confrontation, since he emphasizes the privatization of religion. For Ramadan, cooperation and communication between Muslims and non-Muslims are essential. The status or rights of Muslim communities should be given equal and consistent treatment as with any community in society, secular or not: this recognition is, therefore, more negative or passive. From their approaches to modernism, we can see that confrontation and cooperation may complement each other. Moreover, they both stimulate our thinking about recognition in this pluralistic world, and help us understand in *which situations* we should adopt a more positive recognition and in which a more negative, instead of practising either/or thinking, acknowledged or not.

### *Religiosity and Reflexivity*

For Nasr, faith in the higher level of Reality makes people more humble, more sympathetic and more respectful towards the Divine, the living environment, and the experiences of other human beings and animals. This religiosity offers to human beings meaning, impulse, and the passion to put what they believe into practice, and it therefore generates an existential or real authority over humans. However, it also prevents humans from transgressing established ethical and social norms, which makes society more stable and safe but also reluctant to change. For Tibi and Ramadan, human rationality offers reflection on and a critique of established ideology or authoritative discourse. Such reflection encourages change, reform and innovation regarding existing ideology, problems, situations or environments. It enables humans to progress from one stage to another. Therefore, both are essential factors in contemporary society; we cannot highlight one but neglect the other. Both encourage us to think, first, that Islamic

religiosity does not equate with backward or 'uncivilized' and that Islam is not non-reflective or irrational; and secondly, that, religiosity and reflexivity should be maintained in a more creative balance in relation to our social development.

The above four R's do not, of course, represent complete solutions regarding the relationship between Islam and modernism, but I believe that they are major perspectives or factors to be considered by Muslims in seeking to preserve a constructive or normative relationship with, and being an authentic minority in, the West. In the following, concluding chapter, I would like to suggest a bold action that we should take right now in respect of Western book publication and the direction that further research concerning Islam and the West might take.



## Making a Small Change for a Better Future for Islam in the West

Since 9/11, feelings of fear and anxiety between Muslims and non-Muslims have hovered over the West. Events like the film *Innocence of Muslims* (2012), the burning of the Qur'an by some US pastors (2010), a ban on constructing minarets in Switzerland (2009), the 'problematic' speech of Pope Benedict XVI on Islam (2006), the Danish cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad (2005), the ban on wearing Islamic headscarves in French public schools (2004) and the Rushdie affair (*The Satanic Verses*) (1989) suggest that similar events will occur again and again in the future. Islamophobia has now become a common term in the media, as if there were no other appropriate word to describe the fear some non-Muslims in the West have of Muslims. What is the future of Islam in the West in these 'Dark Ages'? In Chapter 5, I discussed the past situation of Muslims in the West and some possible reasons why feelings of hatred were aroused between Muslims and non-Muslims (in relation to the competition for employment and welfare and the fear of Islam after 9/11). In Chapters 2, 3 and 4, I introduced the thought of Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan in order to investigate whether there might be possible ways of thinking open to Muslims living in the West as positive as those available to their fellow non-Muslim citizens, and whether non-Muslims can also live without fear with their fellow Muslim citizens. In short, shared Sacredness (Nasr), shared secularity (Tibi), and a shared platform of communication (Ramadan) between Muslims and non-Muslims represent these thinkers' intellectual contributions to our thinking about Islam in the West. However, in Chapter 3, Huntington reminded us that 'the dominant elements in the host civilization, in most cases the West, have to be willing to embrace the convert [Western Muslims]'. We should ask, then, what action Westerners should take in order to show such

willingness. Also, what direction for future study can help to improve the relationship between Islam and the West? In this concluding chapter, I hope to suggest a bold but feasible action, along with some possible future avenues of research which Western academics and publishing houses could consider as a gesture of willingness.

In Chapter 1, I considered Kant's definition of the Enlightenment as suggesting a possible advent for the discussion of modernism, according to which the relationship between religion and modernism has already endured for at least two hundred years. Understandings of religion should, therefore, be diverse, corresponding to what I have identified as radical, counter- and moderate trends. Similarly, the views of different intellectuals about the relationship between Islam and the West may be placed in the following five broad categories:

1. Islam has not yet experienced the normal process of Western modernism – mainly its secularism – and hence, Islam is not compatible with modernism.<sup>1</sup>
2. The proper Islamic response to modernism is back-to-Islam, which means reverting to a perfect and untainted Islam. By and large, this kind of thought can be called Salafism.
3. Following premises (1) and (2), the difference between Islam and the West is clearly unambiguous: their cultures appear to be distinct by nature, and therefore the Muslim world easily becomes the imagined post-Cold War enemy of the West and inevitably falls into what Samuel Huntington called a 'clash of civilizations' in the present modernized world.<sup>2</sup>

- 1 For a division of Islamic responses similar to categories (1), (2) and (4) see Malik, *Islam and Modernity*, 5–6. When people argue that Islam is not compatible with modernity, 'modernity' to a certain degree refers to modernism in our usage, which includes secularism; while when people argues the other way round, the term mainly refers to contemporary society, including modern science, technology and social institutions, which is similar to the conception of Seyyed H. Nasr discussed in Ch. 2.
- 2 See Huntington, S. P., *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

4. At best, Islam can be modernized in a dynamic way like the West has been, with Islam developing its own version of the modern Islamic world; at worst, Islam can imitate the process of modernization of the West make itself compatible with modernity.
5. In line with premise (4), Western modernity, in the form of political and economic liberalism, will eventually prevail around the world, and so it is universal, rather than a merely Eurocentric project. This is what Francis Fukuyama asserts.<sup>3</sup>

There is a certain amount of truth in all the above. However, especially after 9/11, this multifarious interaction between Islamic discourses and modernism at the level of various social domains or classes seems to have become reduced to ‘Islamization’ (discussed in Chapter 3), the ‘clash of civilizations’ (Chapter 4) and ‘the Muslim minority’ (Chapter 5).<sup>4</sup> Since 9/11, these three discourses have increasingly been emphasized in the media and in academia, and unfortunately, all of them are unfriendly to Muslim communities. Instead of merely studying a long-term solution from Muslim perspectives, can we ask Westerners to do something right now to *bring about a little change*? I have a bold suggestion to make to Western academic book publishers, being as I am a student of Islamic studies and familiar with the academic profession (analogous suggestions may be made regarding other professions). My suggestion is that publishers should, when planning textbooks or introductory books on Western religious, philosophical or political thought, always include a chapter or two on contemporary Western Muslim thinkers in the relevant discipline. In the following, I will provide my rationale for this suggestion.

3 See Fukuyama, Francis, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Perennial, 2002).

4 Islamization in Tibi’s sense means its ideological influence in the political or public spheres, whereas it has another meaning, namely the growth of the Muslim population in the West. However, statistics concerning Muslim populations are always contentious and unreliable, and so in this book I do not examine Islamization in this numerical sense.

## Accepting Muslim Thinkers in the West as Western Thinkers

For me, Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan are well qualified to be religious and political thinkers, especially Nasr, who in 2001 was the first Muslim scholar to be invited to be part of the Library of Living Philosophers series, which is restricted to prominent world-class thinkers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur. However, the question that concerns me here is, if Nasr is classed as being among Western religious thinkers or philosophers, why are his thoughts seldom published as a component part of general Western religious and philosophical textbooks, and instead published mainly in specifically Islamic books?

To answer this question, we have to consider two academic boundaries established in European universities. The first is the boundary within religions, and the second one is the boundary between religion and philosophy. As we know, the European medieval institutions generally considered to have been early universities were established for the study of the arts, law, medicine, and *theology*, and these universities mainly evolved from much older schools and monasteries. There is no doubt that for a long time the study of Christian theology dominated European academia as the *only* religion included in religious studies. Even in respect of publications in the 1960s or later, we can still occasionally find books whose title includes the word 'religion' which are in fact studies of Christianity alone.<sup>5</sup> I am not saying that the authors of these books should select for study people of different religions; what I am articulating is that the ideology and the usage of conflating Christianity with religion *in toto* is problematic. It is similar to naming the Jewish or Hebrew Bible the 'Old Testament'. From the Christian perspective, it is not simply 'politically incorrect': it also misrepresents other religions.

Fortunately, this ideology and usage in religious studies in Europe and the USA has gradually changed. Among many contributory factors, credit

5 See e.g. Rupp, E. G., *Six Makers of English Religion, 1500–1700* (London: Hodder, 1964). All the makers are Christians.

should be paid to the work of Mircea Eliade and his phenomenology of religious studies. Basically, Eliade tried to articulate the essence or commonality of religious experience, which is, as Nasr also tells us, the sacred experience in response to the Divine or the Holy.<sup>6</sup> It exists in all religions, not just Christianity. It has its problems as a theory (the classic one being over-generalization of the sacred to all religions), but it does help to elevate the status of 'Religion' as an academic discipline in itself, rather than an attachment to or a by-product of the study of Christianity.

As regards recent academic publications in the West, a book with the word 'religion' in the title may very well include discussions of non-Christian religions: that is, Christianity no longer dominates as the only religion in academic study. But there is still sometimes disappointment. Two particular reference books are worth mentioning here since they also relate to the next boundary, that between philosophy and religious studies. Their titles are *Twentieth-century Western Philosophy of Religion, 1900–2000* (Long, 2000) and *Twentieth-century Religious Thought* (Macquarrie, 2002).<sup>7</sup> Both claim to be studies of religion or religious thought, but they only examine Christianity and Western philosophy. From this, we can see that although many scholars like Eliade have tried their best to eradicate this ideology and usage, it still appears from time to time.

The secondary boundary is the separation between philosophy and religious studies. In the hierarchy of the liberal arts in the Middle Ages, philosophy was the servant or handmaiden of theology, the so-called *ancilla theologiae* articulated by Thomas Aquinas.<sup>8</sup> However, in the course of modernism in the field of academia, the former servant, philosophy, dethroned theology as the mistress of science. As with the moderate trend identified in Chapter 1, there is an ideological tendency to separate the study of theology and philosophy in order to preserve the autonomy of each, though this is

6 Eliade, M., *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961).

7 Long, E. T., *Twentieth-century Western Philosophy of Religion, 1900–2000* (Dordrecht and Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic, 2000); Macquarrie, J., *Twentieth-century Religious Thought* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002), new edn.

8 See Gilson, É., *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages* (New York: Scribner, 1948).

not always the case. Nowadays, however, given the more open, interdisciplinary and pluralistic Western academic culture, the so-called conflict between theology and philosophy has gradually faded away, and the same is true regarding their separation. Therefore, if we read the above two books again, we can find discussions of Gadamer, Ricoeur, Habermas, and many other Western philosophers and Christian theologians. Their practice is to put philosophy and Christian theology side by side in order to create a deeper understanding of their influence upon and dialogue with each other. Philosophy and religious studies ‘cross over’ again with each other in recent academic research, but again, ‘religion’ most often refers merely to Christianity.

If the above two boundaries are to be blurred (i.e. if religious studies are no longer to be dominated by Christianity alone) this will, for example, include Islam, and studies of philosophy and religion will no longer be mutually exclusive. So, why can I not find one Muslim thinker in the two books cited above, or similar books? Are they not ‘Western’ enough?<sup>9</sup> If we read the history of Western philosophy or religious thought, it is not unusual to find a basic introduction to the thought of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) or Ibn Rushd (Averroes) as examples of Islamic philosophy in the Middle Ages. To a certain extent, they are part of the history of Western philosophy. In my view, contemporary Muslim thinkers should be presented as part of the modern history of both Western philosophy and Western religious thought in the same way. I believe (cf. my conclusion to Chapter 5) that this reflects, in fact, another hidden prejudice (or unconscious ideology) of academics (and book publishers) regarding Western Muslim thinkers, one which views them as the ‘Other’ of the West *even though they actually are Western thinkers*. In the final part of this book, I will suggest some research that may be worth carrying out in the future vis-à-vis relationships between Islam and the West.

9 Of course, I have not read every Western philosophical or religious textbook or reference book, and I hope that readers of this book may bring to my attention books of this kind which discuss contemporary Western Muslim thinkers.

## Directions for Future Research

Four other areas have stimulated me during my research into the thought of Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan. The first is furthering the comparative study of philosophers and Muslim thinkers, as in this book; the second is the communitarian-liberal debate in Islamic political thought; the third is the public relevance of Muslim theology and, accordingly, the role of Muslims as public intellectuals; and the fourth concerns Christian–Muslim relations and rewriting the history of Western religious thought. I am not saying that the above four categories of research are not available in existing scholarship; I just want to emphasize their significance.

### *Comparative Study of Philosophers and Muslim Thinkers*

There are numerous possibilities for research comparing Western and Muslim thinkers. Examples might be research that compares and contrasts the thinking of: Nasr and Alasdair MacIntyre on moral tradition; Tibi and John Rawls on political consensus; Ramadan and Habermas on communicative theory; or Mohammed Arkoun and Jacques Derrida (or other poststructuralists and postmodernists).

### *Situating Islamic Political Thought in Modern Communitarian-Liberal Debate*

The communitarian-liberal debate is an important intellectual debate in modern political thought, and it will be fascinating to observe the contributions of Muslim thinkers to it. It is not difficult to situate the thought of Tibi and Ramadan (among many others) in the political spectrum as liberal, but who is qualified to be a Muslim communitarian? Nasr and his students? We have to define the meaning of communitarianism clearly in order to answer this question. My own view is that it may be difficult to argue that they are communitarians without distorting their ideas. This question demands further investigation.

### *The Public Relevance of Muslim Theology*

My book can be placed in this category as well, since it relates to the public relevance of Muslim theology or thought and people can argue that Nasr, Tibi and Ramadan are public intellectuals in the West, though it is arguable whether Nasr is so since he is sensitive about expressing his views at specific political and social events. Moreover, my book focuses on these thinkers' approaches and methodology in response to modernism rather than on practical criticisms of social and moral issues (i.e. applied ethics), so I do not articulate their role as public intellectuals here. More research of this kind (on the applied ethics of Islam regarding modern society) should certainly be carried out.

### *Christian–Muslim Relations*

Comparative studies of Christian and Muslim thought will usually treat one or other of them unfairly owing to the religious affiliation of the researcher. (Of course, this can be resolved if the researcher is neither Muslim nor Christian, but normally a researcher will not have an interest in studying two religions if he or she is not an adherent of at least one of them.) However, if we can use the thinking of such religious adherents to critique various modern concepts or ideas such as capitalism or the philosophy of science, the bias will be minimized, since they are not criticizing each other. For example, we can articulate the contribution and critiques of Nasr and Alister McGrath regarding the modern philosophy of science. I believe that this kind of research will help to improve and enrich Christian–Muslim relations.

### *Rewriting the History of Western Religious Thought*

The history of Western religious thought should, I would suggest, be rewritten in order to incorporate the ideas of contemporary Western Muslim thinkers. Today's Western Muslim thinkers deserve a status similar to that

of Avicenna and Averroes, who occupy one chapter or two in textbooks in this field. It is true that strictly speaking I am referring here to the writings of existing scholarship rather than to ongoing research, but my suggestion is aimed above all at stimulating an awareness of Muslim thinkers as an integral element of thought in the West.



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