Historični seminar 8

Uredila
Katarina Keber in
Luka Vidmar

HISTORIČNI SEMINAR 8

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Against the Grain: Rethinking Islam in an Inhospitable World

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ABSTRACT

This article examines some ideas developed by progressive Muslim intellectuals in the late twentieth century. Challenging traditionalist and fundamentalist interpretations of Islam as well as the secularist discourse of Western modernity, these alternative Islamic discourses have often been met with a hostile response or reception in the Muslim world, and have been ignored in the West in the wake of the influential "Clash of Civilizations" theory.

KEYWORDS

contemporary Islam, modern Islamic thought

IZVLEČEK

Članek obravnava ideje, ki so jih konec 20. stoletja razvili napredni muslimanski intelektualci. Ti alternativni islamski diskurzi, ki so izzvali tako tradicionalistične in fundamentalistične interpretacije islama kakor tudi sekularistično misel sodobnega Zahoda, so v muslimanskem svetu pogosto naleteli na sovražen odziv ali sprejem, na Zahodu pa so jih prezrli zaradi teze o spopadu civilizacij.

KLJUČNE BESEDE

sodobni islam, sodobna islamska misel

In the wake of Samuel Huntington's influential 1993 article "The Clash of Civilizations" (subsequently turned into a highly successful book) and Benjamin Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld*, the dialogue between the West and the Muslim world has become extremely polarized. After the events of September 11th, 2001, this trend has only accelerated to such an extent that the debate is no longer couched in terms of dialogue but outright confrontation. Both camps now consider themselves to be under siege by the other side. Consequently, there is an increasing perception in the West that Islam is openly antagonistic to and incompatible with Western values. Given the anti-Western rhetoric issuing from substantial numbers of self-proclaimed

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spokespersons for Islam, it is understandable that such views have become widespread and taken root in Western public opinion.

What is often forgotten is that moderate voices still exist in the Muslim world. Unfortunately, in the present climate they have less and less chance of being heard. Even more regrettable is that the proponents of such views are facing an increasingly inhospitable environment within the Muslim world itself. In his article "The Crisis within Islam," Richard W. Bulliet opined that what he called the "silence" of that "other Islam" is the result of a crisis of authority in the Muslim world: nobody speaks on behalf of the more moderately inclined Muslims. I would argue that instead of silence it is more appropriate to speak of a "drowning out" of alternative voices.[1]

There are present-day Muslim thinkers that propose alternative ways of engagement with Islam as a religion, its civilizational tradition in a broader sense, and its place in a globalizing world. Within the Islamic world, however, their position is extremely precarious. Where freedom of expression is not suppressed by the state (not infrequently assisted by a like-minded traditionalist religious establishment), their participation in intellectual debate is curtailed by the disproportionate influence of militant Muslims. Consequently, many such intellectuals have been subjected to severe criticism, have failed to find a forum in which to develop their ideas, or have even suffered outright persecution.[2]

I believe this lack of tolerance is indicative of a widespread lack of self-confidence (and self-criticism) and a sense of insecurity. The roots of these feelings can be traced back to the colonial experiences of most Muslim countries during the age of Imperialism, but the sense of crisis became more acute in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the case of the Middle East, the two Arab defeats in the wars against Israel in 1967 and 1973 heralded the bankruptcy of both the traditional monarchies and the supposedly revolutionary and emancipatory regimes founded on secular nationalist or socialist ideologies. In their despair, many Arab Muslims saw no alternative but a return to their own Islamic heritage, often opting for a literalist interpretation that left no room for accommodating differing perspectives.

The traditional or orthodox Islamic view of society, religion, ethics, politics, and education functions in a continuum because the real and the political had to be constructed in the image of the ideal and the divine. In the perceived union between the sacred and the profane, there can be no distinction between religious affairs and political activities. Muslims' ultimate religious aim is to submit themselves to the will of God, manifested in the form of divine law, the *Sharî'a*. This makes it imperative to participate in a political system that seeks to conform itself to that law.

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[1] Kersten, Collateral Damage, p. 1.
[2] Kersten, Collateral Damage, p. 1; cf. also Kamrava, *The New Voices of Islam*, pp. 24, 101.

Traditional Islamic politics do not foresee the need for a legislature – the *Sharî'a* is the given divine law – but they do recognize the need for interpretation. This interpretation is meant to be inherently dynamic because of the lack of formal institutionalization in the form of a clerical organization and hierarchy. From the earliest periods onwards, interpretation emerged from debates among the *'Ulamâ'* or Islamic scholars, and a diversity of opinions was not considered problematic but was even encouraged. The onset of rapid changes resulting from European incursions, interventions, and eventual occupation of large parts of the Muslim world eroded the importance of these traditional *'Ulamâ'* in the system of governance in favor of a professional bureaucracy. These were initially staffed by Western-educated elites and then as time progressed by the graduates of a secular, often foreign-imposed local education system.

The contours of a countercurrent to stem this trend began to take shape in the late nineteenth century.[3] Islamic reformist thinkers like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh propagated a reinvigorated Islam, drawing inspiration from the primary scriptures the Qur'an and the *Hadith*, the body of texts containing the "traditions" of the Prophet and the actions of the first generations of Muslims, known as the *al-salaf al-salih* or "Pious Predecessors." These were the roots of the *Salâfi* movement: Islamic revivalism based on a return to a perceived "original" Islam. Some of the early reformists were especially enamored with Arabia's Wahhabi movement because at the time it was not just the only real-life model of the political implementation of the *Salâfi* doctrine, but it was also one of the few places where Western influence was, for the time being, held at bay. The problem is that Wahhabism was and is fiercely intolerant – even outright hostile – towards any other strands of traditional Islam, especially Islamic mysticism or Sufism and Shi'a Islam. In fact, anything that did not comply with the narrow literalist Wahhabi interpretation of the scriptures was considered *Shirk* or polytheism and therefore unbelief.[4]

Wahhabism's function as the state doctrine in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has had worldwide impact because since the 1920s it has controlled the holy places of Mecca and Medina, the centers of Muslim pilgrimage and learning. These sites are visited by Muslims from around the world that often stay for prolonged periods of time, and the influence of the stern and austere Wahhabi doctrine thereby spreads throughout the Islamic world. Since the 1970s, Saudi Arabia's financial prowess has also been put to use for the expansion of Wahhabism.[5] Salafi-inspired Islamic revivalism was also taken up

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[3] For an excellent overview cf. Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* and Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change.*

[4] A brief, if not entirely neutral, overview of Wahhabi doctrine is given in Algar, *Wahhabism.*

[5] Two useful studies on the global spread of Saudi-sponsored Wahhabism are: Quandt, *Saudi Arabia in the 1980s* and Al-Rasheed, *Kingdom without Borders.*

by radical Muslim thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb in Egypt, who became an icon for many militant extremists, and Pakistan's Mawlana al-Mawdudi, who turned the Jamiat-i-Islami into a powerful political force. In the early 1970s, with the political bankruptcy of various secular ideologies, this fundamentalist strand took center stage in the Islamic world because of its appeal to disenfranchised urban Muslim youth.

Aside from fundamentalism and a traditionalist understanding of Islam, there is, however, another strand of Islamic thought that looks to engage with Islam's legacy in a critical and creative fashion. Proponents of this approach include both secularists and pious Muslims. What they have in common is a willingness to look beyond both traditional and literalist Islamic learning, often drawing on methodological achievements of the Western humanities. Rather than considering Islam from the narrower perspective of religion in the conventional sense of the word, these intellectuals regard Islam as a wider cultural phenomenon or civilization, referred to in Arabic as *turath* or "heritage."[6]

In order to reclaim its place in an increasingly interconnected world, Islam should pin its hopes upon this line of thought. In order for this to happen, alternative Muslim discourses must be given more weight, and that is the purpose of the following brief survey.

One of the most prominent scholars, exploring what he calls the "rethinking" of Islam, is the Algerian Mohammed Arkoun.[7] His particular interest is in the methods offered by structuralist linguistics, semiotics, and text criticism and so he is often characterized as a "postmodernist" – a qualification he does not like, preferring "meta-modernist" instead.[8] Within that arcane field, Arkoun can be considered as having a greater affinity with his fellow Algerian Jacques Derrida than the more politically and psychologically inclined Michel Foucault.[9] A key question for Arkoun is whether present-day Islam possesses the intellectual and cultural means, freedom, and social framework required for a *modern* philosophy. In answering that question, he always places distinct emphasis on the historicity of meaning, truth, and the use of reason. This does not mean he is an outright relativist. He merely demands that all claims of having determined the ultimate truth must be open to intellectual criticism.[10]

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[6] Cf. Abu-Rabiʻ, *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence*, pp. 40 ff.; Binder, *Islamic Liberalism*, pp. 293 ff.; Boullata, *Trends and Issues*; Flores, Egypt: A New Secularism?

[7] The most extensive intellectual biography of Arkoun has been published in German by Ursula Günther, *Mohammed Arkoun*.

[8] Cf. Arkoun, Clarifier le passé pour construire le future, p. 10; Günther, *Mohammed Arkoun*, pp. 77, 91, 105.

[9] Cf. Binder, *Islamic Liberalism*, pp. 161–169.

[10] Other good discussions of Arkoun's work include: Benzine, *Les nouveaux penseurs*, pp 87–118; Lee, *Overcoming Tradition and Modernity*, pp. 143–174.

Arkoun pleads for a multidisciplinary approach to the study of Islam and, in fact, to the study of all religions. What is needed is a dynamic team of thinkers, writers, artists, scholars, politicians, and economic producers that will give expression to an Islam attuned to our modern, scientific mentality as well as the religious experience of Muslims. The danger of leaving religious interpretation to the theologians of various traditions is that this tends to lead to the legitimization of the will-to-power of each religious community. It is here that politics and epistemology intersect: religious scholars try to seize control of determining the truth by monopolizing the exegesis of sacred texts. Arkoun refers to this practice using Derrida's term *logocentrisme*.[11]

He also takes his own academic specialty, history, to task. To demonstrate how ethnic and cultural groups of different sizes and various individual dynamics have mined the same quarry of symbols for the creation of belief systems, he favors a holistic model of historiography influenced by the French *Annales* School, which addresses religious, cultural, and philosophical aspects rather than political and strategic issues.[12] What is happening in the humanities is comparable to what orthodox Islamic theology has done: that is, religious awareness of its myths is being stripped by ideological manipulation of popular beliefs and traditions. Historians, philosophers, anthropologists, and semiologists are bypassing the contribution of myth, the symbol, the sign, and the metaphor as ways humans have tried to give meaning to life and the surrounding world. Arkoun calls those ignored elements of our cultural heritage "the unthought." When areas of the "unthought" are declared no-go areas by scholarly or religious orthodoxy, he refers to that as "the unthinkable."

The remedy, according to Arkoun, is a historical deconstructionist approach, which he calls "Applied Islamology."[13] For this new research agenda he draws not only on *Annales* historiography but also the social sciences, in particular anthropological investigations of Brazil's hybrid cultures by scholars like Gilberto Freyre and Roger Bastide.[14] The main endeavor of *rethinking* Islam, or any religion for that matter, is to evaluate, with a new epistemological perspective, the characteristics and intricacy of the knowledge system – both the historical and the mythical – free from the essentialist, substantialist postulates of classical metaphysics. When rethinking religions, we must realize that these are mythical, symbolic, and ritualistic ways of being, thinking, and knowing. This is only possible by carefully distinguishing

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[11] Arkoun, *The Unthought in Comtemporary Islamic Thought*, pp. 176–178, 186–197.

[12] A good introduction to the *Annales* School in English is Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*.

[13] Cf. Arkoun, *Pour une critique*, pp. 43–63. For a detailed analysis of this research agenda cf. Kersten, The 'Applied Islamology' of Mohammed Arkoun.

[14] Cf. Bastide, *Applied Anthropology*. On Gilberto Freyre, cf. Burke and Pallares-Burke, *Gilberto Freyre*.

between the mythical dimension linked to the oral cultures and the official ideological functions of religion.

Another point raised by Arkoun is that the very concepts of "orthodoxy" and "tradition" have not been elaborated upon in traditional Islamic thought. "Orthodoxy" refers to two values. For believers it is synonymous with "authenticity," while historians view it as the ideological use of religion. Arkoun proposes to separate orthodoxy as a "militant ideological endeavor" from "the tool of state legitimization" as well as from what is supposedly "the way to discover the Absolute." The same is true of traditional Islam's attitude towards "tradition." This reasoning may appear somewhat circular, but what Arkoun means is that the Shi'ites, Sunnis, and Kharijites have all reduced their tradition to what they call the "authentic" text collections. As an alternative, Arkoun suggests making inventories of a community's *exhaustive tradition* that extends to all written and oral collections used by religious communities.[15]

In his study of the Qur'an, Arkoun insists upon the absolute necessity of recognizing the distinction between what Muslims call *umm al-kitâb* or "mother book," the primordial, all-encompassing Word of God, and the historical revelations to Muhammad, which were informed by the specific linguistics, semantics, and semiotics shaping religious symbolism in seventh-century Arabia. Various terms are used for these historical revelations, the most common being *al-qur'ân*, but Arkoun himself uses the term "Koran stories." These "Koran stories" were recorded and committed to paper. For this final form, Arkoun uses the Arabic term for a copy of the Qur'an, *mushaf*. The distinction between the two is vital for reevaluations to be made by modern theology.[16]

The Egyptian scholar Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid (or Zayd) took up Arkoun's suggested challenge to study the Qur'an using linguistic methods and paid dearly for it.[17] In 1990, qualifying the Qur'an as a *text* was considered unacceptable by both the religious establishment at the al-Azhar Islamic University and by fundamentalist organizations. In 1993, they resolved to silence Abu Zaid by filing a charge of apostasy against him. Based on that allegation, they also demanded that he divorce his wife. Finally, during the 1995 appeal, a guilty verdict was pronounced, and Abu Zaid – in the meantime promoted to full professor at Cairo University – considered it expedient to go into exile. He was virtually made an outlaw, having been declared an apostate and legally found guilty. A similar pronouncement in 1992 led to the assassination of the liberal writer Farag Foda. Abu Zaid was given sanctuary at Leiden University in the Netherlands, where he now teaches Arabic. Examining his

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[15] First used in Arkoun, *Essais sur la pensée islamique*, p. 10.

[16] His most important study on the Qur'an is Arkoun, *Lectures du Coran*.

[17] Cf. Abu Zaid, *Divine Attributes in the Quran*, pp. 190–211.

considerations regarding the status of the Qur'an, I find nothing degrading about Abu Zaid's approach. On the contrary, it shows great respect for the Qur'anic tradition. He is, however, very critical of both the establishment and fundamentalists, whose common cause is to stunt the interpretation of the scriptures.

Abu Zaid claims that the Qur'an's textuality can be asserted through the Qur'an itself. The process of revelation (*wahy*), described in modern linguistics terms as an act of communication between a speaker (God) and a recipient (Muhammad), using a code (Arabic), and via a channel (the Holy Spirit), need not offend Muslims. The term *wahy*, being equivalent to God's speech, should also raise no objection to dealing with the Qur'an as a text. Moreover, the Qur'an itself categorically states that the various semantic levels of the text need to be resolved by intra-Qur'anic evidence; that is, interpreting the ambiguous on the basis of the evident (III.7). The very presence of semantic ambiguity is a fundamental characteristic of textuality. A further support is that the arrangement of the Qur'an's chapters and verses is not the same as the chronological order of revelation. It is this very structure that suggests its textuality, while the serial nature of revelations reflects its historicity.

Another crucial element for decoding the text is a socio-historical analysis of the way the Qur'an has been studied from its creation onwards. Here we must move beyond the traditionalist philological approach, which was virtually frozen in time after the twelfth century, when questioning the eternity of the Qur'an became anathema. It is this decoding process that permits extraction of the "temporal," which carries no significance in the present. This entails what Abu Zaid has dubbed "interpretive diversity," without which the message would degenerate and become subject to ideological manipulation. Though it allows the divine origin to remain intact, we must admit that the interpretation is human.

Even the barest empirical facts cannot but confirm the historicity of the Qur'an: not only did the Qur'an emerge in a certain cultural context, but it also became the producer of a new culture. In order to make seventh-century Arabs receptive to changing their entire worldview, the revelations had to appeal to their cultural – in particular linguistic – sensibilities. This particular encoding, however, is not final and absolute but must allow for an endless process of interpretation, or decoding as Abu Zaid calls it. The very emergence of a new Islamic culture is the historical evidence thereof, which in turn indicates the direction of the new message. This direction in turn allows us to move from "meaning" to "significance" in the present socio-cultural context and thus become aware of the crucial difference between the fixedness of meaning and changeability of significance.

Finally, there is also what one could call "circumstantial evidence" that, even early in Islamic history, the intelligentsia was aware of the textuality of the Qur'an, although they would not have referred to it in such terms. I am

referring here to the old debate on the eternal versus created nature of the Qur'an. For a while the latter view, developed by the rationalist school of the Mu'tazila, was favored.[18] According to them, language does not refer directly to reality but reality is conceived through the symbolic quality of language. The Qur'an is therefore created action and not the eternal verbal utterance of God. Thus they endeavored to build a bridge between the divine word and human reason. Their opponents rejected the concept that language was a human invention, but believed it had been given to man as a divine relation to an unseen reality. Eventually this view was raised to the level of indisputable dogma.

The problem is that this leaves two philosophical questions unresolved. One is the matter of predestination. If the Qur'an is eternal and divine and every described event is preordained, what is left of man's responsibility? How do sin and salvation fit in? The other issue is that an eternal, uncreated Qur'an can be considered a violation of the absolute unity and unicity of God (*tawhīd*), which is also a key dogma.

Debating philosophical questions is at the heart of Hasan Hanafi's work.[19] A survey of his scholarly output reveals his voracious intellectual appetite. Of the living philosophers in the Arab world, he is probably among the most well-versed in Western philosophy. His career path also mirrors the watershed events in the Arab world over the last half-century, defining the concerns of both the society at large and an intellectual like Hanafi. From 1956 until 1966, Hanafi studied philosophy at the Sorbonne. Before his departure for France, his plans to formulate a general philosophical method on the basis of a reinterpretation of a traditional Islamic science called 'foundations of jurisprudence' had been frustrated because it clashed with prevailing trends in Egypt's academic circles at the time.

During his time in France he was occupied with laying the foundations for a grand philosophical project that he expected to take up the remainder of his life as a professional academic philosopher: examining the tension between tradition and modernity. Even his dissertation betrayed the enormously ambitious task he had set for himself. Inspired by his encounter with the writings of Muslim thinkers such as fellow Egyptian Sayyid Qutb and Indo-Pakistani poet Muhammad Iqbal and his introduction to the German Romantics, he plunged into a phenomenological analysis of both rationalist idealism and existentialist-oriented realism.

After his return from France, Hanafi was eager to expand his project to

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[18] A very readable introduction to Mu'tazili thought up to the present is Martin and Woodward, *Defenders of Reason*.

[19] The only comprehensive study in English is Olsson, *Renewal and Heritage*. Apart from that there is a chapter on Hanafi in Esposito and Voll, *Makers of Contemporary Islam*, pp. 68–90 and the somewhat dated PhD thesis by van den Boom, *Bevrijding van de mens in islamitisch perspektief*.

a comprehensive analysis of the Muslim attitude towards their own cultural legacy and that of the West and to use this to synthesize a new philosophical approach to the future in his "Heritage and Renewal" project.[20] His plan was cut short by political events. The disastrous outcome of the 1967 war seemed to make secluded academic research meaningless and Hanafi spent the next few years writing feverishly about an array of issues pertaining to the acute identity crisis into which the Arab world had fallen. Reflecting the general intellectual mood, Hanafi – who had enthusiastically embraced the Nasserist experiment – set out to dissect what had gone wrong.[21]

His criticism drew the attention of the secret police and in 1971 Hanafi heeded the advice of the rector of the University of Cairo to go into voluntary exile, departing for a four-year assignment to Temple University in Pennsylvania. The constraints of Egyptian academic life prevented Hanafi from doing what he intended to do. Moreover, even after his return in 1975, Hanafi went on to spend extensive periods of time abroad as a visiting professor whenever his ideas created controversy.

The main focus of Hanafi's thought remained consistent: to design a comprehensive methodology based on a refined synthesis of Islamic heritage and Western modernity. With respect to the latter, Hanafi came up with the term "Occidentalism," meaning an informed analysis of the West by Muslim scholars, viewing Western modernity as one mode among a number of possible alternatives and questioning the ethnocentric assumption of its universality.[22] On the other side of the spectrum, Hanafi became the standard-bearer of a rethinking of *turâth* or "Islamic Heritage." His interpretations in that area caught the ire of the increasingly powerful fundamentalist movement in the 1990s. In 1997, his position had become extremely precarious as he faced attacks from ultraconservative elements of al-Azhar.[23] In view of Farag Foda's fate in 1992 and the Abu Zaid episode of 1995, these were ominous signs for Hanafi.

A key motivation of Hanafi's philosophical method is of a non-metaphysical nature, namely the transposition of Islam from a static to a dynamic tradition. Hanafi distinguishes himself from modernists in the conventional sense because he does not focus on the technological and economic realm, nor does he advocate the introduction of Western philosophies per se because renewal from the outside will not truly be able to penetrate into another (religious) tradition. Instead, ideologies of change can only be fed by drawing from the traditions of the people. The task for Muslim intellectuals is there-

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[20] Outlined in the introductory volume that bears the same title, cf. Hanafi, *Al-Turath wa'l-Tajdid.*

[21] For Hanafi's relationship with Nasserism cf. Riexinger, Nasserism Revitalized, pp. 63–118.

[22] An entire volume of his "Heritage and Renewal" project is dedicated to Occidentalism, cf. Hanafi, *Muqaddima fi 'Ilm al-Istighrab.*

[23] Cf. Haddad, Pour comprendre Hasan Hanafi, pp. 49–50.

fore to mine the quarry of Islam's intellectual heritage for its "psychological treasury."

Here the notion of the "humanizing" element of religious tradition – in this case Islam – enters into Hanafi's philosophy. Closely connected to this is Hanafi's plea for a shift from a vertical worldview of "man with God" to a horizontal worldview of "man in history."[24] If man is liberated from the vertical model's hierarchical structure, he can come to the understanding that Islamic culture is not a gift (ostensibly from God) but a result of human action. With this we have arrived at the revolutionary aspect of Hanafi's Islam: it is an Islam that is conceived of as a human product. Only the symbols and values derived from the traditions of the people will mobilize a historical consciousness of the task at hand: Islam is a liberating human activity striving for authenticity, solidarity, and progress. In Hanafi's terminology, this is a plea for a "leftist Islam."[25]

An important consequence of this approach is the conclusion that there is no opposition between theology and anthropology because theology is the human science *par excellence*. It is within this notion that we find the resonances of Hanafi's exposure to philosophers like Spinoza, Lessing, Hegel, and Feuerbach. What Hanafi challenges is the absence of a discipline of "the humanities" in Islamic tradition. There is theology and metaphysics but no anthropology: the perspective of "man in history" is lacking. The primary cause for this is to be found in an exaggerated respect for institutionalized religion, the pyramid-shaped worldview caused by the political situation in the Muslim world, and the strong influence of Neo-Platonism. All these factors have inhibited a critical engagement with the role of human activity in the realm of religious traditions.

An interesting point of Hanafi's thinking in this respect is the great appreciation it exhibits for the mystical ideal, insofar as the various stages that the Sufi has to traverse are taken as activities of human consciousness. Such an anthropological movement into mysticism can be equated with the discovery of subjectivity in Western philosophy. Here Hanafi sees parallels between the twelfth-century Sufi thinker Ibn Arabi's concept of *wahdat al-wujud* or "unity of being" and the third stage of the Hegelian philosophy of religion as the finale of a progression of "man in history" and of nature towards one integrated divine manifestation. However, he warns against the inherent threat of Sufism's monistic ideals, where human freedom disappears in God's omnipotence because – in Hanafi's opinion – this is nothing less than mysticism succumbing to the vertical worldview.

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[24] Hanafi has articulated this anthropological rereading in Hanafi, Theologie ou anthropologie?, pp. 233–264.

[25] Hanafi published a manifesto-like pamphlet outlining the "Leftist-Islam" agenda; cf. Hanafi, *Al-Yasar al-Islami.* For an analysis in English cf. Shimogaki, *Between Modernity and Post-Modernity.*

By contrast, Hanafi recognizes the importance of the attempts by thinkers such as Ibn Rushd, Ibn Khaldun, and Ibn Taymiyya to introduce a horizontal worldview into the Islamic traditions of philosophy, history writing, and theology. He also had high hopes that Muslim fundamentalism would be capable of mobilizing a revolutionary shift from a vertical toward a horizontal worldview in the contemporary Muslim world. After 1979, however, he became increasingly critical of fundamentalism's failure to realize the importance of reviving Mu'tazilite rationalism. In his appreciation of rationalist approaches, Hanafi can be said to remain under the influence of the post-Renaissance Western philosophical tradition. Although he rejects using philosophical concepts derived from other cultures, he does recognize the significance of human consciousness as the central pole of post-Renaissance Western thinking.

All of these considerations are important for Hanafi's suggested methodology: a new hermeneutics that would provide an original anthropological motive for understanding the phenomenon of revelation. In Hanafi's view, Islamic exegesis finds itself in a methodological crisis because it is trapped in a theistic worldview and lacks existentialist sensitivity.

Rejecting a range of so-called negative methods of exegesis, Hanafi endeavors to move towards an Islamic "Liberation Theology." Highly critical of the idealism of the *salafiyya* movements and slogans such as "Islamic socialism," Hanafi looks towards the possibilities offered by phenomenology in battling the metaphysical orientation of the Islamic sciences. A second objective for using a phenomenological method is the search for the original meanings of religious concepts: to which reality do classic concepts (sin, God, revelation) refer, and which "new words" can be used in their place?

Hanafi's hermeneutics are of an intimidating scope and very complex, and the above summary therefore cannot do full justice to his intricate reasoning. The wide range of Hanafi's philosophical oeuvre, with its references to German Romanticism, philosophers such as Spinoza, Hegel, Feuerbach, and Bible critics such as Rudolf Bultmann, alongside a simultaneous appreciation of the theologies developed by Islamist thinkers as well as early Muslim rationalists, and to the stages of self-realization of Sufism, can easily leave the impression of a lack of doctrinal or ideological homogeneity. However, one interpreter of Hanafi's work detects in this eclectic use of philosophical and theological notions a profound belief that all religious symbolism refers to the task that lies at the foundation of the "original monotheism," which transcends the barriers between Jews, Christians and Muslims: namely the continuous striving of *becoming* truly human.

I would like to conclude this article by taking a look at the reception of these innovative Muslim intellectuals. It appears that apart from expatriate Muslims in Europe and North America, controversial thinkers like Arkoun and Hanafi have found a more receptive audience in Indonesia than in the

Arab Middle East. Their books are usually rapidly translated into Indonesian and eagerly discussed in magazines and on websites. It is often forgotten that Indonesia is the largest Muslim nation in the world and, although located on the geographical periphery, culturally it is an integral part of the Islamic world. Apart from their openness to new ideas from elsewhere, I must also make the point that Indonesian Muslims are making their own important contributions to shaping a more open and liberal Islamic discourse.

One of the most prominent Indonesian intellectuals was Nurcholish Madjid.[26] He became famous or notorious – depending on how you look at him – in the late sixties when he served as chairman of the largest Muslim student organization that launched the provocative slogan: "Islam yes! Islamic party no!"[27]

Moreover, he also borrowed controversial terms like "secularization" and "desacralization," which were then being popularized by Harvey Cox in his *The Secular City* and Peter Berger's *The Sacred Canopy*. Madjid's interpretation of these notions in Islamic contexts was very specific. What he believed was that there is nothing sacred about politics and that it must be relegated the domain of the profane. Islam prescribes no specific form of government. The appropriate way of governing a people is entirely dependent on historical contingency, not some metaphysical necessity.

Although he was thereafter disowned by the main Islamic political party and ostracized by many modernist Muslim leaders, he became the protégé of the minister of religious affairs and the rector of the Islamic state university. His views were also deemed acceptable to the "New Order" regime. He was thus able to retain a public forum for spreading his ideas.

Madjid consolidated his intellectual credentials by obtaining a doctorate from the University of Chicago, where he studied with the famous Pakistani scholar Fazlur Rahman, a man who, in turn, was strongly influenced by Canadian historian of religions Wilfred Cantwell Smith. From Fazlur Rahman, he learned the importance of studying the Qur'an in its historical context, because if one regards the Qur'an as a series of isolated verses then one can easily miss its cohesive outlook on universe and society. To avoid such an "atomistic approach," sacred Scriptures must be contextualized.[28] This was to be the first hermeneutical principle for the proper study of the Qur'an. Following his mentor, Madjid became a proponent of regarding the Qur'an as an ethical guideline, not a lawbook. The moral dimension is far more important

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[26] There are many publications in Indonesian on Nurcholish Madjid. The best introductions in English are: Barton, Neo-Modernism: A Vital Synthesis, pp. 1–75; Burton, Indonesia's Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid, pp. 29–81; Kull, *Piety and Politics*.

[27] Used in a speech he gave in 1970, cf. Madjid, *Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam*, p. 2. Most of his writings have only been published in Indonesian. For some key texts in English translation cf. Madjid, *The True Face of Islam*.

[28] Outlined in Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*.

than any *ad hoc* general prescription. In fact, in Madjid's view, the entire Islamic science of jurisprudence was entirely contingent upon and subject to constant reinterpretation. This definitely set him apart from the view of the traditionalists and fundamentalists, but it received a positive response among more liberal young scholars, intellectuals, and students. This focus on ethics also informs Madjid's second hermeneutical principle: namely that the outlook of the interpreter will to a large extent influence how the Scriptures are understood. Consequently, the subsequent body of Islamic law must be taken as a collection of human responses to a divine revelation, which in themselves have no sacral authority.

Compared to Arkoun and Hanafi, Madjid's approach is more pragmatic. Although well-versed in the Islamic sciences, he has spent little time on the development of an overarching theoretical framework. Far more important to Madjid is that religious learning and its universal message are allocated to their appropriate and central place – where they can exercise a generic and inclusive significance for all humankind. To this end, he founded a think tank targeting Indonesia's urban middle and upper classes, because Madjid was of the opinion that a society can only be changed by influencing its elites and future elites.

The impact of the ideas of intellectuals like Madjid is reflected in the growing confidence among Southeast-Asian Muslims. Particularly in Indonesian university circles, there appears to be a hunger for new ideas. Apart from figures like Arkoun and Hanafi, students are also interested in reading the work of a young generation of Muslim academics specializing in Islamic studies. Often this also leads them to explore postmodern and postcolonial thought originating from Western academe and then applying their insights to the Islamic setting.

Politicians concerned with the relations between Southeast Asia and the rest of the Muslim world have even expressed a greater assertiveness. In a 2002 *Newsweek* interview, Thailand's leading Muslim politician, former minister of foreign affairs, and current Secretary General of ASEAN Surin Pitsuwan explained that the pluralist setting in which Southeast-Asian Islam took shape has bred an inherent awareness of the need for tolerance and open-mindedness. Surin is very wary of the influence of Wahhabism radiating from Arabia. Failing to retain some independence from the Arab center might compromise "the flexible and successful faith" that has developed in Southeast Asia. "For all Islam's history, Southeast Asia was considered a backwater. But the flows of globalization now need to be reversed. *Islam must learn not from the center but rather the periphery.*"[29] In 2004, Malaysia's culture minister also objected to the Arabization of Malay-Muslim culture.

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[29] Zakaria, Look East for the Answer.

Interestingly, it appears that the message is sinking in even with Arabs.[30] It was the Saudi minister for information and culture, of all people, who stated that the Arabs would do well to pay more attention to the cultures of the East, for there was much to be learned from civilizations elsewhere in Asia.

The common denominator in the ideas of the thinkers I have discussed here is the humanist spirit that suffuses their view of religion, their plea for an integrative approach, and their sense of historicity without implying determinism. The cosmopolitanism of Indonesian-Muslim intellectuals such as Nurcholish Madjid appears to live up to the claim of Louis Massignon, the famous French expert on Sufism, who once said that one should not appropriate religious texts but act as their host, indicating that religious traditions can only thrive in a climate of hospitality.[31]

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[30] Wong, Stop 'Arabising' Malay Culture.

[31] The quote was used by Steiner in *After Babel* (p. 416); cf. Kersten, Bold Transmutations, p. 32.

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Proti toku:
Ponovni razmislek o islamu v neprijaznem svetu

Povzetek

Od objave Huntingtonovega *Spopada civilizacij* in po dogodkih 11. septembra je postal odnos med muslimanskim svetom in Zahodom izrazito antagonističen in polariziran. Posledica je bila veliko zanimanje za radikalne oblike islama in zato prezrtje zmernih in naprednih idej, ki so jih konec 20. stoletja razvili intelektualci iz muslimanskega sveta. Ti alternativni glasovi niso bili le spregledani v tujih deželah, temveč so pogosto doživeli celo sovražen sprejem v muslimanskem svetu – včasih jim sploh ni uspelo najti poti v javno diskusijo.

Ta razprava obravnava po uvodnem pogledu na sedanje intelektualno vzdušje v muslimanskem svetu nekaj zastopnikov alternativnega islamskega diskurza iz raznih delov muslimanskega sveta. Francosko-alžirski zgodovinar islamske misli Mohammed Arkoun je večji del svojega dela posvetil prizadevanjem za vzpostavitev novih načrtov in za razvoj inovativnih metodologij za raziskovanje islama, pri čemer je črpal iz dosežkov francoske

historiografije, antropologije, lingvistike in literarne vede. Predloge je kot svojo alternativo predstavil pod imenom *aplikativna islamologija*. Egipčana Hasan Hanafi in njegov nekdanji študent Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid sta v preučevanje islama vsak zase poskušala vpeljati filozofsko fenomenologijo in semiotiko. Hanafijev projekt *Dediščina in prenova* je obsežna in ambiciozna reinterpretacija tako islamske kakor evropske civilizacije, ki temelji na preoblikovanju preučevanja religij iz teološke v antropološko vedo. Nekaj najbolj uspešnih poskusov, da bi dali veri v javnem življenju nov pomen, se pojavlja na geografskem obrobju muslimanskega sveta. V Indoneziji je Nurcholish Madjid zavrnil politični islam in zagovarjal prenovo islamskega mišljenja, utemeljeno na drzni rabi pojmov sekularizacija in desakralizacija v islamskem kontekstu.