

ISLAM AND THE WEST: THE CRISIS OF MODERNITY

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Introduction

Historical evidence does not support the claim that the West and the Arab and Muslim countries of the Middle East are ideologically incompatible. An insurmountable divide does not exist between the West and the region; rather, the Middle East is a region attempting to redefine itself in response to the influences of modernity while still maintaining aspects of the Arab and Islamic tradition. The need for redefinition was triggered by the increase of European colonial influence in the region during the mid-1800s and the simultaneous decline of the Ottoman Empire. Some segments of Middle Eastern society have adopted elements of western modernity that are consistent with Arab-Islamic tradition and which will positively contribute to life in the region. Others have expressed the desire for a conservative restoration of traditional Islamic values. Still others have suggested that accommodation of modernity is impossible, and restoration of traditional Islamic values is not feasible. This last category of reactionaries has proposed to transform Arab-Islamic society based on a new, non-European kind of modernity. Individuals in this group desire development and progress in the region based upon local social, political, and economic traditions and contemporary circumstances. In this paper, we will attempt to illuminate these approaches and their differences but because of the importance of local circumstances and the breadth of the topic, it is necessary to limit the scope of this project.

For the purposes of this paper, therefore, we will focus on events that have transpired in Egypt. Egypt is important in this discourse because of its continuing

political and cultural significance and also for its early and longstanding interaction with western nations. Politically, Egypt plays a strategic role in relations between regional countries and others throughout the world. The Arab League has its assembly in Cairo, and Egypt continues to be an integral player in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Egypt also dominates the mass media and popular culture that is transmitted throughout the region. Most movies and media originate in Cairo. Because of these exports, the Egyptian dialect of Arabic is almost universally understood throughout the region. Furthermore, the largest English language publisher in the region is located at The American University in Cairo, a continuing example of Egyptian engagement with the western world. In fact, the first printing press to arrive in Egypt was brought by Napoleon during the French invasion of 1798. This initial modern interaction with the West began earlier in Egypt than in the rest of the region. Because of these factors, Egypt serves as a significant model of the region's engagement with western modernity.

To understand the impact of history on modern-day Egypt, we begin by briefly summarizing the Egyptian struggle for its modern identity. Modern Egyptian history, during the last two hundred years, serves as a framework for understanding how intellectuals in the region have responded to the influences of western modernity during the same period. During the colonial period in Egypt, a liberal perspective emerged whereby intellectuals tried to reinterpret scientific advancement within an Islamic framework. As the less-than-altruistic motives of the Europeans became evident, however, an anti-European reaction developed. While nationalism and a

version of socialism resulted following Egyptian independence, neither was able to solidify or to reinvent society. Following multiple Egyptian defeats in regional wars (1956, 1967, 1973, 1982, etc.), the society continued to grapple with its identity. A traditional approach to dealing with the West in which western values were rejected in favor of historical Islamic ones became increasingly popular. Because the elites who gained power following independence felt threatened by this movement, the army became the primary political and national-security tool of the rulers. In 1953, a revolution occurred in which Gamal Abdel Nasser and a group of army officers overthrew King Farouk and came to power. During the 1950s and 1960s, the army continued to be used by Nasser to maintain his power and squash dissent. Censorship and corruption have continued to constrict society since that time, especially following the events of September 11 and the invasion of Iraq. In response to western pressure to become more democratic, Arab states have “modernized,” but it has been for the purpose of reinforcing the status quo. Steven Heydemann (2007) from the Brookings Institution calls this trend “upgraded authoritarianism” in *Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World*. In opposition, intellectuals in the region are contemplating a secular, modernizing approach, i.e., developing modernity in the region based upon the local history.

A pattern has emerged in Egypt over the course of the past two centuries. The space in society for intellectual discourse and dissent has decreased as repressive, governmental controls have become more widespread. In his major work *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, Albert Hourani (1962) examines the roots of this current

situation. Hourani begins with the decline of the Ottoman Empire and notes that the quality of the sultans began to decay at the end of the sixteenth century (p.34). This decline was simultaneous with the economic expansion of Europe (p.35). The Europeans established trading posts in the region introducing large sums of gold and silver. The result was a displacement of State finances and growing hardship for the productive class. The consequences of European expansion for the Ottoman Empire included “an increase in taxation, the decline of agriculture and crafts, and the depopulation of the countryside” (p.35). To protect against the effects of an expanding Europe, many people in the Ottoman Empire began to realize the need to learn about and adopt the military techniques that were being so effective for the Europeans (p.41). This realization led to leaders like Muhammad ‘Ali in Egypt who sent scholars to France to study and acquire knowledge, especially that related to the military (p.52). ‘Ali and others began to realize the importance of adopting such western innovations to prevent a complete takeover by the Europeans.

The Liberal Approach to the West: Tahtawi, Afghani, and ‘Abduh

We begin to see the first encounters of Egypt with western modernity in the early 1800s. At first, we see a desire to embrace western modernity. Perhaps the writer most illustrative of this early enthusiasm toward the West is Rifa‘a Rafi‘ al-Tahtawi; Tahtawi was sent by Muhammad ‘Ali to Paris to oversee the students sent to study French military techniques there from 1826 to 1831. During his time in Paris, Tahtawi studied and wrote about French developments and society. Because

European influence in Egypt at this time was primarily related to economic matters, and did not involve all-out occupation, we see a willingness of these individuals to adopt many aspects of western modernity and the scientific revolution. Since Tahtawi was directly sponsored by Muhammad 'Ali, he continuously attempts to justify "entering and writing about the land of the infidels" (Tahtawi, 2004, p.123). While he does praise many aspects of French society, he is cautious with his praise. For instance, when Tahtawi discusses the French Charter, the constitutional document that limited the power of the French king, he provides a description and translation with very little commentary (p.194). Tahtawi did not want to suggest the adoption of or, in any way, praise for a French political concept that might question the authority of his benefactor. Also, peculiarly absent from this work is any mention of the Paris riots of 1830 that occurred while Tahtawi was in Paris. A potential explanation for this absence may have been Tahtawi's concern that he would be labeled as disloyal by 'Ali for dealing with the concept of public riots against the government.

Despite this caution, Tahtawi's text exhibits a willingness to engage with the West that is indicative of this time period. In the works of Tahtawi and his contemporaries, we find a conscious effort to adopt the elements of western modernity and translate them into Islamic terms. Tahtawi employs three key methods for this task: he justifies the adoption of western modernity in Islamic terms, grounds western achievements in the ancient developments of the Near East, and discriminates between those aspects that are in line with the history and traditions of the region and those that are not.

One of Tahtawi's primary tools to engage western modernity is literally to translate French concepts into Islamic terms. Tahtawi attempts to use Arabic terms that will approximately represent the French terms; however, this task is complicated on two levels. First, words in each language have certain connotations that are difficult to translate into another language. Second, to create continuity between cultures, Tahtawi attempts to blend styles, techniques, and vocabulary from both the French and Arabic languages. This challenge explains Tahtawi's use of Arabic vocabulary with religious connotations to explain French secular concepts. For example, to translate the French word for "fatherland," he uses the Arabic word *watan*, which refers to an allegiance to the Islamic community, or *umma* (Tahtawi, 2004, p.145). This word choice attempts to bridge the translation gap and represent an analogous relationship to the French notion of patriotism and nationalism.

Tahtawi also attempts, when possible, to establish a historical link between western developments and their roots in the antiquities of the Near East. Tahtawi writes, "Historians have shown that the founders of science were the Byzantines [...] of Syria, i.e. the Phoenicians, and the ancient Egyptians. These two peoples were the first to put together the numerals and arithmetic, and to arrange them in a particular order. Indeed, the scholar Pythagoras [...] travelled from Greece to Egypt and studied this science" (Tahtawi, 2004, p.348). In this passage, Tahtawi links modern developments of his time in mathematics and the sciences to the accomplishments of the ancient peoples that inhabited the area of the modern Middle East. This technique has three purposes. Once again, we see the attempt to bridge

the experiences of the two cultures. In addition, it is an attempt by Tahtawi to proclaim the great heritage of the Near East, especially in light of the inferior way in which the region was and is often treated by the West. Finally, Tahtawi wishes to establish the parallel between the two cultures in order to prepare the way for a revitalization or renaissance of the region. Tahtawi reminisces about the previous ages when the Ottoman Empire was strong. He links this strength to the caliphs' support of scholars and artists (p.106). This latter device is an obvious appeal by Tahtawi to his audience, specifically his benefactor Muhammad 'Ali. This connection is useful on two grounds. First, by linking the benefactors of the past with those of the present, social development and progress are linked to the tradition of the Middle East. Secondly, it gives legitimacy to the task at hand. By linking patronage of scholars and artists to the great caliphs within Islamic tradition, Tahtawi hopes to quiet concerns about engaging the western world.

Finally, as he attempts to blend aspects of two cultures, Tahtawi is frank when rejecting aspects of French culture that are not compatible with his own. Tahtawi is concerned that the sciences may lead readers away from the teachings of the Holy Qur'an (p.252). While this example may be connected with appeasing the Egyptian religious leaders, there are other examples of Tahtawi's refutation of French culture. Tahtawi criticizes the French, for instance, for being "Christians in name only" (p.126). He writes, they "do not adhere to the precepts of their religion" (p.126). For the French, reason is used as a measure of what is good. In contrast, religion is supreme in determining what is good and right in traditional Islamic thought. Here

we see a poignant example of the blend of culture by Tahtawi. Tahtawi is strategic in the examples of western modernity that he wishes to praise and discriminately distinguishes between those aspects of western tradition that are compatible with Islamic tradition and those which are not. As he lauds the accomplishments of science and reason, he is careful to maintain that these principles reinforce what religion dictates. There is no philosophical departure between the two for Tahtawi. Throughout his discourse, Tahtawi attempts to balance and blend western modernity and Arab-Islamic culture.

As we continue through this liberal period, we do begin to see a sense of caution (which will be justified later in the century when European powers occupied the region) emerge concerning the balance of power between the European powers and the declining powers within the Ottoman Empire. Between 1875 and 1882, the European powers expanded their influence in the region. France occupied Tunis in 1881, and the British landed in Egypt in the same year. The effects of the great European powers were no longer only economic. Direct intervention in the region by the European powers greatly influenced the writing and thought of the next generation of thinkers.

Jamal al-Din al-Afghani wrote in the nineteenth century during the period when the European powers began to occupy countries in the region. Afghani viewed the decline of the Ottoman Empire as a reason that the European powers were able to intervene so extensively and, consequently, present a threat to the region and its people. He believed that the internal problems that had led to the decline of the

Ottoman Empire must be cured to resist the power and influence of Europe (Hourani, p.110). Among these internal problems, Albert Hourani cites the decay of quality leadership during the sixteenth century (p.34). This approach, however, has serious limitations.

Associating the decline of an entire civilization with poor leadership is problematic. It is unlikely that poor leadership is the sole cause of any social decline. Instead, it is more realistic and useful to consider the various factors that contribute to decline in a society. Among these factors may be the role of foreign powers in the domestic affairs of other countries, the effects that these interventions may have, including the economic displacement of the local populations, the decline of the arts and popular participation in society and politics, etc. Afghani realized the importance of these other factors in the decline of Middle Eastern society and associated the internal problems in the region primarily with the weaknesses that had developed within Islam. Afghani likely interpreted the failing Ottoman leadership in Islamic terms, i.e., the faltering leaders were considered a sign that Allah was displeased with leaders' actions and the internal situation within the empire. Afghani's fears were realized when the Europeans began to occupy the region.

According to Albert Hourani, Afghani believes that the central problem during this period is "not that of how to make the Muslim countries politically strong and successful; it was rather, how to persuade Muslims to understand their religion aright and live in accordance with its teaching. If they did so, he believed, their countries would of necessity be strong" (Hourani, p.113). One of Afghani's key

priorities is social unity. Without social unity, Afghani believes that the Europeans will completely undermine and dominate the peoples of the Middle East. He rightly observes that “imitation” of the western powers would require the acceptance of western thought and social morality (p.114). Because he believes that the decay of Islamic social morality is the cause of the weakness of Middle Eastern society, he fears that acceptance of European traditions will further undermine the region internally and also its power relationship with Europe. This perspective is highly influenced by Afghani’s tenure in India where he observed the imperial occupation of the country by the British. To maintain social unity and to prevent the destruction of Islamic society by European powers, Afghani argues, Islam is essential. Furthermore, Afghani contends that absolute emulation of western modernity would undermine Islamic society.

Consequently, Afghani is adamantly opposed to the idea of the separation of Islam and the state. The separation of the state and the religious establishment had become common in Europe at this time after centuries of strife between the state apparatus and the religious establishment. Afghani believes that the conflict between the state and religion occurs when the two try to exist in a common social sphere. Hourani writes, “The contradiction only arose when one trespassed on the field of the other: when as in the French Revolution, reason claimed to govern the world without regard to the needs of the heart, or when religions laid claim (as both Christianity and Islam had done) to a supernatural revelation of truth, and placed restrictions on the human mind” (p.121). The problem in society, for Afghani, is not that the state and

the religious apparatus are cooperative; rather, difficulties arise when the two are not in balance; i.e., when one tries to dominate the other.

Hourani notes that the conflict between “religion and philosophy” is not unique to Islam but is a conflict of human nature (p.122). For Hourani and Afghani, it is difficult to find the equilibrium between rationality and the “needs of the heart.” This concern for balance can also be compared with the tension between individual reason, the product of rationality, and group unity (Hourani, p.127). Afghani finds the answer to this disharmony by a blend of reason and Islam. If all individuals are capable of reason, every person would have their own sense of virtues and values. The Prophet was necessary, therefore, to establish a base for reason, a set of common virtues and beliefs. This interpretation of the Islamic tradition is imperative to understanding Afghani’s vision of the interplay between reason and social unity in Islamic society. In a letter to Ernest Renan concerning Renan’s work *Islam and Science*, Afghani observes that the relationship between reason and free thought is always in a struggle with religion (Keddie, 1968, p.187). This tension between reason and religion is not unique to Islam.

While Afghani is quite skeptical of Europe given the political circumstances of the time, he does believe it useful to adopt and reformulate a European idea concerning civilization in Islamic terms. François Guizot, a French academic and politician during the 1830s and 1840s, argues that civilization requires the development of both societies and individuals (Hourani, p.114-115). Afghani was greatly impressed by Guizot’s idea of increasing social and individual wellbeing and

believed that this idea could be aptly applied to the idea of the Islamic “umma,” or the group of believers. Through the development of society and individuals, Afghani was hopeful that a sense of unity could be restored among the people. While European thinkers, like Ernest Renan, thought that reason would undermine Islam, Afghani argued that Islam held the keys to preserve the unity of the society (p.120).

Afghani does seem, however, simultaneously to reject and accept western modernity. On the one hand, Afghani appeals to the Islamic tradition because he sees it as the key to maintaining unity amongst individuals in the Islamic world. On the other, he contends that reason is inherent within Islamic thought. Nikki R. Keddie (1968) in *An Islamic Response to Imperialism* observes this contradiction and offers a plausible explanation for it. Keddie argues that Afghani distinguishes between adapting elements of western rationalism and pure emulation of the western tradition. While he sees positive attributes in western society, like Guizot’s ideas of development through social and individual well-being, he believes that replication of western modernity will undermine the unity of the Arab-Islamic community. Keddie writes:

[...H]e [Afghani] believed and hoped that the rational attitudes and scientific innovations so necessary to self-strengthening against the foreigner could be adopted without the foreigners’ cultural and linguistic baggage, the acquisition of which he feared would disrupt national and religious unity and encourage passive admiration for foreign conquerors. (p.65)

Here Afghani is concerned with the legitimacy of these new ideas. Because of their different social and historical contexts, ideas must be adapted to respond to the needs of the culture in which they are being applied. This idea is very similar to Tahtawi’s

concept that elements of western tradition must be translated to apply to a different social context.

Finally, Afghani's seeming contradictions illustrate his attempt to balance the necessity to create unity among the masses while allowing for progressive thought about society. This objective may perhaps be most evident in his letter to Renan. In contrast to his writings that seem to suggest complete rejection of reason, this letter acknowledges the important role that scientific development had played in Arab society in previous centuries. He notes that, "[Renan] recognizes that the Arabs conserved and maintained for centuries the hearth of science" (Keddie, 1968, p.185). Obviously, he is not completely opposed to the ideas of scientific inquiry and rationalism. Thus, it becomes apparent that Afghani's concern is not with the development of science or reason within Islamic society; rather, his concern is with the motives of the Europeans and their application of reason. His observations in India led him to the conclusion that science and reason had been perverted by western powers to manipulate other peoples.

In the 1880s, an Egyptian follower of Afghani, Muhammad 'Abduh, continues this discussion concerning the potential for European ideas to undermine the Arab-Islamic community. Like his predecessor, 'Abduh deals with the increasing influence of imperial powers and fears that the emulation of western modernity will undermine the people of the region in relation to the European powers. According to Albert Hourani, 'Abduh is particularly concerned that European influence would cause the division of society into two incompatible spheres: the religious and the secular

(p.136). This concern is related to the emergence of two competing “spirits” among the Egyptian people: “one was the traditional Islamic spirit, resisting all change; the other, the spirit of the younger generation, accepting all change and all the ideas of modern Europe” (Hourani, p.138). Fearing the development and the potential antithetical relationship of these two “spirits,” ‘Abduh’s primary task is to demonstrate that the people of the Middle East can both engage the modern world and remain devout Muslims.

‘Abduh’s primary objectives are to restate the essential message of Islam and to show the implications of this message for modern society (Hourani, p.140). Like Afghani, he is concerned about maintaining the unity of the Islamic community (p.143). During this period, ‘Abduh begins to see the divisive potential of western modernity about which Afghani was so concerned. Albert Hourani observes one manifestation of this tension: the tension between the old religious schools, the modern European schools, and the State schools in Egypt during ‘Abduh’s time (p.137). While the old religious schools remained “stagnant” in their teaching of religion, the modern schools were known for converting students from Islam to Christianity and were feared for their foreign influence. The State schools failed to teach “social or political morality,” according to Hourani, because of their abstract teaching of religion. In response to these emerging tensions between the religious and the secular in Egyptian society, ‘Abduh attempts to address certain questions of religious debate in order to show there is no inherent incompatibility between the concepts of science and freedom of thought and the Islamic religion. ‘Abduh is

particularly drawn to western critiques of Christianity as a model for his argument, specifically “that Christian doctrine as traditionally formulated cannot stand up to the discoveries of modern science and the modern concepts of the laws of nature and of evolution.” In addition, ‘Abduh embraced the idea of rationally evaluating the supernatural aspects of the Gospels. This critique of Christianity also fit well with the Islamic belief that Jesus was a human prophet, and not God incarnate. ‘Abduh believes that this method of reason is completely compatible with the teachings of the Qu‘ran and the hadith, the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad, because both these Islamic texts are based on the concept of rationality. While ‘Abduh accepts this element of western reason, he diverges with western thinkers when they argue that religion is a creation of the human imagination or that human beings are the masters’ of the universe. Rather than accept these western philosophies in their entirety, he contends that Islam provides the balance between these two extremes of thought, i.e., “a religion fully consistent with the claims of the human intellect and the discoveries of modern science, but safeguarding the divine transcendence which, [...] was the one valid object of human worship and stable basis for human morality” (p.143-144). ‘Abduh is convinced that the result of human reason in Europe will be that Europeans would eventually adopt Islam. ‘Abduh argues that Islam balances the competing interests of science, distinction and difference, and social unity and morality. ‘Abduh does assume that religion is a rational choice, an arguable assumption.

For ‘Abduh, however, this progression is only natural. Because of the imperfect nature of human reason, ‘Abduh contends that it is necessary for there to be some way for all people to know true reason (Hourani, p.145). Like Afghani, he believes that the application of these principles may change over time to address contemporary circumstances and challenges (p.148). ‘Abduh also argues that Islamic principles delivered by the Prophet are meant to serve as guiding principles. The application of these principles is not meant to be static for all time; rather, they are bound within their historical context. Because Islam allows for the acceptance of reason, it is possible to reinterpret the principles for modern times (p.151). This need to develop solutions for emerging challenges became increasingly relevant as it became apparent that the British were not interested in the actual development of the Egyptian people.

‘Abduh is also critical of the work of Muhammad ‘Ali to modernize Egypt. As mentioned in the section concerning Tahtawi, ‘Ali was primarily concerned with maintaining Egyptian power vis-à-vis the Europeans. Second only to this goal was ‘Ali’s desire to maintain his power status in Egypt. Consequently, ‘Abduh believes that ‘Ali valued his own power and the loyalty of followers over the actual development of Egypt and its people. Hourani writes, “For his own power he destroyed all who were noble or eminent in Egyptian life; he gave office to those who were prepared to be his docile instruments, and protection and privilege to foreigners of doubtful character” (p.159). After sending Tahtawi with students to learn about French military techniques, ‘Ali employed these foreign techniques, elements of

modernism, to bolster his own power. Consequently, we begin to see a sharp backlash against the ruling powers and their perceived connections with Europe.

The anti-English movement gained strength during this period. The Egyptian people became distrustful of the British because of their prolonged and intrusive stay in Egypt (Hourani, p.180). Concern mounted that the British intended to stay forever. Thus, a movement emerged to resist the European powers and achieve independence. To achieve this goal, it became apparent that the domestic situation of Egyptian must be addressed on three key levels: the economic, the social, and the political. At the economic level, it is argued that Egypt must redeem its foreign debt. Economic dependence on the British was seen as the key reason that occupation by the British continued. Socially, reinventing the educational system became a priority. ‘Abduh and his followers contend that “a proper system of schools would aim at creating a nation morally and mentally united around the modern sciences and the principles implied in them” (p.182). Finally, discussion emerged concerning the form of a new political system. In light of the political domination by Great Britain and the authoritarian control of Muhammad ‘Ali, intellectuals began to consider a new political system. The idea of an absolute, unquestionable ruler became a subject of discussion. Students of ‘Abduh began to argue that Islam did not predispose the Islamic community to one particular form of government (p.188). Rather, the developments and the necessities of the times dictate the necessary political form. This idea of change by necessity, which continues to play a prominent role in discussions of Islamic thought, is a direct descendant of ‘Abduh’s conception of the

Qu'ran as a guide that is to be adapted to and reinterpreted for new situations. On each of the three levels discussed above, we see a desire to engage with the modern world. Throughout this liberal period, the objective remains the same: to engage the West as equals. While the subjugation of the Egyptians and the people of the Middle East by the European powers was not blatant in the beginning (when Tahtawi was in Paris from 1826 to 1835), it quickly became apparent to people in the region. As a result, we see the beginnings of what is misinterpreted as the inherent schism between western and Arab-Islamic philosophy. It is not a schism, but rather, a desire to be treated as equals in the modern world.

Although the move for Egyptian independence up to this point had primarily been among the educated elite, support for independence mounted among the masses of Egypt during the First World War (Hourani, p.209). Fears emerged that Britain intended to make Egypt a permanent colony. These fears were not entirely unwarranted. Albert Hourani notes, "Under pressure of the war, Egypt was in fact treated like a colony: the number of British officials increased while their quality did not improve, numerous peasants and their livestock were virtually conscripted for service with the Allied force in Palestine" (p.209). Consequently, the Egyptian people began to rethink themselves in relationship to the British. After 41 years of British intervention, Egypt was granted limited independence by the High Commissioner in February 1922 (p.213). Even though the protectorate ended, the British still maintained certain interests until further negotiation provided an agreement: "imperial communications, defence, foreign interests and minorities, the

Sudan” (p.213). As Egypt was officially independent of the British, the influences of western development continued to be a concern throughout the region.

Following independence, we see continued attempts to modernize Egyptian society. These efforts began with traditionalists in the footsteps of ‘Abduh attempting to reconcile the historical and religious traditions of the society with modernization. With independence, new obstacles to modernization emerged. The incompatibility of complete emulation of the western tradition with the Islamic tradition created the need to develop an indigenous approach to the challenges of the time. The political space for the intellectual discussion of the modernization, however, diminished after independence. The army became the primary instrument of power, and rational inquiry and reevaluation of tradition and its power structures presented an intolerable threat to the new leaders.

The Traditional Approach: Rida, The Muslim Brotherhood and Qutb

Following Afghani and ‘Abduh, a new group of individuals emerged in the early 1900s that was more committed to the idea of returning the region to a more traditional, Islamic society. Thinkers like Rashid Rida began to ask why the Muslim societies lagged behind the innovation of the Europeans (Hourani, p.228). According to Albert Hourani, Rida offers the following explanation:

Muslims have lost the truth of their religion, and this has been encouraged by bad political rulers, for the true Islam involves two things, acceptance of the unity of God and consultation in matters of State, and despotic rulers have tried to make Muslims forget the second by encouraging them to abandon the first. (p.228)

Rida, like ‘Abduh before him, argues that the disconnection between the people and their religious heritage has allowed for imperial and cultural domination by the Europeans. Incompetent political rulers also contributed to the decline of the region. For instance, Muhammad ‘Ali adopted the military developments of the French and manipulated his followers to maintain his own power at the expense of the Egyptian people. To bolster their own power, ‘Ali and other leaders employed European rationality to undermine the unity of the Islamic community. Rationality was used as the primary tool to evaluate the success of leaders rather than the standard of the Qur’an. In contrast, Rida believes that, if rationality informed by the Qur’an had been applied correctly, the regime would not have been subordinated by European powers.

Thus, Rida and ‘Abduh identify the same problem but have different solutions. The Qur’an does not provide examples for every situation that occurs. The Qur’an must be used as a guide of general principle, but rationality must be used to apply the principles of the Qur’an to modern circumstances. While ‘Abduh contends that the Qur’an’s principles may be applied directly to modern circumstances, Rida provides two critiques. First, if a specific injunction contradicts a general one or if necessity overrides what the law forbids, it is allowable to diverge from the teachings of the Qur’an (Hourani, p.233). Second, there are circumstances that the Qur’an does not address at all. Albert Hourani notes that for Rida human reason may be used to guide human decision in these instances. The key difference between Rida and

‘Abduh, therefore, is Rida’s belief that rationality may be used when necessity dictates and when the Qur’an and the hadith offer no instruction.

Once again, we see a reaction to the West that argues for a nexus of the two traditions. Rather than completely adopting all of European tradition as some thinkers would have liked, Rida argues that it is more important to adopt lessons that had been learned from Europe and that could be used to create greater Arab self-sufficiency (Hourani, p.235). If we apply this concept to the economic, social, or religious tradition of Egypt, we may understand the implications of Rida’s argument. Like ‘Abduh, he understands the importance of economic development to establish an equal partnership vis-à-vis other powers. Furthermore, Rida realizes the importance of rational thought in intellectual and social development. Finally, given the inability of the Qur’an to address modern developments on all conceivable issues, Rida realizes that the elements of western rationality that address these areas could be beneficial to Middle Eastern society.

While wishing to address modern circumstances, Rida, like his predecessors, is concerned with the need to maintain the unity of the Islamic community (Hourani, p.238). How then does Rida reconcile this desire for unity with the belief that necessity may override, and therefore question, tradition? Can the rational determination of necessity allow for the maintenance of social unity? In order to create the unity that the thinkers before him desire, Rida argues in a favor of a “caliphate of necessity” (p.240). After which, a genuine, religiously sanctioned caliphate would be installed. In this way, Rida wants to adopt elements of the Islamic

tradition to create social unity and to embrace rationalism for social development and progress. Out of the existing extremes of thought emerged this movement for the establishment of a middle ground: maintaining elements of the Islamic tradition while allowing for elements of change (p.243).

Interestingly enough, Rida is considered one of the founders of the traditionalist school, those thinkers who wished to address the social questions that emerged after independence through the reinvigoration of the Islamic tradition. John O. Voll (1991, p.358) in “Fundamentalism in the Sunni Arab World” notes that while providing the roots of the traditionalist movement, he remained disconnected from the mainstream movement due to “his overt mistrust of nationalism in its more secular and liberal forms.” We see this mistrust in his willingness to address elements of western rationality as he also desires to ground this rationality in the traditional caliphate. Voll also suggests that Rida’s influence was limited because of his “highly intellectualized” arguments (p.359). Consequently, his arguments had little appeal for the majority of Egyptians.

In place of Rida’s liberal, but intellectual, response to western influence, there emerges a traditional response that is more appealing to the Egyptian masses. Here we see the emergence of one of the key characteristics of the traditionalist approach: efforts to appeal to the masses. This realization of the power of the masses is not new to the traditionalist approach but is adopted with a new found fervor. We see the roots of this method in the writings of Afghani. Afghani crafts a different message depending on his audience. For instance, when writing for the Egyptian populace, he

focuses on the need to return to tradition and develop modernity out of the historical and religious circumstances of the region. In contrast, when he writes to Ernest Renan, his letter resembles much more the rationalistic critiques being developed in Western Europe at the time. This division in Afghani's writings according to audience creates a seeming contradiction in his thought. In response to this supposed contradiction, 'Abduh and Rida attempt to ground their arguments much more in the religious tradition. In this attempt to appeal to the sentiments of the highly-important Egyptian religious community, they are not focused on appealing to the masses. Here we see room for the development of an approach to deal with western modernity and engage the masses of the Egyptian community.

The most well-known example of this type of approach in Egypt is the Muslim Brotherhood. The founder of the Brotherhood was Hasan al-Banna, who was born in a small city outside of Cairo in 1928. Al-Banna was greatly disturbed by what he perceived as a moral crisis left by the Europeans (Voll, p.360). Consequently, he sought to counter the corruption that the West had unleashed on the Egyptians. Initially, the Brotherhood aimed at developing educational and devotional programs that would reinvigorate the Islamic tradition in Egypt and cause the people to return to what Al-Banna sees as the "life proper to Islamic faith and practice" (p.361). Although the Muslim Brotherhood is now commonly associated with violence to achieve its goals and also stringent government oppression, the organization was not a violent organization at its founding. Hasan al-Banna, in fact, rejected the use of violence and the intervention of the group in the political sphere.

To emphasize the separation of the political and religious spheres, Al-Banna told his followers, “you are not a benevolent organization, nor a political party, nor a local association with strictly limited aims. Rather, you are a new spirit making its way into the heart of this nation and revivifying it through the Qur’an” (p.362). Al-Banna clearly delineates the role that he feels the Brotherhood should perform in society, i.e., reinvigorating the Islamic tradition. Like ‘Abduh and Rida before him, Al-Banna is concerned with the decline of Islamic society and believes that the society must return to its Islamic roots to prevent further decay. Given the widespread corruption that existed within the political system, Al-Banna is not concerned with entering the political sphere but, instead, with fostering change by encouraging the masses to adopt the true Islamic religion and reject the corruption that resulted when this tradition was ignored.

While Al-Banna rejected the use of violence, increasing pressure from the government under the rule of King Farouk resulted in the development of a segment of the organization devoted to the group’s defense (Voll, p.362). This group was responsible for the violent actions taken before and after World War II in Egypt in response to oppression by the police. Following independence, the ruling elite had been challenged by political groups and became increasingly wary of organized action that might turn political. Consequently, when Al-Banna and the Brotherhood participated in an anti-British protest in 1941, they were jailed (p.363). Hostility mounted between the rival political groups, the government, and the Muslim Brotherhood. In 1948, the tension resulted in the murder of the Egyptian prime

minister by a member of the Brotherhood. Supposedly in retaliation, Al-Banna was murdered shortly thereafter. The mounting tensions between the competing interests resulted in a coup d'etat in which King Farouk was overthrown and the Free Officers, led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, came to power. While there was initial cooperation between the Brotherhood and the Revolutionary Command Council, this "peace" was short-lived. An assassination attempt on Nasser by a member of the Brotherhood gave Nasser and the new ruling powers the necessary cause to execute and imprison many members of the Brotherhood. While the Brotherhood maintained a large base of supporters, Nasser and his commitment to a modern Egypt overpowered the desires to return to a more traditional, Islamic society through oppressive measures.

During this early period, the Muslim Brotherhood was committed to the teachings of Al-Banna. Primarily, the Brotherhood sought to find a middle ground, as did the previous thinkers, between the Islamic tradition and the western developments. Unique to the Brotherhood's philosophy at this time is its commitment to avoiding both blind traditionalism and blind adoption of western modernity (Voll, p.364). Al-Banna relies on two key Islamic principles: "ijtihad" and "tawhid." Ijtihad refers to the "exercise of informed independent judgment," similar to the western conception of reason but with God, through the teachings and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, as the final arbiter (p.364). Like 'Abduh, Al-Banna rejects the western idea of man as the final arbiter of reason. Instead, he opts for the concept of "tawhid," in which, God is the point of reference in all matters.

Although Al-Banna was not interested in the Brotherhood acting as a political unit, he did believe that these principles needed to be applied to all aspects of life.

As with the adherents of the previous thinkers discussed above, followers of this traditional approach were concentrated mainly in urban areas. Given the urban location of the traditionalist approach's supporters, this approach takes on a unique character. John O. Voll describes it in the following way: "Because fundamentalism is a response to a perceived crisis, the programs of specific fundamentalist movements are in some measure conditioned by the specific ideas and practices of 'the enemy'" (p.365). The traditional approach exhibits a key difference from and a key similarity to the liberal approach before it. The traditional approach makes a greater appeal to the sentiment of the masses concentrated in urban areas. Thus, the Brotherhood was founded primarily as an urban organization. Like the liberal approach of Tahtawi, Afghani, and 'Abduh, the traditional approach is a reaction to the emerging problems of the society. The decline of the Ottoman Empire coincided with the influx of imperial influence. Consequently, the European powers became the primary target for criticism in society.

Under Gamal Abdel Nasser, we enter a new phase of the traditionalist approach. From 1954 to 1967, Nasser implemented plans to transform Egypt into a modern nation. These plans included external interaction with the West and the Soviet Union and internal socialistic policies. These policies resulted in the disenfranchisement of the wealthy Egyptian elite as Nasser redistributed their land and imposed high taxes on them. Nasser's aim was to spread the wealth in Egyptian

society. The result, however, was that he was targeted by the traditionalist opposition because his policies reflected external influences rather than internal traditions.

Nasser likely feared the popular support that could be raised amongst the people under the auspices of transforming the society in line with the Islamic tradition.

In order to prevent a popular uprising, Nasser employed aggressive action to eliminate the influence and potential threat of the traditionalists, specifically the Muslim Brotherhood (Voll, p.368). Imprisonment and threats of persecution were common in 1954 and in the mid-1960s. Because of the methods employed to suppress opposition to the government, the nature of the Muslim Brotherhood and traditionalism became more violent (p.369). The revival of Islamic tradition was the reason for which Hasan al-Banna was oppressed because of the threat that it posed to the ruling regime. When faced with imprisonment, threats of harm, and executions, the peaceful ideal of Al-Banna became violent.

Following the murder of Al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb came to the forefront of the traditionalist movement. Qutb was able to fill the leadership vacuum that was created with the death of Al-Banna. While Qutb had originally been a secular thinker, he was disenchanted by what he perceived as the corruption of Islamic and Egyptian society by European powers and influences. As a result of a two-year stay in the United States, Qutb was concerned about the potential consequences of adopting the western model for Egyptian society. Based on his visit to the U.S., Qutb said the following about the US, ““any objectives other than the immediate utilitarian ones are by-passed and any human element other than ego is not recognized”” (Voll, p.369). Once again,

we see concern for the potential disunity of the Islamic community. For Qutb, the natural conclusion of the materialism of the West is “class struggle which becomes inevitable and visibly evident” (p.369). Qutb would have been familiar with the writings of Afghani concerning the potential for European influences to undermine the cohesion of the Islamic community of Egypt. Because of these associations with the modernizing plan of Nasser, Qutb draws on the thoughts of previous thinkers to present an alternative.

Rejecting the westernization strategy of Nasser as a solution to the problems in post-independence Egypt, Qutb draws on the ideas of restoring the traditions of Islam as a means to address the contemporary challenges of Egypt. These early thoughts of Qutb are highly reminiscent of the Muslim Brotherhood of the 1940s and Hasan al-Banna and exhibit similarities with the desires of Rida and ‘Abduh before them. While Qutb draws on the idea of addressing Egypt’s challenges through the Islamic tradition, his ideas make an important departure from those of the earlier thinkers. The main innovation in Qutb’s thinking is his rejection of the concept of “sovereignty to the Arab nation rather than to God” (Voll, p.371). The nationalism and socialism of Nasser were strongly rooted in the western tradition and as such were subject to scorn by Qutb.

Qutb’s scorn of the Western tradition and its influence on Egyptian culture was not especially unique. What is new and highly controversial in the ideology of Qutb is the consideration of whether self-described Muslims can be labeled as unbelievers and be the targets of punishment (Voll, p.372). This question is

important because Nasser was the first Egyptian to rule the territory in several millennia. Consequently, Qutb is forced to consider whether it is possible to refute the power of Nasser. For centuries, thinkers in the Arab-Islamic world were committed to the idea that leaders, as representatives of social order and Islamic power, were beyond question and overthrow. Now, Qutb introduces the idea of questioning and attempting to undermine a Muslim leader. Because of Qutb's knowing and willful attempt to undermine the sovereignty of Nasser, he became a threat with whom Nasser had to deal. Qutb and many other members of the Muslim Brotherhood were deemed such an immense threat that they were tried and executed in the 1960s.

The important question becomes, "What was so threatening in the position of Qutb and the Muslim Brotherhood that Nasser felt it necessary to execute members?" Voll argues that the threat that Qutb presents is that he "provide[s] an intellectual and theoretical foundation for the concrete rejection of Nasserism" (p.371). This foundation for the rejection of Nasser is based on the Islamic principle of "jahiliyya." In its original context, "jahiliyya" referred to the period of history before the Prophet Muhammad. During this period, the people were considered "of belligerent and stubborn ignorance" (p.371). While this concept had traditionally been applied to the people of this pre-Islamic time, Qutb translates the term for contemporary use to refer to "all who rebelled willfully against God's rule." In Qutb's view, promotion of the nation transmits sovereignty from God to the nation and the leaders of that nation. The natural conclusion from this argument is that Nasser's programs ought to be

rejected because sovereignty of the nation and Nasser represented a willful rebellion against the sovereignty of God.

This argument must be understood at two key levels. First, the Europeans had exploited the Egyptians and its people for their own interests. It is not striking, therefore, that a negative reaction toward European-style reforms existed following independence. While Nasser was concerned with modernizing Egypt so that it could gain prominence as an equal player with the Europeans, the masses were deeply concerned about the existing domestic circumstances. Believing that the Europeans had brought and then accentuated these problems, they sought a solution from the Islamic tradition. Anytime a society goes through such a dramatic transition, there will be a social attempt to grapple with the causes of the situation and to formulate a response. The seeming failure of the European approach prepared the way for the traditional approach. Second, inherent in this “rejection” of the west and return to tradition is this approach’s popularity with the masses. Because of the growing dissatisfaction with Nasser’s approach and his increasingly oppressive measures to drown opposition, the traditional approach gained support. Necessarily, Nasser became increasingly concerned about the potential influence of Qutb and the Muslim Brotherhood on the Egyptian people.

Disaffection with policies of westernization and modernization mounted following the Egyptian defeat in the 1967 war and Nasser’s long-standing brutal tactics. The absence of Islam from the political mechanisms of the state was equated with these negative developments (Voll, p.376). As a result, there was a not

unpredictable resurgence of Islamic fervor. Tension between the government and the traditionalist opposition mounted during the presidency of Anwar Sadat. The reconciliation of Egypt with Israel in the 1978 Camp David Accords was contemporaneous with the economic downturn of Egypt and consequent large-scale food riots (p.378). The continued tactics of oppression mounted under Sadat and are cited by John Voll as one of the reasons for his assassination in 1981. Sadat's assassin was the brother of a man arrested under the oppressive measures used against the Muslim Brotherhood and other opposition groups. As the situation in Egypt deteriorated under Sadat, Islam was increasingly identified as holding the solutions to the existing social challenges. Here again we see that Islamic solutions are reinvigorated by the failure of "western" policies to solve the problems plaguing Egyptian society. Voll also notes that the relative tolerance of the traditionalists by current Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak has caused the movement to become more community-based once again (p.390). This return to more community-based efforts illustrates that traditionalist movements became violent when there was a lack of outlets to contribute to positive change in society. Violence, therefore, does not seem to be intrinsically linked with the traditionalist approach in Arab-Islamic society.

Following September 11, 2001, the U.S. government began to put considerable pressure on the Egyptian government to democratize. One of the masterminds of the hijacking, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is from Cairo. Zawahiri is a surgeon who lived in the affluent Cairo suburb of Maadi and continues to be a leader of al-Qaeda. To combat the fundamentalism that led to the September 11 attacks,

American leaders identified democratization in Egypt as the best approach. This approach was drastically different, however, from the hands-off approach adopted by the US in the previous two and a half decades. Following the Camp David Accords in 1978, the US government took an arms-length approach to matters in Egypt. If the Egyptians continued to maintain and support peace with Israel, Egypt continued to receive US military and economic aid. The US government looked the other way when it came to human rights abuses and issues of democratization. As the US pushed for democratization in Egypt and the region, the governments of the countries there have had a different idea of “progress” than the U.S.

Under Hosni Mubarak and his contemporaries in the region, a disturbing pattern is emerging. Steven Hedeymann (2007) in *Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Modern World* describes the paradoxical trend by which governments in the region have become more authoritarian while permitting limited democratic privileges, e.g., more open operation of opposition political parties, acknowledgement of human rights. These privileges create the semblance of democratic reform as the governments actually increase their authoritarian control. For instance, Heydemann notes, “In 2006 the Egyptian authorities cracked down on civil society activists and renewed emergency laws” (p.2). While intellectual discourse continues in the present period, such discourse is pursued at great personal risk as we will see in the next section.

The Modernizing, Secular Approach: Jabri, Mernissi, and Zayd

In the early 1990s, some Arab intellectuals began to reevaluate the previous 200 years of interaction with the West and to try to determine where Middle Eastern societies were going in the future. Three key thinkers are pivotal in understanding this developing period: two Moroccans, Mohammed 'Abed al-Jabri and Fatema Mernissi, and one Egyptian, Nasr Abu Zayd. Here we see an attempt to critically analyze the Islamic tradition by understanding its roots and its influence on modern-day circumstances.

In order to understand the current situation in the Middle Eastern reaction to the West, Fatema Mernissi (2001) in *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World* begins by evaluating the reaction against the West that was associated with European imperialism. She addresses the subject of concern for every thinker since Afghani: the tension between modernity and social unity. Mernissi's key argument is that progress will come through "a rereading of our past and a reappropriation of all that has structured our civilization" (p.160). While previous thinkers argued in favor of adopting elements of western modernity or returning to traditional practices, Mernissi presents the idea of engaging indigenous traditions and adapting them for modern circumstances. She uses the relationship between Islam and women to illustrate her point. She notes, "The mosque and Koran belong to women as much as do the heavenly bodies. We have a right to all of that, to all its riches for constructing our modern identity" (pp.160-161). Although the Qur'an and the mosque may have traditionally been considered the domains of men, Mernissi believes that in the twenty-first century they may also be the domains of women.

Mernissi also observes that Middle Eastern society has historically identified two distinct options when interacting with Western modernity: Middle Eastern society can either embrace western traditions at the possible expense of undermining the sense of communal unity or reject western modernity and maintain this sense of unity (p.42-43). The option of embracing the West would bring with it the idea of *r'ay*, "individual opinion," and *'aql*, "reason." In contrast, the traditional approach presents the idea of *ta'a*, "obedience." Concerning the latter, Mernissi notes that this approach implies "foreclosing all western innovation." Mernissi, like several of the thinkers we have discussed and unlike the societal perception, contends that the relationship between *r'ay* and *'aql* and *ta'a* does not require a choice between individual reason and social unity. Instead, Mernissi believes that equilibrium is possible between individual opinion and social unity (p.91).

In fact, Mernissi argues that this balance between individual opinion and social unity is inherent within Islam. According to Mernissi, Islam creates a sense of identity among the whole community and allows an outlet for individual opinion. Mernissi describes these two characteristics as "a sense of identity and the power to struggle" (p.59). The problem within modern society is that the sole outlet for the exercise of individual opinion is through religion. To illustrate this point, Mernissi tells the story of a personal friend, Mina, who was fired from her job. Mina did not go to the government labor office to complain even though she had worked at the factory for many years. Mina describes the situation as if she were being hired anew everyday she went to work. While the government refused to address this injustice,

Mina found solace in Islam. Mernissi writes, “This is where Islam plays a key role in the struggle to preserve dignity. [...] Islam gives someone like Mina a framework within which to express her pain and to change it into anger and a program for vengeance” (p.58). Through Islam, Mina is given an outlet to express her anger. There is no such political outlet for her in society. Mina identifies God as her defender in this circumstance and finds an outlet for redress in Him. In the absence of political outlets for redress of wrongdoing, Islam fulfills this role. Mina and other individuals are able to find comfort in the Islamic world-view and through it, are provided with the opportunity to struggle for justice.

To explain this absence of political outlets, Mernissi discusses the tendency for fundamentalism to arise from the universities. In contrast to western perception, Mernissi argues that the growth of fundamentalism within the university community is completely logical. She writes, “Actually, it is the most logical thing imaginable, considering the ambiguity that surrounds the idea of freedom” (pp.49-50). The source of this ambiguity of the idea of freedom is the restriction of rational inquiry to the development of technical skills for a specific professional purpose. In the university, rational inquiry is not applied to political and social life. How does this occur? Knowledge is fragmented so that individuals may be trained within universities for professional careers, e.g., engineers, doctors, etc. They are not trained, however, to apply the rational techniques of their careers to the rest of their lives. When individuals are presented with problems within the political and social spheres, their only means for engaging these spheres is through religion. Mernissi

believes that this dichotomized worldview is not inherent within Islam; rather, the existing power structures in society, like the universities, governments, and religious institutions, have restricted the exercise of rational inquiry for self-serving reasons.

Mohammed ‘Abed al-Jabri (1999) in *Arab-Islamic Philosophy: A Contemporary Critique* discusses the use of the religious lens in this way and offers a rereading of tradition that allows for the creation of political outlets for action in society. The root of the problem, according to Jabri, is the separation of science and religion into separate spheres at the revelation of the Qur’an. Jabri notes that the problem is not that “science did not evolve at all during the era of the Arab-Islamic enlightenment. [...] These advances—because they could not—did not impact the predominant conceptions of that period’s philosophers” (p.41). He mentions Arab scientific advancements in mathematics and medicine. These advancements show that science has always been existent in the Arab tradition. Jabri makes the point that these advancements, however, did not influence the Islamic tradition. This divergence of science and religion dates back to Ibn Sina, also known as Avicenna, in the eleventh century. According to Jabri, Avicenna continuously attempted to adapt “the structure of ‘scientific’ (Greek) thinking to that of (Islamic) religious thinking” (p.38). Avicenna believed that the two fields were two parts of the same whole. Although Avicenna wanted to reconcile science and religion, Jabri notes that he was still “driven by the conviction that the first one represented the rational and ‘scientific’ conception of man and the universe, and the second one represented

‘absolute’ truth, as well as cultural identity” (p.38). Science and religion are clearly delineated into two distinct fields.

This separation occurs on two levels. First, the belief in Islam as the ultimate truth made it less necessary for science to explain the circumstances of the world. Second, priority was given to reconciling rational conceptions of the time in accordance with religious convictions. According to Jabri, “Muslim philosophers concerned themselves, priority-wise, less with producing conceptions based on new substance, than with reconciling the religious conception of the world to reason, and to justifying rational conception from a religious standpoint” (p.42). Emphasis was not put on innovation because Islam was thought to hold the keys to societal problems. Thus, scientific innovation was not as important in the following centuries. A second potential reason for this stagnation of scientific inquiry is the realization by leaders of the threat that scientific inquiry posed.

Jabri cites this stagnation of scientific inquiry as the primary reason for the perception that Islam presents a backwards and unchanging social system. For Jabri, Islamic philosophy has always been viewed as only an ideological discourse. In addition, he argues that ignorance and disregard of this discourse has pervaded discussion of Islam and Islamic society. “Islamic philosophy [has been viewed by observers] with the same eye as they would Greek philosophy or European philosophy,” writes Jabri (p.42). Consequently, these observers “are doomed to remember from it only an ‘immobile’ void of progress and dynamics.” Because Islam and science have been disconnected, Islam came to be viewed only as an

ideological subject; like any ideology from antiquity that has been surpassed by newly developed ideologies as it lacks the innovative nature of scientific inquiry. This lack of development and connection with antiquity results in the stagnant view of Islam as a form of social infrastructure.

After acknowledging the separation between science and religion and the consequent stagnation of society, Jabri argues that the key for the future of Arab-Islamic society is to rejoin these two traditions. The goal, according to Jabri, is to rejoin [...the scientific and religious traditions] in a new form and under a new relationship, so that we may make it contemporary to us” (p.29). To rejoin tradition with the modern world, according to al-Jabri, it is necessary to read tradition on three levels: the structuralist approach, the historical approach, and the ideological approach (p.28). The structuralist approach requires a rereading of the Qur’an and the works of the philosophical thinkers of the Islamic tradition to understand the ideas as a whole. The historical approach, Jabri contends, requires us to understand this content in the historical context of the time of the text. Finally, the ideological approach requires analysis of the sociopolitical function of the texts. It is necessary, according to Jabri, to evaluate tradition on these three levels to create continuity between the past and the present (p.32).

Jabri goes on to note that it is necessary to evaluate the texts on these three levels because of the interconnected nature of the external situations. Jabri calls this complexity the “unity of problematics” (p.33). He specifically identifies the relative factors of interest during the Renaissance period of Arab-Islamic thought, i.e., the

thoughts and writings of Tahtawi, Afghani, and ‘Abduh: “European invasion, Turkish despotism, poverty, illiteracy, education, language, the status of women, the lack of national unity, etc.” (p.34). In the case of European invasion, traditionalists invoked Islam to garner support, create unity, and resist European influence. While Islam has attempted to address many of these issues over the last two hundred years, it has done so based on a time-bound interpretation of the Qur’an.

Here Jabri finds it necessary to distinguish between the cognitive field and the ideological field of the historical approach (p.36). The cognitive approach corresponds to the notions and concepts of particular thoughts and philosophies while the ideological approach relates to the socio-political implications of these thoughts. In his conclusion, Jabri argues that it is possible to reinterpret the ideological nature of past thoughts, but it is not possible to reinterpret the cognitive nature of these thoughts for another time (p.122). What this means in application, if we take the Qur’an for example, is that the ideas of the Qur’an, given their time-bound nature, are difficult to apply without consideration of modern circumstances and how they should be applied at present. It is possible, as previous thinkers have argued, that the ideas of the Qur’an can be applied to modern society, but it is difficult to determine what, if anything, is based purely on historical context and may be applied differently in the modern context and what is meant to be absolute, unchanging law.

According to Jabri, the distinction between the cognitive and ideological fields allows for a needed break with Avicenna’s tradition of interpreting science and reason in terms of religion. For Jabri, “the future can only be Averroist” (p.120).

Averroes, also known as Ibn Rushd (1126-1198), introduced a new understanding of religion, science, and reason. The key point of departure between Avicenna and Averroes is that Averroes believed that the Qur'an was a discourse of reason rather than that of pure spirituality (p.125). Rather than interpreting science and reason in terms of religion, Averroes argued that reason should be applied to analyze both religion and science. The result of this approach would, Jabri writes, "enable us to have a scientific and objective understanding of both [religion and science] and would help us invest them jointly along the same perspective: to give a basis to our authenticity within modernity and to give a basis to modernity within authenticity" (p.126). The key to embracing modernity in the Middle East, therefore, is to understand the tradition of reason in the region and to apply it to the Qur'an and in society.

Following along this same argument, that the Qur'an must be reinterpreted for modern circumstances, Nasr Abu-Zayd argues for a hermeneutic approach to the Qur'an in which sophisticated techniques of literary criticism are applied to the study of the Qur'an. Abu-Zayd (2003), an Egyptian, raises this topic in "The Dilemma of the Literary Approach to the Qur'an." In the 1940s, a student, Khalafallah, wrote a thesis at what is now Cairo University concerning the Qur'an as a literary text. This idea was also ingrained in the thoughts and writings of Muhammad 'Abduh. As Albert Hourani observes, 'Abduh was concerned with "reopen[ing] the door of interpretation, *ijtihad*, in all aspects of social and intellectual life" (p.19). Abu-Zayd is especially interested in the reinterpretation of the Qur'an through a critical literary

analysis. On the broadest level, Abu-Zayd pinpoints the contentious debate among Muslims, religious and political leaders, and Islamic societies: Is the Qur'an a divine text or a human product? Since the early days of Islam, religious scholars have debated the very nature of the Qur'an. Abu-Zayd discusses two key groups: the Mu'tazilites that view the Qur'an as a created document and the anti-Mu'tazilites that view it as an eternal document. The most important questions surrounding this debate are: 1) what are the distinguishing characteristics of each approach, and 2) what are the key implications of each? Finally, the critical literary analysis opens the door for questioning of all aspects of Islam and its religious infrastructure; therefore, there is a strong backlash against engaging the Qur'an in this way.

On the first issue, the revelation of the Qur'an resulted, as with any religious movement, in the debate over the meaning and implications of the text. In the eighth and ninth centuries, a debate emerged over whether the Qur'an was a created, historical text or an eternal text. As Abu-Zayd notes, the debate was not concerning whether the Qur'an was the Word of God, but rather, whether "the Qur'an is eternal or created (by God) and thus historical" (p.35). If the Qur'an is a created, historical document it suggests that it can be reinterpreted for contemporary circumstances; whereas, an eternal document suggests that all things are preordained by God and that modern situations must be viewed in light of the actual text of the Qur'an.

The Mu'tazilites argued that the Qur'an is not an eternal document for two key reasons. First, within the religious context, the Mu'tazilites criticized the concept of the "eternal" Qur'an for being contrary to the idea of the absolute unity of God

(p.36). To suggest that both the Qur'an and God are both eternal is to undermine the absolute oneness of God. Second, the Mu'tazilites argue that language is a creation of humankind, not God. Therefore, the Qur'an was divine in its nature and not necessarily because of the specific texts (p.37). The Arabic language was the means by which the message of God was translated to humankind through the Prophet Muhammad. As a human creation, language is bound within the cultural context of its heritage. The Qur'an, therefore, is a historical document, although divinely created, bound within the political, social, and historical circumstances. Abu-Zayd writes, "Religious texts though divine and revealed by God, are historically determined and culturally constructed" (p.34-35).

Because the Qur'an is rooted in these historical circumstances, it is necessary to view the examples grounded in this way. Furthermore, Abu-Zayd's argument allows for the Qur'an to be reinterpreted according to contemporary circumstances. He presents a reasonable argument that the Qur'an has to be contextualized for modern times because it was written for the audience of the Prophet. He writes, "the message of Islam could not have had any effect if the people who firstly received it could not have understood it," i.e., if it was not written according to existing "socio-cultural" context (p.38). This argument presupposes that the overarching principles can be applied to the circumstances of our time while the examples in the Qur'an are bound within the seventh century. To support this argument, Abu-Zayd argues in favor of applying techniques of literary criticism to the reading of the Qur'an. Abu-Zayd submits the following six characteristics of the Qur'an to critical analysis:

First of all, the Qur'an deliberately ignores mentioning not only the time and the place of the historical incidents in its stories, but also some of the characters. Second, in dealing with some historical stories the Qur'an selects some events and omits others. Third, the chronological arrangement of the events is violated. Fourth, the Qur'an sometimes relates certain actions to some characters and sometimes relates the same actions to different characters. Fifth, when the story is repeated in another chapter of the Qur'an, the dialogue related to the same character is not the same as in the first case. Sixth, the Qur'an sometimes adds to the story some incidents that are supposed to happen chronologically afterward. All this evidence clearly indicates that the Qur'an exercises the same freedom exercised in literary stories dealing with history. (p.26)

Literary texts manipulate reality to portray underlying themes. Here Abu-Zayd argues that the same happens with the Qur'an. Actual people, places, time, and events are irrelevant. What is more important is the message that is presented by the texts.

Concerns were raised by the suggestion that the Qur'an is a created, historical document, and specifically the question of the "divine" nature of language and its implication that the Qur'an is historically-bound by language. Let us take the issue of the divinity of the Arabic language first. Based on some debatable literal translations from surahs in the Qur'an, anti-Mu'tazilites argue that the Arabic language is a divine gift from God to man. Following this argument, Abu-Zayd writes, "God's word is not a created action but it is one of His eternal attributes" (p.37). Because the Qur'an is viewed as one of the eternal attributes of God, the message of the Qur'an is considered eternal. An "eternal" message implies predestination by God and that the Qur'an is directly applicable in its original context to all contemporary situations.

Predestination has been used and continues to be used to support the continuance of the status quo, especially in politics. In the early days of Islam,

therefore, the argument for an “eternal” Qur’an was used by the existing political powers to justify their positions. The argument contends that the Qur’an predestines everything. Consequently, God preordains the power of the current leaders.

Throughout the approaches that we have examined, we have observed the use of religious tradition to justify the power of the status quo, especially the continuance of the existing regimes. Abu-Zayd shows that this trend is as old as the Qur’an.

Although it is clearly not a new phenomenon, Abu-Zayd exposes it as a manipulation of the Qur’an and the religious tradition. Here he proves the value of treating the Qur’an as a literary text. Abu-Zayd writes, “the people will be easily convinced that the literary approach presents not only a threat, but will also cause severe damage to the divinity of the Qur’an” (p.34). Religious leaders are able to foster concern among the masses about the destruction of Islam. Questioning the historical validity of the Qur’an concerned and continues to concern religious leaders and members of the Islamic community because it opens the door of “ijtihad,” i.e., it allows for the rethinking and potential questioning of the historical tradition and existing power structures. While some legitimate concern for the preservation of Islamic tradition may exist, fostering concern among the masses serves an additional purpose. By precluding questioning of the existing religious structure through “ijtihad,” questioning of the social power structures is also prevented.

Because of the power of his argument to undermine the existing power structure, the threat posed to the existing elites in society is clear. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Egyptian government in coordination with the religious leaders at

the Al-Azhar in Cairo called for Nasr Abu-Zayd to be declared an apostate following the publication of this article. The Egyptian leaders also called for the dissolution of the marriage between Abu-Zayd and his wife under the auspices that he was not a true Muslim. A non-Muslim cannot officially marry a Muslim woman. As a result, Abu-Zayd and his wife fled to the Netherlands for asylum. This reaction is not new to Abu-Zayd's presentation of the argument. This kind of concern about intellectual inquiries has existed since Tahtawi went to Paris and thus pervades the debate concerning modernity in the Middle East.

Conclusion

The key question that emerges from this examination is, "What is the major threat of modernization to the Islamic community?" It is not just western influence that presents a potential threat; it is any challenge to the existing authority. Over the course of the last two centuries in Egypt, the space in society for intellectual discourse, political dissent, and rational inquiry has shrunk while government control has increased in the name of security. This security is related more to the desire of power elites in Egypt to maintain the status quo than to the security of the entire nation and its people. The potential challenge of rational inquiry to the status quo is not unique, however, to Islam and the Arab world.

Christianity presented similar challenges to the existing authorities. These challenges led to the separation between the Protestant and Catholic churches and continue at present with the division into denominations and the splitting of churches.

Here is presented the first challenge noted by each thinker we have addressed: the need for societal unity. The splintering of society into increasingly individualistic units does present a challenge to social cohesiveness and community. It remains a concern in the western world. Secondly, religion has been used in both the western and eastern spheres as a means for controlling the actions of the people. Leaders are able to control their subjects through the religious doctrines that promote submissiveness. As a result, any questioning of the religion in the Islamic world presents a potential challenge to the ruling power elites. Here we also see the relationship between governance and religion. The Caliph, for instance, was considered both the political and religious leader. Finally, rational inquiry provides the roots for popular dissent and potential overthrow of the existing regimes. Thus, all the individuals who benefit from the existing power structure, both political and potentially religious, stand to gain from reinforcing the said structure. Because of this relationship between the power structures of society and scientific inquiry, it is obvious that the resistance of people with Islamic traditionalism is not only not related to incompatibility of western rationalism and reason but is indicative of the threat that rational inquiry poses in all societies.

Rational inquiry poses a threat to all power structures throughout the world, not to those just in the Islamic world. The very nature of rational inquiry allows for the continual destruction of existing forms. Thus, if it poses a threat to one society, it poses a potential threat to undermine all societies. It does not mean that rational inquiry should be banned or restricted, but it does mean that rational inquiry and

organized society require a difficult balance. Fatema Mernissi describes this balance as that between individual opinion and reason and obedience. The tension between these extremes is not unique to Islam or Arab society, but rather, is a struggle for all societies and all humankind.

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